

THE AMERICA AMPLIFIED GUIDE TO

Community Engagement Journalism

A Playbook for Leaders and Journalists at Public Media Stations



America 
Amplified



The America Amplified team met with station editors in Kansas City, Missouri, in January 2020. From left: Jennifer Tufts, Jeff Young, Donna Vestal, Dave Rosenthal, Ann Alquist, Scott Blanchard, Andrea Tudhope, Maria Carter, Richard Fenton-Smith, Matthew Long-Middleton, Kate Concannon, Alisa Barba, and Kathy Lu. John Dankosky is on screen.

This playbook is dedicated to the journalists in more than 50 public media newsrooms who tirelessly innovated with America Amplified to get at the heart of this country by listening first, reporting second. We hope their work — much of it shared here — inspires others.

And we thank all those who shared their stories with us as we challenged ourselves to better understanding America in 2020, a year that saw a devastating pandemic, nationwide protests for social justice and a divided presidential election. We have so much more to learn.

As a team leading this initiative from proposal to practice, we will forever be grateful for this opportunity, which wouldn't have been possible without the ongoing support of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. We hope we have captured helpful guidance that elevates journalism now and into the future.

The America Amplified team

Ann Alquist, Alisa Barba, Matthew Long-Middleton, Kathy Lu, Andrea Tudhope, Jennifer Tufts and Donna Vestal

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CREDITS





Welcome to a practical exploration of how public media newsrooms can better engage with and amplify the voices of their local communities.



This guide is based on the work of America Amplified: Election 2020, a Corporation for Public Broadcasting-funded initiative that set out to rethink coverage of the national election by listening to communities first.

America Amplified partnered with eight journalism collaborations across the country encompassing more than 50 public radio stations, from New England to the Mountain West. The effort involved experimenting with dozens of tactics and strategies, particularly ones needed during a pandemic.

What we heard from editors and reporters:

Rachel Hubbard

KOSU Executive Director

“We were blown away by the coverage that emerged from [community engagement].”

Susanna Capelouto

WABE News Director

“We have gotten so many people complaining about voting problems and reaching out, because they know now that WABE is very responsive.”

Sydney Boles

Ohio Valley ReSource Reporter

“Working with America Amplified showed me a new approach to journalism: Reporting in partnership with my community. I can’t wait to continue deploying audience engagement techniques in the future.”

The heart of this guide presumes everyone — at every level — can take small or large steps toward better community engagement.

That said, the full impact of a successful community engagement strategy can only be realized when it’s adopted by the entire newsroom ecosystem, from general manager to reporters.

These tools and case studies were written with a public media audience in mind, but they can be used by any organization that wants to “flip the script” — creating content that is fueled by deep knowledge and understanding of people’s needs and aspirations.



But first: What is community engagement journalism?

This playbook is built on America Amplified’s definition:

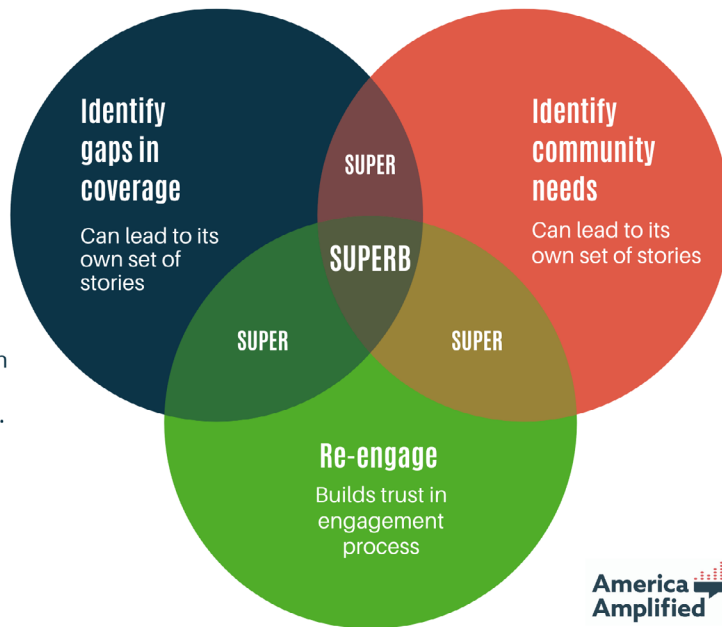
Journalists cultivating relationships with communities to discover, understand and elevate community needs and aspirations.

Community engagement is a process that grows stronger with practice. At the core of the process is listening to the communities you want to reach, reporting on what you hear, sharing with the communities what you published and listening to their feedback.

Envision the process as having three main components and as a cycle:

How community engagement impacts journalism, trust

It is super when: More than one challenge is met through engagement work.
It is superb when: Your journalism fills in the gaps in coverage, highlights a missing community narrative and involves continued engagement. This is how trust grows.



Community engagement journalism is how you can:

- **Connect with underrepresented communities;**
- **Challenge** dominant narratives;
- **Co-construct** stories with partners, either media or community organizations;
- Ensure your sources **accurately reflect** your coverage area;
- **Reveal new stories;**
- Identify the best platforms to **meet information needs;** and
- **Build trust** with the communities you are already covering and aspire to cover.

That’s a lot to promise. But as America Amplified and others have proven, community engagement — particularly when it is embedded in an organization’s overall vision and strategy — can deliver.



How to use this guide

Ideally, your entire organization will embrace the roles outlined here and work in sync through the processes. Or, if you are already on this road, you can navigate to the relevant components.

The playbook is constructed to apply the community engagement mindset to four roles: Station Managers/CEOs; News Managers; Reporters and Producers; Talk Show Teams. But all the lessons intertwine; you will find helpful ideas throughout. You can also visit www.americaamplified.org to go through each role in a web-friendly version.

At the end of this playbook are four appendices with tools and resources for your journey.

Appendix A: Source Diversity Tracking

Appendix B: Tools For Engagement

Appendix C: Worksheets, Samples and Planners

Appendix D: Further Reading

The journalists who worked with America Amplified shared many ways community engagement has surprised them.

May you have many wonderful surprises, too! And please share your experience with us by using the hashtag #americaamplified on Twitter or by emailing americaamplified@gmail.com.

Station Managers



“I think community engagement is absolutely critical to sustainability. Sponsors want to be associated with our name because we do good, impactful work and we’re in the right place to help build bridges in our communities.”

Cara Williams Fry

WITF Chief Content Officer

Read about how WITF prioritizes engagement on page 16



How to lead journalism, fundraising efforts with community engagement mindset

Community engagement journalism takes investment and patience, but the rewards can also improve the bottom line.

The commitment to better understanding communities will certainly lead to more authentic stories and improve your connections to underserved audiences. It may even make your news staffers feel good about their work — “because it’s the right thing to do” in the words of one news director — and help you attract a more diverse and ambitious staff. The additional argument here is that if you devote your entire organization to the goals of community engagement, you will have a powerful message to take to members, funders and underwriters.

Ask yourself these three important questions:

- Are you expanding and attracting new audiences?
- Are you able to identify new funders to support your journalism, whether existing or aspirational?
- Are you satisfied with your station’s capacity and ability to provide the best news service possible?

Community engagement can effectively address these critical leadership concerns.

This chapter provides food for thought and action, along with guidance for making the case to oversight boards, funders and your staff — no matter the size.

SET THE STAGE

It’s critical to be clear about how you see community engagement fitting in with or changing your organization. That means you first have to know what you’ve got, establish a vision and then align your organization to deliver on the goals and priorities.

Assess your staff and resources

Take stock of your staff’s current obligations and priorities. Consider:

- Do you have an up-to-date organizational chart?
- Do you understand what everyone on your staff is responsible for?
- Does everyone on staff — newsroom and others — have a clear job description?
- How do your newsroom and talk shows interact or support each other?
- Do you already bring the community together for events? If so, how does the newsroom



connect with this outreach?

- Do your mission statement and strategic plan incorporate community engagement?

These are essential questions that must be understood at the top as you lay the foundation for engagement work. You may want to update your strategic plan (or create one), revise your organizational chart or redesign job responsibilities. You may need to bring in a consultant for an outside perspective.

Connect your station's mission to engagement

Your frank assessment of your current mission and strategic plan may lead you to be more intentional. When asking yourself if your strategic plan is engagement-ready, you may need to work with the staff to revise your organization's mission statement and stated objectives to align with community engagement.

Language from these mission statements may be helpful:

- *... our vision is to be the most valued, vital and vibrant service. One that inspires people to look at the world from multiple perspectives and capitalizes on emerging opportunities to serve our audience and engage our communities. ([CapRadio](#))*
- *Listening is our core strength. We listen with curiosity and empathy to each other, to our city, our audiences and our work. ([WNYC, New York City](#))*
- *WITF inspires lifelong learning by connecting people and communities of Pennsylvania through trusted journalism, thoughtful discussion and educational experiences. ([WITF, Harrisburg](#))*

Find your leaders

Do you have a driver or drivers in editorial, whether it be the news director, or the executive producer of a talk show team, who can implement a community engagement strategy?

If the answer is 'yes,' you are a step ahead. John Kotter, a corporate management expert at Harvard University, notes that corporate CEOs who recognize the need for a division change also recognize that the leader in that division is key for making change. Having a deep understanding of why a leader wants to make this change will provide you with the basis for how you can support their efforts.

If the answer is 'no,' then you may need to hire someone or create a position to lead the way. If this is where you land, then you may have to make the hire before finalizing an engagement plan. It's imperative that you have an editorial lead who is in sync with the organization's vision to adopt an engagement strategy.

Or, you may have to take ownership of the engagement strategy yourself.

At a few stations, station managers/CEOs have managed to be the key force on community engagement in their operation — sometimes because of concern about demographic changes, a



new media competitor gobbling up potential audience, or funding drying up. But, really, the most effective avenue for a station manager to drive a community engagement approach may be by securing funding to support a specific initiative or ongoing work. To incentivize staff, you may even craft funder proposals that bake in engagement practices and address strategic objectives identified by the staff.

Engage the organization

This is an organizational process. As station manager, you shouldn't determine editorial priorities, but rather establish and support a vision for the institution. Is your focus connecting with new audiences? Filling a void in your media market? Directly addressing information needs? Or in this age of intense media disruption, do you have a desire to experiment with innovative models of content creation and service?



A 2016 event hosted by KCUR in Kansas City that featured journalists taking questions.

Have your news team perform a source diversity audit (Appendix A) to reveal who you are including in your coverage now, and who you are leaving out.

Bring together key people in your organization for a discussion about making the shift to a community engagement journalism model. From the outset, you'll want to include:

- Program director
- Content or news director
- Marketing manager or director
- Development director
- Operations manager



- Individual reporters or producers who may be inclined or who have an interest in using new technologies, or changing up their journalistic approach.

For this meeting you'll need to work closely with your content leadership (news director, chief content officer, etc.).

The worksheet on page 162 can help your team establish a vision for your engagement strategy, discuss where gaps or biases may exist, and set goals and aspirations. It's ideal to use this worksheet after a source audit so you already have gaps identified, however it is not absolutely necessary.

Establish metrics for success

You should to establish and support success metrics for the strategies. These may need to be in line with your funding, or they may help write a narrative for future funding — but they need to be established before the work begins. Some possibilities:

- Story ideas coming to you from the community
- More diverse voices on the air
- Partnerships brokered with community groups and or other media
- Attendance at listening events (diversity of people present at such event/s)
- Number of enterprise stories produced
- Number of new sources/contacts established
- Impact — After hearing a report on KCUR about a mothballed theatre in Atchison, Kansas, a listener reached out and gave the community [an idea for a solution](#)
- Staff acquires new skills (live video streaming on Facebook; organizing and tracking a texting club; producing audio diaries)

EXECUTE AND SUPPORT THE VISION

As your team moves toward execution of an engagement strategy or strategies, be clear that you are allowing room for experimentation, for fast fails, for investing time and space to collaborate with other media or community organizations. You also must ensure that you are providing the resources necessary for the team to succeed.

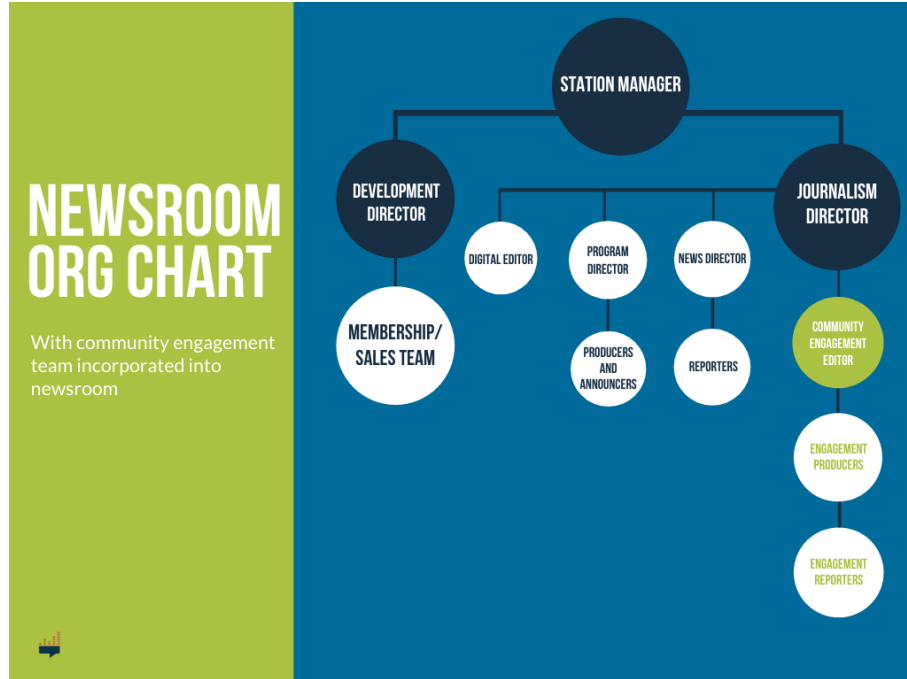
Build engagement into your staff structure

Your newsroom may need tools such as [Hearken](#) or [GroundSource](#), or access to event space. But most importantly, community engagement requires staff commitments — and perhaps a rethinking of your organizational chart.

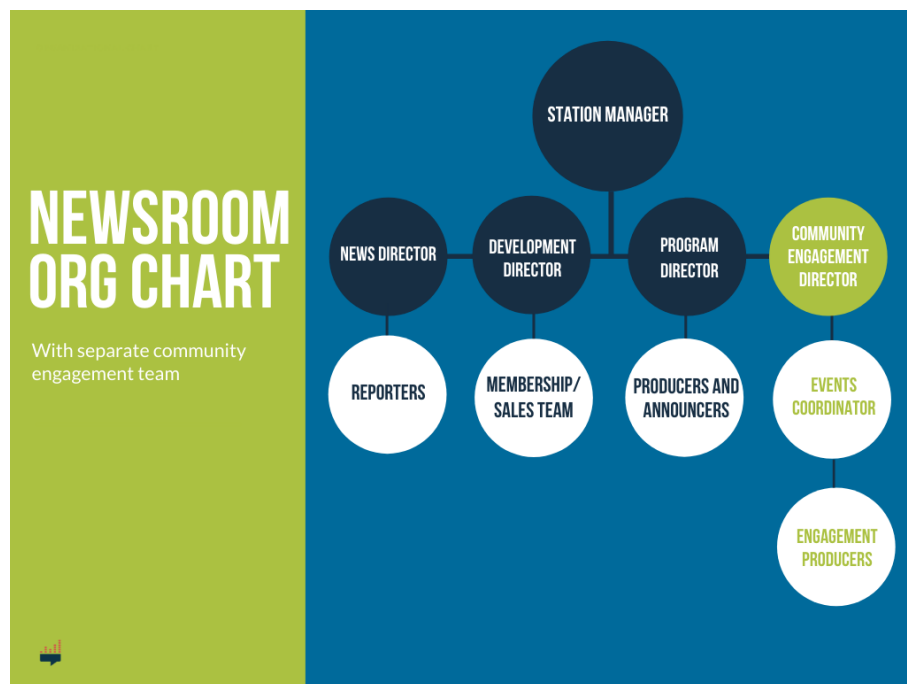


Community engagement can ‘live’ inside or outside the newsroom, but must be connected to the newsroom. See the following examples.

Inside the newsroom:



Outside but adjacent to the newsroom:





Cara Williams Fry

Chief content officer at WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

“I believe that community engagement and marketing have separate goals and missions but need to work in parallel for success. The community engagement director has to be at the [editorial] table, listening to what’s going on, responding to the ideas that are germinating, to work with and focus on the reporters and editors.”

Community engagement jobs

If you and your content team decide to build engagement responsibilities into the newsroom (moving an existing person into a new role or making new hires), consider job titles that signal the new focus. Say, an **audience editor** who continues with regular editing tasks but emphasizes understanding audiences and how relevant delivery platforms can be used for different communities. Another option might be a **community engagement producer** tasked with producing content that uses community engagement tactics to add more diverse voices and perspectives—and perhaps guiding the work of other producers in this regard.

Or, your strategy may lead you to create engagement role(s) outside the newsroom. The advantage from a manager’s perspective is that it puts a clear focus on the job description and it creates a position that immediately connects different parts of the organization.

A **community engagement specialist**, for example, could be tasked with the nuts and bolts of engaging communities: soliciting participation across different platforms from new audiences, developing and maintaining partnerships with outside organizations, and convening and facilitating community conversations. This role in other organizations has not been designed to produce content, but to inform and influence content. They participate in newsroom and talk show meetings and make sure the engagement work is feeding back into the content.

Another option is to establish a **director-level position** with a seat at senior leadership meetings and comparable pay. This person would create and communicate a sophisticated strategy to support your vision and newsroom goals. Having someone focused on community information needs, trends, and managing engagement tools can take the burden off the newsroom. However, having someone without a journalism background advising the newsroom can create tension. It’s a tension that will need to be managed and you’ll need to be prepared to stand by the decision.

Reference the Sample Job Description on page 170 in Appendix C for a list of engagement core competencies, and some boiler plate language you can copy and paste into a job posting for a community engagement director, specialist or producer.



Prioritize diverse perspectives

Hiring for staff to implement community engagement — whether inside or outside the newsroom — can help attract candidates who bring a different set of skills, backgrounds and perspectives. Some stations actively seek fluent Spanish speakers, for example, with an eye toward producing Spanish language content, but at the very least attracting Latino candidates.

Hiring more diverse staff who come from various cultures, races, ideologies, and class differences will improve community engagement journalism efforts. Fostering and supporting diversity within the newsroom has countless benefits and will broaden source outreach and challenge implicit and explicit bias in coverage and within the newsroom. (See the News Managers chapter for suggestions on where to go to find diverse candidates.)

Screen candidates for an engagement mindset, particularly with respect for diverse perspectives.

And to be clear: You should pay engagement specialists in line with others on your staff. While the work itself may not lead to a byline, the objectives are the same: disseminating facts, providing accuracy and context, and building trust. Treat it with the same value.

Bring in funds

Many funders — nonprofits and others — are intensely interested in community engagement. That creates an opportunity for you to make the case based on your strategic commitment. Specifically, you can build a case around:

- Working through a new engagement platform such as [GroundSource](#), [Hearken](#), the [Local Voices Network](#), etc. (For more details on tools, see Appendix B.)
- Hiring an engagement specialist, journalist or team
- Developing specific initiatives that focus on particular communities
- Diversifying your audience, reach or staff

You can use this playbook to help you develop the language for your approach. See a sample letter to potential funders at the end of this chapter. As your work develops, you can use your successes to build a case for additional funding.

You are a key connector to help your development staff identify local, regional and national funders who are looking for innovative proposals that can make an impact. Your proposal will stand out by emphasizing new audiences you can serve through engagement, investing in new interactive platforms and making your outreach intentional.



SIDE EFFECTS

PUBLIC HEALTH
PERSONAL STORIES

Side Effects Public Media, an America Amplified partner, incorporated community engagement into a grant proposal for the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation and was awarded \$1.5 million for health and education coverage over a three-year period. The grant will allow Side Effects to hire another community engagement specialist to focus on education.

Side Effects says the proposal highlighted:

- Participation in America Amplified, including: 11 COVID-related Facebook Live events and six televised panel discussions — many co-produced with the Indianapolis Recorder.
- Two cellphone texting services, allowing them to collect input, answer audience questions and guide further engagement and journalism.
- Outreach to immigrant communities that were hit hard by COVID-19, including translating Q&As into Spanish and Burmese and distributing them through community groups.

SUSTAIN A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

There's an inherent tension between wanting to see immediate results and recognizing that change will require developing a different set of skills (technical, partnership and community convening skills). Give the work time. As the station manager/CEO, you're looking for momentum that excites your team, and looking for a drop in morale if the results are less than stellar.

Make connections

Offer to broker introductions with leaders in the community who can help you reach new audiences. When the leader of the local public radio station calls, it's flattering to be invited as part of a new process. If partnerships are made, help/support partner organizations.

Integrate efforts with membership and development

Talk up community engagement journalism to your current donors. (See a sample letter to donors at the end of this chapter.) Your development and membership staff have a reservoir of names; when you make your major donor or funder calls, reference how your shift to community engagement



journalism is meeting information needs and diversifying your audience. Share notes with your development staff if there's interest, some interest, immense interest. They can add the notes to the donor database and you can start developing a pool of donor names who sound excited about your work.

Celebrate quick wins and give permission for fast failures

As the work progresses, recognize relatively quick wins such as improving diversity in sourcing; a strong response to a survey from a new community; or a community conversation that brought together people across differences. Acknowledge all staff and name the people who contributed to the success.

Don't ignore failures or efforts that could be improved. Convene the content leadership and ask what was learned and what's next. Reference your metrics, and adjust. Also, remember that numbers aren't everything, especially if it's the team's first go at an engagement initiative. A producer may be experimenting with a new platform that only generated an audience of 50 people, but if it's 50 people who represent a new audience, that's a win.

Encourage content critiques

Encourage or facilitate content critiques so news managers can dig into the successes and find areas for improvement. While source audits reveal gaps and biases, a content critique can help you assess other parts of your coverage. Not just whom you talked to, but why you talked to them, the language you used, how you told the story and what story you chose to tell.

Taking the time to think critically about the news product is an essential step that is often missed because journalists are busy moving on to the next story. Station and newsroom leaders should make this a priority and build discussions and audience feedback into the workflow. (See how KCUR organized regular critiques on page 56.)

Share your progress with stakeholders

Continue your communication outside your organization. You want to help stakeholders understand how your commitment to community engagement is evolving.

Focus, in particular, on your board of directors or community advisory board, membership and major donors. (See the sample letter to a board of directors at the end of this chapter.) Use your member newsletter to share work, with links to click on — especially if you have an explanation, or a “behind the story” box about how the journalism was created.

There's also a language around community engagement journalism. The phrase will sound foreign, especially to stakeholders who see your station as an extension of the NPR brand. You'll need to define community engagement journalism to them. Here are a few examples to consider in your communications:



- *Our pivot to a community engagement journalism model means that we're people-centered.*
- *Community engagement journalism connects people directly to a reporter or producer.*
- *Community engagement journalism is more than a process of how we produce news; it's also a strategy to connect people with information that is relevant to them and on the platforms that make sense to them. We can't expect communities to come to our broadcast — we must go to their preferred platforms.*
- *Community engagement journalism requires us to identify information needs and fill them.*
- *Community engagement journalism sees all communities as our newsroom's assignment editors.*
- *Community engagement journalism focuses on covering for, rather than about communities.*

Strive to be a thought leader for your local community and the public media industry.

Be a cheerleader. Share the new content on your personal social media pages (especially LinkedIn) and make it clear that it's an example of community engagement journalism.

Nurture staff well-being

Any organization's most valuable asset to sustain a change is people. Is there a culture of belonging at your station that allows people to be their authentic selves and shows care and attention to individuals? Some ideas to consider:

- Give a comp day after an intense period of work spent on an initiative, event series, community conversations or launch of a content series. Community engagement, especially around difficult topics, can be draining. Make time for renewal.
- Pay attention to people who are spending evenings or weekends out in communities, taking the time to manage a partnership and feeding community input into the newsroom. The people who practice the nuts and bolts of engagement, especially if it's a new position, should hear from the leadership that their work is valuable.
- When you have a powerful story to tell about the impact of the station's engagement (say, at a board meeting), allow the practitioners to convey that story.

Ensure the future of your investment

Regularly update your strategic plan. It should be a living document to guide where your station is headed. You may have some version of community engagement baked into it already; take another look at it and incorporate the vision work to memorialize it. When you decide you're going to move on, you will have a document that can be passed on to future station leadership.

If you're in a position to play a role in succession planning, whether you're considering retirement or a new chapter elsewhere, be explicit about the central role of community engagement at the station.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

At WITF, community engagement success is 'absolutely critical to sustainability'

Cara Williams Fry has been the Chief Content Officer at WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, since 2010. WITF has a unique and successful culture of community engagement journalism. America Amplified's Ann Alquist talked to Williams Fry about how it works at the station and her advice for other stations interested in pursuing this approach. This conversation has been excerpted and edited for clarity.



Why was community engagement important in 2020?

Community engagement became even more important around covering the election in 2020 because we were worried that we hadn't connected with real people [in 2016 election coverage]. We knew going in that we needed to do more, and we needed to do better. We had to build trust with more people across the state.

So, in planning our election 2020 coverage along with America Amplified, our whole approach was community engagement. It was all about getting into the communities and spending real time with people. We didn't want to do the stories where a reporter shows up for one day, does a story, leaves, and then acts like they know that community.

Our entire goal with election 2020 was to do community engagement by embedding reporters [in a few chosen communities], to make sure people knew them. They would work not only with the community leaders, but also the people who live there and are passionate about their town.

That was our singular focus — not to put a quota on the number of stories, but to make sure that our reporters got to know people in certain communities that feel they're underrepresented or feel like they're voices are never heard. In Pennsylvania specifically, it's very much just Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, and everywhere else is no man's land. With that in mind, we very specifically picked communities that feel left out and deserted or underrepresented.

WITF has a Director of Community Engagement. How did that job come about?

About a year and a half ago, I proposed creating a position at WITF for a Director of Community Engagement. I knew it wouldn't be an overnight decision, but I also knew it was integral to our future success.

There was some resistance to the idea because, at that time, it was an unbudgeted position, a brand new position and [there was] a belief that



the position should live in a marketing department, which we also did not have. But I thought the position should exist in the content department and believe that community engagement and marketing have separate goals and missions but need to work in parallel for success.

The community engagement director has to be at the [editorial] table, listening to what's going on, responding to the ideas that are germinating, to work with and focus on the reporters, editors and in our shop the educators.

We had one person at the station who had the most experience organizing engagement events and producing. She and I really thought about how you get true engagement.

My argument was we have this person with this skill set already and who is much better prepared than anyone else. She had worked with me for years and was the right person to elevate into a position of leadership because people trusted her, and she has the wherewithal to be thoughtful about the needs of our newsroom and the station.

You launched the 'Toward Racial Justice' video series in 2020. How did that happen?

"Toward Racial Justice" was a really good example of an almost immediate success in having a director of community engagement. ["Toward Racial Justice" is a biweekly YouTube series of community conversations addressing systemic racism and injustice in central Pennsylvania and beyond.]

If we had not had a person that had this as their sole job, we could not — I can say with emphasis — have pulled this off every other week since June with really good quality guests and with really good quality conversations. Between COVID and the election, it would have gotten lost, since our staff was already working at max capacity. Because we had this position with this person with these talents and understanding outreach, and in-reach, we succeeded.

Within a week of the intense social unrest and protests, we invited six Black people from throughout our community to be part of a sub-committee for "Toward Racial Justice."

Then we hired, as a moderator, a man who is a host on the only black-owned radio station in all of Pennsylvania. The series was run by our director of community engagement, in



WITF's "Toward Racial Justice" panel links environmental justice with health, human rights and self-determination
By Rachel McDevitt

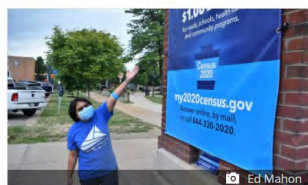


Young voters of color in central Pa. urge peers to turn out, report mixed plans for voting

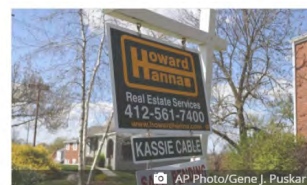
By Alanna Elder



WITF's "Toward Racial Justice" panel links environmental justice with health, human rights and self-determination
By Rachel McDevitt



Ed Mahon



AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar



conjunction with a few other people from our newsroom and internal diversity committee.

The external subcommittee, which was originally filled with Black people, is now expanding to Black and Brown people. Because this is her job, to focus on community engagement, to make sure we were talking to the right people — we continue to grow and produce these conversations.

What are your next steps?

At the time we reacted to something that mattered in our community and we created a platform for community conversation. So now we have to analyze, is it working? And is it achieving our goals? And if not, what can we do?

Also — what are our goals? Is it just to have a large audience? Is that our goal or is it to have a diverse audience that we've never had before? Or is this a mission-based thing or is it a combination of all of the above? Is it a trust-building exercise?

As a mission-based organization, we need to continue to do this kind of outreach. We need to continue to build trust and conversation, but how do we make sure it's getting to as many people as possible? We're talking about turning it into a radio program after it's on YouTube and Facebook, and then offering it to the other Pennsylvania stations in the market.

We want more and more people to hear these conversations and to become part of the conversations.

We, as the NPR/PBS station in central Pennsylvania, can't just show up when it's a thing and then walk away. We're really trying to look at how to make it stronger, how to make it deeper and to engage a more diverse audience.

What is your role in supporting community engagement?

My job, fundamentally, as the chief content officer is to try to help people work together in a team landscape that's not siloed. I have a team leaders' group that meets with me every Thursday to talk about the big picture ideas. I usually assign one person to carry out the idea, and to rely on every other person at the table as a resource. Everybody has their own responsibility, and everyone has been given the authentic power to make their decisions and to move forward.

We don't want five of me at the table; we don't want five of any kind of the same person at the table. We bring together this group of people who all care passionately about public media, care about their piece of it, and I have worked with them to understand the other pieces of the puzzle better.

You learn a little something from one person, and that idea bounces and a little something different bounces off of that person. And all of a sudden, everything we're doing is bigger than what any one of us individually would do.

How important is community engagement to station sustainability?

I think community engagement is absolutely critical to sustainability. Once upon a time people did community engagement and they were like, oh my god, it's so much work for so little return. There's only 50 people and I spent six months and all this money doing this event! And so, management and staff got away from it, right? And there wasn't a position dedicated to engagement ... it was just someone's extra/additional responsibility.



Then the trust factor came into play, right? All of a sudden people across the nation aren't trusting journalists anymore. Community engagement is a great way to rebuild trust, thereby build brand and get more underwriting and sponsorships. Sponsors want to be associated with our name because we do good, impactful work and we're in the right place to help build bridges in our communities.

Then there are the questions: What is the goal of engagement? Is it to raise money? Is it to always grow a larger number of attendees? Maybe someday I would like it to at least raise enough money to pay for itself. But it is our mission to build trust and deliver quality information. People know that they can come and talk with us, whether it's a fun children's event, a trusted news conversation or a really serious end of life issue. We can be there for people with different needs.

Our goal is to touch individuals and communities and to engage people in a way that will continue to build on who we are because we are a community resource. Our public media institution doesn't just serve the community, we're part of the community. The only way to do that, to both serve and be a part of the community, is to have community engagement.

How do you work through failures and celebrate successes?

It takes time to build trust. You can't ever have the mindset to throw someone under the bus if something doesn't work. You have to talk it through, regroup and talk about what worked and didn't work and then offer solutions.

You have to offer authority. That's a strong word, but you have to make sure the individual team leads know they will be supported as they make decisions. I always say if people hate a

project, it's my fault. If people love the project, it's the team's success.

We often celebrate the small moments. I don't endorse the concept to hold champagne for the absolute best thing ever in life, and then they never drink it. We celebrate the team and successes both big and small with champagne, chocolate, laughter and pride. As well as the commitment to keep doing the good work.



SAMPLE LETTERS

To the board of directors

Dear Board of Directors/Community Advisory Board:

I'm writing to bring you into a process of change that we are undergoing in the news department in terms of how we are covering the communities we serve.

In the past, journalism has been practiced from the top down: news editors and content managers help determine the stories worthy of coverage, and we then assign reporters to go out and find sources, talk to the relevant experts, and then come back and put a story together for broadcast and publication.

We're starting to do things differently and I want to explain how and why.

We are shifting our focus to a community engaged journalism model. Community engagement journalism is a strategy to connect people with the information that is relevant to them on the platforms that makes sense to them.

While we will continue to serve our audience through our traditional broadcast platforms, we will also be reaching our audience through social media, on-demand content, live and virtual events. Rather than focusing our journalism to be about communities, we want our journalism to be for those communities — to identify needs, and produce journalism that serves those needs.

We will be doing that in the coming months and years by employing a host of tools to enable us to listen first to what people in our communities are telling us, and then report those stories.

Our nation's demographics are shifting and we in public media have frankly not done well in expanding our audience. For us to survive and thrive, we must continue to grow our audience by finding new ways of connecting to them. Community engagement will also help us develop more trust in public media. That is the heart and soul of why we are changing.

As we undergo this process, I will share with you what we are learning and how it is impacting the journalism we produce. I trust there will be a learning curve, but I also believe you will hear and applaud the new voices, new issues and new communities we bring to our journalism.



To potential funders

Dear Funder:

Our station's mission is to provide accurate, relevant journalism that stimulates dialogue and discovery. It is also to provide a public service to the communities we cover.

To bolster our role in the community, and trust in our journalism, we're embarking on a strategic shift over the next three years to focus on community engagement journalism.

