

ENGAGED JOURNALISM:

**PRACTICES FOR BUILDING TRUST,
GENERATING REVENUE, AND
FOSTERING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the news industry, organizations large and small, commercial and nonprofit, single issue and daily news are experimenting with “engagement”: Audience engagement, engaged journalism, engagement editors and specialists, engaging for trust, and the list goes on. But what is engagement? Why are organizations experimenting with engagement, and to what effect?

We set out to answer these questions through a four month research project where we surveyed the field to identify the practices organizations consider to be “engaged journalism,” an inclusive practice that prioritizes the information needs and wants of the community members it serves, creates collaborative space for the audience in all aspects of the journalistic process, and is dedicated to building and preserving trusting relationships between journalists and the public. We then dove deep into four very different organizations to learn not only what they do, but why they engage with communities, as well as how they know if their strategies are working.

Through this research, we find evidence to support the following:

- Engaged journalism increases audience trust in journalists and journalism organizations.
- Engaged journalism builds trust among journalism organizations

and audiences, which results in audiences being willing to financially support the journalism.

- Engaged journalism results in audiences being more civically engaged in their communities.

And while there's evidence that engaged journalism can contribute to organizational sustainability, if there's a single learning that applies to every organization we looked at, it's that effective engagement requires a way for communities to be in contact with journalists in a relational rather than purely transactional manner. Furthermore, organizations that are able to clearly articulate a **shared mission** with their communities have the strongest foundation upon which to build relationships.

As organizations continue to experiment with new forms of engagement and institutionalize those that work with their communities, they must also identify appropriate indicators of success, metrics, and research methods to understand if their engagement practices are having the desired effects, and if not, why.

But relationships take time. Funders of engaged journalism must take into account the fact that journalism organizations that are working in, with, and for communities require time and resources to build **authentic** relationships that put the principles of **transparency, positivity, and diversity** into action consistently.

In the end, engaged journalism is just good journalism. It's cultivating and listening to sources *throughout the community*, rather than in niche sectors or in the upper echelons of power. It's producing *hard-hitting, moving, and accurate stories* that are relevant to community members and reflect their lived realities and meet their needs. And it's understanding that journalism - whether it's for profit or not - is a public service, and as such, must respect and include the public in its processes and practices.

WHAT IS “ENGAGED JOURNALISM”?

BACKGROUND & RESEARCH REVIEW

We [define engaged journalism](#) as an inclusive practice that prioritizes the information needs and wants of the community members it serves, creates collaborative space for the audience in all aspects of the journalistic process, and is dedicated to building and preserving trusting relationships between journalists and the public.

This research has been designed to test the following three hypotheses, shared by the News Integrity Initiative and the Impact Architects:

HYPOTHESIS #1

Engaged journalism increases audience trust in journalists and journalism organizations.

HYPOTHESIS #2

Engaged journalism builds trust among journalism organizations and audiences, which results in audiences being willing to financially support the journalism.

HYPOTHESIS #3

Engaged journalism results in audiences being more civically engaged in their communities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research contributes to robust industry and academic literature about trust, revenue, and civic engagement in journalism, with a specific emphasis on engaged journalism practices. In order to test the three hypotheses identified above, we reviewed NII grants and industry and academic research, and we conducted interviews and a field survey from August through December, 2018.

The survey was designed to help us better understand how journalism organizations think about engagement in relation to their work, identify trends in the field, and [find opportunities for the research to contribute actionable information for organizations.](#)

Following the survey, we identified four organizations to include as in-depth case studies. We selected Free Press, Outlier Media, ProPublica, and McClatchy because they use a wide array of engaged journalism practices (identified through a review of NII's grant portfolio, field survey, and literature review). Two of these organizations - Outlier and Free Press - are current News Integrity Initiative grantees, ProPublica is a nonprofit news organization that is not a current grantee, and McClatchy is a commercial, for-profit news organization that operates in four regions across the United States. For each organization, we reviewed publicly available content and conducted multiple interviews with staff.

RESEARCH REVIEW

TRUST: WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT IT? AND HOW DO WE GET MORE OF IT?

[According to a late 2016 Gallup poll](#), Americans' trust in the media is the lowest it has been since the polling organization began tracking it in 1972. The matter of trust is an industry-wide question, with nonprofit and commercial media alike working to increase trust in their brands and information for the good of society, as well as for their bottom lines.

Of late, there is evidence that engaged journalism practices can increase audience trust, and there are some experiments that illustrate the ways in which trust can result from engagement-centered journalism.

A [June 2018 report from the Agora Journalism Center](#) offers a useful framework for understanding how the media can get to trusting relationships. The researchers, Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn, started from the premise that “trust in journalism” isn't a unique species of trust, and in order to understand how the media can gain trust with communities, it's necessary to understand why people trusts anything. Through public conversations in four diverse locations (Pico Rivera, Calif.; Vienna, Ill.; Boston, Mass.; and Oxford, Miss.), Heyamoto and Milbourn identified six characteristics that lead to trust:

- Authenticity;
- Transparency;
- Positivity;
- Diversity;
- Consistency; and
- Shared mission.

While these elements of trust can be found in many engaged journalism practices, there hasn't been systematic research designed or conducted to measure the effectiveness of these strategies.

Authenticity

One of the tenets of “Authenticity” as a trust-factor requires that the media organization acknowledge it does not know everything. In practice, this is exemplified by news organizations’ increased emphasis on “listening.” By beginning with listening, the journalist assumes that they do not already “know,” be it community needs, challenges, or solutions.

In [“How a culture of listening strengthens reporting and relationships,”](#) The American Press Institute defines listening as:

The process of seeking out the information needs, feedback and perspectives of the people in our areas of coverage. In particular, this emphasis on listening is meant to expand our attention to people and communities who feel alienated or have traditionally been marginalized by news coverage.

Importantly, API’s definition of listening is active rather than passive, focusing on the audience’s curiosity, not only the journalist’s. Thus “listening” as an engaged journalism practice likely contributes to building trust in media.

In addition to listening, journalism organizations have been experimenting with personal storytelling - both by community members and journalists - as a way to authentically communicate across difference. For examples, Capital Public Radio in Sacramento, California has hosted a series of Story Circles, highly curated, in-person, personal storytelling events in order to listen to community

members' diverse perspectives, explore the power of personal narratives, and to seek ways for the media organization and participants to work together on solutions.

Many journalism organizations, from The Center to Investigative Reporting to McClatchy to the New York Times, are experimenting with reporters telling the “story behind the story,” to show how the reporter’s personal perspectives, experience, linguistic skills, and more contribute to the reporting process. Reporters sharing their own personal narratives, challenges they face during reporting, and decisions about how and what to report demonstrate that they are real, authentic people working to get important stories to audiences.

Transparency

Many organizations experimenting with engaged journalism say that they want to demystify journalistic processes and professional norms to increase accountability – in other words, transparency. This shows up in different ways, and while some of these practices are novel, many are tweaks to common practice. For example, [unedited and searchable audio interviews and transcripts and social media updates](#) on reporting in progress give audience members insight into the “raw” side of journalism. Accountability is evident in “learn more” prompts that provide information about the funding sources for reporting and the reporter’s professional background, as well as in foregrounding corrections.

These efforts to increase transparency attempt to make journalism and journalists real for audiences. One way journalism organizations demonstrate transparency is by inviting audiences to participate in the process of journalism. Audience members can be involved at any point, from question development to distribution. A [2018 report by the Agora Center for Journalism](#), however, found that newsrooms who use Harken,

which is a platform designed to bring the community into the story creation process in its entirety, are far more likely to engage audiences in the story pitch and feedback stages than the parts of the process in between. This act of transparency can lead to trust, but the community participation may be more piecemeal in practice than in theory.

