



# Creating an Engaged Newsroom: **A TOOLKIT**

November 2016

**NEWS VOICES**

## A Guide to Community-Based News Engagement

**The future of local journalism and the future of our communities are intertwined.**

Our communities need hard-hitting, in-depth reporting to stay informed and participate fully in our democracy. But local journalism is going through a period of upheaval. Technological innovations and shifting reader habits are changing how people consume news.

After years of media consolidation and job cuts, reporters today are expected to do more with fewer resources to meet ever-increasing demands for more stories, more multimedia content and more social media interaction. There are fewer professional reporters covering local news, and those who remain are stretched thin.

We believe journalism's best hope lies in building stronger relationships with local communities. Doing that requires listening and inviting the public to be part of the conversation about local news.

Through the News Voices project, Free Press has been organizing for better journalism, hosting community events, and starting projects that help local reporters and residents find ways they can support one another.

This guide will show you how newsrooms can engage the communities they serve using techniques that help journalists better understand and address residents' needs and concerns. That understanding helps newsrooms produce outstanding journalism that gives community members a greater voice in public affairs.

This toolkit showcases best practices, addresses questions and concerns we've heard from reporters, and provides concrete tips for newsrooms interested in engaging with residents. Whether you're already working with your community or want to move in that direction, this toolkit is for you.

### Let Us Know What You Think:

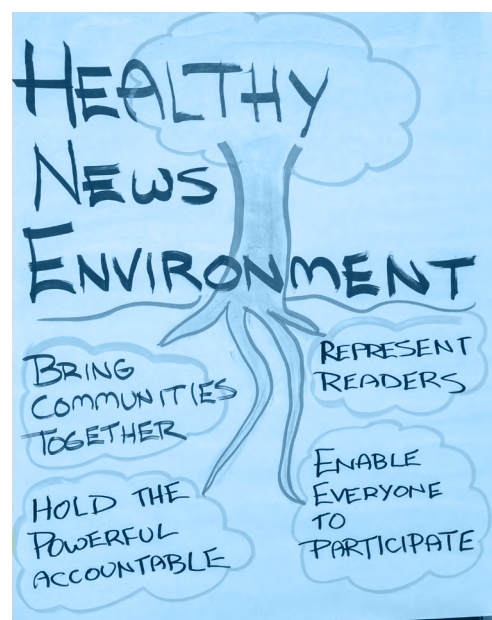
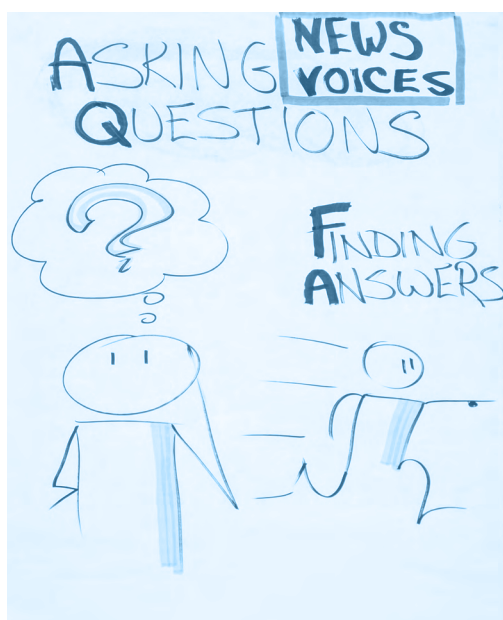
Mike Rispoli and Fiona Morgan | Free Press | [newsvoices@freepress.net](mailto:newsvoices@freepress.net) | [@freepress](https://twitter.com/freepress) | [#NewsVoices](https://twitter.com/NewsVoices)



Credit: Vanessa Maria Graber

## What you'll find inside

What Is Community Engagement? .....	4
Why Community Engagement Is Crucial .....	6
Questions to Ask Before You Begin .....	8
The News Voices Model .....	10
Supercharge Engagement Through Organizing .....	12
5 Starter Engagement Ideas .....	14
Outreach How-To's for Community Events .....	16
Host the Conversation .....	17
Checklist: What to Do During and After Events .....	18
Sustaining Engagement .....	19
Want to Dig Deeper? .....	20



Credit: Brad Resnick Photography

## What Is Community Engagement?

**Engagement is a big buzzword in journalism. Here's what it means and how to do it.**

Journalism is better when it engages communities through meaningful and thoughtful conversations. Practices vary from newsroom to newsroom. But at its heart, engagement is about interacting with an audience to further a newsroom's mission.

