

WEB METRICS

for Nonprofit News Organizations



Contents

p 3 What Metrics Matter?

p 4 What do Funders Want?

p 5 Site Metrics

p 5 Getting Started: Audience Overview

p 8 By Geographic Area

p 10 Getting Started: Customizing for a Geographic Area

p 13 Story Metrics

p 15 Getting Specific: Reporting Templates

p 16 Getting Started: Customizing for Top Stories

p 19 Summary



WHAT METRICS MATTER

YOU'RE DOING GOOD WORK, WRITING STORIES THAT MATTER. YOU WANT TO know that your content is making a difference. Better yet, you want your funders to know it too.

Getting a sense of the online traffic to your news stories can be complicated for any news organization. But as someone working at a nonprofit news organization, you're facing special challenges. Your primary audience, for example, isn't expected to find your content on your website; they may not even know that your organization exists. More likely, they're accessing the content you've created through your partner channels.

So the strategies used by most media companies to collect online analytics data doesn't really work in your situation. Using traditional website metrics for distributed journalism organizations can, at best, understate your impact. At worst, it can be misleading and a waste of time for you to compile and then try to analyze. For nonprofit news organizations, the metrics that matter aren't web metrics at all.

Where does this leave you as someone attempting to report your outreach to funders?

What do funders want?

More than likely, you have a website that is a destination site for your target audience. And, if so, then the most important metrics are those that are most likely to change based on the stories you produce, the marketing campaigns you launch and anything else your organization does to achieve its goals. The website metrics that you report to funders should be aligned to your mission statement or the “About Us” section on your website.

The importance that funders place on website metrics in an assessment of a news organization’s impact varies. For example, some funders compile standardized website metrics to analyze their portfolios. Therefore, it’s critical as a news organization to work with each of your funders to agree on what are truly meaningful metrics.

For nonprofit news organizations that have destination sites, an annual report to funders should include an assessment of traffic:

- to the site as a whole (site metrics)
- from users in the targeted geographic areas
- to the stories and specific topics unique to the news organization



SITE METRICS

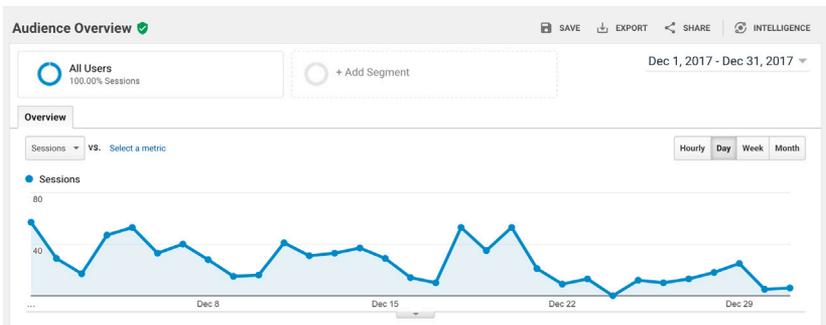


THIS GUIDE USES GOOGLE ANALYTICS TO illustrate the types of software tools used to gather and report metrics data. Each digital media platform has its own metrics and tools. In addition to Google Analytics, Adobe SiteCatalyst, Chartbeat and WebTrends are just some of the free or paid tools you can use.

Also, we encourage you to check out the first guide of the “Understanding Media Metrics” series, *Web Metrics: Basics for Journalists*, which provides basic terms and methods for understanding digital audiences, as well as a step-by-step guide to using Google Analytics. You can download the guide at www.mediaimpactproject.org/web-metrics-guide.html.

Getting Started: The Audience Overview

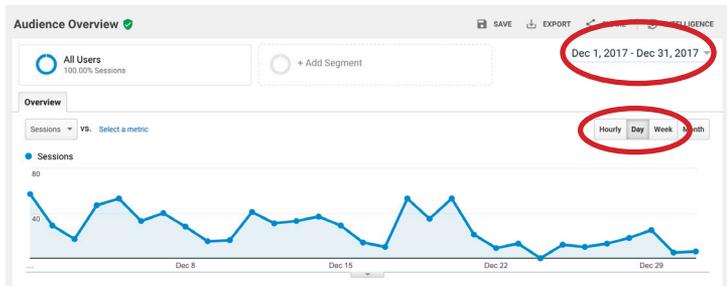
- 1 Once you log into Google Analytics, you can click on your website and choose Audience → Overview on the left-hand sidebar to see the Audience Overview report. This will give you a broad view of your site’s **SESSIONS**, or how many times someone visited your site.



