

Tactics for Transforming Local News

A playbook for activating communities to realize a new vision for media



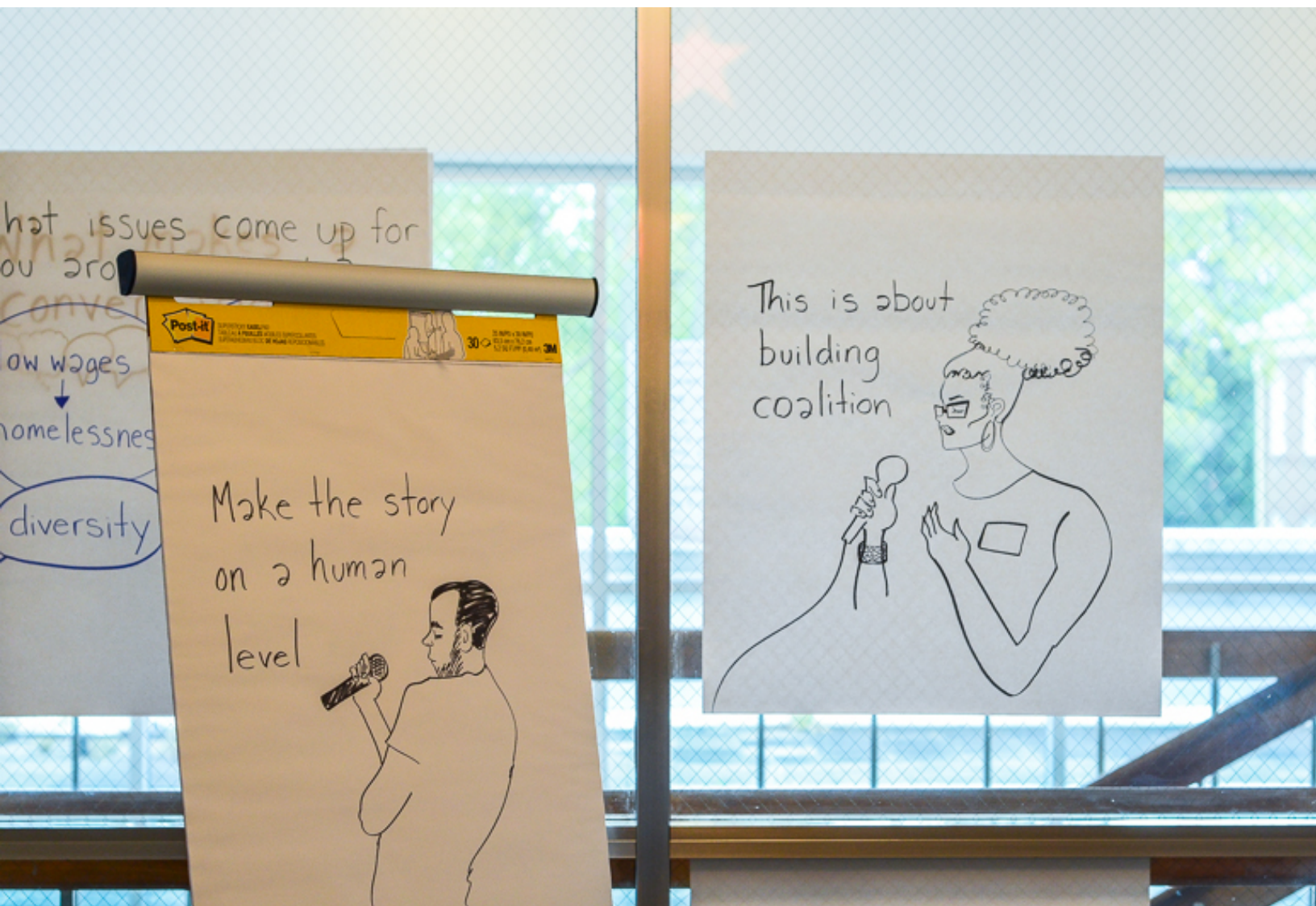
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News Voices



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Transformation Starts with Building Relationships.....	5
Tactics for Transforming Local News (With or Without Newsrooms).....	7
Tactics for Transforming Community Relationships with Newsrooms.....	13
Weaving the Tactics Together.....	17
Resources & Support.....	18
About Free Press.....	20



Introduction

Communities can play a crucial role in reshaping the future of local news.

When we think about stories of and for our communities we often think about how the media tells those stories. But community storytelling is an old practice, one owned by the residents in a given neighborhood, town or city. It's alive and well in our corner stores, diners, places of worship, and at the bus stop where parents drop their kids off for school.