Positivity

The field of journalism has seen an upswell in solutions-oriented reporting in the past three to five years, largely propelled by the [The Solutions Journalism Network](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting solutions-oriented reporting and showing how it can be done. Engaged journalism that works with community members to identify and understand the roots of problems and what's been done about them can often use a solutions approach in order to report out what else can be done to address these challenges.

According to the Solutions Journalism Network, [solutions journalism has four qualities](#), all of which include positivity:

- Presents a response to a problem;
- Offers evidence of results linked to the response;
- Conveys an insight or teachable lesson; and
- Explains the limitations of a response.

For example, the Solutions Journalism Network collaborated with the Seattle Times to create [Education Lab](#). According to a Nieman Reports summary,

The team flipped the script on education reporting. Instead of identifying the worst schools in the region and explaining why they were failing, they set out to find the schools that were improving and ask how their educators and students excelled

despite poverty, crime, and other challenges. Instead of reporting on the problems in the schools, they would cover the solutions.

Convening conversation can be another form of solutions journalism. Minnesota Public Radio and Spaceship Media, for instance, [collaborated to host a Facebook group about food systems in the midwest](#). The geographically diverse group included farmers and urban gardeners. The idea behind the conversation was to create space for group members to identify solutions through the exchange of ideas and chart their own path for creating solutions.

Solutions-oriented reporting can also take place through live events. For example, Richland Source did significant reporting about high maternal and infant mortality rates in their community. Wanting to engage with the most affected women and families, but recognizing that their publication was not a trusted source of news and information, in addition to the fact that the problem they were reporting on was already known to low income women, many of whom are women of color, the publication decided to host a [community baby shower and listening post](#). This in-person event brought together the most affected community members and shared information and resources directly with the community.

Diversity

Engaged journalism practices seek to connect with communities by centering community needs over the journalists' so that community issues are accurately and regularly represented. [A Tow Center for Digital Journalism study examined roots](#) of mistrust in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, which is low income and mostly black, residents said that the media favored covering crime, and that their motives for any coverage the community received didn't consider the community's needs. If members of a community only see themselves

represented by the media in a negative fashion, they'll have little reason to trust the media. Out of this research, WHYY, Philadelphia's public media station, is implementing changes in order to diversify staff, story choice and coverage, and to directly engage with community members who are not a part of WHYY's core audience.

Another thread that attempts to ensure that people hear themselves represented fairly and regularly is source tracking. [Public media outlets](#) like KQED in San Francisco, KUT in Austin, KUOW in Seattle, WHYY in Philadelphia, PRI in Minneapolis, and MPR in Saint Paul all practice some form of source diversity tracking. They can all be traced back to [NPR's self-investigations that started in 2015](#). The idea behind these efforts is to generate reliable data about who newsrooms are choosing as sources in terms of race and gender and what types of stories they eventually contribute to. The work is ultimately designed to change behavior at the front end of the story creation process so that the final product will lead to a more diverse source base. Engagement and trust play significant roles in that behavioral change for local newsrooms. If there is ever going to be source diversification, it will be a result of building relationships with underrepresented communities.

Other factors of trust

Little research has been done to understand the connections between consistency and trust or shared mission and trust in the context of journalism organizations. However, the presence of single issue and mission-driven nonprofit journalism organizations like the Marshall Project, Fuller Project, and the Center for Public Integrity suggest that consistently reporting on particular issues and mission alignment are two factors that lead to increased trust and the likelihood of individual membership to such organizations. This is an area of opportunity for future research.

REVENUE: WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW? AND HOW DO WE GET MORE OF IT?

Many engaged journalism initiatives have, at their core, an assumption that these practices will lead to increased revenue for the organization, especially in the form of individual donations, subscriptions, or memberships. And while there is not yet an authoritative body of research to demonstrate that this assumption is, in fact, truth, there are preliminary findings that suggest the assumption bears out.

A [2018 report from the Tow Center for Digital Journalism](#) identified three basic models of audience-based revenue generation:

- Donations;
- Subscriptions; and
- Membership.

The authors, Elizabeth Hansen and Emily Goligoski, also delineate the different types of relationships between the organization and the audience for each of these models. Donation models are a form of charitable giving that leverage the shared mission between the audience and the organization so that the latter is willing to provide either time or money to the former. The subscription model is a transactional relationship wherein the audience pays money to gain access to a product. The membership model is a donation with the expectation that the benefit is something more intimate and lasting than a mere product.

The authors don't favor one approach over the other as a preferred method, as different circumstances call for different approaches. Notably, seven of the report's nine key findings, which double as recommendations, are related to engaged journalism practices, such as graying the line between the public and the newsroom, deepening

relationships with face-to-face interactions, and communicating a mission with real world value and wide appeal.

This general analysis bears out with other organizational case studies. For instance, Bitch Media used the Hearken platform for a year and analyzed its readership during that time ([an INNOvation Fund Grant](#) funded the study). A major question was whether or not readers who responded to a Hearken query, and therefore created direct contact with the newsroom, were more likely to provide revenue than those who did not. The research found that Hearken-engaged readers “were between two and five times more likely to convert to sustaining membership than ordinary readers.” This case suggests that the higher engagement that resulted from using Hearken led to additional revenue; however, the study didn’t dig deeper into the causal link.

The Dutch publication De Correspondent has established a revenue model based on audience participation and membership. De Correspondent is exclusively funded by members who have the opportunity to participate in shaping content as part of what [Digiday calls](#) the publication’s “unusual transparency into the editorial process.” The transparency is designed to lead to trust, and it has clearly led to revenue from members. It’s not yet clear whether or not this model can scale; however, the U.S. version of De Correspondent, The Correspondent, launched a crowdfunding campaign [in late 2018 and surpassed its \\$2 million goal](#).

These examples support the idea that engagement that is intentional about building trust can lead to revenue, especially in the membership model.

While subscription models haven’t historically relied on engagement, it’s still useful to understand the reasons why people choose to subscribe to a publication. [A 2018 study by the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#)

found that the top reason people subscribed to a local newspaper was “access to local news” (30% of the sample of about 4,100 recent subscribers). The research overall identified nine “pathways to subscription”:

- Digital paywall converters;
- Topic hunters;
- The locally engaged;
- Social media mobile discoverers;
- Journalism advocates;
- Life changers;
- Coupon clippers;
- Print fans; and
- Friends and family.

Notably, “engagement” isn’t cited as a specific reason for subscription, although this might be a reflection of industry language that isn’t shared by audiences. We don’t yet know whether or not coupling engaged journalism with these paths to subscription would enhance revenue.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT IT?

There is significant evidence that access to local news increases community members’ levels of civic engagement. A 2016 study by the [Pew Research Center found a strong relationship between local news habits and civic engagement](#). For the purposes of that research, Pew defined civic engagement as an individual voting, volunteering, and/or “connecting with those around them.” This research implies that strengthening access to local news can have the democratically beneficial consequence of increasing civic engagement.

[Josh Stearns of the Democracy Fund](#) and [Chloe Reichel of the Kennedy School's Journalist's Resource](#) page independently reviewed case studies and academic literature that address the question, “what happens when local communities lose local news?” The key findings were:

- Declines in local news are tied to declines in civic engagement and government accountability.
- Investment in local news is exponentially returned as a public benefit.
- Local news is the first to identify and investigate local problems and forms the foundation of national reporting.
- Local news builds social cohesion and strengthens communities.

There is less research specifically about the relationship of engaged journalism to civic engagement. However, there is preliminary evidence that intentional and goal-oriented engaged journalism practices designed to build trust can result in increased civic participation, and as such can be viewed as a key element for the improved health of journalism as well as democracy.