When assessing the health of your website, focus on sessions instead of individual users or even pageviews, which are a count of each time someone views a page. Sessions give more insight about how an audience uses your content. Examining what users do when they're on the site gives you far more useful information than simply counting users and pageviews.

With sessions, you can drill down or analyze them by segment to understand what type of user drove the peaks — or which ones were missing from the valleys.

You'll want to see total sessions vs. sessions from new users vs. sessions from returning users in one Google Analytics chart.

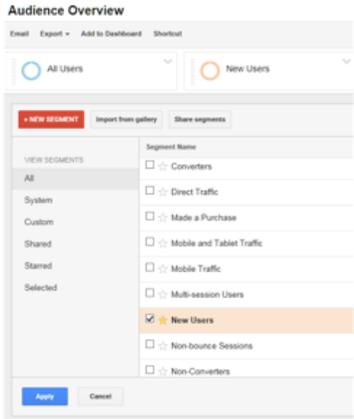


2 Change the date and the interval.

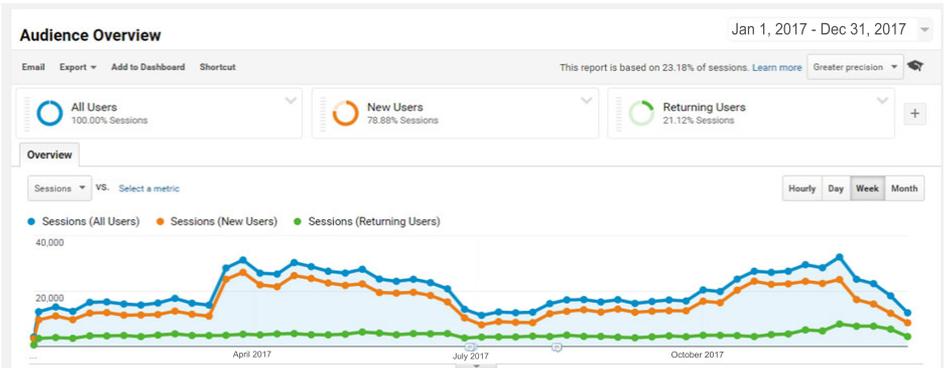
3 Click on the “Add Segment” option.



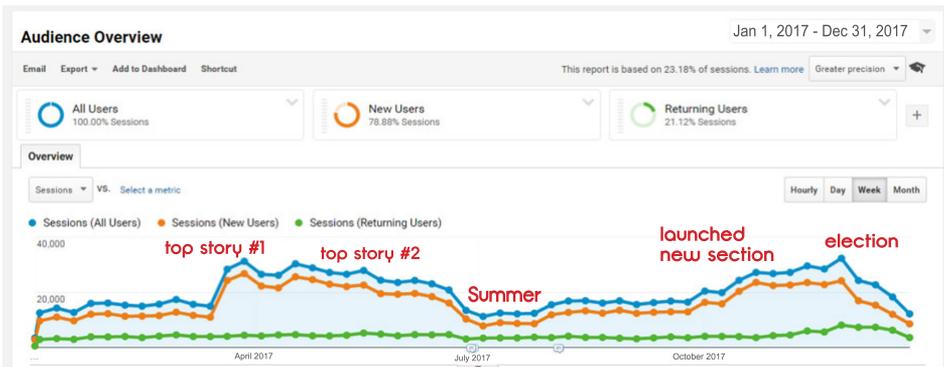
4 Then check the “New Users” and “Returning Users” segments from the list. Click “Apply.”



You'll get something like this:



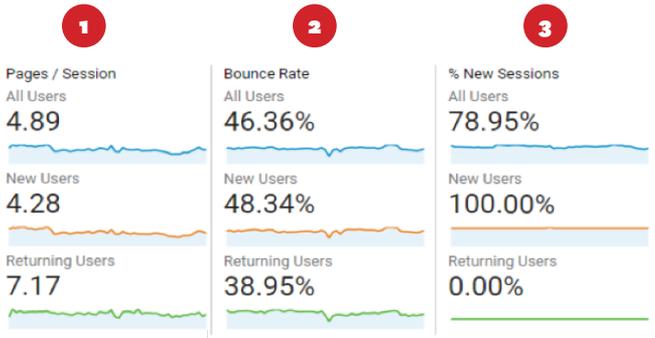
As you do an annual assessment of the overall health of your website, your main objective should be to identify if your site built and retained its target audience. Review your overall trend in sessions by week. Try to explain the peaks and valleys too, and see if you can identify major initiatives, news events and top stories.



