AGORA JOURNALISM CENTER REPORT

The 32 Percent Project

How Citizens Define Trust and How Journalists Can Earn It

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UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
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Contents

Foreword

The University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication established the Agora Journalism Center in 2014 to drive transformational advancements in journalism and communication to enhance public knowledge, and to enrich civic life for all community members. We care about the future of journalism because it is linked to the future of a healthy democracy. And we believe the future of journalism depends on journalists finding new and better ways to engage with the publics they serve.

We support a variety of projects to advance these goals, including an Agora Faculty Fellowship program. Agora Faculty Fellows undertake a range of projects that help point the way forward in research, teaching and practice to connect journalism and civic engagement.

The 32 Percent Project explores not just what hinders trust, but what might be done to help it.

In this report, our colleagues Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn explore the roots of the public's declining trust in media. They use engaged journalism techniques to listen deeply to diverse voices in four communities around the United States, exploring not just what hinders trust, but what might be done to help it. The 32 Percent Project spans geographic, urban/rural, racial, economic and political divides, and gathers input not just from avid news consumers but also from many people who don't consume the news at all or opted out long ago. Importantly, it gets people to step outside of their knee-jerk responses to media by exploring through conversation how trust operates in peoples' personal and professional lives.

Heyamoto and Milbourn find that people apply some of the same standards from their relationships with others in their lives to their relationship with the news. People demand that the news earn their trust with authenticity, transparency and real diversity. They want news that is consistently presented and focused on what's working as well as what isn't. They hunger for news that reflects a sense of community.

The comments arising from these community conversations don't always fit within news insiders' understandings of what journalism is and how it should function. Reflecting what Benjamin Toff and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen have described as "folk theories of news," only some of the public's beliefs about media and information fit easily with journalistic concepts of objectivity, neutrality and the like. Rather than demanding that journalists remain at a cool remove, many participants in these conversations said they want news that digs into the complex realities of their communities with both a critical eye and a shared sense of mission. In other words, they want news to be relational, not transactional. At the same time, this report reveals how little some members of the public may understand about how

the daily news is produced—a fact that calls out for more transparency about journalists' methods, constraints and professional commitments.

We think these insights — and the recommendations the authors offer —could not come at a more opportune time, as the news industry struggles to adapt to a rapidly changing technological, social and political environment, and a public that is far less inclined to accept news at face value.

We welcome your thoughts on the future of news and the developments outlined in this second Agora Report.

Regina G. Lawrence
Executive Director
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Introduction

In the fall of 2016, a Gallup poll reported what had largely become common knowledge: Americans' trust in the news media had sunk to an all-time low. Just 32 percent of those surveyed had confidence that the media would report the news "fully, accurately and fairly,"[1] a number that had been steadily — and now drastically — declining.

If the trend had been the cause of some concern among journalists over the past several years, it became a full-blown industry crisis when events surrounding the 2016 presidential election revealed just how far journalists had fallen in the nation's esteem. Terms like "fake news" and "crooked media" emerged to describe journalists who, in the speakers' view, deliberately used their platform to spread lies and personal opinions to an uninclined public. In addition, journalists became the target of increasing censorship efforts[2] and physical attacks.[3]

Participants at a 32 Percent Project workshop in Oxford, Miss., discuss trust in the news media.

These might be considered isolated incidents if they didn't underscore such widely shared sentiments. A Gallup/Knight Foundation survey released in January 2018 revealed that fully two-thirds of Americans believe news organizations are doing a bad job separating fact from opinion and 43 percent have a negative view of the media.[4]

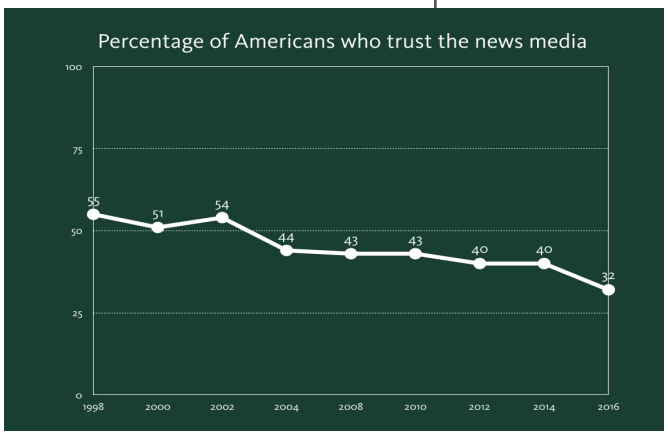
Many might perceive this as a media literacy issue, and that's certainly part of the story. The same Gallup/Knight Foundation survey reported that just 27 percent of Americans feel very confident that they can distinguish factual news from commentary or opinion, and a polarized country has led to a polarized media landscape in which news consumers tend to seek out information that mirrors their political views.[5]

But to focus solely on media literacy as an antidote to the current state of distrust is to discount the role that journalists themselves play in fostering an environment in which the public trusts news organizations to report factually, fairly and in good faith.

This exploration of trust in the news media began with a simple question: How can journalists persuade the public to trust them more? But a deeper dive into the issue revealed we had it backward. Trust is not something to ask for — it's something to earn. So, the more productive question became: How can journalists better earn the public's trust?

Viewing the issue through this lens revealed that a critical voice had often been missing from the conversation: citizens themselves.

Both before and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, many journalism researchers and practitioners set out to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamics of trust,[6] and how they're evolving in an age of digitization and political polarization. The Arena project at the London School of Economics examines the rise of disinformation,[7] The Trust Project at Santa Clara University explores strategies for identifying and labeling high-quality content,[8] the Trusting News project focuses on improving trust-building practices within newsrooms[9] and the News Integrity Initiative seeks to strengthen journalism's public service mission.[10]



The percentage of Americans who have confidence that the news media will report "fully, accurately and fairly" reached a new low in 2016, according to Gallup.

The 32 Percent Project launched in July 2017 to add another dimension to this work. The project explores what drives and disrupts interpersonal trust as a way to isolate and identify strategies that can be applied to the practice of journalism. Since trust is a concept that is differently defined by different people, the query entailed detailed, personal conversations with diverse groups across the country. The project team hosted workshops in urban and rural areas, with people of varied demographics, backgrounds and political affiliations. In all, 54 people participated in four community workshops, which were held in public meeting spaces in Pico Rivera, Calif., Boston, Mass., Oxford, Miss., and Vienna, Ill.

This diverse group of citizens shared insights into the characteristics of trust, which can inform the way journalists and media organizations approach their relationship with the communities they serve. After all, there are 68 percent of Americans who don't see the value in the critical work that journalists do. Now comes the worthy task of showing them.

Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn
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June 2018

Key findings

The 32 Percent Project held a series of community conversations with citizens across the country about trust in the news media in 2017. The team conducted a qualitative analysis of those conversations, which spanned racial, geographic, economic and political divides, and identified six key themes. These are the "conditions of trust" — the critical factors that citizens themselves say must be present for them to trust a news organization.

These conditions are overlapping and reinforcing, and will look different when applied to specific news organizations. They represent what participants said during workshop conversations rather than their actual behavior as news consumers. For any news organization looking to build — or rebuild — trust, they represent a compelling starting point.

Authenticity

Participants said they tend to trust people in their personal lives who don't rush to judgment, and are comfortable saying what they don't know. They want to see the same characteristics in news organizations. While many news organizations strive to showcase the authority of their journalism, participants said it's more important to be authentic in how that information is delivered.

Transparency

Conversations revealed that the public has thin knowledge of exactly how journalism is produced. How are news decisions made? Where is the line between fact and analysis? Without a deeper understanding of what choices journalists make and why, the public is deeply skeptical of the product it is expected to accept as true.

Participants filled out placards to capture their thoughts on how news organizations can earn their trust.

Consistency

Participants reported that the most trusted people, organizations and institutions in their lives had a history of consistently and predictably following through on a promise. Whether that promise was reliable information delivered by a trusted news personality or that a pizza would be delivered in 30 minutes or less, people wanted to know that they could depend on the other party to meet clearly stated and mutually understood expectations.