CASE STUDIES

journalism
you need
texted right
to your phone

P

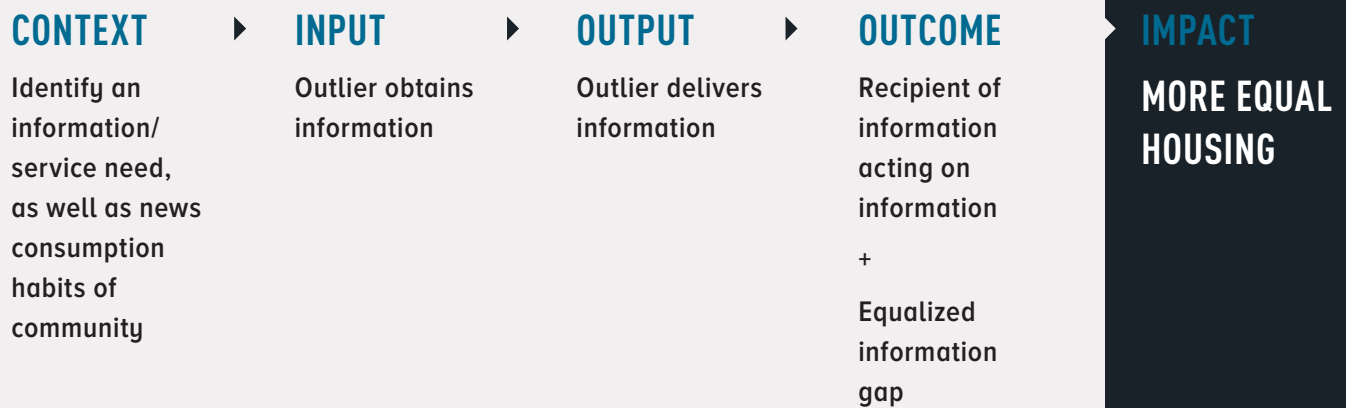
FP
Free Press



CASE 1: OUTLIER MEDIA



THEORY OF CHANGE



BACKGROUND

Authentic efforts to meet information needs will build trust from the distrustful.

[Outlier Media](#) is a Detroit-based journalism organization founded and led by Sarah Alvarez. Outlier’s mission is to “identify, report, and deliver valuable information to empower residents to hold landlords, municipal government, and elected officials accountable for long standing problems in the housing and utilities markets.” Outlier defines itself as

a “service journalism” entity, and its sole focus is to deliver information about housing to Detroiters - especially low-income residents - via SMS (GroundSource is the vendor). Because Outlier Media’s mission is to deliver information people need and can use, Alvarez prefers to refer to the intended audience as “consumers.”

Alvarez says that Outlier’s distribution and engagement strategy – SMS – is designed to “distribute the watchdog function of journalism” by providing consumers with access to high value and actionable information. By doing so, Outlier aims to close the information gap between renters and homeowners on the one hand, and landlords and local government on the other. The individuals who receive the text messages with property information can hold those in power accountable, not the media organization that sends it.

Rather than marketing its content broadly across the city of Detroit, Outlier Media finds its consumers by periodically sending out targeted, batch text messages to about 5,000 numbers with an explanation of what Outlier is and what it can do. In 2018, the message read¹:

This is Outlier Media, a free journalism service for Detroit. You can use these texts to check if your home is on the auction list or if your landlord has blight tickets. You can also talk to a journalist about your housing and utility questions this way. . . . Enter an address in Detroit to get started. Only use the house number and street name like this: “123 Gratiot” & right away you’ll get tax and blight info.

¹In 2019, Outlier Media changed the welcome text to say: “*This is Outlier Media, a free nonprofit journalism service for Detroiters. Use these txts to check if your home has tax or inspection issues or to report a problem with utility shutoff. You can also talk to a reporter for one-on-one housing and utility answers.*”

Std msg rates may apply. Text STOP to quit and we won’t get in touch again. More about us: www.outliermedia.org. Privacy + terms: <https://outliermedia.org/data-and-privacy/>.”

Alvarez buys lists of telephone numbers as a marketer would, and she typically hears back from a couple hundred people. Of those who respond, not all are in need of the specific information Outlier Media provides, such as inspection and tax history; Outlier's service is most useful to people who are about to move, have concerns about where they live, or have questions about a house on their block.

While Outlier's SMS content is personalized and sent to a single phone number, the role it plays is similar to a typical news story from a media organization that purports to meet the information needs of a community. The exchange gives consumers the information they need to make informed decisions, as well as to hold the powerful to account. It also leaves the recipient with the possibility of speaking directly to a journalist.

Outlier Media is in the process of expanding its service beyond housing information to include utilities information. Doing so is more complex because the information is more diffuse, but the mission to close information gaps between residents and institutional power remains. It is also experimenting with a new prompt that offers options about what information the individual would like to receive.

Asking what other information would be useful sometimes leads to Outlier Media's other form of content distribution, which are news stories that run on partner publications like Bridge, Detroit News, Michigan Radio, or WDET, Detroit's NPR affiliate station. These partnerships tend to either focus on the stories of individuals facing housing problems, or about a broader problem that still fits Outlier Media's goal to provide actionable and useful information. For instance, two stories focused on [housing foreclosures due to unpaid taxes](#) – sometimes just a few hundred dollars – that residents didn't even know they had to pay.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TRUST, REVENUE, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

For Outlier Media, community engagement isn't a tool in its toolkit. Instead, its entire premise is to connect with individual Detroiters who need information about housing and utilities, and then to directly provide them with actionable information, while also inviting them to speak one-on-one with a journalist. There would be no Outlier Media without community engagement.

Outlier Media's target audience isn't likely to have much trust in the media. And, while we don't have specific data to determine to what extent Outlier Media's strategies are building trust within a likely distrustful community, the organization exhibits at least three of the six key forms of creating trust.

First, Outlier Media demonstrates authenticity in its method of delivery.

Alvarez said that it was "extremely easy" to figure out that Detroiters get their news information via text message, so that was the only choice for Outlier Media's content delivery. If that preference happens to change, she said, Outlier Media will change along with it. News delivery by SMS is not a novelty for Outlier Media, but a necessity to meet the consumers where they are.

Second, the organization practices transparency. It states upfront what the organization can do for the consumer, and it follows through with consumer questions and requests. The practice is straightforward.

Finally, Outlier Media exhibits a shared mission with those with whom it interacts. When Outlier Media delivers property information to someone who asks for it, free of charge, the organization and the individual are

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bonded by the idea that the public has a right to the information and that it can be used to protect the vulnerable.

Outlier Media's engagement process directly involves Detroiters in civic life by accessing public information and providing it to the people who can put it to use so that they are able to make the best decisions they can. Alvarez, for instance, has heard from individuals who said they used the information Outlier Media provided to avoid eviction or to buy a house.

In order for Outlier Media's model of community engagement to generate sustainable revenue, it would need partnerships, underwriting, or to be brought into a larger organization. Membership or audience supported models would be unlikely to work for Outlier Media, mostly because Outlier Media serves individuals with high value information, but they may only need that information once over the span of a few years (although Alvarez said that she has seen repeat users). This could change, of course, if Outlier had increased reporting capacity to cover multiple issues in the greater Detroit region.

As of now, most of Outlier Media's operating budget is supported through grants; however, there are additional avenues of revenue. Outlier Media has an agreement with Detour Detroit wherein a membership to support Detour Detroit generates a membership to support Outlier Media – the “buy one, give one” model. Having the text messages underwritten is another possibility. Perhaps the most reliable way for Outlier Media's work to be sustained is for it to be subsidized by or integrated into another media organization with added staff support.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Alvarez says that Outlier Media needs more refined measures of success. There are currently no ways to systematically track how many

people have put the housing information to use, how effective that has been, and whether or not usage is increasing. In fact, there's no information about how many of the numbers to which Outlier sends SMS messages actually receive the text message and how many went to defunct phone lines, so even pure reach is difficult to calculate.