News stories have always been most true and representative of a community when people have a say in how those stories are told. But people are generally removed from the process of creating local news. Too many news outlets think of them only as consumers or fodder for quotes.

At News Voices, we don't think people are passive consumers of local news; rather, they're active participants in the shaping and telling of stories. We believe in organizing communities into a constituency for local news and information. These stories are told within our local-news ecosystems, which are made up of a variety of local institutions enabling information to move from person to person.

Journalism is one component of that ecosystem. Overlooked, though, is how everyday people participate in and shape this ecosystem. When news stories aren't told in ways that align with community experiences, residents often turn off the television, tune out the nightly radio broadcast and stop reading the paper.

And if you leave a house alone long enough, it will disintegrate and fall apart.

But if you need a place to live and you want it to feel like home, you can renovate the house with the help of your community or you can build something new to move into.

The same is true of local news.

Newsrooms are constantly thinking about how to adapt to the new media climate.

We believe that strong local-news ecosystems rely on the power of the people and the communities that hold them.

You can transform local journalism and the entire local-news ecosystem to align it with what your community is witnessing, experiencing, feeling and desiring.

This toolkit — based off of years of organizing in communities to reshape local news — provides tactics for building power toward transforming media where you live. Just as communities are organizing for equitable and just social policy, we can organize for equitable and just local news. To transform local news, we have to build local leadership.

These tools aren't meant to be rules, and are by no means prescriptive or all encompassing. Try them all or only try some. Modify them. Use them as inspiration for creating new tactics where you live.

Whatever you do, **know that you can create movement and an abundant local-news ecosystem that holds the dignity your community deserves.**

This playbook is meant to be an overview of the various tactics — each one of them could be its own guide — so if you want to learn more, News Voices is here to help. Contact us at newsvoices@freepress.net for more information, or follow us online at freepress.net, on Facebook at facebook.com/freepress or on Twitter [@freepress](https://twitter.com/freepress) with the hashtag #NewsVoices.

What is a news ecosystem?

- “Communities rely on a diverse set of institutions (newsrooms, schools, libraries), infrastructure (broadband, technology), and networks (platforms, people) for information.” **This is a news ecosystem.**
- “These ecosystems are deeply rooted in place but are also subject to the larger ‘climate’ of media — economics, politics, shifting user habits, changes in technology, etc.”

—From the Democracy Fund's Public Square Program

Transformation Starts with Building Relationships

To transform the culture of local news, we have to transform the relationships that comprise it.

Too often the relationships between community members and journalists are transactional. Journalists on deadline and under pressure often turn to community members only at the last minute to get a quote or information. Community organizations want coverage that can help their cause, and philanthropic grants may require that their work generate press coverage.

This method of building relationships creates and re-creates a transactional culture. That can be frustrating for everyone involved, because oftentimes people leave the transaction feeling like only part of their work or part of their lives were acknowledged.

We address how community members can build deep relationships with journalists in our “How to Have a Voice in Local News”¹ toolkit. For the sake of the toolkit you’re reading right now, we want to acknowledge the importance of first starting with building relationships to create transformational change. But we won’t be going too deep into that, so please read “How to Have a Voice in Local News” if you haven’t yet.

These are some of the relationships that impact local-news ecosystems:

- A local resident and another local resident
- A local resident and a reporter
- A reporter and their editor
- A newsroom and their publisher
- A newsroom and their advertisers
- A community and the businesses that advertise via local news
- One newsroom and another newsroom

Some questions to consider as you seek to build, strengthen and transform the relationships that impact local news:

- Who are the people in your community who are community connectors?
- Who are the people in your community who are perceived as local leaders?
- Who are the people in your community who receive and share stories?
 - Note: Your inclination may be to think about local journalists or people who have access to various community newsletters. But what about baristas? Cashiers? Hairstylists? The elders who sit on their porches and watch the neighborhood?
- What is your relationship with those people?
- How can you help connect those people to local journalists?
- What do you value in your most important relationships?
- How do you build and sustain the relationships you already have?
- How could your values and tactics for building relationships translate within the local-news ecosystem?

¹ “How to Have a Voice in Local News,” News Voices: https://www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2018-03/news_voices_community_guide.pdf



Photo: Collette Watson

This toolkit discusses ways to strengthen connections between residents or between residents and local journalists, but they can be used to shift other relationships. (And there's room for experimenting with other tactics outside of those outlined here.)

Supporting & Showing Up for Each Other

An ongoing tactic for transforming and building our relationships is supporting and showing up for each other. Remind the people you're building relationships with to drink water. Ask how they're doing. Encourage them to rest and take breaks.

