
NONPROFIT PLAYBOOK:

A National Model for
Sustaining Local Journalism

The Salt Lake Tribune

An aerial photograph of Salt Lake City, Utah, showing a dense urban landscape with various high-rise buildings. A prominent white building with a grid of windows is in the foreground. To the right, a taller building features a 'usbank' logo. In the lower center, a sign for 'Dames' is visible. The background shows more city buildings under a hazy sky.

Contents

Introduction	1	Audience Revenue	28
○ The Salt Lake Tribune	1	○ Types of Audience Members	30
○ Who and What This Playbook is For	3	○ Reader to Donor Pathway	32
		○ Strategies for Increasing Pathway Movement	33
Nonprofit Basics	4	○ The Supporting Subscriber Program	35
○ What Does it Mean to be a Nonprofit Newspaper?	5	○ Retaining Donors	37
○ How Does Tax Status Affect Business Structure?	5	○ Audience Data	39
○ How Does a Newspaper Change Ownership When Transitioning to Nonprofit Status?	7	○ The Salt Lake Tribune’s Tech Stack for Managing Audience Data	41
		Ethics & Gift Acceptance Policies	42
Nonprofit Business Models	8	Education & Public Engagement	43
○ Comparing Innovative Business Models	9	Evaluating Progress & Success	44
○ The Hybrid Supporting Subscriber Model	11	Resources for Further Reading	45
○ Keeping the Meter	12		
○ Accounting for Nonprofit Revenue Streams	13		
○ Revenue Diversification	15		
Transition Timeline	16		
○ Preparing for Transition	18		
○ Fundraising Staff	20		
○ Creating a Board of Directors	24		
○ Investing in Expertise	25		
○ Community Involvement	27		

Introduction

Newspapers nationwide have faced a common challenge: a crippling decline in subscription and advertising revenue as the news, technology, and readers themselves change rapidly in an increasingly globalized and digitized society. The local print newspaper industry in particular has changed dramatically over the past decade. Responses to this difficulty have manifested in various forms in recent years, and new innovations continue to be considered and attempted.

While the [problems facing news media](#) are unvarying, local newspapers are unique in their community, their readers, and their history. The result is that one solution will not and does not fit all newspapers. However, as various approaches are attempted and resulting successes come to light, newspapers grappling with this issue can follow, adapt, and learn from the experiences and trials of industry innovators. The Salt Lake Tribune is one such experiment.

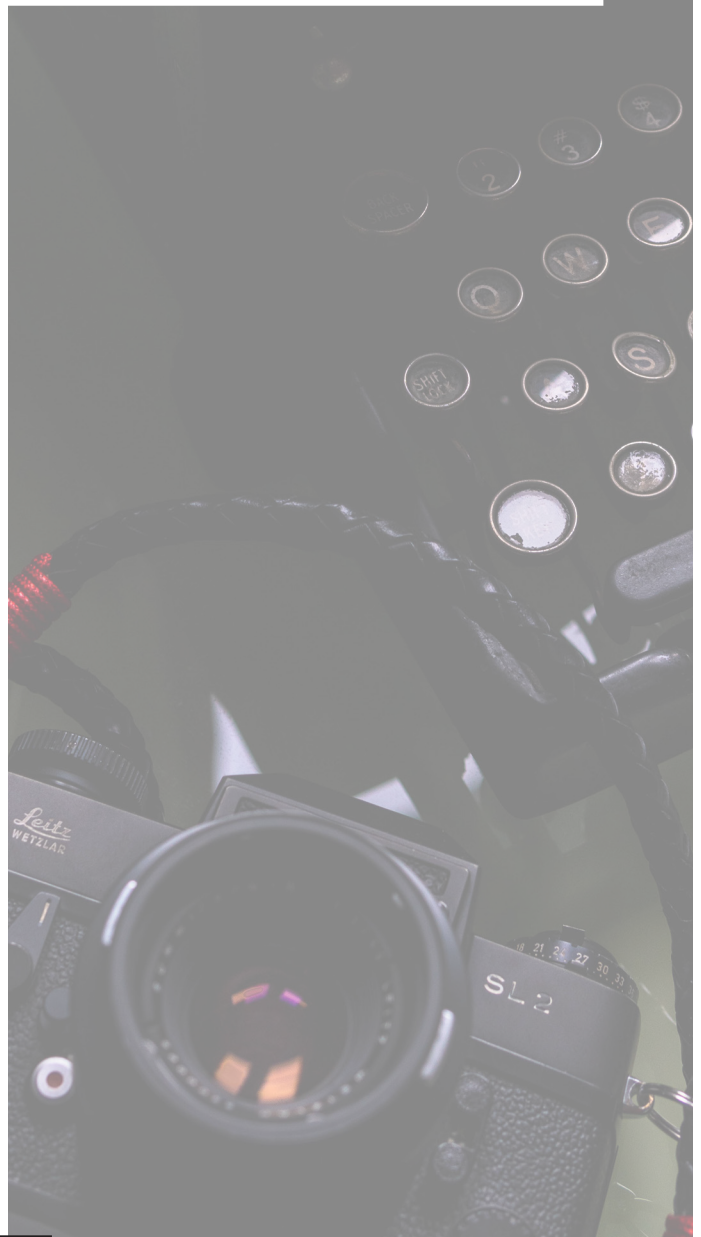
The Salt Lake Tribune:

In 2019, [The Salt Lake Tribune](#) became the first legacy news organization in the nation to receive approval from the Internal Revenue Service to become a public charity under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code; in other words, a nonprofit.

Since its inception in 1871, The Tribune has served as Utah's independent voice for news and information. After nearly 150 years of family and private ownership, The Tribune was sold to Tele-Communications Inc. (TCI) in 1997, which merged with AT&T Corp. soon after the sale. Only a few years later, in January 2001, Denver-based Media News Group bought the newspaper. The Tribune was sold again in 2010, this time to Alden Global Capital, a New York-based hedge fund. In 2014, Alden renegotiated the long-standing Joint Operating Agreement with the Deseret News to The Tribune's financial disadvantage, prompting layoffs, a lawsuit and a U.S. Department of Justice investigation.

In 2016, after two years of intense negotiations, the Tribune was purchased by Paul Huntsman, a Utah businessman with a long history of family philanthropy.

Almost immediately upon assuming ownership, Huntsman realized that the traditional business model of ad and subscription revenue, as well as the ancillary ticketing and publishing enterprises created by many newspapers as an additional source of revenue, would not be sufficient to ensure the long term viability of this critical community asset. A major change in the business model was the only path to long-term stability.



The Tribune benefited from the generous time and insight of many who had created new non-profit digital native sites, and those that were creating hybrid Benefit Corporations. News leaders around the nation opened their doors and shared their models. However, rather than directly replicating the approaches taken by these other news organizations, which were not designed to suit a local legacy newspaper, leaders at The Salt Lake Tribune decided to try something new.

"My father used to say, 'When you are the one responsible for the payroll, it is going to keep you up at night,' I didn't really appreciate that until I acquired The Salt Lake Tribune. I took the losses and subsidized the paper as long as I could. The losses were devastating to me personally. I said, 'I have to make a change.'"

- Paul Huntsman,
[The New York Times](#), May 17 2019

Transforming from a for-profit to a 501(c)(3) charitable organization is not the best option for every newspaper. However, The Salt Lake Tribune's nonprofit transition and business innovation can serve as a model for newspapers across the U.S. and may be particularly relevant to small and medium-sized markets or to family-owned news organizations.

In this playbook, we offer a new construct for community based, sustainable local journalism. Ultimately what will make a legacy news organization a successful and sustainable nonprofit is excellent journalism that meets local needs.

For The Salt Lake Tribune, a few key factors indicated that becoming a nonprofit organization was the structural change that was most likely to be successful:

- The newspaper was not profitable.
- The owner/publisher of the paper was willing to contribute the masthead and any assets to a new nonprofit organization and create a Board of Directors, giving ownership and leadership to the community the Tribune serves.
- Utah is a relatively small state with an outsized history of philanthropy and a willingness to collaborate in order to achieve goals. For example, Utah demonstrated these attributes through a collective effort to successfully host the Olympics in 2002, following 9/11.
- The paper has deeply rooted connections to Utah history and community identity.
- The Tribune is known for its excellent, Pulitzer prize winning, watchdog journalism and stands out among other local news organizations. In particular, the Salt Lake Tribune has a strong following due to its independence from the religious and political influences that dominate the state.
- The news organization has a clear charitable mission: to engage, educate, and empower Utah readers with reporting that informs and advances civic dialogue.

Who & What This Playbook Is For:

WHO: Newspapers (meaning print and digital news organizations, products, and reporting that serve a local community) facing financial decline, news organization leaders or owners that are curious about the changes they are seeing happen in the news media landscape, newspapers or owners that want to explore different business models or revenue streams, newspapers that want to become nonprofit entities, communities, and funders concerned about the sustainability of their local newspaper. (Please note: for the purposes of this playbook we use the words newspaper or paper, inclusive of digital products.)

WHAT: This playbook recounts the Salt Lake Tribune's process through its transition to nonprofit status, and the changes they made to their business in conjunction with that change. The playbook offers their story as a learning resource for other papers who wish to follow their path or parts of it, and also serves as a general resource with insight from the considerations, challenges, and innovations that the Salt Lake Tribune experienced. The playbook was produced with the support of the Google News Initiative as part of the North America Innovation Challenge.



Because each business situation is unique, this playbook will be most useful to those who have already assessed their newspaper:

- Where does your revenue come from?
- What community do you serve and how?
- How committed is the community to your reporting?
- Are there sufficient philanthropic assets to support a portion of your operating costs?
- Whose voices are missing from your pages?
- How diverse is your news room and coverage?
- What are your assets?
- What are long and short-term liabilities?
- Who are your readers?
- What are your strengths?
- What is your history and role in your communities?
- What is your mission?
- What are your goals?



Like the factors that made the Salt Lake Tribune a good candidate for nonprofit success, considering these questions and others will provide a basis for identifying what innovative business strategies are most suited to your particular paper.

Having an understanding of these aspects of your paper will prepare you to use this playbook as an adaptive guide and not a prescription. If you are still in the process of assessing your paper, this playbook will help you understand how to do so and how that information we hope can be used effectively.

Nonprofit Basics



To qualify as a tax-exempt nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization under the U.S. tax code, an organization must meet the following requirements as defined by the [Internal Revenue Service](#):

1. The entity must be organized and operated to solely pursue an exempt purpose, including one that is "charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering national or international amateur sports competition, and preventing cruelty to children or animals."
2. Extending on its purpose, the entity must not be organized and operated to benefit private interests and none of its net earnings can result in benefit to any private shareholder or individual involved in the activities of the organization.
3. A 501(c)(3) organization may not endorse candidates or electioneer. According to the IRS, this means that the organization "may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities and it may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates." This does not, however, preclude an organization from publishing editorial and opinion pieces.

In short, a nonprofit organization answers to its stakeholders, while a for-profit organization answers to its shareholders.

What Does It Mean To Be a Nonprofit Newspaper?

The two key components that differentiate a nonprofit from a for-profit entity are tax status and ownership.

Ownership:

- The nonprofit newspaper is not owned by any individual or private entity. It is a public asset, owned by the community it serves.
- In lieu of an owner or shareholders, the nonprofit newspaper is overseen by an independent board of directors that reflect and represent the community.