Through the News Voices project, we've learned from community-engagement specialists, listened to local residents and drawn on organizing tools to discover what types of engagement work best for newsrooms and the public.

It's possible to achieve some of these goals through digital interactions. But in our experience, the best outcomes are reached when journalists meet with community members face to face, listen to their concerns, identify shared interests and incorporate these perspectives in their reporting.

### Goals and outcomes for community engagement:

- » Creating or rebuilding relationships between journalists and community members
- » Initiating and maintaining dynamic two-way conversations with residents
- » Inviting residents into the newsroom and getting journalists into the community
- » Empowering community members to help shape a newsroom's agenda and priorities
- » Elevating marginalized voices, including people of color, low-income communities, immigrants, labor, women and youth
- » Ensuring that reporting reflects the entire community, includes historically overlooked perspectives and avoids stereotypes
- » Forging collaborations between reporters and residents that identify community problems and explore solutions
- » Building capacity within a newsroom by tapping into community knowledge and expertise



Credit: Vanessa Maria Graber





Credit: Tim Karr



Credit: Tim Karr

## Why Community Engagement Is Crucial

**Seeking and reporting the truth is the essence of journalism. Community engagement is a powerful way to do that work.**

Decades of rampant consolidation and newsroom layoffs have harmed the news industry in countless ways. Communities are struggling too: They're contending with job losses, income inequality, pollution, lack of affordable housing — the list goes on.

Despite these hardships, people are eager to talk about local journalism. When we tell them they can play a role in news coverage, they're eager to know how.

Among the questions that have come up during our public forums and in post-event surveys are: How do editors choose the stories they feature? How can community members reach out to reporters? What makes a story attractive to a reporter? As one attendee put it, "How does the media work?"

Lifting the veil and showing people how newsrooms operate establishes trust and understanding.

Here are some of the things we've heard and learned throughout the News Voices project.

### **People care about their communities**

Skeptics assume the public is apathetic and that people don't pay attention to the news because they don't care.

But in every community, there are people who care deeply about what's happening around them. They care about the future they share with their neighbors.



Credit: Vanessa Maria Graber



The people who care are a diverse group. They don't all care about precisely the same issues, and they don't have the same perspectives. They face different obstacles to getting involved, and they often disagree on solutions.

But they all need timely, credible, factual information on which to base their actions and inform their advocacy.

Journalists often ask: "How do I make people care?" Instead, they might ask: "What do people in my community care about?" "Who cares about a particular issue, and why?" "If people want to create change, what information do they need?"

## **People want more and better coverage from their local news outlets**

When people complain that the press ignores their neighborhoods, it's because they know that news coverage can get the attention of people in power and help make change happen.

When people say that coverage of their communities is too negative, it's because they feel that news stories dictate a narrative that becomes self-fulfilling or warps outsiders' perceptions.

People see the news media's influence around them all the time. And when they're critical of the media, it's because they want and need it to serve them better. They may not understand the process of story selection or reporting or how headlines get written, but they know these things matter.

What we hear in these comments is a heartfelt appeal to journalists to use their power to support the communities they serve. (Yes, overworked reporters and editors may forget it, but they have a lot of power.)

These pleas for more and better coverage present an opportunity for newsrooms to build relationships with new audiences.

### **How community engagement benefits newsrooms:**

- » Listening to residents enables newsrooms to report on the issues that are most on people's minds. Those stories draw greater interest and attention.
- » Engaging an audience enlists an army of sources. Conversation with knowledgeable community members helps reporters learn, gather facts and get stories right.
- » Engagement helps reporters be transparent about how they do their work and how they know what they know. This approach builds trust and makes readers more critical news consumers.
- » With so many forces competing for people's attention, engagement gets the story out and helps ensure that hard-hitting journalism has the impact it should.
- » Engagement is an opportunity to convey the value of journalism. When community members see that value, they become more dedicated audiences, they share stories with others, and they're more likely to support journalism financially.

## Questions to Ask Before You Begin

There's no one-size-fits-all form of engagement.