Show up for the things that are important for them.

Is there a local journalist who really “gets it” and does a good job at reporting on your community? Make sure to read, watch or listen to the journalism they produce to show others they may be working with that this work holds value.

Is there a small business in your community that also serves as a place for people to convene and connect? Support that business. Choose one day a week to work out of there or stop by, if possible.

Is there a community organizer working to make your community better? What's the next event or action they're coordinating? Show up to that event.

Is there an artist telling stories you might never find in a newspaper? Support their work. Go to their shows. Encourage others to do the same.

If this is something that's new to you, it might feel like extra work. Mapping out what people are doing and making sure to support them is real work and can be hard.

But as with any muscle, the more we practice supporting and showing up for others in our community, the easier it becomes and the better we are at understanding people as full human beings.

For more information on building relationships to reshape local news, please read our toolkit “How to Have a Voice in Local News.”²

² “How to Have a Voice in Local News,” News Voices: https://www.freepress.net/sites/default/files/2018-03/news_voices_community_guide.pdf

Tactics for Transforming Local News (With or Without Newsrooms)

The following tactics are aimed at transforming the relationships we have with one other. They can be done in collaboration with local newsrooms or they can be done to uplift other elements and relationships in your local-news ecosystem.



DREAM SALONS

To create a transformative future, we have to dream and vision it. Otherwise, we'll move through our days recreating the same old systems and processes, some of which are problematic or even harmful.

But if we want a different future for local news — one that better represents our communities, our experiences and our perspectives — we have to envision what it looks like.

Clearly naming and defining our dream for the future of local news will give us a guidepoint to work toward. Dreams aren't set. We should be in an ongoing process of dreaming and visioning what else might be possible. As we dream those things, we can incorporate them into our vision for the future of local news.

Before we take actions to transform local news, we need to name the future we are creating. Practice naming your dreams affirmatively. Instead of saying something like, "I hope all of our voices will be heard and valued," try "All of our voices are heard and valued" or "I'm creating a future where all of our voices are heard and valued."

The more you frame those dreams in positive terms and take action to make them real, the more you'll see them show up in your community.

Steps to hosting a dream salon:

1. The best way to plan your gathering is with a group. Invite people to join you in the planning. A successful gathering will include three or more people — so start by asking a couple of friends who can help you plan.
2. Choose a date, time and location that will work well for as many people as possible. If there's a budget for it, try to order food for your meeting. Meetings are always better with food. Or you can organize a potluck where people bring food they make or purchase.
3. Develop an outreach plan. Is your planning meeting open to the public? Will you only invite certain people?



What happens at a dream salon:

1. Arrive early to set up the space. If there's food or drink, have it set up when attendees arrive.
2. Have something for people to engage with as they arrive. Perhaps this is food or maybe there's music playing. Perhaps a video is being screened.
3. Greet people as they arrive.
4. Once everyone has arrived, welcome all of the participants and facilitate introductions.
5. Provide an overview of what you'll be doing and why. (Tip: Most people don't know what a dream salon is until you explain it to them.)
6. Map the local news you have in your community right now. Depending on the size, that can happen with the whole group or in smaller ones. It's best to have no more than five people per group.
7. When you map your local news, consider questions like: How is local news where you live? How does it function? Who is a part of it? Who does it represent? Who are journalists in relationship with?
8. Map out some general themes that arise.
9. Draw on what you've learned to dream the future. Explore these questions: What is the future you want to create? What does it look and feel like? What are some of the sounds people hear? What are some of the experiences people have on a regular basis? What news ecosystem do you need in the future you're creating? In that future, what does journalism look and sound like? How is it meeting your community's needs? Who is a part of it? How does it function? What are your wildest dreams for the future of local journalism?
10. Once everyone has time to dream, work together to draft a collective dream.
11. In meetings that follow the dream salon, begin to map out what actions folks need to take to achieve the collective dream.



LOCAL-NEWS POTLUCKS & HOUSE PARTIES

Hosting an informal gathering like a potluck or a house party provides an opportunity to get to know the people in your community and figure out what they care about. Hosting this kind of gathering provides you with time to bond about the specific news & media issues that matter in your community.

Steps to planning a potluck, party or other gathering for local news:

1. The best way to plan your gathering is with a group. Invite people to join you in the planning. A successful gathering will include three or more people — so start by asking a couple of friends who can help you plan.
2. In coordination with your friends, pick a date, time and location.
3. Invite people — more attendees means more fun!
4. Invite your friends to take on key roles such as sending invitations, organizing the potluck food, identifying someone who can greet people as they arrive and plan an icebreaker, asking someone to take photos and short videos throughout the gathering, etc.
5. Within three days, follow up with people, thank them for coming and remind them about the next steps the group agreed to.

