

Refining your Value Proposition

A member-driven newsroom needs to be able to tell a compelling, accurate story about its mission. This story makes it easy for audience members to understand how your work improves the world they live in and how they can play a role by supporting you, whether that's with their time, ideas, expertise, connections, or money. All of this begins with defining your newsroom's value proposition, then your membership value proposition.

Your **newsroom value proposition** guides your organization's overall strategy and direction. It is not a summary of everything you do. Instead, it articulates what your newsroom uniquely exists to do, the value it creates, and why it is distinctive. It connects what your audience needs to what your newsroom creates.

A **membership value proposition** builds on your newsroom value proposition, articulating why an audience member should go beyond just consuming your journalism and become an active participant and supporter of it. A membership value proposition gives audience members a reason to join, and gives them a clear picture of what they're opting into.

A strong value proposition, whether that's for your entire newsroom or just for your membership program, is grounded in audience insights.

That's why Membership Puzzle Project coach Jessica Best developed the following process for helping a newsroom go from having no value proposition at all to having both a newsroom and membership value proposition that reflects what audience members value about them. It's based on her work with an Eastern European newsroom in 2020. We share their answers at each stage to help you:

1. Articulate your assumptions about the value you provide to your audiences
2. Test those assumptions to ensure any value proposition you create is deeply rooted in audience insights

Steps 1 to 4 encourage you to articulate the assumptions you have about your audience members. Conducting audience research (Step 5) will either confirm or refute those assumptions, and you can adjust your value proposition accordingly.

[Read more about the importance of a clear value proposition and how to come up with one in the Membership Guide.](#)

Step 1: Conduct a “First, Best, Only” exercise

This can serve as a starting point for figuring out your newsroom and membership value proposition.

Complete these three sentences with your team, about your newsroom:

- 1) We are the first ones to...
- 2) We are the only ones to...
- 3) We are the best at...

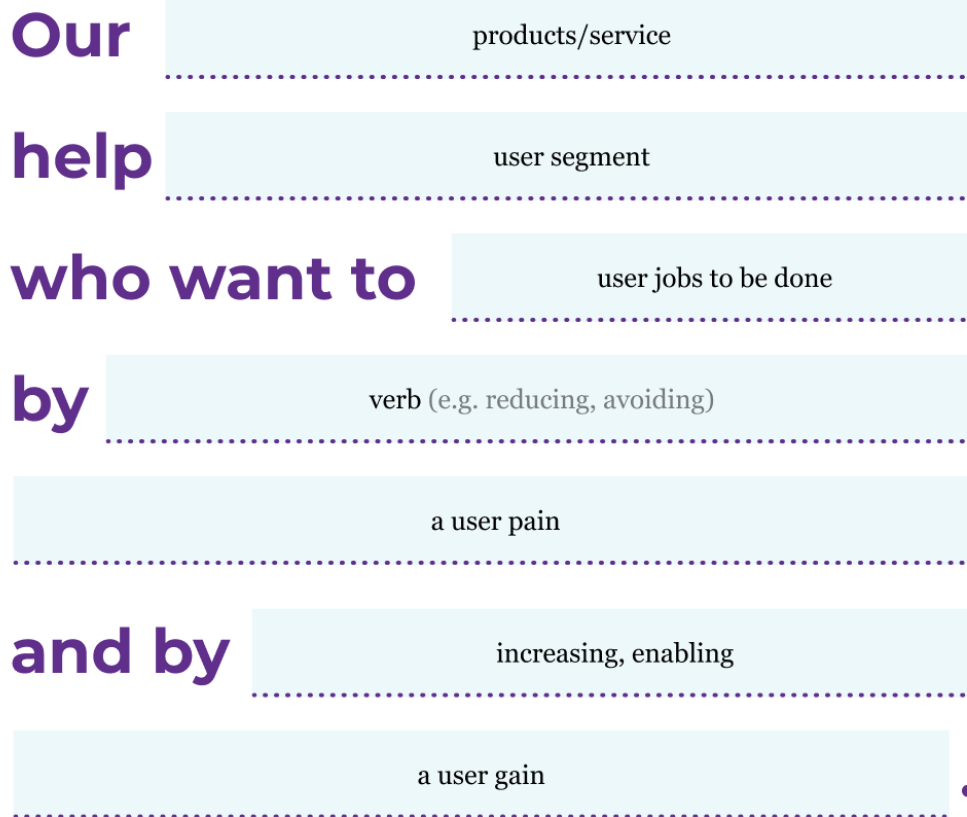
[More detail about this step here](#)

Example:

- **We are the first...** to provide opinion and commentary on a topic that goes beyond just news.
- **We are the first...** media outlet in [country] that is grounded in a classical liberal perspective.
- **We are the only...** ones who cover politics in neighboring countries.
- **We are the best...** at responding quickly to events with opinion pieces and commentary on issues.
- **We are the best...** at understanding what topics and debates are about to get in the spotlight.
- **We are the best...** at finding high quality experts and authors not yet in sight of the mainstream media.

