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Building Engagement

SUPPORTING THE PRACTICE OF RELATIONAL JOURNALISM



ENGAGE LAB
—MENT

Emerson
COLLEGE



UNIVERSITY OF
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School of Journalism
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Foreword

This report is the outcome of a collaboration between the Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication and the Engagement Lab at Emerson College in Boston. It reflects the melding of our respective missions—the Agora Journalism Center's mission of supporting and researching the intersections of media innovation and civic engagement, and the Engagement Lab's mission of designing for civic learning and action.

In these pages, we describe what we learned from collaborating on the Finding Common Ground project. That initiative brought together seven teams of journalists from across the U.S., U.K. and Europe who aimed to create meaningful dialogue around pressing public problems, ranging from affordable housing to prisoner reentry, and from a diversity of geographies, spanning rural Kentucky to post-communist Lithuania. Working with these remarkable projects provided a unique opportunity for us to design a framework for journalists who are engaging people in face-to-face conversations, sometimes difficult ones across lines of political and cultural differences—a piece of journalistic practice often ignored or misunderstood. A key concept guiding this work is the notion of relational engagement: journalism that focuses on engaging with people as members of communities, not just as “audiences.”

In this report we present the Reflective Practice Guide, a methodology for documenting and reflecting on community engagement efforts and impacts, so that journalists and the organizations they work for will be better

able to assess the value of doing relational engagement work. The guide grew out of a previous study by the Engagement Lab that looked at how a range of practitioners from government, NGOs and news organizations sought to build trust with their changing constituents. Here we refine that work to a specific community of practice, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities engaged journalism presents. We strongly believe that the future of journalism will hinge on the way organizations build and maintain relationships with communities. And managers and funders need to take notice because this work often requires different skills than traditional journalistic practice. The insights in this report and the tools we provide do not solve the problem, but they are building blocks towards pushing the institution of journalism to recognize that there is a problem.

At a time when journalists are grappling with eroding trust in media and finding new ways to build connections with the communities they serve, we offer a concrete way of talking about and documenting relational engagement. We hope that these tools are valuable to journalists, academics, and engagement practitioners. Please take a look, try things out, and start the conversation!

- Regina G. Lawrence, *Executive Director, Agora Journalism Center*
- Andrew DeVigal, *Associate Director, Agora Journalism Center*
- Eric Gordon, *Faculty Director, Engagement Lab*

Executive Summary

At a time of dramatically declining trust in media, news organizations of all kinds are searching for ways to build better relationships with the communities they serve. This report highlights trust-building innovations that involve relational journalism: journalism that focuses on enriching reporting by engaging with people as members of communities, not just as “audiences.”

Growing attention to community relationships is happening against a backdrop of eroding trust in the media. Recent research suggests that the public is looking for greater authenticity, transparency, positivity, and diversity in the news and a sense of shared mission between communities and news organizations. Relational journalism can be a critical trust-building innovation, offering media organizations a path toward greater trust and therefore greater sustainability. This report describes the background work that goes into creating that kind of news, and offers journalists an evaluative tool to capture the effectiveness of the work.

Even as many media organizations are work-

ing to address the crisis of public trust, they are often not doing the work of building internal capacity, establishing metrics for success, or crafting compelling narratives to connect the programmatic work of the newsroom to the work of building trusting relationships with the communities they serve. In short, most organizations lack adequate resources and training, not to mention the organizational and cultural buy-in, to do authentic engagement work.

This report shows how news organizations can build capacity to more effectively engage the communities they serve. It presents a constructive evaluation tool we call the Reflective Practice Guide (RPG). The RPG offers a set of concepts and a process for documenting and reflecting on community engagement efforts and impacts, so that journalists and the organizations they work for will be better able to build accurate and complete narratives around the value of doing engagement work. As journalists continue to carve out a space for relational journalism in their practice, articulating the value of the work to stakeholders, audiences, managers,

and funders will be essential, particularly because it often requires different skills than traditional journalistic work. In short, the RPG provides a way to measure work that is often novel to news organizations and difficult to quantify.

The tool was refined through a project called Finding Common Ground—a collaboration of the Agora Journalism Center and The Engagement Lab, with support from The Robert Bosch Foundation, the News Integrity Initiative, and Zeit Online. Seven project teams were selected to join a cohort of journalists willing to “think out loud” about their engagement practice in order to refine the evaluation tool. The project leaders learned new ways to create more meaningful engagement with their communities, and learned how to better anticipate the kinds of work that meaningful engagement requires. The questions posed in the RPG invite journalists to identify the texture of four basic activities in their com-

munity engagement work: Network Building, Holding Space for Discussion, Distributing Ownership, and providing for Persistent Input. As the illustrations in this report show, the RPG encourages journalists to articulate what they are doing to build community engagement and why they are doing it. It aids in the identification of challenges and provides insights into how to overcome them. And it helps journalists speak with their peers, superiors, and funders about the value of engaging communities in the practice of news making.

The four activities described in the report can create the kinds of journalistic behaviors and news content that audiences see as markers of trustworthiness. The activities shared in this report and the instrument provided for journalists to evaluate them provide a potential roadmap for media to build greater trust with the communities they serve.



Finding Common Ground project leads and researchers: (from left to right) Top row: Regina Lawrence, Carolin Wattenberg, Jonathan Elbaz, jesikah maria ross, Maeve McClenaghan, Molly de Aguiar, Andrew DeVigal. Middle row: Ina Daniel, Andrea Wenzel, Ashley Kang, Anne Hillman, Caroline Mellor. Bottom row: Eric Gordon, Karolis Vyšniauskas. Photo courtesy of Jack Fisher.

Introduction: Building Capacity for Relational Journalism

As digital technologies and multi-platform media have swept up seemingly everything in their path, journalism has struggled to adapt. Journalists who used to produce stories for print once per day have had to learn not only how to publish online multiple times per day for a never-ending deadline, but also how to think about storytelling using social and multimedia platforms and genres. Skills that once seemed esoteric have become essential.

Meanwhile, the collapse of journalism's traditional business model and, more recently, the highly-publicized crisis of trust in media have created strong incentives for news organizations to rethink their relationships with

the public. Jobs in "engagement" (or synonyms) have increased even while traditional reporting jobs have continued to decline.¹

"Engagement" is an evolving set of practices within journalism², and relational journalism can be thought of as a subset of these emerging practices that focus closely on building connection with communities both on- and offline.³ The impact of relational engagement on growing and keeping audiences has yet to be fully documented, particularly by the scholarly community. According to one recent study, "As publications struggle to survive, journalists can't help but think that improving the relationship between news producers and

1 Elia Powers, "The Rise of the Engagement Editor and What It Means," MediaShift, August 19, 2015, <http://mediashift.org/2015/08/the-rise-of-the-engagement-editor-and-what-it-means/>. "Newspaper publishers lose over half their employment from January 2001 to September 2016," Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 3, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/newspaper-publishers-lose-over-half-their-employment-from-january-2001-to-september-2016.htm>.

2 Lindsay Green-Barber, "Towards a Useful Typology of Engaged Journalism," Impact Architects, October 18, 2018, <https://medium.com/the-impact-architects/towards-a-useful-typology-of-engaged-journalism-790c96c4577e>.