It's a strategy that starts with listening to communities to understand their local information needs, and then meeting them where they are — whether it's with a specialized newsletter, a new beat in the newsroom or an investigative project.

[PROJECT DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE] In the coming months we want to focus our attention specifically on [specific community] in our [city, region, state] to better understand their concerns and needs. We are planning to collaborate with nonprofit organizations, community leaders, church and school organizations in this community and invite community members to a series of in-person/virtual listening sessions to assess information needs and priorities.

Our deliverables will include [number] community conversations, [number] feature length stories and [number] talk shows that are driven by what we hear.

With your investment of [\$], we can invest in these new relationships and produce relevant and needed content. We can tell stories that haven't been told, expand public media's fan base and strengthen its role in our community.

Thank you for your consideration.



To donors

Dear <FIRST NAME>,

First, thank you for your last contribution of <\$AMOUNT>. It's your support that makes our local and national journalism possible, from NPR programming to reports from the statehouse.

I want to let you know about some of the ways we're innovating our journalism. The reaction to George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis caused us to reflect on how well we were serving African American communities, and led us to the conclusion that we needed to do more. (Use a story relevant to changes to your coverage)

In July, we started a community committee focused on listening — our editorial team is listening to community members to identify gaps in our coverage and ways in which we let our biases inform coverage. The result of this listening is a series of stories and forums that launch <DATE,TIME>.

This is content truly by, of and for the community. We partnered with <LIST PARTNERS>; it's been a great privilege to create this series in concert with them.

We see this as the start of a new way to engage with communities and community partners. We can't only be reactive to the news, to show up when others do and then leave. We have to understand what's happening now and make a commitment to stay and tell stories of everyday struggles and everyday triumphs.

As we progress, I'll keep you informed to show how your contribution supports so much at <STATION>. It's because of you we're able to provide essential journalism.



PRINT AND PIN ON YOUR DESK FOR EASY REFERENCE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR

STATION MANAGERS



Community engagement will not only strengthen your newsroom's journalism and its relationship with your community, it may also lead to new audiences and funding sources. Here where you can start.

ARE YOU SATISFIED?



- Are you expanding and attracting new audiences?
- Are you able to identify new funders to support the journalism service, whether existing or aspirational?
- Are you satisfied with your station's ability to provide the best news service possible?

➔ Start by choosing one thing to improve.

BRING IN THE MONEY



- Find funders to support different parts of engagement, such as:
- A new engagement platform
 - An engagement specialist
 - Specific short-term projects that focus on particular communities

WHAT ARE YOUR RESOURCES?



- Do you have an up-to-date organizational chart?
- Do you have someone on staff who is already doing community engagement work?
- Do you have a manager who would be good at leading this effort?

➔ You may already be equipped to handle this change with some simple reorganization.

HIRE FOR ENGAGEMENT



- The following is a short list of job titles that can complement your newsroom's work:
- Audience editor
 - Community engagement producer
 - Community engagement specialist
 - Director of community engagement

WHAT'S YOUR VISION?



- Set a vision around what improving the area of dissatisfaction looks like.
- Host a meeting with a cross section of newsroom staff to agree on a strategy.
- Use America Amplified's Community Portrait Worksheet as a discussion guide.

➔ Doing this with newsroom staff will help foster a sense of unity and purpose.

BE TRANSPARENT



- Create a special newsletter around your community engagement efforts.
- Send updates to station members and donors.
- Add "Behind The Story" boxes to the end of digital stories to explain how community engagement led to the project.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THE WORK?



- Broker introductions with community leaders.
- Be a cheerleader. Share your newsroom's work on your social media channels and/or in staff emails.
- Share community engagement journalism impact with donors and stakeholders.

➔ Celebrate wins large and small along the way. Also give permission to fail.

ADD IT TO STRATEGIC PLAN



- Make community engagement efforts an agenda item in staff meetings.
- Include questions about community engagement in your hiring process.
- Update your strategic plan to include why this vision is important.

News Managers



“Fundamentally, we’re trying to change the culture of how we do journalism.”

Mary Shedden

WUSF news director



How to foster a culture of engagement in your newsroom

Community engagement is an essential tool for newsrooms to build trust with communities, to demonstrate relevance and to find and grow new audiences. As a news manager, you are critical in making the shift in the way journalism is practiced in your newsroom. You can immediately initiate an audit of your current coverage to reveal gaps. You can set the expectation for a change in behavior, adjust resources to support an engaged journalism initiative and broker partnerships with like-minded organizations and other media.

The toughest investment for everyone in your newsroom is time. Making the time for your staff to reflect on their reporting, to identify biases, to convene and listen to communities, and to work with partners is a huge part of your role in driving community engagement. The other investment is, ultimately, financial. You can advocate for modest or bold investments in tools that will help your staff manage community engagement.

This track is divided into three sections: strategy, resources and content. Each of those sections is divided into two phases: *What you can do **now** to effect change*, taking advantage of existing resources and personnel, and *what you can aim for **in the future** with additional financial support*.

CULTURE AND STRATEGY

To be most effective, community engagement should not be thought of as an add-on to the newsroom, but should become an integral part of your newsroom and journalism process and culture.

NOW

Work with management to establish your vision

To work toward a culture of community engagement, you should start with help and support from



the station leadership — it signals the importance of making this shift. What is your station's vision for community engagement? Ideally you should bring in station leadership from many different departments — marketing, development, membership — to get buy-in to the concept and break down silos. You'll need their help and your efforts at engagement will be valuable to their work as well.

Acknowledge your biases

Take time to [understand your own perspective](#) (from Poynter) and make an [honest inventory of your own privileges](#) (from Wellesley College) and [biases](#) (from Harvard). Know your blindspots and develop systems to help recognize and counter them. (See Bias Check on page 123 in Appendix B.)

Audit your coverage

Discover who you are talking to already and who you are engaging by doing a limited source diversity audit. Identify someone who can look back through the last two months of spots and features, or your last 10 talk shows, and determine the demographics and geography of your current coverage focus areas. (See Source Diversity Guide on page 109 in Appendix A for how to carry out this audit.)

Identify gaps: Find the communities or parts of communities that you aren't reaching but want to reach. Identify and recognize your biases and assumptions about these communities and continually check those against learnings that challenge those biases. Use the Engagement Strategy Vision Worksheet for Station Leaders (on page 162) to help you create a vision for community engagement, and the Community Portrait Worksheet (on page 164) to help you compare what you learn about communities against your pre-existing assumptions and bias.

Try out engagement tools

Working with your reporters and producers, select at least one tool to carry out your initial engagement strategy. It could be listening sessions (virtual or in-person), embedded reporters, texting clubs, direct mail or flyers, for example. (See Appendix B.) Listening sessions became an important way to connect during the pandemic and should continue to be used as an engagement strategy — both virtual and in-person — when possible. America Amplified listening sessions informed stories and provided sources. (See Appendix C for a Listening Session Project Planner Conversation Template.) This timeline gives you an idea of the planning involved:



Bear in mind that some engagement tools, such as direct mail, Hearken or GroundSource, will require funds.

You may be surprised by the results.



Rachel Hubbard

KOSU executive director, on sending postcards

“Go in with an open mind. The responses you receive may not be in the channels you expect, and they may not be immediate. We feel the postcard strategy has created a baseline awareness in communities where people knew very little about KOSU.”

Read more about KOSU's effort on page 137.

Allocate staff resources

Assess the resources you have in terms of staffing and time to give this effort a fair shot of success.

- Learn what you are willing to have your newsroom do less of to free up time for this effort.
- Be cautious about adding on engagement to a reporter or producer's already busy workload.
- In creating a culture of community engagement, be patient. Build in time for the engagement to yield insight. Honor quality of listening over quantity of stories produced.
- Decide if you will need to hire freelance help to carry out some of this engagement work. Consider hiring a bilingual freelancer to reach communities where English is not the dominant language.



Measure successes

Have a plan to measure success. There are numerous metrics you can use:

- Story ideas coming to you from the community
- More diverse voices on the air
- Partnerships brokered with community groups and or other media.
- Attendance at listening events (diversity of people present at such event/s)
- Types of enterprise stories produced
- Number of new sources/contacts established
- Impact — After hearing a report on KCUR about a mothballed theatre in Atchison, Kansas, a listener reached out and gave the community [an idea for a solution](#)
- Staff acquires new skills (live video streaming on Facebook; organizing and tracking a texting club; producing audio diaries)



Kate Concannon

Mountain West News Bureau managing editor on the value of listening sessions

“Not only are these sessions valuable for gathering story ideas and source contacts, these events show our community that we are accessible and genuinely want to hear about their insights and experiences.”

Read more about Mountain West’s experience on page 54.

Celebrate successes

Recognize and celebrate successes large and small. Some engagement tools will work well at times, and at other times not so well. For example, your newsroom convened a group of 40, but no one spoke up. Then you convened a group of five, and all were engaged. What worked well and what didn’t? Send an email or a Slack message to the whole newsroom, celebrating success. Bring in ice cream on Friday afternoon to celebrate progress.

Share back

Make community feedback loops part of your newsroom’s engagement culture. Set mechanisms in place for reporters and producers to share content with the community they have engaged, and mechanisms to stay in regular contact.



If your reporters are using a texting service, make sure they text a link to the story produced back to the people who texted. If your newsroom is soliciting questions on a given topic — via Hearken or a Google form — don't just post the answers online, but email the answers directly back to the questioner.

Feedback on coverage can also be solicited through surveys (freeware such as Google Surveys or Survey Monkey) or through community convenings (virtual or in-person). Make sure you follow up with a thank you and an email summarizing what you've learned.

FUTURE

Turn to your community advisory board

Look to your community advisory board or council as a resource for contacts, story ideas and connections to communities you aren't currently covering or serving.

Get to know your new audience members

You've found new audiences — now better understand them. Are they currently members/subscribers? If not, reach out to them. Do they get most of their news via Facebook? Or Twitter? Or WhatsApp? Reach them where they are.

Work with other departments at your station — membership, marketing, development — to follow up on engagement

Can you track an increase in station membership as a result of community engagement? Are you seeing digital audience growth as a result of engagement? These are difficult metrics to pin down, but success in this area will win supporters across the organization.

Foster community connections

Set up a committee of community connectors to provide perspective on how their communities are being covered and to serve as influencers and resources. This committee can be two or three people, or a dozen — think coalition of the willing. Form partnerships with smaller local media in your region to share resources, find new audiences, and provide feedback.

Revisit and revise your engagement strategy and tools

There is no silver bullet when it comes to engagement. Try new things and see how they meet your metrics of success. Encourage your staff to continuously innovate as they try to engage, build trust, and meet information needs.



RESOURCES AND STAFFING

Your newsroom is the engine that drives your engagement with communities. Assess and audit who has the desire and the skillset to implement the changes you want to see now.

NOW

Meaningfully involve your staff

Find the people in your newsroom (or in other departments) who already have the desire to follow up on leads and dig deeper into communities. If you are embedding engagement into existing jobs, consider changing job titles to indicate a shift — from “Reporter,” “Producer” or “Editor” to “Community Engagement Reporter/Producer” or “Audience Editor.” Make sure you are giving them the time needed to do this important work (consider what this person can do less of in order to engage).

In addition to the competencies you’d look for in any journalism position (i.e. can work in a fast-paced environment, multimedia skills, etc.), look for people who have demonstrated:

- An ability and desire to engage with communities before, during and after reporting on them
- Cultural competency; respect for diverse perspectives, experiences and narratives
- Multilingual skills

Reference the Sample Job Description on page 170 in Appendix C for a list of engagement core competencies, and some boiler plate language you can copy and paste into a job posting for a community engagement director, specialist or producer.

Brainstorm as a team

After you’ve had your meeting with station leadership, hold a meeting with newsroom staff to brainstorm ways to engage communities — without the intention of covering them, but with the intention of understanding and listening. Be sure to include everyone, not just reporters and producers, but also digital editors, multimedia managers, social media managers. This is a key step in choosing what engagement tool or tools will help you carry out your strategy.

Break down silos

Bring together key people across departments early in your engagement planning discussions. Invite directors and managers from other departments, such as marketing and development, to participate in your newsroom’s engagement planning discussions; they’ll have ideas about how to create awareness, solicit participation and they’ll have community connections themselves. Oftentimes “engagement” is seen as part of the marketing or development department — encourage everyone at your station to see it as a vital core of your newsroom culture.



Meet people where they are

Research the platforms that communities use to get information — such as WhatsApp or Next-door or a video streaming channel — and find out who on your staff is interested in experimenting with these different platforms. Look for non-English language communities you want to reach and find bilingual staff who could assist in that effort.



Daniela Allee

Reporter for New Hampshire Public Radio on launching a Spanish language newscast

“The first day that this went on the air, we published, it was like ‘wow, it finally feels like I’m doing something that has a tangible purpose for people.’”

Read more about NHPR’s efforts on page 44.

Partner with the community

Create partnerships with community organizations (other media, nonprofits) to share resources and story ideas, but also to reach communities your station isn’t currently serving. KUNR in Reno, Nevada, partnered with a Spanish language newspaper to answer questions about re-opening schools during COVID using Facebook Live. Side Effects Public Media [partnered with the Indianapolis Recorder](#) to better serve Black audiences.

Make time

To make community engagement a priority for your team, you must set aside the time for them to convene, embed, engage without the expectation that the initial engagement will result in immediate coverage or shows. How much time depends somewhat on your strategy and tools. When Statelmpact Pennsylvania embedded reporters for the 2020 election year, they gave them six weeks before content was expected.



Cara Williams Fry

Chief content officer at WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on embedding reporters

“Our entire goal...was to do community engagement by embedding reporters [in a few chosen communities], to make sure people knew them... To not even put a quota on the stories, but to make sure that our reporters got to know people in certain communities that feel that they’re underrepresented or feel like they’re never talked about.”



FUTURE

Make community engagement routine

Make community engagement a routine part of everyone's jobs, from reporters to producers to editors.

Diversify your sources AND your newsroom

Make sure your newsroom staff reflects the demographic makeup of the communities you serve or want to serve. Hire for diversity and representation for full-time and part-time positions. (Check pocinaudio.com or post on social media groups such as [Journalists of Color in Public Media](#) or [Public Media for All](#).) Write job descriptions that encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds; in the interview process, tailor your questions to encourage a wide diversity of response. Post job descriptions on sites that serve diverse applicants. (See Sample Job Descriptions on page 170 in Appendix C.)

Hiring for staff to implement community engagement journalism can help attract candidates who bring a different set of skills, backgrounds and perspective. Some stations actively seek fluent Spanish speakers, for example, with an eye toward producing Spanish language content, but at the very least attracting bilingual Latino candidates.

Hire a specialist

Create a position for a person who has demonstrated impact by engaging communities. Ideally, embed that person in the newsroom to inform the editorial process before content creation and ensure that salaries for that person are equivalent to what you would pay a reporter/producer or a director.

- **Director of Community Engagement.** To signal that you're serious about the role of engagement in the station's journalism, consider establishing a director-level position with a seat at senior leadership meetings and comparable pay. This person can be tasked with creating and communicating a sophisticated strategy to support your vision and newsroom goals.
- **Community Engagement Specialist.** This person is tasked with the nuts and bolts of engaging communities: soliciting participation across different platforms from new audiences, developing and maintaining partnerships with outside organizations, convening and facilitating community conversations. The role is not designed to produce content, but to inform and influence content. They participate in newsroom and talk show meetings and make sure the engagement work is feeding back into the content.
- **Community Engagement Producer/Reporter.** The point person for producing content that uses community engagement tactics — and perhaps guiding the work of other producers in this regard. If you have a daily talk show, this job could straddle the newsroom and talk show(s).
- **Audience Editor.** This person would work with the newsroom on understanding and reaching new audiences and amplifying stories. The emphasis should be on understanding how relevant



delivery platforms can be used for different communities. Note this [audience editor job description from Colorado Public Radio](#) that includes collaborating with editors and reporters “before, during and after the reporting and writing of individual stories, paying particular attention to underserved communities.”



Robin Tate Rockel

Indiana Public Broadcasting community engagement manager

“My job has been really entwined into the flow of the news team and it has been so beneficial.”

Form new beats

Reorganize your newsroom beats to better reflect the issues that are surfacing from the community. If you’re hearing a lot of questions from your engagement about housing, for instance, dedicate a reporter to respond to those issues and questions.



Candice Fortman

Outlier Media executive director

“We work with our audience and they tell us what those beats will be. Which means that over time our beats will change, they are not stagnant.”

Raise money

Make the case to your development team that funders are increasingly looking for “engagement” in journalism proposals. Moreover, engagement with historically underrepresented and/or marginalized communities is becoming a more dominant theme. Work with your development team to share ideas about how community engagement journalism is a good fit for a funder and will meet the information needs of communities. Examples of funding requests include resources to subscribe to a texting service or for specialized staff dedicated to community engagement.

Reallocate resources

Recognize that effectively meeting a community’s information needs may need some extra resources such as:

- Translation services to create guides and FAQs in various languages. (See Content in Non-English Languages on page 127 in Appendix B.)



- Visuals that can be printed and mailed, or distributed electronically. (See Direct Mail/Flyers on page 126 in Appendix B.)
- Geo-targeted print ads to reach communities outside of your core audience with your service or call to action to participate
- Stipends or honorariums to pay community partners for their time to connect their communities with your information service

CONTENT

Community engagement is a tactic to source and fuel your content. Importantly, it is also fundamentally a means to discover and meet a community's information needs.



Rachel Hubbard

KOSU executive director on community engagement

“We were blown away by the coverage that emerged.”

NOW

Set specific goals for diversity in your coverage

In developing your strategy, picking your tool and identifying communities you want to reach, you did an audit of who you are talking to and about in your current content. Use that audit to establish goals to expand your sources, topics and reach.

Encourage innovation and patience in content production

- If you're embedding reporters in communities, make sure they have the time to really get to know the community (Get your oil changed! Get a haircut!) Before content deadlines are imposed. At StateImpact Pennsylvania, embedded reporters were given six weeks to two months before their first feature was expected.
- Be flexible about what platforms reporters can use to showcase their stories. While radio features may be your bread and butter, some communities get content through Facebook or WhatsApp; others may prefer on-demand digital content. Research with your newsroom which platforms are best for the community you want to reach. See NHPR's experiment with a WhatsApp newsletter in Spanish at the end of this chapter on page 44.



- Encourage reporters to work with community members to record their own stories on a given topic, and then produce and air an audio diary that brings these voices to the air without reporter narration. This was an effective engagement tool during COVID and during the racial justice uprisings in 2020 when reporting in-person was dangerous. Side Effects Public Media produced a series entitled [“Essential Voices”](#) during the pandemic in which healthcare industry workers told their own stories.
- Encourage reporters and producers to approach engagement with new communities by listening for community strengths in addition to needs or problems. By prioritizing what is working well in a community, what makes that community proud, you can often find the real story. In Sacramento, California, CapRadio’s jesikah maria ross [used this approach](#) in engaging with one specific neighborhood.

Integrate knowledge and insights

Bring reporters and talk show producers together regularly to talk about what they are hearing in their daily reporting. Small insights into a community can lead to big stories and can lead to opportunities to meet a community’s information needs. In reporting on the impact of COVID on workers in meat packing plants, a Side Effects reporter noted that there were lots of questions and misinformation about the virus. Side Effects then produced [a Spanish-language FAQ](#) to distribute factual information.

Use digital tools at your disposal

There are numerous low-cost or no-cost ways to engage on digital platforms via Google forms, Facebook Live, or even setting up a voicemail box to encourage questions from and interaction with your audience. (See Appendix B.)

Set up a workflow for engagement

If you’re soliciting information from the public, make sure there’s a system to record who your newsroom is talking to and what they are learning. This can be as simple as a spreadsheet with columns noting date, contact information and follow-through. Follow up on what you learn and keep track of the content that emerges from engagement. See how Community Engagement Manager Robin Tate Rockel does it at Indiana Public Broadcasting on page 40 at the end of this chapter.

Be transparent

Audiences don’t always understand. Especially in a community-engaged newsroom, it is imperative that you take steps to explain who you are, how you are funded, why you did the story you did and why you talked to who you talked to. [Trusting News](#) has a newsletter, and a number of resources to help. In addition to being transparent on your website about your mission and funding, add more transparency in your digital stories by sharing the story behind the story. Most America Amplified stories ended with a “Behind the Story” Q&A with the reporter that explained the reporting process. See how KUNR reporter Noah Glick explained his reporting at the end of a story.



Behind This Story

Noah Glick produced this story for the Mountain West News Bureau as part of the America Amplified: Election 2020 initiative, using community engagement to inform and strengthen local, regional and national journalism.

Glick reached out to Latino college students in this community because they are a key voting bloc in the 2020 election.

America Amplified is a public media initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. KUNR is part of the Mountain West News Network and the America Amplified initiative.

Read more about what Glick learned in this Q&A:

Q: What did the people you talked to say about the experience of being interviewed for public radio?

Most people were a bit apprehensive at first and not really sure what to expect. They really wanted to know what the goal of all of this really was. But, after talking for some time, they all became much more relaxed and said they felt really good about being able to share their stories.

Q: What surprised you about this type of community engagement?

I was most surprised at how open people were with me. I thought asking personal questions about their family, struggles, economics and race would turn some people off, or make them feel uncomfortable. I was pleasantly surprised to see how open and willing they were to speak with me, once we got going.

Q: What lessons do you have for others who want to do the same?

Take your time with this. A lot of people don't trust the media right now, and that's OK. Explain clearly what you're trying to do and be upfront and honest about everything. This type of engagement is only possible through mutual respect and trust.

Q: Do you plan to go back to this group for more conversations? When and how?

Absolutely! Every person I spoke with was very interested in following up. I will likely meet in the same place in a couple of months.



FUTURE

Audit all content

Expand your source diversity audit to encompass all your content and audience interactions.

Facilitate critiques

While source audits reveal journalists' gaps and biases and inform changes in whom you contact, a content critique can help you assess other parts of your coverage. Not just whom you talked to, but why you talked to them, how you told the stories, the language you used, and what stories you chose to tell.

Make regular critiques part of the team workflow and expectations — otherwise it just won't happen.

Try scheduling one critique session a month in which the staff examines all the coverage from one day that month. Or, assign two individuals per week for 1-3 months on a rotating basis to "be a listener," i.e. tune in to on-air content and read digital content for one week and share their thoughts in a staff discussion. This approach is especially effective because it allows the team to think about how the audience might be perceiving the news you generate, noticing trends and patterns. Also, you can expand these assignments to staff beyond the newsroom to bring in non-journalist perspectives, and perhaps even to advisory board members or regular listeners. (See how KCUR set up a system for regular critiques on page 56).

Innovate

Try different engagement tactics, such as a direct mailing initiative or hosting in-person or virtual listening sessions or do a live Q&A on your station's Instagram account. (See Social Media on page 123 in Appendix B.)

Create new content products

Start a newsletter or form a texting group catered toward underserved communities or communities you want to reach.

Share back and follow up

Circle back with your membership, development and marketing departments to share how you effectively met a community's information needs. They'll love sharing a story of impact with your donors, foundations and stakeholders who will be impressed with your innovative approach.

Create or become part of a cohort of engagement practitioners. [Gather](#) has an active Slack channel and a weekly newsletter. Find other people in public media committed to this journey and create your own cohort for support and innovation. Share what you're doing and what you're learning at conferences and meetings.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

'When it works you just know it'
by Rachel Hubbard

Rachel Hubbard is an award-winning journalist with a track record of innovative collaborations during her 20-year career at KOSU in Oklahoma. She is now the Executive Director at KOSU and is focused on entrepreneurship as the future of journalism and tells her staff to take a little bit of risk every day to figure out what works. KOSU is a small station that covers two-thirds of the state — with a news staff of only four — but have successfully integrated engagement into much of their journalism.



We've been loosely working in engagement for about 10 years with community forums and other events, but we didn't start thinking about it as a core part of our organization and our journalism until the 2016 election cycle, when we were challenged by a local foundation to really experiment with our election coverage.

We spent a ton of time over a two-month period listening to people in two precincts, and we were blown away by the coverage that emerged from that work. That was when we started thinking about what an engaged newsroom could really look like.

We've used [GroundSource](#), done listening tours, hosted virtual listening sessions with the [Local Voices Network](#) and more. Some of it has worked and some of it hasn't, and sometimes one tool will work for one project and will totally bomb on another. We try to remain flexible and keep trying because when it works you just know it.

The success comes out in all sorts of different

ways — from a disabled woman in a nursing home doing an audio diary about what it's like to have all of her friends on ventilators, to a first-time voter asking for help to know what it will look and feel like when they go to the polls. It is slow work, and we're often not sure where it's going to end up, but we're open to that.

KOSU still does newscasts, but working from an engagement mindset, I think the information is much more practical because we are thinking about how an actual person might use that information or what they might need.

When we started out, we were just experimenting in the margins and it was really hard to do it consistently because it wasn't anyone's job. So we changed one of our beat reporting jobs to be an engagement reporter and really keep track of all of the people in our community and how we're serving them and set a strategy for us.

Now we've rewritten all of our reporting job descriptions to include an engagement element so that we don't lose focus on our goal of truly being reflective of and responsive to the communities we cover.



Robin Tate Rockel is Community Engagement Manager at Indiana Public Broadcasting. She spoke with Ann Alquist of America Amplified about her job and how it is integrated into newsrooms. This interview has been excerpted and edited for clarity.



What is a community engagement manager?

The main overarching theme is connecting with people that aren't currently represented in our news coverage. We go through and look at who we've been talking to, where ideas for stories have come from, and ask: Who are we missing? Who are we not including in that communication?

So my primary role is reaching out to those people and talking to them either in person, or — with COVID — over the telephone or in a virtual face-to-face conversation. Sometimes it involves just sending an email to someone we met or talked to in the past and checking in: "Hey, I was thinking about our conversation from last year. What are the issues you guys are dealing with now? What's not being talked about? What's important to your community?"

So a community engagement person allows us to reach those people more easily because we have someone on the team whose job it is to reach out to those communities and make those connections.

How do you identify where the gaps in coverage are?

I think the most important thing is talking to the editors, talking to the reporters and just

saying, "who do you feel like you haven't talked to, who's hard to reach" and then having that as a starting point to dig into.

What's a tip you have for engaging with the community?

I found just asking people to connect us with other people is always best — maybe it's someone who we spoke to a few months ago that we think knows a variety of different people in the community and asking them who we should talk to.

Gaining trust is what engagement is all about. So if you have people you've worked with in the past and they had a good experience with you, they liked your conversation, they felt heard, they felt like they were represented, then I think that they're very willing to open doors for you.

The most important thing is going beyond the gatekeepers of communities. So many times there will be these communities where maybe four or five people that always get that phone call. But they don't represent that community. You have to go beyond those gatekeepers to really hear what's on people's minds, what they want to share, what experience they're having.



I don't want to make the call to the person that will always pick up the phone, the person that got to voice their experience or story last week on a different platform.

Describe your relationship with the newsroom.

I have a standing meeting with my editor and my digital producer every Wednesday morning. So we're on the phone and talking about what's happened in the last week, what do we need to hash out and plan for this next week?

My editor supports the engagement work and I think that has helped me so much in staying focused, staying on task, making sure I'm doing what's helpful to the team. So it's not just something that happens. It's something that he prioritizes and includes in every conversation.

Every week we're talking about different things, whether it is community conversations, what texts we're going to send out, what embeds we're going to put into our stories or listening sessions happening.

Throughout the week I will meet with reporters to alert them to what people are asking if it is within their beat, and many times, I need their help to provide answers to their questions.

We've seen how Side Effects embeds engagement questions into their digital stories. What

did you learn from what you heard?

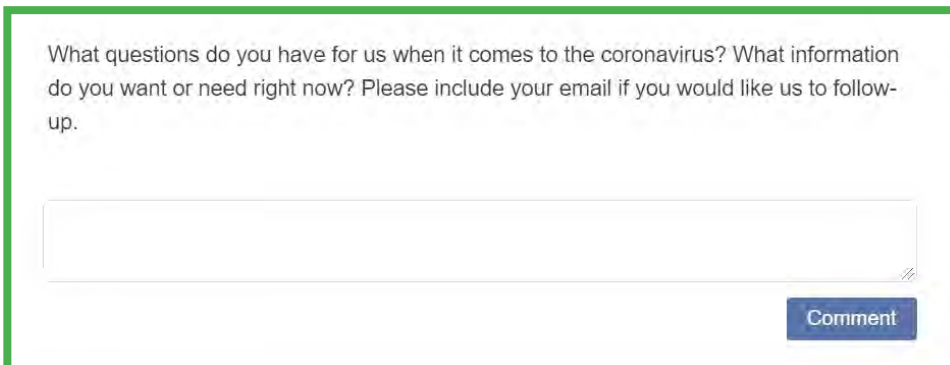
We had two separate embeds in 2020: one COVID and one election. In the middle of each story related to COVID there was a box that said, "What questions do you have about the coronavirus? Is there anything we can help answer for you? Please share your email address if you want to follow it up." We did the same thing for the elections.

For the coronavirus, we had well over 1,000 comments or questions. The election one was open for maybe six months and we only got like 150. So it shows that people were in need of more information on the coronavirus.

Through those embeds we were able to identify the big topics this year: People needed information on unemployment insurance, people needed information on how to look through and read coronavirus data.

We did a whole Facebook Live on questions we had gotten through the embed on how to effectively read information from the state's (COVID-19) dashboard to identify how they can make decisions about their lives.

After people had their 26 weeks of unemployment, people would ask, "Hey, do I qualify for extended benefits through unemployment insurance in Indiana?"





I was able to send that question onto our work-force reporter. He was able to provide me some really good information. So then I was able to email those people directly back, "I checked with our reporter and yes you qualify. Here's an article you can read about it and here's where you can read what the state has to say about it."

So I was able to provide them links, give them a personalized email back. People responded with surprise!

How do you promote your texting club?

We put together a little television promo, we put it into radio scripts. In our story embeds we put in a little box asking people: "If you want to keep in touch with us, we have a text group, text 'elections' to 73224."

Every Friday our digital producer was a guest on the talk show and she was able to talk it up. When we did our Facebook live events, we'd always have a plug at the end of that. I had it in my signature line in my email. Anywhere that we can help spread the word we would!

We asked people to provide their ZIP codes when they joined so we could identify where we had members, and where we didn't. So the idea was that we were going to take some time

to be at community events in those parts of the state with few members.

We were able to do an exit survey with the texting club, asking "Was this helpful to you at all?" We got about 200 responses, which I was pleased with, and 85% of the people said it was helpful.

How do you measure success?

Putting goals on engagement work takes time and it's not always about numbers, we've learned. When we started the text club we wanted to make sure that we were able to create those direct ties from questions and comments people had to our content.

When we have our virtual discussions on Facebook, I view engagement from those as how many people are sharing questions. So if we have a hundred viewers and no one asks a question or is liking anything or reacting, then that's kind of a fizzle. I want people to be engaged. But if we have 20 people and we receive five questions from the people watching, I feel happy.

So it's making sure that we're getting something out of people: "What's in your head? We want your questions. We want you to somehow



Join Our New Health-Focused Text Group

It's more important than ever for journalists to listen to their communities. To join the 'Midwest Checkup' text group, text "health" to 73224.

[LEARN MORE](#)



share something with us.” That’s always kind of what it comes down to with engagement work. There’s no better feeling than making connections with people that might not have happened otherwise.

How do you track what you receive?

I use Google spreadsheets that are updated at least once per week. For questions that are embedded in our stories, I have columns track the generalized topic, the date the question was received, and our response. We also track our text group activity by tracking our prompt, the date it was sent and the number of responses. When we do listening sessions as a team, I track the date, time, who was included and any output.

At the end of the year I pull ZIP codes from engagement so we know the geographies we are reaching.

Everyone on my team has access to the spreadsheets. I also do a weekly update to share major themes and questions. Here is what I shared this week for example:

What people were asking in your stories last week, Jan 4-10:

Unemployment:

- Folks were looking for claim and voucher submission info, payments updates. Overpayment concerns. Complaints about DWD management.
- Several questions about CARES Act and newest stimulus. What is the same? What is different? Especially with unemployment qualifications.

Vaccines (Most answered in recent spots and FAQ updates):

- Are there any plans to give priority to people with disabilities, disease, essential workers?
- Is there enough communication coming from the state to reach people with vaccine info?
- When and where can I get it?
- Comparison with other states.
- Indiana has about 6 million residents. A 95% efficacy means over 300,000 Hoosiers will not be effectively vaccinated. My question is how can I determine if I have sufficient antibodies? Can I get a blood test to determine this after about 14 days after my second “booster” shot?

Randoms:

- Can you please include the Bill No. when you write?
- Two questions on the death data misinformation circulating



If you want to launch a Spanish language show, see these lessons from New Hampshire Public Radio

by Rob St. Mary, America Amplified contributor

In 2020, New Hampshire Public Radio launched a concerted effort to meet the information needs of the state’s Spanish-speaking audience. The effort led by reporter Daniela Allee resulted in a daily newscast, translated into Spanish, that’s gaining audience via WhatsApp.

Allee is host of [NHPR’s “¿Qué Hay de Nuevo, New Hampshire?”](#) She says that when engaging a new community, “be humble — accept the critiques that come your way. Listen. You’re not the expert in that community or that neighborhood — it’s a learning process.”



Daniela Allee

Turns out, New Hampshire is a news desert for Spanish speakers. A free Spanish language paper based in neighboring Massachusetts recently stopped publishing. Boston media provided occasional news. In the middle of a pandemic and with an important election looming, this wasn’t enough.



A news desert for Spanish speakers

New Hampshire is often labeled one of the whitest in the nation — the 2010 Census showed that just about 4 percent of its 1.3 million residents speak Spanish. The 2020 census is expected to see growth for both Spanish speakers as well as for other people of color in the state.

