



Journalist Fellowship Paper

# BBC News: A new contract with our public contributors

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# Contents

Introduction	4
Who is a ‘public contributor’?	6
The link between traumatic loss and a public contributor code	8
Assessing media practice from the contributor perspective	11
The evolution of best practice	15
Recommendations	18
Why BBC News?	19
Why this benefits BBC News	21
Suggestions for further research and improvement	22
Appendix 1: Public contributor code	25
Appendix 2: Advice for public contributors	29
Acknowledgements	35

# Introduction

Over the past two years, the relationship between news organisations and the public contributors who share their stories has been tested by a global, universally shared traumatic experience: the coronavirus pandemic.

As part of the BBC News COVID-19 case studies team, I've seen firsthand just how testing it has been.

## Stories of grief and loss

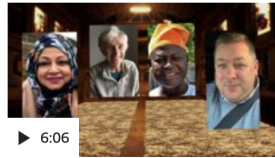
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Losing Mum and Dad to Covid



'I cursed the sterile white room where Ann died'



▶ 6:06  
'Something really precious has been taken away from me'

'While in hospital I lost my daughter-in-law'

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Mother-of-five dies with Covid, aged 40

*Some of the stories gathered by the COVID-19 case studies team*

The challenge of interviewing public contributors was intensified by the nature of the story and the absence of traditional news production logistics: video conferencing platforms and unfamiliar biosecurity measures made it harder to ensure talking about traumatic loss was a comforting experience.

Unmoored from the traditional frameworks of interaction, I began to think more about how we make the experience of sharing a story with news organisations more positive for contributors.

The vast scale of the pandemic meant few were left unaffected, and the spectrum of responses to deeply personal loss helped highlight to me the importance of formalising journalistic practice of dealing with public contributors.

If we didn't capture these stories of traumatic loss, the pandemic would be reduced to meaningless graphs; if we didn't do so with care, their grief would be compounded.<sup>1</sup>

We owe it to all those who lend us their voices and stories to ensure that the process of sharing them with our audiences does not, in the end, make things worse.

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in *Reporting the COVID-19 Pandemic: Trauma on Our Own Doorstep*, where interviewees highlight that “a growing sense of the importance of empathy and a duty of care shapes the ‘new’ framing of the digital death-knock”. (Jukes, S., Fowler-Watt, K. and Rees, G., 2021. *Digital Journalism*, pp.1-18.)

# What is a ‘public contributor’?

In *Becoming the News*, Ruth Palmer describes “news subjects” as people with no previous experience of being in the news, who find themselves involved in a news story.<sup>2</sup> That term may be used interchangeably with “source” or even the more recent “user” in “user-generated content” (UGC).

In this paper, I refer to a specific group of news subjects who are contributing their stories as part of reporting on a news story as “public contributors”. Public contributors’ experiences range from upbeat inspirational stories to brutally traumatic involvement in a globally reported disaster.

For the purposes of this paper, they are not public figures. People in a public-facing or professional role can reasonably claim to be contributors to the news, but they are a discrete category as they will normally be speaking in a capacity related to that role. They are also more likely to have had prior experience or received media training prior to their engagement with us.

By contrast, we can expect most public contributors to be largely unprepared for both the processes and emotions of being part of the news cycle.

Palmer argues that public contributors should not be seen as passive commodities to be exploited so much as an active participant in a collaborative exercise, namely the production of news.

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<sup>2</sup> Palmer, R., 2018. *Becoming the News: How Ordinary People Respond to the Media Spotlight*. Columbia University Press.

Consider the terms for describing public contributor interactions and you'll find traditional journalistic phrases aligned to passivity, such as "reporting on" and "talking to". Perhaps a more productive lens is that of "working with" – as used in the collaborative guidance created by BBC News' Judith Moritz, Sunita Bhatti and Figen Murray, whose son Martin Hett was murdered in the Manchester Arena bombing.<sup>3</sup>

At its most effective, this collaboration should facilitate a public contributor telling their story in a way that allows them to feel they have been treated fairly, and have had an opportunity to give an account of themselves in the context of accurate, impartial public service journalism. They should feel they have been given enough information to understand how a news item is constructed, the processes involved and their role in them.

For many public contributors, being involved in broadcast news will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We only get one chance to make this a positive experience.

The increasing significance of digital media as a permanent public record – particularly in relation to future life opportunities, adds additional urgency and importance to the need for better resources and information to be available to those who choose to become a public contributor to news media.