Positivity

When it comes to personal relationships, participants said they tend to trust people in their lives who are generally positive — and the same goes for news organizations. Many participants pointed out that consistently negative coverage erodes their trust, especially if that coverage doesn't accurately capture what they experience in everyday life.

Diversity

Across all workshops, participants said they did not see themselves reflected in the news they consume. That feeling cut across racial, gender, economic and geographic lines. Few participants said they'd ever met a journalist in person, and the people they see on TV "don't even look like us." Diversity, they said, is a critical ingredient for any news organization seeking to build trust.

Shared mission

Participants expressed a strong desire to engage with news organizations that share their goals and aspirations for the community. In many cases, participants viewed today's news organizations as little more than profit-seekers who were willing to pursue sensational or misguided stories as a way to drive advertising. Critical to building trust, participants said, is creating a sense that a news organization shares bedrock values and is invested in the good of the community.

Methodology

While trust is one of the most frequently discussed topics among journalists and academics who study journalism, critical perspectives are often left out of the conversation — specifically, the voices of real people in real communities across the country. The overarching mission of this project was to seek out those voices, engage in deep conversations and develop a nuanced understanding of how trust plays out on a personal level. The goal was to apply those insights to the practice of journalism, and identify strategies journalists can use to forge deeper connections in the communities they serve.

The project team designed workshops to feel like community conversations.

The 32 Percent Project was funded by a grant from the Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication, and it is rooted in the belief that journalists can best tackle the challenges they face by listening more closely to the communities they serve. Trust, after all, is a two-way street.

The project team identified communities to host the workshops based on several factors. Above all, the team was looking for diversity — a mix of communities spanning America's geographic, economic, racial, political and urban/rural divides.

The team reached out to journalism professionals on the Agora Journalism Center's Gather network and identified potential partner organizations in different regions of the country.[11] Those partner organizations — which included Southern California Public Radio, Everyday Boston and Illinois Humanities — helped steer the team toward specific communities and neighborhoods. Wherever possible, the conversations were held in public libraries, which are themselves widely trusted institutions and a comfortable space for a cross-section of people. In Vienna, Ill., the conversation took place in a local diner.

The 32 Percent Project team recruited participants by tapping the networks of partner organizations, posting on local event calendars, sending out fliers via local libraries and spreading the word through a mix of community institutions, such as schools, churches, chambers of commerce, political parties, neighborhood associations and community connectors. In addition, the team reached out directly to people who posted regularly on community message boards or in the letters-to-the-editor sections of local newspapers.

Workshop format

The workshops were designed to be distinct from traditional focus groups. Project facilitators asked a series of prepared questions on trust, employing a mix of small-group and full-group discussions that included follow-up questions. They aimed to encourage direct, robust exchanges within the group to make the workshops feel less like formal research and more like a conversation with neighbors. Questions used common language and were designed to be approachable for all participants, from heavy news consumers to people who don't engage with the news at all.

These were the questions:

Think about a person or organization that you trust, but not a news organization. Why do you trust them? What makes them trustworthy? What did they do to earn that trust?

This question was exceptionally illuminating because it allowed participants to talk about trust in a personal way. Participants spoke about why they trusted their spouses, faith leaders, community organizations, local businesses, teachers, neighbors, sanitation workers and more. In doing so, they provided rich metaphors that could be analyzed and applied to the practices of news organizations.

The research team held conversations in community gathering places, including public libraries and a restaurant.

Think about a source of information that you trust. It could be a news site, a social media feed, a friend, bartender or hairdresser. Why do you trust them? Is it for the same reasons as before? Anything different? Anything to add?

Here, the goal was to isolate how trust operates in the context of information. Participants discussed both traditional and nontraditional sources of information to reveal compelling intersections between interpersonal and informational trust.

If you could build a news organization in your community from scratch, what would it have to do to be trusted and respected?

The third question was designed to capture the aspirations of participants, and to prompt them to imagine a future in which news organizations are widely and deeply trusted. The approach is rooted in the notion of Appreciative Inquiry,[12] which encourages participants not to dwell on what's wrong with a particular situation but to instead imagine what's possible. Such aspirational discourse can yield intriguing possibilities that might not otherwise surface.

Following the conversations, participants filled out a placard to capture their overall thoughts. The placard was presented as an opportunity for participants to send a personal message directly to news organizations. Their responses were generated using the prompt: ***"I'll trust a news organization when ..."***

After completing the conversations, transcripts were analyzed using an open coding method. The comments were synthesized and organized into six trust conditions that must be met in order for members of the public to trust a news organization. What follows is an examination of each of the six trust conditions along with recommendations for news organizations to consider as they seek to build trust in their own communities.

Community Profiles

Pico Rivera, Calif. **Suburban community** **62,942 population** **$57,203 median income** **91 percent Latino** **Leans Democratic**	*Boston, Mass. (Mattapan)* **Urban community** **23,551 population** **$45,000 median income** **80 percent Black** **Leans Democratic**
Vienna, Ill. **Rural community** **1,343 population** **$27,177 median income** **95 percent white** **Leans Republican**	*Oxford, Miss.* **Suburban community** **18,916 population** **$33,800 median income** **72 percent white** **Leans Republican** **(Lafayette County)**

Sources: U.S. Census American Fact Finder, City of Boston

Authenticity

In each of the workshops, participants stressed that trust is not built on a series of transactions — get the quote, get the story and move on. Instead, it's built upon interactions that are part of a relationship constructed slowly over time. And as with any relationship, authenticity is a key component. Across the country, participants repeatedly said they would trust news organizations that are open and genuine in the way they communicate and interact with the public.

Recognizing limits

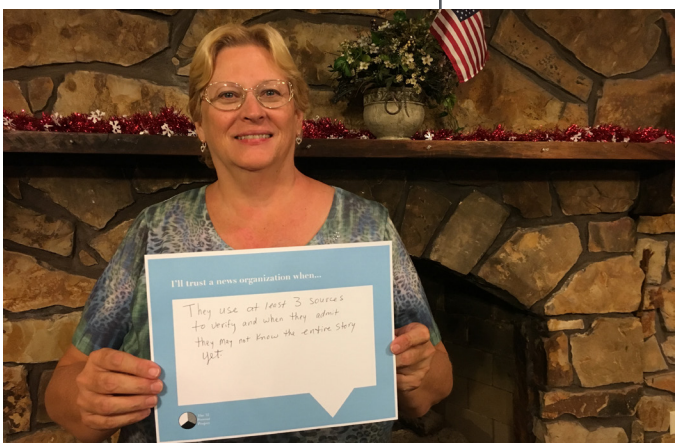
One of the most consistent themes — one that spanned geography, education level and political affiliation — was the idea that news organizations could build trust if they were more comfortable not just sharing what they know, but explaining what they don't.

It's a practice that, for some, begins at home. When considering a person or institution she truly trusted in her life, a woman in Pico Rivera talked about her relationship with her father. She said he was an opinionated man, but she trusted him because he was confident enough to tell her that he didn't have all the answers.

"If you really got to it, he would be honest enough to tell you, 'Honey, I don't know,'" said the woman, who described herself as a Catholic and a mom.

Instead of undermining his authority, she said, this simple act of candor deepened her trust.

A similar theme emerged in Oxford, where a church-going college student talked about how he built trust with his pastors. He said he often approaches faith leaders when he's wrestling with important questions, but that they don't always present him with a perfectly crafted answer. He appreciated that they had the humility to share the limitations of their knowledge.



"I'll trust a news organization when they use at least three sources to verify and when they admit they may not know the entire story yet."

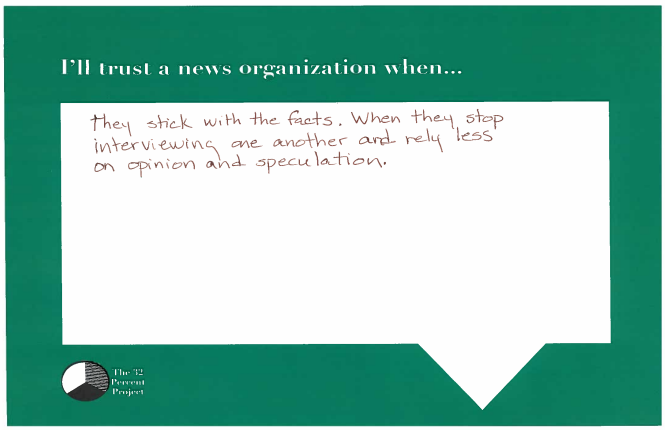
"If you ask them a really hard or difficult question, they'll say, 'I don't have all the answers. I don't know everything,'" he said. Instead, the pastors often direct him to quality source material — the Bible, in this case — so he can search for answers on his own.