What happens during the gathering:

1. Welcome statement and brief introductions

- » Once all the expected attendees have arrived, one of the coordinators will start the event with a welcome statement and brief introductions.

2. Breaking bread and bonding

- » The coordinator asks everyone to get some food and then gather for an icebreaker. The point of an icebreaker is to get to know a group of people better and have some fun. There is no “right” way to do an icebreaker. It can be a question for everyone to answer like “If you had to eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?” or a game like “Two Truths & a Lie,” where attendees share three things about themselves (one of which is untrue) and the other attendees guess which statement is false. Other icebreakers can be found in books at your local library or online by searching “fun icebreakers for groups.”
- » Once you’ve participated in the icebreaker, use a prompt to get people to talk about why they care about local news. Here are some prompts you can use:
 - What’s happened in the news recently that you want to learn more about?
 - What’s working when it comes to news coverage of your community? What would you like to change?
 - What’s a question you have about your community that you think a journalist could help answer?
 - Why do you care about the future of local news?

3. Building your team and bonding

- » What are the next steps? Do you want to meet again? Are there any other tactics you all want to work on together that address what came up during your discussion?
- » Once the attendee list is generated (make sure you have names, emails and phone numbers), the group can come up with a way to stay connected (via phone tree, email or text thread). Stay in communication to continue to meet and work together to make your next steps happen.

Reading, Film & Discussion Groups

In various moments throughout history, people have generated social change by choosing a piece of media (books, films, etc) and then engaging in follow-up discussion about it. This provides space to build relationships with community members while learning together and connecting to new material. These discussion groups can help you further understand your media landscape while figuring out what actions to take to shift it.

Suggested books and films include:

BOOKS

- *News For All The People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media* by Joseph Torres and Juan González
- *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* by Robert McChesney
- *What Are Journalists For?* by Jay Rosen
- *Chasing Newsroom Diversity: From Jim Crow to Affirmative Action* by Gwyneth Mellinger
- *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde
- *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *In Search of Belonging: Latinas, Media, and Citizenship* by Jillian M. Báez
- *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown
- *Culture and Technology: A Primer* by Jennifer Daryl Slack & J. Macgregor Wise
- *They Can’t Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America’s Racial Justice Movement* by Wesley Lowery
- *Who We Be: The Colorization of America* by Jeff Chang
- *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television* by Kay Mills

FILMS/TV SHOWS

- *Citizen Kane*
- *All the President’s Men*
- *Network*
- *The Insider*
- *Spotlight*
- *Page One*
- *Anchorman*
- *The Wire* (season 5)
- *Goodnight and Good Luck*
- *His Girl Friday*
- *Sweet Smell of Success*
- *Broadcast News*



STORY CIRCLES

Story circles are a process developed by John O’Neal, a former civil-rights activist with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and founder of the Free Southern Theater, which would later become Junebug Productions.

In a story circle, a small group of people sit in a circle and share stories from their own experiences focused on a common theme. As each person tells a personal story, a larger and more complex narrative unfolds.

Newsrooms are now starting to use story circles to build relationships with communities and to surface untold stories, with journalists like Jesika Maria Ross leading the way. For a more in-depth guide to story circles, find “Story Circles: Deep Listening and Bridge Building on Issues That Matter”⁴ by Capital Public Radio in Sacramento, California.

Steps to planning a story circle:

1. The best way to plan your gathering is with a group. Invite people to join you in the planning. A successful gathering will include three or more people — so start by asking a couple of friends who can help you plan.
2. Decide on the goal and topic of your story circle.
3. Choose a date, time and location that will work well for as many people as possible. If there’s a budget for it, try to order food for your meeting. Meetings are always better with food. Or you can organize a potluck where people bring food they make or purchase.
4. Develop an outreach plan. Will your story circle be open to the public? Will you only invite certain people?