Alvarez has received anecdotal evidence from people who say they used the information to avoid eviction or to be better equipped before buying a house. She has also heard that individuals who received the text message but didn't need the information at the time passed on the number to others who did. Alvarez

has also considered asking consumers a follow-up question about whether and how they've used the information supplied by Outlier, and says they may choose to do so in the future.

There is also evidence that the work is having impact at the institutional level. Alvarez said that the Wayne County Treasurer informed her that policies may be changing regarding sending houses to auction due to unpaid taxes (the subject of two pieces of traditional reporting). She also noted that houses have been moving off of the foreclosure list that otherwise would have led people to losing their homes. These institutional impacts appear to be more closely related to Outlier's traditional text reporting that has been published in partner publications like Bridge Magazine.

OUTLIER MEDIA MAY HAVE HAD AN IMPACT IN THE WAY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS BY INFLUENCING THEIR PRACTICES TO BE MORE AUTHENTIC TO THE COMMUNITY.

The treasurer also said that they would begin texting residents payment plan information. In this way, Outlier Media may have had an impact in the way the local government functions by influencing their practices to be more authentic to the community. And, while we don't know how many Detroit residents have directly used information from Outlier to make requests of the city, it appears that the number has been significant enough for the city to see SMS as an effective form of communication with residents.

LESSONS & OPPORTUNITIES



Outlier Media shows us that that people will enter into a relationship with a news organization if that organization is meeting an information need, even if the individual is likely to have a low baseline for trust in the media. Outlier Media's method is

appropriate for building trust and for civic engagement. The model is transportable as long as the organization is able to identify an information gap, knows where to find that information, and figures out an appropriate delivery method for the community.

CASE 2: PROPUBLICA



THEORY OF CHANGE

CONTEXT

Story in need of amplification; “who’s being harmed and needs their story told?”

+

Distribution method to get question to appropriate people

INPUT

ProPublica
Crowdsourced information

OUTPUT

ProPublica
Investigative story

OUTCOME

Institution
changes law
or policy

IMPACT

**LONG-TERM
SOCIAL
BENEFITS FROM
CHANGED LAWS
OR POLICIES**

BACKGROUND

Crowdsourcing powers investigative journalism and creates an opportunity to empower the crowd.

[ProPublica](#) is a non-profit newsroom that began operations in 2008. The organization is laser focused on holding the powerful accountable

through investigative journalism. It also perceives the goal of its journalism as policy changes that benefit the public, whether the policy is from an institution or government. This is reflected in ProPublica's mission statement:

To expose abuses of power and betrayals of the public trust by government, business, and other institutions, using the moral force of investigative journalism to spur reform through the sustained spotlighting of wrongdoing.

The New York based organization delivers national and local stories on its website. It previously produced a podcast about its general reporting, and it currently co-produces a podcast in collaboration with NPR affiliate WNYC about the Trump Administration, called Trump Inc. ProPublica operates a second newsroom in Illinois, ProPublica Illinois, and also supports investigative reporting fellows and maintains a Local Reporting Network, which is the basis of partnerships with seven newsrooms throughout the country (as of this writing).

ProPublica's approach to engaged journalism [was initially mostly unidirectional](#). It appears in the form of crowdsourcing information or user-created databases that help ProPublica's reporters in their investigations.

The unidirectional strategy began to change in early 2017, when ProPublica hired two engagement reporters. While the stories they produced [still tended to rely on crowdsourcing](#) to help the reporting, there were new elements to the process. For instance, an investigation into maternal mortality began with an ask – “Do you know someone who died or nearly died in childbirth?” That prompt was typical of ProPublica's crowdsourcing, but the reporter, Adriana Gallardo also paired individuals who shared their stories together once all the stories were published to have a conversation about the problem.

While there are shifts taking place in the way ProPublica practices engaged journalism, their model is still firmly that of the audience sharing stories and information to propel the reporting.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TRUST, REVENUE, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ProPublica's current method of community engagement contains three practices that have been shown to lead to trusting relationships. First, it exhibits authenticity and transparency when it crowdsources.

The entire premise of crowdsourcing information is an acknowledgement that the news organization does not know everything, and that it can benefit from outside help. That this approach to engaged journalism engenders trust is particularly evident because the crowdsourcing efforts often include sensitive information.

Second, ProPublica's crowdsourcing consistently produces investigative stories that utilize the information they received from the public. This reliable and ethical use of personal information is another practice that creates trust.

Finally, much of ProPublica's engagement work begins with a shared mission or interest, a third characteristic that is typical of trusting relationships. According to Terry Parris Jr., former deputy editor for engagement at ProPublica, the story process at ProPublica goes

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CREATES TRUST.**

something like this: Identify a person or group who has been harmed and has had their stories ignored, and then go deep into the nature of the harm and the ways in which institutional failings contributed to it. The shared mission between the news organization that wants to know more about the harm and the victim who has experienced it is that they both want to understand it in context and rectify it.

For example, when health care reporter Marshall Allen launched an [investigation into health care quality in 2012](#), he solicited information from [patients](#) and [medical professionals](#). The questionnaires were designed to provide more possibilities for investigation, as well as to create a source base for his reporting. Through this questionnaire, ProPublica generated a database of hundreds, and eventually thousands, of individual stories, as well as aggregate data and trends. For Parris, these respondents are part of a community, which was brought together through a Facebook group (created in 2012) where they could share resources with each other, filling a gap that ProPublica felt it could not.² And, for Allen, these respondents represent a pool of potential sources for stories – “We do this to do our journalism.” Thus, depending on the reporter’s perspective, the value of engagement is somewhat different, as is the organization’s responsibility in any ongoing relationship with these individuals.

Civic engagement is often a component of ProPublica’s crowdsourcing asks. For instance, in March 2017 ProPublica [asked its audience to help them fact check](#) what members of Congress were saying about the Affordable Care Act. It also asked for individuals to share any letter they may have sent, and any response they may have received, to their members of Congress regarding the ACA. Each of these actions are examples of civic engagement; however, there’s no indication that the

²ProPublica created the Facebook group in 2012 and moderated it until 2018, when it handed the group off to a patient safety advocacy group.

appeal caused civic engagement that wouldn't have otherwise existed. Their intended audience were people already civically engaged: "We're looking for civically engaged people to help us fact-check what members of Congress are sending to their constituents." Without also asking questions like "how often do you engage your members of Congress?" or "would you have written your member of Congress if it weren't for seeing this prompt?" it's difficult to determine any causal relationship between ProPublica's crowdsourcing approach and increased civic involvement.

Since its founding, ProPublica's revenue has mostly come from large donors, both from individuals and institutions. There is no clear link between its approach to community engagement and revenue. But as ProPublica continues to grow nationally and increase its investment in local journalism, its donors are getting smaller and smaller. The organization is now well-positioned to test whether or not community engagement can itself lead to revenue. But in order to do that, it may need to modify its definition of success, as well as add an element to its approach to community engagement.

MEASURING SUCCESS

At an organizational level, ProPublica identifies the impact of its reporting in a straightforward manner: If a story changed a policy or law, then it achieved impact. Engaged journalism is one way for reporters to harness relationships in order to generate information and stories for the journalism in order to make it as high-impact as possible. This approach to impact measurement makes sense given ProPublica's mission. There is an assumption that communities will benefit if the work fulfills the organization's goal to alter harmful policies. However, this assumption does not necessarily take into account the complicated processes of social change and the ways in which communities, social movements, and individuals can generate change, or their relationships with institutions.