3 Andrew DeVigal, "Engagement Is Relational, not Transactional," MediaShift, November 16, 2015, <http://mediashift.org/2015/11/engagement-is-relational-not-transactional/>.

the audience is at least a step in the right direction.”⁴ Another recent report suggests that engaged journalism “builds trust among journalism organizations and audiences, which results in audiences being willing to financially support the journalism.”⁵

But currently, many journalists who have been charged with doing engagement work, or who are curious about ways to connect their reporting more deeply to communities they serve, are not being given strong orientation or training and are often somewhat disconnected from their larger newsrooms.

In order to do relational journalism that builds real connection and trust with communities, journalists and the outlets they work for need to have tools, skills, resources, support from fellow practitioners, as well as commitment from their bosses and coworkers. But at many news outlets, one or more of these critical supports is missing. As Lindsay Green-Barber recently reported, for example, a survey by The European Journalism Centre found that “engagement work is often divorced from the everyday workflows and systems of editorial teams” even at newsrooms that employ “engagement specialists.”⁶ Addressing these gaps may also require a change in newsroom culture, away from a top-down, journalists-know-best philosophy to a more open and collaborative attitude toward communities.⁷

Many news organizations are working to address the apparent crisis of trust, but they are typically not doing the work of building

internal capacity, establishing metrics for success, or even crafting compelling narratives to connect the programmatic work of the newsroom to the work of building trusting relationships with the communities they serve. In short, most organizations lack adequate resources and training, not to mention the organizational and cultural buy-in, to do authentic engagement work.

Moreover, even for outlets committed to incorporating community engagement into their work, they often lack ways to describe the efforts that go into engagement work and assess the impact of that work.

This report is about how news organizations can build capacity to more effectively engage the communities they serve. It describes an effort, called Finding Common Ground, that sought to experiment and build capacity for relational engagement among a range of journalistic organizations. Presented in these pages is the documentation of the individual cases, as well as a reflective evaluation instrument used by the cohort to capture and assess the work that goes into community engagement projects. By better documenting and reflecting on efforts and impacts, journalists and the organizations they work for will be better able to build accurate narratives around the value of doing engagement work and to measure things that are often difficult to quantify. In sharing the instrument here, our hope is that it is adopted by media organizations so they can think about, plan for, and more fully appreciate the impact of their engagement efforts.

“Even outlets committed to incorporating community engagement into their work often lack ways to describe engagement efforts and impacts.”

4 Jacob L. Nelson, “The Audience Engagement Industry Struggles with Measuring Success,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, April 30, 2018, https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/audience-engagement-industry-struggles-measuring-success.php.

5 Lindsay Green-Barber and Eric Garcia McKinley, “Engaged Journalism: Practices for Building Trust, Generating Revenue, and Fostering Civic Engagement,” *Impact Architects*, January, 2019, <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/lindsaygreenbarber.com/assets/IA+Engaged+Journalism+Report+1.31.19.pdf>.

6 Green-Barber, “Towards a Useful Typology.”

7 Regina G. Lawrence, Damian Radcliffe, and Thomas R. Schmidt. “Practicing Engagement: Participatory Journalism in the Web 2.0 Era,” *Journalism Practice* 12, no. 10 (2018): 1220-1240.

It is important to note at the outset that building capacity for relational journalism is not a strategy for short-term gain. While many news organizations now see “engagement” as an essential activity⁸, it is often approached in transactional terms with short-term metrics in mind. Our focus is on relational rather than transactional engagement, and on longer-term versus short term impacts. Some initial evidence suggests that building relationships with audiences by involving them more meaningfully in the work of journalism can have measurable effects on social shares and time spent on site.⁹ But practicing quality engagement is about the long game: In this critical moment for journalism, impactful, relational engagement is crucial for long-term sustainability.

Journalism and the Crisis of Trust

Growing attention to community engagement is happening against a backdrop of eroding trust in the media. In the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. election, polls found that a decades-long decline in public trust had accelerated. Only 32 percent of the U.S. public, according to a 2016 Gallup poll, expressed confidence in the media to present the news “fully, fairly, and accurately.”¹⁰ A Pew Center survey in 2016 found even more alarming numbers:

only 22 percent of Americans reported a great deal of trust in information from their local news media, and only 18 percent trusted national media a great deal.¹¹ In a related finding, a Knight Foundation survey conducted in 2017 found that two-thirds of Americans thought the media were doing a poor job separating fact and opinion, and that more people had a negative view of the media than a positive view (43 per-

8 Damian Radcliffe, “Local Journalism In the Pacific Northwest,” Agora Journalism Center, September, 2017, https://journalism.uoregon.edu/sites/journalism1.uoregon.edu/files/agora_report_2017_damian_radcliffe.pdf.

9 Thomas R. Schmidt and Regina G. Lawrence, 2018, “Putting Engagement to Work: How News Organizations Are Pursuing ‘Public-Powered Journalism,’” Agora Journalism Center, November, 2018, <https://dl.orangedox.com/putting-engagement-to-work>.

10 Art Swift, “Americans’ Trust in Media Sinks to New Low,” Gallup, September 14, 2016, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx>.

11 Katerina Eva Matsa and Kristine Lu, “10 Facts About the Changing Digital News Landscape,” Pew Research Center, September 14, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/facts-about-the-changing-digital-news-landscape/>.



Reconnecting media with the communities they serve is critical not just for the sustainability of media outlets, but for the civic health of communities.

cent versus 33 percent).¹² In early 2019, the Knight Commission declared a “crisis of democracy” in the U.S. stemming in large part from a breakdown of trust in the media and other institutions.¹³

This decline in trust is not only an American problem. The most recent Edelman Trust Barometer found only 47 percent of the general public in countries around the globe expressing trust in media, accompanied by low levels of trust in other institutions as well.¹⁴ Edelman’s 2018 survey, however, also found that journalism is better trusted around the world than are search engines and social media platforms; that more highly informed publics show higher levels of trust than the less-informed; and that trust in journalism specifically increased between 2017 and 2018.

Today, many news organizations are struggling to find a path to economic sustainability. Regaining the public’s trust is a crucial element of the business model for journalism. And reconnecting media with the communities they serve is critical not just for the sustainability of media outlets, but for the civic health of communities. Without robust

local journalism, communities have less locally-relevant information and may lose the crucial lever of accountability provided by media scrutiny of officials, institutions, and other powerful actors.¹⁵

Research also shows that when local news organizations shut down, people’s participation in their local communities decreases,¹⁶ while political polarization increases. When local news goes missing, people tune into other news sources, replacing concrete and relevant local information with more nationalized and polarizing discourse.¹⁷

By the same token, social trust—defined as “the belief that others will fulfill socially shared expectations in mutually beneficial ways”—is related to people’s confidence in media. Increasing social distrust may also drive people away from news by undermining media credibility.¹⁸ To the extent that communities feel alienated from one another, the sustainability of general interest news outlets may be endangered; to the extent that communities do not tune in to shared sources of news, understanding one another’s needs and experiences becomes more difficult.

12 “American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy,” Knight Foundation, January 16, 2018, <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-trust-media-and-democracy>.

13 “Crisis in Democracy: Renewing Trust in America,” Knight Commission on Trust, Media, and Democracy, February, 2019, <http://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Knight-Commission-TMD/2019/report>.