But numbers weren’t the drivers of this effort.

Allee was hired at NHPR to cover the western part of the state. As a child of immigrants from Columbia, Allee was also personally interested in how the state’s Spanish-speaking community gets its information.

“As a public radio station our mission is to serve the public. So, if we are only thinking of the public in New Hampshire as majority white, majority English speakers then... then I don’t think we’re really serving the whole public,” Allee explained. “So, to me, it’s a matter of actually living up to the mission of public radio.”

Don’t assume you know what’s needed

NHPR had some experience. For the 2018 election, the station created a voter guide in Spanish for the first time — a critical service because the state’s election laws do not require it to provide ballots in various languages. This guide was the beginning of the station’s efforts to engage the state’s Spanish-speaking community.



In early 2020, Allee said leadership at NHPR expanded the effort by asking the question: “What do people need to know now and how might that information be useful to their decision making.”

“It was just part of the mentality from the very beginning — go directly to the people who would be using this rather than just trying to assume what would be the best way to get it done,” Allee said.

Covering immigrant communities is not Allee’s beat. But because of her interest and her connections, doors were opened. Being a Spanish speaker with immigrant parents helped people relate to her.

She began by calling churches holding Spanish-language Mass as well as bakeries and restaurants owned by Latin American immigrants. Allee also found sources from colleagues who had done previous stories in the community.

She created a list of about 15 to 20 community leaders and members who would meet with her twice a month to talk about what’s happening in the community and to review NHPR reporting. She said this was important to creating trust with a community who didn’t have a relationship with the station.

Meeting the audience where they are: on WhatsApp

On April 30, 2020, the first episode of “¿Qué Hay de Nuevo, New Hampshire?” went live.

“The first day that this went on the air, we published, it was like ‘wow, it finally feels like I’m doing something that has a tangible purpose for people,’” said Allee.

Allee realized one platform could help boost

their efforts: WhatsApp. The messenger app, which has about 68 million users in the U.S., allows for voice and video calls as well as text, video and photo sharing. It is widely used by the Spanish-speaking community.



“Whenever I talk to the sources I have in the community, it’s through WhatsApp. That’s what I use to talk with my family,” said Allee. “It’s a platform people are already familiar with so rather than trying to get people to come to the NHPR website to listen, we’ll just send it to them and they can listen at their leisure. They understand the app, they are familiar with it, they can forward it along to their friends and family.”



The show audio is also posted on the station's website as well as its Facebook page.

Why you need resources, and where it can come from

"¿Qué Hay de Nuevo?" began with grant funding. In June, it picked up two sponsors — an immigration law firm and a local college.

"From a marketing perspective people understand that the Latino population is growing and that's something that they want to reach and market to," Allee said. "There's awareness and I'm pleasantly surprised that we have two underwriters for a show that is only three months old."

Doing engagement around and producing a weekday program could be Allee's full-time job. It's not. She has to balance it with her regional reporting duties. Allee soon realized the show needed extra help and brought on a part-time producer Maria Aguirre.



Maria Aguirre

"And that's how we have our amazing producer Maria, a grad student at Northeastern, currently living in Ecuador," explained Allee. "It takes about two-and-a-half to three hours to put this newscast together every day. She does 85% of

the work. I just edit the script, voice it and listen to the mix. She does the translating, audio editing and mixing, and then someone else on staff sends out the message via WhatsApp. If it were just up to one person I think it would take up to 4 hours a day."

Be transparent, own up to criticism

For newsrooms wanting to engage with new communities, Allee said there are several things to consider. Recognizing that mistakes may have been made in the past is an important first step.

In preliminary conversations with the community she heard criticism.

"You guys just want to talk to us when suddenly Latinos are in vogue or something bad has happened — and I think that is a very fair criticism, in particular around election time," she said. "So, we recognize that and just kind of own up to it. And this is why we think it's important to be meeting with you consistently so that we're not just showing up when it's a bad moment or when we have decided that you are now finally a priority for our coverage."

Allee said she'd like to see the show, and NHPR reporting in general, broaden its scope when covering Latino communities, and do stories that showcase the full range of people's lives.

"Sometimes the focus can be pretty heavily on immigration or challenges of living here as an undocumented person, which are all important stories to tell, but it feels like that's the overarching narrative of being a Latino in this country," she said. "I would love to have stories about everyday life in this community... and that we get to see and hear from people in their full complexity as a person and not just from their ethnic or racial identity that they have to speak to every time they talk to a journalist."



7

takeaways from NHPR's Spanish outreach efforts

New Hampshire Public Radio launched a daily WhatsApp newscast. Its success so far is due to creating a meaningful community relationship. Here's how it happened.

1. Build ties with coverage.

Reporter Daniela Allee had been covering Spanish-speaking communities for 2 years and cultivated relationships during that time. She is now part of the team producing the WhatsApp newscast.

2. Meet communities where they are to build trust.

Daniela visited Latino bakeries, churches and attended sporting events, such as the 2018 World Cup watch parties, to listen to community concerns and be more familiar to them.

3. Find like-minded partners with similar goals.

NHPR is part of the Granite State News Collaborative, which is interested in providing better community news to Spanish speakers. The network helps coordinate regular meetings with Spanish-speaking community leaders.

4. Put yourself in the role of the audience.

Does the story serve a need in this community? Can it help them make decisions? NHPR writer/producer Maria Aguirre curates the content for the WhatsApp newscast with an eye for usefulness and relevance.

5. Identify the relevant platform.

Instead of assuming a community will listen to your station if you air stories, find where they are already connecting and sharing information. Daniela was already using WhatsApp and knew several community members who did, too. So NHPR created a newscast on that platform.

6. Partner with community leaders to get feedback.

NHPR worked with its community advisory group to workshop their explainer page about how to subscribe to WhatsApp. They used the community's input to make it better.

7. Set simple metrics as goals.

If you're trying to reach a specific community, start with existing data. NHPR knew from the Census that 40,000 Latinos live in New Hampshire. They set a subscriber goal of a percentage of the number of Latinos in their coverage area



Daniela Allee



Maria Aguirre

This guide was put together by the America Amplified team from a webinar led by Daniela Allee and Maria Aguirre of NHPR.

You can email Daniela at dallee@nhpr.org or Maria at msaguirre28@gmail.com.

To watch the webinar, visit www.americaamplified.org/guides.





Facebook Live en Español: KUNR's efforts to fill a need and grow an audience

by Rob St. Mary, America Amplified contributor

When COVID-19 arrived in the United States in the spring of 2020, stations working on community engagement efforts were faced with a challenge — stop their efforts completely or move from real world to digital events. One station in Nevada found a way to build upon previous efforts, leverage partnerships, and create new opportunities to focus on a growing segment of its community.






Natalie Van Hoozer

Growing and underserved

According to the 2010 Census, about 24% of households in the Reno, Nevada, area are of Hispanic or Latin-American heritage, an increase of about 6% since the 2000 Census. While an ethnic background does not automatically mean Spanish is the primary language in the home, it does mean there's a population

there with information needs.

"We know that there's a large news gap between what's available in English and what's available in Spanish. We have a couple local Spanish language newspapers but they have small teams and there are few daily news sources in Spanish [in the Reno area]. Traditional outlets are not really serving the needs of the

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KUNR Public Radio, Washoe County


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community,” said Natalie Van Hoozer, a bilingual reporter at KUNR who started working in Spanish language at the station while a student.

Text and audio reporting in Spanish are currently offered on the KUNR’s website. The station formalized bilingual reporting through a student internship program in 2016 with *Noticiero Móvil*, a student staffed bilingual newsroom at the University of Nevada-Reno’s Reynolds School of Journalism.

“That program in 2016-2017 was really focused on event journalism. We’d have different listening parties with the community where we would set up in a room at a restaurant in town, invite different community members to come listen to our stories and ask questions, and offer suggestions for things that we could cover. With the pandemic all that [in person work] has pretty much dwindled,” said Van Hoozer.

Reopening schools & election information via Facebook Live

Engaging local Spanish speakers in the digital space started to take shape in the late summer of 2020. Van Hoozer and her team, along with help from the Mountain West News Bureau, produced a series of Facebook live events in Spanish around COVID-19 and [the reopening of schools](#) as well as a discussion about [the voting process](#) in the 2020 election.

The two live discussions not only provided critical information but also a platform where Spanish speaking people could get answers to their questions about both topics.

Van Hoozer says it is important to take the time to do enough outreach to bring the audience to these discussions. “I’ve tried not to

do it in less than three weeks because of that outreach component. I know that we need time to send out emails to community members and do individual follow up with different people to try to make sure that we’re reaching an audience.”

Van Hoozer also explained that promotional materials and graphics need to be created in both languages. On the day of the event, she produced an event script and sent out questions in advance to guests so they were prepared for the discussion.

“If we did get questions [during the event] then we would pivot to those and I’d direct those to the right guest on the spot. We knew we wanted our events to be at least a half an hour in order to give people time to trickle in and we really didn’t want it to be more than an hour,” Van Hoozer explained.

Building partnerships to drive engagement

Partnerships are critical to building not just an audience but goodwill and long-term communication between a newsroom and a community that has not typically been top of mind for a station. KUNR partnered with Latinos de Nevada for the first Spanish language event and then with the Nevada Independent’s Spanish page for the second one.

“Part of it was trying to find community organizations to partner with that also have a presence virtually to help reach their audience and, hopefully, more Spanish speakers that way. We made sure to set it up so that the Facebook Live event was cross streamed on our page and our event partner’s page so that both audiences would get a notification that the page was live for an event,” Van Hoozer said.



KUNR also worked to promote the event through the social media accounts of the speakers highlighted in the events. They printed out flyers and shared them throughout the community. They worked with Noticiero Móvil to compile a list of community members who might be interested and sent out email blasts in English and Spanish a week or so before the event, and followed up a day before and the day of.

Consistency builds community

One-off events are far less effective in terms of engagement than consistent, scheduled events that demonstrate to the community that the newsroom is seeking to engage over the long term.

Moreover, newsrooms should have a clear idea of who they want to reach and why: “I would recommend any station or news director have a clear, consciously thought out motivation for why you want to do this outreach. I’ve found it easier to find people who would be a good fit [as guests] if we know exactly what purpose we want the event to serve. So being very intentional about that I think is important and, in my experience, even more so with work in Spanish because we have a community here that’s battling misinformation in Spanish being sent on social media,” Van Hoozer said.

The results of this kind of engagement may not be immediate.

“We’re trying to offer a service to community members who would not expect to get this kind of information from us. Even now a lot of people who speak Spanish would never think to go to their local NPR station for any news in Spanish. It’s just not part of NPR’s identity or English language radio. So even though it’s been a couple years we know there’s still a lot of work that needs to be done as far

as reaching people and then seeing that in a cyclical pattern of coming back to us as far as with engagement and feedback. [KUNR’s Station manager and news director] understand this is a long haul process that we are working on,” Van Hoozer said.



The community as assignment editor: A conversation with Detroit's Outlier Media

by Rob St. Mary, America Amplified contributor

Sarah Alvarez started in civil rights law before becoming a senior producer and reporter for [Michigan Radio](#), the Ann Arbor-based NPR affiliate. Believing that journalism is a service that should be responsive to the needs of all, Alvarez wanted to find a way to fill the information and accountability gaps in communities where those things are needed the most, typically low-income neighborhoods.

In 2016 she found it in the palm of her hand by connecting Detroiters to information and engaging them via text.

[Outlier Media](#), founded by Alvarez, is now run by three women of color and one part-time reporter. The organization partners regularly with newsrooms in Detroit while finding new ways to help communities by using cellphones.

To better understand the organization and its efforts, I spoke with [Outlier Media's Executive Director Candice Fortman](#). The interview has been excerpted and edited for clarity.

How did you learn what Detroiters needed?

The first part of the model is that we do an



Candice Fortman



info needs assessment via the SMS text service and we actually pay people. If you take the assessment you get a \$10 gift card to a grocery store of your choosing.

We want to figure out what people are worried about and concerned about and need information about today. When you ask the question in that way people are telling you what they need to survive, not to thrive.

We're not asking people do they need more arts and culture reporting? We are asking people what do you need in order to make it to the next day, next week, next month and that's where we get to the issue areas that we cover.

"I always say that the community of Outlier users are the assignment editors...they tell us the direction that we go in and that's the direction we head."



What do you mean by the community being your assignment editor?

The nine areas of coverage for us are all based on what our audience has told us are their information needs. We didn't decide what those beats are going to be, we work with our audience and they tell us what those beats will be. Which means that over time our beats will change, they are not stagnant.

So, last year we were only doing housing and utilities reporting. This year, with the COVID coming into Detroit the way it has, that has expanded to seven additional topic areas. That's because those were the things Detroiters needed in order to be able to feel like they were surviving in place.

The first thing that we offer them is information. So, we never go in seeking information first, which is typically how relationships are set up between newsrooms and communities.

So, when you get a text message from Outlier or you reach out to Outlier natively you'll get a menu of options of things you might be coming to us to get information about. Everything from housing to food and from child abuse and elder neglect to jobs and unemployment. Then, always in the menu options, is that final option to speak directly to a reporter because what we find is that sometimes people need information, they might already have the information, but, what they're really looking for is for someone they can trust to say "the thing that you're deciding to do is the right thing to do."

What are the hard questions newsrooms need to answer about themselves?

When approaching these communities, newsrooms need to decide if they actually value

these voices or just want more stories? Do you actually value these voices or you just want more access funding, which requires finding more diverse voices? If the answers to those two questions are not aligned with you caring about the voices then it doesn't matter what model your newsroom uses. Eventually the model won't work because no one will really care about the value in the voices that the models bring you. They won't care about the information needs of those communities, the value of the diversity in opinions that those models bring you.

How are you going to address communities that come to you and say "*where have you been?*" because they are likely to ask you that question and you need to have real answers for them.

The other thing you're going to need to have is a plan in place for how that won't happen once your listening project is done. Because oftentimes people are doing listening projects attached to a particular editorial project as opposed to how the editorial lens of their newsroom will work. So, communities know when you're just pulling resources out of them with no intention to put anything back long term. There will always be some extraction — that's the nature of journalism. But, our hope is that we are always leaving as much as we take out.

The stories that emerge

- A mother trying to help her HIV positive son who was to be paroled from a Michigan prison. His parole was delayed and as a result, he contracted COVID-19 in prison. That became [a piece from Bridge](#).
- Texts asking about Michigan's eviction moratorium during the pandemic and how people in hotels or AirBnB rents



were not covered. That story was recently [reported by Detour Detroit](#).

Those were stories we were able to tell because one individual had a problem but it highlights a systemic issue that needed to be solved at the state policy level... those would have been stories we would not have found unless people knew they could directly come to us. We are trying to push journalism to a place where it is valuable to the communities that have been underserved for so long.



Why this editor is 'addicted' to community engagement after hosting listening sessions

Kate Concannon is the Managing Editor of the Mountain West News Bureau, a collaboration of public media stations that serve the Rocky Mountain States of Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Montana and Wyoming. In 2020, the MWNB was part of the America Amplified initiative and hosted listening sessions as part of their engagement strategies.



What was your timeline?

Going into the 2020 election year, we had hoped to host town hall style events, but of course those plans changed because of the pandemic. We hosted our first virtual listening session in July 2020, and then hosted about one per month after that.

In lieu of hearing from community members in person in one community, we were able to invite a cross-section of community members from towns and cities across the Mountain West. That was a positive. On the other hand, hosting an event over Zoom limits who can participate, which is obviously a negative.

What did you do with what you learned in the sessions?

We gathered as a team after the sessions and talked about the themes and discussion that came up in breakout rooms, and processed as a group what we had learned. From there, reporters reached out and followed up individually with attendees if they wanted to interview them for a story. Importantly, we hosted these sessions before we launched our coverage of a topic or a theme, so the input and ideas from sources could inform our reporting from the onset.

We were able to produce spots and features that we might not otherwise have heard about. And in some cases, we were able to call on sources who we met during listening sessions for follow-up interviews, and those stories made it to broadcast.

For example, one Boise source talked about the disparity between COVID-19 cases in white and Black communities, and we ended up interviewing her for a spot after that. Another source seeded the idea of how the arts are struggling in our region. We turned that into a story as well.

How did you work with other stations and how much time did reporters devote to this?

We partnered with some of our member stations in the Mountain West (Wyoming Public Media, Boise State Public Radio, KUNC in northern Colorado, KUNR in Reno, Nevada), who helped advertise the sessions on social media and radio promos. We also partnered with the [Local Voices Network](#) to help produce our last session about policing in the Mountain West. In both cases, the partnerships went well and didn't consume much time.

We had a community engagement producer organizing the sessions and conducting outreach for the events, so our reporting and editing



staff were able to remain focused on other responsibilities. At the most, reporters had to take time away from their usual responsibilities on the day of the listening session so they could be there and facilitate a breakout room, but that was only a couple of hours.

The experience taught me the importance of having a full-time community engagement producer on staff. Yes, as reporters and editors we can adjust and incorporate community engagement into our everyday planning and reporting. However, it's a distinctive role with its own set of unique skills that is well-served by having a full-time person on staff. The support of America Amplified allowed us to do

that — and now I'm addicted!

What's your takeaway from hosting listening sessions?

Not only are these sessions valuable for gathering story ideas and source contacts, these events show our community that we are accessible and genuinely want to hear about their insights and experiences. During this pandemic, when we often feel disconnected from one another, these events serve as a vital line for our newsroom to stay in touch with our community.

Advice for hosting your own listening sessions:

- Consider hosting a listening session before you begin a big project. That way you're fresh to the story and the direction of your coverage can come from what you hear. Listening sessions with both Mountain West communities and law enforcement officers in the region helped inform and shape our series: [*Elevated Risk: Police Violence In The Mountain West*](#). It's about how our region has the highest rate of fatal encounters with the police in the entire country.
- Decide ahead of time whether you want these sessions to be on the record or off the record — there are advantages to both, depending on the issue.
- Break into small groups so everyone gets a chance to share.
- Start off with informal questions to break the ice.
- Don't have a hard script but definitely bullet points so you stay on track.
- Have community members ask one another questions so the conversation is more a round table, rather than a ping pong between facilitator and participants.



How KCUR added critiquing their own content into the newsroom process

by Donna Vestal

Donna Vestal is America Amplified's Managing Director. She is a veteran editor who has devoted the last 10 years of her career to public media collaborations at NPR affiliate KCUR 89.3 FM, first as founding editor for Harvest Public Media and then as Director of Content Strategy for the station.



Public radio stations produce a ton of local content on a wide range of platforms: news features, digital stories, videos, talk shows, newscasts, announcer breaks, promos. But it's difficult to actually listen and read in real time to evaluate how well we are serving communities. News directors and other managers may carve out time to evaluate the work, but we really need more diverse observations to continually improve.

That's why KCUR in 2018 embarked on a year of critically examining its own content.

I assigned two staffers each week to listen carefully to content on all platforms and read carefully through digital content. I usually matched one person from the content team with someone from another part of the organization. Including everyone (including the station manager) helped diversify perspectives and build rapport and enthusiasm.

The two-person teams were not expected to listen to everything, but to listen as much as they could and to try to put themselves in the role of the audience (core and non-core). They were instructed to ask themselves these questions in regard to local audio content, including newscasts, features, talk shows,

and podcasts:

- What was the best moment?
- What was the worst moment?
- Did our work hold your attention? Why or why not?
- What would you like to have heard?
- Do you think KCUR was 'in the moment' most of the time? (Note: Being more 'in the moment' was a stated goal for the year.)
- Any ideas for what we could do better?

Also for the KCUR website:

- What was the best work here?
- What was lacking?
- Is the website content relevant?

Each Monday, the teams from the previous week shared their feedback during the regular staff meeting; many staffers also wrote expansive summaries. Nothing was off the table. I summarized feedback in the weekly staff memo, and would — when warranted — make immediate changes in how content was being created.

More importantly, the staff used this information to adjust job expectations and ultimately



the yearly content plan/goals.

My year-end summary stretched to 1,800 words and included dozens of action items that had more buy-in because they came from staff. For example:

- Reporters: Work with our community engagement team ... ask people what they think and what they want and what they're talking about.
- Don't just react to the many press releases that we get each day, but set our own agenda.
- Make sure if a story is discussed in a news-cast or talk show that the relevant story is back on our home page.
- Daily newsletter: Be careful that it sometimes reads like a liberal media outlet.

Tips for newsrooms

Critiques are a great way to build in time for internal feedback and ensure everyone's voice is heard. You must, though, come up with a plan for how your station can learn from and build off these critiques. Do not let these important observations fall into a vacuum.

In addition to the questions posed by KCUR, your content critiques could incorporate questions along the following lines:

- What communities are we covering?
- What communities are not included in our coverage?
- Who is framing the issue at the center of our stories? The community or the journalist?
- Are we meeting our community/ies' information needs in our content?

You should provide regular summaries of

feedback to the entire organization. This could incorporate both these staff observations and what you are hearing from your audience.

After six months of content critiques, meet with your news leadership team to distill the feedback into three or four priorities for change. Be sure to communicate with the news staff some metrics for changes in content based on those three or four main points. And, of course, welcome further feedback.

Bottom line: Make it a priority to listen to what the people in your organization have to say about your product. And give them the time to focus on the content.



Watch: Local Media Collaboration: How to do it right.

A webinar on how Side Effects Public Media and the Indianapolis Recorder continue to strengthen their partnership.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1K1Nea1fJ4>



PRINT AND PIN ON YOUR DESK FOR EASY REFERENCE

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?



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR

NEWS MANAGERS/EDITORS

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.



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.



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 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.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR

NEWS MANAGERS/EDITORS

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.



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.



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.



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!

www.americaamplified.org

Reporters and Producers



“Spending a couple minutes entering my sources at the end of each day forces me to see my failings on a regular basis ... source tracking is a critical tool to seeing my patterns and pushing me in the right direction.”

Celia Llopis-Jepsen

Kansas News Service reporter

Read about Llopis-Jepsen’s work on page 78



How community engagement flips the script on producing and reporting

As a reporter, you understand that your journalism depends upon engaging with a wide range of sources to get to truth and understanding. That often means paying keen attention to and developing relationships with people in power, focusing on their motivations and observations.

Community engagement journalism asks you to flip the script in your approach to coverage. Listen, listen and listen again to community members' concerns and aspirations, what they say they need from powerful people and institutions, and what strengths they celebrate as a community.

Maybe you already approach your stories this way, whether for an in-depth investigation or daily event coverage. But challenge yourself to go further. Whether you're well-versed or new to community engagement journalism, this chapter will help you learn more about your blindspots and biases, try new things and take an innovative approach to your coverage.

The strategies, tools and personal stories from the field presented here will help you:

- Identify and overcome personal biases that affect your work
- Meaningfully connect and foster trust with the communities you cover
- Deepen your understanding of communities and therefore pave the way for better journalism
- Cultivate feedback loops with long-lasting benefits to your journalism and your newsroom

The Community Engagement Journalism cycle





Community engagement reporting is a continuous cycle — the antithesis of parachute journalism. When you engage with a community to start a new relationship, it should not be a one-and-done experience. You should seek feedback, continue to engage and report more stories with greater impact.

IDENTIFY GAPS IN COVERAGE ... AND LISTEN

This discovery process can seem overwhelming. Through your regular reporting, whether on a beat or project or talk show, you're already engaging in a discovery process just by interviewing sources and generating content. But a community engagement approach requires taking a critical dive into your current work, personal biases and coverage decisions.

Consider these important steps.

Acknowledge your biases and don't even think about stories (yet)

We all have biases. That's natural, because we're all influenced by our experiences. The problem is that we often unknowingly let our biases shape our stories and affect who we cover. Take time to [understand your own perspective](#) with this free Poynter course. Take time to understand what white privilege is [with this piece](#) from Wellesley College. Know your blindspots and develop systems to help recognize and counter them.

Audit your last 10 stories using a source diversity tracker

America Amplified has a source diversity tracker you can adapt if your newsroom does not already provide this information. (See Source Diversity Tracker in Appendix A.) You also can advocate for your newsroom to adopt such a tool.

As you analyze your work, pay attention to your implicit bias — who do you interview, when and why? For example, NPR conducted a source diversity audit in 2019 that revealed the network was increasing racial source diversity; however, the majority of those sources were in stories about race. Prioritize diversity across the board, in all coverage.

Compare the diversity in your coverage, revealed by your audit, with the demographic makeup of your coverage area. Through a source audit in 2020, WABE in Atlanta discovered that its arts reporting featured a majority of white sources, even though it broadcasts in a majority African American city.

Set specific goals for diversity in your coverage

We know it's not enough just to identify your biases and blindspots. Take your findings from your source audit and set personal goals. Your news manager may also be setting newsroom goals for diversity.



Be proactive and look at those goals before you pick up the phone to make calls on a story. For example, if your audit revealed to you that you mostly engaged with sources who identify as men, you could set a goal to increase your engagement with women and gender non-conforming sources by 30 percent.

Hone in on a community you want to engage with

So your source audit showed you who you're NOT talking to. Use that as a starting point for your coverage moving forward. See the Community Portrait Worksheet on page 164 in Appendix C for how you can better understand the communities you want to reach.

Think about communities overlooked by your station as a whole, or maybe even by local media at large. Here are a few approaches you could take:

- **Analyze demographic trends.** The American Community Survey keeps tabs on age, income, race, size of households, population growth and decline. Is there a population in your community that is underrepresented in your current coverage?
- **Analyze political trends.** Look at historical data of counties to see over time how voters have shifted (or not) for candidates. Particularly for areas that are solidly “red” or solidly “blue”, this is an opportunity to complicate a community's narrative with your coverage.
- **Assess news deserts.** Many communities no longer have local news outlets. Is there one near you that could use your attention?
- **Identify language barriers.** What are the dominant languages in your community? Are certain groups underrepresented in coverage?

Reach out and meet people where they are

- **Connect with community fixers/influencers/leaders.** Start a conversation about what is missing in news coverage. (See tips on how to identify those community influencers on page 88.)
- **Identify a community group to partner with to convene a community conversation.** This could be a neighborhood association or faith organization, in person or virtually. You could even join in on a previously scheduled event. The topic can be simple to start: What's missing in news coverage about your community? What issues are important to you?
- **Dig into social media.** Look at Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist to see what people are buying and selling in your area. Join Facebook Groups of communities you'd like to cover.
- **Invite questions through digital channels.** Use Google forms, email, voicemail, social media to invite people to send you questions.
- **Try direct mail or posting flyers.** Certain methods resonate more with certain communities. Physical mail or flyers posted in popular areas in the community can be very effective, especially if you include a photo of yourself, the reporter, your contact info and that you're interested in learning about the community. (See Direct Mail/Flyers on page 126 in Appendix B.)



- **Circulate a survey.** Ask your digital team if they can make a station URL redirect to your version of the survey — or if that’s not an option, try making a custom bit.ly link — and include the link in your direct mail/flyers, on-air promos, social media posts, pretty much any of the above strategies.

Acknowledge your blindspots upfront and be respectful

Cultural competency is an ongoing process, and none of us is an expert in every culture or community. On top of that, not all communities or individuals within a cultural group share the same customs. Just be humble and remain open to learning and adapting your behavior. And most importantly, openly acknowledge that you’re not the expert here, and that you’re actively interested in learning from the community. E.g. I am new here, and I want to make sure I’m being respectful. Please don’t hesitate to stop me if I’m overstepping, or if there’s something I need to do or say differently.

Here are some things to consider:

- **Gender:** For some communities, it may not be customary to have private conversations one-on-one with someone of a different gender.
- **Generation:** Some cultures put a high value on generational deference.
- **Race:** Race is a powerful identity fault line. Be aware of systemic inequity and histories of oppression. Know the role media has played in perpetuating and exacerbating painful stereotypes, injustice and oppression, especially if there are specific examples in the community/-ies you’ll be engaging with. (News flash: there are!)
- **Language:** Of course, it’s easiest for people to communicate in their first language. If you don’t speak the language, consider bringing along a colleague who does, or finding a community member who is willing to translate. Also, consider investing in learning a new language, and asking your news manager for support.
- **Politics:** Polarization is significant, even [the way we talk about “discussion” is different](#). Trust that most people have their positions because they care about something, their family, their future, etc. As in all source interactions, practice empathy.

ENGAGE AND REPORT

The process of community engagement journalism can be uncomfortable for content producers and editors. The approach requires an openness to the possibilities and leads you’ll encounter from continually showing up and connecting with community members. As you get ready to dive in and tell stories, don’t overthink it. Follow where your sources lead, and be experimental with how you tell stories and how you present them.



ENGAGE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Be patient

Building trust takes time. With that in mind, enter the space (physical or digital) with an open mind and a willingness to believe whatever the community members share with you. Maybe their information is inaccurate. Rather than correcting them, focus on finding out how they came to this idea and developed this perspective.

Ariel Worthy

WESA reporter

“It can be kind of time consuming because when you are simply trying to build trust with a community that sometimes means you will literally just be there to listen and get to know a person. As a reporter sometimes your whole goal is to get the story so sometimes you feel like, ‘I came out there and I got nothing from it.’ But you’re actually getting a lot because trust is such an important factor in a story. It is OK to just go out to these communities and just listen.”

Read more from reporter Ariel Worthy on page 79.

Try this:

- **Put your recorder away, at first.** Consider beginning your time with this community/-ies off the record. It’s a great way to establish accountability and transparency right off the bat.
- **Be a human.** Be yourself, be down to earth. When prepping your questions, take a moment to consider, “how might I answer this? Would I take issue with this framing?” If you can’t think of how you’d answer, toss it!
- **Embrace the silence.** Let sources have more time than your instincts allow to fully develop and share their thoughts — welcome and embrace the silence that might come in a moment when someone is figuring out how they feel and what they want to say.
- **Throw away your assumptions.** Invite your sources to introduce themselves the way they’re most comfortable. Give people space to define what “community” means to them/how they identify. Their answers will surprise you, and they’ll appreciate the agency you’re providing them.

The Maynard Institute offers training on recognizing your personal bias around the fault lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, generation, geography and class, as they apply to journalists, newsroom collaboration and coverage. Poynter offers free training on examining your own assumptions about race and ethnicity. (For more on this, see Appendix B.)



- **Be open to creating a new, vast network.** Ask each source you meet for recommendations for others to talk to.

Use throughline questions

Having a set of questions that you want to ask different audiences can help you find a theme (or not) among the different people you're meeting. As an example, America Amplified reporters asked versions of these questions in 2020: "What's something you want people to know about your community?" and "Where do you get your news and information?" You can also use this as a way of bringing disparate communities together. Based on answers, you could bring sources or communities together for group discussions on or off air.

Use social media

Social media is free and easy, use it. Ask questions of your followers, crowdsource, DM people you want to talk to. (See Social Media on page 123 in Appendix B for ideas.) Ask community leaders or admins of community groups on Facebook if they'll share a post for you on their pages or in groups, to help you tap into an existing audience that is outside of your personal and professional bubble.

Use other digital tools

Does your newsroom use texting or a platform like Hearken to solicit questions? If so, use it, too! If you don't have Hearken, a Google Form embedded in a story will work. Try out specific prompts using those digital tools, and keep track of what format, topic, medium provokes the most response.

Remember to meet people where they are. Find a medium that the community you want to reach already feels comfortable in or communicates in regularly. For instance, New Hampshire Public Radio launched a Spanish-language newscast/podcast in 2020 that is delivered via WhatsApp.

Convene a listening session

Bring community members together — either virtually or in-person — to talk about a specific issue, or to talk about the strengths of and challenges facing their community. (See Convenings on page 149 in Appendix C for guides to help you host community conversations.)



Sydney Boles

Ohio Valley ReSource reporter, on hosting a Zoom listening session

"It was incredible to watch in real time as young people from two very different regions began to recognize the ways in which their experiences were similar. Given the space to express themselves, the students were curious, generous and vulnerable."



Reflect on what you've heard from the community

Have a spreadsheet, use sticky notes and a big wall/board, find a method that works for you to review and begin to make sense of all the notes you've taken or the responses you've gotten, conversations and observations on and off mic. This is where you can begin to identify stories to report, draft follow up questions, etc. Revisit the Community Portrait Worksheet (See page 164 in Appendix C) to keep it up to date with what you learn.

IT'S TIME TO REPORT

Let the community be your assignment editor

One of the most important pieces of this puzzle is letting the community tell you what the story is, rather than entering the community with the story in mind.

Ed Mahon

WITF reporter

"We weren't going into that trip with a specific story in mind, we were really trying to just listen to as many people as possible."

Read more about his work in Erie, Pennsylvania on page 82.

To invite this, make asking general questions part of every interview; e.g. "Outside of this issue, is there anything I or my colleagues should also be paying attention to?"

Then pursue the stories the community has identified as most important. Don't overthink it.

Don't forget to report on the joys, celebrations and strengths of a community

Approach engagement with new communities by listening for joy and strength in addition to needs and problems. But, as always, let the community take the lead. Don't force a narrative. If a community is grieving, don't push joy. Make a commitment to tell the good and the bad, and in doing so, you'll foster trust. In Sacramento, California, CapRadio's jesikah maria ross [used this participatory journalism approach](#) in engaging with one specific neighborhood.

Be prepared for editorial challenges

Here are some challenges you may face, and some advice on how to tackle them:

- **You've received several responses to your engagement, but no common thread is emerging, or maybe the responses are too vague.**
 - ♦ One person is concerned about "schools," another about "safety," another about "the environment," but there's little focus. You're going to have to dig in more. Pick two or



three responses that seem like they might work best and follow up directly with that person/those people and ask more questions. Your goal is to get them into storytelling mode and learn more.