Tax Status:

- As a tax-exempt 501(c)3 charitable organization, all mission related income and revenue is tax-exempt. However, non-mission related income can be taxed. This is called Unrelated Business Income Taxation (UBIT).
- The nonprofit newspaper can accept donations directly from the public and from foundations, and these donations are tax-deductible.

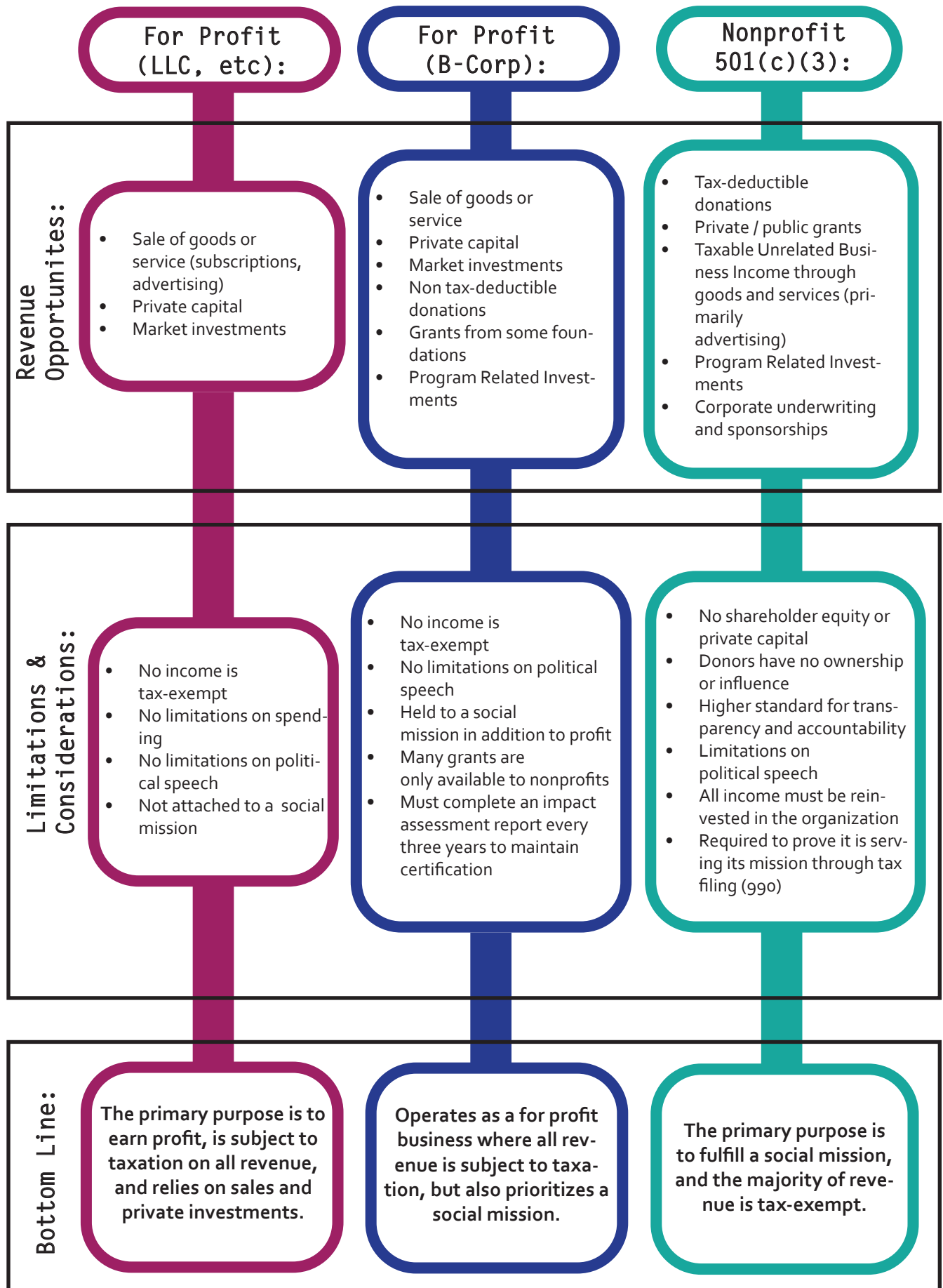
How Does Tax Status Effect Business Structure?



Changing tax status is not the same as changing business structure. While they can and often do coincide, they are not related. The connection between tax status and business structure lies in the difference between allowable revenue streams for each. As a nonprofit or a for-profit entity, some revenue options become available and others become unavailable, or at least more complicated. As a result, a shift in status often accompanies a shift in business structure.

A benefit corporation (B-corp) is a certification and legal designation used by for-profit companies that are focused on a social or environmental mission. While maintaining their for-profit status and primary accountability to shareholders, their stakeholders and mission carry equal weight. The dual responsibility is often referred to as a “double bottom line”. This certification, like a for-profit LLC or C-Corp or a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, comes with its own set of opportunities and limitations for business structure and revenue sources. For more information about Benefit Corporations see [this resource from B Lab](#).

Tax Status & Business Structure



How Does a Newspaper Change Ownership When Transitioning to Nonprofit Status?

There are multiple routes to moving from private ownership to being a community-owned institution:

1.

A new nonprofit corporation is created, and the preexisting for-profit company donates the newspaper masthead and assets to the nonprofit.

Owner of The Salt Lake Tribune, Paul Huntsman, donated the Tribune masthead and assets to the newly created Salt Lake Tribune charity. This ensured that liabilities weren't transferred to the new entity, and avoided complications with the Salt Lake Tribune's pre-existing joint operating agreement.



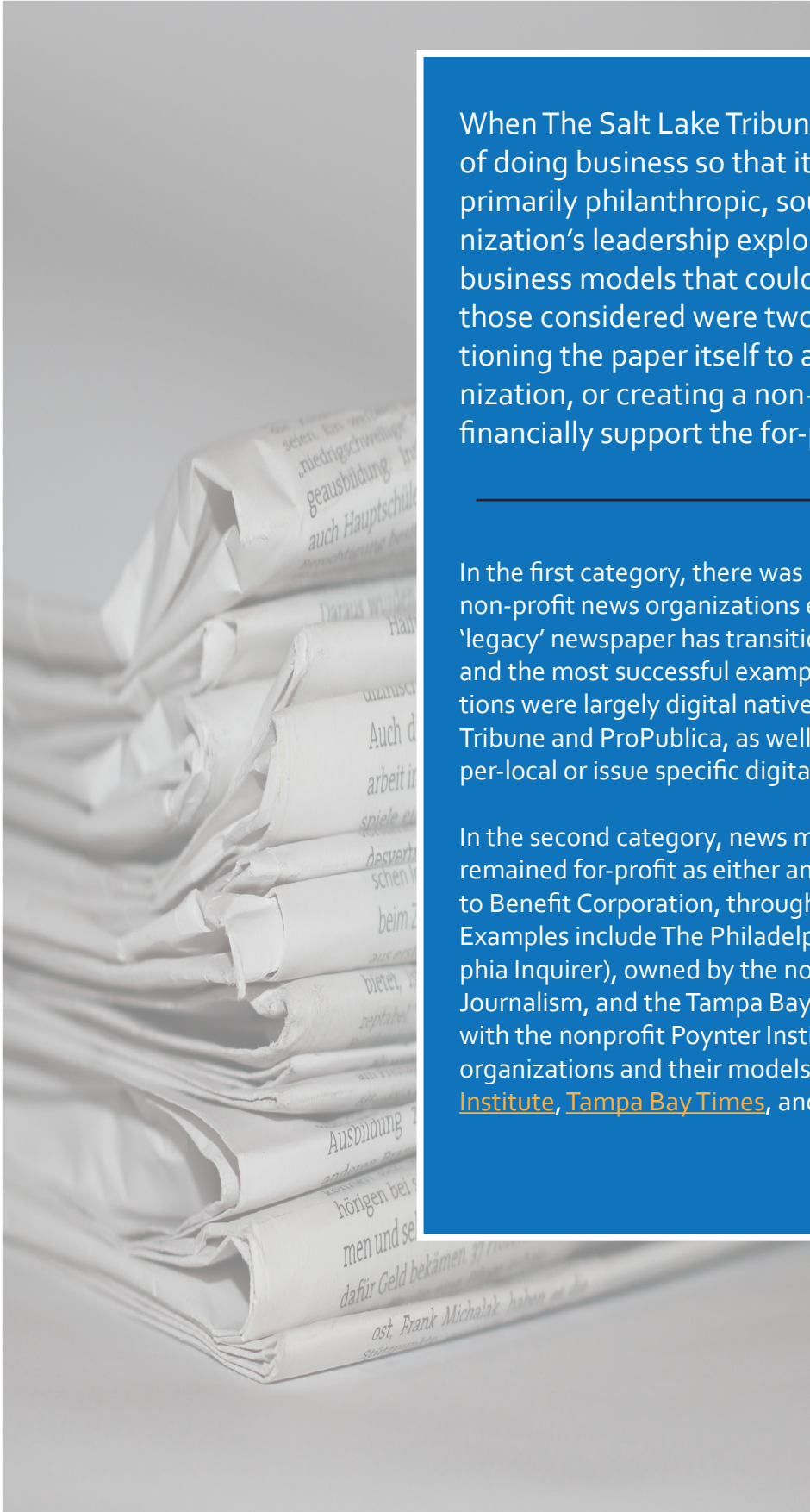
- Donating the paper to a nonprofit organization that will operate the paper releases the owner from the liability, and elevates its value as a public asset.
- For an owner, especially for family-owned newspapers, giving away ownership can be more than a business decision. The decision to give away a long-standing asset comes burdened with years of personal involvement and emotional investment that can complicate the decision-making process. The power to endorse candidates goes away too.

2.

The original entity is converted to a nonprofit organization.

- Not all states allow for statutory conversions of business entities.
- Depending on if the newspaper is an incorporated business or held as an unincorporated business such as a sole proprietorship, the process for conversion will be different.
- For a detailed description of this process, see this [step-by-step guide to converting a business from for-profit to non-profit](#). The [Institute for Nonprofit News](#) is another great resource.