And while the organization does consider change at the level of individual audience members or among communities to be impact, reporters have found value in closing the feedback loop and ensuring that the journalism makes its way back to the community that contributed to reporting. For example, Allen says that he creates email listservs for investigations that had crowdsourcing elements through which he shares all relevant reporting. And, as mentioned above, reporters have experimented with creating issue-based Facebook groups for individual community members to connect. Through this Facebook group, a pre-existing Patient Safety Network was able to join and reach new individuals to share resources and to build the network of advocates and activists for patient safety. This nuanced community impact may not be a policy change, but the power of organizing can be massive, especially over the long term.

LESSONS & OPPORTUNITIES



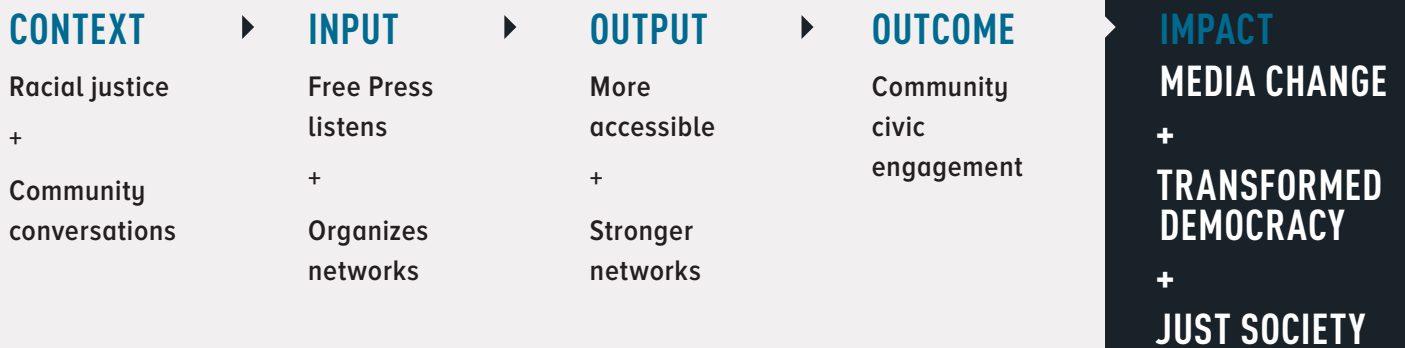
Community engagement is an effective tool to power investigative reporting, especially when an organization consistently interacts with individuals over time. There is opportunity to more deeply integrate

community engagement *with the community* and reporting *on the community* and to understand the powerful, and potentially unique, impact of these reporting practices.

CASE 3: FREE PRESS: NEWS VOICES, NORTH CAROLINA



THEORY OF CHANGE



BACKGROUND

Ambitious impact from the bottom up.

Free Press is a non-profit advocacy organization founded in 2003 and is the only organization in this study that is not a news organization. Instead, it focuses its energy on the relationship between the media and democracy, guided by principles of racial justice. This is reflected in Free Press’s mission:

We seek to change the media to transform democracy to realize a just society.

Free Press’s central claim is that media practices need to change so that communities are better served and community members are better prepared to engage in democratic processes.

In pursuit of its mission, Free Press dedicates resources to activate communities, organize, and protect what it calls an individual’s “right to connect and communicate.”

In this context, Free Press is concerned with local journalism, for which it launched the News Voices initiative in New Jersey in 2015³. News Voices centers

on community events and seeks to “build power with communities” so that they have the tools to actively participate in the revitalization of local journalism. The initiative emphasizes building relationships among media partners and residents.

The News Voices work has emphasized creating strong relationships between local communities and local newsrooms by brokering conversations between the two. According to the News Voices model,

INCLUDING COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS FOR THESE EVENTS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE THE ACT OF LISTENING HELPS FREE PRESS TO UNEARTH SPECIFIC COMMUNITY INFORMATION NEEDS.

³In New Jersey, Free Press was part of a statewide collaborative, funded in large part by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Over the course of three years, News Voices organized community members and media outlets in NJ. During the same time, the Center for Collaborative Media at Montclair State University and the Center for Investigative Reporting led additional [media collaborations](#). In 2018, the NJ collaborative was instrumental in the passing of the Civic Information Bill. The Bill created a consortium with, according to Free Press, “the mission of strengthening local news coverage and boosting civic engagement in communities across the state.” Work in NJ remains ongoing.

the first step for generating constructive community conversations is to practice inclusion from the very beginning. News Voices does this by reaching out to community members to determine what shape gatherings should take (including looking over the program), where they should happen, how accessible they are, and even what kind of food should be provided so that community members are at their most comfortable. Including community members in the planning process for these events is important because the act of listening helps Free Press to unearth specific community information needs.

Outreach to newsrooms is equally important. News Voices approaches newsrooms from a position of honesty and a clear indication that it's there to support local journalism. The News Voices team may ask to give a presentation to the newsroom, or simply invite a journalist to a gathering. News Voices offers opportunity for journalists to connect with communities they might not know. It is also transparent with newsrooms about what the News Voices team is hearing from community members, so when journalists do attend community gatherings, they have a reasonable expectation of how the conversation will go.

In North Carolina, for example, News Voices held small stakeholder meetings in [April 2017 in Charlotte and Durham](#), and the first big event in North Carolina took place in [August 2017 at Johnson C. Smith University](#), an HBCU in Charlotte. One paper that sent staff to this event was the Charlotte Observer, a McClatchy publication.

The Observer's presence is particularly notable because it contributed to a stronger relationship with News Voices. After the event, Alicia Bell, News Voices' North Carolina Organizer, reached out to the Observer to organize a presentation for the Observer's board of editors as a "get to know" session, including time for Q&A, followed by one-on-one

conversations. Both activities, according to Bell, “seeded everything” in terms of sustaining relationships with the newsroom so that there was widespread buy in to the News Voices’ approach.

In May 2018, the Observer and News Voices held a community breakfast at the Observer’s newsroom, the first of what has become monthly community meetings. Bell said community members came to the meetings for one main reason: Because community members, despite not fully trusting the Observer, saw that the Observer was putting in time and effort to reach out and that the reporters were committed to expanding and sustaining relationships in the community. Over time, responsibility for planning these events has passed from News Voics to the Observer.

As with all News Voices events, the form of each gathering depends on its size, but there are two guiding principles: The community’s needs come first, and journalists and community members will dialogue with one another. In these exchanges there’s value for both the community and the journalists. For the community, the gatherings are an opportunity to speak directly to journalists and to be heard. For the journalists, they can meet community members and get new story ideas. And there’s value for democracy because the relationship between community member and local journalism has been strengthened.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TRUST, REVENUE, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Free Press’s News Voices approach to community engagement provides useful comparisons to newsrooms as it relates to trust, revenue, and civic engagement. In particular, its role as an information advocate and mediator between communities and newsrooms

highlights how important involvement from non-media organizations can be to sustain the health of local journalism. They also show that community organizing tactics like deep and broad community listening and inclusion, while resource intensive, don't necessarily conflict with the premises of nonpartisan, impartial journalism.

In order to cultivate trust between local journalists and communities, News Voices community events focus on open dialogue. The openness is designed to show journalists that communities have perspectives about their own information needs that are rooted in experience, and also to demystify journalism for the community.

Free Press is also intentionally inclusive in the development of its community events. By doing so, it strives to create an environment where community members are comfortable and more willing to be open. This environment should encourage honesty, and that honesty should in turn lead participating journalists to place more emphasis on the information needs of those communities.

Having a shared mission, another element of trust, is where Free Press is most distinctive. Free Press's approach to community engagement is to make the argument that communities and local journalism have a shared mission. Communities that may never have trusted the media,

[FREE PRESS'S] ROLE AS AN INFORMATION ADVOCATE AND MEDIATOR BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND NEWSROOMS HIGHLIGHTS HOW IMPORTANT INVOLVEMENT FROM NON-MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS CAN BE TO SUSTAIN THE HEALTH OF LOCAL JOURNALISM.

like communities of color, likely need to be persuaded that strong local journalism is an essential ingredient for a just society. Notably, Free Press argues that racial justice is a condition for quality local journalism, not a result of it. If it were the latter, the promise would likely ring hollow.