Step 2: Draft your newsroom value proposition

Based on these assumptions, draft your newsroom value proposition using [the Strategyzer template](#).



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Example, Version 1:

“Our content helps readers interested in politics, economy, and ideas, who want daily access to high quality political content by avoiding tabloid–style journalism and by providing daily commentary and opinion on trending political, social, and economic topics and challenging/new/different ideas.”

Step 3: Identify your loyal audience members’ pains and gains

Consider the question: What are the reasons we think loyal/engaged readers might become paying members?

Example:

What are the reasons we think loyal readers might become paying members?

- Because they think our media outlet should exist in the [domestic] media landscape.
 - For quality economic content that is not being produced by anyone else.
 - For analysis with a historical lens.
 - For our expertise in drug policy.
 - Because they're interested in experiments with new media formats eg. podcasts.
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Step 4: Draft your membership value proposition

Using [the Strategyzer template](#) once again, plus information from Steps 1 to 3, draft your membership value proposition.

Example

“Our membership program helps our most loyal readers who want unique, quality journalism in experimental formats, by avoiding restrictive text-only formats and by offering exclusive podcasts on health and economy.”

Step 5: Conduct audience research

The questions you ask should test the assumptions you made in Steps 1 to 4.

Questions could include:

- What type of [organization] content do you find most valuable?
- What makes [organization] different from other news products you consume?
- If [organization] was to offer additional benefits for the readers who support us with their time, money, or skills, which of these benefits would you find most valuable?
[Multiple choice]
- What would you value about being a [organization] member?

For more examples of questions to use during audience research, see MPP’s [Membership Viability and Design Survey Template](#).

Step 6: Synthesize your audience research responses to form insights

If you’ve never synthesized audience research results before, MPP [offers straightforward advice in the Membership Guide](#).

Example

- The characteristic respondents value most about our platform is that we provide a unique perspective on a range of issues not seen elsewhere in the domestic media landscape.

- The most popular member benefits indicated were exclusive articles on economics, society/culture, and politics.
- The least popular member benefits indicated were new formats such as podcasts.
- A significant proportion of respondents indicated they would like benefits that allowed them to engage with journalists, editors, and other members.
- Our most loyal audience members are 21-45 year olds who live in [country's] major urban centres, as well as diaspora living in the United States.

You can see here that these insights warn the newsroom away from investing any of their resources in podcasts at this stage. That's helpful to know, because podcasting is resource-intensive, and now they know they can put those resources into something else.

Step 7: Refine your newsroom and membership value propositions

Your insights likely confirmed some assumptions and refuted others. Rework both value propositions to reflect that.

Example: Newsroom value proposition, Version 2

“Our content helps readers who like to see a different approach to politics, economy, and society by avoiding tabloid style reporting, sensationalism, and polarization, and instead offering them daily analysis, commentary, and new ideas on trending topics.”

Example: Newsroom value proposition, Version 3

Further specificity added

“Our content helps [language]-speaking readers in urban areas who like to see a different approach to politics, economy, and society by avoiding tabloid style reporting, sensationalism, and polarization, and instead offering them daily analysis, commentary, and new ideas on trending topics.”

Example: Membership value proposition, Version 2

“Our membership program helps our most dedicated readers who want political, economic, and social coverage that helps them understand a topic from a range of perspectives. We do this by giving them access to exclusive political and economic analysis, interviews, and commentary on trending topics, and opportunities to directly engage in discussion with our editorial, journalists, and authors.”

Step 8: Forge ahead!

The value proposition is not something you'll ever publish, at least not in the Strategyzer template form. But it will become your internal North Star for everything from writing your launch announcement to designing your membership program.

This exercise only scratches the surface of the value proposition. You can read more in [the Membership Guide](#). If you feel like you have a handle on your value propositions now, you can move on to [designing your membership program](#).