Nonprofit Business Models:



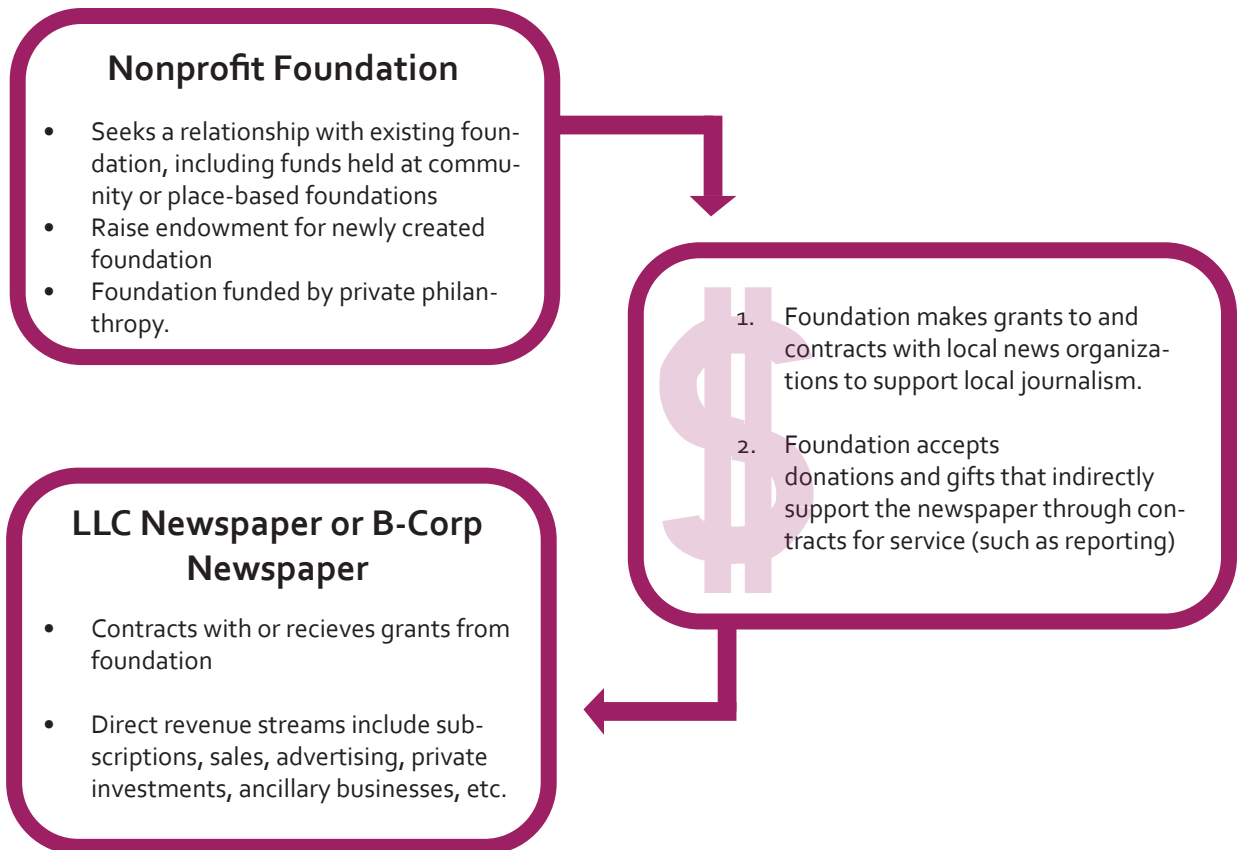
When The Salt Lake Tribune decided to change its way of doing business so that it could attract additional, primarily philanthropic, sources of revenue, the organization's leadership explored multiple prospective business models that could suit its needs. Among those considered were two broad categories: transitioning the paper itself to a non-profit charitable organization, or creating a non-profit foundation that could financially support the for-profit newspaper.

In the first category, there was no precedent. While many non-profit news organizations exist, no metropolitan daily or 'legacy' newspaper has transitioned from a for-profit structure, and the most successful examples of nonprofit news organizations were largely digital native start-ups, including The Texas Tribune and ProPublica, as well as a growing number of hyper-local or issue specific digital news sites.

In the second category, news media entities had successfully remained for-profit as either an LLC, or modified their status to Benefit Corporation, through ownership by a nonprofit. Examples include The Philadelphia Media Group (the Philadelphia Inquirer), owned by the nonprofit The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, and the Tampa Bay Times, which has a relationship with the nonprofit Poynter Institute. To learn more about these organizations and their models see their websites: [The Lenfest Institute](#), [Tampa Bay Times](#), and the [Poynter Institute](#).

Nonprofit Foundation + For Profit Newspaper

Working with a local foundation or creating a side by side foundation to support your paper is a good option. The foundation is able to accept donations and raise funds through private philanthropy. The foundation supports the news organization through contracts and grants for its service. This model incorporates philanthropy, indirectly, into the business model of the news organization without changing tax status of the organization itself.



Examples:

1. Philadelphia Media Group (Philadelphia Inquirer) + The Lenfest Institute
2. Tampa Bay Times (owned by Times Publishing Company) + Poynter Institute
3. Seattle Times (and other) Lab initiatives

Shared attributes of successful newspapers:

- Newspaper is financially viable, or has strong revenue from subscriptions or private capital
- Ownership structure does not lend itself to easily becoming nonprofit, or owner(s) wishes to maintain oversight/authority/influence
- Local philanthropic support available through a community foundation or other foundation

Nonprofit News Organization, No Meter



Free Access to News Content

- No subscription revenue
- Relies on grants, corporate sponsorships, and donations
- Additional revenue from events, advertising, which may be considered Unrelated Business Income and thus taxed

Examples of Free Access Model:

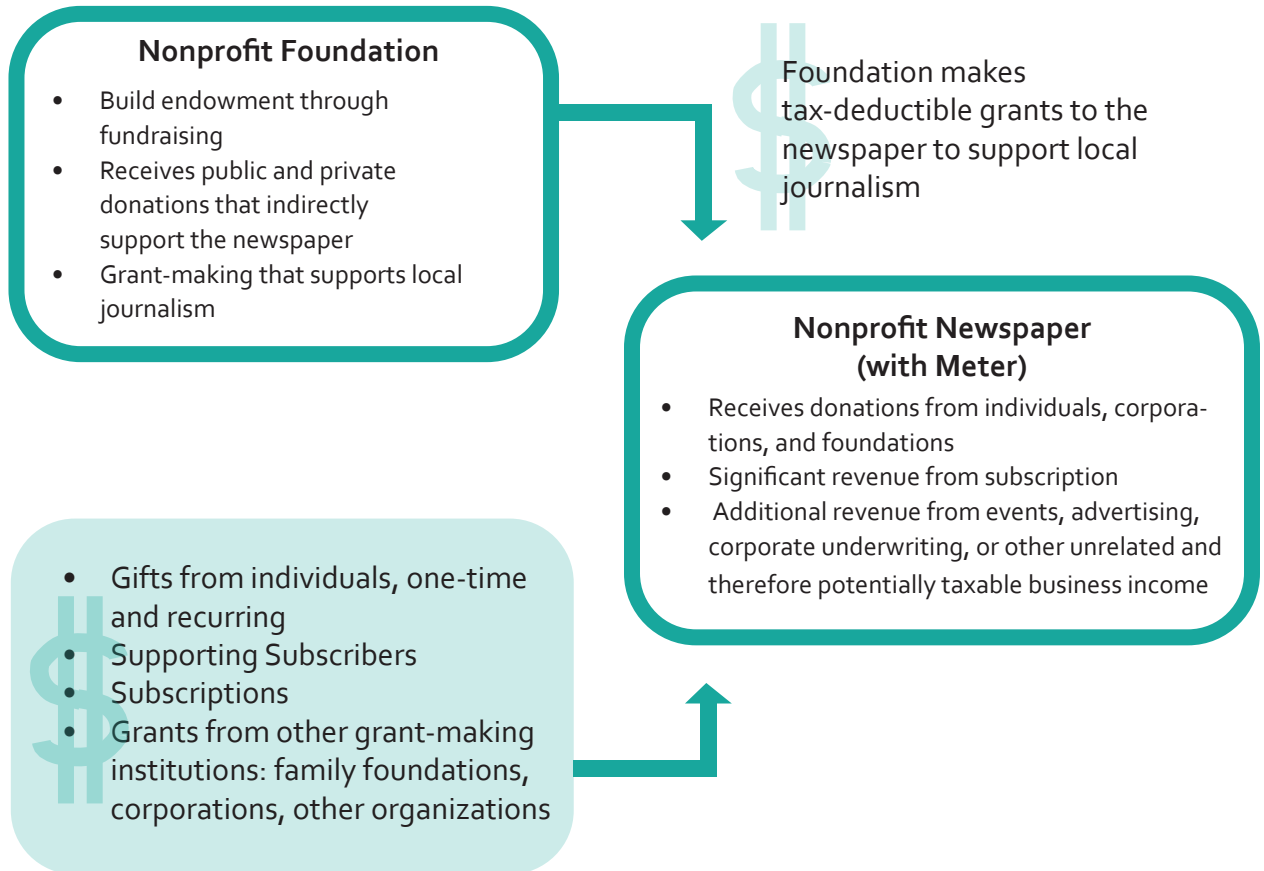
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. ProPublica | 1. Voice of San Diego |
| 2. The Texas Tribune | 2. MinnPost |
| 3. Flint Beat | 3. WyoFile |

Shared attributes of successful models:

- Primarily digital native, or minimal operating and printing expenses
- Hyper-local or focused reporting on a particular community, locale, or issue
- Often newly-formed or digital-era news media entities, rather than legacy newspapers

Hybrid Supporting-Subscriber Model

The hybrid supporting-subscriber model incorporates components from both the previous models. Like the first model, the hybrid model receives grants from a local nonprofit foundation. Like the second model, the newspaper itself is a nonprofit organization. However, this model includes revenue from donations and from subscriptions.



Example of Hybrid Model: The Salt Lake Tribune

The Salt Lake Tribune chose to create a “hybrid” model, blending elements from the existing models. Like Lenfest and Poynter, the Salt Lake Tribune created a foundation, The Utah Journalism Foundation, to provide endowment-based funding for their operations, those of other news organizations, and the next generation of journalists. Unlike others, the paper itself was transformed from a for-profit to a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. It retained the meter and thus subscription revenue and added a “Supporting Subscriber” membership and a major gifts program.

Becoming non-profit was not the end of the transformation process. Exploring a sustainable business model to accompany the change brought many more questions:

- Do we move to a 'membership' model?
- Should we provide the digital news product for free?
- What improvements need to be made to our digital products to increase subscriptions?
- How can we optimize the change in tax status to enhance our community engagement?
- What new partnerships might be available to us as a nonprofit?
- How can we take editorial positions while not running afoul of IRS rules?
- How can we make portions or all of our news free to underserved populations?
- How will an editorial board and publisher role work in a nonprofit model?
- How can we ensure the public that donors will not influence the stories we tell or how we tell them?
- How can we convince local foundations and corporations to support our journalism while ensuring no influence over reporting ?
- How will we measure the impact of our reporting within a new business model?
- How can we create a long term endowment to support local journalism in Utah?

Keeping the Meter

Unlike digital-native startups, when the Tribune transitioned to a nonprofit model it was already encumbered with significant personnel and operating costs. With no immediate replacement for subscription revenue, offering free access to the news content was not a viable option. Rather than align with the more common free access model, the Tribune operates as a social enterprise; a nonprofit organization that provides a product to generate revenue, in order to fulfill its social mission. As a social enterprise, market-based revenue strategies can complement philanthropic sources of funding like donations and grants, and lend greater sustainability to the business model overall.

The hybrid model reflects a new relationship to the community. It maintains subscriptions for most reporting content, but for the first time asks people to contribute to the newspaper as well as to subscribe. This adaptation of a membership model is not unheard of; many performing arts entities operate similarly. For example, a patron both purchases tickets, which are not tax-deductible, and makes charitable gifts to help support the creation of the art she enjoys. She may also be enjoying the performance in a building named from a major benefactor or private foundation, and read the names of corporate supporters and underwriters and paid advertisers in the program. The arts organization provides free programming to local schools. At the intermission she buys a T-shirt. This model blending a full range of revenue sources is similar to that of The Tribune.

