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The Craig Newmark Center for
ETHICS and
LEADERSHIP



JOURNALISTS' TOOLKIT

Accurate reporting when sources shut down

On your keyboard, press option (on a Mac) or control (on a PC) and right arrow to jump to the next page

Build new source relationships

- Start a relationship with your sources as early as you can – in person. Having a relationship is an opportunity to educate them on your work and intentions.
- Expand your network of sources beyond the “official” and into the community. Get out into the field, gather firsthand accounts from community members and stakeholders. This offers new ways of getting at the story.
- Expand your routine beat coverage. Do stories that feature the community or address issues the people in the community feel are important.



Report for America corps member Jasper Kenzo Sundeen interviews Teresa Romero, president of United Farm Workers in Sunnyside, Washington. (Photo by Santiago Ochoa/Yakima Herald-Republic)

- Cultivate relationships. Take initiative and be proactive when interacting with sources.

Build expertise/beat reporting

- You build authority with each story you produce and each event you attend.
- Have a calendar of key dates (such as legislative votes, annual reports, etc.), a clear map of the arena (the formal bodies, the citizens impacted, the interest groups, the policy analysts, etc.) and a robust list of contacts.
- Focus on discipline, time management, and right-sizing your expectations. Discipline means each week adding a little something to your store of knowledge. Time management gives you space to do that. Getting your expectations straight reduces the frustration that comes when things take longer than you

expect — which they always will.

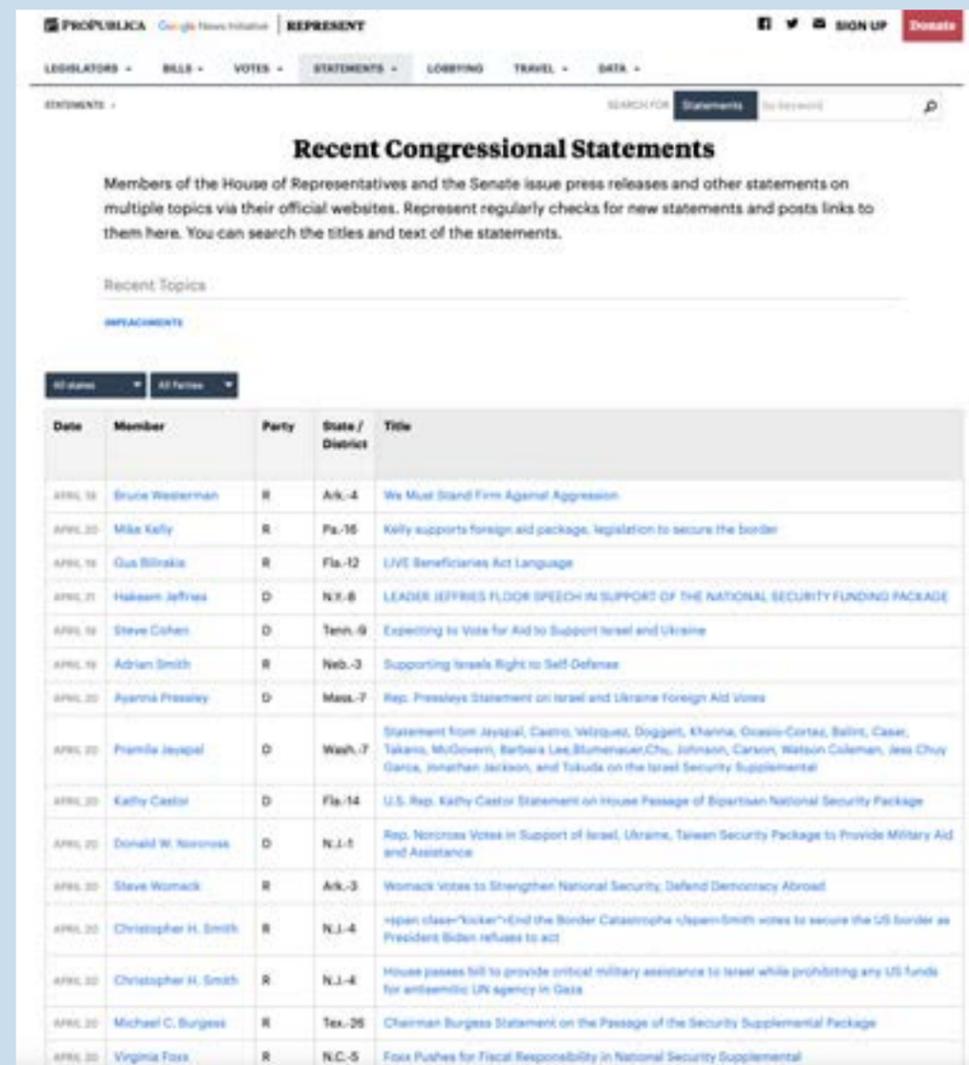
- Make use of tools like Google Alerts to keep tabs on newsmakers who won't communicate with you. You might find out things on the fly.