Things to consider for a story circle:

1. With participants’ permission, you can record story circles or take photos. You can also set up areas or tables as “mobile story booths” to record stories and take photos after the event.
2. According to Capital Public Radio, “It’s important to frame Story Circle prompts so that anyone could answer using their own life experience. For example, if your circle focuses on crossing political or racial divides, you might ask: Tell a story about a time when you broke through a barrier to connect with someone different from yourself. Or if you want to explore community safety, your prompt could be: Tell a story about a time when you’ve felt safe — or the opposite — in your neighborhood. For other topics, you might ask: Share a story about an experience that gave you an insight into the state of education, health care, parenting, policing, etc. in this country. For our circles on housing we asked: Tell a story about a time when housing made a difference in your life.”⁵

“If there is one powerful truth about history, says [civil-rights leader] Curtis Muhammad, it is that those who write it control it. ‘We don’t know how the pyramids were built because there’s a layer of people that history writes about,’ he says, ‘And there’s a layer of people that history doesn’t talk about.’”³

“It was that simple truth that compelled Junebug Productions, with the support of a group of activists, including Muhammad, to launch a program ensuring that the history of the civil rights movement would include the stories of those behind it — at every level. Called the Color Line Project, the effort strives not only to ensure that such stories are told, but that there is an accessible record of them forever after.”³

³ “Using Art and Theater to Support Organizing for Justice,” Junebug Productions: <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/nyuwagner.pdf>

⁴ “Story Circles: Deep Listening And Bridge Building On Issues That Matter,” Capital Public Radio, Oct. 2, 2018: <http://www.cpradio.org/123930>



Photo: Timothy Karr

What happens at a story circle:

1. Arrive early to set up the space. If there's food or drink, have it set up when attendees arrive.
2. Have something for people to engage with as they arrive. Perhaps this is food or maybe there's music playing. Perhaps a video is being screened.
3. Greet people as they arrive.
4. Once everyone has arrived, welcome all of the participants and facilitate introductions.
5. Describe the story-circle process.
 - a. What group guidelines are there?
 - b. What makes a story?
 - c. Can people pass?
6. If there are more than six people, break into smaller groups.
7. Share stories. Each person has three minutes to share a story.
8. Reflect on themes that arose during the circle. Map those themes out visually.
9. Decide whether there will be follow up or next steps.
10. Close the circle.



CREATING COMMUNITY-PRINT MEDIA

Some news and information are shared through official journalism channels and some aren't, either because it's not the kind of information a local newsroom would report on or it's sensitive information that communities seek to keep mostly among themselves.

Two vehicles for communicating within communities outside of traditional journalistic spaces are zines and community newsletters.

Zines are small self-published publications of original or sourced texts or images. They're usually reproduced via photocopies or shared digitally for others to reprint.

Community newsletters provide ongoing up-to-date news, information, and details on activities within a specific community. They're usually geography- or identity-based.

Steps to planning & creating community-print media:

1. The best way to create something sustainable is with a group. Invite people to join you in the planning. A successful planning group will include two or more people — so start by asking a couple of friends who can help you plan.
2. Talk to people in the community to better understand what their needs are, the types of stories people want to see, and which language(s) the publication should be in.
3. Decide on the purpose of your community-print media. Why do you want to create this? What kind of news and/or information do you want to share?
4. Decide what format you'd like your media to take. Will it be a zine? A newsletter? A website? A combination? Make sure you consider how people in your community consume information, and chose a form of media that best meets their needs.
5. Choose a name for the publication.
6. Decide on your layout and either find or create content (both text and images) to fill in the layout.
7. Create your publication.
8. Develop a distribution plan. Who will you share it with? How will they get it? How regularly will you create your community media?
9. Seek additional resources and skill-building opportunities online for zinemaking and/or community-newsletter creation and distribution.

Reporting on Local Meetings

Communities have a lot of meetings. These range from grassroots community meetings to governmental meetings. Regardless of the city or town, there are usually too many meetings for any one person to attend, which is one of the many reasons why the local-news ecosystem is so important. By strengthening the relationships that comprise the ecosystem, you can ensure there's more information about the range of meetings in your community.

Maybe the local paper doesn't have a reporter it can send to every city-planning meeting. This would be a good opportunity for a community member who regularly attends those meetings to document what's covered and share that information with other residents, including members of the newsroom.

Perhaps it's difficult for folks to attend every grassroots community meeting. This could be a good opportunity to create a community newsletter or zine to share and circulate information on a regular basis. It could also be a good opportunity for community organizers and local journalists to build relationships and share information as it makes sense.

One of the organizations that does this work well is City Bureau in Chicago through its project "Documenters." For more information, resources, and guides visit documenters.org.

Tactics for Transforming Community Relationships with Newsrooms

These tactics are aimed at strengthening the relationships communities have with local newsrooms, including those specializing in digital, print, radio, TV and more.



ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

One-on-one meetings are tools community organizers have used for decades, but they describe how we build and maintain any of the relationships we hold. We set up time to meet, we meet in person and we check in with each other in the times in between. These types of meetings allow us to practice listening and sharing in authentic ways.