News stories or major events might have helped drive traffic to your site, or may have curbed viewership.

The chart above shows that the peaks in the spring and fall were driven by sessions from new users. The trend in sessions from returning users was flat by comparison.

Scroll below the Audience Overview chart and you'll find the following metrics:



- 1 PAGES/SESSIONS.** This represents average pages per session for all sessions vs. sessions from new or returning users. The average pages per session is calculated by dividing the number of pageviews divided by the number of sessions. The unofficial industry standard is 2 pages per session. A high average indicates many users are going to multiple pages when they visit your site.
- 2 BOUNCE RATE.** This column represents the site bounce rate for sessions from all users vs. sessions from new or returning users. The site bounce rate is the percent of sessions in which the user came to the site but immediately left without clicking to another page. A high bounce rate of above 50 to 70% could indicate that users are not encouraged to go deeper into your site.
- 3 % NEW SESSIONS.** This is the overall percent of sessions from new vs. returning users for the year. News sites usually have a high number of sessions from new users, especially from search engines during peak news periods. So your organization should focus on analyzing the trend in the number of sessions from returning news.

In this case, you can see that about half of the sessions from new users bounced (48%), compared to 39% from returning users. Returning users also went to significantly more pages per session (7.17) on average than new users (4.28). By focusing on sessions from returning users rather than the sessions in total, you can get an overall picture of whether your news organization is building an audience base that will sustain you.



BY GEOGRAPHIC AREA

IN GOOGLE ANALYTICS, YOU CAN ANALYZE THE BEHAVIOR OF USERS FROM ANY combination of countries, states, metropolitan areas and incorporated cities. Incorporated cities will include only a small fraction of a targeted geographic audience. So depending on your geographic and topic focus, you should define your target geography with a combination of states and metropolitan areas.

An example would look something like this:

Texas Tribune: Texas and Washington, D.C. metro

Public Radio Stations: Metropolitan areas reached by broadcast bandwidth

Voice of OC: Los Angeles metro and Sacramento metro

Every news organization gets traffic from around the world, and it may be uncomfortable to focus on some audiences but not on others. But analyzing website metrics by targeted geography really helps both you and your funders in the following ways:

- It helps you focus on the audiences that are most likely to engage with your content consistently and over the long term.
- It helps you assess outreach and marketing initiatives more accurately.

Here is a template you can use that outlines these strategies:

I. Targeted geographic areas to measure

- A. Countries:
- B. States or Provinces:
- C. Metropolitan Areas:

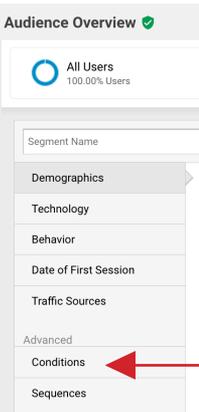
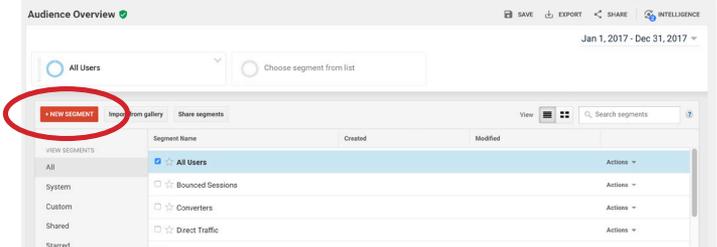
In Google Analytics, you can find the metropolitan areas in the left-hand navigation under Audience → Geo → Locations → [Country] → Metro

Getting Started: Customizing for a Geographic Area

- 1 To target for a geographic area in Google Analytics, you'll want to set up a custom segment. Under Audience Overview, click the "Add Segment" option:



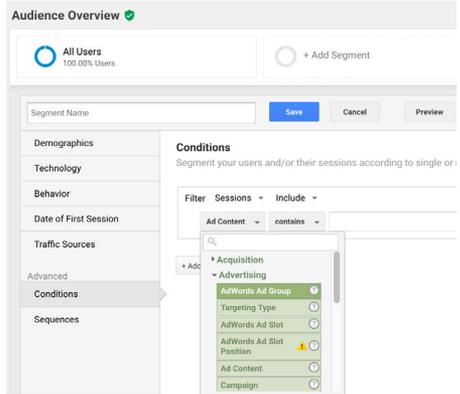
- 2 Then, add a "New Segment"



- 3 On the left-hand side of the new screen, under "Advanced," choose "Conditions."