14 “2018 Edelman Trust Barometer,” Edelman, January 21, 2018, <https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer>.

15 Steven Waldman, “The Information Needs of Communities,” Federal Communications Commission, July 2011, https://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc-report/The_Information_Needs_of_Communities.pdf.

16 Lee Shaker, “Dead Newspapers and Citizens’ Civic Engagement,” *Political Communication* 31, no. 1 (2014): 131-148.

17 Joshua P. Darr and Johanna L. Dunaway, “Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior,” *Journal of Communication* 68, no. 6 (2018): 1007-1028.

18 Masahiro Yamamoto and Seungahn Nah, “A Multi-level Examination of Local Newspaper Credibility,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (2018): 76-95.

Engaged Journalism and Trust-Building Innovations

Communities across the globe are becoming increasingly divided socially, politically, and ideologically. This polarization is related to the increasing normalcy, especially among strong partisans, of getting one's news from friends and family online.¹⁹ A Pew Center study from 2017 showed that social media's "algorithmic categorizations" that are designed to deliver news that keeps consumers on their platforms longer greatly amplify these echo chambers.²⁰ On the global level, the construction of polarized spaces compounded with increased nationalism and social isolation can stymie inclusive dialogue and cross-cultural understanding.²¹

Yet out of crisis comes opportunity. News organizations around the U.S. and Europe are seeking new ways to connect with the communities they serve and to rebuild trust—or, in some cases, to create it anew. Innovators within and beyond legacy media are experimenting with new approaches to journalism—approaches that more directly engage with the public, that bring the public into the news-making process, and that reposition journalists as conveners and

facilitators of community conversations. One recent overview highlighted 25 media projects aimed at building tolerance and "making strangers less strange" by convening people of disparate views and experiences, either online or in person.²²

Engaged journalism has emerged as "a broad spectrum of efforts that help position communities at the center of journalism," reframing news as "a conversation with the community."²³ Engaged journalism, particularly its subset, relational journalism, changes the relationship of journalists to the public through methods such as crowd-sourced reporting, co-production of news stories, and public convenings. It also shifts the journalist's toolkit to include deep listening, facilitating dialogue, and collaboration with citizens. While the term "engagement" often connotes media marketing efforts, relational engagement focuses on building more substantive connections with communities and "aims to achieve something more fundamental": "making sure your work matters to your audience."²⁴

The relational journalism approach offers one promising path toward trust building. A

19 Matsa and Lu, "10 Facts." <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/facts-about-the-changing-digital-news-landscape/>

20 Lee Rainie and Janna Anderson, "Algorithmic Categorizations Deepen Divides," Pew Research Center, February 8, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/02/08/theme-5-algorithmic-categorizations-deepen-divides/>.

21 Susan Pinker, *The Village Effect: How Face to Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier, Happier, and Smarter* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2014).

22 Caroline Murray and Natalie (Talie) Jomini Stroud, "Making Strangers Less Strange," Center for Media Engagement, November 14, 2018, <https://mediaengagement.org/research/making-strangers-less-strange/>.

23 Angelica Das, "Pathways to Engagement: Understanding How Newsrooms are Working with Communities," Democracy Fund, March, 2017, <https://www.democracyfund.org/publications/pathways-to-engagement-understanding-how-newsrooms-are-working-with-communi>.

24 Mónica Guzmán, "The best ways to build audience and relevance by listening to and engaging your community," American Press Institute, May 2, 2016, <http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/strategy-studies/listening-engaging-community/>.

recent study called the “32 Percent Project” (named for the percentage of Americans expressing trust in media) convened community dialogues in five cities around the U.S. to explore in depth the reasons people don’t trust the media.²⁵ Among the “conditions of trust” that emerged from these dialogues were transparency, authenticity, and a sense of shared mission between journalists and communities. Participants in these dialogues also wanted to see greater positivity in news and better reflection of the diversity of their communities.

Building on the trust principles uncovered in these community dialogues and based on case studies of four different organizations, a recent report by Impact Architects argues that “Engaged journalism increases audience trust in journalists and journalism organizations.”²⁶ And a recent report by the Knight Commission and the Aspen Institute recommends “radical transparency and community engagement from news organizations” as a key way to reestablish public trust in the press.²⁷

As these various reports suggest, relational engagement approaches can increase transparency by bringing journalists into more meaningful contact with communities. Developing deeper understanding of the information needs of communities can also create a greater sense of media accuracy and authenticity, convey-

ing journalists’ aim to “get the story right” and indeed to know what “the story” really is. Engaging in conversations with communities can translate into news that lifts up genuine community concerns while stepping outside of standard reporting routines that the public often sees as unhelpful. Thoughtful and deliberate engagement can expand journalists’ reach into all corners of diverse communities and allow news to better reflect their diversity. And crucially, as the 32 Percent Project discovered, relational engagement can build a sense of shared mission:

Participants expressed a strong desire to engage with news organizations that share the same goals and aspirations they have for their community. In many cases, participants viewed today’s news organizations as little more than profit-seekers who were willing to pursue sensational or misguided stories as a way to drive advertising. Critical to building trust, participants said, is creating a sense that a news organization shares bedrock values and are invested in the good of the community.²⁸

If audiences are looking for greater authenticity, transparency, positivity, and diversity in the news and a sense of shared mission between themselves and news organizations, this report describes the background work that goes into creating those outcomes.

“If audiences are looking for greater authenticity, transparency, positivity, and diversity in the news and a sense of shared mission between themselves and news organizations, this report describes the background work that goes into creating those outcomes.”

25 Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn, “The 32 Percent Project: How Citizens Define Trust and How Journalists Can Earn It,” Agora Journalism Center, June, 2018, <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.uoregon.edu/dist/2/9795/files/2018/10/2018-32-Percent-Agora-Report-wd1bwq.pdf>.

26 Lindsay Green-Barber and Eric Garcia McKinley, “Engaged Journalism: Practices for Building Trust, Generating Revenue, and Fostering Civic Engagement,” Impact Architects, January, 2019, <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/lindsaygreenbarber.com/assets/IA+Engaged+Journalism+Report+1.31.19.pdf>.

27 Knight Commission, “Crisis in Democracy.”

28 Heyamoto and Milbourn, “The 32 Percent Project,” 8.

How to Build In Real Life Engagement: The Finding Common Ground Project

Finding Common Ground (FCG) was funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation, based in Germany, and the News Integrity Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY, and facilitated by the Agora Journalism Center, housed at the University of Oregon. The project reflected the organizations' overlapping missions around supporting civic engagement and civil dialogue. Finding Common Ground also presented a unique opportunity to support and learn from projects from across the U.S. and Europe—and in particular, to test a tool for measuring relational journalism efforts.

The Finding Common Ground project aimed to create cross-border collaboration with engagement practitioners in the media in ways that would support greater understanding between peoples. Critically, the project focused on a particular subset of engaged journalism: media initiatives to bring people together for face to face dialogue across social and political divides: to get people to look up from their devices, meet people with different opinions, listen, and engage in meaningful and civil dialogue across social media silos and polarized positions. The project brought together European and U.S. media organizations who have successfully organized face-to-face “conversation catalysts” with a dual purpose: For media organizations, the purpose of sharing best practices and finding opportunities for collaborative learning; for civil society, the purpose of fostering civility in today's polarized political climate.

