



News Goggles

ProPublica investigation

Sept. 21, 2020

First things first. . .

The Big Picture



- Read [the original story](#)
- Use these slides to guide your reading
- **Be sure to view slides in presentation mode**
- Download our full annotations in Microsoft Word or as a PDF

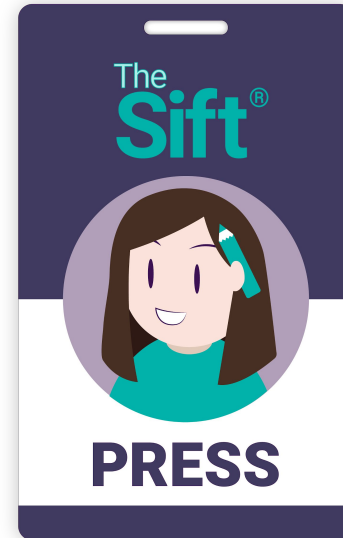
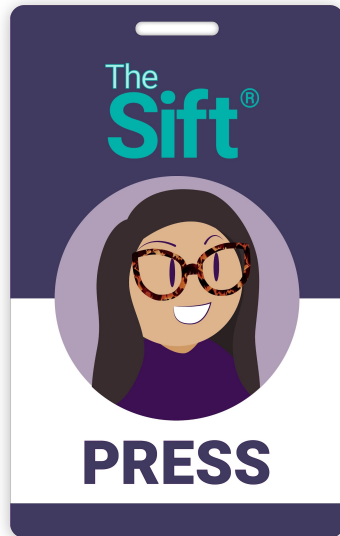
Lingo List

Journalists have their own vocabulary.
Here's this week's newsroom lingo.

- **FOIA:** Short for "Freedom of Information Act," which allows journalists (or the public) to request federal records.
- **Graf:** Short for "paragraph."

First things first

- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.



What to look for

- 1. Public records:** How does ProPublica use public records obtained through a FOIA request to report this story?
- 2. Fairness:** What steps has ProPublica taken to show fairness and transparency in its reporting process?



Hello, I'm Suzannah. I'll help you analyze the use of records in this report.



Hi, I'm Hannah! I'll point out a few notable features related to fairness and transparency.

Public records

The headline shows that documentation is central to this story.



CORONAVIRUS

Emails Show the Meatpacking Industry Drafted an Executive Order to Keep Plants Open

Hundreds of emails offer a rare look at the meat industry's influence and access to the highest levels of government. The draft was submitted a week before the executive order, which bore striking similarities.

by Michael Grabell and Bernice Yeung, Sept. 14, 2:43 p.m. EDT



How did ProPublica obtain the hundreds of emails? Let's read on and try to find out.

Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that almost from the start of the crisis, the meatpacking industry and the USDA were largely focused on how to keep workers on the line.



Here we go! ProPublica got at least some documents used in this report after requesting them under the Freedom of Information Act (or FOIA, for short).

Related: Here's [another recent story](#) based on information from public records

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

By **Tony Romm**, **Jacob Bogage** and **Lena H. Sun**

September 17, 2020 at 3:32 p.m. CDT

Newly revealed USPS documents show an agency struggling to manage Trump, Amazon and the pandemic

Nearly 10,000 pages of emails, memos and other private documents offered new details about the agency's struggles and the pro-Trump figures to whom it turned for advice

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

These documents were obtained by The Washington Post through different sources than ProPublica. Can you spot the difference?

The records were obtained by the Post from a separate watchdog group.

But like the ProPublica records, these documents also came to light under FOIA.

The wide-ranging headaches that so troubled the USPS in April ultimately foreshadowed... trusting the once-venerated agency into a political... a presidential election. Newly disclosed details... nearly 10,000 pages of emails, legal memos and other documents obtained by The Washington Post from American Oversight, a watchdog group that requested them under the Freedom of Information Act.

Fairness



Journalists include these details to show that their reporting process was fair and provided ample opportunity for story subjects to respond.

What happened next within the USDA and the White House records. The USDA declined to answer questions and did not respond to requests for comment. But while the final wording wasn't verbatim, Trump's order emphasized the points that the industry had proposed. The agriculture secretary to take the operations."

Standards-based news organizations often explain the efforts they took to reach someone as well as the outcome. Here we can see that while the USDA acknowledged and declined ProPublica's interview request, the White House did not respond to multiple requests before publication.



This line shows that ProPublica tried to reach two groups directly involved in the story's findings — the USDA and White House.

News Goggles: next steps

Idea: In the United States, teach students about the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Then show them how to [file a FOIA request](#) for a piece of public information about a topic that affects them or their communities (such as school budgets). For local and state records, try using [the letter generator](#) from the Student Press Law Center. For federal FOIA requests, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press offers [some helpful guidance](#).

Resource: [“Democracy’s Watchdog”](#) (NLP’s Checkology® virtual classroom).

Thank you!



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