Two factors led to the decision to keep the meter:

1. Print and digital revenue brought in enough revenue that removing it would significantly increase the organization's dependence on donations right from the start. The organization had pre-existing operating costs that could only be met with subscription revenue. Keeping the meter aligned with a first priority of achieving financial stability, without compromising the mission.
1. As a legacy newspaper, radical change like dropping a primary source of revenue is much more difficult. Becoming a nonprofit was a huge step to take towards a new model and new relationship with the public. Preserving the prior, transactional, news-to-reader relationship maintains a thread of familiarity that supports the legacy and history of The Salt Lake Tribune.

Accounting for Nonprofit Revenue Streams

The hybrid supporting-subscriber model utilizes both tax-exempt and taxable sources of revenue. Keeping track of where money is coming from and how it is used is crucial to maintaining accurate accounting for organization and donor taxes. As a nonprofit, tax-exempt revenue will be reported to the IRS using form 990, while taxable revenue (Unrelated Business Income) is filed through form 990-T. Note: please speak with your accountant about your individual situation. This is a general overview and not legal or accounting advice!



Tax-Exempt Revenue:

- Donations from individuals, either one time or recurring
- Recurring donations attached to a monthly subscription
- Private foundation and corporate grants
- Program Related Income or investments
- Some corporate underwriting

Taxable Revenue:

- Subscriptions
- Advertising
- Some Corporate underwriting (can be treated as either)
- Other Unrelated Business Income such as non-educational events.



Strategies for Success:

- Invest in the organization's capacity to handle increased accounting needs by hiring, contracting, or consulting with tax and accounting experts.
- Consider robust CRM software to most effectively track donations, subscriptions, and any other revenue separately.



Considerations:

- Be aware that some grants and gifts are 'restricted' requiring additional accounting.
- Corporate underwriting can be tricky. Generally, it is up to the corporation to decide how to characterize their contribution or payment for tax purposes. Public radio has extensive experience in this area and using their guidelines is a good call.
- *Advertising* includes offers, pricing and specials, for example: "Come to Bob's House of Goods and Services for 50% off on a 2021 Widget - just \$10 for a brand new widget!"
- *Underwriting* is much more general, for example: "Brought to you by Bob's House of Good and Services".

As a nonprofit, the organization is held to greater financial transparency requirements. Required reporting includes the following:

1.

Form 990: The IRS Form 990 is an annually-filed document detailing the tax-exempt financial behavior of the organization, and should be made publicly accessible. Major donors are listed on the form, as well as the compensation of the highest paid employees. The IRS provides [resources & tools for filing form 990](#). It is best practice to place the 990 on the organization's website.

2.

Major Donors: Many nonprofits choose to list all their donors, and some even publish the amount of their donation. This is above and beyond the disclosures required by the 990. As a condition of membership the Institute for Nonprofit News requires disclosure of donors that give more than \$5,000 annually, either by publishing these donors on the organization's website or through posting a direct link to the 990 filing that outlines these donors.

3.

Donor Tax Information: As a matter of course, nonprofits should send a thank you immediately to donors, no matter the amount of their gift. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit is also obligated to provide a receipt to donors who have contributed cumulative gifts over \$250 per year. An organization may choose, although it is not required, to send all donors a tax letter to ensure good faith and protect against legal liability. And saying thanks is always good practice.

For more information regarding public disclosure, access this [additional resource list](#) compiled by the National Council of Nonprofits. The [Institute for Nonprofit News](#) is another excellent [resource on gift policies and disclosures specific to news](#).

Revenue Diversification

A key consideration for any non-profit is creating and maintaining a diversity in revenue sources. Philanthropy plays a vital role but it is rarely sufficient to sustain and scale an organization. Subscriptions, events, sponsorships and ads can all play a role alongside grants and gifts.

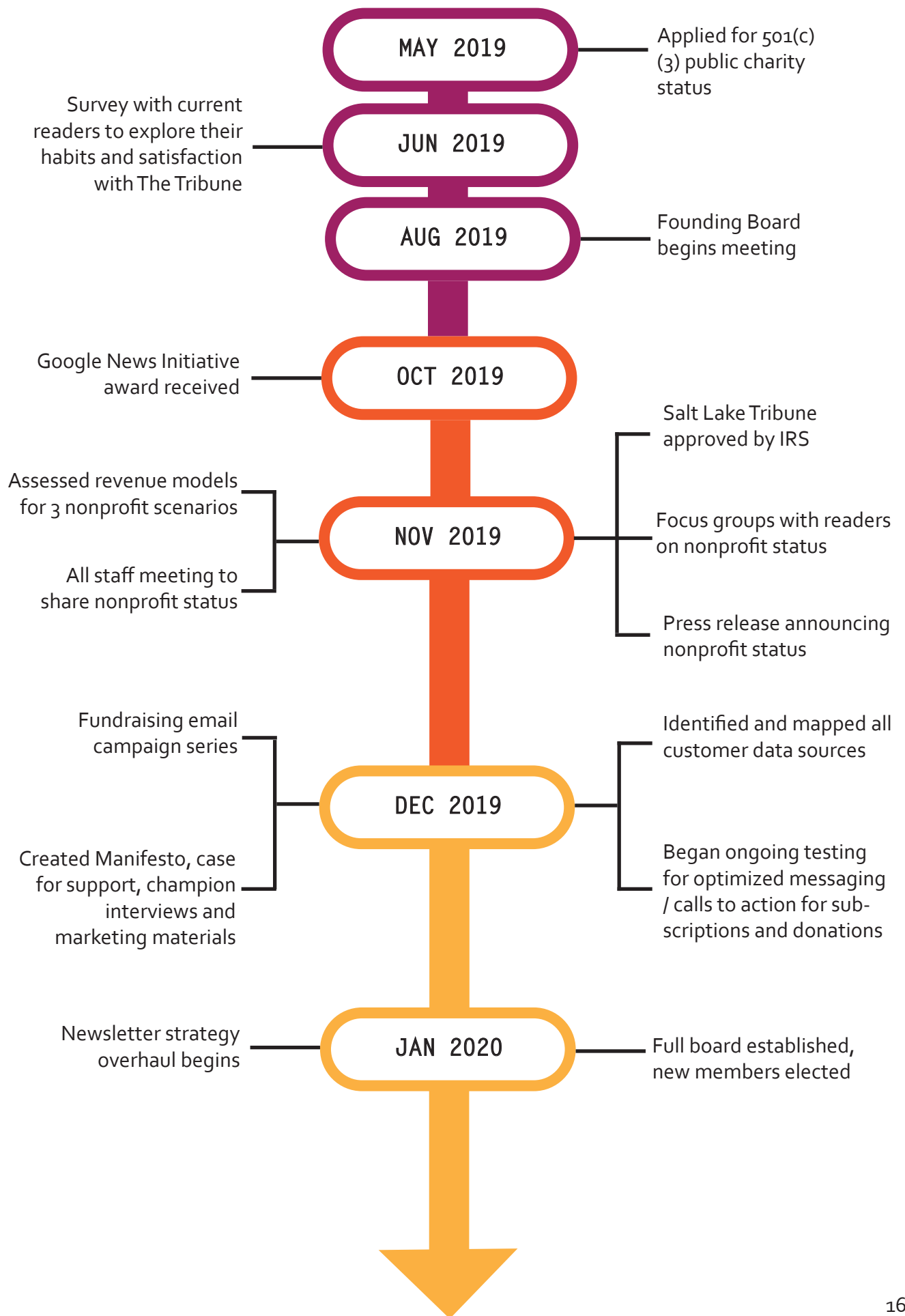
The diversification of philanthropic revenue is also important. Public charities (501(c)(3) nonprofits) are expected to have both diverse control through a sufficiently large and multi-perspective board, and demonstrate diverse funding. The public should demonstrate its support of the public entity, and no nonprofit should be completely dependent on one donor or one foundation. No one voice should control the Board either.

The IRS requires that nonprofits report that at least 33.3% of donations are made by individuals who give less than 2% of the nonprofit's overall revenue. The 'test' goes into effect after an organization's initial five years, and it is based on a five-year period (the current year and the four years immediately preceding). In other words, many smaller donors demonstrate that the nonprofit is indeed supported by the community. Program income (subscriptions) can also count toward meeting the 'public support test'. This is more than good fiscal policy; it dilutes any one person or party from having the appearance of influence. Revenue diversification is particularly critical for news media organizations, who must be wary of maintaining a firewall between revenue sources and editorial content.

Revenue diversity is fiscally and ethically paramount for every business model.

The Texas Tribune, a digital-only nonprofit, explains their approach in their [strategic plan](#).

Transition Timeline



Transition Timeline

Attempted to create a data warehouse using Salesforce in partnership with News Revenue Hub to combine print, digital, newsletter and other data sources (not successful).

FEB 2020

New reader Tipline portal launched

MAR 2020

Began SLTrib.com website redesign to be more user friendly and attractive to donors. Added journalism education content.

Began pop-up messaging and continued A/B testing of subscribe / donate links on website

MAY 2020

Facebook Accelerator: Designed a new subscription squeeze page and a new donation page

Developed new donation accounting procedures

Created a new onboarding email series for newsletter and digital subscribers

Gift acceptance guidelines developed, approved, and added to website

Launched new Supporting Subscriber program

JUN 2020

AUG 2020

Launched bundled subscription with New York Times

New Salt Lake Tribune website launch

SEP 2020

Preparing for Transition

Before receiving IRS approval as a nonprofit, the Tribune prepared a number of critical documents and plans. First, we worked with the law firm of Caplin and Drysdale to complete the formal applications to the IRS for both The Salt Lake Tribune Inc. and The Utah Journalism Foundation. We also contracted with a small local writing firm to develop a series of messages to communicate with various stakeholders about the decision.

[The Salt Lake Tribune's 1023 application](#) provides a comprehensive view of requirements. Topics discussed in the application include:

- Past, current, and planned activities of the organization
- In-depth description of the organization's charitable purpose
- Disclosure of financial behavior, conflicts of interest, and organizational leadership

Messaging & Communication



While preparing to submit an application to the IRS, the Tribune developed a strategy for communicating the change in status. This process included designing messaging, testing that language and receiving community feedback when applicable, and selection of messaging owners and leaders can use to communicate with various stakeholders.

Examples of the Salt Lake Tribune's messaging around the nonprofit change:

- [Salt Lake Tribune Manifesto](#)
- [Calls to Action](#)
- [Letter to readers](#)
- [Nonprofit Launch social media communication](#)
- [Nonprofit Launch email campaign](#)



In order to be successful as a nonprofit, it is critical that readers and subscribers, the Board of Directors and the general public understand the financial reality of the newspaper. As a nonprofit, the Tribune is now community-led and community-funded, at least in part. If the community doesn't understand that their dollars are needed, and how they will be used, they may not have the motivation to donate.

The Salt Lake Tribune took several initial public steps to explain our new model to our readers:

- A press release sent to local and national media, and a story in our own pages
- A series of early communications from the owner, Paul Huntsman and the editor Jennifer Napier-Pearce, to readers including a FAQ. These were also placed on sltrib.com

We of course also asked the public to celebrate with us by making a donation. We did a 'soft launch' ask to readers the day we announced the IRS' decision, and prepared a more comprehensive communication and donations strategy to begin in December during the traditional year-end giving period.