- ◆ Another option is to take the top two or three responses and ask that community and your audience to rank which is most important to them. This kind of follow up was utilized by [The Tyee](#) in British Columbia or the [Curious City](#) model.
- **People just aren't responding to your prompts.**
 - ◆ Consider engaging through a different tool or method or platform. Maybe your initial idea didn't resonate or reach this community. Try a different method for connecting to this audience. For instance, if a listening session didn't work, try flyers, direct mail or something else.
 - ◆ Loop back with your community influencer/liaison and any partner organizations and ask for advice. What would they recommend?
 - ◆ Reach out to the participants and ask them about other people they'd recommend connecting with and talk with those folks.
- **Your responses have yielded several great potential stories.**
 - ◆ Turn on your editorial skills and resource awareness: What, of these suggestions, will have the most impact for this community? What resources do you have to address these needs? Again, especially on the first engagement, consider leaning into your strengths (beats/previous reporting experiences) so you know you have the greatest chance to deliver impact.
 - ◆ Make a commitment to telling multiple stories, and set a timeline for yourself and try to prioritize stories that need immediate attention.

Hold people accountable, including the community itself

The work you do is at the service of the community and your audience. The produced work (features, web posts, social media posts, events, etc.) should be laser focused on addressing the community's expressed questions, needs, aspirations. To that end, hold people and the systems they operate accountable:

- **Misinformation:** Journalists are positioned to set the record straight, without bias. In doing this work people might express views that are inaccurate. First listen and try to understand how they came to this idea and developed this perspective. Then do work that tells the story of how this misinformation came to be, of course, being exceptionally clear why it's misinformation (show your work).
- **People in power/decision makers:** Maybe there's a very specific problem that the community has identified. Address that very specific concern. Take that concern to the people in power. Ask, what's taken so long? What's standing in the way? Maybe there's a community-based solution to this specific problem. If there is, be the catalyst that brings those people together to



address that goal. Outlier Media in Detroit is a good example (page 51) of how a media organization works to identify a problem and report on a solution.

Remember these stories are not just for the community you're engaging with

You are serving the community you've engaged with by reporting and following up on the stories that are important to them. But you are also bringing their stories to a broader audience.

CREATE INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGED JOURNALISM

Here's how to apply community engagement to your story format and platform

While radio features may be your bread and butter, some communities get content through Facebook or WhatsApp; others may prefer on-demand digital content. Talk to your editor or news director about the necessity for being nimble and flexible about which platforms and story format is appropriate for which content.

- **Audio features:** Stories that emerge from this process should have a distinctive sound. Experiment with and consider the following:
 - ◆ **Use tape in the lead.** If possible, include a montage of tape in the host intro or lede featuring the voices of people you spoke with, ideally highlighting multiple/contrasting perspectives. This is a way to establish off the bat that you're passing the mic, in a sense. And the more airtime for the people, the better. The story should be sound-rich with as little narration as you can get away with.
 - ◆ **Find ways to be transparent in your script.** Make it clear in your story that this is a different kind of journalism. Consider sharing some of the behind the scenes, like how you partnered with the community, or spent X amount of time discovering what matters most to the community, etc.
 - ◆ **Try recording some narration in the field.** Not only does this sound good, it also can have the effect of subverting the extractive storytelling model, where you swoop in and take a story back with you to the studio. Telling some of the story on the scene can help unravel that false power dynamic. You're not the voice of authority on this community. You're an observer. Narrating some, on the fly, from the field can help make that clear, to that community and your listeners.
 - ◆ **Highlight tape that complicates existing narratives.** Reveal nuance in the perspectives of your sources. Don't always settle for sharing the most extreme view someone shares with you. Instead, in your reporting, follow up and keep asking questions of your source in order to understand where that extreme view/statement comes from. Often this will be a process of unearthing underlying values. By presenting that tape, instead of the extreme soundbite, you're giving your listener a chance to understand what they're hearing and where it comes from.
- **Audio diaries:** Audio diaries are a particularly empowering format for flipping the script, passing the mic and breaking down the power dynamic between journalists and communities.



Here are some tips:

- ◆ **Let people tell their own story.** You've likely produced non-narrated stories before. Much like that, this gives a source the chance to tell their own story in their own voice. But audio diaries take it a step further. Rather than interviewing a source, let them record on their own, like a diary entry.
 - Post a how-to, with instructions that make it easy for anyone to record themselves at home. No detail is too small. [KOSU in Oklahoma's instructions](#) include tips such as: *"Make sure you are in a quiet area to record. Turn your smartphone on silent mode so you will not hear notifications as you record."* It also includes prompt questions. The station also set up an email address for submissions.
 - If you've got the resources, try lending out simple handheld recorders for sources to record "diary entries" to send you on a regular basis.
 - Again, and as always, find what works best for your sources. While some may need the guidance of an interview, others may shine with few prompts recording on their own. Get to know your sources first — start with a pre-interview.

- ◆ **Launch a series.** Certain local or national developments invite an opportunity for this format to shine. When the pandemic hit in 2020, audio diaries became not only the safest and most practical way to keep up with sources, but also they offered a way to elevate personal, human experience stories about a national pandemic and a way for us to reveal shared experiences. Story ideas can emerge from these audio diaries that can inform your future coverage.

KOSU in 2020 [launched an audio diaries project](#) with America Amplified to document oral histories of how Oklahomans were living through the coronavirus. It's a process they refined and extended into 2021.

- **Two-ways:** Especially in the early days when you are focused on listening and learning, record a two-way to share what you're hearing with a fellow reporter or talk show host. This also gives you a chance to be transparent with the audience, share your goals and lay some of the groundwork for what will be an ongoing process with the community. Here are a few tips and ideas:
 - ◆ **You can still prioritize tape in two-ways, so do it!** Introduce listeners to community members.
 - ◆ **Consider doing a two-way with a community member.** That could mean interviewing the community member, or having a fellow reporter or talk show host interview you and the community member together.
 - ◆ **Try flipping the script — invite a community member to interview you in a two-way.** Maybe they could ask you about your process as a journalist, and your goals for engaging with their community, etc.
- **Digital stories:** Getting to know a community and earning their trust takes time. The stories you produce are proof that you're committed. Don't just wait to release a "big story" in an



audio feature; write and post short digital stories along the way. This can be especially beneficial because the folks you're engaging with may not be listeners, and digital stories are great for sharing, on social media for example, and can show your commitment to elevating the stories of this community, big and small. A few things to remember and try out with your digital stories:

- ◆ **Make sure you get good visuals.** Portraits of people or event photos. You can use this on social media, too.
- ◆ **Consider FAQs.** An FAQ is a great option for stories that are complicated, quickly changing or of high interest. It is also the easiest way to turn engagement into a story. By asking the public to send in questions about a topic and answering them, it shows you are responsive. Many newsrooms did this during the pandemic, answering questions about the virus and later, about vaccine distribution. You can solicit questions in various ways, like asking on social media, in your newsletters or through Google forms or Hearken.
- ◆ **Try infographics.** If statistics are integral to your story, produce graphics to enhance your points. In [Mountain West News Bureau's "Elevated Risk" series](#) about police violence in the region, several data visualizations are used to illustrate what they discovered. These graphics are also great for sharing on social. Ohio Valley ReSource used infographics to help [illustrate the voters' political divide](#) and how COVID-19 illnesses were affecting hospital capacity.
- ◆ **Translate the story.** Every city has communities for whom English is not the dominant language. Translating stories that could be useful to these communities is a wonderful public service and form of intentional engagement. Options can range from hiring an intern or contractor, to partnering with a local organization like a university. (See Content In Non-English Languages on page 127 in Appendix B.)
- ◆ **Be transparent: Include a 'Behind the Story' box about how the story came to pass.** Check out [this example from Statelmpact Pennsylvania reporter Min Xian](#). Here are a few questions you could answer:
 - Why did you want to reach this particular community?
 - Why did you decide to hold a town hall, text campaign or listening session?
 - What surprised you about the process?
 - What did you hear from the community about the process?
- **Talk show segments:** Have talk show producers join you in listening sessions and involve them in your process early on. Knowing that you'll likely come across more stories and sources than you alone can highlight, share ideas and contacts with your talk show team.
 - ◆ See the Talk Show Teams chapter on page 93 for more ideas about collaborating on community engagement.



Think outside of the box — be bold

Can you find a way to partner with a community member or group to co-create something? In the summer of 2020, WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, convened a group of Black community leaders to advise the station on guests and topics for a series of virtual community discussions entitled [“Toward Racial Justice.”](#) The community group was the editorial lead for the series, while WITF advised on technical aspects of production. The series was live-streamed on YouTube, and WITF staff did radio features/digital stories out of the episodes.

In Indianapolis, WFYI collaborated with a local newspaper, the Indianapolis Recorder, on a series [“Where do we go from here?”](#) that aired on local television and YouTube. The Recorder, founded in 1895, is one of the oldest African American publications in the country.

CONTINUOUSLY RE-ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES

The most important part of engagement is in the follow-up and follow-through. This is one of the key differences between extractive and engaged journalism. This is how you strengthen a new relationship, how you foster trust and how you show that your newsroom is committed. Holly Edgell of Side Effects Public Media says re-engagement is her favorite part of the cycle: “it’s where we as journalists often drop the ball.”

Share your story with the communities you engaged with

Sharing the story is the bare minimum, and yet, a lot of journalists skip this step. Make it part of your routine, and then take it one step further. In an email follow-up, invite feedback and provide space to share new developments. Here are a few more ideas:

- **Post the story on your Facebook page with a link.** Be conversational. If the story comes from comments you’ve gathered, say that. Go back to the original Facebook post calling for comments and share the story link in the comment section there so those people get notifications about it.
- **On Twitter, tag the people who should see the story, like politicians or cities.** Pin the post to the top of your profile. Go back to your original call-out tweet and post a link to the story in the thread.
- **On Instagram, feature those great visuals.** A quote block will also work.
- **Monitor the comments and responses.** You may find other story ideas. You also want to gauge reaction and respond to questions.

Invite new sources to participate elsewhere

Maybe you’re holding a listening session on another topic, or a Facebook Live event. Send a personalized invitation to your new contacts to join you on this different platform.



Schedule regular check-ins

Create a spreadsheet of the contacts you've made and how often you've contacted them. Set aside time to reach back out to your old and new sources just to catch up. Scheduling regular visits or phone calls will help solidify this part of the engagement process, and you're bound to get story ideas and source recommendations each visit.

Be transparent

Being transparent about how you produced content will build trust with people. Sending the story directly to each source you engaged with — whether they made it into the story or not — is the bare minimum. Consider hosting a listening session where you present the work and solicit honest feedback (both in that moment, but also provide ways for them to provide feedback anonymously afterward). Ask what you missed, what could have been better and be intentional about going through that feedback. Just because you broadcast a feature doesn't mean the community feels heard, recognized or served.



Mary Shedden
WUSF news director

“Fundamentally, we’re trying to change the culture of how we do journalism.”

Don't stop at simply inviting feedback

After soliciting that feedback, plan your follow-up. Did you mischaracterize a person or event? Make a plan for reporting another story to clarify. If there was a serious error, certainly issue a correction; but also try taking it a step further and commit to another story, or maybe even a two-way or interview on your local talk show between you and a source about the error.

Foster virtual communities

Most news outlets have beats: health, immigration, politics. You may discover a topic of high interest not on a beat (see [Seattle Times' Orcas in Peril series](#)). You can gather the contact info of community members you've contacted and create a community around this topic with an email group, text club or social media (Facebook group). Point out that this story, or series of stories, was made possible by ... them! If you're using engagement specific platforms, like Hearken or GroundSource, gather the respondents contact information and send them a follow up.

Keep the connection going

If you're really committed to this community, show it. Make arrangements to do this work again.



Or if you don't have those resources, check in with your closest sources at least twice a year, if not more often. (Put the appointment on your calendar now.) Keep the web version of your question form active and make sure you check it.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

How I took diversity tracking into my own hands

By Celia Llopis-Jepsen

Celia Llopis-Jepsen is a reporter for the Kansas News Service, covering health issues from a consumer perspective, as well as state education policy. She previously worked at the Taipei Times and Topeka Capital-Journal, and brings in-depth experience covering schools. Here she shares how she holds herself accountable on source diversity.

Over the next few years, it will hopefully become standard for public radio stations to keep tabs on how diverse their sources are in features, newscasts and talk shows.

But if your station isn't heading in that direction yet, you can do it on your own.

I found that a simple Excel spreadsheet with just a few columns for demographics does the trick. The "pivot table" tool lets me set up formulas that continually crunch the stats for me as I add sources.

I started this a few years ago and found myself faced with one shameful truth that I anticipated (my sources were much whiter than the state I cover), and a second fact that caught me off guard (my sources were by far mostly men).

This made me a believer that source auditing — both the value and simple tools to carry it out — should be taught at J-schools and implemented in newsrooms. Also, that our own identity doesn't guarantee that we do a good job seeking voices from others of the same background. I'm a woman, but women were underrepresented in my work.



There's no question that when my work better reflects Kansas, it better serves Kansas. Take the issue of nurse practitioners, for example. NPs are critical to expanding health care access. They're more likely than doctors to serve communities of color in Kansas and elsewhere. Communities of color in Kansas are more likely to struggle with health care access. POC community members and nurse practitioners have helped me explain the stakes and impact of health care shortages.

Spending a couple minutes entering my sources at the end of each day forces me to see my failings on a regular basis.

Before the pandemic, it spurred me to spend more time walking the spaces I covered (schools, college campuses, a Statehouse full not just of lawmakers but also advocacy groups seeking to sway them).

Now I cover more places I'm not allowed to enter due to the pandemic, such as nursing homes. But as I rebuild my rolodex for a new beat, source tracking is a critical tool to identify my patterns and push me in the right direction.



Ariel Worthy on her lesson from Pittsburgh's Hill District: Trust takes time

Interview by Rob St. Mary, America Amplified contributor

Ariel Worthy, a reporter for WESA in Pittsburgh, spent 2020 as one of StateImpact Pennsylvania's embedded journalists through the America Amplified initiative.

Worthy is a city government reporter and when she was asked to choose a community to cover for America Amplified, she knew she wanted to focus on a Black community.

She chose the Hill District, Pittsburgh's oldest Black community and home of the famous playwright August Wilson.

From its heyday in the 1950s as a center of Black entertainers and entrepreneurs to its decline from urban renewal, the district spent 30 years without a local grocery store. One finally opened in 2013.

"I felt they have such a rich history and they are so overlooked sometimes that I felt it was important to bring their story out," Worthy said.

She wrote several stories out of her engagement with the community. Here, she talks about how she found the stories and how she earned people's trust.

Starting with the newsroom

Her colleagues at the station put her in touch with former City Council and School Board member Sala Udin.

"I think we talked for about two hours and he



Ariel Worthy

just gave me the entire history of the Hill and about some of the key playmakers in the Hill District and he told me who to connect with. He did give me a heads up that people might be resistant but he said just to tell them that he sent me and they would probably be a bit more receptive if they heard his name," said Worthy.

"A lot of Black residents in Pittsburgh don't exactly trust the media because of the way they have been covered in the past. Usually it was, there was a shooting or somebody went to jail or got arrested and that's it. So they often don't like talking to (the media). So when I heard that I was like 'OK, this is going to be a bit of a challenge' trying to get to know people in the Hill District, and it kind of was."

Lunch with the barber

Udin gave Worthy a list of people to reach out to in the Hill District. The first person Udin mentioned was a barbershop owner.

She said he gave her the runaround for a while, until she decided to ask him to lunch.

That lunch meeting allowed the barber to open up, to talk about his personal history in the Hill District,



and other aspects of his life and the community's.

"He gave me a long list of names of people to connect with and I just started working down that list and as I went down that list they would give me more names. So I just kind of built up my network that way," Worthy said.

Answering 'Why are you here?'

"One thing I really emphasized is that they tell their stories from their perspectives and it's not just me coming in, grabbing something and leaving, and that I was going to be there for a while and they were going to hear a lot from me and I would probably get on their nerves, honestly... they actually seemed more welcome to that. A lot of them did have the question 'why the Hill District... why are you covering us... why are you here?' I told them that I felt this was a community that was overlooked... there's so much happening here that needs to be told because they kind of operate on their own. There's such a sense

of community in the Hill District and they thrive so well that I kind of wanted to highlight those stories, highlight how they are a community that is very united," said Worthy.

This was all before the pandemic.

After COVID-19 hit, Worthy turned to social media. She followed people on social media, checking in with them to see how they were doing, how their businesses were doing, and the state of the community.

"They have been very welcoming to me and have even checked on me and asked how I was doing. It's actually been working out quite well," Worthy shared.

An activist providing masks; a mom on a hunger strike

As she got to know the community, she started to tell its stories. When the death of George

*Credit: Sarah Schneider / 90.5 WESA
Danielle Brown started a hunger strike and set up on the Hill District's Freedom Corner.*





Floyd in Minneapolis sparked nationwide demonstrations, Worthy saw the Hill District respond with intimate community gatherings.

“The Hill kind of has its own way of dealing with these kinds of tragedies,” Worthy said.

She published a [story about Lakeisha Wolf](#), a local activist who worked to get masks and food to those in need in the Hill.

Worthy’s engagement work led her to Danielle Brown, whose son fell 16 floors to his death in 2018 at Duquesne University. Brown started a hunger strike and set up at the Hill District’s Freedom Corner, demanding records and reform from the school.

[The story was about Brown](#), and also about how the community started taking care of her during her protest. Worthy followed the story throughout the fall and at the end of the year, [Worthy updated Brown’s story](#) again. The grieving mother was still at the Hill District, now living in an apartment, and still on a hunger strike.

Building in time for engagement

Worthy said her station management has been very supportive of her engagement efforts and often checked in with her. While her priorities were still on city hall, Worthy said she built in time for engagement.

She often set aside Fridays for her Hill District work.

“I wasn’t always there... but, I just made sure to kind of prioritize. I scheduled times to talk with people... I would make sure I was on their calendar and they were on mine,” Worthy explained.

Lesson: ‘You’re getting a lot’

Worthy said community engagement work is

time consuming because it’s about establishing and fostering trust. Reporters and editors need to be prepared to accept this.

“When you are simply trying to build trust with a community, that sometimes means you will not interview, you will not record anything, you will literally just be there to listen and get to know a person,” Worthy said. “As a reporter sometimes your whole goal is to get the story so sometimes you feel like ‘I came out there and I got nothing from it.’ But you’re actually getting a lot because trust is such an important factor in a story.”

Worthy’s advice: “Be patient.”



Ed Mahon of WITF on finding the 'human element' through engagement

Interview by Rob St. Mary, America Amplified contributor

Ed Mahon, now with [Spotlight PA](#), was a legislative reporter for WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a partner station of America Amplified. His 2020 community engagement work centered around being embedded in Erie, a city in the northwest corner of the state.

He had covered stories about the city's education and refugee issues, but wanted to get to know its residents in a different way.

His original plan: "Trying to spend as much time in the community as possible and ... in a way that is not just as a reporter but as a regular person."

When the pandemic shut down communities in March, Mahon cancelled a trip to find out more about the county's plan to create its own community college. The pandemic shifted his focus to covering the impact of COVID-19 on Erie residents.

In May, Mahon [produced a story about Andrew Cousins](#), a rideshare driver who talked about the pandemic's effect on his income and mental health.

Visiting Erie's Juneteenth event

When case numbers started to fall around mid-June in Pennsylvania, Mahon decided to make the trip in person.

By now, protests for racial justice had spread across the country in the wake of the police killing of George Floyd. An annual Juneteenth



Ed Mahon

celebration in downtown Erie was becoming a protest and demonstration.

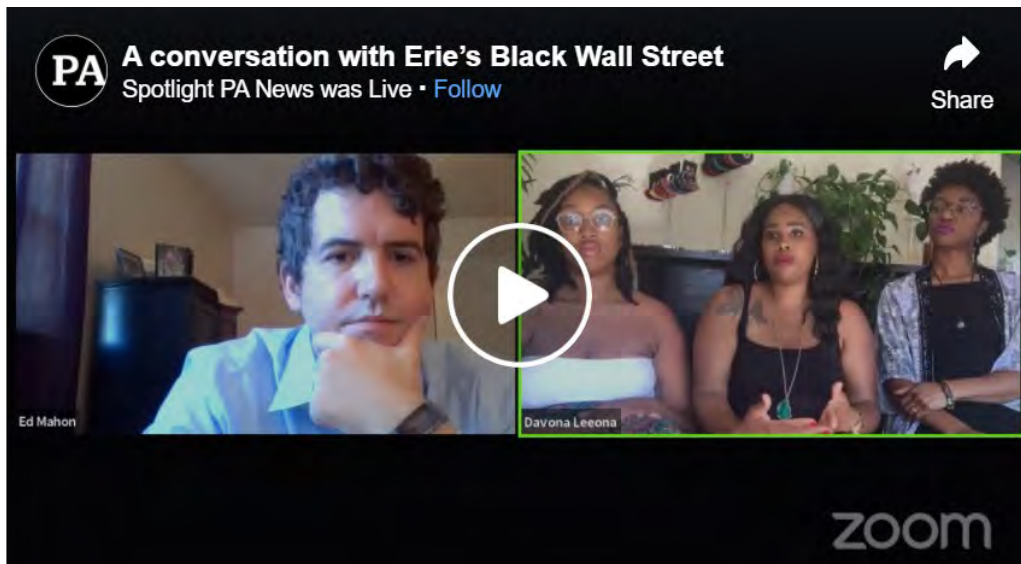
"We weren't going into that trip with a specific story in mind, we were really trying to just listen to as many people as possible," Mahon recalled. "So I went to that demonstration on the 19th (of June) and talked to as many people as possible and that's when I learned about Erie's Black Wall Street. I thought it was worth doing more reporting on."

The organizers of Black Wall Street — all young, Black entrepreneurs — were planning something around the Fourth of July holiday, so Mahon moved quickly to produce a story about how the group was meeting the community's needs.

"What they did was they started with a Facebook group as a sort of a business directory for all the Black-owned businesses in Erie and then on Juneteenth, they expanded to their own website and they're also organizing more and more events," said Mahon.

On July 2, Mahon hosted a [Facebook Live](#) through a Zoom conference call with three organizers from Erie's Black Wall Street.

"I think it worked out well to have the three of



Ed Mahon hosted a Facebook Live with some of the organizers of Erie's Black Wall Street.

them together, they were more open because they were together. ... I feel like this was very much a conversation and they were feeding off each other and elaborating and feeding off the points the other person was making... there was a lot of good communication ... it helped them to be more candid than maybe they would have been if I would have just interviewed them on their own," said Mahon.

The interview also [resulted in a story](#).

Tips and advice

The time commitment between day-to-day reporting and engagement requires scheduling and flexibility, especially during the pandemic.

"Balancing all that has been a constant conversation with my editors and just trying to be clear with them about what I need and why I need it as much as possible," Mahon said. "So getting time before a trip and after a trip to make sure I get the most out of that trip and also setting time after a trip to make sure that I can follow up with people quickly like we did with Erie's Black Wall Street."

Mahon added that Lisa Wardle, the PA Post's Digital Manager, helped with Facebook Live technical issues and moderated viewer comments, allowing him to focus on the conversation.

Mahon also found that having throughline questions helped start conversations. Mahon used the questions supplied by America Amplified:

- What concerns you most in the coming year?
- What do you want people to know about your community?
- Where do you get your news and information?
- Describe your voting experience, past and/or present.

"They have been helpful in terms of just going out and talking to people without any set agenda or organizing an event – just go out and hear back from the people about the issues that are affecting their community the most," Mahon said.



'The human element'

Since the Facebook Live event, Mahon has returned to Erie to continue the conversations. Mahon said newsrooms considering an engagement strategy should look at where the conversations and relationships can go.

"It was definitely something that would be worth doing more and I think some of these conversations have been really informative in terms of the issues that are most pressing in the community. This approach emphasizes talking to people that might not be the 'official person' who always gets quoted in stories but really trying to go deeper," Mahon said. "It's that human element in these stories. ... a compelling, real person who is affected by an issue."



How I found true engagement on an 800-mile bike ride through the Mountain West

by Nate Hegyi

Nate Hegyi is the rural communities reporter for the Mountain West News Bureau, focused on Indigenous issues, outdoor recreation, public lands, growth and affordability. Hegyi's reporting in 2020 was supported by America Amplified.

My introduction to community engagement journalism was bumpy. It began under the shadow of the pandemic-related lockdown in March of 2020.

I cover rural communities and small towns across the Mountain West, and suddenly I couldn't speak with people face to face. I was tethered to my desk and my computer. I tried reaching out to folks via Facebook community pages and had somewhat middling success.



For me, community engagement via phone and computer didn't feel right.

So once the pandemic eased, temporarily, in the summer, I hit the road on a bicycle.

Nearly 800 miles along the Continental Divide speaking with folks in small towns and rural communities about the upcoming election and

Nate Hegyi met Lucas Medina and Jesus "Eddie" Archuleta in Rawlins, Wyoming.





some of the biggest issues facing the West right now. It was essentially a month-long fact-finding mission. That's when community engagement hit its stride for me.

The conversations were open-ended and often lasted nearly an hour. I conducted around 40 interviews over three-and-a-half weeks and watched as themes emerged.

There was deep concern over political divisiveness in America, a worry about growth and housing affordability, and a shared love of small town culture, open spaces and Western values.

I came back from that trip with a better understanding of the diversity of folks living in the rural West, as well as the crossroads facing many of them. I also had sources who came in handy when pro-Trump loyalists overtook the U.S. Capitol on January 6. I was able to call up folks I met along the road to get their thoughts. Some of them have since sent me follow-up

story ideas.

As I remarked to my wife that week, it was the first time since beginning this beat that I felt I was making headway and had a substantive list of trusted sources I could reach out to. That wouldn't have happened without community engagement.

The technique came in handy, once again, when we first launched [a series about the relatively high number of killings by police](#) in the Mountain West. Before diving into story ideas, our community engagement producer reached out to members of community and law enforcement for an online listening session. The conversations were enlightening and helped us focus our approach. It also helped us build a source list that we later used during production of the series.

Here's an excerpt from my [Across the Great Divide](#) blog, chronicling my ride:

This country is a hell of a place to live in. I've only biked 750 miles across it, through a pocket of the American West, and I'm in awe of its diversity. The land morphs from desert to alpine forest over a matter of miles. Mountains erupt and disappear.

But the people – my God, the people!

I've met everyone from a saddle shop owner to hitchhiking musicians to a fly fisherwoman to African mormons to truck drivers to a wheelchair karate expert to a Trump-supporting knife craftsman to a Hispanic oil worker to a punk rock sous chef. Each understands America and the West differently – their views informed by lifetimes of pain, family, open country and wild places.

If there's any conclusion I'm coming to now that this journey is nearing its end, it's that I don't understand how America has worked for this long. It doesn't feel like a country of shared values. It's an unwieldy quilt – each community stitched to the other but some are colored and sized differently.

Now forces are trying to pull the quilt apart, yanking at the threads until they fray.



In addition to the blog, Hegyi produced a [five-part podcast called *Facing West*](#).





TIP SHEET: CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY INFLUENCERS



Knowing community influencers will help you better understand the issues in a community. The definition of a community influencer is someone outside of government institutions who is identifying and addressing community issues and problems.

A few examples to consider:

- **Finance:** People in a community who provide non-traditional access to startup money. New Americans will turn to personal networks instead of banks or government subsidies to fund businesses. For example, Islam has a prohibition against paying interest, so alternatives are needed to get a new business off the ground. Other communities face historic barriers to accessing loans.
- **Faith:** Faith leaders often function as connectors to and/or provide social services. They are looked to as not just spiritual guides but as someone who can access local resources. If you're looking for a trusted partner to host a community conversation, talking to faith leaders is a good place to start.
- **Youth:** Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousfzai became global influencers. Who are the youth setting the tone for conversations — perhaps on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram — in the community you're covering?
- **Sports:** If you are looking to engage Latino and African communities, follow soccer if that resonates with those community



Megan Feeney, a reporter for America Amplified in Nebraska, got permission to set up a table at a farmers market to meet people.

members where you're engaging. Consider contacting local leagues to start informal conversations.

- **Food:** Find the organizers of festivals, harvests, farmers markets, community celebrations to engage with a new community. *Idea:* A farmers market allowed America Amplified reporter Megan Feeney to set up a table one Saturday to meet people.
- **Farm:** Reach out to the cooperative extension agent or agency to connect with rural communities.



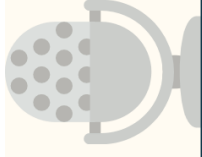
This list should get you started on thinking about different ways people can exert influence in their communities. Take a look at your community with an eye toward approaching people not as sources who fit into a story, but as local power brokers who are identifying and addressing a community issue and concern.

However, be wary of people who appoint themselves as a “community leader.” Ask around to see if others agree that this person is a leader in the community.

By expanding your list of community influencers, you’ll rely less on a spokesperson and will be in a position to elevate people who are authentic, or who can connect you to people who can expand your understanding of a community.



PRINT AND PIN ON YOUR DESK FOR EASY REFERENCE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR

REPORTERS & PRODUCERS

How do I understand the gaps and biases in my coverage?

AUDIT YOURSELF: Look at your last 10 stories or shows. Do an audit of the sources featured to see how diverse the group is in terms of: age, race, ethnicity, expertise, geography, gender identity, sexuality and more.

SET GOALS BASED ON RESULTS: What patterns do you see in the audit? Do your sources skew heavily toward a few traits or demographics? Take what you learned and apply it to your next story or show. Set a goal for centering people who did not surface as much in your audit. Set a goal NOW to audit your next 10 stories.

How do I engage?

VIRTUALLY: Host virtual listening sessions; Facebook or YouTube live shows; send out a Google survey, text, post on social media. Call your sources just to chat.

IN PERSON: Attend a community event, find a community partner who can introduce you to others. Host your own event. Meet people for coffee.

TRACK YOUR ENGAGEMENT: Create a spreadsheet of the contacts you've made and how often you've contacted them. Set aside time each day or week to routinely reach out.

How do I report?

COMPLICATE NARRATIVES: Center tape that's surprising, and try to feature as much of it as possible.

TRY AUDIO DIARIES: Give people a platform to tell their story in their own words, without narration.

MAXIMIZE ACCESSIBILITY: Translate your story; meet people where they're at and publish on multiple platforms.

CO-CREATE: Be bold! Pitch a series in collaboration with a local community group or media outlet.

How do I re-engage?

CLOSE FEEDBACK LOOP: Share your story or show with the people who helped you make it happen. Take time to get their feedback. Commit to producing more stories; engagement is not a one-and-done deal.

WHAT'S YOUR FOLLOW-UP? Usually there is more than one thread to pull on a story. What's another angle to the story? How can you go deeper?

www.americaamplified.org



Talk Show Teams



“Having a platform like ours is a privilege, and we have a responsibility to use that platform wisely and conscientiously, and that means challenging our norms and trying new ways to truly put the community first.”

Andrea Tudhope

America Amplified coordinating producer

See Tudhope’s essay on page 101



How to center lived experiences, bring engagement to talk shows

Locally produced public radio talk shows are a form of public square. They offer an efficient and traditional way to interact and amplify voices around salient issues. In this regard, talk shows are the original form of public radio style engagement: a space where experts can answer questions from the public, where communities can share how issues are directly affecting them.

The day-to-day grind of producing a regular talk show, whether live or pre-produced, has its challenges, and when you're in the thick of it, it's hard to find the time to break out of the typical workflow and methodology. Of course, community engagement asks us to do just that.

So, with that in mind, here are a few ideas tailored to producing community-engaged talk shows. You can pick and choose from these ideas and incorporate some or all into your workflow, **before** production, **during** production, and **after** the show. The goal is to center stories around your communities and generate innovative approaches and enterprise topics to spruce up your regular programming.

BEFORE PRODUCTION: USING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR SOURCING

Use these ideas to change how you source guests and topics for your show. Start by choosing one or two of them.

Audit your show

Audit your last 10 shows using our source diversity tracker. (See Appendix A.) This is something to do before you produce a show and also after (see next section). Pay attention to who you're not talking to, and also pay attention to who you are talking to about certain topics. For example, NPR conducted a source diversity audit that revealed they were increasing racial source diversity; however, the majority of those sources showed up in stories about race. Lesson: People of color should not mostly appear in stories about race.

Set specific goals for diversity in your coverage

It's not enough just to identify your biases and blindspots. Take your findings from your source audit and set goals for your show.

Be proactive and look at those goals before you pick up the phone to pre-interview potential guests, before you have your production meeting, before you finalize your lineup. For example, if your audit revealed to you that you mostly engaged with sources who identify as men, you could set a goal to increase your engagement with women and gender non-conforming sources by 30%.



Get out into the community

Try getting out once a week, or even just once a month, just to get to know your community. Easier yet — attend a local event (virtual counts), jot down talk show segment ideas, and get to know some new sources and ask what they want to hear. Then, from the studio, call and invite them to be a guest, or ask for their ideas. You may be surprised how many ideas can come out of attending a single community event or outing.

Bridge that age-old newsroom/talk show divide

Ask the news director if you can sit in on newsroom meetings, if you're not already. The reporters in the newsroom should be out in the field a lot — what are they hearing that they don't have the time to follow up on? Can your show tackle it? And, vice versa, invite reporters to your talk show meetings. Solicit input from them about potential guests from their source pool who could diversify perspectives and lived experiences on your show. Are they hearing about misinformation in different communities that a talk show could illuminate and help correct?

Co-create a special series with a community group or local media outlet

Partner with an organization or other media to co-produce a series of shows on a topic of interest to both groups.

In the summer of 2020, WITF in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, convened a group of Black community leaders to advise the station on guests and topics for a series of virtual community discussions titled [“Toward Racial Justice.”](#) The community group was the editorial lead for the series, while WITF advised on technical aspects of production. The series was livestreamed on YouTube, and WITF staff did radio features and digital stories out of the episodes.