Authentic voice

Participants also talked about authenticity in terms of communication style — both written and visual. Participants in Pico Rivera praised media personalities who demonstrate an ability to explain things in the kind of simple, direct language that draws them into the conversation. Often, they said, the news can feel intimidating. They felt there is a special language that news organizations use to describe, say, politics or world affairs alongside an assumption that the audience is already closely following events.

One antidote, these participants said, is to use language geared toward a wider audience.

"You want to be able to understand simple, simple English or simple ways to communicate," said a participant in Pico Rivera who attends the local community college. "When you do something that is sophisticated, superfluous, and you don't quite understand the communication, you start losing the communication."



Some participants said they don't trust news organizations that frequently interview other journalists.

One of the student's classmates noted a link between the jargon-laden language of news and the advertising-based business model. In his view, those facets taken together made him feel like the goal was not to serve the audience's needs. He offered a pithy recommendation for any news organization working to earn his trust: "No adjectives, no advertising."

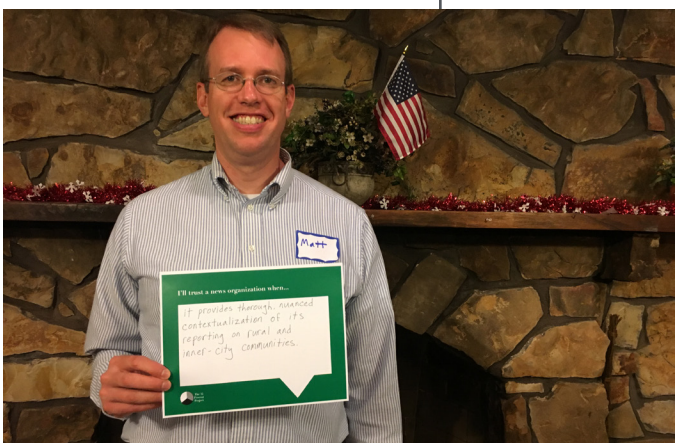
The notion of authenticity extended to visual journalism as well. Participants in the Vienna workshop, in particular, derided the visual clichés of television news — from the shiny stingers that announce the arrival of "breaking news" to the weather reporter braving a stand-up in a hurricane. As one participant in Vienna put it: "If I have to see somebody in a slicker rain suit say, 'We're going to hunker down' one more time ..."

That kind of theatricality breeds skepticism, she said, and ultimately undermines authenticity by assuming viewers require stagecraft to understand the news.

Second-hand trust

Participants in each of the workshops wanted to know that journalists are willing to put their reputation on the line when asking people to trust their work. In Oxford, for example, participants listed radio shows and podcasts as trusted information sources, not because of the inherent trustworthiness of the journalists who run them, but because of the second-hand trust conferred upon them by the guests they featured. If a prominent person who I respect is willing to associate with this news organization, the thinking went, then I'm willing to trust it too.

Sports productions in particular earned praise in this area. One young man in Oxford listed Mad Dog Sports Radio as a trusted source of information because it attracted high-caliber guests. That leads to more people listening, he said, which in turns leads to a more economically viable production.



"I'll trust a news organization when it provides thorough, nuanced contextualization of its reporting on rural and inner-city communities."

"I trust that they put their reputation on the line to give good information, because if they don't, they're going to lose their job," he said.

Likewise, other participants in that conversation reported a distrust of organizations that relied on journalists interviewing other journalists because it implied a suspect degree of insularity.

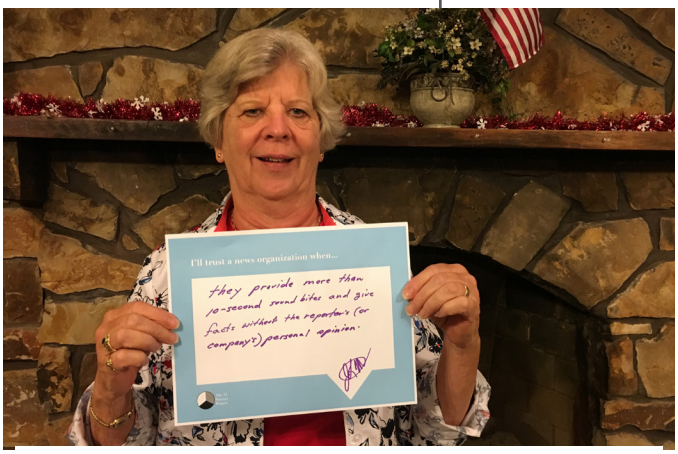
Instead, several participants in the Vienna workshop said journalists should develop a deeper understanding of their communities and audiences.

Transparency

Workshop participants said in clear terms that they do not understand the journalistic process. Many said they had almost no knowledge of how journalists gather information or what choices they make and why. And when reading news stories, they said they're often unsure about whether they're looking at facts that have been obtained independently or have been reinterpreted or aggregated. Without a deeper sense of how journalism works — and how it's held accountable — they said they were simply unwilling to trust the finished product.

Sources and methods

Several participants in the Vienna workshop contrasted the practice of journalism with the Scientific Method, which they described as rigorous, replicable and easy-to-understand. In particular, participants in different locations independently cited astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson as being trustworthy because they understand the method behind his work. "It's verifiable," a woman said. "Reproducible," added another. "Independently," chimed in a third.



"I'll trust a news organization when they provide more than ten-second sound bites and give facts without the reporter's (or company's) personal opinion."

Facebook, by contrast, was mentioned as untrustworthy by participants in Oxford because it does not conveniently reveal the process by which information shows up in News Feed. Participants said they know they're only seeing a small portion of what's out there, but have little idea why they're seeing one thing as opposed to another.

The journalistic process is viewed as similarly inscrutable — an informational black box that is susceptible to manipulation. They felt journalists should find ways to be far more transparent about their reporting process, which echoes a position long championed by media critic and scholar Jay Rosen of New York University.[13]

Another way to boost trust, according to participants in Oxford and Boston, is to provide opportunities for news consumers to verify information themselves. Wikipedia came up repeatedly as a trusted source of information because each fact is linked to the source material. Several participants said they like being able to explore original sources and to discover how information is incorporated into the narrative.

When asked what steps they'd take to create a trustworthy news organization, participants in each of the workshops said one of their first jobs would be to make source material much more widely available.

"We would have a great reservoir of information available for people who wanted to see the original press conference, the original statement, whatever it was," said a woman in Pico Rivera, summarizing the views of the people at her discussion table. "They can access it and have that reassurance that what the reporter (relayed) actually reflected it."

The same idea held true for visual journalism, which a participant in Oxford said was often guilty of presenting information without context.

"They tend to just zoom in on what the action is or zoom in on some small part of the drama instead of showing everything that's going on around it," said the participant. "Do 360(-degree) spins with the camera... show everything around you."

"[Cable news] just kind of flows between news and opinion. You don't see that segue. You just think it's news."

Along those lines, a participant in the Vienna workshop said she wanted to see some kind of industry guideline when it came to the number of sources used in a single story. She said three sources per story would be a good number, and felt news organizations should both require it of all stories and widely share that standard with consumers. Another Vienna participant said she trusted MSNBC commentator Rachel Maddow because "she'll say, 'Well, we haven't verified this because we need three different independent sources to verify.'"

Trust in labeling

Participants in each workshop expressed frustration that journalistic stories seem to contain a blend of fact, analysis and even opinion. Time and again, they said they wanted a much clearer separation, as well as obvious and straightforward labeling to help them distinguish between fact and opinion.

Participants in Oxford and Boston said they don't have a problem with a journalistic outlet or story being biased, as long as it's transparent about that bias and clear about when it comes in.

"My whole thing about trust is, you have to understand where (a person is) coming from," said a participant in Boston.