Communicating transparently with the public about financial need early on enables an organization to build a relationship with the community that will set the stage for philanthropy. Ultimately, the best messaging is authentic and purposeful, and uses techniques such as weaving in member feedback, using stories to explain the newspaper's role in the community, and sharing perspectives from journalists and others inside the organization.

Language can shape the way a change in leadership or business model is received. Carefully considering messaging for stakeholders with these concerns in mind can mitigate anxieties, including of staff and readers. Without full buy-in from the board and organizational leadership, the transition process can't take off.

Fundraising Staff

In addition to changing the tax-designation for the newspaper to a nonprofit, the new revenue model also adds the priority of reaching and encouraging donors in addition to subscribers. It is critical to have a person whose responsibility and focus is on the identification and cultivation of donors. While many donors are subscribers, the development relationship is different from that with a reader. This is not a minor point. Development, like journalism, is a profession with its own processes, norms and ethics. While journalists can make great development officers, we caution against simply assigning a reporter to fundraising.

As a new nonprofit, engaging new revenue sources was first on the agenda for the Salt Lake Tribune, and included four initial components:

1. Encouraging readers to support the Tribune with a donation in addition to their paid subscription.
2. Identifying and applying for local and national foundation grants.
3. Creating a short and longer term fundraising plan, including major gifts and support for specific initiatives.
4. Ensuring that all systems were in place to both accept and account for donations and to ensure that donors are acknowledged and cultivated appropriately.

1

Applying for Grants

Foundation grants offer immense potential for funding non-profit journalism. However, searching for and applying for grants is incredibly time-consuming.

Guiding Recommendations for Grant-Seeking:

- Allocate appropriate staff and capacity to development / fundraising
- Consider grants that are for specific purposes. For example, grants for reporting staff, for improved technology, or for operations.
- Some grants are restricted in how they can be used. Have accounting policies and systems in place to track and attribute expenses to the appropriate funding source.
- Look who in your community is funding like organizations. Think outside the Public Radio box to education, equity, women's issues, government, etc.
- Participate in the growing number of fundraising training opportunities offered by groups like Report for America, the Lenfest Institute, Knight and the News Match, News Revenue Hub and others.
- Attend local fundraising seminars put on by your state's nonprofit association or universities.

2

Accepting Donations

Putting donations and donors at the center of business sustainability is a radical change from a for-profit operation and mentality.

Guiding Recommendations:

- Have a gift acceptance policy. These outline what kinds of gifts the organization will, and will not, accept. These should be easy to understand and posted on your website.
- Have a statement about the ethics underlying your fundraising and journalism. No donor, for example, should be able to dictate favorable coverage. That may seem obvious to a journalist, but it is a common question from the public.



The Salt Lake Tribune's ethics and [gift acceptance policies](#) can be viewed on the website, and excellent examples are available on other nonprofit news sites. See the section of this playbook titled "Ethics & Gift Acceptance Policies" for more information.

- Be prepared with the internal infrastructure to receive and track donations. This should include funds received, how the gift was generated (email campaign, personal call or letter), any specific purpose, information about the donor, and gift acknowledgment.
- Allocate sufficient staff and resources. A successful robust development program requires, at a minimum, a full time position. At the very least carve out sufficient time for time-consuming donor communication efforts.
- Embrace a culture of philanthropy; think about how the entire organization, especially the leadership and editor, can be a part of fundraising efforts and understand the importance of stewarding donors and serving the public.

The Salt Lake Tribune's owner Paul Huntsman understood the importance of having an experienced nonprofit professional on staff even before the paper made its application to the IRS. This individual, who holds the title Vice President of Business Innovation, was charged with overseeing the work to prepare to become a nonprofit as well as the initial implementation.

The decision from the IRS came 6 months sooner than anticipated. We had to scramble to set up a temporary giving portal and get our press release and 'soft' fundraising in place.

Although the news of our approval was sudden, our readers and the community knew we were seeking to become a nonprofit. We had done the work to prepare our readers for this exciting opportunity, and for their role in our new business model.

We also benefited from two early investments: the Google North America Innovation Challenge and a significant grant from the James S. and John L. Knight Foundation. These two gifts, totaling \$550,000, allowed us to hire necessary staff and move forward quickly. We owe our success to these visionary funders and the 1,503 individuals who together donated over \$200,000 in the first weeks of our nonprofit status.

3

Fundraising Initiatives

Donors are motivated to support by a deeper sense of purpose than subscribers. Fundraising initiatives can move donors through a sense of urgency or a clearly communicated intention.

- Use specific occasions and junctures to kick start fundraising.
- Focus a campaign around a specific reason or purpose for what the money will be used for in order to show the impact of donations.
- Use audience member data to inform and intentionally target potential donors.
- When doing an email campaign be sure to remove those who give from further asks in a series.



The Salt Lake Tribune, with help from the News Revenue Hub, initiated a six-part fundraising and communications campaign in December 2019.

The initiative served two purposes: to raise money and to answer questions from the community regarding the change.

The campaign consisted of a series of six emails from leadership sent over the course of one month. Included was an in-depth FAQ with the owner about the future of the Tribune and its commitment to the highest standards of local journalism. The campaign raised over \$200,000.

This donation and communication fundraising strategy not only spurred donations, but increased our readers' understanding of what becoming a nonprofit means and their role in sustaining the Tribune. It also propelled community engagement.

Seeking new philanthropic revenue streams will benefit from laying the groundwork early. Preparation should include:

- Planning for the personnel and resources that will be required to manage philanthropy and development.
- Having clear messages in place describing the importance of your work and its value to the community. A standard set of calls to action or a manifesto can be used across a case for support, foundation grants, fundraising letters and emails, etc.
- Communicating to stakeholders, potential donors, and readers transparently about the need for their financial support in a time of decreasing revenue. While this may be a sensitive topic, it is a necessary step in attracting and retaining donors. People will not give if they do not think their donation is needed. Studies show a significant motivator for public support is the understanding that their dollars are necessary.
- Thanking your readers and subscribers! Don't let subscribers feel that their financial support is unimportant. Not every communication with subscribers and donors should include an ask. Send news of your successes and reporting, hold free educational events, thank people often and in different ways.
- Connecting with readers through a variety of means, including emails, newsletters, social media, or regular 'pop ups' or calls to action on the website. While this process can be concurrent with other components of the nonprofit transition, taking these measures to increase reader understanding, engagement and giving early on will bolster development.

Creating a Board of Directors

A fundamental distinction between for-profit and nonprofit entities is the leadership structure. For a nonprofit organization, the board of directors is the public-facing leader. Because a nonprofit is owned by the community it serves, the board of directors must represent and reflect that ownership and thus the community.

Nurturing, educating, and supporting a board is a job in and of itself. A great board works closely with the executive or leadership team and with each other. They, like any other part of the business, need support to understand their role, have timely information with which to make sound decisions, and have an appreciation for their critical volunteer service. Initially, boards may be staffed by the person in charge of development, or another member of the leadership team. Board meetings should be attended by the Editor and other leadership so that they can assist the board in understanding pressing issues and inform, but not make, high-level strategic decisions.

Speaking generally, a nonprofit board is involved in setting the mission and strategy of the organization, hiring and evaluating the CEO, fundraising and ensuring public support and engagement. This includes actions such as high-level decision-making, approval of policies, ensuring ethical practice, and advocating for community stakeholders. A board is governed by a set of bylaws and by its own traditions and culture. Boards change over time; it is critical to instill regular turnover on boards and their Chair.

The Salt Lake Tribune's current 9-member Board of Directors was carefully selected to represent ideological, professional, and cultural diversity relevant to Utah, among other criteria. A board's membership and bylaws should, like other critical governance and financial documents, be posted for the public. The Salt Lake Tribune's Bylaws can be viewed [here](#).

There are many excellent resources on how to select, nurture and get the most out of a nonprofit board, as well as the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of a board member. Local nonprofit associations and even some colleges and universities offer training for board members and their leadership teams. Resources include [Board Source](#) and [Independent Sector](#).



What criteria indicated a strong Board Member candidate?

- Long-standing support for the Salt Lake Tribune's local journalism
- Successful in their own field or area of expertise
- Enthusiastic and able to be an active, involved, working Board Member
- Bring diversity of lived experience, political and religious affiliation, geography, race, ethnicity and gender to reflect a broad cross-section of the community



How was the Board developed?

1. Before being approved by the IRS as a nonprofit, the original Board was a group of 3 personal and professional associates of the owner, Paul Huntsman. A small 'friends and family' board is very typical in founding documents, and adding to this Board is one of the first steps to becoming a community-led nonprofit.
2. After approval, the Chair invited members of the community to share their interest in becoming a Board Member, and reached out to other candidates. Many people reached out to the Tribune asking to be involved, or to suggest qualifications and people.
3. Potential Board Members were interviewed by the Board Chair and often the Executive Editor. A 9-member Board was assembled by April 2020.



How will the Board operate going forward?

- A founding board takes awhile to gel and to understand the workings of the nonprofit. This is even more complicated when it is a new type of organization and comes with a 150-year history, a joint operating agreement, 68 employees and a daily print newspaper. Consequently, we do not anticipate much change on the Board for a few years.
- Following the formative stage, the Board will enforce its Bylaws, which include terms for Board Members. Board terms are important because they ensure a fresh perspective, add to the community's engagement, and allow for turnover at the leadership level. Ideally a third of the Board rotates off every year, replaced by new community members who share a passion for the mission. These new members are selected by a Governance Committee, whose job is to identify, interview, and select and onboard new members.

Investing in Expertise

Throughout the transition to a nonprofit model, The Salt Lake Tribune invested in personnel that brought the skills and knowledge to successfully execute new areas of business. Some of these experts were hired as full-time employees, others were contracted for specific projects for practical and strategic use of funding.

Ultimately, having the appropriate human resources ensured the Tribune could move quickly and manage the increased volume of work in areas like communications, web and data management and development.

Internal Experts:

Full-Time Hires

- **Membership Manager & Director of Corporate Relations:** manages all donor relations and the Salesforce CRM used to track and communicate with donors; manages events for donors, calls all donors for gifts over \$500; manages communications and services for Supporting Subscribers.
- **Vice President of Business Innovation:** leads the nonprofit transition, development, and manages all major gifts and grants; serves as a member of the leadership team; liaises between editorial and operations staff.
- **Marketing & Analytics Director:** leads initiatives driving digital subscription revenue; gathers and analyzes data across the organization to make revenue-driving decisions; heads marketing for all initiatives within the organization.
- **Additional Web Developer:** creates donation portals; manages the technology and report behind gifts; makes changes to the website as a result of the change in status.

External Experts:

Contracted Organizations & Consultants

Write On!

Generated language and content for website and Utah Journalism Foundation

Third Sun

Developed website for the Utah Journalism Foundation

News Revenue Hub

Developed messaging strategy for transition and website recommendations, developed data storage and organization system with Salesforce CRM

Inbox Collective,
Dan Oshinsky

Consulted on email newsletter strategy including content, growth, and metrics

Pathways

Assist with design of major gifts program and wealth screening for potential donors

The Tribune chose to engage short term consultants and experts outside the organization for three reasons:

1. To accommodate a fast-moving timeline and project turnaround
2. To ensure best practice in new or unfamiliar endeavors
3. To mitigate expenses associated with additional salary-based employees

Community Involvement

In addition to communicating the change in tax status, and consequently ownership, to the public, the Salt Lake Tribune significantly stepped-up opportunities for public participation in various areas of the newspaper. Including the public in a meaningful way reflected the newspaper's commitment to the nonprofit mission.