4

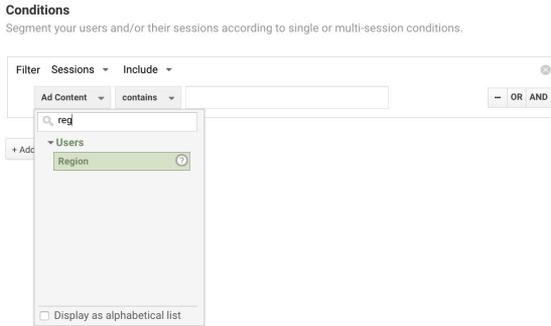
Click on the arrow next to “Ad Content” to get the drop-down menu.



5

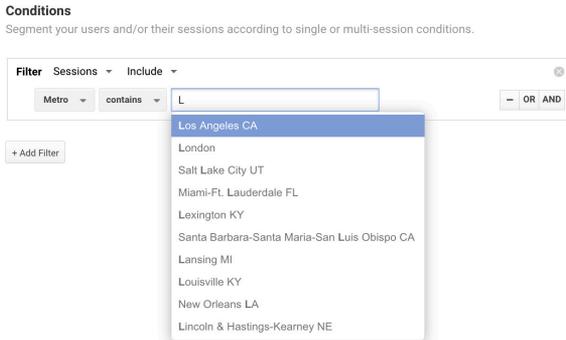
Begin by typing in “Region” or “Metro,” and that segment will pop up.

In Google Analytics, a “Region” is a U.S. state and “Metro” is a metropolitan area. Avoid using “City,” as it will only include, for example, the incorporated city of Los Angeles and not all of Los Angeles County.



6

Start typing in the region or metro area. A drop-down box with the available areas will appear.

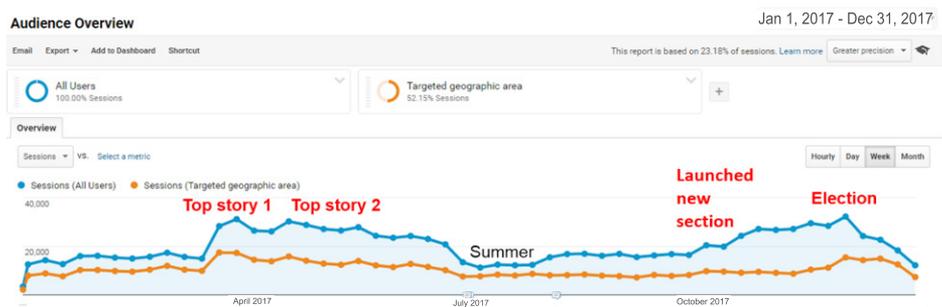


7 To add additional areas, click “OR.” OR AND

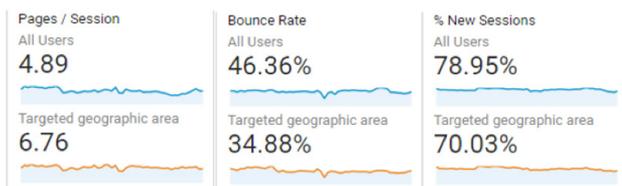
8 Name that segment, then click “Save.”



As we did with sessions from returning users, you can also separate out sessions from a selected state, group of metro areas or other types of targeted geographies. And as with returning users, you should expect a lower bounce rate and a higher average pages-per-session from users in target geographies.



Identify the total sessions per week vs. the sessions from a targeted geographic area.



You should calculate the percent of sessions from users in the launched target geography as an indicator.



Here's an example calculation of percent of sessions from users in a target geographic area. You can see here that 52% of sessions came from users in the target geography.



STORY METRICS

YOU'LL DEFINITELY WANT TO FOCUS YOUR METRICS ON A STORY OR TOPIC THAT is related to a specific grant. But if your organization is doing an annual content assessment, try to include story metrics for one or two topics that are the core reason for your existence. The topics you choose should be the focus of your assessment regardless of other topics that may have performed well.

And if you have the time and resources, you may want to consider assessments for the following:

- Each topic in the navigation bar of your website. Whether or not this reflects the range and priority of your coverage, the navigation bar is the most visible, public-facing statement of your content strategy.
- Topics that you are considering reducing coverage of, based on resource constraints, staff changes and other issues.
- Topics that are good prospects for future grants. Maybe these are topics that have not gotten much traffic or engagement in the past. However, there may be an upward trend or other indicators that would help strengthen your grant application and work with funders to set realistic and measurable baselines.

