COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR
NEWS MANAGERS/EDITORS

As the managing editor, news editor or team leader, you are a critical driver of community engagement journalism. You can set expectations, adjust resources, and form partnerships with local organizations and other media. Here are three key areas to focus on to ensure success now and into the future.

STRATEGY/CULTURE

START HERE

What's your mission or vision?
Does your GM have a vision for why community engagement matters?
Work across departments to get buy-in to the vision.

Have a plan to measure success, failure
Set goals that you can track: is it in number of emails or comments received, people who have signed up for texting exchange, page views? Are the hours your team is putting worth the result? Be brutally honest. Tweak the process along the way.

Celebrate successes regularly
Success can be a phone call returned; an event planned or a new guest on a talk show. It can also be new funders or social media praise. By regularly sharing these, you will keep spirits high around engagement.

ADD THESE

Community feedback loops
Have a process and someone responsible for getting feedback from the community

Form new partnerships
Share stories or other resources with community organizations or smaller local media in your region.

Turning to your board of directors
Look to your board as a resource for contacts, story ideas, and connections to communities you aren’t currently covering or serving.

Find community connectors
Who can your newsroom connect with to broaden your perspectives about the communities you cover? Think about what you can bring to the relationship if they help you.

Analyze your new audience
If your engagement work is attracting new listeners or readers, find out more about them. Are they currently members or subscribers? What story ideas do they have?

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STAFFING/RESOURCES

START HERE

Find the right people
You may have someone in the newsroom or in another department who is interested in engagement.
Remember engagement is about being interested in people and good customer service.

Brainstorm with your team
Hold a meeting with everyone on your newsroom staff to brainstorm new ways to engage communities - without the intention of covering them, but with the intention of understanding and listening.

Experiment with different platforms
Ask if someone on staff would be interested in reaching new communities via a new-to-you platform (WhatsApp newsletter, texting exchange).

Give your staff time
Give them time to convene, embed, engage without the expectation that the initial engagement will result in immediate coverage or shows.

ADD THESE

Community engagement is everyone’s job, every day
Have a plan for how this would look. Expect it to take time.

Translate your stories
You can serve a non-English language community by offering stories in their language. Is there a staff member who can do this? Or can you partner with a community provider to provide this?

Hire for diversity or representation in all positions
Does your newsroom makeup reflect the makeup of the communities you cover or want to cover? Look at representation in leadership and reporter/producer levels.

Hire for a position you don’t have right now
Some ideas
- community engagement specialist
- audience editor
- engagement director
- social media manager

Reorganize your beats around community issues
If you’re hearing a lot of questions from your engagement about housing, dedicate a reporter to respond to those issues and questions. Treat the community as your newsroom’s assignment editor.

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**CONTENT**

**START HERE**

- **Conduct a source audit**
  Pick a beat or use your station’s talk show(s). Audit the last 10 stories or shows to find out which voices are missing or over-represented. This can help reveal implicit biases in coverage.

- **Start engaging**
  Identify a community you want to learn more about, send a reporter to spend time there. What are they hearing that should be investigated?

- **Use digital tools available**
  Push your staff to use tools like Google forms, Facebook Live, voicemail box to foster engagement.

- **Set up a workflow for engagement**
  If you’re soliciting information from the public, create a system for response. Who will be writing a story, who will be sending a thank-you note.

- **Be transparent about your efforts**
  Share the story behind the story with a Behind This Story box or a 2-way with the reporter about how the story happened.

**ADD THESE**

- **Expand source audit to entire newsroom**
  Create a spreadsheet for everything you want to audit and make the document accessible to the newsroom. Regularly share and discuss the findings.

- **Expand engagement beyond the newsroom**
  Work with marketing or audience departments to host virtual or in-person community events. They have access to resources like boosting posts that can help promote your journalism.

- **Create new products**
  Newsletters are a popular way to reach readers. If your reporting has revealed a high-interest topic, create a newsletter to share your stories. You can also start a texting exchange around a similar topic or to reach a specific community.

- **What haven’t you tried?**
  Consider: direct mailing postcards; hosting an Instagram Live Q&A; buying a spot at a community event; creating short videos promoting your stories; creating a citizen journalists group; or a new podcast series. The sky’s the limit!

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