Opportunities for Community Input & Participation:

1.

The Tribune conducted a series of focus groups early on in the development of their strategic plan in order to gain community insight regarding reader habits and subscriber motivation, and to learn directly from audience experiences. View our [Community Input Strategic Plan & Survey Questions](#).

2.

Focus groups with Tribune subscribers and community stakeholders provided strong feedback on transparency regarding donations and funding.

3.

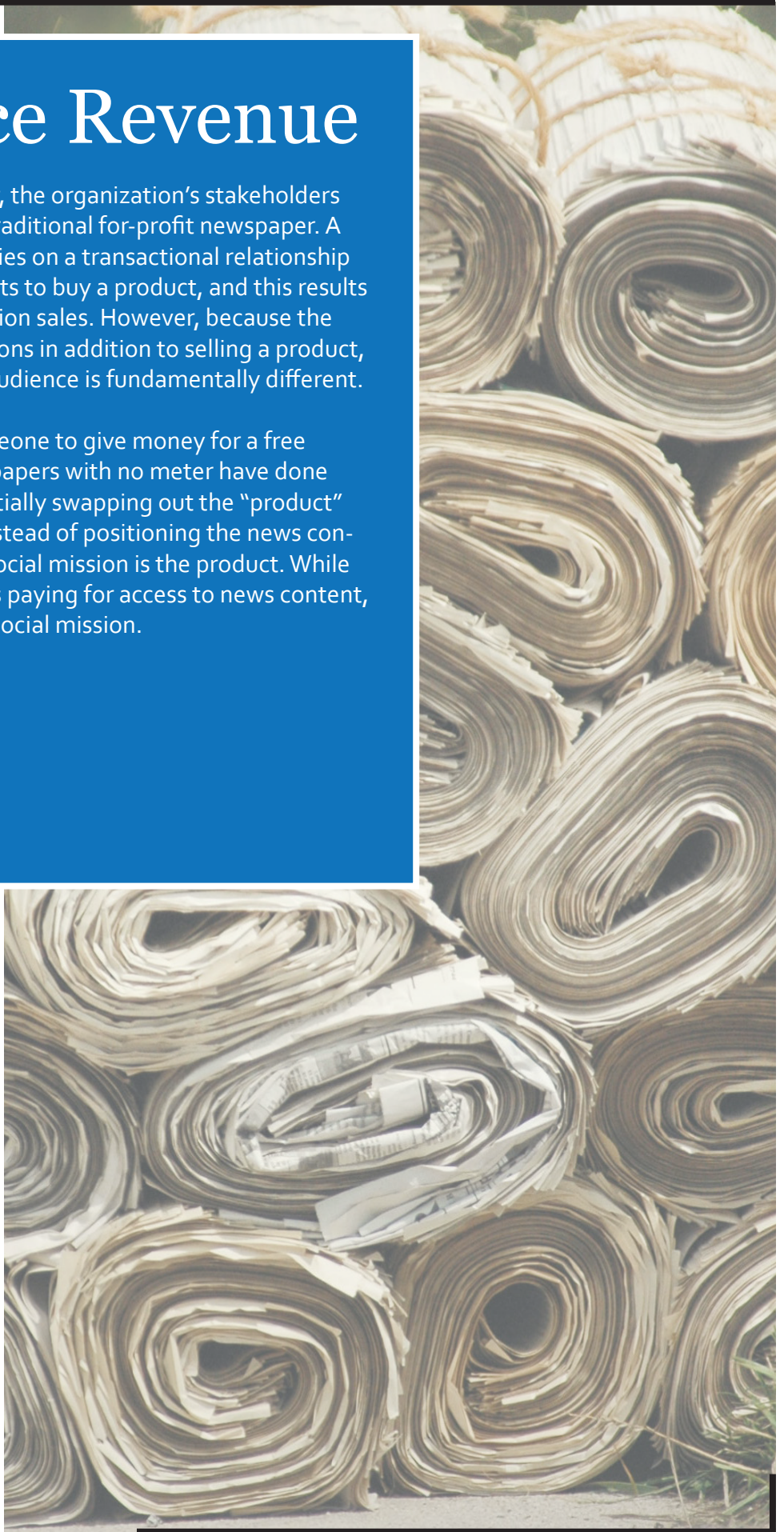
Readers and non-readers were surveyed to determine interest in the product, support for The Tribune, feedback on the new model, suggestions for improvement, barriers to subscribing and to gather positive language for grants and fundraising.

The Salt Lake Tribune also joined organizations like the [Institute for Nonprofit News \(INN\)](#) in order to both contribute to the shared practice they facilitate, and to gain access to valuable resources available to nonprofit news organizations.

Audience Revenue

As a nonprofit newspaper, the organization's stakeholders are more diverse than a traditional for-profit newspaper. A for-profit organization relies on a transactional relationship with a customer who wants to buy a product, and this results in revenue from subscription sales. However, because the nonprofit relies on donations in addition to selling a product, the relationship to their audience is fundamentally different.

It is hard to convince someone to give money for a free product. Nonprofit newspapers with no meter have done this successfully by essentially swapping out the "product" available for purchase. Instead of positioning the news content as the product, the social mission is the product. While the for-profit subscriber is paying for access to news content, a donor is paying for the social mission.



For-profit audience relationship:

- Revenue-generating audience = subscribers
- Product: access to news content
- Social mission of independent journalism is implicit and not paid for
- Motivated by transaction

Nonprofit (free access) reader relationship:

- Revenue-generating audience = donors
- Product: social mission of independent journalism
- Access to news content is implicit and not paid for
- Motivated by participation or belief

For The Salt Lake Tribune’s model, which includes both donation revenue and subscription revenue, the audience is even more complex.

The revenue-generating audience for a nonprofit with a meter includes subscribers and donors. However, just like a nonprofit with free access, donations and philanthropy contribute significantly to the bottom line. Our strategy is that philanthropy and Supporting Subscribers combine to cover the majority of costs associated with the newsroom, and that these revenues are augmented by base subscription, ads and events. The Supporting Subscriber program, described in the next section, is a hybrid of the transactional subscriber relationship.

Ultimately, converting readers and subscribers to donors generates more revenue than converting readers to subscribers. By segmenting audience members into distinct groups, interactions with each group can be informed, targeted, and result in increased conversion and stronger relationships.

Types of Audience Members

Readers:

- This audience engages in content but doesn't pay for it. There are known and unknown readers. Unknown readers account for web page views, or print readers who don't subscribe. Known readers have a name and/or email attached to them, with varying levels of engagement. For example, an engaged reader may receive a free email newsletter but not subscribe.
- They are the widest audience, and they make up the pool of potential subscribers or donors. They also indicate the newspapers general reach and provide a baseline for understanding audience habits and size.

Subscribers:

- This audience pays a monthly fee for full access to news content. They are essentially customers that buy a product (the news content). Their relationship to the organization is transactional, but it can become philanthropic as well.
- They maintain the traditional relationship between reader and news. They are regular readers but may or may not exhibit an attachment to the organization's mission. This group provides important data for content value and targeting decisions. Long time print readers have been among the Tribunes' most valuable donors.

Supporting Subscribers:

- This group buys the news content and supports the organization's mission in addition by paying a higher price for a monthly subscription. A portion of that fee is tax-deductible. They are regular readers that also feel an attachment, connection, or commitment to the organization beyond valuing its basic product.
- They are likely to become donors because they have both a transactional and a personal relationship with the organization.

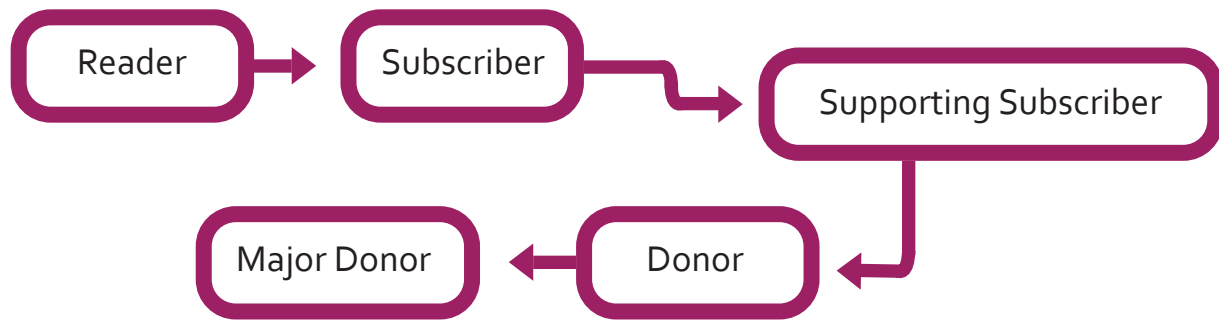
Donors:

- Donors may be readers or subscribers, who contribute financially to the newspaper through a one-time gift, or regular donations.
- This group is most attached to the mission-related value of the organization, making them not only the greatest potential revenue source but also the most likely to personally advocate for the social mission of the organization.

Major Donors:

- These are individuals who make a gift that has a significant impact on the mission, and often pledge over several years. There is no set amount for a 'major gift'. Many times these individuals are part of a club, circle or society.
- This group is critical to the long term sustainability of any nonprofit as 80% of the total giving generally comes from 20% of donors. These individuals are most likely to make a gift to the nonprofit through their Donor Advised Funds, family foundation or in their planned giving (wills and estates).

Reader to Donor Pathway



Understanding audience members at critical points along the pathway makes it easier to encourage them to move to the next level of engagement and support.

A first step to increasing engagement, and consequently increasing revenue, is segmenting and assessing existing data for audience members at each stage. In addition to quantifying how many audience members are in each group, this assessment should include:

For Readers:

- Contact information for non-subscribers (lapsed subscribers, leadership contact lists, members of other like organizations etc.)
- Contact information for former print subscribers who have not moved to a digital product. This would include, therefore, “lost” as opposed to “lapsed” subscribers.
- Contact information for newsletter subscribers and event attendees who are not digital or print subscribers, or duplicated in a different data location.

For Subscribers:

- Contact information for digital subscribers, current and lapsed.
- Contact information for print subscribers.
- Note: physical addresses and names tell us a lot more about a person than their email! There is a balance between asking for this level of information in a digital age, and turning off a subscriber

People become subscribers or donors for different reasons. Some may be interested in a single topic of local news coverage, while others are moved to support by a desire to sustain independent journalism. A significant number convert to subscription because of a promotion or free trial. Most subscribers base their purchase on the accuracy and integrity of the news and opinions they read.

With this data, readers and subscribers can be contacted and targeted with intentionality, eventually becoming Supporting Subscribers and donors as their engagement increases and their relationship with the newspaper deepens.

Strategies for Increasing Pathway Movement

1.

Optimized Access Points:

- Use reader analytics and A/B testing to identify what access points and messages are most effective for driving conversion to donations or subscriptions.
- Placement of subscription links, donation links, and requests for contact information such as an email pop-up can be optimized to drive increased support.



To discern what converts readers to subscribers or to donors, The Salt Lake Tribune had to test the assumption that subscribers are paying for a product they want, while donors are making a more emotional decision with discretionary dollars.