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<sup>3</sup> Tips for working with bereaved families. n.d. [online] Available at:

<<https://staff.bbc.com/gateway/academy/article/tips-for-working-with-bereaved-families/>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

# The link between traumatic loss and a public contributor code

The BBC's history of working with witnesses to traumatic events is as old as BBC News itself. In living memory, we can count stories like the Aberfan disaster, the Northern Ireland Troubles, Zeebrugge ferry disaster, the Lockerbie bombing, the Dunblane massacre, the Hillsborough disaster, Manchester Arena bombing, the Grenfell fire, and a series of London terror attacks among the many events whose traumatic nature still resonates in the public memory and the lives of those affected. Then there are the far more common stories shared of illness or accident, or the deeply personal loss of a miscarriage or stillbirth.

We have already developed resources to prepare our journalists for dealing with these contributors – these are discussed below. And yet, when I sent a questionnaire to 89 BBC News journalists between October and December 2021 about their experiences of working with public contributors, 46% indicated that the people they had spoken to had no or little idea of what to expect when talking about their traumatic loss. Only 12% felt contributors were well or very well informed.

In the same questionnaire, 86% said they felt that it would be helpful or very helpful to have a resource to share with contributors about what to expect.

The standards I propose here were devised while thinking about those experiencing traumatic loss. By designing a code of conduct and guide that works for the most vulnerable, we are creating a standard that should work for all public contributors.

The code and advice are designed to give public contributors the confidence to trust us with their stories about a range of historically under-reported experiences:



domestic violence, miscarriage, stillbirth, sudden loss (through illness or accident), loss of employment, loss of 'home', loss of identity or status.

Gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status also all play a role in the power dynamic of interacting with a journalist. Here, the accountability of a code of conduct gives public contributors a tool to insist on a more equitable experience in return for their consent to share their story.

We cannot afford to be naive about creating a new code: our news output may not always be something our public contributors are completely happy with – they are not to be treated as our public editors. But that doesn't mean we can't ensure public contributors feel they have been equipped with resources and lines of recourse to deal with a negative experience.

Dr Anne Eyre, a Hillsborough survivor herself, is an expert in the experience of those involved in major traumatic events. She says that a public standard (code of conduct) would “absolutely” make a difference to contributors in giving them a clear framework in which to develop trust and to retain control during their interactions with journalists.

Dr Eyre believes that, properly implemented, a public code of conduct would lead to “a cultural change at every level”, not just by better equipping public contributors to work with news media, but by helping journalists to better balance the needs of “a good story” against the needs of the contributor.

From the interviews and research conducted for this paper, I have realised just how easy it is for anyone – contributor or journalist – to drift into a situation where the “good story” ends up outweighing the contributor's needs.

One public contributor, well aware of the nature of journalistic process, found themselves thrown when a broadcast crew with a satellite truck arrived outside their house and revealed their reasons for being there to a neighbour. They had given consent, but hadn't fully appreciated the stressors that may be generated by being interviewed in their own home.

A journalist related how their own practice of engaging public contributors had changed after witnessing the impact when their story was picked up and repackaged by other news providers who didn't observe the same standards of duty of care. They described carrying work-related guilt for their failure to foresee and advise the contributor accordingly.

Neither of these examples were a result of poor conduct, malice or bad faith, but both are examples of how pursuing "a good story" may cause us to forget to consider the consequences.

# Assessing media practice from the contributor perspective

The study of trauma management for journalists – and the moral injury that accompanies interviewing traumatised contributors – has evolved greatly since Anthony Feinstein first identified high rates of PTSD among war correspondents in 2002.<sup>4</sup> There is plenty of literature and many organisational resources available, yet a questionnaire completed by 89 BBC News journalists for this project revealed that even the best quality information in this area can go unused.

While 89% said they had interviewed someone experiencing traumatic loss for a story, fewer than 20% had read or received training based on either the BBC Academy's "Tips for Working with Bereaved Families" or the Dart Center's "Getting It Right: Ethical Reporting on People Affected By Trauma".<sup>5,6</sup> Only 25% had sought out other training or been offered resources for dealing with contributors who have experienced a traumatic loss.

A review of the literature about media interactions from the perspective of contributors reveals that they have been consistent in asking for an approach rooted in respect, fairness, decency and understanding.

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<sup>4</sup> Feinstein, A., Owen, J. and Blair, N., 2002. A Hazardous Profession: War, Journalists, and Psychopathology. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 159(9), pp.1570-1575.