Free Press also posits that journalists need to listen to all community members in order to fulfill its mission of serving the information needs of communities. This is something most newsrooms would probably want to do but may not know how, especially for communities not already

part of an organization's audience. Free Press attempts to compel communities and news organizations to come together and fight for the shared mission of universal, quality access to information.

FREE PRESS ATTEMPTS TO COMPEL COMMUNITIES AND NEWS ORGANIZATIONS TO COME TOGETHER AND FIGHT FOR THE SHARED MISSION OF UNIVERSAL, QUALITY ACCESS TO INFORMATION.

Regarding revenue, the question is more about how News Voices' community engagement can generate revenue for news organizations. If News Voices is successful at showing local communities the value of local journalism, and local news organizations listen more deeply and create relationships with those communities, then community members may be more likely to pay for those services, either in a subscription or membership model. Heather Bryant of The Membership Puzzle summarized this sequence in a recent article: "[Before communities can invest in news, newsrooms must invest in communities.](#)"

Civic engagement is an essential component to Free Press's theory of change, which makes it also a fundamental part of its community engagement. Attending community events to discuss major questions

in the community is itself a good example of civic engagement for both community members and journalists. News Voices has also developed toolkits for civic engagement. The “[How to Have a Voice in Local News](#)” guide details how community members can build relationships with journalists, and their “[Organizing for Journalists](#)” guide shows how journalists can use activist tactics to build trust in communities. Both guides provide ways for people to take action and change media narratives. And that, according to News Voices Director Mike Rispoli, is yet another form of civic engagement.

MEASURING SUCCESS

According to Free Press, the News Voices initiative tracks its success using the Objectives and Key Results framework. Its indicators are how many people the organization is engaging, the percentage that are people of color, the number of events and workshops hosted, and how many people they are activating in pursuit of its overall mission. There’s confidence that what they are doing is working: Communities continue wanting to work with Free Press, and newsrooms continue to be receptive to their invitations to community conversations. For example, in New Jersey, the Atlantic City Press and community members invited Free Press to convene the community to address new challenges and opportunities a full three years after the initial work took place.

The New Jersey version of News Voices had a major success with the passage of the Civic Information Bill through the New Jersey legislature (implementation of the bill is still uncertain).

A central goal of News Voices is to catalyze a culture shift within newsrooms. Free Press recognizes that this is a slow process and that the focus on racial justice and centering community can make

newsrooms uncomfortable. Nevertheless, Rispoli and Bell both said that News Voices is seeing newsrooms changing culture. In particular the Charlotte Observer's incremental shift from interested and supportive to taking a leading role is an example of a culture shift.

LESSONS & OPPORTUNITIES



News Voices' community engagement shows that residents, even if they have not necessarily felt represented by the media, are willing to talk to journalists about their community. The work also shows that journalists, if invited and approached with

honesty, are also willing to listen to community members. The News Voices work is resource intensive, but the conversations that take place before and after the community meetings are good ways to lead to trusting relationships.

CASE 4: McCLATCHY



THEORY OF CHANGE

CONTEXT

Clear mission



INPUT

Reporters
create mission-
oriented pitches



OUTPUT

Reporters and
editors produce
mission-oriented
journalism



OUTCOME

Making a
difference
in local
communities

IMPACT

**CONVERTING
READERS TO
SUBSCRIBERS**

BACKGROUND

Building trust through transparency as practice and principle.

McClatchy is a for-profit publisher that operates in 14 states and 30 markets in the U.S. The markets range from small to mid-size and, as such, the publications all have a local emphasis. Director of Audience Growth and Loyalty Jessica Huff described McClatchy's mission:

To produce local journalism that resonates with readers and makes a difference in our communities.

McClatchy produces content in two ways. First, their newsrooms create local stories in the form of text, audio, and video. Second, McClatchy has a team of reporters and editors who produce national content for the entire organization. This reporting also can take the form of text, video, or audio content.

According to Huff, everyone in a McClatchy newsroom is expected to practice engaged journalism, and journalists are encouraged to integrate it into their workflow. To encourage this, McClatchy has five regional “growth teams” that serve multiple newsrooms. This team of editors and producers are responsible for digital engagement and expanding each publication’s reach. They are also responsible for encouraging engaged journalism practices, identifying opportunities to use these practices, and guiding reporters and editors on how to take advantage of them, ideally at the beginning of a story.

Because McClatchy operates so many newsrooms, it practices many kinds of community engagement. It doesn’t have an organization-wide definition of what engagement is other than the shared purpose to build relationships with readers. But, based on conversations with Huff, Jennifer Robillard, the California region growth editor, and Eric Frederick, the growth editor for the Carolinas region, engagement at McClatchy appears to be guided by transparency.

Frederick defines transparency as “letting everyone know exactly what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, how we’re doing it, and how [the audience] can participate in it.” One way this shows up is in text boxes at the end of a story under the heading “How We Reported This Story.” For instance, a story about [Congressman Devin Nunes from the Fresno Bee](#) has one of these text boxes. It describes how many calls the paper made, who responded, who declined to be interviewed, and even how much research the reporter did. This can also show up as a standalone story, as the [Sacramento Bee did about its reporting](#)

[on state complaints against for-profit colleges](#). Audience participation could show up in McClatchy's diverse use of Hearken, as well as in Facebook groups and community events.

It's also common practice in California and the Carolinas for reporters, especially new ones, to introduce themselves to the audience via video or text and distributed on social media or on the paper's website. Like in-text explanations, the idea behind this practice is to make journalists and the practice of journalism more real for McClatchy audiences, bringing both transparency and authenticity to the reporting.

Similar to ProPublica, McClatchy also crowdsources for reporting purposes. The Sacramento Bee, for instance, prompted [readers to review 52 body cam videos from the fatal shooting of Stephon Clark](#). They asked residents to record what they saw on a Google spreadsheet, which was monitored by reporters, and ask any questions they might have. This form of community engagement, however, is the exception rather than the rule for McClatchy.

DESPITE MCCLATCHY OUTLETS ACROSS THE US HAVING MUCH LATITUDE TO EXPERIMENT WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, THERE IS A DEEPLY SHARED GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF TRANSPARENCY.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: TRUST, REVENUE, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite McClatchy outlets across the US having much latitude to experiment with community engagement, there is a deeply

shared guiding principle of transparency. The relationship between transparency and trust has been well established throughout this report, and McClatchy understands the strong relationship between the two. McClatchy also attempts to build that transparency into its revenue model.

McClatchy uses a subscription model for reader support, but it also runs ads on its websites and in its papers. All McClatchy websites have a paywall. Readers can read five posts on a 30-day rolling basis, after which they will be blocked from content without a subscription.

McClatchy is experimenting with ways to use analytics to connect its transparency practices with subscriber conversions. For example, California publications have developed tracking codes to go along with some of the “How We Reported This Story” boxes. This can ultimately be an indication of whether or not trust building activity is leading to additional revenue. McClatchy has also found an opportunity in its free newsletters, both by developing tailored newsletters based on what people say they want, and by including reporter introductions in them to cultivate a sense of intimacy with the publication. The line between McClatchy’s journalism and its subscriptions may be solid, but the one between its engaged journalism and revenue remains, for now, dotted.

Huff summarizes the relationship between McClatchy’s journalism and revenue:

The more often a reader is engaging with our work, it is likely they’ll consume more of our content, which increases our chances of converting them to a digital subscriber. And if a reader is engaging with our work, then it is more likely to have an impact and achieve our journalistic missions.