### Questions you should ask about the community's needs:

- » **Socioeconomics:** What is the community's economic and social makeup? What transitions are happening in the community? How is it changing and why? Who is benefiting from these changes?
- » **Race:** How much of the community is comprised of people of color? Is there segregation in housing, schools, etc.? Is local political leadership representative of the community's racial makeup?
- » **Information needs:** How do people get their information? Do all people get news from the same place or are there multiple outlets to choose from? Besides conventional news sources, where do people find out what's going on? Do those sources differ by neighborhood, language spoken or other factors?
- » **Community concerns:** What are the top concerns of people who are economically comfortable in your town? What are the top concerns of those who are struggling? Is anything being done either to alleviate or aggravate those concerns?
- » **Recent events:** Was there a recent event, like a natural disaster or job losses, that had an impact on the community? Is there something significant on the horizon, like a major real-estate development, that you want residents' perspectives on?
- » **Civic infrastructure:** Which community groups (youth centers, houses of worship, advocacy organizations, arts groups, businesses, etc.) are community leaders? Which of those groups does your newsroom have relationships with?



Credit: Vanessa Maria Graber



## Questions you should ask to clarify your newsroom's goals:

- » **Desired outcome:** Are you engaging the community to enhance a particular story or series? To improve relationships with your audience? Something else?
- » **Type of story:** Is the reporting project focused solely on the "what" in a given situation? Or do you also want to delve into the "so what" and "now what"?
- » **Targeting:** Who can help you tell this story? Do you want to talk to a cross-section of the community? People who share a particular experience? Residents of a certain neighborhood?
- » **Timing:** Where are you in the process of your reporting and when can you bring the community in? Is community input needed before, after or throughout the reporting?
- » **Communication:** What is the best way to reach out to people? Do they use email or social media, or would in-person conversations be most effective? Is there a civic organization that could help you connect?
- » **Type of engagement:** Given your goals, does it make sense to have a one-time event or an ongoing gathering?
- » **Accessibility:** Are you making it easy for the community to engage with you? For your reporters to engage with the community? What resources do you need to facilitate this process?

## Questions journalists and editors should ask to ensure the project benefits the community:

- » **Follow-through:** How will you keep the community informed about the progress of this work? How will you show them that you've made good use of their time and effort?
- » **Utility:** What will the community get out of participating in this project?
- » **Unheard voices:** Are you hearing from people who already have a voice in the paper, or is this engagement giving voice to people who have historically been ignored?
- » **Trust:** How is this engagement building or repairing trust between the news outlet and the community? Between groups within the community?



Credit: Tim Karr

## The News Voices Model

Free Press launched the News Voices project in New Jersey in 2015. We chose New Jersey because it's one of the most underserved states when it comes to news coverage.

But there are also exciting new journalism projects and startups in the Garden State. We wanted to build on these developments and mobilize a network of people invested in the role local journalism plays in shaping the state's future.

The News Voices model begins with outreach to both newsrooms and the communities they serve. We then organize public forums where residents and journalists of all kinds sit at the same table to discuss local concerns. We work to build trust and identify undercovered issues and establish new source relationships.

Using input from those discussions, we help create community-driven partnerships and collaborations. Both residents and journalists work with us to identify gaps in coverage, interest in issues, and newsroom capacity. As projects take shape in response to the needs of local participants, we guide stakeholders to help make their efforts sustainable.

### How we do it:

- » **We reach out across the community** to draw as many people as possible from different neighborhoods and backgrounds. We prioritize outreach to historically marginalized or overlooked community members. This groundwork is hands-down the most crucial step in the process.
- » **We listen to residents and journalists from multiple news outlets.** We take note of the needs and concerns of each group and explore how a public forum could address those concerns.
- » **We host forums and create programs that reflect the input we've gathered,** tailoring each event to local needs. We listen to local allies and partners to ensure the event will be useful to them. We elevate local voices at the event by recruiting speakers from news outlets and community groups.

### Our work is making an impact

Hundreds of people have attended our News Voices events, and crowds have been diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, age and socioeconomic backgrounds. Post-event surveys and follow-up conversations tell us that community members feel journalists are listening to them and hearing their concerns. Meanwhile, journalists say they come away from our events with new sources and concrete story ideas.

We've worked in five communities so far: Asbury Park, Atlantic City, Morristown, New Brunswick and Newark. We're also working with statewide media organizations and advocating for policies to support journalism across New Jersey.