<sup>5</sup> Tips for working with bereaved families. n.d. [online] Available at: <<https://staff.bbc.com/gateway/academy/article/tips-for-working-with-bereaved-families/>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>6</sup> Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. 2014. Ethical Reporting on Traumatized People. [online] Available at: <<https://dartcenter.org/content/dvd-launched-ethical-reporting-people-affected-by-trauma>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

In “Collective Conviction: The story of Disaster Action”, Dr Anne Eyre and Pam Dix document in great depth and clarity the ways in which news media can both support and fail those whose voices lie at the heart of stories.<sup>7</sup> Disaster Action is a charity that supports survivors and the bereaved in traumatic events. Founded in 1991, its members have experience dealing with at least 29 significant trauma events.

Its [Guidance for the Media](#) should be considered mandatory reading in journalism education and for any journalist who may have to work with those affected by a traumatic news event.<sup>8</sup> In outlining what good practice should be, it also makes abundantly clear what bad practice looks like. Their work is so well informed and insightful that it is difficult to attempt to replicate the depth of knowledge it draws on within the limits of this paper. Key concepts include clear communication, privacy, and fair representation.

More recently, a 2021 report by Survivors Against Terror subtitled *Media reporting of terror attacks through the eyes of survivors*, found 59% of survivors and bereaved surveyed feel they had suffered from media intrusion.<sup>9</sup> Similar issues were raised in the *Words Matter* series of films from the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Peace Foundation in 2018.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dix, P. and Eyre, A., 2014. *Collective Conviction: The Story of Disaster Action*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Disaster Action. n.d. *Guidance for the Media / Disaster Action*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.disasteraction.org.uk/guidance\\_for\\_the\\_media/](https://www.disasteraction.org.uk/guidance_for_the_media/)> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>9</sup> Survivors Against Terror. 2021. *Media Report October 2021*. [online] Available at: <<https://survivorsagainstterror.org.uk/downloads/documents/reports/Media-Report-Oct-2021.pdf>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>10</sup> The Foundation For Peace. n.d. *Terrorism survivors urge media to report responsibly during and following terror attacks - The Foundation For Peace*. [online] Available at:

Survivors Against Terror proposes “a voluntary agreement not to directly contact the bereaved and seriously injured for at least the first 48 hours following an attack.”

This proposal is reasonable and hard to argue against, particularly where it refers to the practice of news media physically approaching the bereaved and seriously injured, including by “door knocking” at an identifiable residential address, or through publicly accessible digital media platforms.

In the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event, witnesses, survivors and bereaved relatives I’ve spoken to in the past have frequently been in a heightened emotional state where they are struggling to make sense of events, let alone the complex issues of informed consent and long term impact of engaging with the media.

Other BBC colleagues, interviewed for this research, agree that they have better outcomes in working with survivors and relatives where they have avoided attempting direct contact – such as “door knocking” or being part of a press gathering near the family home – in the initial days following an event.

Crucially, all three initiatives I have mentioned here say that speaking to journalists can be helpful and cathartic when the correct boundaries are observed. The Survivors Against Terror report found that 52% of those surveyed had had at least one positive experience of working with the media.

Dr Eyre’s work and advocacy in this field can be traced back at least 20 years, and it is almost a decade since the Leveson Inquiry “into the culture, practises and ethics

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<<https://www.peace-foundation.org.uk/terrorism-survivors-urge-media-report-responsibly-following-terror-attacks/>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

of the press”.<sup>11,12</sup> And yet no organisation has acted to formally codify a transparent policy for public contributors based on these recommendations.

Given the consistency and frequency with which the same issues and questions are raised by public contributors, it is remarkable how limited the evidence is for meaningful and tangible change in journalism practice.

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<sup>11</sup> BBC News. 2000. Mother calls for disaster openness. [online] Available at: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/726201.stm>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Leveson, L., 2012. Leveson Inquiry - Report into the culture, practices and ethics of the press. [online] Leveson Inquiry. Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leveson-inquiry-report-into-the-culture-practices-and-ethics-of-the-press>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

# The evolution of best practice

Journalists I spoke to for this research said they had had more success in contacting public contributors involved in traumatic news stories by delivering a handwritten letter with contact details at a home address, with an open invitation to respond when/if they felt ready to talk. While this approach may not entirely address what some members of the public see as an encroachment on privacy, such a code of practice would be a step away from the aggressive pressurisation of “doorstepping”.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, compiling accurate databases of victims and contacts with survivors/relatives – as used by BBC News during major events such as Sousse, Manchester Arena Attack, Grenfell Tower Fire – has been a useful tool in working towards better practice by attempting to reduce duplications of approaches and intrusions.