One participant in Oxford, who described himself as apolitical, listed The Daily Wire podcast with conservative host Ben Shapiro as a good example.

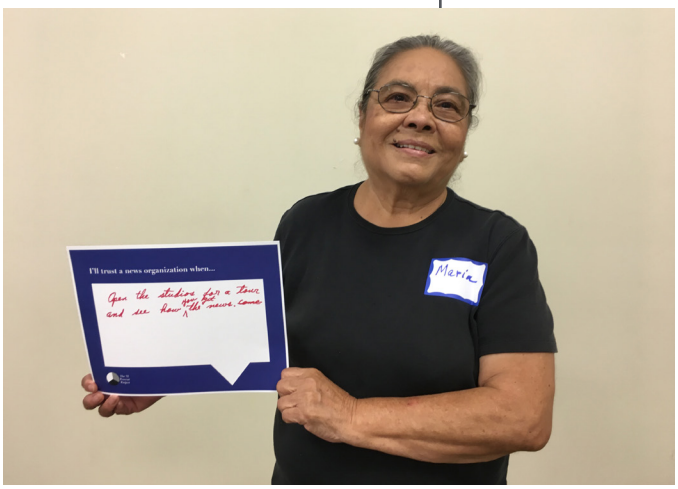
"He's biased, but he gives the source material first and then gives his interpretation," the participant said. "You know he's not mixing it in."

Several sports podcasts were also favorably mentioned as clearly separating fact from speculation and analysis, but cable news programs were dinged for not labeling at all. "It just kind of flows between news and opinion," said a young man in Pico Rivera. "You don't see that segue. You just think it's news."

Mutually understood standards

Another gap in understanding emerged around how the industry holds itself accountable.

One participant in Vienna, a military veteran who said he watches Fox News and identifies as a Republican, wondered why journalism doesn't have a more clearly communicated set of rules and standards along the lines of the U.S. military's Uniform Code of Military Justice. The man said such standards not only help people make better decisions, but generate greater public confidence.



"I'll trust a news organization when [journalists] open the studios for a tour and [we] see how you get the news."

"With that as a guideline, I absolutely trust them," he said of the military.

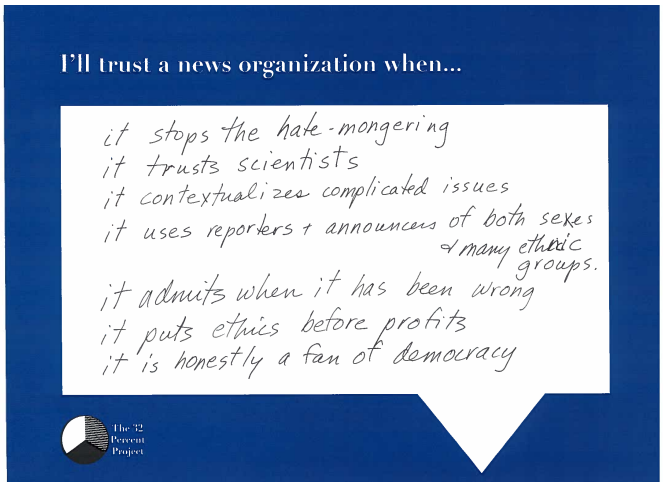
The idea of some sort of accrediting body for journalism was discussed in detail during the Oxford workshop, although participants were clear that such oversight should not come from the government. Rather, they said they liked the idea of a professional association that could certify professional journalists and remove that accreditation if they broke a set of clear standards.

"Doctors, with their licenses, with their credibility, they have a sense of accountability and incentive to tell you the truth," said a participant in Oxford. "If a doctor diagnoses you as sick just because he wants money from you, that comes out. He's going to lose his money and his job and his license, so he has incentive to tell you the truth."

Ultimately, participants in each of the workshops said transparency isn't just about news organizations taking specific actions to be more open — it's about communicating those steps to the public. One participant in Pico Rivera recalled her experience working as a school board member. She said the board worked hard to involve the community in its budgeting process by making documents available

and inviting families to sit in on meetings. The board considered itself exceptionally transparent for taking those steps, she said. Yet despite these efforts, some members of the public still felt the process was opaque.

"We're putting the facts out there, but if you don't believe that we're transparent, then from your perspective, we're not," said the woman.



Participants shared specific ideas about how news organizations can earn their trust.

Consistency

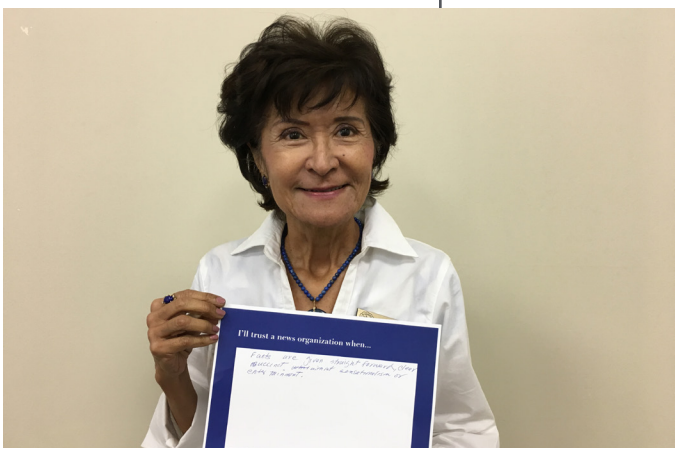
Relationships are the foundation of trust, participants said, and they are often built upon a series of small, routine interactions that create a sense of reliability over time. Being consistent can help cultivate trust, especially when an organization sets clear expectations, does what it says it will do, delivers on time and makes itself accessible. But those expectations cut both ways. Consistency can also undermine trust if audience members come to associate a news organization with bad motives or practices.

Meeting expectations

When talking about people and organizations that demonstrated consistency, participants focused on institutions that provided everyday functions.

One example, cited by several participants in the Oxford workshop, was the consistency displayed by the local sanitation department, which participants celebrated for creating what they considered a durable culture of trust.

"They're the best on the planet as far as we're concerned," said one of the participants, who's lived in Oxford for decades. "They're reliable, they're nice, they're punctual. They even work on holidays. They're in a good mood, they're friendly, we can count on them — counting on people is a theme."



"I'll trust a news organization when facts are given straightforward, clear, succinct without sensationalism or entertainment."

Another participant in Oxford — a student at the University of Mississippi — said he felt he could count on Domino's Pizza and its famous speedy-delivery deal. He said he'd ordered from the company countless times, and drivers met or beat their deadline every time.

"They always have my pizza to me 30 minutes or before like they say they will," he said. "So I trust them."

In Pico Rivera, participants talked about consistency not just in terms of how an organization meets expectations but how it handles a failure. In particular, one young man said he trusts his favorite restaurant, In-N-Out Burger, for precisely this reason.

"When we may have an issue, a problem, it's taken care of, it's addressed," he said. "That builds trust for me."

Consistency in process

When it comes to information, participants said they valued consistency in both the product and the process behind it.

In Boston, three participants singled out a one-man local news website called Universal Hub for its ability to respond to questions, tips and inquires — even late at night. For these participants, that kind of reliability was a pathway to trust.

"Two-thirty in the morning, he'll retweet," said a Boston-area mail carrier who pays close attention to the news. "Everything is through Twitter but he doesn't randomly just throw up whatever you want. He's gonna check it out and it will be there. Channel 7 won't be there. Channel 5 won't be there."

In an age when many people's news feeds are a chaotic mix of information and entertainment, several participants in Boston said they appreciate news organizations that deploy a standardized, consistent article format. While they enjoy a diversity of content, they said it's important to know what to expect from an organization when clicking on a particular article.

For instance, the mail carrier who reads Universal Hub said one of his favorite things about the site is that every article is five paragraphs or fewer, an approach also embraced by national outlets, such as political journalism startup Axios.

"It's just what happened and then that's it," he said.

While consistency is a critical component of trust, it takes time and focus to build. Comments from participants suggest that it requires establishing a clear set of expectations, communicating them to a community and then delivering on those expectations in a reliable way.

As one participant in Boston put it: "You can't really be trustworthy off the bat. You have to build that reputation ... The most important part is staying consistent."