To learn more about News Voices, visit [NewsVoices.org](https://NewsVoices.org)

**We focus on small-group discussions so everyone is heard** and people can build personal relationships. We put residents and reporters at the same table and facilitate collaborative conversations. We ask participants to discuss issues that are important to them, to identify the untold stories related to those issues, and to explore ways in which community members and journalists can work together to tell these stories and move toward solutions.

**We follow up with concrete next steps.** We don't go into events with predetermined ideas of what should happen next. Instead, we listen to the discussions and find ways to act on them. We schedule follow-up meetings with attendees and give feedback on which ideas could lead to fruitful projects. We connect participants with people and resources that can help them succeed.



Credit: Vanessa Maria Graber

## From issues to stories

- » When people who are active in civic life talk about what matters to them, they talk about issues: jobs, housing, poverty, and so on.
- » But journalists don't write issues; they write stories.
- » Engagement offers opportunities for translation. We help journalists and residents translate issues into stories by teasing out basic questions: who, what, where, when, why and how?
- » When residents say an issue needs coverage, we ask: What do people need to know? Who does the community need to hear from?
- » Once we drill down to facts and perspectives, the narratives start to emerge. So do the points of access — people, policies, documents — that can help tell the story.



## Supercharge Engagement Through Organizing

Organizing strategies can be powerful tools when adapted for the newsroom.

By “organizing,” we don’t mean “activism.” Organizers know how to uncover untold stories, mobilize communities to address long-standing problems and get people to take collective action.

Here’s how reporters can adopt an organizing mindset to engage communities.

- » **Start by listening:** People can tell whether you care about them. Community members should be treated with dignity and respect, even if you remain skeptical about their motives. Residents’ interactions with reporters shape how willing they are to engage. If you approach people with a spirit of openness and engage in active listening, the community will be more likely to trust you.
- » **Acknowledge the whole person:** People aren’t simply sources of quotes. They have a range of concerns and intersecting perspectives. Developing stronger relationships with everyday people allows reporters to tap into a community’s collective knowledge. This informs not only how a journalist approaches individual stories but also how the reporter covers the community as a whole.
- » **Embrace the community:** Some of the most meaningful engagement happens when journalists stop thinking of themselves as being apart from the community and instead start seeing themselves as *part* of the community. Discussions then go from being transactional or one-sided to being empathetic and reciprocal.
- » **Shift into a reporting with approach:** Journalists play invaluable roles when they provide information that holds the powerful accountable. But members of the media should remember that they have significant power, especially over the communities they report on. Reporting *with* rather than reporting *for* requires a change in mindset to address this power dynamic and draw on residents’ knowledge to create useful stories that respond to community needs.



Credit: Vanessa Maria Graber



Credit: Tim Karr



Credit: Brad Resnick Photography



## 5 Starter Engagement Ideas

The form of engagement varies by newsroom and project. Here are some successful approaches.



**Issue forums** are live events that allow journalists to interact with residents in two-way conversations about specific topics. The topic might pertain to a recently published investigative series or to reporting that's underway. Avoid the typical panel discussions with "experts" talking, followed by a few minutes of Q&A. The reporting will be stronger if you regard all of the people in the room as experts in their own right and harness their wisdom through deliberative-dialogue techniques. The best forums explore solutions-oriented journalism, inviting people within the community to share their perspectives on what's needed and what works.

**Spotlight:** In Sacramento, California, Capital Public Radio's Hidden Hunger project brought people experiencing food insecurity together with other community members for small-group conversations and broadcast parties. By staying engaged with participants, the station reported not just on hunger but on solutions that emerged from these conversations.

**Pop-up newsrooms** are a simple way to get out into the community and invite the public to be part of the work of journalism. Some pop-up newsrooms turn news events into public events, such as an Election Night event where people watch returns with reporters filing stories. But pop-up newsrooms can also be as simple as setting up a table, chairs and sign at a public park, or a booth at a community festival. It's cheap, easy and less ambitious than hosting a live event as you can piggyback on other events and meet people where they are. This approach boosts the news organization's visibility — but don't think of it as marketing; think of it as part of the reporting process.



**Spotlight:** The Boston Institute for Nonprofit Journalism set up its first BINJ Mobile newsroom in the Roxbury neighborhood where the youth media group Press Pass TV was hosting an outdoor film screening. BINJ reporter Chris Faraone brought a table and chairs, a sign and old-fashioned typewriters to serve as conversation starters. He had open-ended conversations with residents and heard their concerns about policing, development and employment. By getting out into the neighborhood, Faraone was able to report stories that often go untold in Boston's media, and he also connected with people who weren't already familiar with BINJ's work.