What's not as common are meetings between community members and local journalists. These kinds of meetings are rare because the people who are most disconnected from local newsrooms usually believe that journalists won't respond to them. And journalists, due to shifting demands, usually end up prioritizing other aspects of their work. But the relationships that one-on-one meetings create are the ones that will transform the future of local news.

Steps to planning a one-on-one meeting with a journalist:

1. Find the contact information for the reporter you'd like to meet with. You can find this information on a newsroom's website or via social media.
2. Reach out to them and explain that you'd like to meet. Share the reason you'd like to meet as well. Good reasons include: "I'm interested in the work you're doing" or "I recently saw a story you wrote and wanted to learn more."
3. Choose a time, place and length of time for your meeting. Note: It's always nice, when possible, to meet over food or drink, or in an interesting setting like a community garden or public-art installation.

What happens at a one-on-one meeting with a journalist:

1. Share why you're meeting. Examples of this include: "I was hoping to learn more about your work" or "I wanted to figure out how we might work together in the future."
2. Ask questions toward that purpose. Sample questions include: How did you get into the work you're doing? What are some of the things you care about most? How do you understand yourself as a part of our community? What are some of your short-term and longer-term goals? What fascinates you? What are you curious about?
3. Share why you're interested in supporting their reporting and how their work could strengthen community building. This topic should open up opportunities for expansive dialogue.
4. Figure out a way to follow up or meet on a regular basis.

Note: Don't meet to share a story idea or pitch a story. This can come later. One-on-one meetings aren't work meetings. They're all about building relationships.



LOCAL-NEWSROOM VISITS

One of the best ways to understand how something works is to experience it in person. Scheduling in-person visits to newsrooms helps community members see the news-production process, increases transparency, and signals to people in the newsroom that community members want to learn more about the local-news ecosystem.

Steps to planning a local-newsroom visit:

1. The best way to plan your gathering is with a group. Invite people to join you in the planning. A successful gathering will include three or more people — so start by asking a couple of friends who can help you plan.
2. Decide on three to five dates and times you're all available to visit the local newsroom.
3. Find the contact information for one local newsroom. This information should be available in its masthead or in the "about" section of its website.
4. Contact the local newsroom and say that you'd like to schedule a tour or visit. (If you're already connected to one of the journalists in the newsroom, reach out to them first.)
5. Decide on the date and time that works for both the newsroom and the community members.

What happens during a newsroom visit:

1. Make sure you arrive 10–15 minutes ahead of time so your group can huddle before going in together. Make sure everyone is on the same page about the visit's purpose, and settle on any questions folks want to have answered.
2. Tell your story in the meeting. Why do you care about local news? Why are you interested in learning more about this newsroom?
3. Ask any questions you have about the newsroom.
4. Ask journalists if they have any questions about you or your visit.
5. Take photos of the newsroom or of yourselves with journalists if you're given permission to do so.
6. You should aim to build a relationship with the newsroom and the reporters who work there. If the visit and conversation create opportunities for follow up, be sure to exchange contact information.

After a newsroom visit:

1. Send a thank-you note after the meeting.
2. Debrief with the community members you attended the visit/tour with: What went well? Were there more questions you thought of after leaving? Is there more information you'd like? How do you want to build relationships with the journalists you met?





RESIDENT-JOURNALIST MEETUPS

Meetups with residents and journalists provide an opportunity to get to know the people in your community and figure out what they care about.

Meetups are different from informal gatherings because there's usually one or more facilitators who ensure the conversation is constructive and outcome-oriented, which is especially important when challenging discussions are needed. It's best to have an agenda for the discussion, even if the agenda is loose.

These community meetings are ways for residents to deepen relationships with journalists from one or multiple newsrooms, talk about stories they'd like to see more coverage of, and share their expertise and experience.

For journalists, it's a way to open up the newsgathering process, respond to people's needs and uncover underreported stories.

Steps to planning a meetup for residents & journalists:

1. The best way to plan a meeting is with a group. Invite people to join you in the planning. A successful gathering will include three or more people — so start by asking a couple of friends or a journalist to help you plan.
2. Figure out who needs to be in the meeting. Is this meeting open to the public or is it invitation-only? Is there a particular part of the community that's under- or misrepresented in local coverage that could benefit from participating?
3. Make sure the day of the week, time and location work and signal a welcoming environment. If there's a budget for it, try to order food for your meeting. Meetings are always better with food.
4. Plan the agenda. Ask people in your group and in the broader community what types of issues and stories they'd like to discuss in a group of neighbors and journalists. Assigns roles such as facilitator, notetaker and timekeeper to ensure a smooth meeting where everyone is heard and respected.
5. Invite people using one-on-one meetings, emails, flyers, phone calls, social media, community-calendar posts and word of mouth. Go to spaces where people meet and invite folks. For larger groups, set up an online RSVP page to keep track of the number of attendees; use the link to spread the word about the meeting.
6. Encourage journalists to attend and participate in the discussion (not necessarily cover it as a story). Journalists often face tight work deadlines, so let them know how long the meeting will last so they can plan accordingly.
7. Prepare any materials you need — pens, post-its, informational guides you can find online, worksheets, etc.