Along with The Robert Bosch Foundation, the News Integrity Initiative, and Zeit Online, the Agora Journalism Center launched an open call to identify promising projects from across the U.S. and Europe. A selection committee identified seven organizations that collectively represented a broad range of geographic locations and approaches. Ultimately, three projects from Europe and four projects from the U.S. were selected to receive 10,000€. At this point, the network expanded to include the Engagement Lab at Emerson College, a Boston-based research organization focused on emerging norms of civic engagement, because of its work with evaluative frameworks in civic media.²⁹ At an initial meeting at the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, project leaders convened to share and learn best practices from various and diverse perspectives and identify opportunities for collaboration. In subsequent online meetings, project plans were refined and a schedule of cross-border visits planned. During the process of mounting their projects and visiting other project sites, each project team employed and helped to refine a framework to measure the progress of their work. (More about this research in the next section.)

The seven projects focused on reducing social distances and using dialogue to increase understanding among people of different perspectives, backgrounds and experiences. Though the project leaders may not have articulated their goals in academic language, their projects intuitively reflected the notion of dialogue as a “process of genuine interaction

29 Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar, “Civic Media Practice: Identification and Evaluation of Media and Technology That Facilitates Democratic Process,” Engagement Lab, January, 2018.



Connection between participants in the *My New Homeland, Your New Homeland* project, courtesy of Ina Daniel.

through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they hear.”³⁰ Theorists believe that increased understanding happens through dialogue not by changing the values of participants, but by humanizing and decreasing the degree to which we see those with different opinions as inherently “other” than ourselves—a critical building block towards increased trust within communities and with societal institutions. Similarly, the Finding Common Ground projects intuitively reflected contact theory, which suggests that intergroup conflict is reduced through positive interactions,³¹ as well as recent research suggesting that such interactions must be carefully structured to effectively reduce social conflict.³²

In the pages that follow, we share the seven case studies and the Reflective Practice Guide (RPG) that we refined through working with these projects, followed by a practical

guide for journalists who want to document and assess the efforts they are putting into community engagement work. Along the way we provide brief descriptions of what the RPG revealed about the efforts, accomplishments, and challenges involved in each of these seven projects. Overall, the project leaders learned new ways to create more meaningful engagement with their communities, and learned how to better anticipate the kinds of work that meaningful engagement requires.

Community in Unity

ALASKA, UNITED STATES

Since 2015, Alaska Public Media has been bringing members of the public who wouldn’t normally interact into the same physical space to actively listen to each other. For this phase of that work, project leader Anne Hillman organized and facilitated conversations inside

30 Harold Saunders, *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts* (New York: Springer, 1999).

31 Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1954).

32 John F. Dovidio, Peter Glick and Laurie A. Rudman, *On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years After Allport* (Malden: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

urban and rural prisons. Currently incarcerated people and community members convened to share experiences, with the goal of helping community members gain a better understanding of life in prison and to de-stigmatize people with a criminal justice history—particularly as current inmates will need to reintegrate into the community when they are released from prison.

Community Storytellers

OHIO COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Project leaders Andrea Wenzel of Temple University and Sam Ford, Director of Cultural Intelligence at Simon & Schuster, worked with Dustin and Lee Bratcher of the Ohio County Monitor, a local online newspaper in Ohio County, Kentucky, to increase the capacity of the Bratchers, the paper’s only staff members, to sustain the Monitor and develop new engagement programs in that large, rural county. These programs included a listening tour to local “liars tables” - a colloquial name for informal conversational gatherings (generally of men) at local diners, grocery stores and gas stations - and a reinvented “society column” series (historically a venue for women journalists) with entries written by community volunteers. The project goals included to develop more diverse voices and to decrease the social distance between residents separated by geography and by identity, with a specific goal of outreach to the local refugee community. Notably, this partnership targeted new opportunities to connect the Monitor’s multiple engagement programs.

The View from Here: Place and Privilege Story Circles

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

Like many cities across the U.S., Sacramento is grappling with an affordable housing crisis. Capital Public Radio responded by producing The View From Here: Place and Privilege, a cross-platform project delving into the history, politics and economics of housing in Califor-

nia’s capital. Project leader Jesikah Maria Ross dug further into the issue by facilitating Story Circles that brought over 100 residents together to increase understanding and empathy between those affected by the region’s lack of affordable housing and homelessness and those without that direct experience. The Story Circles were embedded in an overall project aimed at expanding the collaborative capacity of 11 different community-based organizations in order to build relationships, networks and trust in the broader Sacramento community, as well strengthen the organizations’ ability to collaborate and replicate the Story Circle model in the future.

My New Homeland - Your New Homeland

DORTMUND, GERMANY

Project leader and freelance journalist Ina Daniel organized and facilitated dialogues between senior citizens who were WWII refugees and newly migrated refugees from the Middle East and Africa. While both groups came to Germany as displaced peoples, they did so at different historical moments and carry different cultures, religions, languages and political backgrounds. Dortmund’s social landscape is split between the north and south sectors of the city, with recently displaced people concentrated in the North. In a region rife with ethnic tensions that have sometimes erupted into violence, the project aimed to reduce social distances and stereotypes between groups, and increase opportunities for integration.

NYLA Live

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA

The NYLA podcast series, the first professionally produced podcast in Lithuania, brings people together for live debates and conversations about current issues. The project’s overarching goals were to pull people away from the echo chambers and social isolation correlated with that society’s heavy reliance on social media; to support a new debate culture in Lithuania by increasing the broader community’s belief in the power of civil, face-to-face discussions;

and to address Lithuania’s lack of a strong tradition of free press and open debates due to 50 years of Soviet annexation, when media were state-controlled. For this particular project, Project leader Karolis Vysniauskas and his team created a face-to-face story circle discussion between previously incarcerated individuals and community members, with the aim to increase community members’ understanding of criminal justice issues and to de-stigmatize the re-introduction of formerly incarcerated individuals.

South Side Photo Walk

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

This project grew out of collaboration between Syracuse University, local community organizations, and The Stand, a community newspaper that aims to be a voice for the city’s South Side neighborhood—a community often marginalized by the mainstream press and one that suffers from some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment for African Americans in the United States. The Stand’s annual Photo Walk is the paper’s most popular community event, bringing together local residents, university students and other members of the public to tour the South Side, interact with community members and take photos of

the people and places they encounter. According to project leaders Ashley Kang of The Stand and Greg Munno of Syracuse University, the project seeks to bridge divides between other neighborhoods and the South Side and to build the capacity of local neighborhood residents to document their lives.