In Indianapolis, WFYI collaborated with a local newspaper, the Indianapolis Recorder, on the series [“Where do we go from here?”](#) that aired on local television and YouTube.

Convene a listening session or community forum

Listening sessions, in-person or virtual, can transform and deepen your show's connection with your general audience and/or specific communities you want to serve more directly. They have the best attendance when promoted with partners and community influencers. (See more about influencers on page 88.) If possible, have one person see it through beginning to end, and manage relationships with partners.

Start with one [listening session](#) around a chosen issue. After that, schedule three more. (See Conventions on page 149 in Appendix C for guides to help you host listening sessions.)



Andrea Tudhope

America Amplified senior producer

“Our team held a dozen virtual listening sessions with participants from across the country and, after each session, we would digest what we heard — reflecting on themes that arose, or thoughts that stood out to us.”

After the listening session, send out a thank you email and let the participants know you’ll be in touch soon with how it will inform a talk show episode. Ask your moderator to take 15 minutes to identify participants and takeaways that stood out to them in the conversation. Make time in a pitch meeting to share those insights with the entire talk show team and create segments around those issues and/or individuals.

In future listening sessions, you can play clips from your talk show and use them to prompt additional deeper conversation.

Maximize your station’s use of digital engagement tools

If your station has invested in an engagement specialist who manages a texting club, or a digital engagement tool such as [Hearken](#), ask them if there’s a way to use the talk show as a platform to answer questions that emerge from their engagement work. Invite the engagement specialist to your talk show meetings and brainstorm how you can work together to address information needs.

Consider setting up a voicemail box (see next section) to gather responses to a question posed ahead of show taping. Reporters and others in the newsroom can also share the questions on their social media channels to increase visibility. Below is an example of an Instagram post with a question posed during the America Amplified Election 2020 talk show.

Set up a voicemail box

Establish a way to keep in touch with your existing audience, as well as an invitation to potentially new audiences, by setting up a voicemail box. Having a voicemail box makes your show more accessible to audiences who might not be able to engage with you during your show. Share the number on social media, and in promos. The voicemails could be used as clips for broadcast, to help ensure we hear from as many voices and perspectives as possible during the broadcast. If they don’t make it to air, you and/or your reporters could follow up and build source relationships for future coverage.





Develop a relationship with your station's community advisory board

Stations are required to have a CAB or a CAC (community advisory council). Consider having a discussion with the members about what's missing in your talk show coverage. What are they seeing in their own lives and communities that isn't bubbling up in your station's coverage? If your station's CAB only meets once a year, consider setting up another time to check in with them.

DURING PRODUCTION: BOOKING AND HOSTING WITH ENGAGEMENT



America Amplified produced its COVID-19 talk show at KCUR in Kansas City, Missouri, with engineering staff from the station.

Engagement during the show will change how it sounds and feels. Try out some of the following:

Treat lived experience as expertise

Consider a panel of guests who are affected by a topic, rather than abstracting a topic by having a traditional "expert" — like politicians, public officials — weigh in. Develop your show topic and approach around your guests and the experiences they bring to the table, rather than by plugging in a particular source with a particular experience to fill a need. There's a tendency in public radio to air clips from community members with lived experience and get expert guests to respond. Try flipping that. Book guests from the community — those most impacted, those leading grassroots efforts, etc. — get them to respond to how experts are talking about and handling a certain topic.



Book guests who disagree

Convene groups or individuals from different backgrounds and life experiences, who may have never shared space together. Try taking a solutions approach and invite guests who are solving an issue that is affecting them. Bring together the stakeholders on any given issue, especially if they frequently talk at each other rather than with each other, or are facing the same problem from different angles. Make your show a space for people with different perspectives to share and discuss ideas.

Maximize the voices you bring on air with pre-produced elements

From sources you've developed, consider creating pre-produced elements, such as audio diaries, to incorporate into your show. But be aware of and sensitive to who gets a seat at the table on your panel, and who only gets a few seconds in a clip. Make sure you're prioritizing diversity and lived experience with the guests at your table.

Script with the community's input

Incorporate your community outreach into your script. At the end of the day, as producer or host, you're just one person, coming up with questions from your perspective. Break outside of that by sourcing questions and talking points directly from the community — through tweets, calls, etc. If you are working with an engagement specialist managing community questions, answer them on the air. Prioritize the community in the conversation itself by opening your show telling your audience how to engage with you, and keep those mentions coming.

Let your guests drive the conversation

As a host, try out broad questions and let the guests guide you. Give your guests space to interact with each other. Think of your job as a "conversation facilitator" rather than a host who has come prepared with a set of questions you want answered. Rather than positioning audio clips as produced pieces, incorporate them meaningfully into the dialogue by turning to your panel guests for their responses.

Rethink your call-screening process

Taking calls is the most basic way you can engage with your listening audience. Consider taking it a few steps further: In addition to simply queuing up callers for the program, take down their contact information and ask them what topics they'd like to hear you cover in the future. Think of this as a way to build meaningful source relationships vs. as a one-off.

But don't just rely on people who are already inclined to engage with you. Try partnering with community organizations that work with groups that do not normally call in to your shows. Encourage them to let their community know how to engage with the show by calling in or leaving a voicemail. Don't forget to promote the live call-in or voicemail number regularly and specifically with compelling prompts, even outside of the show's broadcast window.



Host your show on Facebook Live

Tap into your social media audience — i.e. your non-listening audience — by hosting a show on Facebook Live. Then consider rebroadcasting your FB Live conversation outside of your normal broadcast hours. In Florida, WUSF and WMFE launched a [collaborative Facebook Live show called “The State We’re In”](#) in 2020 that allowed them to bring in new voices and focus on issues that resonate across the central part of the state.

AFTER THE SHOW: ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Extend the life of the show by continuing to engage with listeners afterward or posting a story about it. Here are some ideas:

Re-audit your show

Find a strategy and tool that works for you so that auditing becomes part of your regular, daily production process. Create a spreadsheet to regularly track your sources as guests, as callers and as audio in your shows. Continually monitor, assess and address gaps, and refresh the goals you set for diversity as you go along.

Solicit feedback, and mean it

Don’t just send a thank-you email to your guests. Take it a step further and ask for their feedback on the show itself and their overall experience. While you’re at it, ask them what else your show should focus on. Get source recommendations and segment ideas.

Start an email list as you develop deeper community connections by sourcing through listening sessions and following up with guests who’ve appeared on the show. Send them links to shows you’d like feedback on or ask for advice about how to approach a topic that came up in a talk show meeting. Do be careful about being an “askhole” — we ask a lot of our sources. Be sensitive to that. Be sure to share your gratitude in your interactions, and let people know when and how their input and insight made a real difference in the content.



Robin Tate Rockel

Indiana Public Broadcasting community engagement manager

“The most important thing is going beyond the gatekeepers of communities. So many times there will be these communities where maybe four or five people always get that phone call. But they don’t represent that community. You have to go beyond those gatekeepers to really hear what’s on people’s minds, what they want to share, what experience they’re having.”



Think digital

You worked so hard to book that panel and line up those pre-produced elements, so extend the show's life with a digital post that tells the story of that show. Writing a story about the show, with photos of the guests, gives you another way to share the show and attract more audience.

One option is publishing the edited transcript for accessibility. Another option is writing a short story with quotes. Here's a simple format: Start with explaining the show topic, list the guests and share some of their quotes, and conclude by letting readers know how they can share their feedback with you and perhaps what to expect on future shows. Share this link with your guests and on your station's social media. Here's [what that looks like](#) on [americaamplified.org](#).

Many shows also have their own newsletters: See [KCUR's Kraske Off Mic](#) (from "Up To Date" host Steve Kraske). This is a great way to grow the talk show's own audience.

Establish a talk show community advisory group

Make sure you're prioritizing diversity and representation in this space, just as in your production process. Invite community members and leaders and establish regular meetings. Set a date and a virtual meeting place and work to make participation easy by making it available across multiple channels. Enter group discussions with a set of prompts, like: What are we missing in our talk shows? Are there issues you see as not having enough attention that we could amplify? Also, voice your own concerns and ask for their recommendations.

Be conscious of the ask you're making of their time and energy — share back the content they've informed and inspired, and talk with your station about some kind of compensation for their time.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

How I prioritized listening, empathy and diversity in producing America Amplified's talk show

by Andrea Tudhope



Andrea Tudhope is an award-winning multimedia journalist based in Kansas City, Missouri. Over her five years at the NPR affiliate, KCUR, she produced a daily talk show and reported daily news and long-term investigative features, including a series on gun violence, with a grant from the Dart Center at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. She was the coordinating producer for America Amplified in 2020, directing various community engagement efforts across the country and leading production of two national talk shows.

As a former daily local talk show producer, I understand how stressful it can be to imagine switching things up in your daily production routine. But I promise you, it's worth it. Having a platform like ours is a privilege, and we have a responsibility to use that platform wisely and conscientiously, and that means challenging our norms and trying new ways to truly put the community first. We did that for [our six-week national talk show](#) around the 2020 election.

Our show was a collaborative effort drawing on resources from stations across the country. We had no pre-existing framework for the show, so I was able to dream big and try out several strategies. As someone who's worked on a smaller scale, though, I know that a lot of what we accomplished at the national level can be replicated at the local level.

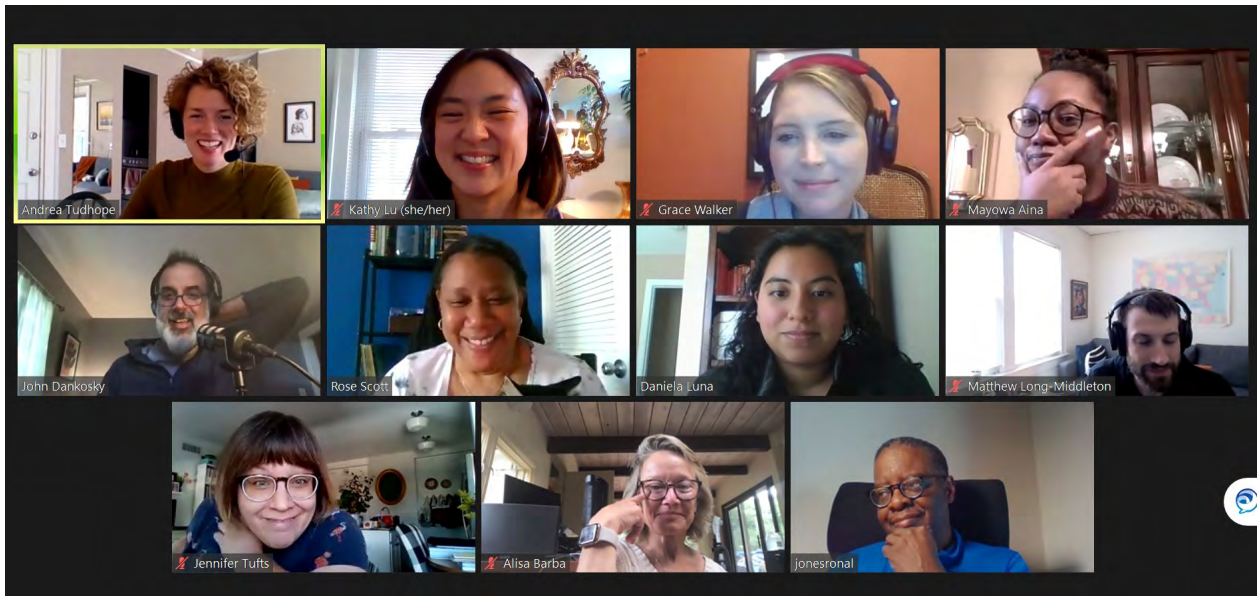
Here's how I did it.

'Listen first' is my daily mantra

From the very start, our show was centered around community. Our team held a dozen virtual listening sessions with participants from across the country and, after each session, we would digest what we heard — reflecting on themes that arose, or thoughts that stood out to us. That's how we landed on topics for our shows, like 'What divides us?' and 'Who has access to the American Dream?' The listening sessions also provided us with several guest possibilities for our shows.

Even the structure and framework was derived from the insights of the community members we met. For instance, we heard a consistent call for "good news" in media coverage. So I decided we would end each show with a short audio postcard, highlighting how one community was coming together in the face of crisis, or how a local artist was finding solace and healing for their community in their craft. Here's one [audio postcard](#) from reporter Sydney Boles, highlighting a storytelling festival in Pound, Virginia.

Though we started out with a topic for each show gleaned from our listening sessions, we still kept an open mind to let our guests be our guides each week. Listening first is a mentality you can apply to any stage of producing a show.



This was our week one talk show team. Top row, from left: Andrea Tudhope, Kathy Lu, Grace Walker, Mayowa Aina. Center row, from left: John Dankosky, Rose Scott, Daniela Luna, Matthew Long-Middleton. Bottom row, from left: Jennifer Tufts, Alisa Barba, Ron Jones.

I gave the guests the driver's seat

A lot of us pitch and pursue topics for our talk shows based on what we think are hot-button issues right now. But ... we're not all-knowing, and even journalists live in bubbles. That's why I think it's so important to get out into the community, host a listening session, even call up new folks you haven't talked to before with open-ended questions like, 'What's going on in your neck of the woods lately?'

Rather than coming up with a topic internally — on our most likely homogenous staff, let's be real — and then reaching out to people to fill a specific perspective, reverse that process: Invite community members to the table and let them drive.

For our fall show, we approached our pre-interviews with simple and open-ended questions: What are the main issues facing your community right now? How are you overcoming challenges? What are your hopes for the future for

your community?

We then shared what we heard from our sources in production meetings, and from there, we honed in on the focus for our show. [Our third episode](#), in which we spent time discussing who and what is usually missing from national media coverage and presidential debates, is a great example of how this can work.

It's a subtle shift, but an impactful one. You can hear the difference not only in the way the show plays out, but also in the way the guests speak and share their perspectives. Our guests knew that this show was for them.

Hosting plays a big role in this shift. Rose Scott, our stellar host from WABE in Atlanta, skillfully facilitated this by keeping her questions short, and placing emphasis on letting guests respond to each other directly, transitioning between guests with a simple — "Guest A, you heard what Guest B said, what are your thoughts?"



The impact of empowering your sources and guests cannot be understated. And listeners notice! Here's an email we received from a listener in Louisville: "I heard your show kinda by chance this evening. OMG! Your idea of having people of different opinions actually speaking to each other without yelling is like salve to my soul. BRAVO! BRAVO! BRAVO!"

"[Your] show let me be connected, even when I did not agree, with all those speaking on all sides of the political spectrum because they shared and explained and were to me fair and honest."

— From a listener in New York

And another, from a listener in New York: "For months all the public voices I have heard were rants or one sided comments from all other media outlets ... [Your] show let me be connected, even when I did not agree, with all those speaking on all sides of the political spectrum because they shared and explained and were to me fair and honest. We all have different backgrounds and can learn something from each other."

Lived experience is expertise, and I practice journalism accordingly

With our show we pivoted from the traditional experts... policy makers, politicians, public officials... to make way for community members, experts in their own communities, experiences and personal lives.

I know there's a need to hear from the public officials, and to hold them accountable. When I have to book a traditional "expert," I like to

prioritize finding folks who both work and live that expertise. For example, in our pre-election show we decided to spend some of the hour exploring and unraveling voting blocs — like the so-called "Latino vote." To kick off that discussion, we booked Danielle Clealand, a professor in Mexican American and Latino studies, as well as African and African diaspora studies. Danielle is also Afro-Latina herself. All of this made her a wonderful guest who could share nuances and insight from a personal and professional level.

Another thing: the traditional experts we tend to give a platform to are white men. Do yourselves and all of us a favor, and break that mold. Which leads me to...

I make diversity a priority, not just a hollow buzzword

It will take extra time and effort to diversify your source pool. Do it anyway! A lot of us use the word diversity — in our mission statements, for example — but fail to truly commit to it.

We made a commitment from the outset to prioritize diversity in race, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, sexuality, class, etc. in every show. That meant including in discussions and in show notes the identifiers folks shared with us. We also tracked the diversity in a spreadsheet, so we could see our gaps and correct course along the way.

This is an ongoing process that should be refined as you go along. There are definitely things I think we could have done better. Always! For example, we could have set actual percentage goals for representation.

But we stayed true to our priority throughout, and you can see that in the demographic breakdown. 45% of the sources in our show who identified as white were featured through



Guests from the last episode of “America Amplified: Election 2020” were, clockwise from top left: Catherine Meeks, Elisa Batista, Cecilia Johnson, Kendall Stephens, Valencia “V” Gunder, Tim Ramos and Allie Young.

our pre-produced elements — meaning we typically heard from them in 10-second clips. Meanwhile sources who identified as white made up a minority of our panel guests at 19%. People who identify as Black constituted the majority of our panel guests at 30%. Altogether, BIPOC — which included folks who identify as Ahtna Athabascan, Navajo, Ojibwe, Zuni, Tohono O’odham, Black, Guatemalan, Afghan American, Korean American, Puerto Rican and Filipina, just to name a few — made up 81% of our panel guests, and 55% of our sources for pre-produced elements.

Typically, in terms of this breakdown between guests and clips in talk shows, the opposite is true. Sources invited to the table tend to be white, while sources featured in clips tend to be POC.

By continually voicing this as a priority every step of the way, we flipped that script.

For me, empathy and humanity are at the heart of the work

In our first listening session last fall, my colleagues facilitated a breakout room conversation between Meadow, a conservative white woman from Minnesota, and Jayme, a liberal Black woman from Georgia. It was a powerful, emotional conversation about race, one that came up a lot in our team discussions afterward.

I kept in touch with both women over the course of our show. In one phone call I had with Meadow just before the election, I learned that her experience in our session had been eye-opening, and had, along with other life experiences of late, called her to question her political views and who she would vote for.

I decided to call both women after Election Day to invite them into another one-on-one conversation. They both agreed, and we had an



hour-long discussion — another doozy. Meadow said she reluctantly went for Trump. She was nervous to talk with Jayme about it. It was a tense but honest and respectful discussion — one I was able to edit down into a short feature for our show. It made for a [truly innovative and riveting segment](#).

There are countless benefits to follow-up — developing meaningful, long-term source relationships will lead you to a reservoir of guest possibilities and show ideas that will keep giving. Throw away your extractive practices, and keep in touch with people. If they had a bad experience, dig in and work through it. It's a long game, but it's worth it.

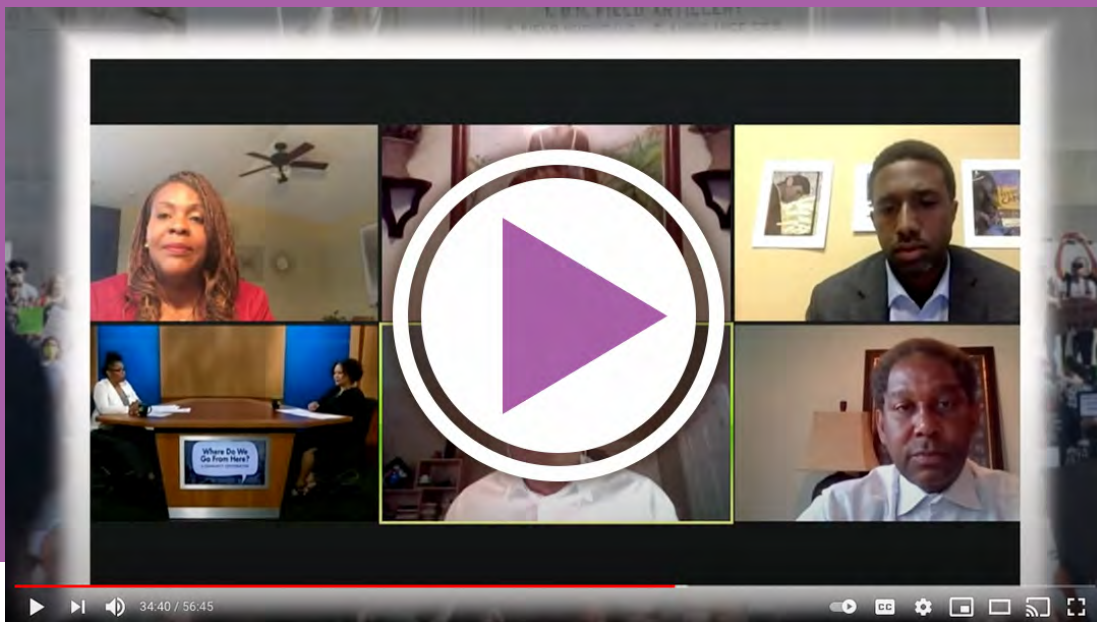


Watch: WITF's "Toward Racial Justice" series addresses systemic racism and injustice in Pennsylvania through community conversations



<https://www.witf.org/racialjustice>

Watch: WFYI co-created "Where Do We Go From Here?" conversation series with the Indianapolis Recorder



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBvfzU03hAs>



PRINT AND PIN ON YOUR DESK FOR EASY REFERENCE

How to use community engagement for

Talk shows



BEFORE PRODUCTION

Start with one or two of these ideas

Audit your show

Take a look at your source diversity and set goals based on what you're missing.

Get out into the community

Attend an event, virtually or in person. You may be surprised how many ideas can come from one event!

Work with reporters, editors

Sit in on newsroom meetings (if you're not already) and invite reporters to sit in on talk show meetings. The cross-pollination will enrich your topics.

Co-create a special series with a community group or local media

See: WITF's "Toward Racial Justice" series and WFYI's "Where Do We Go From Here?" series.

Host a listening session

Virtual or in-person, if possible. Keep it open-ended and let the community determine and guide the conversation. Then try scheduling regular events. Send thank-you notes and how participants can listen to the related show.

Use digital engagement tools

Solicit questions and participation via social media, polls, Google forms, texting, etc.

Set up a voicemail box

Voicemails can be used as clips for broadcast or sources for future shows. Also gives your listeners access to you outside of your broadcast hours.

DURING PRODUCTION

Center the community in the show itself, through booking, hosting, call-screening and more.

Center lived experience as expertise

Flip the script: Pivot from traditional experts. Invite guests with personal lived experience to weigh in on important issues in your city.

Book guests who disagree

Convene individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives and give them a space to share and discuss ideas.

Maximize the voices on air

Try pulling together pre-produced elements, like audio diaries, to give more air time to the community.

Script with the community's input

Source questions and talking points directly from the community - from tweets, calls, etc.

Let your guests drive the conversation

Give your guests space to interact with one another. Invite their responses to one another and to clips.

Rethink your call screening process

Don't let the relationship end with the call. Take down contact information, ask them what topics they'd like to hear. Prioritize bringing on air callers who bring a different perspective to the show.

Host your show on Facebook Live

You'll reach a new and different audience. You can broadcast the show live as it airs or record it and post later as a video. Invite comments.

AFTER THE SHOW

The broadcast is the beginning of participation, not the end

Re-audit your show

Find a strategy and tool that works for you. Continually refresh goals you set for diversity of sources, and keep track as you go along.

Solicit feedback, and mean it!

When you thank your guests for their time, ask for their feedback on the show. Ask if you can keep in touch. Remember: We ask a lot of our sources. Always say thank you, and share back how their insight impacted the content.

Write a digital post

Extend the life of your show by turning it into a story. Try this format: Explain the show topic, list the guests and some of their quotes, and conclude by letting readers know how they can share their feedback.

Start a talk show advisory group

Invite community members and schedule quarterly meetings for feedback. Be conscious of the ask you're making — share back the content they've inspired, and ask your station about compensation for their time.

Appendix A

SOURCE DIVERSITY TRACKING





SOURCE DIVERSITY TRACKING GUIDE

Tracking the diversity of your sources is one step toward being a news organization that reflects the community you serve. In the short term, you will want to conduct an audit of your current content to identify who you are already talking to.

In the long term, your newsroom should implement a diversity tracking tool to use on an ongoing basis. This will help you assess whether you are meeting your goals.

Ultimately, tracking diversity helps newsrooms to produce content that is more reflective and inclusive of all community perspectives.

DIVERSITY TRACKING TOOLS

- Reporter enters the demographic information.
- Sources enter the demographic information themselves. If your newsroom can manage this consistently, this is the most accurate method.
 - ◆ If you are the only person tracking your source diversity (i.e. this effort is not station-wide) you could consider doing a hybrid of the two systems, but this is only advisable for people who are experienced with data management using Excel or Google Sheets.

To get started, copy the following documents into your own Google drive.

Reporter-generated Tracker Suite	Source-generated Tracker Suite
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Form: for collecting • Google Sheet: for sorting • Google Data Studio: for visualization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Form: for collecting • Google Sheet: for sorting • Google Data Studio: for visualization

Definition of terms

- **Google Form template**
 - ◆ This is where data are originally entered, either by the reporter/producer or by the source.
 - ◆ It is only to be filled out with the information about or by sources who are quoted or featured in productions (web stories, audio features, newscasts, show segments, podcast episodes, etc.).
 - ◆ When using the source-generated form, be certain to share the public-facing link.



- **Google Sheet (fed by Google Form)**

- ◆ This is where all the data entered into each form/survey are automatically collected.
- ◆ Do not give out this Google Sheets link to **anyone** you don't trust with the data as it contains sensitive information.

- **Google Data Studio Report (fed by Google Sheet)**

- ◆ Google Data Studio allows you to analyze and slice your data in countless ways.
- ◆ You can share the Data Studio Report to show the results of your tracking without giving access to identifying information from your sources. To share a report, go to the top right and click on "Get report link." That link gives them "viewing" access to the Data Studio Report.

OVERVIEW

- **Start with an audit of past work**

- ◆ Using the Reporter-Generated Diversity Tracking Template, select a given period of time (the last two months/the last 10 talk shows, etc.) and make your best informed speculation into the identities of the sources.
- ◆ You do not have to assess all the suggested diversity categories included in the template, nor is the template exhaustive. Start with just two or three areas of focus and expanding to track more demographics. Consider what your goals are and the potential identity fault lines:
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Age/generation
 - Geography
 - Class
 - Sexual orientation
 - Politics
 - Religion
 - Education

- **Assess the findings**

- ◆ Using Google Data Studio, you should be able to quickly assess the diversity of sources during this audit period.
- ◆ Compare your source audit to demographic data for your listening area and/or any specific



communities you want to reach. You may need to combine various areas (counties/cities/towns) to more accurately reflect the audience in your broadcast area. The numbers aren't the goal, but they can be a guide.

- **Making it an ongoing process**
 - ◆ If your station isn't implementing diversity tracking across the whole institution you can **always** track it for your own work.

CONSIDERATIONS

For reporter-generated forms	For source-entered forms
<p>METHOD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At the conclusion of the interview the reporter/producer/editor either asks the sources their demographic info (preferred) OR makes their own assessment of the source's identity (least preferred). Only enter demographic info for sources used in your content. <p>BENEFITS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Database will likely have more information than the source-entered approach. ● Database will be more quickly populated. <p>CONSIDERATIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If the data is entered by the reporter it can be clouded by the reporters' own biases and assumptions. ● Data will not have the authenticity of how people define themselves. ● It will take time, so try spending small chunks of a day entering data. 	<p>METHOD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The reporter/producer/editor sends an email to the source(s), inviting them to fill out the form. <p>BENEFITS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Authentic and accurate data. ● Could be perceived as less intrusive by the source(s). ● Another way to engage with your sources. <p>CONSIDERATIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don't expect 100% participation right away, though some stations and diversity tracking projects have had 50% to 80% response over time. ● If someone hasn't responded, follow-up with a second email. ● You can use this in tandem with entering your own information (if you're making your own assessments).



Here is some suggested language practitioners can use when talking to or emailing sources about diversity tracking:

In an effort to track the representation of people who have shared their perspectives with **[STATION]**, we hope you'll answer these few questions (it should take less than two minutes). We really appreciate your time and participation.

Email or alternative option:

Thank you for sharing your time and your experience with us.

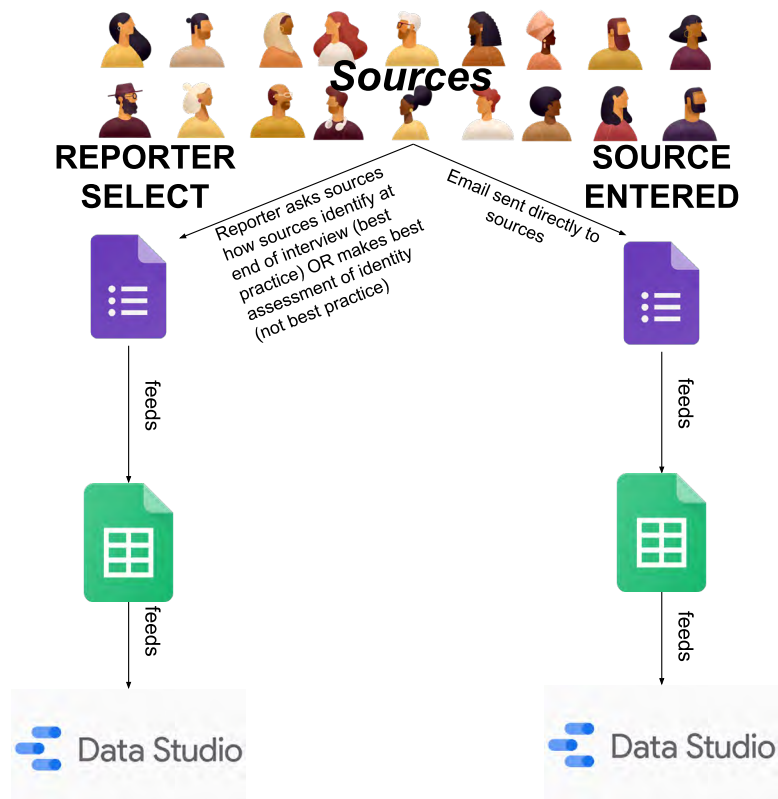
[STATION] is working to better understand the diversity of people and perspectives we bring to our news coverage. We hope you'll complete this two-minute survey (That quick; we timed it.) to help us do that.

A link to the show/feature is **[here]**

Feel free to share the link on social media. **[appropriate links to reporter and/or station Facebook/ Twitter/Instagram accounts]**

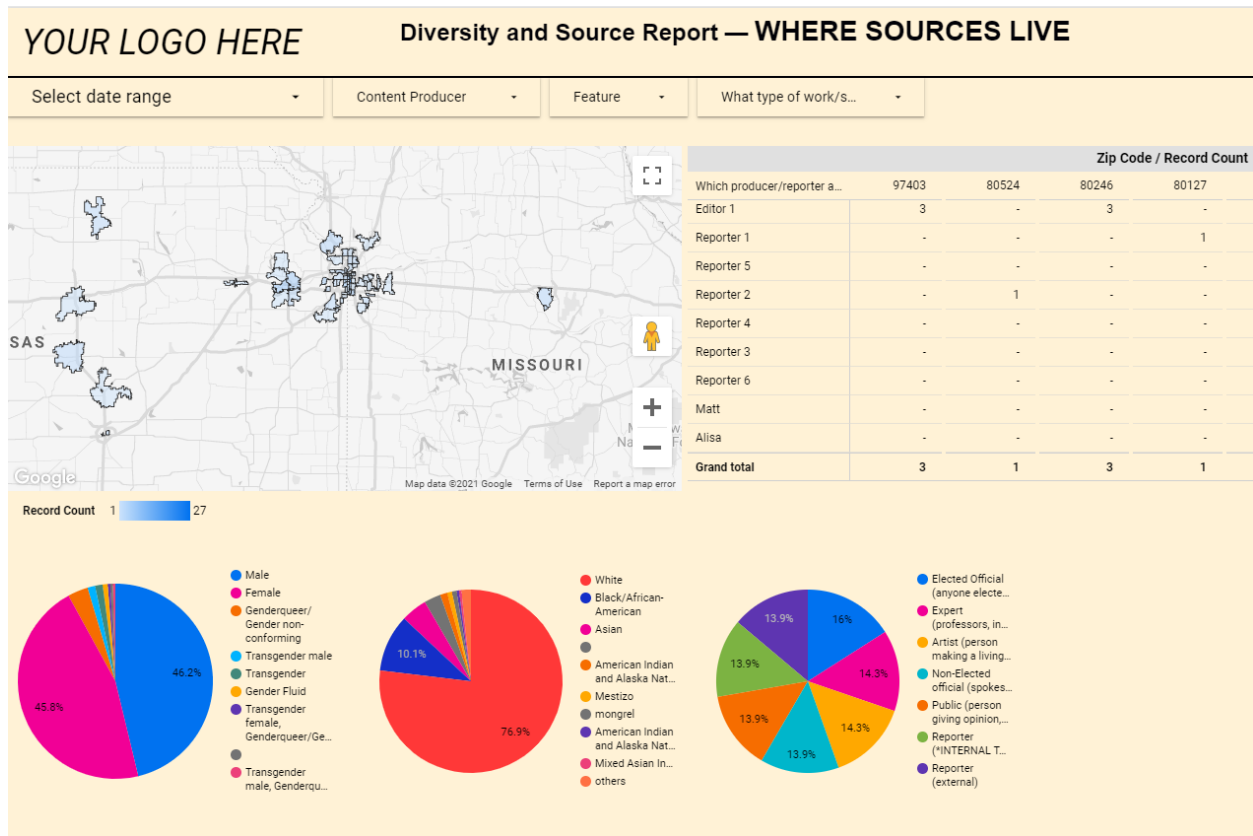
Please don't hesitate to be in touch with ideas about what we should be talking about.