To accomplish this, the Tribune tested the placement of subscriptions and donation links on various areas of their website, and tracked how placement connected to reader support; Do editorials move more donors than subscribers? After what period and what kind of ask do subscribers become donors? How do newsletters impact conversion and donation rates?

From February to July 2020, we completed 70 tests relating to subscriptions and donations:

Subscriptions

- For subscriptions with asks by coverage area: Utah Jazz (NBA team) readers (in a test done pre-COVID-19) are less likely to convert on an ask than other dedicated audiences like opinion, politics or religion readers. In fact, opinion desktop readers are more likely to subscribe than most other audiences when served with a dedicated ask.
- Themed asks: We have no conclusive data for this at this time. We saw wins with themed pop-ups over Valentine's Day, but not with similar asks around July 4.
- When asked to donate or subscribe (outside of a meter) users rather universally chose subscribe: at a 10:1 ratio in one test and 5:1 in another test.
- We launched an exit intent pop-up for users on the subscribe page offering a discounted deal. We saw an incredible jump in conversions on that page, and that pop-up alone has a double conversion rate of normal pop-ups, no matter the offer.
- We've done tests asking for donations from subscribers and non-subscribers on our free content, which has included COVID-19 stories and earthquake stories. We've seen solid conversion rates on them, but in March when most of these events began, including the earthquake, a full letter from our editor to the reader served as a pop-up had double the conversion rate. Personal stories matter.

-
- We've seen wins with breaking the cost down to weekly rates, but breaking down the rate to daily cost was not a win in any test.
 - A very simple message that just says subscribe with no other information was not effective.

Donations

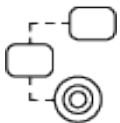
- Small donation asks on stories/traffic from Reddit and Drudge or evergreen content that trends consistently occasionally results in conversions and are worthwhile to have on the site.
- We launched an exit intent window on our donation page asking for a small donation and saw a 4X increase in conversion rate on that page.
- An image of a photographer working during the coronavirus with an ask to donate performed 16X better than the same ask to subscribe and within that, the ask for \$25 performed better than any higher or lower donation amount.

Overall Tests on Messaging and Color:

- Messages that talk about community and ownership by the community perform better than journalism or democracy-based messages.
- Black/white messaging does best.

2. Newsletters:

- Newsletters help understand readers' interests and provide a solid entry point for deeper engagement, and ultimately revenue.
- Not every newsletter revenue strategy will be effective and different strategies will work for different audiences.



The Salt Lake Tribune contracted with Dan Oshinsky of the InBox Collective, to improve our newsletter strategy in order to grow subscribers, engagement, and revenue.

This process began with a complete review of existing data and templates housed in the newsletter software MailChimp, and culminated in a strategy across six key areas: content, growth, monetization (subscription strategy + ads), engagement, best practices, and deliverability. In addition to the growth strategy, a dashboard was set up within the existing software to measure progress and newsletter success more effectively.

3.

Subscription and Donation Incentives:

- Seek out opportunities to increase the value of a subscription for limited time periods through partnerships with other organizations to provide an additional product or service as a “bonus”.
- While donors are not directly buying a product, offering exclusive content, events, or swag can influence readers and subscribers to become greater supporters.



In an effort to provide additional incentives to move readers to subscribers, the Salt Lake Tribune is offering a bundled subscription with The New York Times. Supporting Subscribers at the annual level (\$150 a year) are offered a free one-year subscription to the digital New York Times. Driving people to commit to an annual subscription decreases churn.



Major donors are motivated by their desire to support the mission of the organization, and also by their desire to be part of an intimate cohort of supporters and participants. The Salt Lake Tribune incentivizes donors that make large gifts to continue annual giving by inviting them to join the [First Amendment Society](#).

The Supporting Subscriber Program

The defining feature of the Salt Lake Tribune’s nonprofit business model is the “Supporting Subscriber” membership program. Like regular subscribers, Supporting Subscribers pay a monthly or annual fee for digital access to news content. However, on top of that base cost, they elect to contribute an additional amount to support the Tribune.

The program provides community members with a necessary middle-ground option between donating large one-time gifts and only paying the minimum subscription fee. In addition, it enables readers to engage with the organization in a new, mission-oriented way, while also maintaining the transactional subscriber relationship. The Supporting Subscriber is a critical stepping stone to convert subscribers to large donors by familiarizing them with a more intimate, engaged relationship with the organization. It has also rapidly increased reader revenue.

Supporting Subscriber Program: Strategies & Considerations

1. Simplify options for donation amounts.

Supporting Subscribers at the Tribune are offered only 2 options for monthly amounts, and 1 annual option. Offering fewer options streamlines the decision-making process for a prospective Supporting Subscriber. One of the two monthly options is called a “decoy” and is used to drive conversions to the preferred annual option.

2. Combining subscription fee and donation payments into one lump-sum can be an additional burden on the accounting process.

It is important to be prepared with a method for separating deductible and nondeductible payments. The Salt Lake Tribune uses one portal (Piano) for subscriptions and another (Moonclerk) for [donations](#). They have had to make it clear to donors that they are not receiving a subscription, and to subscribers that their subscription is not deductible. Clear communication is critical!

3. Providing program perks to Supporting Subscribers further distinguishes the label from subscribers, and fosters a sense of group belonging.

In addition to unlimited digital access to The Tribune, Supporting Subscribers receive a quarterly newsletter just for supporters, a cloisonné lapel pin from Pat Bagley, our brilliant and beloved political cartoonist, advance invitations to Tribune events and, for a limited time for an annual subscription, the New York Times.

4. Make being a Supporting Subscriber easier than being a subscriber.

The Salt Lake Tribune chose to direct all subscription links to a shared [subscriber web-page](#) that strongly encourages being a Supporting Subscriber through a carefully designed ‘squeeze page’.

The Salt Lake Tribune participated in the Facebook Accelerator program focused on driving consumer digital revenue, led by Tim Griggs.

The squeeze page was the result of this effort, and the resulting strategy and increased reader revenue could not have been possible without their support.

Help ensure that Utah's independent voice is never silenced

Become a Supporting Subscriber of The Salt Lake Tribune today.

A portion of your subscription is tax-deductible. You can cancel at any time.



Monthly Supporting Subscriber

\$15/month

Unlimited digital access, charged monthly

[SUPPORT THE TRIBUNE](#)

The Salt Lake Tribune

\$150/1 year

with

The New York Times

Unlimited digital access, charged yearly

You save \$30.

[SUPPORT THE TRIBUNE](#)

Monthly Supporting Subscriber

\$25/month

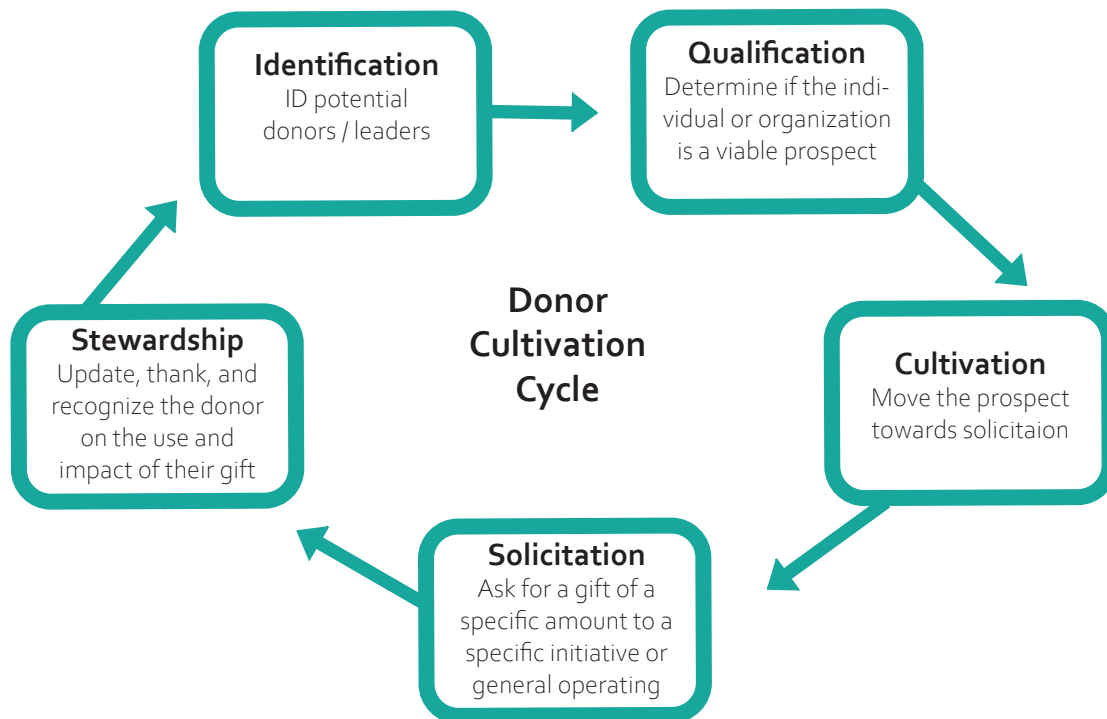
Unlimited digital access and invites to exclusive events

[SUPPORT THE TRIBUNE](#)

- Unlimited digital access to SLTrib.com
- New \$150 subscribers receive one year digital access to The New York Times
- A Pat Bagley enamel pin
- Advance invitations to events
- Our Top Stories weekday newsletter
- A quarterly newsletter just for supporters
- A login can be shared on up to 5 devices for family access

[MAKE AN ADDITIONAL DONATION](#)

Retaining Donors

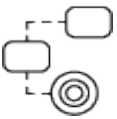


Maintaining existing donor relationships is just as critical to building donation revenue as converting readers to become new donors. Maintaining donors, and increasing their giving, can be summarized into three philanthropy practices:



Ongoing Communication

- Regular check-in and follow-up with donors, including emails and calls, especially after receiving a donation.
- Prompt thank-you notes and gift processing, as well as acknowledging recent donations when asking for additional contributions, are vital to retaining donors.
- Accurate and organized data can help significantly to streamline communication. Notes on various contacts allow for personalization and donation data can show patterns and habits that enable intentional solicitation and appropriate asks for an increase in the size or regularity of their gift.
- Communication has to be accurate and reflect a donor's interests and behavior so that they feel known and valued.



Showing Impact

- In addition to showing appreciation, donor retention relies on showing the impact donations have. The most straightforward way to demonstrate impact is to show donors how greatly the organization needs and relies on their money.
- One way to do this is through donation campaigns around a single financial cause. For example, like many news organizations the Salt Lake Tribune rallied donors around raising money to support COVID-19 reporting coverage.
- Another way to show financial need is through including language and messaging around donation reliance in all donor communications. Including a simple statement of "we could not do this without you" goes a long way to underline a donor's importance. Ultimately, if a donor believes the organization will survive without them, they are less likely to donate.
- Unlike many other philanthropy contexts, donors experience the product in journalism each and every day, even several times a day. Show the effect of their donations by sharing the results of high impact stories like a change in policy. Hold events to meet the journalists making the difference with their reporting.
- Some donors want to have their money contribute to a specific place or cause within the organization. Retaining donors requires honesty and transparency about where money goes. [Report for America](#) has been very successful in helping their partner newsrooms target fundraising for their corps members.