- Adopt the strategy of small bites of the apple. You don't need to aim for the big takeout. One small story after the next is a great way to learn, build your network and serve the audience.

Look for where they *are* talking

- Find other news outlets or past interviews where the sources you need have spoken before.
- Find transcripts. Most of the major cable networks, CNN, Fox News Sunday, and MSNBC publish transcripts from their shows.
- Use ProPublica's Recent Congressional Statements database. It contains the latest press releases, statements of House and Senate members. It's not comprehensive, but it's very timely.



Date	Member	Party	State / District	Title
APRIL 18	Bruce Westerman	R	Ark.-4	We Must Stand Firm Against Aggression
APRIL 20	Mike Kelly	R	Pa.-16	Kelly supports foreign aid package, legislation to secure the border
APRIL 18	Gus Bilirakis	R	Fla.-12	LIVE Beneficiaries Act Language
APRIL 21	Hakeem Jeffries	D	N.Y.-8	LEADER JEFFRIES FLOOR SPEECH IN SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY FUNDING PACKAGE
APRIL 19	Steve Cohen	D	Tenn.-9	Expecting to Vote for Aid to Support Israel and Ukraine
APRIL 19	Adrian Smith	R	Nebr.-3	Supporting Israel's Right to Self-Defense
APRIL 20	Amyra Pressley	D	Mass.-7	Rep. Pressley's Statement on Israel and Ukraine Foreign Aid Votes
APRIL 20	Frankie Espinal	D	Wash.-7	Statement from Arroyo, Castro, Velázquez, Doggett, Khanna, Gossin-Cortez, Balint, Caser, Takano, McGovern, Barbara Lee, Blumenauer, Chu, Johnson, Carson, Watson Coleman, Jess Choy, Garcia, Jonathan Jackson, and Tokuda on the Israel Security Supplemental
APRIL 20	Kathy Castor	D	Fla.-14	U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor Statement on House Passage of Bipartisan National Security Package
APRIL 20	Donald W. Norcross	D	N.J.-1	Rep. Norcross Votes in Support of Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan Security Package to Provide Military Aid and Assistance
APRIL 20	Steve Womack	R	Ark.-3	Womack Votes to Strengthen National Security, Defend Democracy Abroad
APRIL 20	Christopher H. Smith	R	N.J.-4	Open class="nickel">End the Border Catastrophe Smith votes to secure the US border as President Biden refuses to act
APRIL 20	Christopher H. Smith	R	N.J.-4	House passes bill to provide critical military assistance to Israel while prohibiting any US funds for antisemitic UN agency in Gaza
APRIL 20	Michael C. Burgess	R	Tex.-26	Chairman Burgess Statement on the Passage of the Security Supplemental Package
APRIL 20	Virginia Foxx	R	N.C.-5	Foxx Pushes for Fiscal Responsibility in National Security Supplemental

Platform the problem: publish when sources won't cooperate

- Make a source's refusal as tangible as possible. Include the details of the shutdown in your reporting or editorialize about it.
- Be intentional in educating readers and sources about what you do.
- Alert people through social media and other outlets to issues such as public-records struggles, journalistic hurdles while acquiring information and source's shutdown.
- If your source is a politician, raise the shutdown with the target's political associates, including major political funders. This can sometimes increase the pressure for the person to respond.
- A simple "could not be reached for comment" is not enough. Explain to the audience not only that the source is unwilling to participate, but also the context and ramifications of that decision.
- Consider keeping details about problems with sources or records within the body of a story, rather than in separate pieces that the audience of the original story might miss.

Tell your audience details about records denials

- When you report on records denials, be specific and add context. Specify how many times a request for information was made, or how much money your news organization had to pay.
- Remind your audience about their legal right to know. Denying access to journalists denies access to the public.
- Consider legal action. Letting sources know you're considering suing might be enough to wriggle the records free.
- Call a lawyer for a consultation, at minimum.



- Familiarize yourself with resources like the Reporter's Committee for Freedom of the Press' legal hotline, the Society of Professional Journalist's legal defense fund, and similar resources that may be available through local organizations.
- Form consortiums with other media outlets to split the costs of suing for records.

Collaborate rather than compete

- Strength in numbers. Collaborate with other news organizations in expertise, perspectives, physical access, and legal-defense support. For example, a reporter from another news organization might be able to ask a question at a press conference you can't get to or are barred from.
- Consider creating a pool report with other outlets at the local level or on specific beats.
- Collaboration increases visibility and enhances the public's awareness.

- Collaboration can create pressure on sources and raise the stakes for them. And when one news organization is blocked or silenced, others can show solidarity and help find a way through.



Photo by Tampa Bay Times

It's OK to say NO

- If a source has granted access but with restrictions or conditions, the journalist should weigh that against their journalistic purpose and mission.

- If the sources' requests are unethical or would compromise the integrity of the reporting process, journalists should reject the access and note that in their reporting.

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