As Dr Eyre has long argued, every organisation should have a disaster plan for such events and a clear understanding of how to deploy it effectively to the benefit of all those affected.

The use of this type of disaster planning has evolved largely on a voluntary, organic basis within BBC News. It has been led by the UGC Hub and experienced journalists such as Kirsty Gardner, who was responsible for overseeing the accurate documenting of the victims of the Grenfell Fire and leading the COVID-19 Case Studies team.

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<sup>13</sup> Dr Eyre fairly warns that this method will not work if the letter is delivered while other journalists remain camped outside or persist in door knocking, and the letter will likely be conflated with an invasion of privacy by others.

The BBC News Covid Case Studies team worked to compile accurate background information before deciding whether, and how best, to approach potential contributors who were experiencing a bereavement from COVID-19. Our guiding principles were sensitivity, fairness and respect.

One approach was to collaborate with on-air reporters who were willing to be the initial and main point of contact for a contributor, allowing them to build a trust relationship that spanned their interactions. As Palmer summarises it, contributors may not trust journalists in general, but they will make an exception for *their* journalist, who has taken the time to listen to them.

This meant that when contributors felt able to speak, more space could be given to talk about the person lost as an individual and to reflect their human experience of loss, as opposed to asking them to relive a detailed and traumatic chronology.

Examples of the benefits of this more empathetic approach can be seen in [Jon Kay's](#) reporting with the families of Rob Healey and Jan Docker, and Catherine Burns' story focusing on four families who had lost a loved one among the 100,000 COVID deaths the UK recorded by March 2021.<sup>14,15</sup>

It is also the case in many events that witnesses contact BBC News directly for a number of reasons. Some wish to bear witness to what they have seen so that it can be accurately documented in the public interest, some wish to seek assistance in locating a close contact, and some wish to communicate their grief, trauma and loss to ensure the human toll remains at the heart of the story. We should always seek to

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<sup>14</sup> Kay, J., 2021. [online] Twitter. Available at:

<<https://twitter.com/jonkay01/status/1346564633163927553>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>15</sup> Burns, C., 2021. 'Something really precious has been taken away from me'. [online] BBC News.

Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-55806244>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].



include the voices of those who wish to speak, but not visit additional trauma on those who are not yet ready. Journalists must know when to interview, and when to refer to other organisations that can help.

There is a broader context of change happening in the organisations that deal with traumatised people, Dr Eyre told me. Change that illustrates a clear need for an evolution in journalistic culture. “You want to mirror that change, as well as pushing it,” she said.

# Recommendations

My recommendations for the next evolution in the BBC's public accountability and transparency include the creation of:

- A publicly available, transparent code of conduct for BBC journalists working with public contributors. This code would be housed on our website, and journalists can refer contributors to it by including a link or a PDF in early communications. (See Appendix 1.)
- A resource guide to be made available to contributors by default during early contact, to support and assist them in having a positive experience of sharing their story with BBC News. (See Appendix 2.)
- During a major traumatic news events, BBC News should offer both “pool agreement” and “exclusive agreement” to contributors, meaning they can ask that their television broadcast interviews be shared (or not shared) with all major outlets we have an existing agreement with – ITN, Sky. This should be offered as a default to public contributors to minimise additional trauma of multiple interview requests, or seeing their footage repackaged without permission. (See also: suggestions for further research and improvements.)
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# Why BBC News?

The Serota Review of BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture concludes: “If the BBC is to maintain the trust of audiences it must set the benchmark for editorial excellence across the world.”<sup>16</sup> The actions proposed in this paper are designed to contribute to meeting Serota’s recommendation.

As the BBC arrives at its centenary in 2022, we have a clear opportunity to restate our purpose as a force for good in how we work with the public. By setting out transparent, publicly available standards of engagement – the Public Contributor Code – the BBC has both the reach and corporate culture to drive positive change in British news media’s relationship with the public.



*A view of the BBC Newsroom. Credit:@BBC\_HaveYourSay*

The BBC is a globally recognised leader in public service news media. For much of its existence, it has been an engine of innovation for public good, not just in the UK, but globally. As one senior news executive told me, when it comes to how to work

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<sup>16</sup> Serota, N., 2021. The Serota Review. [online] BBC. Available at:

<<https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/the-serota-review.pdf>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

with contributors, many public service news providers will follow the example set by BBC News.

The BBC's standards for best practice have always evolved to keep pace with technological innovation: be it radio transmission, television, online news provision, or streaming video on demand. And the evolution of a new standard for public contributors has been in motion ever since Sir David Attenborough commissioned *Open Door* in the 1970s, and created the Community Programme Unit. That led to Video Diaries which, in 1990, gave the public the opportunity to document their lives on camera and edit their own stories for BBC Two.