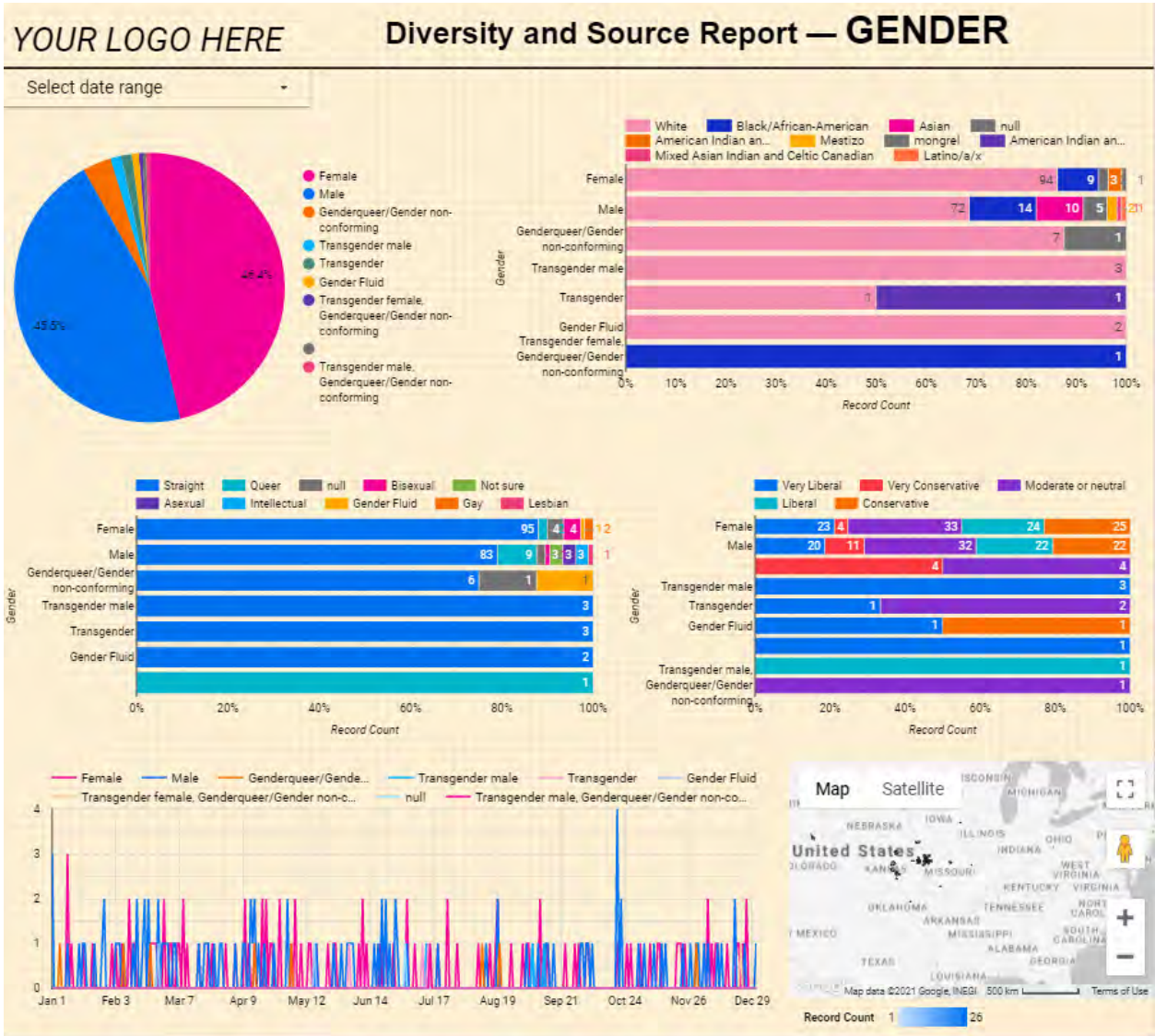
HOW THE DIVERSITY TRACKERS WORK





EXAMPLES FROM GOOGLE DATA STUDIO REPORTS







How tracking source diversity revealed changes in America Amplified stories

By Matthew Long-Middleton

Matthew Long-Middleton has been a talk-show producer and community producer for KCUR, the NPR affiliate in Kansas City. At America Amplified, he was the Media Training Manager.



credit: Julie Denesha

Doing a diversity audit is a step toward understanding how reflective stories are of the communities you cover and the gaps your coverage may have, but it is only a start toward making an impactful, systemic change.

For newsrooms confronting inequality in their practices and culture while seeking the public's trust in journalism, an audit must be shared internally within the newsroom and externally with the communities served.

Here's how America Amplified tracked its work with eight stations in 2020.

We started by creating a baseline, based on data from 186 stories, features and talk show posts published on the websites of KCUR, WABE, WITF, Louisville Public Media, New England Public Radio, WUSF and WIFU between February 23 and February 29, 2020.

This week was chosen because it was before America Amplified community engagement work was implemented at these stations and it was after President Trump's first impeachment proceedings, which was dominating the news cycle. Our baseline was drawn from 447 sources.

We then compared the results with America Amplified content from those same eight stations between February 29 and July 1, 2020. We also compared the results with all America

Amplified content produced during that same time period, including those eight stations (noted as "all stations"). Our network includes more than 50 stations.

Note: The 36 stories, features or posts representing 104 different sources in "All Stations since February" is a partial sample size of America Amplified content.

See the charts on pages 116-121 for specifics:



Types of Sources	8 Station Audit before America Amplified Influence: between February 23 and February 29, 2020	All America Amplified Content between May 1 and October 31, 2020	% change (proportion of total sources compared to baseline)
EXPERT or INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL	213	41	▼33.9%
GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL or GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE	139	51	▼14.0%
REAL PERSON (source is directly impacted by topic of this story)	95	188	▲41.6%
OTHER	0	190	▲6.4%



Generation of Sources	Stations before America Amplified Content: between February 23 and February 29, 2020	All America Amplified Content between May 1 and October 31, 2020	% change (proportion of total sources compared to baseline)
SILENT (75+ years old)	10	3	▼1.2%
BABY BOOMER (56-75 years old)	138	58	▼10.8%
GEN X (39-56 years old)	170	75	▼12.1%
MILLENNIAL (24-38 years old)	74	58	▲3.6%
GEN Z (8 to 23 years old)	8	26	▲7.3%
SOURCE(S) PREFER NOT TO SHARE AGE	0	0	▲0.0%
NOT SURE OF AGE	45	67	▲13.2%



Race	Stations before America Amplified Content: between February 23 and February 29, 2020	All America Amplified Content between May 1 and October 31, 2020	% change (proportion of total sources compared to baseline)
AMERICAN INDIAN or ALASKA NATIVE	0	8	▲3.0%
ASIAN	9	19	▲5.2%
BLACK/AFRICAN-AMERICAN	54	57	▲9.4%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN or OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER	1	1	▲0.2%
WHITE	318	145	▼16.4%
TWO OR MORE RACES	2	6	▲1.8%
OTHER race not listed here	1	1	▲0.2%
SOURCE(S) PREFER NOT TO SHARE THEIR RACE	0	0	▲0.0%
NOT SURE OF RACE	62	28	▼3.3%



Gender Identity	Stations before America Amplified Content: between February 23 and February 29, 2020	All America Amplified Content between May 1 and October 31, 2020	% change (proportion of total sources compared to baseline)
FEMALE	167	135	▲9.7%
MALE	276	142	▼12.3%
TRANSGENDER FEMALE	1	1	▲0.1%
TRANSGENDER MALE	0	0	▲0.0%
GENDERQUEER/GENDER NON-CONFORMING	0	2	▲0.7%
SOURCE(S) PREFER NOT TO SHARE GENDER	0	0	▲0.0%
NOT SURE OF GENDER	3	7	▲1.8%



Latino/a/x Identity	Stations before America Amplified Content: between February 23 and February 29, 2020	All America Amplified Content between May 1 and October 31, 2020	% change (proportion of total sources compared to baseline)
IDENTIFY AS LATINO/A/X	9	30	▲8.7%
SOURCE(S) PREFER NOT TO SHARE LATINO/A/X IDENTITY	0	0	▲0.0%
NOT SURE OF LATINO/A/X Identity	141	40	▼17.3%
NON-LATINO/A/X	297	211	▲8.6%



Political Ideology	Stations before America Amplified Content: between February 23 and February 29, 2020	All America Amplified Content between May 1 and October 31, 2020	% change (proportion of total sources compared to baseline)
VERY LIBERAL	2	16	▲8.7%
LIBERAL	33	60	▲21.8%
INDEPENDENT/NEUTRAL	0	18	▲10.8%
CONSERVATIVE	42	30	▼0.1%
VERY CONSERVATIVE	3	7	▲2.9%
NOT SURE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY	153	36	▼44.1%

There were a number of things we observed in this snapshot.

We saw a greater proportion of sources with lived experience, as opposed to experts, in America Amplified stories.

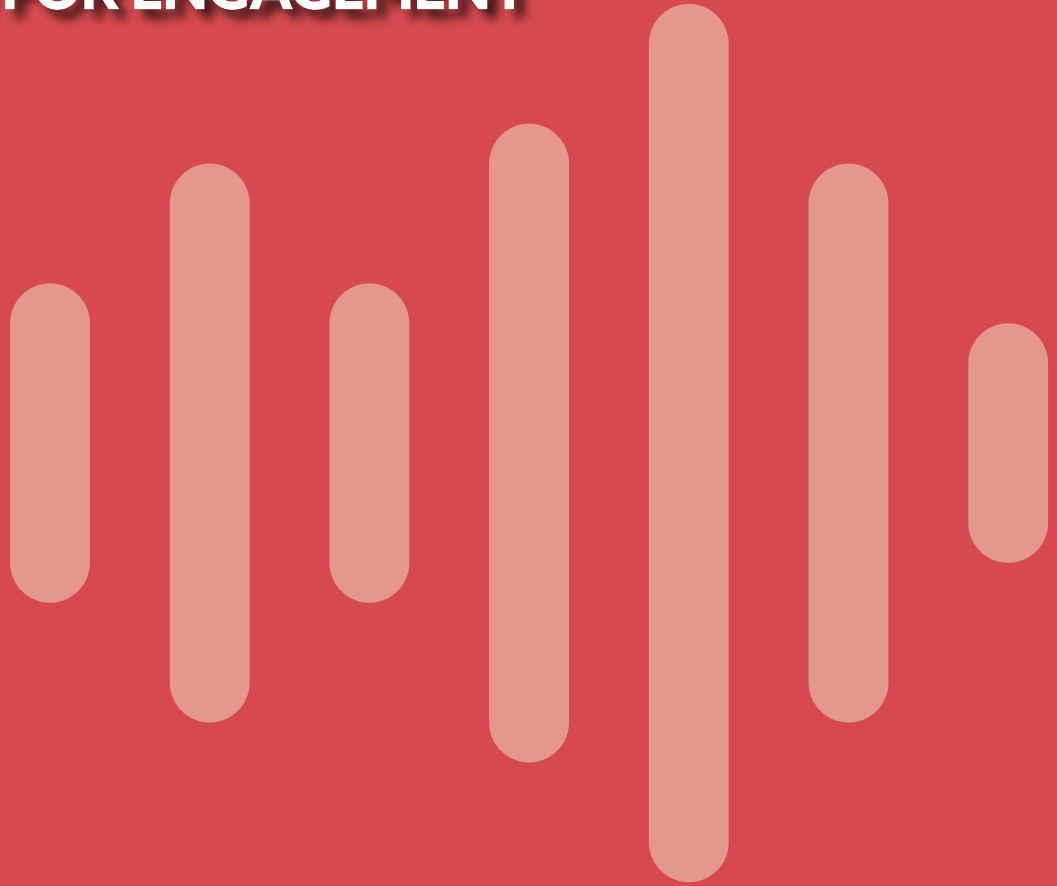
We also saw increased representation of people with Latino and Black/African American identity in America Amplified content. We also came closer to population representation in gender identity.

We believe community engagement journalism will play a role in producing work that sounds different and features people who haven't typically been on public radio airwaves.

It is up to each of us to hold ourselves and each other to higher standards, to know what choices — conscious and unconscious — we're making daily.

Appendix B

TOOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT





This playbook references various tools you can use in your engagement process. Here's a summary.

- **Bias check**

We all have biases (yes, even journalists), and that's ok! The more you recognize where your biases are, the better you can address them — personally and professionally. In journalism, bias shows up in the types of voices we bring to shows, the communities we cover, the topics chosen or types of questions we ask. When it comes to being more inclusive in journalism, these tools (in addition to the source audit) can help improve your coverage.

- ◆ **Maynard Institute's Fault Lines:** Our personal bubbles are where our fault lines are. These lines include but are not limited to: where we live, our race, our socio-economic status, our age, our abilities, our sexual orientation, our religious beliefs, our political beliefs and our education. How often do your stories examine topics along these fault lines (for example, a story about education, what has it meant to people in different communities? How are the results different beyond test scores)? How often does your fault line affect a story you cover (Do you mostly do stories in the neighborhoods you frequent)? It's about more than seeking diverse perspectives, it's about understanding how we're affected by what defines us.
- ◆ **Community Portrait exercise:** Before you engage a new community, examine your own assumptions. Then, as you are engaging, write down what you are learning about who this community is, where they gather, what they read and trust. Compare and check your findings with your assumptions to create a richer, more complex and authentic portrait of the community. (Use the Community Portrait Worksheet on page 164 in Appendix C as a guide.)
- ◆ **Free Poynter course** on examining your own assumptions about race and ethnicity.

- **Social media**

Social media is free, so take advantage as much as you can. Every reporter should share his/her own stories. Tagging relevant accounts is also important for increasing visibility and reach. Finally, remember your social audience may not overlap much from your listening audience. Share your stories in ways that are most effective on the respective platforms (for example, tapping into emotion on Facebook and Instagram or using a thread on Twitter). Beyond that, here are other ideas for engaging via social.

- ◆ **Posting to local Facebook groups** — Seth Bodine at KOSU joined local FB groups to learn more about those communities. He was transparent about why he was there. His effort paid off, leading to a series about the poor water conditions in rural towns. Read about Seth's experience on page 139.

**Seth Bodine**

KOSU rural issues reporter

“I initially got this story idea when I was posting on chicken groups to see if any of their mail order chickens arrived DOA. Someone commented: ‘You should look into the water in Cordell. It’s worse than Flint Michigan.’ The biggest takeaway: Social media engagement work leads to stories! In unexpected ways.”

◆ **Facebook Live**

- **You can host a Facebook Live series on a high-interest topic.** Side Effects Public Media and Indiana Public Broadcasting held a series of live streams to answer questions they received about COVID-19. To learn more, see the Facebook Live workflow template from Side Effects Public Media on page 141.
- **Live stream your talk show on Facebook Live:** Set up a camera in the studio and stream your show while it’s airing to make it available to more people. You can also gather live comments this way. After the show is over, download it and post it to your YouTube site — a recent Verge story found more people listening to podcasts on YouTube than on Apple podcasts or Spotify. Use the Facebook Live for Talk Shows guide on page 146 to help you plan.

◆ **Paying for post boosts/ads**

- Putting some money behind boosting your posts can help with growing your social audience and with reach, especially if you’re soliciting comments or promoting an event. You can geo-target Facebook ads to try to reach specific communities. You can also target certain demographics, including age and political beliefs. Because Facebook owns Instagram, your paid boosts may show up on both platforms.

◆ **Host an Instagram Q&A**

- Have a reporter or editor host an Instagram Q&A on your station’s account. It’s a great way to engage on a platform where 56% of users are younger than 35. Social Media Examiner has a step-by-step on how to do this, which starts with posting a story using the Question function. Think of a high-interest topic in your community — like the COVID vaccine — or share a special project you recently published. You can also feature a reporter with an “Ask Me Anything” prompt. The key is to post the question with a photo of the person who will answer the questions. Give it a few days for questions to come in and then schedule an Instagram Live to answer the questions (the app will automatically show you the questions sent in). After it’s over, you can save the Live video and share it as an Instagram post, too. [Read this story for details.](#)



◆ **Use Twitter threads**

- By highlighting different parts of your story with a Twitter thread, you give readers another way to access and share your story. This is especially useful when you want to highlight infographics, different impactful quotes, and different angles. See how [Nate Hegyi used a thread](#) to share all that was covered in the “Elevated Risk” series about police violence in the Mountain West.

◆ **Google survey**

- A survey can help surface questions from your community. Create one with Google survey and ask your digital team if they can make a station URL redirect to the survey (i.e. www.kcur.org/covidsurvey). If that’s not an option, make a custom bit.ly link. Include the survey link in the station’s direct mail/flyers, on-air promos, social media posts, etc. [You can start with this template](#). **Note:** Be sure to copy this version of the Google Form into your own Google Drive and then customize to suit your needs.

● **Convenings**

A huge part of community engagement is bringing people together to share ideas, stories, and experiences. These convenings can take the form of a town hall or forum or a listening session where you, as the journalist and host, are there to learn about a given community. While in-person convenings are most personal, there are advantages to virtual convenings, including being more accessible to people who live far away. The following are some resources to help you plan:

- ◆ The Town Hall/Forum/Listening Session Planner on page 149 in Appendix C
- ◆ [Local Voices Network](#): LVN offers a seamless experience for hosting and recording a virtual community conversation. On the front end, LVN can help with scripting a conversation and setting up a call. On the back end, LVN’s program transcribes the conversation that makes searching, filtering and sharing an easy process — a huge benefit for audio journalists.

WITF reporter Sam Dunklau hosted a Zoom listening session with Erie, Pennsylvania, area residents.





- **Texting exchange**

Texting is a great way to engage people on a device they're used to using: their phones. Studies show that people like getting texts from brands. A [2020 Simple Texting survey](#) shows that a majority of consumers either prefer mobile messaging or consider it their second choice for communications when compared to phone and email. Also: Click-through rates for text marketing are higher than any other messaging channel. This is fertile ground for media companies, who have stories to share.

America Amplified worked with GroundSource and Subtext, both texting service platforms. Partner stations used texting in different ways, from connecting with specific communities to outreach for a daily talk show.

- ◆ **Texting tool workflow (page 144):** How do you start a texting campaign and how do you keep it going? This document, based on our experience with GroundSource, will help.
- ◆ **GroundSource 2020 report (page 129):** Kateleigh Mills of KOSU shares how the station grew its texting audience in 2020 and the resulting stories.
- ◆ **WILL's The 21st Show (page 131):** Illinois Public Media started using GroundSource for its Monday-Thursday talk show and quickly gained more than 250 people who joined the exchange. Follow the link to read how it happened.

- **Hearken**

Hearken provides a feedback form that can be embedded onto your site to collect questions and information. The system can be integrated through Slack so anyone on your team can see the incoming questions and you can keep track of them through Hearken's backend system. The Ohio Valley ReSource used Hearken in 2020 to solicit questions from their audience. Read managing editor Jeff Young's assessment on page 133.

- **Direct mail/flyers**

With all the technology available, why snail mail? Because some communities aren't wired. Because it's a personal touch. Because it's another way to connect. There are two ways to engage a segmented demographic within a given geography: A) Buy a list from a data merchant or B) Partner with an organization willing to allow use of its mailing list.

- ◆ **KOSU sent postcards to 4 communities:** KOSU in Oklahoma wanted to reach rural communities, so it sent out more than 27,000 postcards designed with questions personal to each of the four communities. The response they received surprised them, because it came through unexpected channels! Read about it on page 137.
- ◆ **Flyers/posters:** This is another old-school method of getting the word out about an event or to join a group, like a texting exchange, or to contact a reporter. Ed Mahon, an embedded reporter in Erie, Pennsylvania, posted flyers around town about joining his texting exchange. The response rate may not be high, but it is another way of sharing information. Another method is to have a community group you're partnering with to share the flyers. See examples [here](#).



- **Content in non-English languages**

Translating stories is a public service and a form of intentional engagement. Before you translate anything, do some research to learn what stories would be most useful to the community you're trying to reach. Consider, too, whether translation is needed or if your newsroom needs to cover stories differently to better serve culturally diverse audiences.

"The best way to reach Hispanic/Latino audiences may not be in Spanish," said Hugo Balta, President of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. "Start with understanding the diversity of the audience, [their] nuances the same way if reporting to African American or LGBTQ audiences."

- ◆ **NHPR WhatsApp Spanish outreach:** Daniela Allee started a Spanish language podcast to serve an unmet need in the community. Then she broadened its outreach with a WhatsApp newsletter, a platform already used by many in the Latino community. Within a few months of launching, the newsletter picked up two sponsors. Read more



Daniela Allee

Reporter for New Hampshire Public Radio on launching a Spanish language newscast

"I know a lot of Spanish speakers are on WhatsApp...and it's a platform people are already familiar with so rather than trying to get people to come to the NHPR website to listen we'll just send it to them and they can listen at their leisure."

about Allee's work on page 44.

- ◆ **America Amplified partner stations translated English reporting on COVID-19 into Spanish.** America Amplified provided the centralized support and funding to hire one full-time translation and interpretation professional and two full-time bilingual teachers. You can use the America Amplified Translation Services Workflow on page 168 in Appendix C as a guide for setting up your own translation practice.

Evaluate your translation work with your community partners and your translators. Include your translators in conversations about how to effectively reach Spanish-speaking (and other language) community members.

In addition to expanding the reach of essential health information, translation was a first step for some stations that wanted to cultivate relationships with bilingual or Spanish-only communities and media. KCUR in Kansas City collaborated with Hispanic KC, a bilingual weekly print and digital publication, to share translated content.

- ◆ Learn about refugee or non-English speaking populations in your own community and



find a way to provide translations of important stories and information. In Indianapolis, Side Effects Public Media partnered with Indiana University to provide [translations in Hakha Lai for Burmese readers](#) because reporters knew there was a large Burmese population in the city.

- **Newsletters**

Billions of emails are sent every day, and it is still one of the most effective and powerful forms of marketing. According to a 2017 Statista study, 49% of consumers said that they would like to receive promotional emails from their favorite brands on a weekly basis. For newsrooms, this means you should try newsletters. Also think of newsletters as a curation tool for readers: You're helping them sort through what's important. Don't know where to start or what to add? Here's a start.

- ◆ **Breaking news/headlines of the day:** As a newsroom, you should offer a newsletter that highlights your five to seven main headlines of the morning.
- ◆ **High-interest topic.** 2020 was the year of pandemic/coronavirus/election newsletters, as it should be. And there's still plenty of news there to share. By corraling all your related headlines to that newsletter, it's a service to the readers. If there's a high-interest topic in your community that you're devoting resources to, consider adding a newsletter.
- ◆ **High-profile show or personality.** Starting with a popular show or personality already guarantees you'll have interest. The newsletter could share links to the show, give behind-the-scenes stories, personal messages and preview what's ahead.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

KOSU GroundSource Report from January 1, 2020 – January 7, 2021

by Kateleigh Mills, KOSU Special Projects Reporter



KOSU utilized the GroundSource App in 2020 to engage with communities about the COVID-19 vaccine, elections and asking them about local topics that pertain to reporters' beats (indigenous affairs, health, criminal justice).

We gained 613 sources in our total GroundSource 'KOSU Texting Club' from January 1, 2020 – January 7, 2021.

Our retention rate for the KOSU Texting Club was 86% throughout that time period. We had a total of 192 unsubscribers during that period.

In that time period we sent a total of 94,134 text messages. We received a total of 12,224 messages from people in the KOSU Texting Club.

The engagement tool allowed us to create helpful guides throughout the year, most notably:

"Your Voter Guide for Oklahoma's November 3rd Election": <https://www.kosu.org/post/your-voter-guide-oklahomas-november-3rd-election>

"Your COVID-19 Testing Guide in Oklahoma": <https://www.kosu.org/post/your-covid-19-testing-guide-oklahoma>

"KOSU's 2020 Holiday Safety Guide and Community Voices": <https://www.kosu.org/post/kosus-2020-holiday-safety-guide-and-community-voices>

For our current guide, "What We Know About Oklahoma's Vaccination Plan," we began the text messages with this:

Hi there, this is Kateleigh Mills with KOSU. The coronavirus vaccine has made it to Oklahoma and doses are already being administered. Health officials are telling us that the state's vaccine plan is fluid and could change depending on supply issues or other developments.

Right now, I'm working alongside other KOSU and StatImpact Oklahoma reporters to provide a community guide for Oklahoma's Vaccination Plan -- and we'd like your input!

Do you have any questions about the vaccine you'd like us to look into?

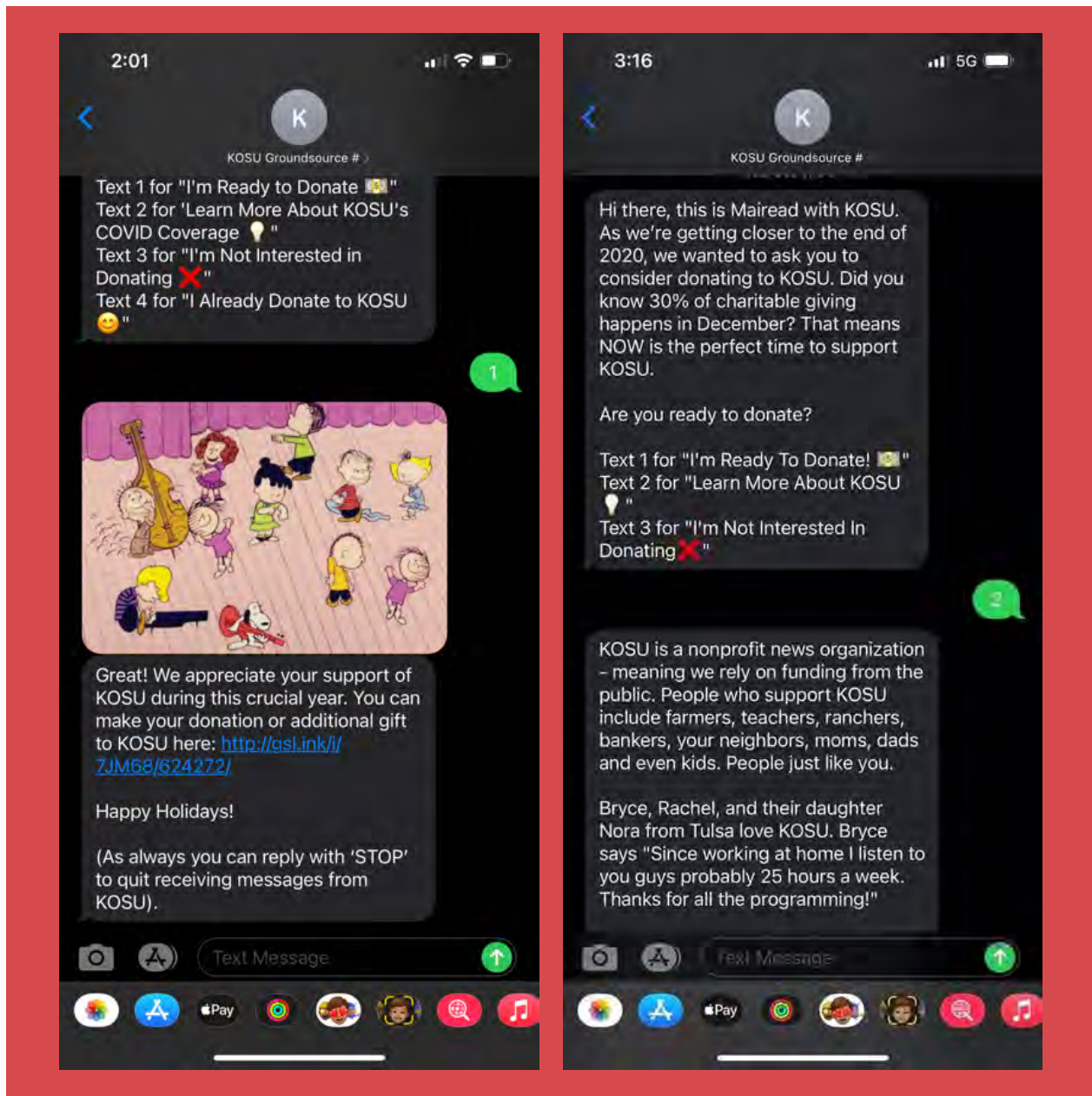
The resulting story is here: <https://www.kosu.org/post/what-we-know-about-oklahomas-vaccination-plan>

We experimented with GroundSource at the end of the year for membership drive purposes on Giving Tuesday and also every Wednesday in December.



We almost always exceed our GroundSource goals every month — in part because the goals are set too low since our total GS population has grown in the past year. We need to up both the messages and engagement goals. On the backend of GroundSource, I talk with people often on a one-by-one basis. I share their questions with our other reporters who can answer

them better than me and share the info back. They are always very appreciative that we take the time to send them a personal response in this way. Our weekly news round-up has been doing really well. It has 218 sources who opted in to receiving local news straight to their phone on a weekly basis.





Why WILL/Illinois Public Media wants to keep texting forever

Illinois Public Media/WILL is one of the Harvest Public Media stations that's been using the GroundSource texting tool as part of its America Amplified efforts.

WILL decided to use it for its [statewide Monday-Thursday talk show, The 21st](#), to engage with listeners. The results have been so promising that Reginald Hardwick, the station's news and public affairs director, says he wants to use GroundSource "forevermore."

So what's going so well?

Eunice Alpasan, the station's engagement producer, shared the following.

Q: When did you start using GroundSource with the 21st talk show and why?

We started our Text The 21st initiative using GroundSource in late May of this year. We wanted to uplift diverse voices from all across Illinois and give listeners an easy way to be part of the conversations happening on our show. In light of the pandemic and the 2020 Election, we wanted to get a better feel for what listeners were seeing in their areas and what issues really matter to them.

Q: How many people are in your texting exchange now and how many join each week?

We have around 250 people signed up for our texts. About 3-5 new people join each week.

Q: What have been some of your most popular questions in terms of engagement?

Help shape COVID-19 coverage in Illinois

Text TALK to 217-803-0730



- Will you be voting by mail for this upcoming election? Why or why not? What questions or concerns do you have about mail-in voting or voting in general?
- As we head into the colder months, what questions do you have about COVID-19? What are you seeing in your area? Are people and businesses following safety guidelines?
- Do you think down-ballot & local races are more or less important to you & your community than federal elections? Why?

Questions related to Illinois-specific policies and politics are popular as well.

Q: What advice do you have for stations who want to do similar engagement with their talk shows?

Text messaging can easily be a cold form of communication when you give listeners in a text group the impression that there isn't a real person reading their texts on the other side.

Responding to individual texters personally and signing off with your name and title can be a good way to help people feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts. It can be as simple as sending something like, "Thank you for



your response, Angela. -Eunice, engagement producer of The 21st.”

Also, I suggest thinking about your goals for garnering texts and how you would want to use them in the talk show. This can guide how you choose to frame questions and how often you want to send out texts.

Lastly, think about all the different ways you can promote the texting club, whether it be during the talk show, social media, paid ads, newsletters, web posts, on-air promos or community Facebook groups.

Q: Has anything surprised you about the effort?

It has surprised me how various parts of Illinois are represented in our texting group. It’s been interesting reading about listeners’ experiences in their towns, and some of the responses have helped shape our news coverage on The 21st.

Even though we’re an Illinois-based show, it has surprised me that we’ve also gotten texters from Florida, California and Indiana!



Ohio Valley ReSource's use of Hearken: What was helpful, what was limiting

By Jeff Young

Jeff Young is the Managing Editor of Ohio Valley ReSource. He is an award-winning journalist and has reported from Appalachian coalfields, Capitol Hill, and New England's coast, among other places. His book, "Appalachian Fall: Dispatches from Coal Country on What's Ailing America," was released in August 2020.



OHIO VALLEY RESOURCE

The America Amplified partnership made possible a one-year contract with [Hearken](#) to use its online audience engagement tool across the seven partner stations in the Ohio Valley ReSource collaborative.

The original intent was to use Hearken to gather input on important regional issues in the 2020 election. Initial plans called for coupling the use of Hearken with audience engagement events and partnerships with local institutions such as schools and libraries to increase the range of input. The arrival of the coronavirus, of course, changed those plans. The pandemic became the main focus for our application of Hearken as the pandemic severely restricted our ability to leverage Hearken via events and partner institutions.

APPLICATIONS

Ohio Valley ReSource used Hearken to generate audience questions and input about:

- Coronavirus pandemic
- Changes to election rules and voting due to the pandemic



credit: J. Tyler Franklin, Louisville Public Media

- Voting attitudes and low voter turnout
- COVID vaccine
- Black Lives Matter

We used web posts, social media, and radio promotion across our partnership to encourage community participation.

CONTENT PRODUCED

COVID & vaccines

[Answering Your Questions About The COVID-19 Vaccines](#) (Dec. 17, 2020)

By combining interviews with regional experts and material generated by America Amplified partners we were able to address five major issue areas that emerged early on from audience questions about the COVID vaccines: safety, availability, efficacy, cost and the general experience of getting vaccinated. Those issue areas represented about 15 to 20 of the questions we had received to that point.

[Why Kentucky Is Changing Some COVID-19 Data: The Positivity Rate Explained](#) (Oct. 14, 2020)



Although we did not explicitly link this explainer piece to Hearken feedback, our editorial decision here was informed by what we were seeing in some questions — people didn't understand how positivity rates were calculated and why the measure is important as a leading indicator of the trend of infections in an area.

[Q&A: Pandemic Expert on Ohio Valley Mask Orders, School Reopening](#) (July 19, 2020)

A second interview with Boston University's Dr. Gerald Keusch, addressed some Hearken questions regarding mask use and public health orders.

[Masking Questions: How Pandemic Health Measures Became Politicized](#) (July 2, 2020)

We incorporated some audience questions from Hearken in this interview with Dr. Richard Besser, CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Listener questions had to do with PPE, masks and social distancing practices.

[Your Coronavirus Questions, Answered](#) (April 2, 2020)

This interview with Dr. Gerald Keusch, professor of medicine and international health at Boston University, addressed several audience questions about protective equipment, vulnerability to repeated infections, and effects of the virus.