This list could help you in determining which stories to assess:

I. **Story topics to measure**

A. Topics essential to your existence (choose a maximum of 2)

B. Topics specific to a grant

C. Option: Topics listed in your navigation bar

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

D. Option: Other topics (e.g., possible reductions, future grants)

Reviewing at the following metrics can give you valuable insights for longer term strategic planning:



PAGEVIEWS: The number of times this page was delivered.



PAGE BOUNCE RATE: The percentage of sessions in which this page was the first — and only — page that a user saw.



TRAFFIC SOURCE: Metrics that indicate how users got to your site give you insights about your marketing strategy. The major traffic sources are:



SEARCH ENGINES: organic or paid (e.g., Google AdWords) keyword searches



DIRECT: Typed in or clicked from a bookmark



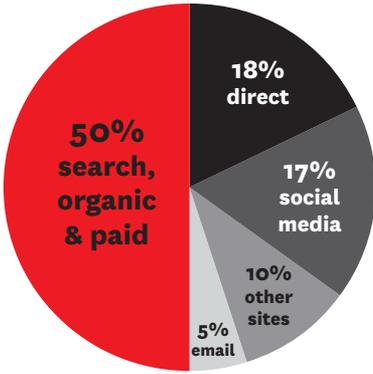
SOCIAL MEDIA: Includes sessions from anywhere in a social media platform, not just an organization's page or account



OTHER SITES: Links referring users to a story



EMAIL: Email newsletters



Here’s what the percentages of sessions by traffic source for your organization may look like.

The impact of a story can’t necessarily be measured in pageviews or within weeks or months of a story’s post date. However, examining pageviews and other metrics for groups of stories can give valuable insights for longer term strategic planning.

Getting Specific: Reporting Templates

STORY-LEVEL METRICS REPORTING TEMPLATE

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Story-level metrics by content group							
2								
3		Topic or content group	Story post date range, if applicable	Date this data was collected	Pageviews	Bounce Rate	Primary Traffic Source(s)	Notes
4	1	Topic essential to your existence						
5	2	Topic specific to a grant						
6	3	Topic in your top level navigation bar						
7	4	Topic that you’re considering cutting						
8	5	Topic related to a grant proposal						

The table above could be useful as part of a written narrative in which story-level metrics are supplementary data to address questions such as:

- Are the top stories what your team expected? Are there any surprises?
- How many of the top stories are about your target geographies and topics?
- Which stories appeared to draw users further into the site?
- Did a story that you promoted heavily on Facebook and Twitter get the number of pageviews that you expected? Are there any approaches you’re going to try with similar stories in the future?

- Were there any referring sites that should be noted?
 - Referring sites that are one-time sources of traffic, e.g., Reddit
 - Referring sites that suggest your organization is an influencer among a target audience group

Some things you'll want to consider as you collect your data:

- Google Analytics counts pageviews based on unique URLs. Most news organizations post variations or updates of a story multiple times a day, sometimes with different URLs. So be sure to identify and combine the data from the various rows in Google Analytics.
- The template above has columns for both post date and data collection date, which for an annual report should usually be December 31.
 - Putting in “January 1 to December 31” of any given year in Google Analytics will give you story metrics for a story from the date it was posted through December 31.
 - So be sure to include “top” stories posted in November and December that may not have as many pageviews as stories in January, for example.

TOPIC OR CONTENT GROUP METRICS REPORTING TEMPLATES

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Story-level metrics by content group							
2								
3		Topic or content group	Story post date range, if applicable	Date this data was collected	Pageviews	Bounce Rate	Primary Traffic Source(s)	Notes
4	1	Topic essential to your existence						
5	2	Topic specific to a grant						
6	3	Topic in your top level navigation bar						
7	4	Topic that you're considering cutting						
8	5	Topic related to a grant proposal						

Whereas the **STORY-LEVEL METRICS REPORT** identifies specific stories that worked well, the **TOPIC OR CONTENT GROUP REPORT** answers different questions and can be part of your narrative about your overall progress and areas to be addressed in the near future. An Excel worksheet template such as