What happens at a meetup for residents & journalists:

1. Arrive early to set up the space. If there's food or drink, have it ready when attendees arrive.
2. Have something for people to engage with as they arrive. Perhaps this is the food or maybe there's music playing. Perhaps a video is being screened.
3. Ask people to share contact info when they arrive so you can follow up.
4. Introduce the meeting and its purpose. Use an icebreaker.
5. Facilitate using the agenda.
6. Create next steps or follow-up steps that everyone in the room can agree to. Is this a one-time meeting or do people want to plan ongoing meetings? Is there something you all want to work on together?
7. Debrief with the planning team after the event.
8. Follow up with those who attended with meeting highlights, notes and next steps. Share photos or videos if you took them.



Photo: Jonathan Cooper

CASE STUDY: Residents & Journalists Meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina

In early 2018, Free Press' News Voices: North Carolina team and the *Charlotte Observer* worked together to plan a community breakfast and invite residents into the newsroom to talk about local issues in a relaxed setting.

The meeting happened on a Saturday in May at the *Charlotte Observer* office.

In our time together, we had a range of participants, from reporters and photojournalists to artists and high-school students. We discussed the stories that need to be told in Charlotte and new ways that storytelling could happen. We discussed what the various communities we're part of need.

Journalists had the chance to ask community members questions, but not because they were seeking a quote or a source. Residents had the chance to ask questions of the *Observer* staff — questions about their process and about why they do the work they do.

At the end of our first gathering, an editor asked: Should we do this again? People in the room said yes and from there, we decided that these community meetings needed to happen more often to create the continuity that helps in building trust. They needed to happen even if the number of people attending waxed and waned. So the *Observer* and News Voices began co-hosting these meetings semi-regularly.

During each of these monthly gatherings, we discussed how to transform the discussions into action. At the same time, we remained grounded in the awareness that genuine relationship building needn't always be measurable, productive or visible.

As of the publication of this toolkit, the *Charlotte Observer* and News Voices continue to organize community gatherings and are expanding them to be open to the public.

Issue-Based Community Forums

Another type of community meeting or event to plan is an issue-based forum. You can choose any issue that impacts your community: housing, transportation, incarceration/reentry, environmental justice, education, etc. Journalists and residents can work together to plan an event about the stories that need to be told about the issue.

One event News Voices planned in North Carolina was called "The News & Information Charlotte Needs to Solve Economic Inequality." Journalists and residents gathered to talk about the various issues that shape economic inequality in Charlotte. From there they worked together to surface the stories that needed to be told and the information community members needed to address economic inequality.

In New Jersey, we co-hosted an event in Newark with WNYC about the intersection of race and the media. Community members, local leaders and policymakers discussed their own experiences with oppression, White supremacy and how the media express harmful stereotypes about people of color in Newark and beyond.

These kinds of events can happen once or they can be ongoing because the issues that matter most to a community are worth exploring over time.

Weaving the Tactics Together

There are many ways to implement the tactics in this toolkit. While all they all build power for communities to reshape local media, they are most effective when used in tandem or on an ongoing basis. Strengthening and transforming local news requires constant tending to, persistence and the building of long-term relationships.

You can have regular one-on-one meetings with journalists to help them better understand community perspectives. You can hold quarterly potlucks or small-group meetings with your neighbors to lift up unheard stories that demand more coverage.

You can also choose multiple tactics and weave them together. Perhaps you could host a potluck dinner and share the themes from the potluck in a one-on-one conversation with a local reporter to lift up any stories. Then you could host a newsroom visit with that local reporter and the people who attended your potluck, with the goal of later hosting a larger community forum or a dream salon.

How we engage and build power with our communities rests on having access to quality, trustworthy, timely and trusted news and information.

We aren't passive consumers in deciding who tells our stories, and how they're told. We can realize a new future for how we create and receive news and information. We can dream of the impossible, and start doing the work to get us there. We can organize to transform local news.