Elections & voting

[Last Minute Voting Questions](#) (Oct. 30, 2020)

Reporter Alana Watson used Hearken feedback to address questions people had about in-person and absentee voting.

[Ohio Valley Election Officials Prepare For Unprecedented Pandemic Election](#) (Sept. 25, 2020)

This piece provided an overview of the general election changes in our three states and links to the voter guides for each state.

Primary guides: we used Hearken input to

What questions do you have about the Covid-19 vaccine?

Your contact info
We'll be in touch if we look into your question.

Name

Email address

Sign me up for your newsletter!

Please don't publish my name

I am over 16 years old

I accept the [Terms of Service](#)

Submit

Powered by Hearken | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)



create these guides to address basic questions about the newly expanded absentee and early in-person voting. Kentucky example here: [A Pandemic Voter Guide For Kentucky's Primary Election](#)

Voting attitudes and low turnout: We [sought input about](#) the region's low voter turnout and produced this feature exploring some factors that contribute to low voter turnout. However, the Hearken prompt generated very little response.

OBSERVATIONS & ASSESSMENT

Our most successful uses of Hearken — as measured by the number of responses — were near the onset of the pandemic and shortly after the announcement of vaccines. Those were two moments when people had a lot of questions about major events and there was a pressing need for clear communication about public health information.

There were also questions specific to state and local level concerns, such as the nature of restrictions on workplaces and the schedule for availability of vaccines. I felt very fortunate to have use of this tool to solicit public questions from across the region during this crisis.

In addition to the products that we generated directly in response to Hearken questions, I found it useful as an editor to use the audience feedback as a general “finger on the pulse” type of indicator to better understand where an audience is on a given issue. I think this was particularly important over the course of the pandemic, as the audience clearly grew more informed about the measures being used and as new information and developments came to light.

Questions at the outset of the pandemic reflected a need for very basic information about the virus and the public health precautions in

place. Within a month, however, questions became more detailed and focused on some very practical aspects of day-to-day life while coping with the virus, such as best practices for use of protective equipment.

Later, we saw questions that reflected people's anxieties about returning to work as local economies reopened. With news of successful vaccines we saw a similar development of the questions we got from the public: first a need for very basic information, then more detailed and regionally specific questions.

Our application of Hearken to elections and voting practices did not yield as much response as we had expected but still played a role in our development of our guides to new voting rules in our three states.

So far our use of Hearken in association with the “Black Lives in Red States” series has not generated much feedback.

Direct engagement

Ideally the engagement process doesn't end with a question being answered: We also want to follow up with the questioners. In some cases the reporters were able to do this directly, but for pieces that involved more questions (such as the Q&A on vaccines) direct feedback became unmanageable. The addition of a part-time engagement specialist (Tajah McQueen) has helped enormously.

Final assessment

Hearken web embeds are easy to use for both the newsroom and for our audience, allowing us to create an attractive interface for our users and then collect responses in a central location (using the Slack API).

However, there really is not much about Hearken



technology that we can't duplicate using other existing (and free) applications. In fact, Hearken's embeds have some limitations we found frustrating.

For example, when covering the top agenda items for the new Biden administration, we wanted to ask our audiences to rank what items they thought were most important. Hearken didn't allow for that type of feedback, so we instead used a Google doc form to allow people to rank issues.

Hearken has also not adapted especially well to social media applications.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Hearken contract was the advice about how to craft prompts to give us the best chance of generating productive input. That essentially served as training for me, my reporters, and our engagement specialist, which will likely serve us well after the contract expires and we continue with audience engagement through other means.

While we have realized benefits from our use of Hearken, we do not plan on extending our contract with them. We will apply lessons learned to generate our own tools for engagement and raise money to make the engagement specialist position permanent.



KOSU sent out postcards; the response was surprising

America Amplified worked with KOSU to design and send postcards to four rural communities in Oklahoma as an experiment in engagement via direct mail.

The takeaway: Success may come in unexpected ways.

Here's what **Rachel Hubbard**, executive director of KOSU, reported of the effort:

Q: How many postcards did you send out?

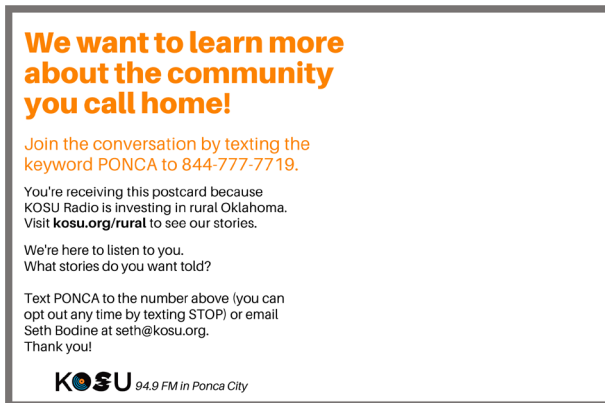
We sent 27,460 postcards to residents in four rural communities. We chose these communities based on census data, population changes, geography and changing industries and job opportunities. They have largely been the focus of our engagement during the 2020 election cycle.

Q: What are some of the results?

We asked people who received the postcards to tell us something they felt we needed to know about their towns by joining our GroundSource texting club or by emailing our agriculture and rural issues reporter. The initial results didn't seem that great. We had 22 people join the texting club, and we have had around 20 emails trickle in.

Q: Did anything surprise you about this form of engagement?

While people didn't respond in the way we expected, we've seen surprising and positive responses in other ways. We had been trying for months to get responses through community Facebook groups. Prior to sending



out the postcards, the engagement in these groups was almost zero. Following the postcards, one callout for story ideas in a Facebook group generated more than 100 responses. Also, when we were making calls in one of the communities trying to find people who might be interested in participating in a Local Voices Network session on agriculture, participants said they recognized the station because they had received the postcard.

Q: What lessons do you have for others who want to try this?

Go in with an open mind. The responses you receive may not be in the channels you expect, and they may not be immediate. However, we feel the postcard strategy has created a baseline awareness in communities where people knew very little about KOSU.



Now, when we show up in a Facebook group or call on the phone, they know a little bit about who we are and are more willing to engage. We believe it has been helpful in softening the ground in these communities.

New sponsorships

KOSU in Oklahoma shared that its rural engagement efforts inspired new corporate sponsorship for the station from the Oklahoma Pork Council and, for the first time, the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. Other agricultural organizations are also considering sponsorships.

So far this year, KOSU has covered the pandemic's toll on farmers; how facial recognition technology is used to identify cows; and the challenges Black farmers face to keep their family land. KOSU's experience is a good reminder that setting intentions and continuing relationships can have measurable impact on funding in addition to increasing page views and ratings.



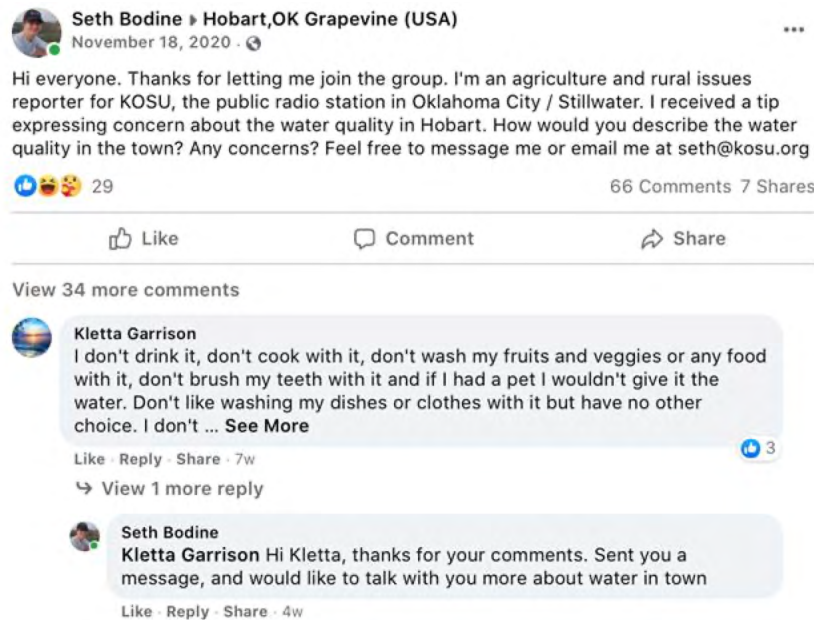
How Facebook posts led me to a community problem in Oklahoma

by Seth Bodine

Seth Bodine covers agriculture and rural issues for KOSU in Oklahoma as a Report For America corps member. In December 2020, he published a story about the poor quality of water in Hobart, Oklahoma. Here's how he discovered the story through Facebook.



Much of my time last year for engagement was in Facebook posts in rural town groups. The biggest engagement effort was for my last feature of the year about the water in the town of Hobart. Here is the initial post:



This resulted in several sources I used for my story. I replied to individual comments to see if they'd be willing to talk to me over the phone and eventually meet. I initially received the tip about Hobart from posting on a Cordell page, from someone who said problems with the water were also there.

Once the story was published, I posted again with highlights from my report and a link to the story. Many Hobart residents posted it. Following the story, another reporter, Steve Shaw, went to Hobart to do a story, further highlighting the issue.



I initially got this story idea when I was posting on chicken groups to see if any of their mail order chickens arrived DOA. Someone commented: "You should look into the water in Cordell. It's worse than Flint Michigan." The biggest takeaway: Social media engagement work leads

to stories! In unexpected ways.

I also posted in Cordell and received several emails about the water. All screenshots on page below.



Seth Bodine shared a link.

December 18, 2020 at 9:14 PM · 🌐



Hi everyone. Thanks for your comments, messages and emails about the water in Hobart. After some reporting, I published a story about the water and how it fits into the trend of other towns. See below, along with some additional links and info. Feel free to share if you find this helpful. Here's what I found:

The story with all the details:

<https://www.harvestpublicmedia.org/.../rural-towns-across...>

Highlights:

- According to a 2020 EPA Consumer Confidence Water Report looking at 2019, there were no violations in contaminants in Hobart. The water was within EPA standards. Water supervisor in Hobart told me the color in the water could be from the old pipes in town. See the report here: <http://sdwis.deq.state.ok.us/DWW/CCReports/OK1011502.pdf>
- However, according to Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, there have been 11 complaints since 2010. Three have been made between 2019-2020. In six instances, a chlorine residual violation was found. I was told by the DEQ director of communications that in those cases, the complaints were received within seven days of each other and all related to the same issue. In 2019-2020, DEQ found more chlorine issues and worked with the city to flush it out. In another instance, a line break was causing odor and coloration and the city flushed it out to fix the problem.
- Travis Archer, who works for the water quality division for the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, says the department runs into taste and odor issues frequently in Oklahoma. Most of the time, he says the issue is what the EPA defines as secondary contaminants, minerals or chemicals that don't threaten health but can affect the taste or appearance of water. These secondary contaminants include iron or magnesium, which often cause discoloration.
- If you are concerned about the quality of your water, the best way to find answers is by reporting to DEQ. Here is the link to make a complaint. They can't fix a problem they don't know about, especially if it's happening in a specific area of town. Link to make a complaint: <https://www.deq.ok.gov/environmental-complaints/>
- It's important to make a complaint to DEQ, because often, contaminated water in rural areas is underreported. According to a 2006 EPA audit, 92% of Lead and Copper Rule health standards and 70% of monitoring *were not reported*. A report by the [Government Accountability Office](#) in 2011 also showed underreporting of violations.
- Feel free to message or email me with any comments or concerns (or more story ideas) at seth@kosu.org

Thanks!

-Seth Bodine, agriculture & rural issues reporter for KOSU



How Side Effects Public Media plans its Facebook Live events

by Brittani Howell

Brittani Howell was a lifestyle reporter and editor in southern Georgia and the education reporter for the Herald-Times in Bloomington, Indiana before joining Side Effects as community engagement specialist to lead various efforts, from texting exchanges to hosting events.

With communities isolated from one another during the ongoing pandemic, it's important for reporters to connect with their audience members and be responsive to their informational needs. Side Effects Public Media and Indiana Public Broadcasting have been using audience questions to drive reporting and coverage. To supplement that coverage, and to address some questions publicly, we are hosting a Facebook Live series with reporters across our teams.

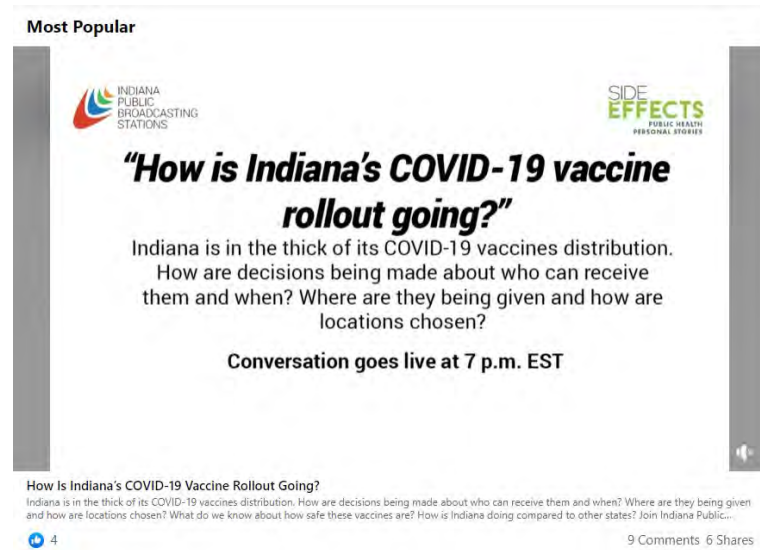
As we receive incoming questions, engagement specialists sort the questions thematically. Facebook Live conversations are built around those questions and scheduled depending on current reporting or recent breaking news. (Example: After Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb announced the state was working with other Midwestern governors to reopen, our team brought in reporters from three different states to discuss what reopening might look like.)

For 45 minutes to 1 hour, reporters speak to a host (another reporter or an engagement specialist) about the topic and answer questions we have received, in addition to any questions that may come in through social media during the stream.

At Side Effects, we try to stay within the following metrics for each episode:



- One livestream every other Thursday, to make sure we can put forward the best product without overtaxing our tech strategist.
- Stream is 45 minutes to 1 hour long, because anything longer would be pretty draining and anything shorter tends not to perform as well.
- 2-3 guests at a time; any more than that gets a bit taxing for the viewer. Also, with a limited time frame, you want to make sure everyone gets enough airtime.
- Web build turnaround within 24 hours.



Workflow

Brainstorm. You want a good bank of topics to explore and experts to consult. As we build up audience and enthusiasm, we’ve been keeping our experts “in-house” (i.e. limited to people on our staff), but we would like to branch out into community experts in the near future. Create a shared document with a list of topics and possible guests, and share it with your reporting team/teams to get their feedback and buy-in.

Timeline

Once you have a few topics you’d like to explore and a rough idea of your schedule, you go through the process of building each “episode.” Here is what that timeline looks like for me:

- **Two weeks out**

Decide topic, based on current reporting and incoming audience questions.

- **One week out**

Invite and finalize guests.

- **Five days out**

Write out a “script” based on the questions and the reporting. Distribute to guests so they have time to prepare.

Write up social media promos with the date, time, and a few details of your lives-tream. Send these promos to everyone on your team and at your organization. Ask them to please share the posts as often as they can to drive up interest and awareness.

Create a Facebook Event for your lives-tream. Plan to share the link, once it’s live, to that space.

- **Three days out**

Send any personalized invitations to people you think would be interested in the topic you’re exploring.

- **Day of**

Send reminders to all station members to share the event details on social media. Include a calendar reminder.

Post reminder in the Facebook Event.

Send follow-ups to your invitees.

Schedule a “sound check” with all parties to make sure everyone’s audio and video are coming through alright.

- **Day after**

Thank-you notes to everyone involved.



Web build of the Facebook Live to share on the website and over the next few days for anyone who missed the livestream.

- **Two days after**

Start again!

Staffing

This is a team effort, and you need a good group to pull it off right. Aside from guests, you need **at minimum**:

- A host/moderator (we've been using the engagement team or the host of the state-wide talk show)
- a technical director
- producer monitoring the social media stream and incoming comments
- digital editor/reporter who can commit to turning the stream into a web build the next day

Some of these roles can be doubled up, but it's best to leave the technical director as free as possible because they will be carrying a heavy lift.



TIP SHEETS

Ideas & workflow for using GroundSource texting tool



By Celisa Calacal for America Amplified

GroundSource is a texting service that offers a way to reach people who do not normally listen to public radio, thereby diversifying the voices and perspectives we feature.

Basics

GroundSource is a texting tool. People interested in participating can “opt in” to the conversation by using a short code word.

GroundSource allows us to craft survey-like questions and send it out to the subscribers. The responses can help reporters gather more information and data on a given topic and connect them with potential sources for stories.



TEXT US!
**WHAT'S YOUR
UNEMPLOYMENT
STORY?**

Text **WORK** to **816-601-4777** to answer a few questions about your experience.

You can text STOP at any time to opt out

3 ways to use GroundSource

Survey

Gather people’s thoughts on a topic. Ask yes or no questions or open-ended questions.

Benefits:

- It can supplement traditional reporting efforts for stories.
- It can help inform a talk show conversation (WILL, for instance, [uses GroundSource to gather potential listener questions/testimonies](#) for their talk show, The 21st).

Breaking news alerts

Send push alerts and story links regarding breaking news events. These messages can be sent without any questions and are a way to keep your broader, non-listening audience informed.

Benefits:

- It shows your newsroom is on top of the breaking news .
- It’s easy to do.
- It broadens the audience for your story, especially for those not watching the news during the day.

Gathering interest

Send out links to special projects, enterprise stories, investigations, or a story of high community interest.

Benefits:

- It’s a way to experiment with the rollout, beyond publishing a post and broadcasting. For example, you can break down the story by scheduling the sharing of different parts.
- It can start a relationship between the subscribers and the reporters working on the story.
- It’s a chance to ask for questions to continue the reporting.

Make GroundSource grouping work for you

The keyword function allows you to establish a the word people will use to enter into the texting conversation.

You can have different conversations running at the same time and group sources together based on what they’re interested in.

The best way to keep your sources organized is to use the “tags” feature. Conversations related to coronavirus coverage can be tagged “COVID,” which will create a group of “COVID” sources.



Working GroundSource into your editorial process

- 1 Identify how you want to use GroundSource** (i.e. for a talk show, one topic, one reporter) Involve the GroundSource manager from the beginning of the story process.

- 2 Create a rollout timeline.**

For GroundSource to yield successful and useful results, it's important to establish a timeline that includes the following:

- **Marketing plan: Get the word out as much as possible**
 - Write a [digital story explaining how GroundSource works](#), why the station is using it, and how joining the texting exchange could benefit people. Make it clear this tool/process would allow people to contribute more meaningfully to our coverage, and it's an opportunity for them to receive coverage from the station.
 - Social media posts, airing promos on your station, placing ads in local newspapers, reaching out to local organizations, etc.
 - Promote on talk shows. The show host can promote the texting campaign by telling listeners the number and codeword to text.
 - Use GroundSource website embed that allows people to sign up by entering their phone number
- **Drafting messages/questions with Celisa or your GroundSource manager**
 - Think about the topic you want to focus on — voting, coronavirus, etc. — and what kind of information you're hoping to get from respondents. For instance, do you want to know how they're being impacted by a certain policy?
 - For survey-style conversations, it's important to include a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions. Start with simple, close-ended questions and then following up with open-ended questions.
 - Keep the questions simple; don't bog them down with unnecessary wordiness.
 - Sign up and test it yourself.
- **Publishing text exchange on GroundSource and start marketing rollout.**
 - Here's one example: For [KCUR's our first GroundSource texting exchange](#), we asked questions about their voting behavior prior to the Missouri primary on March 10:
 - "What qualities do you look for in a presidential candidate?"; "Do you plan on voting during the presidential primary"

- 3 Close the loop and keep it going**

- **Monitoring GroundSource**
 - Responses will be entered into a spreadsheet.
 - Decide how to get the responses to the right reporters and editors
 - Are there follow up questions to ask of the subscribers, or stories that you've published you can share?
 - Decide what's next.
- **Share with the subscribers**
 - Did you publish a story or include some of the responses on air? Share that with the subscribers.
 - Do you have more coverage plans? Share that
 - Maybe have the reporter and/or editor schedule a Q&A session with the subscribers
 - Ask what other topics you can focus on to get ideas on other threads.



How to stream your talk show on

FACEBOOK



BEFORE THE SHOW

Promote it! Start at least a week out with social posts explaining such things as:

- [STATION] will be streaming its [NAME OF TALK SHOW] on [DATE] on Facebook Live. Watch us, leave comments and questions, and we may answer some on air.
- Share who will be the hosts, tag them or their organization if possible.
- Post the promotion natively on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (pay for a boost if possible).
- Remember that FB doesn't like it when you post the same thing within 3 days. Create a simple graphic to use with the promotion. Just be sure to include Facebook URL.

DAY OF SHOW

- Remind listeners it's happening on air and in all social media channels.
- Have a producer on hand to monitor comments OR provide host with second screen.
- Be sure the hosts also acknowledge the Facebook Live audience and remind listeners that they can join, too. As comments or questions come in, answer the ones that you can and mention the person's name/handle.
- Regularly remind Facebook Live viewers that they can engage with you and thank them for watching.
- During show, tweet out photos from show with a link to the FB Live so people can join.
- Thank listeners and viewers when show ends, both on air and in comments.

AFTER THE SHOW

- If you have a digital post recapping the show, go back into the comments thread and share the story.
- Take a look at analytics to see how the show performed. Share the stats with your team.
- If you have a YouTube channel, download and post the video there.
- Get ready for your next one!

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Provided by Cody Newill of KCUR

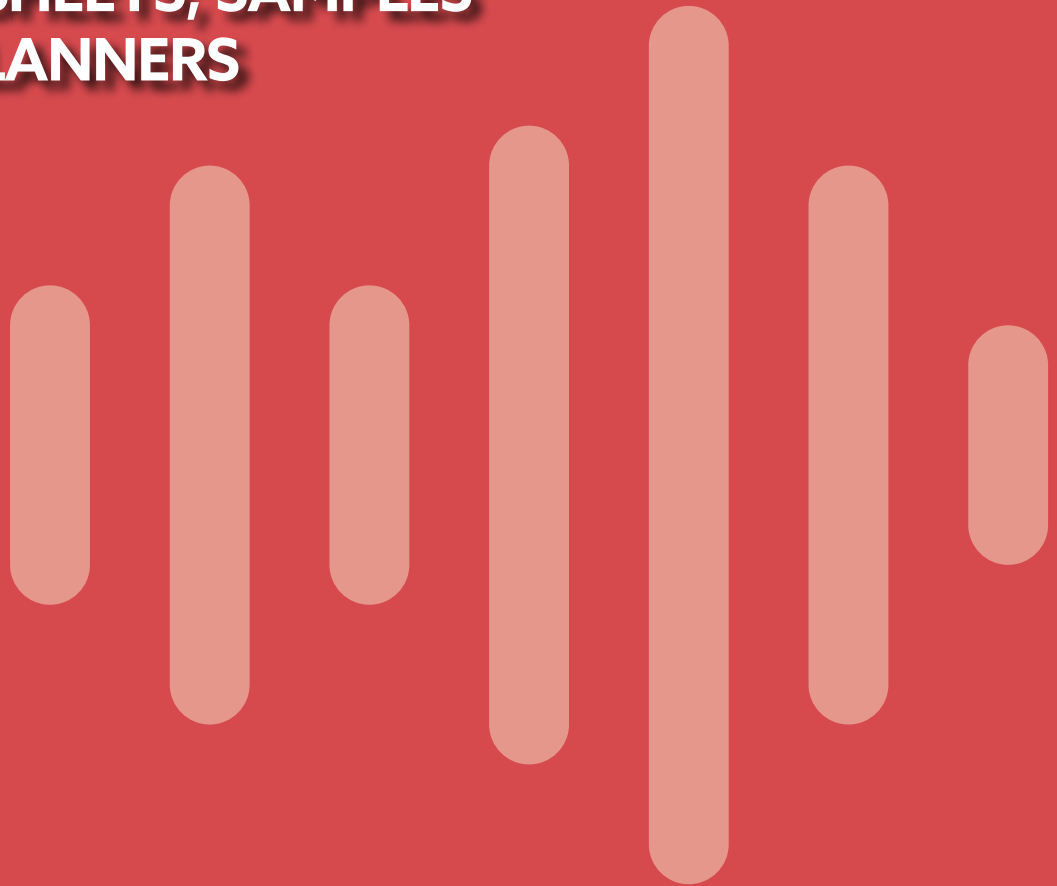
- Get the Facebook Page Manager app and get access as administrator or manager of your newsroom's FB page.
- Make sure you have a phone/tablet with a headphone jack (or a dongle with a jack).
 - Get an iRig. The small plug goes into your headphone jack. There will also be a headphone line that you'll plug into the headphone box in the studio. Plug the headphone end of the iRig into your phone/dongle. Plug the headphone line into the headphone box in the studio.
 - Set your phone in the tripod clamp and position the tripod where you can see as many of the in-studio guests (and hosts) as possible. SHOOT HORIZONTALLY.
- Open the Page Manager app on your phone. Go to your station's page. Hit the button near the top that says "Post." On the next screen, hit "Go Live."
- Your phone will bring up the camera and you can type a description. For example: Name of show, topic, date. Hit the wide blue button to start the stream just a few minutes before the show begins. SHOOT HORIZONTALLY.
- When the show ends, end stream. **MAKE SURE YOU POST THE VIDEO** (ending the stream doesn't post it.)
- You're done! Add guest details after it posts.





Appendix C

**WORKSHEETS, SAMPLES
AND PLANNERS**





CONVENINGS

TOWN HALL/FORUM/LISTENING SESSION PLANNER

This planner is designed to help you convene a town hall, forum or virtual listening session, but with a community engagement focus on serving the information needs of your targeted community. Over the long term, gatherings using this model should allow you to build relationships within this community as well as broaden your source base and understanding of community strengths and challenges.

Town halls and forums typically aren't the best forms of community engagement. Traditionally, they reinforce typical power structures with journalists, experts and elected officials disseminating information, insights and advice. Often true dialogue is missing and Q&As can be counterproductive.

In a community-engaged model, it's about flipping the script. Put reporters and/or producers as "guests" of the forum and make the community members the hosts. Ask them to share their curiosities, concerns and wisdoms. Ask them to interview the journalists. Ask them to pitch ideas to the reporters.

If you must host a traditional forum with experts, include at least one panelist who is a community member and not a typical leader; someone with lived experience of the issue you're gathering around. Remember, lived experience is expertise.

A town hall/forum can also be a good follow-up to other engagement strategies. For instance, if you learn through a previous listening session that there are concerns about air quality in a neighborhood and then you do reporting on it, consider hosting a town hall/forum about what you learned and become a catalyst to establish next steps for the community.

The same principles should be followed for a virtual listening session.

In all cases, the event will be most productive if a wide variety of people from your newsroom participate — prioritizing diversity of gender, age, race and background. Additionally, collaboration from across departments with news, talk shows, membership and development teams will build buy-in for the initiative and create a foundation for expanding your station's reach.

Overview

- Step 1: Determine who are the intended people with whom you'll be engaging.
- Step 2: Start a conversation with community influencers and/or possible partners.
- Step 3: Schedule and plan the town hall/forum/listening session.
- Step 4: Host the town hall/forum/listening session.
- Step 5: Send 'thank yous,' follow up after each town hall/forum/listening session.



Step 6: Look for the journalism.

Step 7: Quick debrief about what worked and what didn't work.

Step 8. Do the reporting at the service of that community and be intentional in following up directly with all who made it possible.

Return to step 2 and repeat.

1. Who are the intended people with whom you'll be engaging.

In your earlier work with a source diversity audit (see Appendix A), you identified the gaps in your coverage and a community or communities with whom you'd like to engage. You've gone through the Community Portrait Worksheet (see page 164) to identify your assumptions about that community. And in that worksheet you should have identified three to nine different places for engagement as well as individuals and/or organizations that you currently believe are sources of trusted information and news. These are where you should begin your outreach efforts.

2. Identify and start a conversation with community influencers.

- Look to our community influencers tip sheet (on page 88 in the Reporters and Producers chapter) for ideas on finding new partners.
- Explain your effort and the intended outcome (to change the way your station does its work)
- Ask the community members:
 - ◆ What are the most urgent needs of the community (over the next week, month, year)?
 - ◆ What are the biggest strengths of the community?
 - ◆ What are the biggest gaps in information needs?
 - ◆ What are the biggest issues and/or impediments to progress?
- Pitch them the idea for a town hall/forum and get their ideas on the best ways to build participation.
- Use this script as a place to start (edit to your needs and situation)



Thank you for your time earlier, it really helped us refine our thinking about how to serve you better.

I want to loop back with you and make sure you know about [station name]'s upcoming town hall/forum/listening session.

As you may know, we're trying to innovate how we come up with sources and topics for our journalism. A central part of this work is hosting these listening sessions, loosely organized around [an identified topic].

We're hoping to get a broad and diverse group of individuals from across the community into conversation with one another. Our goal is to really listen and discover what people are concerned and excited about.

Depending on the number of participants, the session will be broken into several small groups of 3 to 10 people. Each conversation will be facilitated by at least one member of the [station name] team. There will also be a larger group conversation.

We expect these sessions to inform our journalism, so some participants may be contacted by one of our reporters or producers afterward.

What we're hoping for

There are a number of different ways you could choose to be involved with this effort. Let me know which, if any, of these fit your interest and availability.

- *Partner with us by promoting the town hall/forum to a wider mailing/membership list and/or posting it to social media groups you have a connection to through your reporting or work.*
- *Suggest town hall/forum guests, we're especially interested in featuring and hearing from individuals who have influence in the community.*
- *Listen in on the town hall/forum to see what people have to share.*
- *Be a co-convenor and/or participant working with the [station name] community engagement team to develop the programming of one, or more, of these town halls/forums.*

3. Schedule the town hall/forum/listening session and outreach

- Set date time/s.
- Establish metrics and goals for the event/s (i.e. to collect emails, questions or find new sources).
- Develop an outreach/promotional plan to reach potential participants — who will do the outreach and how will it be done? Through partner email distribution lists, texts, membership emails?



- Advertise and market the event on your station's website, social media, on the air, through flyers or direct mail, through mailing lists of community influencers and partners. [Here's how America Amplified publicized its series of listening events.](#)

For virtual listening sessions

- ◆ Create a meeting in Zoom that requires registration; registrants will be sent a link and calendar invite for the event.
- ◆ Create quick intake questions for registrants to assess demographics (ZIP code, race/ethnicity, gender) as well as questions to assess this person's willingness to participate in dialogue with others who may have different views.
- ◆ Create a spreadsheet of participants and their responses to your intake questions. You can export this information from Zoom via the "reports" tab.
- ◆ Send participants listening session guidelines via email before the event, advising them on the date and time of the event, some of the basic Zoom instructions (chat function, gallery view, mute button, etc) and that these conversations will be recorded.
- ◆ Remind participants of ground rules, such as how dialogue not debate is preferred; to be curious, show respect, speak your truth, etc. Consider creating a slide deck with these points to share at the beginning of the session.
- ◆ Day of event – send emails/texts to remind participants.
- ◆ An option if you have resources: Partnering with a service like [Local Voices Network](#) to help manage, record and transcribe your session.

4. Host the event

- Your goal is to solicit insights, experiences, joys and sources of struggle/pain/vulnerability.
- Remember to minimize your own preconceptions of what might be their responses.
- Consider unconventional questions for your guests that get them to reveal their personal connection and lived experience. Start with general questions that get people talking (i.e. who influenced your views most in life?). Focus on community assets and strengths with positive questions (i.e. What is something that's going really well for you, or your community, right now?). Recognize the negative emotions associated with certain kinds of questions (i.e. What is your biggest source of stress right now?).
 - ◆ The Listening Session Conversation Guide is a good place to start.
- Leave room for solutions with questions like, "Can you share a story when you or someone close to you overcame, or avoided, [topic]? What was most important to your or their success?"

5. Send a thank you after each engagement

- Keep a centralized contact list for participants. Over the long term, create a database of



community engagement contacts.

- Create a brief survey for participants to give you feedback on the session.
- Set an Outlook reminder to follow up with specific individuals at specific intervals (one month, each quarter, every six months, once a year) about future events.

6. Look for the journalism

- After your town hall, meet with your news team to reflect on what was learned and what were the key takeaways. Pay particular attention to:
 - ◆ Moments when individual and community needs and aspirations of the community were raised: hopes, fears, confusion, disagreement
 - ◆ Emotional responses
 - ◆ Moments when your preconceived ideas about this community were challenged
 - ◆ Moments of surprise
- Go back to participants and/or community influencers before committing to the story/journalism. Do they think what you're proposing to pursue conforms to their understanding? Think of these individuals as your assignment editors.

7. Debrief about what worked what could work better

- After each engagement effort, look at the metrics you established in step 3 and determine if you hit those goals and you might change next time to improve your desired outcomes.
- Go back to your Community Portrait Worksheet and update it with what you've learned.
- Be sure to note if follow up was done and how it will be continued and potentially improved. Improvement could mean adding additional or different community influencers or partners.

8. Do the reporting at the service of that community. Share the story with all who made it possible

- Thank each source and those who participated in the community engagement but maybe weren't quoted. Include a link to your story.
- Encourage sources and participants to share their feedback on the work: Did it resonate with them? Was it accurate? What could have made it better or have more impact in their lives?
- Ask sources to share the story with others who may be interested. Say you welcome their feedback, too.

Return to step 1 and repeat the process with the insights you just learned.



LISTENING SESSIONS CONVERSATION GUIDE

This is a sample script for a virtual listening session, hosted on Zoom. Please use this as a rough guide for virtual or in-person listening sessions and adapt it for your own purposes.