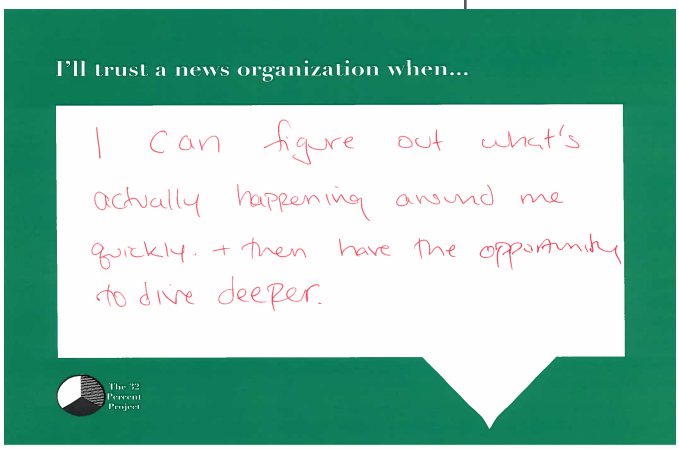
"You can't really be trustworthy off the bat. You have to build that reputation ... The most important part is staying consistent."

Consistency cuts two ways

But just as building a positive reputation takes time and consistency, it can be a challenge for news organizations to overcome perceptions of not meeting a community's needs.

One conversation in Boston underscored the importance of deep and consistent coverage.

A community organizer who has lived in Boston for 40 years said she felt offended that the local newspaper had not covered the Puerto Rican community festival that year, and described it as evidence that the outlet was not committed to covering that population.



Several participants expressed a desire for news organizations to clearly and consistently separate breaking news from other content.

Another participant pointed out that the newspaper had, in fact, covered the festival, and pulled up the story on her phone. The woman was unmoved, and all but refused to acknowledge the coverage, despite direct evidence to the contrary. To her, the issue didn't appear to be about the festival itself. Rather, it seemed to be an entry point to a broader concern that news organizations had not consistently covered her community in a way that reflected her lived experience.

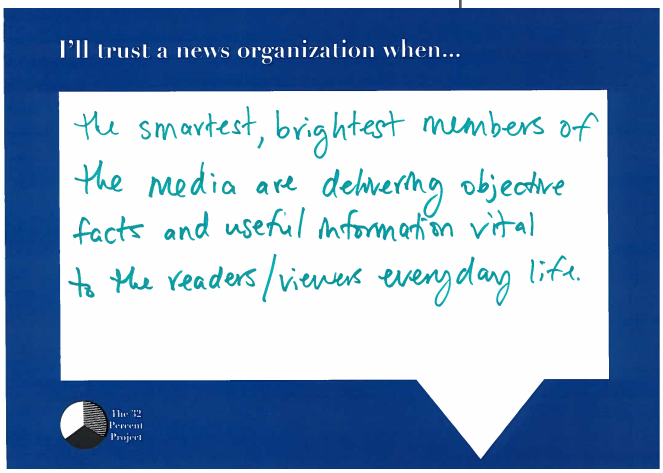
After years of neglecting to cover her area of Boston in a thoughtful way, the woman said she'd made up her mind about members of the news media: "I don't believe none of them. Okay? None of them."

Positivity

In each workshop, participants said they felt the news is too negative. It wasn't that they resisted the idea of journalists covering crime and malfeasance, they said. They just wanted to see a foundation of positive news from the outlets that serve their community.

There was a particular hunger for positivity in Boston's Mattapan neighborhood, which residents said is usually portrayed by news organizations as either a haven for crime and drugs or the subject of gentrification. Participants said news organizations have left a deep perception that they will parachute in only when things go wrong, and that the road to rebuilding trust would be a long one.

A longtime Boston resident explained the reason for her antipathy: "Trump called them 'fake media' and when it comes down to my community, you all look the same to me. When there is something good going in my neighborhood, I don't see it. Never. But if somebody shoots somebody, oh, first page."



Many participants felt the news did not reflect the baseline of positivity they experience in their daily lives.

Baseline of goodwill

Across all workshops, participants contrasted their perceptions of the news media with people and institutions they encounter in other parts of their lives.

To many, positivity was a key factor in evaluating trustworthiness. They said it helps establish a baseline of goodwill and mutual interest, which can sustain a relationship even during challenging times. This hunger for positivity has been documented in an academic context by Andrea Wenzel, a journalism professor at Temple University, who argues that focusing on the solutions to problems — rather than just the problems themselves — could represent a "pathway to rebuild constructive and mutually beneficial relationships of greater trust."[14]

One Vienna participant, a non-profit manager who focuses on the health of rural communities, described what he called the "two sides of trust." The affirmative side creates a bedrock of support, while the critical side enables constructive feedback. You can't have one without the other, he said, and described a work colleague who exemplifies this idea.

"He just loves to encourage people and find reasons to compliment the people's work," he said. "But you know that he's not just putting you on because when he does identify something that could be improved, he'll tell you so, kindly."

That sentiment was echoed in Boston.

"You want to be around people who have positive things to say," a woman said. "It's a turn-off for me when somebody at work or in the community says negative things about other people or is just a Debbie Downer. You just want to be around positive people because it makes you feel good. You're around negative people, it's just like 'oh, total bummer, right?'"

Not cheerleading

Despite the general support for positivity, several participants in Boston said they were not interested in mere cheerleading from news organizations. Rather, they saw positivity as a foundation upon which needed criticism could be delivered.

"We cannot be positive all the time because we won't learn from each other," said one of the participants in Boston. "We need to be open to being corrected."

Participants spoke of positivity not just in terms of news content, but in terms of style and presentation. Participants in Pico Rivera, Oxford and Vienna described what they viewed as "shouting matches" on cable news, lamenting what they perceived to be sensationalism and conflict prioritization. As one participant in Pico Rivera put it: "You've got the three right and these three left screaming at each other. You can't even watch that anymore."

"Trump called them 'fake media' and when it comes down to my community, you all look the same to me. When there is something good going in my neighborhood, I don't see it. Never. But if somebody shoots somebody, oh, first page."

Diversity

Participants were clear in every community: they said they will not trust a news organization that doesn't pay sincere and holistic attention to diversity. Across all four communities, participants said they did not see themselves or their lives reflected in the news they consumed, and expressed an emphatic desire for that to change.

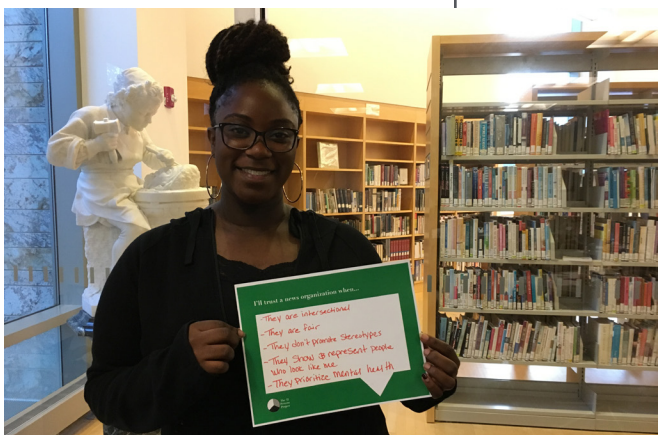
"The community (needs to) feel like what they're seeing in the news is reflective of who they are," said a woman in Pico Rivera. "(We want) a range of gender, race, ethnicity, income level — every kind of diversity you can imagine — so that the stories don't just reflect a narrow amount of people who happen to work for a news outlet."

Reflecting the community

Participants in every conversation stressed a desire that newsrooms better reflect the communities they serve. Many defined diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, but most envisioned a broader interpretation that included geographic diversity, diversity of experience and diversity of background. One woman in Pico Rivera even discussed diversity in terms of physical appearance.

"They have all these beautiful people [anchoring news programs]: perfect hair, perfect makeup, perfect bodies, perfect everything," she said. "It's like 'Wow, nobody looks like that.'"

Participants recognized that news decisions are made by people, and that those people have a particular lens through which they view the world. What many said they wanted to see was a wide variety of lenses.



"I'll trust a news organization when they are intersectional. They are fair. They don't promote stereotypes. They show and represent people who look like me. They prioritize mental health."