In 2003, the BBC News User-Generated Content Hub (UGC Hub), was described as “pioneering and influential” in the field of contributor-led journalism.<sup>17</sup> It, too, has been at the heart of an evolving best practice in how BBC News covers traumatic major events and interacts with public contributors. I joined the team in 2010 and saw the change to how the way we work with contributors was shaped by good and bad outcomes during traumatic events as well as by the emergence of social media and other digital platforms.

BBC News remains the UK's most used and most trusted news brand, making it the ideal institution to test and implement a code for public contributors.<sup>18</sup> If BBC News maintains a transparent, publicly accountable standard in our interactions with public contributors and audiences (often they are one and the same), then it can potentially raise standards not just in public service news media, but the wider industry.

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<sup>17</sup> Allan, S. and Thorsen, E., 2009. *Citizen journalism: Global Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang.

<sup>18</sup> Newman, N. et al, 2021. *Digital News Report 2021*. [online] Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>> [Accessed 2 December 2021].

## Benefits to BBC News

A report on coverage of the Utoya terror attack in 2011 (Backholm and Idås, 2015) found that 42% of journalists involved in covering the Norwegian massacre had experienced a dilemma as a result of uncertainty around code of conduct and that 21% experienced the dilemma of being asked to do a task beyond their moral code.<sup>19</sup>

The research found high exposure to these dilemmas was a significant predictor of a higher level of work-related guilt and post-traumatic stress. This was more pronounced among less experienced journalists.

A clear and ethical public code for dealing with public contributors would address these dilemmas. In turn, this has potential benefits for the wellbeing and resilience of BBC News journalists, by reducing stressors that can limit their ability to work effectively with contributors experiencing trauma. Longer term, it could reduce incidents of moral injury, burnout and journalists choosing to leave the profession.

Effective implementation of the recommendations in this paper would also contribute to addressing issues highlighted in the Serota Review into editorial practice and culture at the BBC, and would contribute to building public trust and leading editorial standards in public service news media.

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<sup>19</sup> Backholm, K. and Idås, T., 2015. *Ethical Dilemmas, Work-Related Guilt, and Posttraumatic Stress Reactions of News Journalists Covering the Terror Attack in Norway in 2011*. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 28(2), pp.142-148.

## Further research and improvements

A 2011 initiative titled “[Connecting in a Crisis](#)” was later adapted into official government advice as part of the Resilience Capabilities Programme.<sup>20,21</sup> But a lack of clarity around how the public media work with and/or refer to official bodies during civil emergencies remains for many BBC News journalists.

There are major events, for example, where BBC News has information (contact details, video and still imagery) which would be useful to investigators or communications officials, for example family liaison officers.

There are also cases where those affected approach the media seeking information that official bodies may be better placed to provide as part of the emergency response. A central guide to our policies here would be useful, and should be made reference to in the Public Contributor Code.

BBC News journalists interviewed for this project also raised the importance of ensuring team diversity so that they can understand and address specific cultural sensitivities that may arise when working with contributors going through a traumatic experience.

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<sup>20</sup> BBC Nations and Regions. 2011. Connect in a Crisis. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/connectinacrisis/>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

<sup>21</sup> Cabinet Office, GOV.UK. 2013. Preparation and planning for emergencies. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/preparation-and-planning-for-emergencies-the-capabilities-programme>> [Accessed 13 December 2021].

One example given was how colleagues' knowledge of Arabic name conventions helped in ensuring that family relationships were correctly reported and detailed in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower Fire.

Having a team with diverse experiences, backgrounds and networks was vital to ensuring that our coverage of COVID-19 reflected the experience of communities across both the United Kingdom and international BBC News audiences. For example, without the assistance of the BBC Burmese Service, our domestic teams would have found it immeasurably more difficult to build relationships with the families of medical workers from that community.

A third area for consideration: implementing a public code may lead to an increase of trust in our journalism, as audiences will be able to see the standards applied in our news production. There is no way of knowing this without devising a way to monitor trust and engagement with BBC News before, during and after implementation.

It is well worth designing and implementing a research project to monitor this, refine our approach and share best practice with others.

Finally, I mention "pool agreements" for broadcast television interviews in my guidelines. This has traditionally covered the three main television news providers (BBC, ITN, Sky). When it comes to non-linear platforms, specifically digital outlets, there is no comparable agreement for UK media. We should consider revising our pool agreement to include more digital outlets and the terms under which we agree to share footage.