You'll need:

- A licensed Zoom account (that allows sessions to go longer than 40 minutes).
- A main facilitator plus 1 or more co-facilitators to host break out rooms.

Listening Session Conversation Template

[Title]

[Day], [Month], [Year]

Facilitators: Remember to verbally hand off when you've decided that your section is complete to the person indicated in the next session, otherwise they won't know when to step in.

Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
FACILITATOR 1	<p>Pre-Meeting Greeting + Technology Acclimation (20 minutes)</p> <p>Facilitators will be on the call early to test tech. and help orient new participants to Zoom.</p> <p>[Facilitator 1] IF ON ZOOM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the "waiting room" and admit participants • Confirm that all facilitators have recording, screen sharing and hosting permissions • Remind facilitators to verbally hand off to next person who you want to speak • Remind facilitators to "record to this computer" when they enter their breakout rooms • (If having more than 3 breakout rooms) Ask facilitators to put that title in their name 	<p>Welcome people as they join the conversation space (digital or physical).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IN ZOOM: Let people know they can change their name and indicate gender pronouns by hovering over their name and right clicking "rename" • Ask everyone to mute themselves and to keep themselves muted until speaking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ If they are on a phone *6 [star 6] mutes and unmutes. • Ask everyone to notice that there are two views (accessible at the top right of the screen): Gallery View is recommended. • Tell them where to find the chat button (bottom bar), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use if you have questions or are experiencing technical difficulties. • Ask each person to chat what they had for dinner last night just to test out and make sure they know/ understand how it works • Tell participants how to find the reactions button at the bottom of the Zoom screen. Let people know they can use reactions to respond to a comment, can respond in the chat, and can raise their hand (or gesticulate in some way) to ask a question, or post a question in the chat.



Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
<p>FACILITATOR 1</p>	<p>Intro to Event (3 minute)</p> <p>This section can be read by the facilitator or by the co-facilitator when available.</p>	<p>Welcome to [this station's] Listening Session.</p> <p>We're so grateful you're sharing your time with us tonight.</p> <p>Intro [station] staff and Co-facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Facilitator 1] – [station] • [Facilitator 2] – [station] • [Facilitator 3] – [station] • [Facilitator 4] – [Partnering Organization] • [Facilitator 5] – [Partnering Organization] <p>Just a bit about [station]...</p> <p>We are a public radio stations serving [area]. We are here to foster collaborative and innovative journalism. Instead of basing stories on preconceived notions, we focus on putting listening first. And that's exactly why we're here with you today – we're here to listen and facilitate dialogue.</p> <p>Together, we'll create a space to learn about each other's lives and perhaps discover potential solutions to shared challenges.</p>
<p>FACILITATOR 2</p>	<p>Rules (2 minute)</p> <p>[Facilitator 1] IF ON ZOOM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meanwhile, prepare the breakout rooms (can be launched later) • Take snapshot/screen capture of breakout room name list for future reference • Prepare the speaking order in the chat <p>To transition to the next section, invite all participants to take a breath together.</p>	<p>You should have received the ground rules for the conversation via email and they've been cycling through in the slide show.</p> <p>We want to highlight one thing before we start...</p> <p>This conversation is being recorded and is "on the record." Or put another way, it may be used in broadcast or quoting in a story.</p> <p>Someone from the [station] team will let you know if we intend on using something you say in broadcast.</p> <p>Does anyone have any questions about the guidelines for the conversation before we start?</p>

If less than 5 participants continue without breakout rooms (skip to "Opening Questions")



Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
<p>FACILITATOR 3</p>	<p>Intro Breakout Groups (2 minutes)</p> <p>FACILITATORS: This is a good time for you to prepare your questions (see: "Breakout group – Questions")</p>	<p>We're going to split into breakout rooms. A facilitator will be with you in each group.</p> <p>You'll have about 45 minutes to talk together.</p> <p>In the breakout group you'll select someone to share back a few key takeaways of what's discussed during <i>your</i> breakout session so the <i>whole group</i> will get a sense of what was covered.</p> <p>After those 45 minutes in the breakout room, we'll all return to the main room for that shareback and a closing larger group conversation.</p> <p>Does anybody have any questions before we break into our smaller groups?</p>
<p>FACILITATORS CONFIRM YOU'RE RECORDING THE BREAKOUT ROOM <i>(check top left corner of Zoom window)</i></p>		
<p>FACILITATORS</p>	<p>Opening Question (15 minutes)</p> <p>If anyone is on the phone, please verbalize the names of people in the order that you plan to go. (This will help with transcription after the event) Let people know we'll use the same order for each question.</p> <p>Facilitators post the order of participants and the question into the chat box</p> <p>Facilitators, please do respond to this question to establish your connections with the group. Include your name, gender pronouns, and where you are from. Please model a brief response.</p> <p>Pause for answers.</p>	<p><i>(if in breakout rooms)</i></p> <p>Welcome to this breakout group!</p> <p>We're gathered to talk along the broad themes of [theme]. It is something that will ultimately impact all of us in some way.</p> <p>We are going to start our conversation with a modified "circle" process, where each person will take a turn speaking.</p> <p>I'll help transition us from one person to the next and I'll post the speaking order into the chat.</p> <p>You can always pass, or ask for us to come back to you.</p> <p>Does anyone have any questions about this process?</p> <p>Let's start with a quick round of introductions.</p> <p>Please share your first name (or a pseudonym), your gender pronouns, where you're joining from, and _____</p> <p>For this first round, I'll start...</p>



Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
<p>FACILITATORS</p>	<p>Nominate Share-back person (2 minutes)</p> <p><i>If NOT in breakout rooms then skip to the next section.</i></p>	<p><i>(if in breakout rooms)</i></p> <p>Before we go deeper into the conversation we need to nominate a shareback person.</p> <p>Is there anyone who'd like to volunteer to shareback some of the key takeaways from this group?</p> <p>Of course, if none of you feel comfortable sharing for the group that's totally fine. I'd be happy to share what I've heard you folks discussing.</p>
<p>FACILITATORS</p>	<p>Group Conversation Process (2 minute)</p>	<p>For this next part of the conversation we're going to move into a more conversational style.</p> <p>All of you are encouraged to ask follow up questions of each other, follow your own curiosity—we want to hear from everybody. This is your conversation and an opportunity to get to know each other better.</p> <p>I may jump in to help move the conversation along, ask clarifying questions, or to make sure everybody has an opportunity to speak.</p> <p>Does anyone have any questions about the process before we begin?</p>
<p>FACILITATORS</p>	<p>Breakout group – Questions (41 minutes)</p> <p>Facilitators: these questions are stacked in a suggested order. You can spend longer or shorter amounts of time on any question or sections; use your judgment. Get people into storytelling mode and to speak from personal experience and observation.</p> <p>Ask one question at a time, allowing participants to pick up threads and ask each other follow-ups, making sure everyone has a chance to respond.</p> <p>Good follow ups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Can you share a story from your experience that will help us understand this a little better?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who influenced your views on [topic] the most in life? What did they teach you? • What role does [any faultline – gender, race, etc.] play into how you think about [topic]? (personally and/or on a community level) <p>Negative emotion leaning questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you concerned about your community today? • What have you noticed about your feelings, or reactions to events since [big national or local event]? Has anything changed or surprised you? • What are some of the losses you've experienced related to [topic]? • What most concerns you about your community's/ family's well being at this moment? • What's your biggest source of stress right now? • Are you anxious about your safety? • Have you, or people close to you, reached a breaking point?



Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
<p>FACILITATORS (cont'd)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Where have you noticed or seen what you’re saying?” <p>It is <i>not</i> expected that the group will get to all of these questions. Let the participants interest and engagement dictate when to, or not, move onto the next question or section.</p> <p>[Facilitator 1] will give 2 minute warning before breakout rooms close</p> <p>Use clips from other reporting or shows you’ve done to elicit responses. Make it clear people can push back on what’s being shared and add their own perspective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me about a time when you felt embarrassed by your community? <p>Positive emotion leaning questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is something that’s going really well for you, or your community, right now? • How much is [topic] impacting your stress right now? Is financial security an issue? <p>Solution orienting questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you share a story when you or someone close to you overcame, or avoided, more serious [topic] issues? What was most important to your or their success? • Can you tell me about a time when you felt really proud of your community? • What do you see as the biggest obstacle for your own [topic] right now? • If you could change one thing where you live related to how it handles or doesn't address [topic] what would it be? • What role do you think the government should, or should not, play in your community's future? • Has your opinion or thinking changed about what your community's future looks like since [perceived big community or national event]? • Has your thinking about [topic/issue/community] changed over time for you? • Has there been any benefit or positive outcome from [perceived big community or national event] in your community life? • How prepared do you feel your community is to solve problems in the future? • Is there something you can think of that you'd like to see changed where you live? • What do you think your community will look like in 6 months from now? What about in a year? <p>Media portrait and relationship questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a story about [topic] that media is missing or sharing incorrectly? • What is working well for you, and/or the people who are important to you, when it comes to [topic] supports?



Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
<p>FACILITATORS (cont'd)</p>		<p>Not easily categorized questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are some stereotypes you think people have about your community? ● Do you have generalizations or stereotypes about other communities? Is there a time when those generalizations or stereotypes changed for you? ● If you were in charge of 3 different reporters who would investigate whatever you wanted what would you assign them to cover or investigate? (put another way, 'what do you need answers to?') <p>QUOTE/CLIP EXAMPLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In our process of reaching out to people to invite them to be part of tonight's conversation, one person replied: "After sleeping on this, I think I'm going to have to pass. I'm just really hesitant right now to go on the record as a Trump voter or even as a conservative. Honestly, I'm also so exhausted with politics and the media in general right now that I don't even feel like taking part in the overall discussion with anyone." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ As you listened to this, what reactions do you have? ◆ Did any personal memories or experiences come to mind? ◆ When you think about reaching across the political divide? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do you want to see? ◆ Are there issues you'd be willing to personally compromise on? What might they be? ◆ What stands in the way of compromise today?
<p>FACILITATORS CONFIRM YOU'VE STOPPED YOUR RECORDING (Facilitator 1: confirm you've started new recording)</p>		



Who	Instructions for Facilitators	Script
FACILITATOR 1	<p>Return to Main Room (23 minutes)</p> <p>Ask one question at a time, allowing participants to pick up threads and ask each other follow-ups, making sure everyone has a chance to respond.</p> <p>If you have time here you might hone in on one or two topics or themes that rose to the top of people’s list. You might ask people to dig deeper into these topics or ask each other questions.</p> <p>The most important questions to ask during this closing session are in bold. If you only have time for one or two questions make it them.</p> <p>Remember to turn the conversation back to the topic by asking, “Where have you noticed or seen what you’re saying?”</p>	<p><i>(If breakouts occurred)</i></p> <p>Welcome back!</p> <p>Let’s take a few minutes to quickly hear some of the key takeaways from each of the breakout groups.</p> <p>If strategies or potential solutions were mentioned to challenges please share how your group thought about addressing them.</p> <p>Is there anything you heard that resonated with you or that you want to expand upon?</p> <p>Thank you all for sharing...</p> <p>We’re going to move from the format of taking turns speaking to more natural back-and-forth conversation. I’d invite you to respond to points that resonate for you when they are made by others in the group while being mindful that everyone who wants to participate has an opportunity to do so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tools or information do you feel like you have? What tools, resources or information do you feel like you’re missing to accomplish some of the changes you’d like to see in your life or community? • Do you have questions for us, the journalists? • Do you have questions for each other?
FACILITATOR 2	<p>Wrap-up (2 minutes)</p> <p>[Facilitator 1]: Press the “stop recording” button at the bottom of the screen.</p>	<p>You can reach out to me or any other of the [station] staff with additional concerns or questions.</p> <p>Finally, it would mean a great deal to us if you fill out a brief survey. It should take less than 2 minutes to complete and will help us assess how to improve these conversations for the future. Thank you all so much.</p>
Stop ALL Recordings		
FACILITATOR 1+2	<p>Wait in the main room</p>	<p><i>(wait until everybody else has left, to make sure nobody has any lingering questions)</i></p> <p>Thank you, goodbye now.</p>

****FACILITATORS — Upload Breakout Room Recording****



- Before closing your Zoom application make sure you convert your recording. (*You should be prompted to do this after you 'leave' the meeting. This process may take a while, several minutes, be patient.*)
- After the conversion, your recording/s should be saved onto your computer hard drive (*not the cloud*).
- By default Zoom recordings are saved in the following directory...
 - ♦ **PC:** C:\Users\User Name\Documents\Zoom
 - ♦ **Mac:** /Users/User Name/Documents/Zoom
- Within that "Zoom" directory there should be a folder with a "YYYY-MM-DD HH.MM.SS" naming prefix corresponding to today's session, this contains everything needed to be uploaded.
- **Please add your first name to both the MP4 (video) file and the M4A (audio) file.**
- **Please email [organizing/lead producer/facilitator] once the upload is complete. Thank you.**



ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY VISION WORKSHEET FOR STATION LEADERS

For engagement to take off at your station, the station manager and the content leadership need to be in sync. This exercise is designed to help you create a vision for your engagement strategy for content, starting with discussing where gaps or biases may exist, and setting goals and aspirations.

The discussion will need to be directed by prompts, and should be led by the chief content officer, news director, and/or managing editor. The people at the table should be the heads of your departments: development, news, programming, marketing.

To make this exercise interactive, have different color Post-it notes the staff can use to write answers to the following:

SAMPLE PROMPTS:

WHO WE REACH NOW:

How are we meeting community information needs currently? How do we know we're meeting information needs?

Who is being served by our current content (news reporting, programming, events)?

WHO WE WANT TO REACH:

Who are the audiences, or the communities we want to reach, but don't currently? (A Source Diversity Audit will help reveal this — see Appendix A.)

What's stopping us from reaching those communities?

OUR CURRENT ROLE:

What are we really good at covering?

What's our current case to our members, to our major donors, to our current audiences about our value as an institution?

Do the sources in our content reflect our broadcast coverage area?

OUR ASPIRATIONAL ROLE:

To be an essential news source for BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of color) communities. (What would that look like?)



To be considered trustworthy by new audiences. (How would you measure this?)

To increase our staff diversity by __ percent. (By when?)

THE PLAN:

Narrow down your findings into the buckets outlined below. If using Post-Its, group answers together under these categories.

Who we reach	Who we want to reach	Our current role	Our aspirational role	How will we know we've been successful

The fourth bucket — “our aspirational role” — is where you’ll identify the nuggets that will create your vision.

It’s also important to identify measures for success in the fifth bucket. If you have too many aspirations, choose three to focus on and set a measure for each. The measures can be in the short term and long term, depending on the goal.



COMMUNITY PORTRAIT WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to help you create and continually refine a portrait of the community with whom you're engaging. Through this recurring process you'll develop a clearer and clearer idea about which people, organizations, places and media platforms to reach out to.

This visioning work will be strengthened if participants come from various departments, including news, talk show, membership, underwriting and if participants are as diverse in terms of gender, age, race, class etc. as possible.

The first time you engage in this exercise you likely will be working from your own assumptions. Consequently, it's essential that you return to this worksheet after each series of engagement to correct your assumptions and reflect on what new insights you have gained through your community engagement work.

Over the long term, this identified community will become part of what you understand to be your core audience. Your reporting will be transformed from being about this community to being for this community.

Before you begin this worksheet:

- You should have completed an assessment of your own biases.
 - ◆ [Understand your own perspective](#) (from Poynter).
 - ◆ Make an [honest inventory of your own privileges](#) (from Wellesley College) and [biases](#) (from Harvard).
 - ◆ For more resources see Bias Check on page 123 in Appendix B.
- You should have identified whom you're currently serving.
 - ◆ Perform a source diversity audit. (See Appendix A.)
 - ◆ Who is your current audience and membership?
 - Where do they live? What are their demographics?
 - ◆ What are the focus areas of your current news and culture coverage?

Step 1: Identify gaps: Who isn't being served?

- Being conscious of your biases and having a clearer picture of what communities you're already serving allows you to think of the communities that aren't yet being served.
- As you develop a consensus around what community you'd like to serve, refine who these people are. The more specific the better. Don't just say you want to engage "people who are Latino." Rather: "affluent, young men who identify as Latino, live in _____ neighborhood and occasionally attend religious services." The more precise you are, the more it will help you with the exercise to follow.



Write your final sentence describing, as precisely as possible, who the people are who make up this community:

STEP 2: Build a persona

Create a persona of a person from this community. In the very first iteration of this exercise, accept and acknowledge your bias and assumptions and accept that this is the beginning of a process to correct those biases and assumptions. You must start somewhere.

Persona/audience Name: (Example: Sofia Ramon, John Smith, Jane Q. Public)

Daily habits: Describe habits, walk through a typical day from their perspective. Example: "Joe gets up at 5 a.m. most mornings, checks Facebook as he makes coffee and breakfast for his two kids..." Also consider noting other things that distinguish this person. Where do they work? Do they travel?



News preferences: Describe assumed news behaviors: e.g., reads headlines, listens/reads before work, listens to podcasts, etc. Be sure to consider when and where they do this consumption, refer back to the daily habits box for ideas. **Once you've completed the list, circle 1 to 3 of what you currently believe to be the most frequently used.**

Whom do they trust: List who and/or what you believe are the trusted sources of information for this person. This could be their spouse, local TV news, TikTok, etc. Again, refer back to their daily habits for ideas) **Once you've completed the list, circle 1 to 3 of the people/sources you currently believe to be this person's most trusted source for information.**

Physical spaces: List the spaces you believe this type of person visits on a regular basis. Refer back to their daily habits for ideas. **Once you've completed the list, circle 1 to 3 of the places you currently believe to be this person's most frequently visited physical space/s.**



You've just identified 3 to 9 different places for engagement as well as individuals and/or organizations that you currently believe are sources of trusted information and news.

If this is your first time going through this exercise these are perfect places to start building partnerships, relationships with community influencers, hosting and promoting events, listening sessions, and finding sources. For example: if the young, professional Latino man you want to reach shops at a certain grocery store, goes to a certain church or is on Instagram, you want to meet him where he's at. Could you partner with his church or grocery store for an event? Would your Instagram stories appeal to him?

When you return to this exercise you should have either re-affirmed some of your previous assumptions or found new or additional opportunities for more impactful and authentic engagement with this community.

Step 3: Do the engagement

In the process of doing your engagement remember to continually ask about the daily habits of the individuals in this community. Don't forget people and communities continually change; just because they use WhatsApp today doesn't mean they will later, for instance.

Step 4: Return to this exercise

Remember to continually refer back to this exercise and do it over as you discover new information. This will help you identify you and your teams' biases and help identify when you're discovering something that complicates those assumptions. These are areas ripe for good stories.

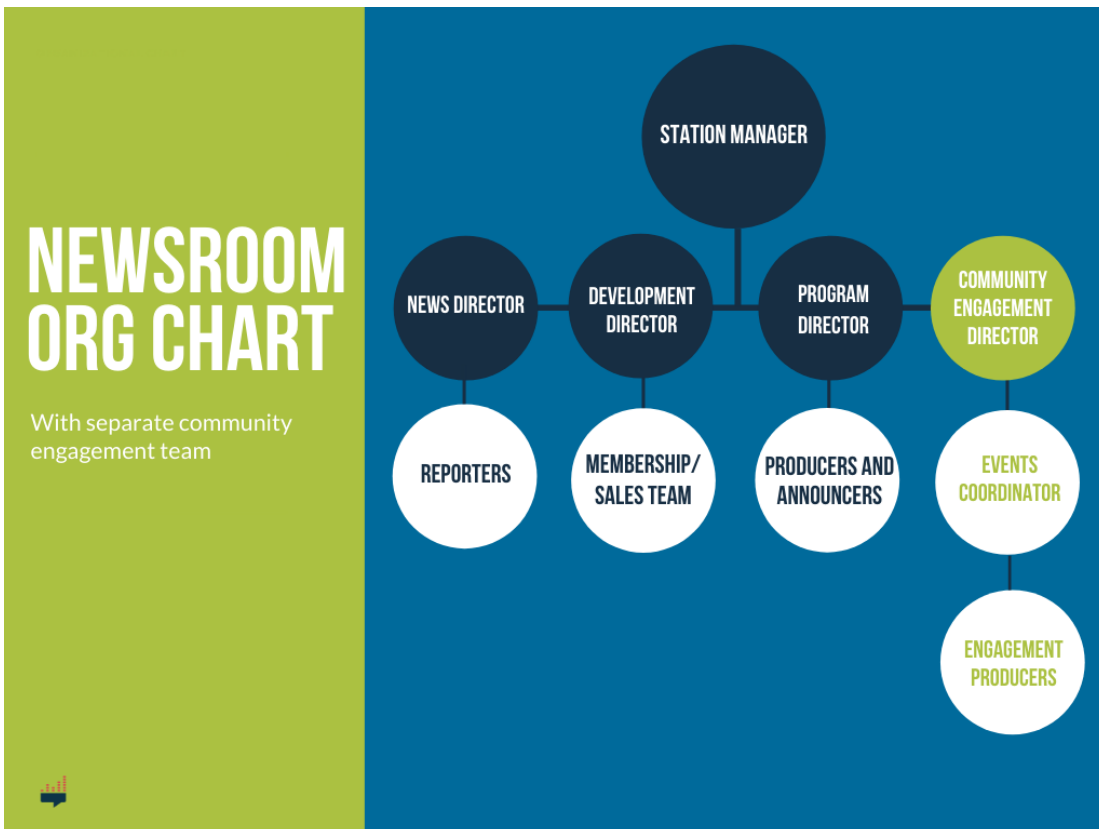
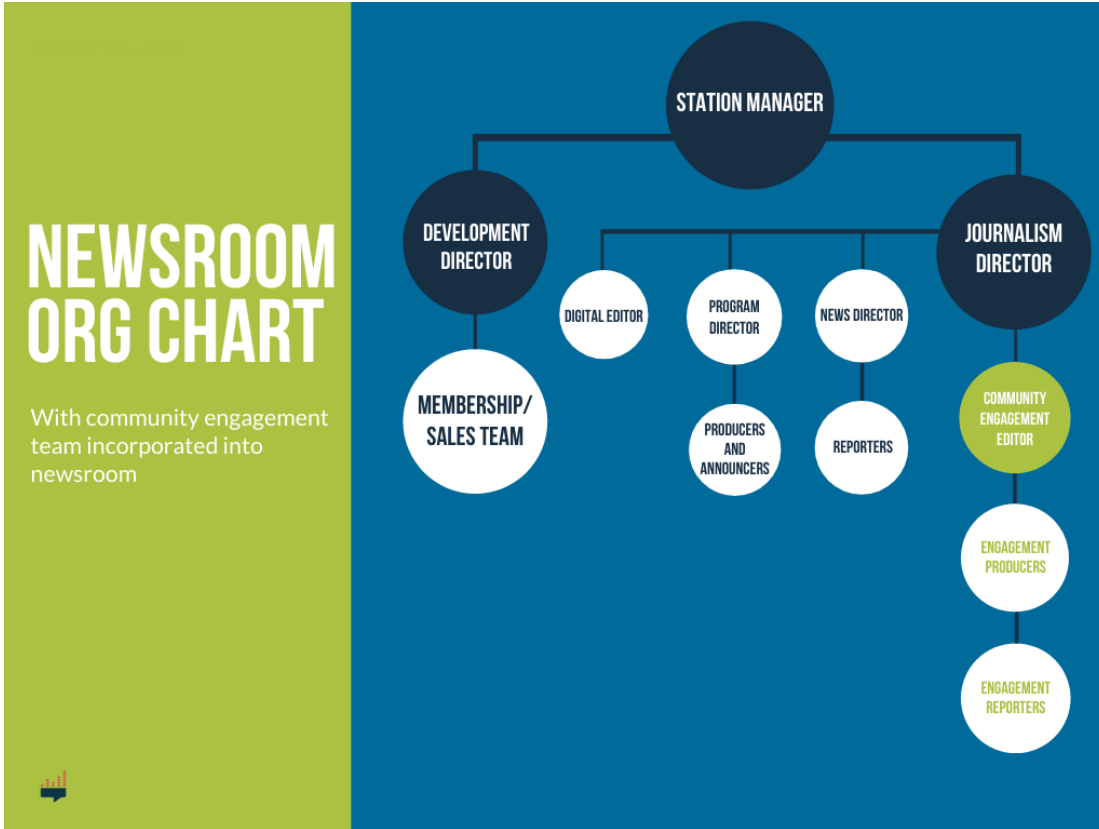


AMERICA AMPLIFIED TRANSLATION SERVICES WORKFLOW

- Professionals seeking English to Spanish translation or proofing through the America Amplified service, send an email or Slack request to Jennifer Tufts.
- Tufts creates a new Google doc and pastes in the requested text. Docs are named for the translator who will be assigned and a shortened headline.
- Once a doc is created, Tufts adds the request into a Google Sheet tracking doc, then emails the translator and the proofreader the request with the editable Google doc link.
- Tufts references the tracking sheet to determine the next available translator.
- Based on their preference, translators will either save an English version of the doc as a back up or leave the English text in the doc as they add the Spanish translation.
- Use the option+command+m formula (if on a mac) or control+alt+m formula (if on a pc) to add comments into the doc if you have a question for the proofreader.
- Translators will notify the proofreader to ask for review when their translation draft is ready for proofing.
- The proofreader will notify the translator when they have completed the review.
- Once the translation is completed, has been proofed and changes confirmed, the English text should be deleted from the translated doc.
- Translators will send Jennifer an email when the final translation is ready to be shared back to the original requester.
- Tufts will send a link to the Google doc to the original requester and update the tracking sheet.
- Translators will invoice at least monthly for work completed.



NEWSROOM ORGANIZATIONAL CHART





SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DIRECTOR/SPECIALIST/PRODUCER

Position description(s):

Community Engagement Director: A Public Media Organization is seeking a creative and curious professional to lead community engagement strategy.

Community Engagement Specialist: A Public Media Organization is seeking a creative and curious professional to coordinate community engagement efforts across multiple departments throughout the organization.

Community Engagement Producer: A Public Media Organization is seeking a creative and curious professional to produce community-engaged content for digital and broadcast platforms.

Essential duties and responsibilities:

- Convene community gatherings on multiple platforms (e.g. live events in person, live events online or on air, virtual conversations, etc.)
- Cultivate community connections, including new media partnerships especially with BIPOC community groups and media.
- Host productive conversations with diverse groups of people.
- Identify community narratives, missing or mis-information and opportunities for enterprise projects.
- Communicate across A Public Media Organization and with the publics you serve.
- *FOR DIRECTORS* — Set community engagement strategy in coordination with A Public Media Organization's mission.
- *FOR PRODUCERS* — Pitch, edit, produce, publish and distribute content for multiple platforms.

Core competencies:

You are a creative and curious professional with experience establishing and maintaining relationships within various communities. Ideal candidates will be able to demonstrate:

- Cultural competency; respect for diverse perspectives, experiences and narratives
- Ability to thrive in a collaborative, deadline-driven environment
- Flexibility to manage competing priorities while meeting deadlines
- Commitment to transparency and accuracy
- *BONUS:* Multilingual skills



- *FOR DIRECTORS* – Ability to manage a diverse team of journalists and/or other professional staff
- *FOR PRODUCERS* – Multimedia skills (e.g. audio editing, writing for digital, photography/video production)

Our commitment to inclusion:

A Public Media Organization believes your lived experience makes you unique, and therefore an important voice to have on our team. Our journalism is for the public, and so is our workplace. The more diverse our perspectives, the better we can serve and cover the diversity of our listeners, readers and communities. Our differences empower us to create innovative and impactful journalism.

**See [this example from Spotify's statement of equality](#)*

Salary and benefits description:

Note: Engagement professionals compensation should be in line with other journalists on your staff. While the work itself may not lead to a byline, the objectives are the same: disseminating facts, providing accuracy and context, and building trust.

Appendix D

FURTHER READING





On engagement's impact on audience and revenue

- [Columbia Journalism Review on how engagement can drive revenue](#)

Detailed examples of ways that news organizations around the world are experimenting with new approaches to raising funds and supporting myriad forms of audience participation.

- [Hearken's data on how engagement brings value to newsrooms](#)

How stories done with engagement have high readership and impact on revenue.

On engagement's impact on trust

- [Agora Journalism Center report on "people powered journalism"](#)

Through conversations with people across the country, the 32 Percent Project identified six key "conditions of trust" – the critical factors that citizens themselves say must be present for them to trust a news organization.

- [Engaged Journalism – Building Trust, Generating Revenue and Fostering Civic Engagement](#)

A study of how four different news organizations practice engagement journalism.

- [Trusting News](#)

Hundreds of trust building strategies newsrooms have employed in partnership with Trusting News, a project of Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute and American Press Institute.

On engagement in practice in other newsrooms

- [JMR's Participatory Journalism Playbook – A Field Guide to Listening and Reporting With Communities](#)

CapRadio's *jesikah maria ross* details how the station used participatory journalism for a project on the Meadowview neighborhood near Sacramento, California. "We committed to spending a year in the neighborhood, listening and reporting stories guided by residents' needs and aspirations. The podcast and digital reporting project, *Making Meadowview*, showed how we can produce journalism that foregrounds community perspectives, priorities, and hopes."

- [How Documented uses WhatsApp to reach local immigrant communities](#)

[Documented](#), a nonprofit news outlet covering New York City's immigrant community, uses WhatsApp to broadcast stories and to solicit readers' questions and concerns, especially about coronavirus. This led to highly responsive, useful and engaged journalism.

On understanding biases and privilege

- ["White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"](#)

Peggy McIntosh's 1989 essay that breaks down how white privilege presents itself in our daily systems. She lists 26 conditions that people of color cannot count on in their daily lives.



- [Maynard Institute resources](#)

The Maynard Institute’s Fault Lines training is about recognizing the many ways humans are similar and different, and how that affects relationships and, in journalism, news coverage. This resources page links to its writings and other studies.



Credits





This playbook was organized and written by the America Amplified team: Managing Director Donna Vestal, Senior Editor Alisa Barba, Project Manager Jennifer Tufts, Community Engagement Director Ann Alquist, Digital and Social Media Editor Kathy Lu, Coordinating Producer Andrea Tudhope and Media Training Manager Matthew Long-Middleton. Rob St. Mary also contributed.

ABOUT AMERICA AMPLIFIED

America Amplified: Election 2020 is a public media initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and led by KCUR 89.3 in Kansas City, Missouri. A central team dedicated the year to innovating and supporting community engagement journalism at eight partner collaborations. The goal was to strengthen public media’s ability to listen to local communities and share their stories more broadly. Journalists at more than 55 stations experimented with dozens of tools and strategies for engagement — complicated and challenged by the restrictions of the pandemic — to reach new communities, meet information needs, and amplify stories that are largely missing in traditional media.



The America Amplified team, top row from left: Matthew Long-Middleton; Alisa Barba; Ann Alquist; center row from left: Donna Vestal; Kathy Lu; Andrea Tudhope; bottom row: Jennifer Tufts.

PARTNERS

America Amplified: Election 2020 partnered with the following collaborations and stations:

- **Harvest Public Media** — KCUR (Kansas City, MO), Iowa Public Radio, NET Nebraska, KOSU (Oklahoma), WILL (Illinois Newsroom, Champagne/Urbana), St. Louis Public Radio
- **I-4 Votes (the State We’re In)** — WUSF (Tampa, Florida) and WMFE (Orlando, Florida)



- **Mountain West News Bureau** — Boise State Public Radio, KUNR (Reno, Nevada), KUNC (Greeley, Colorado), Wyoming Public Media, KUNM (New Mexico)
- **New England News Collaborative** — New England Public Media: WFCR (Amherst, Massachusetts) and GBH (Boston, Massachusetts); Connecticut Public Radio (Hartford, Connecticut); WSHU Public Radio Group (Fairfield, Connecticut, but serves Connecticut and Suffolk County in New York); WBUR (Boston, Massachusetts); Maine Public Broadcasting Network; The Public's Radio (Rhode Island); New Hampshire Public Radio (Concord, New Hampshire, but serves statewide and parts of Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine); Vermont Public Radio (Colchester, Vermont)
- **Ohio Valley ReSource** — Louisville Public Media (WFPL and WFPK, in Louisville, Kentucky); WVPB (West Virginia); WOUB (Ohio); WEKU (Richmond, Kentucky); WKYU (Bowling Green, Kentucky); WMMT, (Whitesburg, Kentucky); and WKMS (Murray, Kentucky)
- **Side Effects Public Media** — Indiana Public Broadcasting; WFYI (Indianapolis, Indiana); WOSU (Columbus, Ohio); WFPL (Louisville, Kentucky); Iowa Public Radio (Des Moines, Iowa); KBIA (Columbia, Missouri); WILL (Champaign-Urbana, Illinois); WSIU (Carbondale, Illinois) and WNIN (Evansville, Indiana)
- **StateImpact Pennsylvania** — WITF (Harrisburg), PA Post (statewide), WHYY (Philadelphia), WESA (Pittsburgh) and The Allegheny Front (Pittsburgh)
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"It's not about creating a pipeline [between community engagement and content] it's about creating a fabric."

"Throw away your extractive practices, and keep in touch with people."

"We learned how to start a story with listening for the angles and fought our internal assumptions."

"Building trust takes time."

Engage. Listen. Report. Repeat.

"I listened more than I ever did in this reporting."

"We've collaborated out the wazoo."

"Welcome the tension."

"Your idea of having people of different opinions actually speaking to each other without yelling is like salve to my soul."

"This project is an island of zen."

"There is no magic tool for doing engagement."

"You are no longer in the business of just overseeing the integrity of your station's journalism, you're in the business of demonstrating your relevance."

"Flip the script."

"Go in with an open mind."