No Refuge Tour

UNITED KINGDOM

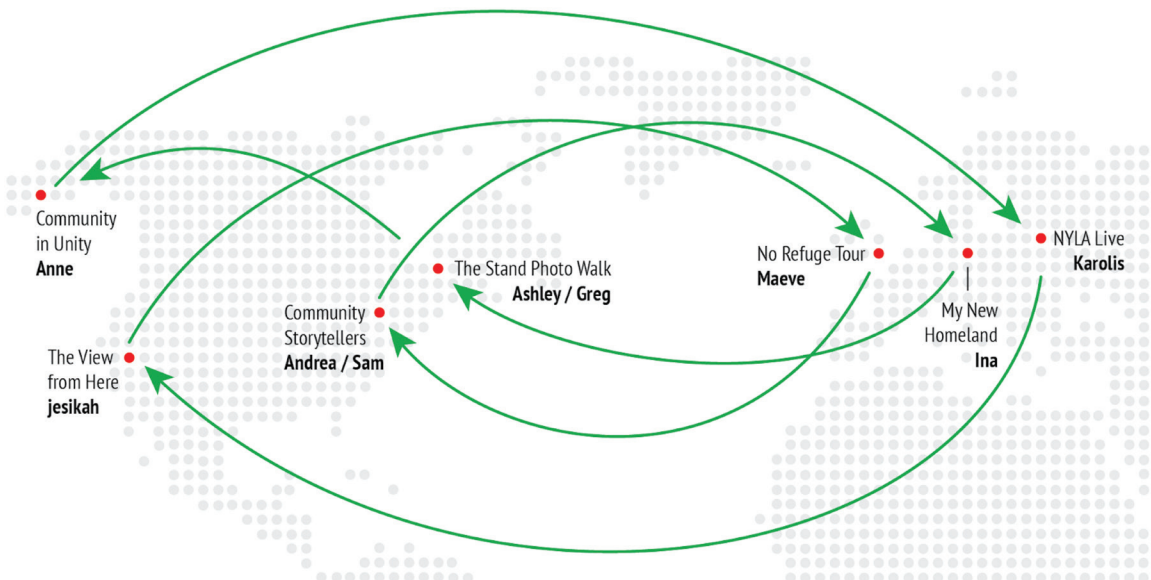
The Bureau of Investigative Journalism collaborates with local communities in the U.K. to produce impactful journalism through data-driven reporting and public engagement events. Over a single year, more than 20 members of the network investigated the problem of domestic violence. Project leader Maeve McClenaghan expanded on that collaboration to create a one-woman show that aimed to use theater and public engagement to demystify investigative journalism while it connected journalists to women fleeing domestic abuse. The show toured eight locations around the U.K, with each performance featuring a community engagement discussion where local journalists discussed their investigations and the challenges the lack of social services for victims of domestic violence in their local communities.



Participant in the South Side Photo Walk project, photo courtesy of Ashley Kang.

Finding Common Ground Projects

Project Name	Project Leader	Organizational Affiliations	Geography
Community in Unity	Anne Hillman	Alaska Public Media	Alaska (multiple locations), U.S.
Community Storytellers	Andrea Wenzel and Sam Ford	Temple University and the Ohio County Monitor	Ohio County, Kentucky, U.S
The View from Here: Place and Privilege Story Circles	jesikah maria ross	Capital Public Radio	Sacramento, California, U.S.
My New Homeland - Your New Homeland	Ina Daniel	Freelance journalist	Dortmund, Germany
NYLA Live Podcast	Karolis Vysniauskas	Nanook Multimedia	Vilnius, Lithuania
South Side Photo Walk	Ashley Kang and Greg Munno	The Stand and Syracuse University	Syracuse, New York, U.S.
No Refuge Tour	Maeve McClenaghan	The Bureau of Investigative Journalism	United Kingdom (various locations)



The Reflective Practice Guide

To increase the capacity of journalists to build trust and develop deeper community connections, and to capture the efforts that go into that work, we developed an evaluative instrument we call the Reflective Practice Guide (RPG), designed to capture the details of process as well as outcomes. Importantly, it allows project investments and outcomes to more clearly and fully emerge through a process of reflection. Through conversation with peers, the guide encourages journalists to articulate what they are doing to build community engagement and why they are doing it. It aids in the identification of challenges and provides insights into how to overcome them and effectively iterate. And perhaps most importantly, it helps journalists speak with their peers or superiors about the value of engaging communities in the practice of news making.

The questions included in the guide were initially formulated through dozens of interviews with practitioners in news, governance, and advocacy who are using media to engage and empower communities.³³ Then, through an iterative process described further below, the questions were adapted to better reflect the particular needs and experiences of journalists and media outlets as they work to build deeper community engagement. The questions invite journalists to identify the texture of four basic activities in their community engagement work:

1. Network Building
2. Holding Space for Discussion
3. Distributing Ownership
4. Persistent Input

33 Gordon and Mugar, "Civic Media Practice."

Network Building is the act of convening either in person or online for the purpose of social connectivity and solidarity. Such convenings, which can include community centers or social media platforms, support encounters between stakeholders and allow people to identify critical mass around local issues as well as explore possible approaches for taking on particular challenges. These sorts of encounters build networks that further enable opportunities for sharing experiences and knowledge. **Holding Space for Discussion** is doing the work of assuring that there is time and space for discussion that makes room for multiple viewpoints and is tolerant of dissent. **Distributing Ownership** takes place when journalists outline clear pathways to participation, actively encouraging a power dynamic where stakeholders take the reigns of the practice, or when journalists adopt an open source ethos to their work, sharing knowledge and encouraging appropriation and repurposing. And **Persistent Input** is when journalists not only ask people what they think, but they do so from a position of stability, continuity, and trust: asking once, and then being in the same place to ask again. This persistence is reflected in long-term relationships between journalists and the communities they work in.

The RPG helps to organize the range of practices in which journalists are engaged. But it does not prescribe desired outcomes. Not everyone at every stage of a project is thinking about persistent input, for example. And at the stage of a project where things just need to get written, produced or launched, it may be that network building takes a back seat. The RPG instrument acknowledges that variability and uses these categories to contain certain practices, while not mandating their realization at every step.

It is also important to note that while the RPG offers a way to conceptualize more clearly the kinds of work that go into community engagement, in reality these activities can seem hard to disentangle. Distinguishing between Network Building and Distributing

Ownership, for example, can seem clearer on paper than in the thick of doing the work. The RPG encourages practitioners to use these categories as precisely as possible in order to better understand the particular ways that any given engagement project is having an impact.

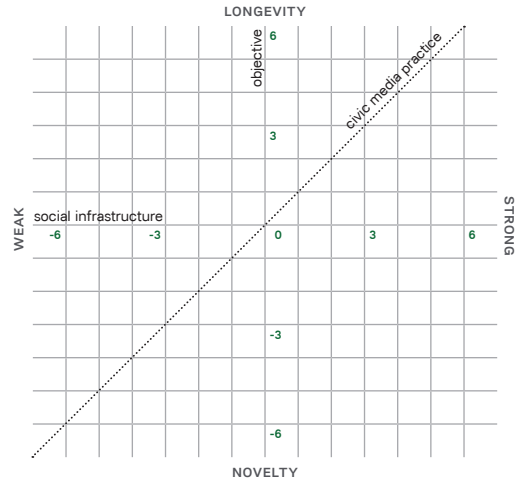


Figure 1: Charting progress

The instrument allows practitioners to document their efforts and then plot them on a chart (see Figure 1). The horizontal axis is a measurement of social infrastructure, spanning from weak on the left side to strong on the right. And the vertical is a measurement of objective, spanning from longevity on the top to novelty below. The goal is simply to achieve a positive slope over time. Acknowledging that different projects will have different starting points, this instrument is designed to acknowledge progress, not dictate specific outcomes. As Gordon and Mihailidis state in their volume *Civic Media*, the success of this work is not necessarily in achieving pre-defined ends, but in “striving for common good.”³⁴ In other words, the RPG accounts for uneven progress, moments of novelty or experimentation, and strategic shutting down of input to get things built. So, while every project may not end up in the top right quadrant, general progress towards that position is usually desirable, to the extent that is in keeping with the organization’s goals.

