

ANNA CLARK

WWW.ANNACLARK.NET

ANNALEIGHCLARK@GMAIL.COM

@ANNALEIGHCLARK

HOW TO SUPPORT GOOD JOURNALISM AND A FREE PRESS

1. **Subscribe, donate, and/or advertise**

Become a stakeholder. Good journalism—or *any* journalism—is impossible without your support. That is just how it is. Over huge swaths of the country, news outlets with traditions of fact-based reporting have been eaten alive. The near-erasure of a local news infrastructure has a real impact on our democracy.

But you can help to sustain and improve our journalism. When you think about where to put your dollars, consider both local news outlets and national ones; digital and print subscriptions; magazines, newspapers, online nonprofit news outlets (like [ProPublica](#) or [The Marshall Project](#) or [WisconsinWatch](#) or [MinnPost](#) or Michigan's [Bridge](#)), public radio ([NPR](#) and [PRI](#)), and public broadcasting ([PBS](#)).

Consider a range of journalism perspectives and reporting styles. And consider giving gift subscriptions to your friends and family members!

This is the number-one thing you can do to help.

2. **Support the work of those fighting for a free press**

This can take a variety of angles. Here are a few possibilities:

The Investigative Fund
www.theinvestigativefund.org

This Fund provides reporters with the editorial guidance and financial support necessary to do the expensive work of investigative reporting. This helps fill the gap in watchdog reporting across the country. Work they've incubated has appeared in or on *The New York Times Magazine*; PBS's *Need to Know*; NPR's *Marketplace*, *Harper's*, *The New Republic*, *AARP Magazine*, *The New Republic*, and more.

The Society for Professional Journalists' Legal Defense Fund
www.spj.org/ldf

A news outlet can go bankrupt when a person wealthy enough to fund a lawsuit decides to sue them—whether the complaint is justified or not. Plus, it takes money for journalists to hold our government accountable to open records laws. This Fund “collects and distributes contributions for aiding journalists in defending the freedom of speech and press guaranteed by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.”

The Columbia Journalism Review
www.cjr.org

Caveat: I've written for them. But I read them long before that. CJR is “the most respected voice on press criticism, and it shapes the ideas that make media leaders and journalists smarter about their work.” Be part of visioning the future.

New America Media
www.newamericamedia.org

This is the country's largest national network of 3,000 ethnic news organizations. New America advocates for strong journalism that serves over 57 million ethnic adults across the country.

Committee to Project Journalists
www.cpj.org

CPJ is a nonprofit that advocates for the rights of reporters around the world who have been attacked, imprisoned and persecuted for doing their jobs. It also does a great deal of research on press freedoms, and their repression.

Economic Hardship Reporting Project
<http://economichardship.org>

Like the Investigative Fund, but with a focus on poverty and economic insecurity. Founded Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nicked and Dimed*, it commissions narrative features, photo essays and video that “put a human face on financial instability.” The Projects funds the reporting and photojournalism, and then helps it get published in places like *The New York Times*, MSNBC, and *Slate*.

3. Participate in media yourself—responsibly

Contribute op-eds and letters to the editor.

When you share news stories on social media, vet them—make sure they are coming from a reputable news outlet, so that you don't contribute to the cycle of disinformation. If you share something that turns out to be false, delete it and make a transparent note about why. Help hold your networks to the same standards.

Also, consider integrating journalism into the work that you do. If you are an educator, for example, you might add news outlets to your curriculum. I've seen college classes, for example, where the "textbook" the students must each get is a semester-long subscription to the *New York Times*, or a magazine of their choice. Media literacy and engagement is part of the necessary work.

And, hell, if you want to start your own great new news outlet, or buy one so you can pour resources into it (ethically!), then more power to you!

4. Read and share original *sourced* work, not aggregations

Rather than sharing a story that aggregates or summarizes or re-reports the news, choose the original source. Often, it is embedded as a link or credit line in the summary stories; it should be no trouble to find it. This ensures that the news outlet that did the actual reporting will get the benefit of all those clicks—not the website that poaches their work.

The same goes for partisan memes, blog posts, and hot takes. Choose instead to prioritize well-sourced opinion pieces.

And before you share something, be sure to do a quick scan of the date, so that you aren't, say, sharing the obituary of someone who died years ago as if it happened today. There is enough that's confusing about the world without that!

5. Remove your ad-blockers

Don't use ad-blockers on your computer. While, yes, they can be annoying, those ads are what [urgently needed to pay for the journalism](#). The news outlet doesn't realize any benefit if your system blocks them.

FOR NATIONAL REPORTERS:

6. Consider who you're talking to

When you report a feature from a place that is a relative news desert—say, the Upper Midwest—consider publishing it in an alt-weekly or regional publication, rather than *Esquire*. You might get it funded by, say, the Investigative Fund, in order

to pay for the work, but then choose to publish it in a place where you are talking *to* and not just *about* people in these areas.

Pause here for a plug to ProPublica, which partners with local news outlets to help fill reporting void. The stories they cultivate are typically cross-published so that readers of both the local and national outlets benefit from it.

FOR DECISION-MAKERS AT NATIONAL NEWS OUTLETS

7. Spread full-time reporting staff across the country

Occasional freelance work and thinly-staffed bureaus are not enough. The digital era has seen [even more media consolidation](#) on the coasts—not less, as one might expect, since it is less logistically necessary than ever. This contributes to serious blind spots in national reporting. Remember: it took three months *after* the Michigan governor acknowledged that Flint’s water was poisonous before it became a national news story. This coastal consolidation also contributes to widespread mistrust of “the media” as journalists become ever more distant and defamiliarized from communities that they want to serve.

To borrow from Pamela Colloff of [Texas Monthly](#), who wrote on Twitter: "My suggestion from flyover country: don't send reporters here on anthropology trips. Live here. Be deeply-rooted."

Hire full-time talent that *lives* in Detroit, Kansas City, South Bend, Louisville, Reno, Houston, and beyond. Plenty talent is already here, after all. They’ve got their notepads, recorders, and wireless connections. They’re ready to do the work.