Personal Relationships

- Building a strong donor network depends on nurturing real, individual relationships.
- Automated emails and follow-ups can be valuable to both decrease the manual workload required and to ensure that no one gets forgotten. However, personal outreach is expected and important, especially to long term donors, or major gift prospects.
- Ultimately, donors stop contributing when there is something wrong in the relationship. They stop giving because they feel unappreciated, or they didn't know or see how their money was used. Communication, aided by organized and thorough data, makes it possible to not only determine what is wrong, but also how to fix it and make the relationship stronger.
- Never harangue a donor who no longer gives. Sometimes they just move on to another cause. One of the great things about fundraising for journalism is that everything matters. So, just as a person who has given for years to education might give a grant to their local paper to cover education, that same donor might, through your reporting, gain an insight into the importance of racial injustice and change the focus of their giving. It is all important.

Audience Data

Ultimately, increased engagement leads to increased support, and the first step to increasing audience engagement is getting to know different types of audience members. Effective conversion strategies are directly informed by audience data, and are made more successful by accurate and organized data.

Collecting, storing, using, and understanding audience data is critical to effective communication and organization, which ultimately lead to increased revenue. Having clean, updated data for all revenue-generating audience members is foundational to accruing and retaining donors.

Unlike new or digital-only newspapers, legacy newspapers have preexisting audience data that can be inconsistent or incomplete.

- **This can be an advantage:** Legacy papers often already have an established reader base in their community and accompanying data can assist in identifying potential donors.
- **It can also be a challenge:** Rather than starting with a clean slate, existing data must be compatible with new organizational systems, new software or storage platforms, and it can be difficult to fill gaps in data attached to individual readers. This is exacerbated for legacy papers like the Salt Lake Tribune which maintain print subscriptions on a completely different system (and are actually managed by a third party through our Joint Operating Agreement).

Developing an audience data strategy should be focused on finding the fastest way to get the knowledge of who can be appealed to for subscriptions and donations.



For some organizations, like start-up and digital-only newspapers, a single automated data storage platform may achieve this goal. For legacy newspapers, an alternative system may be better.

When the Salt Lake Tribune partnered with [News Revenue Hub](#) to begin reorganizing audience data in an effort to create a single data warehouse for donor and subscriber information, a major challenge was matching up data for readers who had long-standing print subscriptions and also had a digital subscription. Many print subscriptions were associated with an address rather than a name, but a digital subscription was associated with a name and email address, and no physical address. The result was that there was no way to automatically link print and digital subscriptions to one reliable record.

Ultimately, a single automated storage system was not the optimal choice for the Tribune due to this barrier. Instead, the Tribune and News Revenue Hub came up with an alternative system that utilized automated components and manual entry, and stored data in multiple locations, with only truly 'clean' data being placed in the CRM (Salesforce). Pivoting from the original vision meant staying aligned with the real priorities of the endeavor: increasing revenue by increasing usability and accuracy of donor data. It also underscores the time and financial benefit of contracting, even in the short term, with people who know complex systems like Salesforce.



Keep in mind the purposes of audience data collection:

1. To readily see who is paying for your product, who is giving donations, who is doing both, and who is doing neither.
2. To make more money from readers, which usually means turning readers into subscribers and/or donors.

Managing Audience Data

Be realistic in assessing current data and organization capacity: What data is consistent? For print/legacy data, what condition is it in? How much pre-existing data do you have and where is it located? Do you have the ability or personnel to manually handle data? What software is currently being used?

Keeping data accurate and organized is just as important to generating audience revenue as collecting data. Properly managed data leads to better donor relationships and increased revenue because it protects against mistakes, like sending a thank you note to the wrong contact (or worse yet, not sending one at all!), and protects against missed opportunities, like omitting a potential donor from a fundraising campaign specifically relevant to their behavior or habits.

A starting point to optimizing a data management system is to determine a level of automation that fits your needs. Automating processes such as uploading donation data into account management software, or composing email recipient lists from stored donor data, is a trade-off between decreased manual work and level of accuracy and personalization.

The Salt Lake Tribune's Tech Stack for Managing Audience Data

Payment Processing:

Piano

- Subscription payments
- Donations attached to monthly subscription for Supporting Subscribers

Moonclerk

- One-time or recurring donations

Account Management:

SalesForce

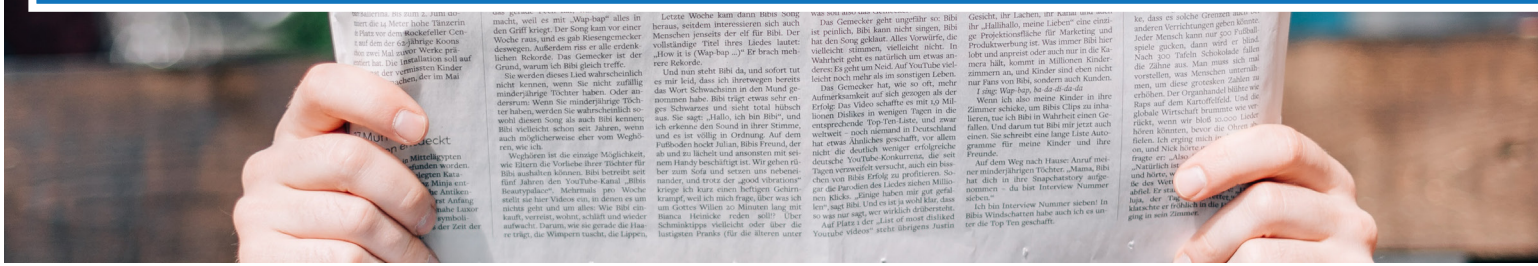
- All donations received through Piano and Moonclerk are cleaned and uploaded
- Thank you emails and gift receipts are generated
- All pledged donations are logged
- Grant applications and major gifts are also tracked in Salesforce
- Donor and Supporting Subscriber information is entered
- To ensure accuracy, print subscriber information is entered only when tied to either a gift (usually by check) or an email address, or when the address is in a target zipcode
- All donors who give over \$100 are wealth screened using iWave
- All contacts with an address in certain zip codes are wealth screened

Communication & Campaigns:

MailChimp

- Initiate and track large-scale communications and campaigns
- Uses donor data from Salesforce to target email campaigns

Ethics & Gift Acceptance Policies



As the nation's first nonprofit legacy news organization, The Salt Lake Tribune has worked to set a firm precedent regarding [ethics](#) policies. When an organization transitions to a nonprofit, a concern for many stakeholders is the organization's independence from those who provide gifts and donations. In addition to adhering to the [Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics](#) and to the editorial independence guidelines of the [Institute for Nonprofit News](#), the Tribune has stated that no donations or gifts will affect the organization or its journalism:

"The Tribune does not accept gifts from any entity or person that seeks or expects control over its work."

Transparency is key to ensuring continuous trust between the Tribune and the community it serves. In an effort to maintain full transparency, the Tribune announced it will display on its website sources of revenue, board and advisory council members, federal tax returns, and annual reports on the work made possible by public support. Donors may request anonymity but all donors of gifts over \$5,000 may not be anonymous, and a complete list of donors is available on The Tribune's website. The Tribune has a [section on their website](#) with financial and legal information and documents.

Editors of the Salt Lake Tribune evaluate donations on an individual basis, and reserve the right to decline gifts of any kind based on their discretion.

"The Salt Lake Tribune's core value is journalistic excellence. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit news organization, The Tribune holds independence and accountability to the public as its guiding principles."

For more examples, see our [round-up](#) of ethics, transparency, and gift acceptance policies from nonprofit news organizations. For help developing a gift acceptance policy or ethical guidelines for nonprofit journalism, see the terrific work of the [Poynter Institute](#) and the [Institute for Nonprofit News](#).

Education & Public Engagement



Community engagement is key for any nonprofit organization to maintain interest and involvement from the public. These tools are used to inform and empower the community, increase public trust, and increase financial support.

The Salt Lake Tribune created multiple resources to strengthen community engagement and education regarding the newspaper's new model. One of these is "Trib Talks", a series of weekly public events aimed at initiating important civic dialogue in the community. Topics of the series have included racism, police brutality, the gubernatorial race, and the spread of coronavirus throughout the state of Utah. The Tribune hopes to make these events a source of revenue in the future, where individuals can both donate to the specific cause being discussed and to the Tribune itself.

Opportunities for engagement and education were also added to The Salt Lake Tribune website. These include:

- Educational content regarding the transition to a nonprofit, the organization's nonprofit model and answers to FAQs. This includes the definition of a nonprofit, ways to donate, allocation of funding, and how the organization will be run going forward.
- A complete list of the volunteer Board of Directors and the Tribune's leadership.
- A story "Tip Line", where readers can call or email story ideas. Readers are also encouraged to contact reporters directly, as well as provide information anonymously. This is to stimulate participation from the community.
- Additional educational content about the role of local journalism in democracy, how news is gathered and reported, and "fake news", including a section for educators.
- Free digital access through libraries and for all high school seniors.



Evaluating Progress & Success



As the Tribune completed the first stages of this transition, many specific goals were set in place for the upcoming year regarding all aspects of the organization:

- Raise \$20 million for the Utah Journalism Foundation
- Raise \$2 million for The Salt Lake Tribune
- Achieve 25,000 subscribers (an increase of more than 15,000)
- Lower webpage average load time to 9 seconds
- Convert 50% of print subscribers to digital subscribers (or both)
- Increase number of annual public engagement events and opportunities
- Increase social media presence on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook

Each individual goal has and will continue to be monitored quarterly. Some goals, such as donation and subscriber benchmarks, are ongoing processes. Goals involving hosting in person events have been suspended due to Covid-19, and replaced by much more frequent, timely, and accessible virtual events.

In order to better understand what new methods and policies are successful, and to better identify the financial impact of the transition on the Tribune, key performance indicators are used to understand growth in real-time.

The Salt Lake Tribune's shift to a 501(c)(3) charity, and to an entirely new business model, has been first and foremost a large-scale experiment. Only years from now will we know if this model is a viable way to redefine at least some legacy news organizations. However, carefully selecting and tracking indicators for success can provide insight into the efficacy of the transition, what worked, what didn't, and how to further improve this developing model.

Resources for Further Reading

[A Playbook for Launching a Local, Nonprofit News Outlet](#)

News Revenue Hub with Shorenstein Center

[Philanthropic Options for Newspapers: A Practical Guide](#)

The Knight Foundation, written by Nicco Mele

[Could It Be Sunny in Philadelphia?](#)

The Knight Foundation, written by Tim Griggs

[A Guide to Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem](#)

Democracy Fund

[Collaborative Data Journalism Guide](#)

ProPublica, written by Rachel Glickhouse

[Reader Revenue Toolkit](#)

American Press Institute

[Essays on the Ethics of Funders and Nonprofit Media](#)

American Press Institute, written by Tom Rosenstiel, William Buzenberg, Marjorie Connelly, and Kevin Loker

Resources on Innovative Business Models

[5 Business Models for Local News to Watch in 2020](#)

The Knight Foundation, written by Mark Glaser

[Pay Models for Online News in the U.S. and Europe: 2019 Update](#)

Reuters Institute, written by Felix M. Simon and Lucas Graves

[Nonprofit Social Enterprise: Models and Funding](#)

Green For All Youth Employment and Leadership Ladders (YELL) Working Group

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