One could argue that the practises of poorly credited lifting and repackaging digital material are so endemic as to render an agreement meaningless, but the existence of an agreement is always the first step to remedying the problem.



# Appendix 1: Public contributor code

**B B C**

 Your account

**NEWS**

Public contributor code

## What to expect when contributing to BBC News

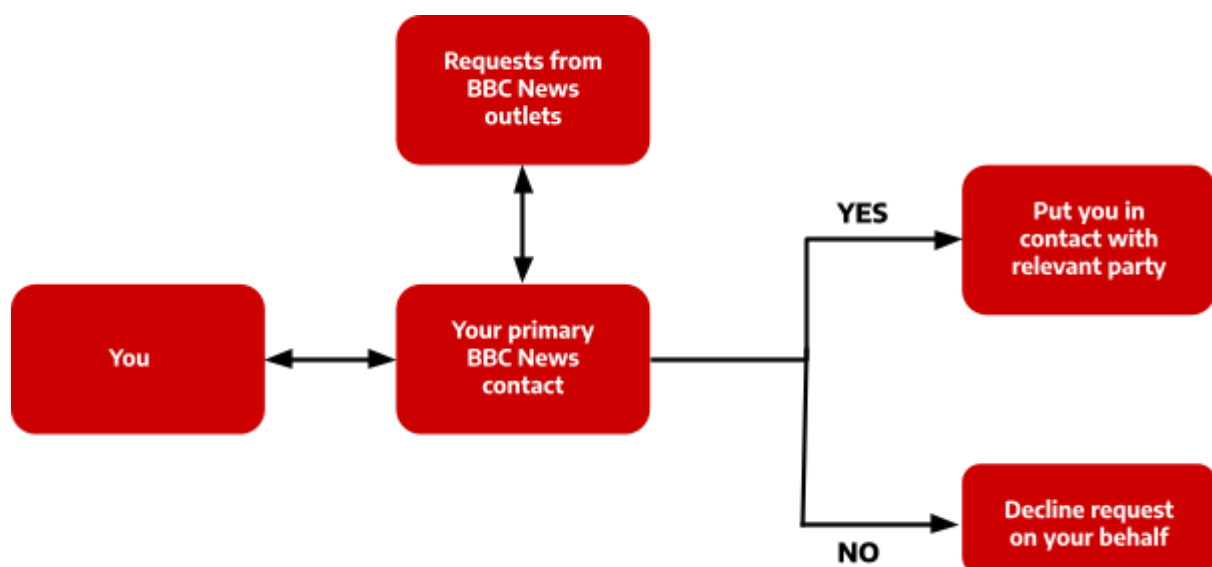
**As the UK's biggest public service news organisation, we believe there are standards of practice and behaviour that members of the public have the right to expect when sharing their story with BBC News.**

By stating our public contributor standards and providing [advice](#), we hope to ensure that trust remains at the heart of your interactions with BBC News. We want your experience to be in line with our [values](#).

1. We will always give our name when we contact you. We believe that it is important you should be able to identify who you have contact with or have been interviewed by, as both a matter of **courtesy and transparency**.
2. **This is your story to tell.** We will always strive to support you to tell it in a form that reflects what you feel is important to share in the public domain.
3. **Your [informed consent](#) matters.** It should be freely given, actively stated, clearly documented and evolve throughout your interaction with BBC News.

We will never publish private material or information that you have not consented to make public.

4. **Our journalists are trained** to interview contributors dealing with difficult or distressing subjects through BBC Academy bereavement training, and Dart Center ethical reporting training. We will act in a way that is **sensitive** to your needs and aims to add no additional trauma to your life. We want you to be able to feel that interacting with BBC News is a positive experience, especially when discussing a difficult or distressing subject.
5. When you are involved in a significant news event, we recognise it may be confusing to be contacted by multiple reporters from different BBC shows. **We will endeavour to agree a primary BBC News contact** who will work with you to make your experience of dealing with BBC News easier.



6. We recognise that being involved in the news is an unusual experience. **We will explain our news-making processes to you** to help you make an informed decision about what level of participation you are comfortable with. This includes fully explaining any interview recording processes, introducing all

personnel present, and giving advice on where a contribution might appear and who else may have access to it within the BBC and its partnerships.

7. When we are seeking an interview, **we will always be guided by respect for your space and needs**, in particular when we are pre-recording. We will always ask for your preference as where and when you would feel most comfortable speaking with us. We will never pressure you into a location or time you are not comfortable with.

Our [Advice for public contributors](#) guide includes a guide on the standards you can expect from us and advice on how you can prepare yourself for an interview.