"(We see) a lot of the same types of stories based on who the producers are," said a young woman in Boston. "It's not like there's (always) a room full of 40 people saying, 'What should we work on today?' There may be just a few."

With only a subset of stories being told, participants said they felt news organizations were only serving a small part of the community. Ignoring everyone else underscored perceptions that the news simply wasn't for them.

For instance, participants in the Boston workshop discussed at length the mayor's use of the word "punk" to describe three young men of color who were accused of murdering a local hardware store owner. Media outlets reported on the comment, but participants did not view the reportage as calling out a public official for using a term they considered harmful to their community. Instead, they chided the news organizations for amplifying the term.

Supporting the community

Several participants in Boston said they wanted news organizations to go beyond merely reflecting the community — they wanted them to play an active role in building it. Journalism, to them, should be about telling the stories of a particular place and its people. It should be a record of their lives, their troubles and their triumphs in a way that enables a community to see itself for what it is, and for what it could be. And they were emphatic that overlooking that role was a surefire way to breed disinterest and, ultimately, distrust.

One Boston participant — a community activist and poet — took the idea even further. He said news organizations that ignore or misrepresent a community were doing actual harm.

"(It) takes away the memory of a people, and when you take away a memory of a people, they lose their plane of reference in the universe," he said. "As long as communities continue to be miseducated and not have a chance to really understand themselves, then you can't say you have a true perception of what's going on."

But that reflection must address the many facets of the community, participants said, rather than a single narrative.

"For me, it needs to be intersectional," said a young woman in Boston, discussing her ideal news organization in terms of her own identities. "Because I'm not just Black. I'm not just a woman."

"(We want) a range of gender, race, ethnicity, income level — every kind of diversity you can imagine — so that the stories don't just reflect a narrow amount of people who happen to work for a news outlet."

Diversity of opinion and perspective

Many participants said they did not want to see opinion or analysis in their news. However, they said they still want to consume it. They simply want it separate, clearly labeled and reflective of a wider range of perspectives. Some said they were making an extra effort to seek out different points of view in a time of deep polarization, but wanted them to be smart, informed and easy-to-access.

"I really, really enjoy reading different opinions," said a woman in Oxford. "A lot of times, finding different opinions can be hard."

In addition, participants in Oxford and Vienna said they liked hearing an international perspective on American news as a way to see things from a bit of a remove.

"I started paying attention more to the BBC and The Economist last year during the election," said a man in Oxford, a retiree who said he follows the news closely. "I wanted to see an outside perspective."

Yet participants wanted a broader inside perspective as well. Those in rural areas said it was critical that news outlets reflect life outside urban America. They said they understood that most news outlets are based in big cities and necessarily focus their attention there.

"I'll trust a news organization when there are more Hispanic journalists."

Many expressed appreciation that some outlets recognized rural coverage as a blind spot following the 2016 presidential election, and were even complimentary about some of the efforts to re-engage. But they pointed out that some rural residents have purposely chosen that life in the same way that many city-dwellers have chosen theirs, and even well-intentioned stories can do more harm than good if they're not told from a place of deep understanding.

"For a long time, there wasn't adequate coverage on a national scale of rural and small-town America, and what coverage there was often was done by journalists who, understandably, because they're from major cities or suburban areas or college towns, don't really have a lot of personal familiarity with more rural communities," said one participant in Vienna, who is a fifth-generation Illinoisan who grew up in nearby Randolph County. "A lot of the time, their contextualization either wasn't adequate or just reflected unfamiliarity."

Another participant, a Vienna-based documentary filmmaker, put it more bluntly: "We're either bumpkins with overalls or we're Bible thumpers," she said.

Though many in Vienna found the media's representation of rural communities galling, they spoke more about how limited rural coverage means the broader country is missing out on a richer picture of American life. While one participant said the news media seems to be taking rural coverage more seriously following the 2016 election, inaccurate portrayals remain commonplace.

"When urban tries to contextualize rural they already have these stereotypes in their heads," one participant said. Added another: "What they don't realize ... is those guys with the wheat in the corner of their mouth in their overalls are the local millionaires."

Participants in every conversation expressed a need for newsrooms that reflect the diversity of the community.

A shared mission

News organizations have historically functioned as both mirror and mouthpiece of a community. Yet participants in each workshop said they felt that that relationship had frayed. They said they did not feel the news organizations they encountered were working for them, with them. They said they wanted to know that journalists were part of the community, were invested in its success and were genuinely interested in maintaining relationships with their neighbors.

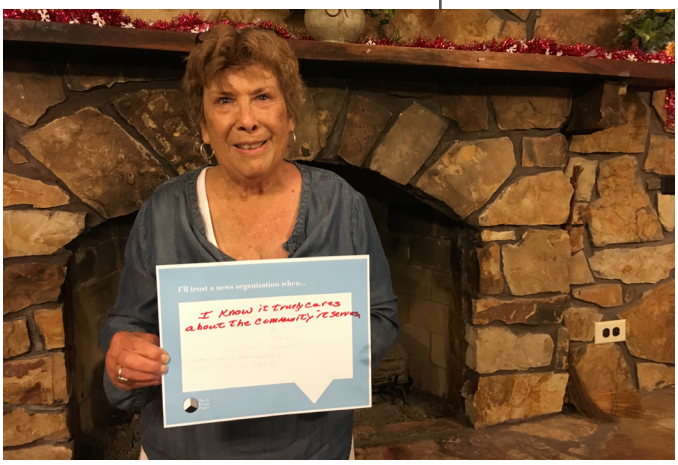
"You don't want people to talk ***at*** you," said a young man in Pico Rivera. "You want people to talk ***with*** you."

Having a sense of shared mission plays a significant role in building and maintaining trust, participants reported. They consistently listed parents and spouses as the most trusted people in their lives. But they did not mention the moments of love and support nearly as often as they mentioned hard times and tough conversations. They said they trusted these relationships because the person told them what they needed to hear rather than what they wanted to hear.

Because participants felt parents and spouses were working with them toward a shared goal, they were inclined to take a long view on the relationship. What mattered most was a sense that they were in it together.

"When they have your interests at heart, that's a good sign of trust," said a man in Vienna.

What underlies this sentiment seemed to be a sense of reciprocity. Participants in Boston and Vienna said a good faith interest and investment from news organizations would represent a potential path to trust, whereas shallow or transactional interactions would not.



"I'll trust a news organization when I know it truly cares about the community it serves."

Research on the link between community engagement and trust is still in the early stages, but one academic study found that community engagement techniques used by local news organizations can have a "meaningful impact on whose voices are heard in the media and how participating residents view a media outlet."[15]

It's important to note that a sense of interpersonal trust does not always extend to informational trust. One workshop participant in Vienna said that she trusted her neighbor on a personal level because he often helped out on her rural property and could be relied on in times of crisis. But she said she did not trust him as a source of information because she felt his biases too clearly colored the information he shared. Proximity alone, it seems, is not always enough.

Questioning the business model

Participants of every background, in every community, expressed deep and vocal skepticism of the traditional media business model, and in many cases felt it outright undermined journalism's civic and democratic role. If a news organization is focused on private profit, they reasoned, then it's not truly focused on public service.

"Many news organizations are beholden to these really extreme financial pressures," a Pico Rivera participant said. "That compromises them entirely."

Across all of the workshops, participants said they were troubled by the economics of news, and how it might be affecting the product.

"Now that ad revenue has disappeared, I feel like news outlets are just desperately trying to find their audience, and they're trying to protect their audience with this kind of bias," said a woman in Pico Rivera. "They're training their audience to only watch their news."

"Many news organizations are beholden to these really extreme financial pressures. That compromises them entirely."

Yet several participants did not place the blame solely on news organizations. They also reflected on how many news consumers gravitate to stories that feed outrage and fear, and how news organizations are often responding to this facet of human nature with their coverage.

"You'll get 10 people watching if a cat is stuck in a tree and the fire department comes out, and it's a feel-good story. But you'll get a hundred people watching if somebody got shot. And that'll get the ratings up, and ratings turn into money," said one of the participants in Boston. "We say we don't want to see this bad stuff on TV," she continued. "But I don't think that's necessarily true. We're all drawn to negativity because we can talk about it, we can have our opinions on negativity. What are we gonna say about a cat stuck in a tree?"