**Crowd-sourced reporting** involves the audience early and often in the newsgathering process, usually combining digital tools with one-on-one interviews. The tools vary in complexity and cost — some are free, like Google Forms or Facebook groups, and others use conversation platforms like the Coral Project's tool, Ask. The best crowd-powered projects involve carefully thought-out questions and incorporate outreach to those who care the most about the issue at hand and can provide information for reporters to follow up on.

**Spotlight:** ProPublica and *The Virginian-Pilot* worked together on a crowd-powered investigation into the long-term health effects of veterans' exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. The team asked people to share their experiences by filling out a 35-question online survey. Within four months, they had collected more than 3,550 responses thanks to persistent, targeted outreach to veterans' groups — online and in person.



**Community listening** is an open-ended approach to finding out what's on people's minds. Instead of asking targeted questions as part of a specific investigation, community-listening projects use broader questions and offer space to discuss a wide variety of responses. This form of listening can generate story ideas that reporters might not have thought of. Digital platforms Hearken and GroundSource were developed with this kind of listening in mind, but you can also use something as simple as an online form or a voicemail box to receive incoming calls. What matters more than the technology is the follow-through.



**Spotlight:** Chicago public radio station WBEZ's Curious City project started as an experiment: What would happen if listeners could submit their own questions or story ideas, people could vote on the best suggestions, and a reporter would pursue the winning story and take the original questioner along for the reporting? Curious City stories have consistently been among the most popular with the station's audience. The project's creator launched Hearken to bring the process to other newsrooms around the country.



**Community advisory boards** provide a dedicated space for journalists to interact with readers or listeners on an ongoing basis. Newsrooms reach out to the community and invite participants to provide feedback on stories and local issues that they'd like to see covered. Most importantly, an advisory board allows residents to have their voices heard and build trust with newsrooms, which is especially valuable in historically marginalized communities. An advisory board might include people from throughout the community, or it might focus on specific neighborhoods or demographic groups. Social

media can be useful for recruiting participants, but the meetings should be held in person. You can invite readers into the newsroom or hold meetings in community spaces. It's a good idea to provide food and give participants public credit for their contributions.

**Spotlight:** In Peoria, Illinois, the *Journal Star* invited residents of the city's South Side, one of the nation's poorest and most crime-affected ZIP codes, to take part in a monthly reader-advisory group. This group, which includes representatives from neighborhood organizations, has helped a newspaper with limited newsroom staff provide more comprehensive coverage of an area that previously got attention mostly for violence and crime. The paper's coverage developed greater context and included reporting on what community leaders were doing to respond to the challenges they faced.



Credit: Brad Resnick Photography

## Outreach How-To's for Community Events

Community events can cultivate new audiences and amplify historically unheard voices.

But to reach new people, newsrooms need to go beyond their existing platforms and do more than put information on a website or social media page. Outreach involves one-on-one conversations in person, over email, and by phone. It also means showing up in the community even if you're unsure what the payoff might be.

Here are some tips on how to do outreach for community events:

- » **Set goals:** Determine up front how many people you want to show up and what types of conversations you want to have. Ask prospective participants, "When this is over, what do you want to walk away knowing?" Incorporate your goals and the community's response into the plan.
- » **Target initial outreach:** Focus your outreach on those most impacted by the issue or reporting project. Think about who you want to get involved and who they trust. Get someone to introduce you, or ask to meet face to face, and always meet people on their territory.
- » **Track invites:** Keep track of who you reach out to and ensure you invite everyone on your list. Solicit suggestions for people to invite and follow up.
- » **Work with community networks:** Amplify your outreach by asking invitees to share info with their networks. Identify movers and shakers in the community, invite them into the planning process, and ask if they're willing to help promote the event. Always find out if they're willing to connect you with other community members.
- » **Make the ask:** It sounds simple, but it's important to ask something of every person you engage with. Ask if folks can commit to bringing coworkers, friends or family. If invitees can't make it, ask if they can promote the event.
- » **Spread the word:** Promote the event via email, social media, flyers, community calendars, community-meeting listservs and community forums. Visit gathering places like libraries, laundromats, outdoor markets, and coffee shops to hand out and hang flyers, and talk with people in those spaces. When appropriate, get contact information and follow up.
- » **Go beyond the usual suspects:** Reach out to people you don't usually speak with. Ask a religious leader to talk to members of the congregation. Go to community events and speak with people hanging out in the back. Talk to and invite everyone you come into contact with.
- » **Pick a welcoming venue:** Choose a place that's welcoming to people from all parts of the community. Get input from your contacts about whether, realistically, people will go there. When possible, choose a venue that's close to public transportation and easily accessible.
- » **RSVPs:** Set up an RSVP system for people to register their interest, which could take the form of a website, dedicated email address, Google form, social media group or free online tool like Eventbrite. These tools let you anticipate headcounts and turnout numbers, post pre-event reminders and follow up with attendees.

