



# DISCUSSION GUIDE

We believe the future of quality local journalism depends on meaningful connections between newsrooms and communities.

We invite you to join us. Visit [NEWSVOICES.ORG](https://www.newsvoices.org) to learn more.



# News Voices: New Jersey

is committed to strengthening relationships between media outlets and the communities they serve. That begins by elevating residents' voices and giving them a greater stake in local news reporting.

Through discussion forums, collaborative projects and ongoing engagement, we're bringing together people from a variety of backgrounds, with shared interests, to listen to each other and to share what they want to know about their communities. We're helping newsrooms deepen local engagement, find new sources and broaden their audiences. And we're helping communities call on reporters to cover the issues they care about most and help create the kinds of local media they need.

**This project will succeed only if we hear from you.** If you're a journalist, tell us about the stories you want to report on. If you're a member of the public, tell us how the media could better serve your community. And if you'd like to learn more about our events, collaborative projects in your area and local news advisory boards, please get in touch.

**You can join the NEWS VOICES: NEW JERSEY project by visiting [NewsVoices.org](http://NewsVoices.org) or emailing Mike Rispoli at [mrispoli@freepress.net](mailto:mrispoli@freepress.net).**

## Democracy Needs Journalism

A healthy news environment brings communities together, holds the powerful accountable and enables everyone to participate in our democracy. Studies have shown that when local news media is deficient or disappears altogether from a community, civic participation drops, corruption rises and lawmakers bring home less funding.<sup>1</sup>

Communities need journalism, and newsrooms need communities – not as passive audiences, but as active partners in shaping the local news agenda.



*Original photo by City of Newark Press Office, via Flickr*

# What News Voices Is Doing in New Jersey

Over the next two years, Free Press will work with our local allies and thousands of Free Press members across the state to foster relationships between newsrooms and communities.

Through 2016, we will:

## Host Events

News Voices will host public forums in cities ranging from Newark to Atlantic City. We'll explore how journalism can improve communities and how community members can improve local journalism. Each event will be tailored to the conversations and networks that already exist in each city. The events will include deliberative dialogue and shared learning, providing space to highlight the work of local media and community groups, as well as opportunities to network and brainstorm. We'll also host informal meetups to continue these conversations.



## Foster Collaboration

The ideas that emerge from News Voices events will grow into collaborative projects involving newsrooms, residents, community groups, students, media makers and others. Free Press will drive follow-up on these projects, providing support to build and sustain relationships between the media and the broader community.

## Build a Constituency for Journalism

Everyone has a stake in the future of news, which means we need a diverse set of voices in the conversation about journalism's future. At the local level, that means building a network of residents, civic leaders, journalists, students, educators and activists to consider what kind of news their communities need. News Voices is working with allies in communities and with state organizations to explore models for community-driven advisory boards that would provide valuable audience engagement and public accountability for news outlets.



## Share What We Learn

News Voices is an experiment in using community organizing to help news outlets engage with communities. And any experiment is most successful when its results are shared. We'll craft a toolkit based on what we learn from our events, collaborative projects and advisory-board efforts that others can use in their own engagement work. We'll publish research on the news environment in New Jersey. We'll propose policies for lawmakers to protect local journalism and safeguard press freedom. And we'll build from these endeavors to foster stronger local journalism across the country.





# You Make It Happen

**NEWS VOICES builds on a dynamic network of active and engaged community members, local journalism outlets and institutional supporters. We're grateful to our allies who bring their knowledge, points of view, understanding, time and talent to this work.**

**Free Press is independent: We don't take a cent from business, government or political parties and rely on the generosity of individual donors and charitable foundations to fuel our work.**

**Please consider supporting News Voices: New Jersey by making a contribution to Free Press online at [freepress.net/donate](http://freepress.net/donate). Thank you!**

<sup>1</sup> Links to original research are available in our blog post, "Free Press' New Jersey Project Aims to Connect Newsrooms and Communities," by Mike Rispoli and Fiona Morgan, June 18, 2015: [freepress.net/blog/2015/06/18/free-press-new-jersey-project-aims-connect-newsrooms-and-communities](http://freepress.net/blog/2015/06/18/free-press-new-jersey-project-aims-connect-newsrooms-and-communities)

<sup>2</sup> Philip M. Napoli, Sarah Stonbely, Kathleen McCullough and Bryce Renninger, "Assessing the Health of Local Journalism Ecosystems: A Comparative Analysis of Three New Jersey Communities," prepared for the Democracy Fund, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, June 2015: [mpii.rutgers.edu](http://mpii.rutgers.edu)

<sup>3</sup> Philip M. Napoli, "Understanding What Audiences Want from Local News," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Sept. 22, 2015: [cjr.org/united\\_states\\_project/understanding\\_the\\_local\\_news\\_audience.php](http://cjr.org/united_states_project/understanding_the_local_news_audience.php)

<sup>4</sup> For more information on our survey of Free Press' New Jersey members, see "Proof That No News Is Not Good News" by Mike Rispoli, Free Press blog, Aug. 20, 2015: [freepress.net/blog/2015/08/20/proof-no-news-not-good-news](http://freepress.net/blog/2015/08/20/proof-no-news-not-good-news)

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