Participants in each of the workshops said they were unswayed by notions of journalistic objectivity, speaking truth to power, the firewall between news and business or other bulwarks against dollar-driven content.

"It's ratings driven, and then you have a certain integrity that you're supposed to maintain," said a participant in Oxford, a writer and musician who identifies as a political independent. "I don't know how you can do both, I really don't."

As a woman in Vienna put it: "They give you 30 seconds of news and then they sell you three or four times."

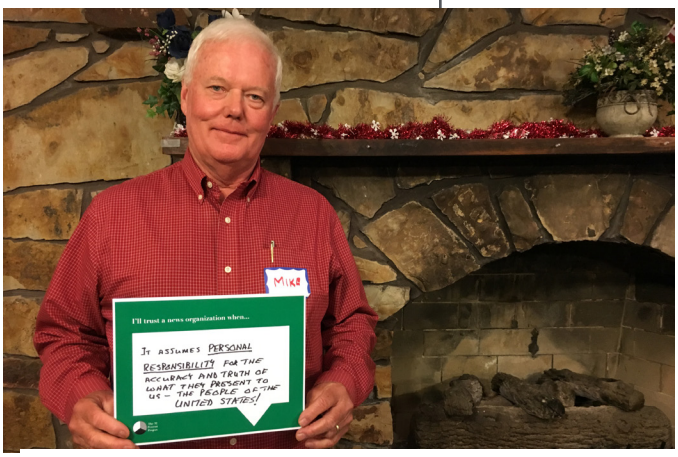
Participants in Pico Rivera and Vienna mentioned specific outlets as trusted news sources explicitly because they didn't run on an advertising-based model, such as NPR, PBS and the BBC. Others said they trusted certain local, digital-only outlets that were run by hobbyists — such as Universal Hub in Boston — which they felt were motivated by a sense of public good rather than profit.

Accountability

Inherent in a sense of shared mission is a notion of accountability. Participants in Vienna said they felt strongly that trust was earned and maintained through a community's ability to hold a news organization to its word. And a comments section or corrections policy is not enough.

Participants who lived in communities that had a dedicated news organization said the potential to have personal interactions with local journalists was a big part of the trust factor. It was important to see journalists living and working in their community rather than being an abstract persona.

That was especially true in Boston, where participants said that journalists who live even a few miles away would have a hard time contextualizing their neighborhood. A similar idea was expressed in Vienna, as participants lamented the lack of dedicated news outlets serving rural America.

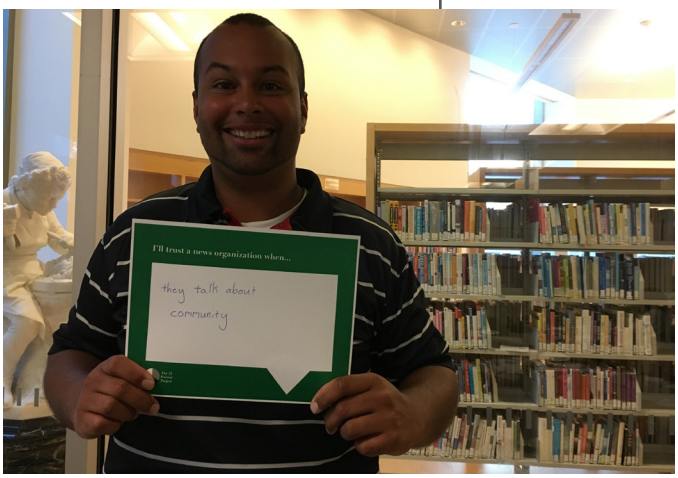


"I'll trust a news organization when it assumes personal responsibility for the accuracy and truth of what they present to us — the people of the United States!"

"It's one of the reasons why rural and small-town people are trusting the media less and less," one of the Vienna participants said. "When they see the coverage of their own setting, either the interpretation is off or they're really missing some important piece of the story. I think it does become a vicious cycle."

An explicit mission

Participants in several workshops said they felt strongly that a shared mission was not effective if it was unspoken or one-sided. Instead, they suggested that it should be spelled out, demonstrated and amplified. Many spoke of trusted groups or institutions that had an explicit shared mission, which served as a North Star during good and bad times.



"I'll trust a news organization when they talk about community."

In Vienna, a veteran spoke of his time in the military as an example of this. Each branch, each unit had a clear goal. That clarity built a critical sense of community.

"We had one mission," he said. "We all knew what it was and we all worked toward it."

In Oxford, a children's book author mentioned her writer's club as a trusted group because everyone is working toward the same goal — to get their work published. Giving and receiving meaningful feedback is crucial to the process.

"You get the feeling you're all in it together," she said. "Everybody lifts each other up."

Participants were asked to design their own news organization that was maximized for trust. A majority of them said they would spend time, money and energy on building deep, genuine relationships with their audience. They felt this was a good way to demonstrate a shared mission, and that stronger relationships would lead to better journalism and deeper trust.

"I would devote a whole small department to reader relations," said a man in Oxford, who identified as an "anti-Trump" Republican. "I think that could really be a good bridge between the media and their followers."

Meanwhile, participants in Pico Rivera spoke of the need to protect that sense of shared mission from those seeking to undermine it. This often emerged in discussions about online comments and social media. When imagining their own trusted publication, several participants said they wanted to create a forum for discussion and debate, but one that had clear rules for interaction and civility. Participants said they

Participants said news organizations should spend time, money and energy building deep, genuine relationships with their audience.

wouldn't mind having to navigate additional hurdles before placing a comment, so long as those barriers could successfully weed out trolls and keep heated commenters in check.

Ultimately, participants in each of the conversations said they were not interested in the traditional model of one-sided communication. They wanted not only a chance to be heard, but a genuine opportunity to interact in pursuit of a shared mission.

"Journalism is a relationship. It's not a product."

This perspective was summed up by a community college student in Pico Rivera who said trusting a news organization was an act of faith that entails a mutual sense of responsibility.

"Journalism is a relationship," he said. "It's not a product."

Participants in every community were skeptical of an advertising-based business model, saying organizations focused on serving advertisers could not authentically serve the public.

Recommendations

The trust gap between news organizations and the public did not open with the 2016 election cycle and its aftermath. In many communities, the embers of distrust had been burning for years and sometimes decades, propelled by a complex array of social, economic and technological forces. While many news outlets have made small-scale adjustments to fast-changing realities, trust isn't a problem that lends itself to quick fixes. Rather, the road to rebuilding trust will be a long one, and one that's hindered by legacy attachments, political polarization, institutional distrust and, critically, embattled business models. While specific strategies for rebuilding trust will vary widely depending on the mission and needs of particular news organizations, this research points toward four potential strategies that citizens themselves say would lead them to trust a news organization.

Radical transparency

When it comes to building trust, clearly articulating the process of journalism appears to be nearly as important as the product. As this research shows, many citizens have only a vague understanding of how news is produced, which makes them prone to skepticism and distrust. It is therefore worthwhile for news organizations to consider taking active steps to demystify how they approach their work, what standards they use and how they hold themselves accountable.

News organizations should take active steps to demystify how they approach their work, what standards they use and how they hold themselves accountable.

The potential trust-building nature of "showing your work" is an idea that's gaining traction in journalism circles, and figured prominently in an essay published by authors Tom Rosenstiel and Jane Elizabeth at the American Press Institute.[16] Some news organizations are already experimenting with these tactics, from the Washington Post's "How To Be A Journalist" video series[17] to ProPublica's new approach to more detailed explanations of corrections. In addition, The Trust Project at Santa Clara University is experimenting with digital article formats that showcase specific "Trust Indicators" to provide readers with information about how an article was reported.[18]

While these projects represent a significant step forward, experiments in transparency are not happening evenly across the industry, with financially struggling local news organizations often lagging behind. While strategies will look different depending on a particular news organization's audience and needs, the conversations conducted for this project suggest that transparency should no longer be an ancillary function of journalism. Instead, news organizations should consider placing transparency at the center of the work they do.