34 Eric Gordon and Paul Mihailidis, *Civic Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

Developing the Tools

Over the course of six months, each of the teams from the Finding Common Ground cohort used the Reflective Practice Guide and survey. They were put in the position of having to verbalize the details of their work, challenged with seeing the connections between outcomes and process, and compelled to confront their minor failures and setbacks and strategize about how to improve. In addition to using the draft of the instruments made available to them, they also provided feedback about how to refine the instrument, both in content and implementation.

The first thing people were asked to do in deploying the RPG was to define the goals of

their project. ross from Capital Public Radio, explained her project as follows: “[It] is about improving a tool for conversation, across divides, building trust among people involved in the project, engaging a wider and diverse group of people in conversations about housing and home, and creating this cohort for ongoing peer support.” Anne Hillman from Alaska Public Media explained her goal as “helping people connect who have somehow decided they’re separate.” Other explanations ranged from building trust with audiences to creating stories that matter to people. The participants were asked to define their project and its goals at each reflection point, thereby making room for project goals to evolve.



Discussions from the *The View from Here: Place and Privilege Story Circles* project, courtesy of Karolis Vyšniauskas.

The RPG next asks project leaders to focus on Network Building. Like all the activities, these questions are meant to unearth details that get lost in the everyday. The simple act of acknowledging newly-formed community connections, as the first RPG question asks, is important in itself; the follow-up questions prompt deeper reflection on how community networks are taking shape through the engagement work.

For example, in the Community Storytellers project, the Ohio County Monitor and volunteers from the local community have collaborated to co-create a series of videos on health and well-being in Ohio County. The pieces have involved a “range of local expertise and voices” hosted on the Ohio County Monitor website. According to the project leaders, this creative process has involved multiple branches of networks including community-based organizations and businesses.

“The simple act of acknowledging newly-formed community connections is important in itself.”

Other members of the FCG cohort used the Network Building prompt to discuss in detail who they were talking to, what organizations they still needed to talk to, and what kind of interactions they were having. Most engagement practitioners think about networking as core to their strategy. But a follow-up question about Network Building asks, “Are there people in your network communicating with each other (without you) who weren’t before?” This framing reorients the purpose of the network from assisting with the strategic completion of a project, to a viable and valuable community-building outcome in itself.

The next set of questions focuses on Holding Space for discussion. These questions are concerned with the design of the space for dialogue, digital or otherwise, so that people are comfortable and capable of expressing themselves and so that a variety of voices can be heard. Holding Space is a



Facilitator questions from the *The View from Here: Place and Privilege Story Circles* project, courtesy of Karolis Vyšniauskas.



The idea is to broaden the conversation and bring people to the table that may not typically be there, so that the project gains more exposure—and also whatever it is that you’re talking about through gains more exposure.

category of activity wherein practitioners can speak about the effort of getting people to the table, and once they’re there, creating the opportunities for them to express themselves in the most meaningful way possible. Project leaders tend to use this part of the RPG to reflect on building a welcoming environment. But larger questions also emerge: How does listening happen? How are people invited to participate? Who is participating, and what additional voices need to be invited in?

Ina Daniel from the New Homeland Project in Dortmund, Germany, which brings together in conversation recent refugees, mostly from Syria, with elderly World War II refugees, said “it’s important to offer space to utter fears or prejudice and listen to them. In my self-image as a presenter, it is my job to question those opinions, but not to judge them. What are the facts? Is there any personal experience with the issue? Where is the source of news? Are there any ideas for personal constructive solutions?” Through the reflection, Daniel was able to clearly articulate her facilitation process and then use that as a means of assessing her success.

In terms of how people are invited to engagement events, ross said about her Story Circle project in Sacramento:

You need that personal invite. When you’re doing mass promotion to people who...are already listening to Cap Radio, you’re just reaching the same people who are self-selecting to be there. And so, the idea is to broaden the conversation and bring people to the table that may not typically be there, so that the project gains more exposure. The model gains more exposure, but also whatever it is

that you’re talking about through the model, gains more exposure.

The third set of RPG questions focus on Distributing Ownership, asking questions such as “What are the elements of your project that can be taken up by people outside of your organization?” These questions prompt project leaders to describe the range of activities they are engaging in to assure that audiences, participants, and contributors feel that they have a stake in the outcomes of the engagement process, including developing capacity, sharing knowledge and shifting traditional power dynamics between the journalist and audience. As they used the RPG, the Finding Common Ground project leaders spoke about activities like hiring locally, training facilitators that could lead events in the future, and assuring that the benefits of participation extended beyond the event itself.

For example, for the Alaska Public Media Community in Unity project, Hillman made sure to reach out to key stakeholders before each public dialogue to get their input on what they want from the event. Before the conversation in Nome, as she did in preparation for all the project’s public conversations, Hillman conducted outreach with people in at tribal organizations, people in city government, and people from behavioral health to see what they wanted to discuss at the event. She also met with the inmates beforehand to see what they wanted to talk about and what they wanted to learn. For another event, the prison superintendent helped shape the project by discussing and co-creating the conversation agenda. Rather than pre-determining the topics of discussion, in other words, ownership of the agenda was shared.



Story circle from the NYLA Live podcast project, courtesy of Karolis Vyšniauskas.

Maeve McClenaghan from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in London used the RPG to reflect on how the No Refuge project had helped create new relationships between journalists and community members around the UK that are continuing to generate new stories around domestic violence. “We met a lot of people that had had experience of the issues we looked at in the play and we made connections, or we deepened connections with the local reporters in each area. And they, in turn, told us that they had made connections with people who had been there on the night [of the No Refuge event] and who had since come to them with story tips.” McClenaghan spoke about these connections not as strategic networks, but as people with a stake in the project and with enough trust in the journalists to share their stories—distributing a sense of investment in the work across many new participants.

Finally, providing for Persistent Input includes

“What are the elements of your project that can be taken up by people outside of your organization?”

all the work put into the longevity of the project, whether it’s the way that work slips into the banal structures of the organization, or how it puts different communication channels in place between an organization and publics that didn’t exist before. This is often the most difficult activity for people to wrap their heads around, but dialogue around the topic can be very productive. Through developing the RPG tools with the Finding Common Ground cohort, we learned that many journalists doing this work do not have the time to think about sustainability beyond the life of a specific project cycle, because they are so focused on getting things done. When they

ask the Persistent Input questions that compel them to think about what happens when the project ends, they can be at a loss. Long-term planning can seem like a luxury when one is simply trying to execute a complex public engagement event. However, what is useful about the reflection is that people begin to realize that they are actually already spending



As journalists practice engagement work, they may make active choices to use less efficient methods over more efficient methods, in order to cultivate social infrastructure that could persist over time.

their time doing the work of sustainability. They are doing simple things like setting up Facebook or LinkedIn groups, and they are doing more complicated things like introducing places, activities and organizations that can sustain activity over time. As Ross says, “there has to be an interest in the community to continue to do this and that’s part of the infrastructure that you have to build.” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism’s “No Refuge” project in the UK offers another example: Building trust in the institution of journalism was one of the project’s main goals, and building trusting relationships was the mechanism through which the effort can be sustained over time.