## Host the Conversation

### Collaborative tools help facilitate meaningful conversations.

There are many deliberative-dialogue processes out there. The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation has a guide to different tools on its site, [ncdd.org](http://ncdd.org).

One we like is called World Café. Below are some features and principles we adapted from World Café to guide open and honest conversations between journalists and community members.

- » **Communicate purpose:** Set a program agenda beforehand and share with participants. Be clear with participants about why they're together and what the conversation will explore. For example, is this an information-gathering session, a decision-making session, or a place where people can problem-solve? Will participants give input that will influence your reporting, or is the goal of gathering to improve relationships between journalists and residents?
- » **Create a collaborative space:** People want to speak with one another and work together to address problems. Create an environment that helps all community members feel comfortable about opening up.
- » **Encourage everyone to participate:** Everyone sees and perceives the world differently, even if they live in the same community. It's important to encourage all in attendance to share their voices and unique experiences.
- » **Spark new ideas:** Allowing everyone to share their perspectives sets the groundwork for changing the status quo. Connecting people who don't usually interact will prompt a valuable exchange of ideas.
- » **Listen:** While facilitating, listen to what people are saying and try to identify patterns. Encourage attendees to both speak and listen.
- » **Shepherd the conversation:** Don't approach an event with predetermined conclusions. Focus on guiding rather than leading participants.



Credit: Brad Resnick Photography



## Checklist:

### What to Do During Your Event

**Post signage:** Post signs at all entrances; include directions to the nearest open entrance if any doors will be locked during the event.

**Greet all participants:** Make a personal connection with as many attendees as possible. Ask, "How did you hear about the event?" or "What made you decide to come?"

**Circulate sign-in sheets and feedback forms:** Bring clipboards and circulate both documents.

**Share the agenda with attendees:** Stick to the agenda but be sure to allow ample time for conversation. Things always take longer than anticipated so structure your agenda accordingly.

**Invite guest speakers:** You may want other community voices to play leadership roles during the event. Ask community leaders and representatives from news outlets to speak during the event.

**Take pictures:** Collect a mix of group shots, candids and close-ups. Hold your event in a well-lit space to ensure that photos come out well. When signing people in at the beginning of your event ask if anyone does not wish to be photographed. Make note of such requests.

**Tweet:** Create, use and promote appropriate hashtags.

**Model best practices:** If you want people to listen, model that behavior and monitor your airtime.

**Take notes:** Notes benefit organizers, attendees and people who couldn't make your event but expressed interest in getting involved. Consider making the notes public using collaborative tools like Google Docs.

**Share action items:** Leave people with a clear action/next steps to take.

**Start and end on time:** Respect people's time and commit to starting and ending on time — otherwise people are likely to leave early. Identify a timekeeper to ensure you stay on track.



## Checklist:

### What to Do After Everyone's Gone Home

**Have a plan! Draft a follow-up plan in advance of your event.**

**Tell the story about the event:** Use your platform to cover the event. This is a great way to engage those who missed the event but would be interested in participating in future efforts.

**Send thank-you emails:** Email close allies and all participants the next day to thank people for attending, share photos and stories, and discuss follow-up steps.

**Debrief:** Check in with allies, partners and colleagues who helped plan the event. Consider a post-event phone call or event to allow people to check in and celebrate.

**Note lessons learned:** After the event jot down some notes to document points you want to keep in mind for future planning. Schedule time to debrief staff to document successes and areas of improvement.

## Sustaining Engagement

**It takes time and effort to build strong relationships. Whatever method you choose, and even if it doesn't work at first, keep at it.**

We've heard time and again that people want to see newsrooms follow through, especially in places where residents feel journalists have maligned or ridiculed them: "People come here, have a meeting, we show up and talk, and nothing happens." The more hardship defines a place, the wearier people are of talking about community problems. They want to talk about solutions, and they want the media to be part of those conversations.