Elevate local voices

Participants in every conversation said diverse voices and perspectives were critical to building trust, yet we believe one approach to this challenge has often been overlooked: hiring people from within the community a news organization serves. Our research suggests that this would help the organization better reflect its audience, and could establish a stronger foundation for trust.

As it stands, a majority of journalists are clustered in big cities, particularly New York City, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles.[19] Many grew up elsewhere and hopscotched from one media market to another before settling in a media capital, drawn by the prospect of jobs with better pay and greater prestige.[20] This industry practice means reporters in smaller communities often have one foot out the door, and don't always develop the deep ties required to understand the true complexity of a community.

Instead of exclusively bringing in journalists from the outside, local outlets should consider elevating the voices that already exist in their community That's a model being pioneered by organizations such as Everyday Boston, one of the community partners on this project. Instead of hiring trained reporters from elsewhere, Everyday Boston reaches into the community, identifies people with compelling perspectives and provides them with basic training in interviewing and story development. They then become "story ambassadors" who produce content for the site.[21] Experiments with a similar model are underway at the City Bureau news startup in Chicago — with promising results.[22]

Instead of bringing in trained journalists from the outside, local outlets should consider elevating the voices that already exist in their community.

This is not to say that the skills often possessed by transient journalists aren't valuable to news organizations — they're critical. But the conversations conducted for this project suggest that news organizations would be wise to develop their local talent, as well.

Report on what's working

News organizations should explore ways to meaningfully address the public's hunger for positive news that is both consistent and contextual. Over the years, many news organizations have tried to counteract the public impression of negativity through a mix of charity promotion, event coverage and "good news" segments. But perhaps it's time to ask a more fundamental question: what qualifies as news in the first place? While leavening a steady stream of crime and car crashes with "feel-good" stories might satisfy some viewers' demands for balance, participants in our conversations did not find this to be a compelling strategy for building and maintaining public trust over the long-term.

One approach gaining traction in the industry is the notion of solutions journalism. As defined by the Solutions Journalism Network, solutions journalism is "rigorous reporting on responses to social problems." It's a shift in framing away from what's wrong and toward what's working, and can allow journalism to help a community confront challenges in ways its practitioners say is both empowering and generates goodwill.

Perhaps it's time for journalists' mission to shift from telling stories about a community to providing a valuable service for a community.

While an empirical link between solutions journalism and increased trust is still being studied, our findings are consistent with other research that suggests audiences are hungry for consistently accurate and positive portrayals of their community.[23] To be clear, journalists will always have a responsibility to shine a spotlight on wrongdoing, but approaching their work with a solutions mindset represents a potential path toward building the public trust necessary to ensure that their work is both empowering and impactful.

Authentic engagement

Traditionally, many journalists have viewed their role as telling stories ***about*** a community. These conversations suggest that perhaps it's time for journalists' mission to shift toward providing a valuable service ***for*** that community. As many participants noted, journalists actively undermine trust by parachuting into a community, extracting the information they need, publishing and moving on. One potential pathway to trust would instead place the public at the very center of the work journalists do. After all, a news organization can't expect to earn trust if it doesn't trust the community it serves.

Across the country, news organizations are experimenting with strategies to more deeply engage with community stakeholders. Although research into how engagement impacts trust is ongoing,[24] promising examples abound, including the experience of The Southern Illinoisan newspaper in Carbondale, Ill., just 36 miles from Vienna. In 2017, it produced an award-winning series on the plight of

people facing eviction from a beleaguered public housing project in nearby Cairo. But instead of jumping in and quickly jumping out, the paper put the community first by hosting a town hall and workshop to provide a civic service.[25] As research by Joy Mayer at Trusting News and others suggests,[26] such a human approach holds much potential as a trust-builder, and news organizations would be wise to accelerate these kinds of experiments.

Journalists must speak truth to empower.

Taken together, these recommendations offer potential pathways news organizations can follow to begin bridging the trust gap within the communities they serve. They also point toward a new orientation for how journalists see themselves and the roles they play in a community.

While the long-standing journalistic rallying cry of "speak truth to power" remains a bedrock of the mission, our findings indicate it's time to update that slogan to better reflect journalism's evolving role in a people-centered democracy. Journalists must also speak truth to ***em***power.

Participants in the Mattapan neighborhood in Boston share their thoughts on what journalists can do to earn their trust.

Acknowledgments

This project benefited enormously from and would not have been possible without the guidance and support of many people and institutions.

First, we'd like to thank Regina Lawrence and Andrew DeVigal of the Agora Journalism Center. Through their leadership, Agora is doing groundbreaking work on journalism innovation and community engagement. This project would not have been possible without Agora's generous support. But more than that, Regina and Andrew's experience and insights helped shape the project, and we're grateful for their guidance.

Thomas Schmidt, a post-doctoral researcher at the School of Journalism and Communication, played a critical role in conceiving the project, collecting data, analyzing results and securing opportunities to present our findings. And he's an excellent road trip partner.

Mike Fancher, former executive editor for The Seattle Times, helped us develop our research questions. Peggy Holman, founder of Journalism That Matters, introduced us to some of the key community engagement techniques we used in our research. Lori Shontz helped with editing and Abbie Stillie and Steven Asbury consulted on the design.

One of the challenges of a project like this is establishing credibility in far-flung communities. We owe a huge thanks to our community partners, especially Cara Solomon of Everyday Boston, Ashley Alvarado of Southern California Public Radio and the team at Illinois Humanities — Simon Nyi, Matt Meacham, Elliot Heilman and Sandra Pfeifer.

As we rediscovered in our travels, public libraries are an indispensable institution in so many communities. We're extremely grateful for the welcoming policies of the Pico Rivera branch of the County of Los Angeles Public Library, the Mattapan branch of the Boston Public Library and the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Dave Heyamoto, Jerrie Heyamoto, Judi Calvert, Tom Milbourn and Cari Milbourn — our wonderful family members who generously looked after our children while we were travelling for research.

Last but not least, we'd like to thank the 54 people who took time out of their busy lives to talk about trust with their fellow citizens and a team of out-of-town researchers. We truly appreciate the insights they provided to help make journalism better.

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Todd Milbourn is an investigative reporter and co-director of the journalism master's program at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. Milbourn joined the SOJC after more than a decade in daily journalism, including stints as a television news producer, magazine editor and a reporter for The Sacramento Bee and other newspapers. He holds an M.B.A. from the University of Oregon, where he studied entrepreneurship and innovation, and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Minnesota.

Todd Milbourn and Lisa Heyamoto

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Graphics

Authenticity

Participants said they tend to trust people in their personal lives who don't rush to judgment, and are comfortable saying what they don't know. They want to see the same characteristics in news organizations. While many news organizations strive to showcase the authority of their journalism, participants said it's more important to be authentic in how that information is delivered.

Transparency

Conversations revealed that the public has thin knowledge of exactly how journalism is produced. How are news decisions made? Where is the line between fact and analysis? Without a deeper understanding of what choices journalists make and why, the public is deeply skeptical of the product it is expected to accept.

Consistency

Participants reported that the most trusted people, organizations and institutions in their lives had a history of consistently and predictably following through on a promise. Whether that promise was reliable information delivered by a trusted news personality or that a pizza would be delivered in 30 minutes or less, people wanted to know that they could depend on the other party to meet clear and mutually understood expectations.

Positivity

When it comes to personal relationships, participants said they tend to trust people in their lives who are generally positive — and the same goes for news organizations. Many participants pointed out that consistently negative coverage erodes their trust, especially if that coverage doesn't accurately capture what they experience in everyday life.

Diversity

Across all workshops, participants said they did not see themselves reflected in the news they consume. That feeling cut across racial, gender, economic and geographic lines. Few participants said they'd ever met a journalist in person, and the people they see on TV "don't even look like us." Diversity, they said, is a critical ingredient for any news organization seeking to build trust.

Shared Mission

Participants said they want to engage with news organizations that share their goals and aspirations for the community. In many cases, they viewed news organizations as little more than profit-seekers willing to pursue sensational stories to drive advertising. Critical to building trust, they said, is creating a sense that a news organization shares bedrock values and is invested in the good of the community.

Notes

1 http://news.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx

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