8. **We will strive to accurately communicate to you a proposed time and date of initial publication/broadcast and any changes that might happen.**
9. **In the case of a major news story, we will offer you the opportunity to have your contribution made available to other UK broadcasters under a “pool agreement”.** In TV, this means that a single interview can be shared with the main news networks (ITN - who make Channel 4 News and 5 News - and Sky News), ensuring that you do not feel pressured to give multiple interviews about something which may be difficult and traumatic to discuss. Where there is a major emergency with a crisis communications team in place, we will endeavour to work with all relevant parties to make this opportunity available to you.
10. **We will support you in accessing advice about the potential impacts of being in the news** following publication. This includes:
  - Sending you a link to [Advice for public contributors](#)
  - Helping you to access resources you may find useful to your experience.

- Explaining some of the reactions you may receive from those you know and from strangers.
- Suggesting techniques and actions you may wish to take to maintain your wellbeing, such as changing privacy settings on public platforms.
- Your avenues for seeking redress or correction, both directly from BBC News and through media regulation in the UK.

11. **Where we make a mistake, we will apologise and work with you to correct it as quickly and fully as possible.** More information is available in the “When mistakes happen” section of our [Advice for public contributors](#).

# Appendix 2: Advice for public contributors

**B B C**

👤 Your account

**NEWS**

Advice for public contributors

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## How we work with public contributors and what to expect from us

**Thank you for agreeing to share your story with BBC News. We want you to have a positive experience working with us, so this advice guide is designed to help you understand how we will work with you and your story.**

### About the news production process

At the BBC we want to encourage public participation in gathering and sharing quality news material. There are two ways in which we may wish to interview you:

- A live interview – in real time and broadcast as you speak, usually on TV or radio
- A pre-recorded interview – recorded ahead of broadcast on TV, radio, digital platforms or social media

# Live interviews

<p><b>What to expect from us</b></p> <p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• give you as much notice as possible</li><li>• tell you what output is planned for it (eg lunchtime news)</li><li>• say how long the interview is likely to be</li><li>• explain what questions we are likely to ask</li><li>• offer technical advice on looking/sounding good if interviewed remotely</li><li>• seek to ensure you feel comfortable so you look and sound your best</li><li>• let you know if we need to end the line for technical reasons</li><li>• check how you wish to be introduced</li><li>• thank you afterwards and check on your experience: this might be in the form of a text message, email or phone call</li></ul>	<p><b>Preparation Tips</b></p> <p>Ask us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• when the interview will take place</li><li>• what the interviewer's angle on the story is/what they are interested in from you</li><li>• where it will be broadcast/planned output</li><li>• how long the interview will be for</li><li>• what you will be asked and in what order</li><li>• for advice on looking/sounding your best</li><li>• what will happen just before and after the interview so you know what to expect</li></ul> <p><b>Let us know:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• if you feel uncomfortable or unsure at the planning stage</li><li>• how you wished to be introduced at the start of the interview</li></ul>
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# A Pre-recorded Interview

<p><b>What to expect from us</b></p> <p>In addition to the points above we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• seek to arrange the interview at a time and place that works best for you</li><li>• give you a sense of how long the interview process will take</li></ul>	<p><b>Preparation Tips</b></p> <p>In addition to the tips above, do let us know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the best time and place for you so that we can seek to accommodate your needs and preferences</li></ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tell you in advance who to expect: e.g. just a video journalist or a camera operator, reporter and producer</li> <li>• take time on arrival to introduce ourselves, our roles and explain the interview process</li> <li>• explain what we may wish to film and why for our report</li> </ul> <p>If filming in your home we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ask if you wish for us to remove footwear before entering</li> <li>• respect family space and seek not to disturb other members of the household</li> <li>• balance filming preferences with minimising disruption to routines</li> <li>• ask permission before touching or moving things as part of setting up our equipment</li> <li>• discuss with you in advance the questions and subjects we'd like to talk about</li> <li>• ask if there is anything we have forgotten or that you wish to add</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if a location or item has a specific significance for your story so we may include it or avoid it as appropriate</li> <li>• if you wish to pause, take a break or stop at any time to gather yourself</li> <li>• if feel there's a question we've forgotten to ask or something you wish to add</li> </ul> <p>If filming in your home you may wish to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• think in advance about which rooms/areas you feel comfortable about being on film, including for example photos and other background material</li> <li>• let us know if there are rooms, areas, items or topics you wish us to avoid</li> <li>• bear in mind that we want you to be comfortable</li> <li>• ask us for advice on giving the best account of your story</li> <li>• ask us when and where the interview will be broadcast</li> </ul>
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## What happens to your contribution and what you can expect

- Under the BBC's [Editorial Guidelines](#), we are not allowed to let you decide the details of what goes into a story, but we will do our best to make sure that we discuss our plans with you.
- Before we publish we will do our best to let you know what's in the final version of the story so that it doesn't come as a surprise when you read it.