Here are some ways to make your engagement sustainable:

- » **Include the community from the beginning:** You should begin any engagement project with outreach, asking people what they want to see. That could take the form of events, stories or online engagement. You want to build something together, so invite residents to the table during the planning process. That way they'll be more invested in the project's success.
- » **Communicate next steps:** Let community members know what projects may arise and invite them to participate. Are you looking to interview people with specific experiences? Do you want residents to share photos or videos? What will you do with this material? While this takes some advance planning, it can instill confidence that the newsroom is in it for the long haul and boosts the likelihood of sustained community involvement.
- » **Keep in touch:** When you host a party, it's common to follow up with people and make plans to see them again. The same principle applies to engagement. If you host an event, follow up immediately and communicate how that event has informed your reporting. Make sure your news staffers answer calls or emails from residents. Continue to touch base during the duration of the project or when a series reaches its conclusion. Email listservs, discussion boards and social media groups allow you to stay connected to those who have already taken the time to be part of what you're doing.
- » **Incorporate the community into your reporting:** You've built all these great relationships ... now what? Find ways to include the community in your reporting or through collaborative projects. For instance, if you hold a forum on local education issues, you could record the event and create a video using the voices of those in attendance to complement a news story or series.
- » **Set expectations:** Sometimes community members don't understand why something isn't being covered. Open communication and honesty are necessary, and you can promise only that you will listen. Be clear about your newsroom's limitations. Not everything can be covered, either because it isn't a "story" or because you don't have the resources. You can also challenge residents to change your mind if they feel a story is important enough to merit coverage.

# NEWS VOICES

## Want to Dig Deeper?

This toolkit will help you jumpstart your community engagement or refresh what you're already doing. If you'd like to go beyond what we've covered here, check out the following resources, many of which we've cited.

We couldn't possibly list all of the great places to look for more information but we hope this will get you started.

Agora Journalism Center: [journalism.uoregon.edu/agora](http://journalism.uoregon.edu/agora)

American Press Institute: [americanpressinstitute.org](http://americanpressinstitute.org)

Build With, Not For: [buildwith.org](http://buildwith.org)

Coral Project: [coralproject.net](http://coralproject.net)

Engagement Hub: [engagementhub.org](http://engagementhub.org)

Engaging the News: [engagingnewsproject.org](http://engagingnewsproject.org)

GroundSource: [groundsource.co](http://groundsource.co)

Hearken: [wearehearken.com](http://wearehearken.com)

Journalism That Matters: [journalismthatmatters.org](http://journalismthatmatters.org)

Local News Lab: [localnewslab.org](http://localnewslab.org)

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation: [ncdd.org](http://ncdd.org)

Restorative Narrative: [ivoh.org/restorativenarrative](http://ivoh.org/restorativenarrative)

Reynolds Journalism Institute: [rjonline.org](http://rjonline.org)

Solutions Journalism Network: [solutionsjournalism.org](http://solutionsjournalism.org)

World Café: [theworldcafe.com](http://theworldcafe.com)

## NEWS VOICES

News Voices is a project of Free Press ([freepress.net](http://freepress.net)), a nonpartisan organization fighting to save the free and open internet, curb runaway media consolidation, protect press freedom, and ensure diverse voices are represented in our media. We're working to create a world where people have the information and opportunities they need to tell their own stories, hold leaders accountable, and participate in policymaking.

In 2015, we launched our News Voices: New Jersey project. We believe the future of quality local journalism lies in collaborations between newsrooms and communities. News Voices aims to build a network of people invested in local journalism and create a healthy news environment that brings communities together, represents its readers, holds the powerful accountable and enables everyone to participate in our democracy. Learn more at [NewsVoices.org](http://NewsVoices.org).

Did we miss something? Have a good idea? We want to hear from you!

Reach out to Mike Rispoli and Fiona Morgan at [newsvoices@freepress.net](mailto:newsvoices@freepress.net).

Follow Free Press online at [freepress.net](http://freepress.net)

Facebook: [facebook.com/freepress/](https://facebook.com/freepress/)

Twitter: @freepress and the hashtag #NewsVoices

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

**Donate to Free Press today:**  
**[freepress.net/donate](http://freepress.net/donate)**