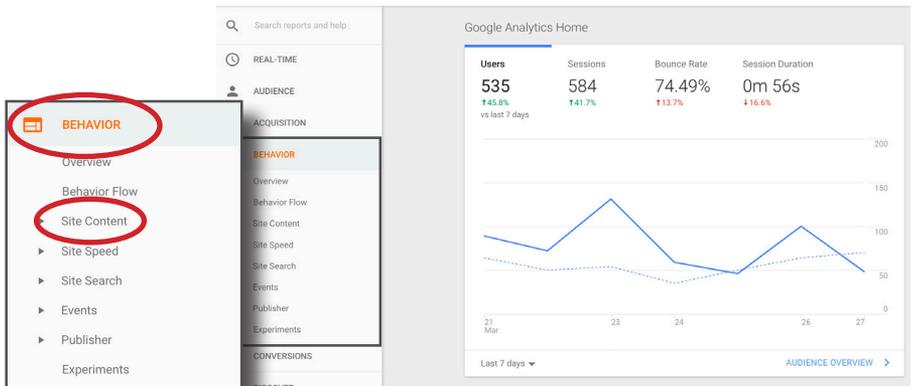
the one here can be used for reporting story metrics by topic or content group.

The topic or content group report takes more resources to compile than the top stories report. Unfortunately, most news organizations don't have the site architecture or customized Google Analytics set-up to automate this data collection.

Getting Started: Customizing for Top Stories

To measure the impact of a particular story or group of stories, you can set Google Analytics to look up stories by pageviews with page titles and traffic sources.

- 1 On the left-hand side of the screen, under "Reports," select Behavior → Site Content → All Pages.



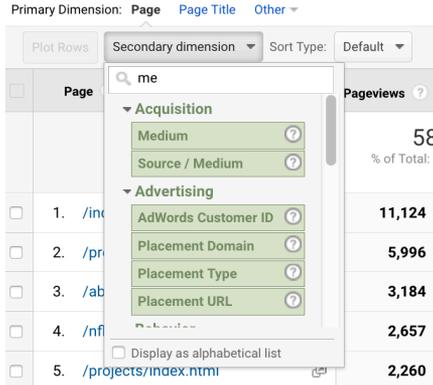
You'll see stories listed by URL. Click on "Page Title" if you'd rather see them by page name or story headline.

Primary Dimension: Page	Page Title	Other	Pageviews	Unit
			58,179 % of Total: 100.00% (58,179)	
1.	/index.html		11,124 (19.12%)	
2.	/project/ca/index.html		5,996 (10.31%)	
3.	/about/index.html		3,184 (5.47%)	
4.	/nflpolitics/index.html		2,657 (4.57%)	

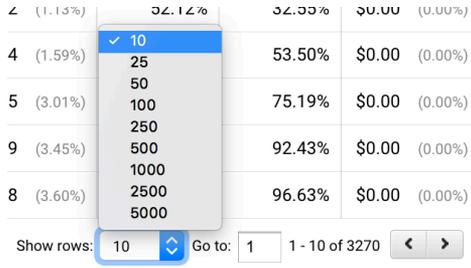
2 Click on the arrow in the “Secondary dimension” box.



3 And in the drop-down box, start typing “Medium.”



4 If you need to see more rows of data, go to “Show rows” at the bottom right.



If your pages are consistently titled throughout your site, you can use the search box to find all of the stories for a topic or content group. Depending on your site architecture, it might be better in this case to use the URL (“Page” in Google Analytics) instead of the Page Title.



SUMMARY

AS A NONPROFIT NEWS ENTITY, GETTING ANALYTICS YOU NEED TO PROVE YOUR impact to your organization and its funders can be a challenging undertaking given that the rules for other news outlets don't apply to you.

But there are workarounds.

This guide covered some of those strategies:

- Understanding basic site metrics using Google Analytics
- Digging deeper into the data to identify your reach in specific geographic areas
- Organizing your topics or stories into a database, from which you then search for the impact of those specific topics and stories

Tunneling into the data can get you closer to capturing those numbers that will ultimately decide where you direct your resources and where you'll seek future funding.

Any feedback on this guide? We would love to hear from you! Please send your questions and comments to us at **media.impact@usc.edu**.



The Media Impact Project is a hub for collecting, developing and sharing approaches for measuring the impact of media. Based at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, we seek to better understand the role that media plays in changing knowledge, attitudes and behavior among individuals and communities, large and small, around the world. For more information, please visit www.mediaimpactproject.org.

Text by Veronica Jauriqui and Dana Chinn
Edited by Veronica Jauriqui
Publication design by Veronica Jauriqui

For more information, email media.impact@usc.edu.



This guide is licensed under the Creative Commons Share Alike, Attribution License.