- We will tell you when your contribution is going out and, where possible, provide a link to it on the BBC News website or social platforms. Unfortunately, it's not always possible to provide clips of all the places where you appear on BBC News.
- We can't guarantee that your story will make it all the way to publication. Sometimes it might not make the news due to breaking or changing editorial decisions about what we are covering.
- If your original contribution does get published when planned, it might get used again later by other BBC outlets. You might talk to a team from one part of television, but you could also hear it on the radio, read it on the website, or see it on social media.
- Your contribution could also be edited and used in BBC contexts other than the news and be available for use within the BBC in the future.
- We can't control where or how far your story travels: it may be picked up by other news providers or media platforms. But we will act carefully and responsibly in those spaces which we have control over and which carry the BBC News brand and values.

## **Further considerations to bear in mind**

- Seeing, hearing or reading about yourself in the news may feel strange and can bring up mixed emotions after a story is published. If your story relates to traumatic experiences it can help to have support in place and someone you can talk to.
- Being on BBC News means a lot of people will see your story, so your friends, family members, your employer and others might get in touch to ask you about your experiences or let you know what they think. Remember you have a choice around when and who you wish to discuss this with.



- If your story appears online or on social media, people will have differing opinions about it. They may share, express personal feelings and make public comments about it. Seeing other people talking about you and your experiences may feel uncomfortable or even distressing, especially if you are used to being private or if the comments and opinions made are negative. Be aware and prepared for this.
- If you have a profile on social media you may receive comment and feedback. While this can be positive and supportive, messages might also be negative and come from people you don't know which can be unsettling.  
Remember that all the major social media platforms have privacy settings which you can control. These include the ability to limit who can see your profile, limit who can reply and comment on your posts, limit who can contact you, and the ability to block or report other users. On some platforms you may be able to remove or hide comments. You can change your privacy settings at any time and we can offer suggestions that may help with this if necessary.
- You may find that links to your story appear near the top of search results for your name for some time. This means that anyone seeking information about you can know the story you have shared, and that this will stay in the public domain into the future. You may have mixed or different feelings about this over time.
- If you are unhappy seeing your name next to a particular story online, you may be able to exercise your legal “right to be forgotten”. This means search companies have to remove your name from their search results. In the UK, you can find full guidance about the [“Right to erasure” from the regulator, the ICO](#) . Outside of the UK, the journalist you are working with can help you with accessing the relevant information. The BBC cannot control what appears in Google search results, but Google provides information about how you can request that they stop indexing content mentioning your name [here](#).

## What if mistakes happen?

- Sometimes we make a mistake in our coverage. We have high standards at the BBC, but in the fast-paced world of news we may sometimes get details wrong. We appreciate that this matters to contributors and our audience and so we do our best to correct errors as quickly as possible. If you think we got something wrong, please contact us as soon as possible so we can make corrections and apologise when appropriate. Usually, the best person to contact is the journalist you spoke to for the piece, or the journalist we have agreed as your primary point of contact with BBC News.
- You can find further information about [how to complain](#) to the BBC, with links to the BBC's Complaints Framework, the BBC's regulator Ofcom and regular reports about complaints at [bbc.co.uk/complaints](https://bbc.co.uk/complaints)

# Acknowledgements

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The UGC Hub has been at the forefront of working with public contributors to BBC News for nearly two decades. It remains home to the most innovative, caring, empathetic values I've encountered anywhere in journalism and puts public contributors at the centre of the story.

By putting human decency at the heart of its ethos, UGC maintains and enhances the best of public service journalism. Its pioneering approach to digital newsgathering and forensics remains vital to the survival of BBC News in the modern news environment.

We've collectively been witness and party to some deeply traumatic experiences, but somehow we've never lost sight of putting people and their stories at the heart of the news. And it's always been a team effort, which is such an important value in journalism, but one which often gets overlooked.

The Covid Case Studies Team, led by Kirsty Gardner, is ultimately what led me to apply for this fellowship. A coalition of the UGC Hub, the willing and the available, it has been truly inspiring to work with you through this pandemic with such dedication to keeping people at the heart of the story and not letting them become statistics.

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