While Huff said that it's an expectation that all reporters integrate engaged journalism into their daily work, she also said that engagement has been more successful at the project level, when growth editors and producers can help strategize with reporters and editors about engagement opportunities early in the process.

MEASURING SUCCESS

McClatchy has straightforward measures for success that include two yes or no questions: Did the story achieve its predetermined pageview goal, and did it help fulfill the organization's mission? To answer the second question, McClatchy developed five yes or no questions. According to Huff, before a story can even begin, the reporter must be able to answer "yes" to at least one of the following questions. And after a story is complete, the reporter must determine whether or not it accomplished what it intended to do:

1. Will the story break news that holds leaders or institutions accountable?
2. Will the story break news that makes a concrete difference in the community?
3. Will the story tell readers how something will directly affect their lives or the lives of their families or friends?
4. Will the story use extraordinary, revelatory storytelling to help readers understand a consequential societal issue in new ways?
5. Will the story attract an extraordinary amount of readership or engagement because it is of great interest or value to our readers for other reasons?

If a reporter can answer yes to both of those questions, it is considered a success. McClatchy has an in-house tracker for reporters and editors

to indicate whether or not they met these goals. Newsrooms use these metrics to inform editorial decisions.

While it hasn't determined them yet, McClatchy intends to integrate metrics for loyalty and engagement in the near future. And, as stated above, the organization is developing a method to connect digital engagement analytics with subscription conversion in order to better understand the connections between audience engagement and revenue.

LESSONS & OPPORTUNITIES



McClatchy shows how transparency can be a principle of engagement that can be applied in different contexts. It also has a simple method for measuring success. There's a unifying elegance to the five yes or no, mission-oriented questions that allow a story to move forward that double as a measure for success.

There is significant opportunity for McClatchy to connect the dots among their digital analytics, types of engagement and content, audience trust, and subscription conversions.

SUMMARY

The four case studies represent organizations that vary by size, mission, revenue strategy, and engagement tactics. The organizations – one small non-profit news organization, one large non-profit news organization, one large for-profit news publisher, and one advocacy organization – clearly show that there are many ways to practice engaged journalism in pursuit of building trust, generating revenue, and increasing civic engagement. Some practices are more directly linked to one or two of the specific goals than others, and each one requires a different level of resources in terms of time and money.

If there's a single premise that applies to each organization, it's that effective engagement requires a way for communities to be in contact with journalists in a relational rather than transactional manner. While obvious, it's useful to consider the many ways to pursue the goal. Outlier Media invites Detroiters to have one-on-one conversations with a journalist, while News Voices' community events are designed for conversation between journalists and community members in North Carolina. Outlier Media and Free Press not only create access to journalists, but they also have avenues for individuals to get to know them and build relationships.

For ProPublica and McClatchy, contact with the audience is more removed. ProPublica's investigative journalism can be "people-powered" in that audience members provide information to make the journalism possible. Their interaction with ProPublica, however, may only be entering information in a database as part

**EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT
REQUIRES A WAY FOR
COMMUNITIES TO BE
IN CONTACT WITH
JOURNALISTS IN A
RELATIONAL RATHER
THAN TRANSACTIONAL
MANNER.**

of responding to a crowdsourcing prompt. Similarly, McClatchy’s engagement through transparency approach gives readers glimpses into the journalistic process and the motivations of journalists, but it may not strengthen relationships in the way that face-to-face conversations or community events would. At the same time, an introduction to a reporter sent in a newsletter will reach more people than a community event.

These differences demonstrate that similar goals can be reached through distinct practices based on organizational structure and resources. For instance, both Outlier Media and ProPublica use journalism to hold the powerful accountable. The distinction is that Outlier Media assumes that this will happen by handing over actionable information to Detroit residents, while ProPublica seeks to do so through publishing its investigative reporting for a national audience. And yet, both rely on relationship building.

ENGAGED JOURNALISM PRACTICES BY ORGANIZATION

	CROWDSOURCING	SERVICE OFFER	CALLOUT	COMMUNITY EVENTS	COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION	COMMUNITY TRAINING	CALL TO ACTION	QUESTION SOLICITATION	FACEBOOK GROUPS
OUTLIER MEDIA		✓		✓			✓		
PROPUBLICA	✓		✓						
FREE PRESS				✓	✓	✓			
McCLATCHY	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Organizational mission drives the other forms of engaged journalism. Free Press, the only non-news organization analyzed here, holds inclusive community events with journalists and community members as a way to change newsroom cultures, ultimately resulting in a stronger democracy. Conversely, McClatchy newsrooms practice engaged journalism in pursuit of the comparatively modest goal of “making a difference” in their communities, paired with the inherent necessity of for-profit entity to convert audience into subscribers.

TRUST AND ENGAGED JOURNALISM

Audience trust as an outcome must begin with building the components of trust into engaged journalism practices.

Without initial planning for systematic measurement of trust, it’s difficult to find evidence that there was an increase in trust in the case studies. We can, however, draw conclusions based on what we do know: The practices of the organization, who the target audiences are and the baseline level of trust those groups generally have toward the media, and characteristics that people feel are the basis of trusting relationship. As a reminder, those characteristics are:

- Authenticity;
- Transparency;
- Consistency;
- Positivity;
- Diversity; and
- Shared mission.

By triangulating engagement practices, the trust characteristics that can be associated with those practices, and intended audience, we can get a rough picture of whether or not there is likely to be an increase in trust. This triangulation can then be the basis of future research and project planning that is more deliberate and systematic.

ENGAGED JOURNALISM PRACTICES AND TRUST FACTORS

Correlation level:

- High
- Medium
- Low



Following this logic, Outlier Media and Free Press’s News voices are the two organizations most likely to have increased trust with their engagement. For both, the target communities are composed of individuals who are not likely to have a high levels of trust in the media in the first place. Outlier Media targets low-income Detroiters, while News Voices focuses on communities likely to lack access to quality journalism.

Besides an intended audience likely to have low trust to begin with, the organizations have engagement practices that exhibit characteristics of trust. For instance, Outlier Media's service offer practice is based on transparency. It identifies itself as a news organization that can do something for the recipient of the text message, and it invites communication directly with a journalist. Even if a resident does not take up Outlier Media on the offer and only uses the service to get information, the engagement practice shows Detroiters what journalism can do, and how it does it, without ever saying "we're performing a function of journalism that holds those in power accountable." Outlier also demonstrates authenticity, in that it is run by native Detroiters and delivers information via SMS, the way that the target audience prefers to get information. And Outlier's chatbot is consistent - if you write to it, it will respond, *every time*. And finally, rather than telling Detroiters only the bad news about foreclosures, it provides actionable information, thereby creating a positive interaction.

**OUTLIER'S CHATBOT IS
CONSISTENT - IF YOU
WRITE TO IT, IT WILL
RESPOND, EVERY TIME.**

For Free Press and News Voices, perhaps the clearest example of a trust-building practice is diversity. The advocacy organization centers racial justice in a way that mainstream news organizations often won't. Their community events are intentionally inclusive from the planning stages to the event itself, and the group of attendees is diverse. This is likely to result in communities' increasing trust in media as long as the journalists listen and, crucially, follow the stories they hear. If the communities either distrust or disregard the media because they don't hear or see themselves represented, they may begin to trust once a journalist listens to their stories and represents it in a sensitive and fair manner. Closely related, News Voices listens to the needs, wants, and suggestions of local community members to ensure that the gatherings are authentically local.

A significant difference in ProPublica's model is that the communities that are involved in engaged journalism aren't necessarily ProPublica's audience (or target audience); instead, these communities are based on topics and tend to be thought of as story sources and contributors to data sets, rather than key audiences for all of ProPublica's reporting. However, among these crowdsourcing participants, it's likely that ProPublica's engagement practices generate relationships and trust. ProPublica is remarkably consistent in terms of harnessing community knowledge through crowdsourcing to execute its investigative reporting, even if the information it asks for is sensitive. It is also consistent in reporting back to its audience how it put the information to use and what came of it.