What’s compelling about this set of questions is that people tend to oscillate between using and developing efficient infrastructure (social media channels) versus the less efficient (physical gathering spaces). But as sociologist Eric Klinenberg warns, “social infrastructures that promote efficiency tend to discourage interaction and the formation of strong ties.”³⁵ He uses the example of a day care center where at pick up time parents are encouraged to walk inside and wait for their children as opposed to a more efficient model where parents line up their cars and kids are ready to be swept away in an

orderly fashion. While the latter is much more efficient, it fails to foster social connections and supportive relationships. Likewise, as journalists practice engagement work, they may make active choices to use less efficient methods over more efficient methods, in order to cultivate social infrastructure that could persist over time. Gordon and Mugar, in their forthcoming book *Meaningful Inefficiencies*, highlight how journalists and engagement practitioners of all sorts are actively designing inefficiencies into process as a means of fostering and maintaining relationships.³⁶ However, in practice, effectively articulating the value of inefficiency is not easy. The RPG can certainly help journalists justify the use of such methods to their peers and superiors, but there is a lot more work necessary to effectively make the case that good process equals better outcomes.

As journalists continue to carve out a space for engagement in the practice of journalism, the ability to articulate the value of the work to stakeholders, audiences, managers, and funders, will be essential. The RPG has shown to be an effective instrument in encouraging journalists to evaluate their own practices and find the language to talk about them in terms of measurable outcomes.

35 Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York: Crown, 2018).

36 Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar. *Meaningful Inefficiencies: How Designers are Transforming Civic Life by Creating Opportunities to Care* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Putting the Guide Into Practice

The following pages include instructions for journalists as they use the Reflective Practice Guide. These are suggestions and do not need to be followed to the letter, but they are based on feedback and iteration with the first cohort of users.

Set Up

- Identify key personnel involved in the project about which you want to reflect.
- If you are working alone on a project, try to identify others in your organization that could help you discuss the project. This could be someone who is aware of the project but does not work on it or someone that can simply encourage you to reflect on your own work.
- In all cases, it would be helpful to assign two roles. Someone should act as a questioner, whose role is to facilitate and encourage the discussion and prompt interesting points of conversation. And someone should act as a note taker, who is less likely to be involved in the discussions as they concentrate on recording responses to the questions.
- This guide is intended to be used multiple times throughout a project. The frequency and timings of this differ from project to project, but we recommend three reflection points. Set these with your team according to what is most appropriate for you.

Getting Started

- Gather your reflective team. The Reflective Practice Guide is split into four sections, each should take around 10-15 minutes to complete.
- Work through each section together. The person in the question role should read out the instructions and each of the questions in turn. Your note taker should record the answers as you go. This could be through brief note-taking or whatever is most appropriate. These notes will be useful to refer to as you progress through the guide. We'd encourage you to audio record the conversation so you have a record of the conversation. Every project is different, so not all questions or activities may be appropriate. If this is the case, it is fine to skip questions. But reflecting on why this is, can also be useful.
- Words like 'community' and 'organization' mean different things to different projects. Interpret the terms however you think they best apply to your project.
- Remember that this is a reflective session, and not a project management meeting, so discussion of successes and failures are equally valid
- The first time you use this process, it is important to define your project in order to be consistent about its boundaries. Take a moment to define your project in 100 words or less. Write it down and keep it handy. Ask yourself the following: What are the goals? Who is involved? Look at this definition each time you use the guide, and change if necessary.

Activity #1: Network Building

This activity involves all the work involved in building relationships.

SINCE THE LAST REFLECTION POINT...

Describe the new connections you have formed with people, communities or organizations in support of your project?

- Are any of these connections with community leaders or trusted organizations?
 - Are any of these connections with people who have lived experience of the topic of your project?
 - How were they formed?
 - In what ways do you think they will be useful for the project?
-

Are there people in your network communicating with each other (without you) who weren't before?

- If yes, how is this happening?
 - If you don't know, how can you find out?
-

Would you feel comfortable reaching out to people in this network in the future?

- If yes, what have you done to achieve this?
 - If no, can you imagine things that you can do now to achieve this?
-

Examples of Network Building

CASE STUDY ◆ **SOUTH SIDE PHOTO WALK**

When gathering participants for the 2018 Photo Walk, lead organizer Ashley Kang leveraged the newspaper's diverse network that includes trusted leaders and organizations from the community, nearby Syracuse University students, and South Side neighborhood residents. Kang estimated that more than 40 people attended the event—approximately double the previous record—with participants from inside and outside the neighborhood. New relationships emerged because the Photo Walk gathered people to learn and explore together; she's noticed new friendships and has even brought on Photo Walk participants as contributors to the newspaper. Additionally, Syracuse University journalism students were able to build out a stronger network of sources by participating in the event. "I know some students who come through find a lot of story ideas, because they're meeting people right where they live," Kang said.

CASE STUDY ◆ **MY NEW HOMELAND**

During project development, project lead Ina Daniel built connections with organizations that serve current refugees and centers that serve senior citizens. She found that both types of organizations had separately created projects focused on the idea of "homeland," and saw an opportunity for a new approach to dialogue. She has established new relationships with the two most important organizations in Dortmund that serve refugees, an institute that works against right-wing extremism and a democracy-focused organization appointed by the city. These organizations became interested in collaborating for the long-run and are able to serve as a new source of professional support for Daniel when challenges arise in her ongoing dialogue work.

Activity #2: Holding Space

This activity involves all the work involved in ensuring that you are creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for participation and feedback.

SINCE THE LAST REFLECTION POINT...

What physical places have you created where people can voice their opinions and listen to others?

What digital spaces have you created where people can voice their opinions and listen to others?

Are the participants in these spaces (physical and digital) broadly representative, or do you feel there are people missing from the discussions, or poorly represented?

- Are there participants from different backgrounds and perspectives? If so, what have you done to support this?
- If you feel that any voices are missing, who are they and what are you doing to address this?

Of the participants in these spaces, do you think that everybody feels able to voice their opinions?

- Have you made any structures or rules (such as ground rules) that make it easier for participants to comfortably contribute?
- How do you allow for constructive disagreement between participants? If you don't, what could you put in place that would allow for this?

How do you demonstrate to the participants in these spaces that you are listening (and in some cases responding) to them?

Examples of Holding Space

CASE STUDY ◆ ALASKA PUBLIC MEDIA

There are a number of ground rules and structures that project leader Anne Hillman implements and participants agree to, which are designed to create a safe and productive discussion space for the Community in Unity project. Each conversation begins with participants agreeing to actively listen to and respect each other, seek understanding, and accept that issues may arise that can't be fully resolved. Additionally, Hillman will often record the conversations by carrying around the microphone and crouching in front of participants while they speak. This has had the surprising effect of making participants feel more comfortable speaking up because they can maintain eye contact with her and not have to address the whole room at once.