Resources & Support

There is a community of organizations and practitioners experimenting with the tactics in this toolkit. Take time to peruse their work and build on what you've read in here. A sampling of those projects includes:

- **Voting Block's Political Potlucks, New Jersey**

- Voting Block, a New Jersey collaborative-reporting project, worked with community members in the neighborhoods they report on to host Political Potlucks. At the potlucks, attendees were asked to listen and share their political beliefs and priorities with people from across the political spectrum. Voting Block included more than 20 newsroom partners and was coordinated by Montclair State University's Center for Cooperative Media, New America Media and Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting. More information about Voting Block's Political Potlucks can be found at votingblocknj.com.

- **Capital Public Radio's Story Circles, California**

- Responding to the Bay Area's housing crisis and following a year-long series, Capital Public Radio collaborated with community partners to co-host a series of story circles. These events brought diverse residents face to face in intimate settings to talk about housing, hear one another and envision the way forward. More information about Capital Public Radio's Story Circles can be found in the "Place and Privilege Story Circle Guide" on capradio.org.

- **City Bureau's Public Newsrooms, Chicago**

- Every Thursday night, City Bureau turns its newsroom on the South Side of Chicago into an open space where journalists and the public can gather to discuss local issues, share resources and knowledge, and learn to report and investigate stories. More information about City Bureau's Public Newsrooms can be found at citybureau.org.

- **Framed by WDET, Detroit**

- Detroit's public-radio station WDET pairs photographers and storytellers to tell the story of ethnic and cultural communities throughout the region. From those collaborations, WDET organizes audiovisual experiences and exhibitions to showcase the stories told. More information about Framed by WDET can be found at framedbywdet.org.

- **Your Voice Ohio, The Jefferson Center**

- In collaboration with more than 50 news organizations, the Jefferson Center held 23 community forums, with almost 700 community members in attendance across all events. The gatherings focused on the state's addiction crisis and the changing economy. These events, driven by small-group discussions modeled after the World Café⁵ dialogue method, provided a space for residents to communicate with journalists about pressing local issues. More information about the project can be found at jefferson-center.org/your-voice-ohio.

⁵ World Café Method: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method>

Journalism Gatherings: A Tactic & A Resource

There are several annual gatherings of journalists and media makers around the world. Most of the time, only journalists and media makers attend these events. However, community members who don't work in newsrooms can attend them as well. These spaces can be a good place to build skill sets, better understand the newsgathering processes, forge new relationships, and share your voice about the future of journalism.

These gatherings include:

Allied Media Conference
alliedmedia.org/amc

Collaborative Journalism Summit
collaborativejournalism.org

Facing Race
Facingrace.raceforward.org

Images & Voices of Hope Summit
ivohsummit.org

MisinfoCon
misinfocon.com

SRCCON (Source Con)
srccon.org

Digital communities and newsletters focusing on journalism include:

American Press Institute
www.americanpressinstitute.org

Columbia Journalism Review
cjr.org

Gather
Letsgather.in

Nieman Lab
niemanlab.org

The Poynter Institute
poynter.org

Trusting News
trustingnews.org

The Online News Association also coordinates local chapters via a program called ONA Local. If there's a local ONA chapter where you live, we recommend reaching out. It's generally a community-minded group of people who are looking for interesting ways to engage with the public. More info is available at journalists.org/programs/ona-local/

These lists are by no means exhaustive. But the more you engage in these spaces and the tactics listed in this toolkit, the more you'll learn and the more fodder you'll have for the creation of new tactics for transforming local news.



About Free Press

News Voices is a project of Free Press, a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan organization fighting for your rights to connect and communicate. We seek to change the media to transform democracy to realize a just society.

Free Press was created to give people a voice in the crucial decisions that shape our media. We believe that positive social change, racial justice and meaningful engagement in public life require equitable access to technology, diverse and independent ownership of media platforms, and journalism that holds leaders accountable and tells people what's actually happening in their communities.

News Voices was launched in 2015 to build power with communities so residents have a stronger voice in how local journalism can be revived, strengthened and transformed. We've held dozens of public forums that brought together community members and journalists, launched creative community-led journalism collaborations, partnered with newsrooms to work more closely with their audiences, run workshops to train reporters on how to use organizing strategies in their newsgathering, developed resources for the public to amplify news coverage of untold stories, and campaigned for legislation to invest in innovative news and information projects.

We're building a network of participants, allies and volunteers, and we'd like you to be part of it. Contact us at newsvoices@freepress.net for more information, or follow us online at freepress.net, on Facebook at facebook.com/freepress or on Twitter [@freepress](https://twitter.com/freepress) with the hashtag #NewsVoices.

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