

Collaborating with Community: A Starting Guide

So you want to invite your community to help you report better? Great!

News Voices centers community members in our work. We've pulled together this guide to help local news organizations examine how they interact with those outside the newsroom. We encourage reporters to think about the power they hold and how they can share that power with the people they serve.

We don't have all the answers, but we do have some questions to help you look carefully at how you set your news agenda and think critically about how you report. These questions have emerged from News Voices public forums and interviews with people in New Jersey and North Carolina.

You may already be asking yourself these questions, but it's good practice to pause and reflect on how journalists build trust with the people they serve.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

- » Consider the issue of gun violence as an example. Beyond the victim and alleged perpetrator, stakeholders might include individual residents, neighborhood associations, first responders, teachers, houses of worship and activists organizing anti-violence campaigns.
- » If there are community members who are affected but not often heard from, how can you include their voices in the story?
- » How can you expand the set of sources you turn to?

HOW DO YOU SHOW UP IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

- » Are there neighborhood meetings you could attend?
- » How can you find places to talk to people face to face?
- » Do your digital conversations take place outside your own newsroom's channels? Are there digital spaces you haven't previously explored (like Facebook groups, encrypted chat rooms or message boards)?

HOW DO YOU INVITE PEOPLE INTO YOUR SPACE?

- » How can you be more transparent about what you cover and how you cover it?
- » Consider asking people what they think of previous reporting on this topic. What did the media get right? What did they get wrong?
- » Are there opportunities to bring your newsroom into the community? Possibilities could include creating pop-up newsrooms, tabling at public events, and hosting community forums.



ARE YOU CHECKING YOUR PRIVILEGE?

- » Are you being respectful of the person? Of cultural differences?
- » Are you aware of how you take up space?
- » Are you aware of the racial- and gender-equity issues at stake?

DO YOU RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN POWER?

- » Consider how members of the media may have misused their power against the community you're reporting on. Do residents have good reasons to be wary?
- » Ask people what they think of your media outlet and listen to the answer, no matter what it is. How can you use this feedback to build trust?
- » When you ask people to speak to you, what potential risks are you asking them to take?
- » Are you sure the people you're talking to share your understanding of what terms like "on the record" and "on background" mean?



HOW ARE YOU FRAMING THE STORY?

- » Is there a narrative emerging from media coverage of this issue? How does your coverage contribute to or challenge that narrative?
- » Who does that narrative serve? Who does it harm?
- » Does that narrative reflect the lived reality of the people this issue affects? How do you know?
- » What spaces are you creating to allow stakeholders to weigh in on the narrative?

DOES YOUR COVERAGE MEET THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS?

- » Are you seeking out the questions community members have on a topic before you start asking your own questions?
- » Does your coverage invite critical analysis of the situation? Are you getting beyond documenting incidents to exploring why this is happening and why the current system is or isn't working?
- » What facts and context does your coverage provide that will help people pursue democratic solutions?
- » How do you know, beyond measuring clicks and shares, that your coverage is useful to people?



Thanks to Vanessa Maria Graber of PhillyCAM and Michelle Gladden of Asbury Park Sun for contributing to this document. For more information about News Voices, visit NewsVoices.org