PROPUBLICA IS REMARKABLY CONSISTENT IN TERMS OF HARNESSING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE THROUGH CROWDSOURCING TO EXECUTE ITS INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING, EVEN IF THE INFORMATION IT ASKS FOR IS SENSITIVE. IT IS ALSO CONSISTENT IN REPORTING BACK TO ITS AUDIENCE HOW IT PUT THE INFORMATION TO USE AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

McClatchy's diverse set of engagement practices, organized around transparency, are likely leading to increased trust. While McClatchy has not directly surveyed audience members about trust levels, anecdotal audience feedback suggests this is true. Subscription conversions as a result of transparent practices would be a reliable measure of increasing trust if that information were tracked.

With a fair degree of confidence we can deduce that the engaged journalism practiced by these organizations are either leading to increased trust, or at the very least maintaining trust with audiences. That's because their engagement practices can be traced to trust factors. The next step is to test this in a more systematic way. If the connection between practice and trust factor can be identified at the beginning of a project or phase of work, along with a plan for how to measure the degree of trust earned, we can get a better idea of what the most effective trust building strategies are.

HOW COULD ORGANIZATIONS MEASURE TRUST?

- Surveys
- Participation rates
- Testing organizational mission

TRUST AND REVENUE

The causal link between engagement, trust, and revenue can be tested if revenue is built in as a measure of success for trust practices.

The strength of the relationship between engaged journalism, trust, and revenue remains speculative. And while there's enough circumstantial evidence to feel confident that engaged journalism practices are leading to increased trust, there's less evidence that the trust is being translated directly into revenue. Still, the case studies reveal possibilities.

The relationship Free Press is establishing between Charlotte communities and the Charlotte Observer could be a revealing test case. If the community events ultimately lead to an increase in subscriptions, then it could incentivize other news organizations to follow the same community engagement model. Of course, hosting regular community events is one of the most resource intensive forms of community engagement, as it not only requires extensive planning, but a great deal of sustained community outreach. However, if there is evidence that the collaborative community events hosted by News Voices and the Charlotte Observer lead to additional revenue in the form of subscriptions or underwriting, then that could be incentive enough for news organizations to find a way to sustain the events independently, either by using existing resources or seeking external funding to develop and launch them. This could be done independently or with support from an advocacy organization like Free Press.

It's worth noting that another local media organization, the Peoria Star Journal, has held monthly community meetings with community groups and civic leaders for the past four years. These events have been held in a low income and historically underserved neighborhood with the goal of listening to the community and soliciting questions and story ideas. The Star Journal has not seen an increase in subscriptions as a result of these events. Any investigation into whether or not local newspapers in North Carolina can translate News Voices' like events into revenue would need to determine what it is about those particular events that is successful.

ProPublica also offers the possibility of a compelling test case. Over its first ten years, the organization has defined success in terms of whether or not its investigative reporting changed a law or policy. Engaged journalism only played a role insofar as it helped power the investigations. ProPublica reporters share the reporting back to individuals who participate in the reporting, but the organization does not look to these communities when measuring impact there. Now, however, ProPublica is expanding its reach throughout the country through local partnerships, and continues to grow

its small donor class to complement large individual and institutional support. ProPublica has a unique opportunity to experiment with the relationship between community engagement and revenue.

Outlier Media's mission is based on community engagement, so any revenue can be causally linked to engaged journalism. However, at this point all revenue comes through grant support. According to Outlier's founder, Sarah Alvarez, the organization is likely not sustainable as a standalone organization with support based solely on donations or memberships, despite the high likelihood that its engagement is increasing trust with Detroit residents. This is because engagement with Outlier is very timebound, meaning a resident might get useful information once, and then not come back to Outlier for months or even years. She says that the best paths for sustaining Outlier Media's work is either institutional support or absorption by a larger service-oriented organization. It will be interesting to chart the revenue partnership with Detour Detroit, whereby Detour subscribers can "get one give one" for Outlier Media, as that is a creative model that other organizations in similar situations can learn from.

McClatchy's revenue streams are traditional newspaper sources: advertisements and subscriptions. In order to draw a link between its engaged journalism and advertising revenue, we'd need to know how well content driven by engagement tactics performs digitally against those that don't. For subscription revenue, McClatchy is in the process of developing analytics to track conversions from people on stories, as well as through newsletters. McClatchy could also consider surveying why people chose to subscribe.

HOW COULD ORGANIZATIONS MEASURE THE RELATIONSHIP OF ENGAGED JOURNALISM AND REVENUE?

- **Surveys**
- **Member/subscriber conversion tracking**

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND ENGAGED JOURNALISM

Civic engagement is an achievable short-term goal for engaged journalism projects, but long-term civic involvement requires a sustained process of engagement.

The case studies present strong evidence that engaged journalism can lead to civic engagement, especially in the general sense of connecting with others in a community. The case studies show that if civic engagement is a desired outcome for engaged journalism, it is often as simple as being intentional about selecting an appropriate engaged journalism tactic. However, it's less clear whether or not those outcomes lead to civic engagement as a long-term impact, and there is still much that we don't know about the relationship.

Outlier Media and Free Press are the two best examples of work with civic engagement at the core. When Outlier Media accesses and provides public data to Detroiters, it involves individuals in public life, whether the individuals conceive of it that way or not. That is civic engagement as an outcome. Civic engagement as an impact would mean increased civic participation beyond the specific context that brought the individual into contact with Outlier Media.

Similarly, News Voices' community events are excellent examples of civic involvement because they are based on conversation with the purpose of bettering the community. Discovering whether or not News Voices events lead to other forms of civic participation would help identify civic engagement as an impact of engaged journalism rather

than just an outcome. Because Free Press's organizational mission is founded on strengthening democracy, they may have the greatest incentive to understand what effect their News Voices events are having on civic life.

Because ProPublica and McClatchy have more general community engagement practices, as well as more varied forms of content creation, the relationship between engaged journalism and civic engagement still holds. For instance, ProPublica asked its readers to share letters they may have sent to their congressional representatives regarding the Affordable Care Act, as well as anything received in return, to create a database about how constituents and representatives are discussing the ACA. We just don't know for how many people ProPublica was the impetus of that civic act, or whether or not it inspired people to participate in other forms of civic life.

HOW COULD ORGANIZATIONS MEASURE THE RELATIONSHIP OF ENGAGED JOURNALISM AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

- Surveys
- Community network formation and growth
- Process tracing and case studies

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Organizations should clearly identify the assumed causal mechanism between practices of engaged journalism and desired outcomes.
2. Organizations should identify indicators of success, metrics, and research methods to understand if their engagement practices are having the desired effects, and if not, why.
3. The industry needs experiments to test the relationship between engaged journalism practices and revenue, and the results of these experiments need to be shared within the field.
4. NII and other funders of engaged journalism should continue to provide grantees with support to strategize engagement practices designed to generate trust and/or revenue, along with a plan for measuring the outcomes of the practice.

The measurement could be in the form of surveys, focus groups, or communal gatherings, and the results will generate shareable knowledge about how to design engagement for trust.
5. NII and other funders should provide support for newsrooms to build capacity for community outreach, whether through support from a third party organization or by backfilling staff time, as a way to encourage deep listening and shift newsroom culture to have the expectation of integrating engagement practices into regular operations.
6. Engaged journalism initiatives that hope to spur civic engagement can do so by clearly identifying pathways for community members to get involved.
7. Community organizing and activism tactics don't necessarily conflict with journalistic impartiality, but the key is to ensure that the goals of the practices align with the mission of the organization.

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