

# Informed Consent for Research

## TO OPINE OR NOT OPINE:

### *Investigating the use of rural opinion journalism in the face of political polarization and low media trust*

#### **Dear Participant:**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Below is information you need to know before agreeing to be a participant in this study. If all of this is acceptable, you can select the appropriate response to the following questions. First, you will be asked to fill out a pre-interview questionnaire. Then, you can indicate your interview preferences.

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:** Should the subject have any questions or wish to discuss any aspect of the research with an official of the institution or IRB, he/she/they should contact the following individual:

- Dr. Jennifer Froese, Institutional Review Board Coordinator, Sterling College
- 125 W. Cooper Ave., Sterling, KS 67579
- Email: [jennifer.froese@sterling.edu](mailto:jennifer.froese@sterling.edu)
- Office Phone: 620-278-4333

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:** The purpose of this study is to understand how community news outlets are navigating the potentially treacherous terrain of maintaining strong editorial voices during politically divisive times by investigating how small-town, rural media outlets use opinion journalism to serve their communities.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:** To collect information, this research will use one-on-one interviews with observations, but those people must specifically volunteer to be interviewed. They can volunteer by completing this form and providing their names, contact information, and other pertinent information.

Anyone who is interviewed will be identified by an assigned alias, as well as their title, general organizational affiliation, and other demographic information as applicable. Interview participants will be asked a series of questions during a 30-to-90-minute session or series of sessions. They will have the choice to answer each question or not. Individuals will be expected to answer questions they choose to answer with openness and honesty, understanding that they can decline to answer any question asked of them. The interviews will be recorded using video and/or audio recording devices. The audio recordings will be used to develop transcripts of the interviews that can be coded and analyzed, and the use of video will help provide some of the observational data. The raw recordings will not be made public, though clips of the interviews (*audio*) may be used as part of the reporting of this study's findings.

The interviews will take place at a time and location agreed upon by everyone involved, and the interview will be discussed following the event, which will serve as a debrief. During this debrief, individuals will be allowed to provide their thoughts and feelings about the questions and processes they've experienced.

No one will be paid for participating.

The information collected through the interviews (*including audio clips but not raw recordings*) might be used for future research or other projects without additional informed consent.

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEWS:** 30-90 minutes

**RISK OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:** There is no anticipated risk from participating, and it is not anticipated that any portion of the process will make an individual uncomfortable. However, should an individual feel any form of discomfort in any way, the individual can stop participating in the interview at any time.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:** This research will help community journalists understand the impacts opinion journalism can have on the profession, and it will provide ideas for how best to operate community news operations and build a stronger community media ecosystem. This will help to improve society, communities, and democracy because these media practitioners will be better equipped to keep their communities informed and able to make important decisions.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** All interview participants will be identified by an assigned alias, as well as their title, general organizational affiliation, and other demographic information as applicable. The information collected might be used for future research without additional informed consent. All data collected will be kept on a password-protected computer in a home office that has a door with a lock. This home office is located within the researcher's personal home, which is also equipped with doors, locks, and security cameras.

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**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION:** *I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.*

*Furthermore, I consent to be recorded via video, audio, or other means as part of the study for the purposes outlined above in the event I volunteer to be interviewed.*

*I verify that my signature below and/or selecting "agree" indicates that I have read and understand this consent form and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described and that my signature/selection acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form or have otherwise retained a copy of this digital form for my own records.*

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*Participant Signature*

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*Date*