CASE STUDY ◆ MY NEW HOMELAND

In her work as a facilitator, Daniel emphasizes the importance of communicating rules for productive dialogue, while offering space for people to share fears. She feels her job is to question prejudices without judgement. She frames this process through a lens of democratic values and human rights, while providing space for participants to share personal experiences and constructive solutions. In the My New Homeland talks, Daniel found evidence that these ground rules enabled participants to gain curiosity about each other's lives and move toward increased understanding, which built trust among participants. She reports that as the talks concluded, some senior citizens reached out to the recent refugees in the room to stay in touch, including one who invited a woman from Syria to lunch. Daniel noted this was a "first for both worlds."

Moreover, on feedback forms, most participants reported that "they got a new perspective on the issue." During one talk, one senior citizen was able to feel vulnerable enough to cry; Daniel paused the dialogue to ask him about the "person or situation who helped him to deal with this situation," which helped him to feel comfortable continuing to engage in the dialogue.

CASE STUDY ◆ CAPITAL PUBLIC RADIO

According to project leader Jesika Maria Ross, the Story Circle methodology thrives in large part because of the intentional and strategic structures the facilitators put into place to create a supportive and safe environment where participants feel comfortable sharing personal narratives of struggle and success. A Story Circle event often features food, candles, and a centerpiece placed in the middle of the circle, such as a bouquet of flowers, to give participants a shared object of contemplation and allow them not to get too fixated on facing each other. Ross often rings a bell and waits patiently for the sound to dissipate before beginning the conversation, creating a sense of unity and anticipation. Community facilitators will often begin the conversation by sharing their own story about the topic, as a model for others' contributions.

Activity #3: Distributing Ownership

This activity includes all the work involved in ensuring that participants are invested in the work and have the will and capacity to meaningfully participate.

SINCE THE LAST REFLECTION POINT...

How have you created new opportunities for people to participate in or shape the project?
What are they?

- Can you identify aspects of your project which would benefit from more input?
 - How have you created opportunities for a diversity of participants to connect with each other through your project?
-

What are the elements of your project that can be taken up by people outside of your organization?

- What are you doing to support this?
 - Do people have the skills and/or resources needed to effectively participate in the work?
 - How can you support the development of skills/resources?
-

How have you shared the process and outcomes of your work with your project network?

- Has it been effective?
-

How and where are you sharing the successes and failures of your project with your professional network?

- What other opportunities (if any) do you see to share successes and failures?
-

Examples of Distributing Ownership

CASE STUDY ◆ CAPITAL PUBLIC RADIO

A primary objective of this project—beyond sparking rich discussion among the community about the challenge of affordable housing—was to build the capacity of partner organizations to learn and improve the Story Circle methodology, with the hopes that the organizations will spread and implement that methodology in future dialogue events. Following the culmination of the Story Circle events, the project partners convened to collect the best practices, techniques and structures they honed and observed over the course of the project. The collaborators have published a downloadable how-to guide for facilitators interested in implementing the conversation model.

CASE STUDY ◆ COMMUNITY STORYTELLERS

The community contributors program exemplifies ways that community members have taken on leadership roles in the Ohio County Monitor's engagement projects. The community contributors program, for example, facilitates local community members to write columns for the Monitor, as a way for readers to connect with each other over local issues, a reinvented version of rural newspaper "society columns." Community contributors also developed their own local oral history project.

Additionally, a long-standing goal of the Monitor's work has been to facilitate the involvement of the local refugee and immigrant population. The community contributors have now become essential partners in that work and as noted by project manager Sam Ford, one contributor has now begun work "on a series capturing the stories of refugee voices who work in the county at a chicken processing plant." Notably, after a community contributor offered a cooperative extension office as an ongoing, neutral and known meeting place, a regular rhythm formed and communication increased among contributors on their work. Ford noted that "feeling the need to send an apology if they can't make it has helped set that regularity and accountability for people to participate more frequently."

Activity #4: Persistent Input

This activity involves all the work of ensuring that there are lasting impacts of the work after the project timeline.

SINCE THE LAST REFLECTION POINT...

What are your thoughts about what happens when the project ends?

- Beyond continued funding, are there things you are doing or could do to sustain the project's impact?
 - What are the challenges faced in planning for the project ending?
-

Will your presence among the people you've worked with persist for longer than the project duration?

- Have you put anything in place so that they can contact you or your project team after the project has finished?
 - Do you feel the project team will continue working with them long-term, in some way?
-

How have you built trust with the people you're working with?

- Do you think this will enable you to continue working together long-term?
 - Do you feel that this trust will enable you to work with other communities? If so, how?
 - Do you feel that your project has created or improved trust among participants and the communities they represent?
 - If you feel like you haven't built trust, why do you think this? What could you do differently?
-

Examples of Persistent Input

CASE STUDY ◆ COMMUNITY STORYTELLERS

The Community Storytellers project demonstrated growing avenues for ongoing, two-way communication and means to share successes between the Ohio County Monitor and the community contributor volunteers. A community contributor Facebook group serves as a venue to discuss issues or ideas with each other, outside of the monthly community contributor meetings. In response to Ford's encouragement to find new ways to intertwine the Monitor's engagement programs, Dustin Bratcher shared that their efforts to get the heavily-male liars' tables and the mostly women society column contributors to work together might be "like chocolate and peanut butter. You don't know. You might end up with a Reese's cup. It could be something that works out." Thus, the project team's discussion of the RPG question about persistent input revealed both the intention and possibility of doubling impact by connecting different engagement programs, but also that this connection is in the works and not yet complete.

CASE STUDY ◆ ALASKA PUBLIC MEDIA

Anne Hillman has returned to the prisons after the Community in Unity events to conduct interviews. "We've definitely built trust with the inmates," she says, "because we're showing we care and we're listening, but I feel like it's also built trust with people who are attending the event and also who are listening." Even more impactful, Hillman reports, has been the simple act of sending thank you notes to participants, which has prompted correspondence with multiple people who are still incarcerated or have recently been released.

Summary

These four sets of questions about Network Building, Holding Space, Distributing Ownership, and providing for Persistent Input are meant to spark discussion, not simply generate answers. For example, consider the last question: How have you built trust with the people you're working with? There is no way to answer this question succinctly. If approached with the right spirit, the RPG motivates a conversation about whether or not this is a driving value of the work and if so, what specific things one is doing to realize that value. The RPG is designed to open up as many questions as it resolves, and is meant to unearth the seemingly banal details that are actually at the core of community engaged journalism.

Survey

At the conclusion of each reflection, one person from the group is encouraged to take a survey, which is designed to represent the questions in the RPG. Survey responses should strive to capture the conversation that happened during the reflection:

1. You and your project team have strengthened your network.



2. People in the project's network are communicating with each other (without you).



3. You have created new opportunities for people to participate.



4. You have made progress in assuring that event participants are broadly representative.



5. Participants feel more comfortable voicing their opinion.



6. There are elements of the project that can be taken up by people outside of your organization.



7. You are more able to share the process and outcomes of your work with project participants.



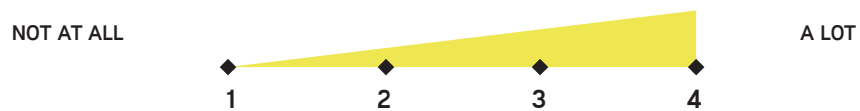
8. You have shared successes and failures of the project with your wider professional network.



9. You feel confident that the project will continue to have value for participants beyond the life of the project.



10. You are confident that people in the project's network will maintain their connections beyond the life of the project.



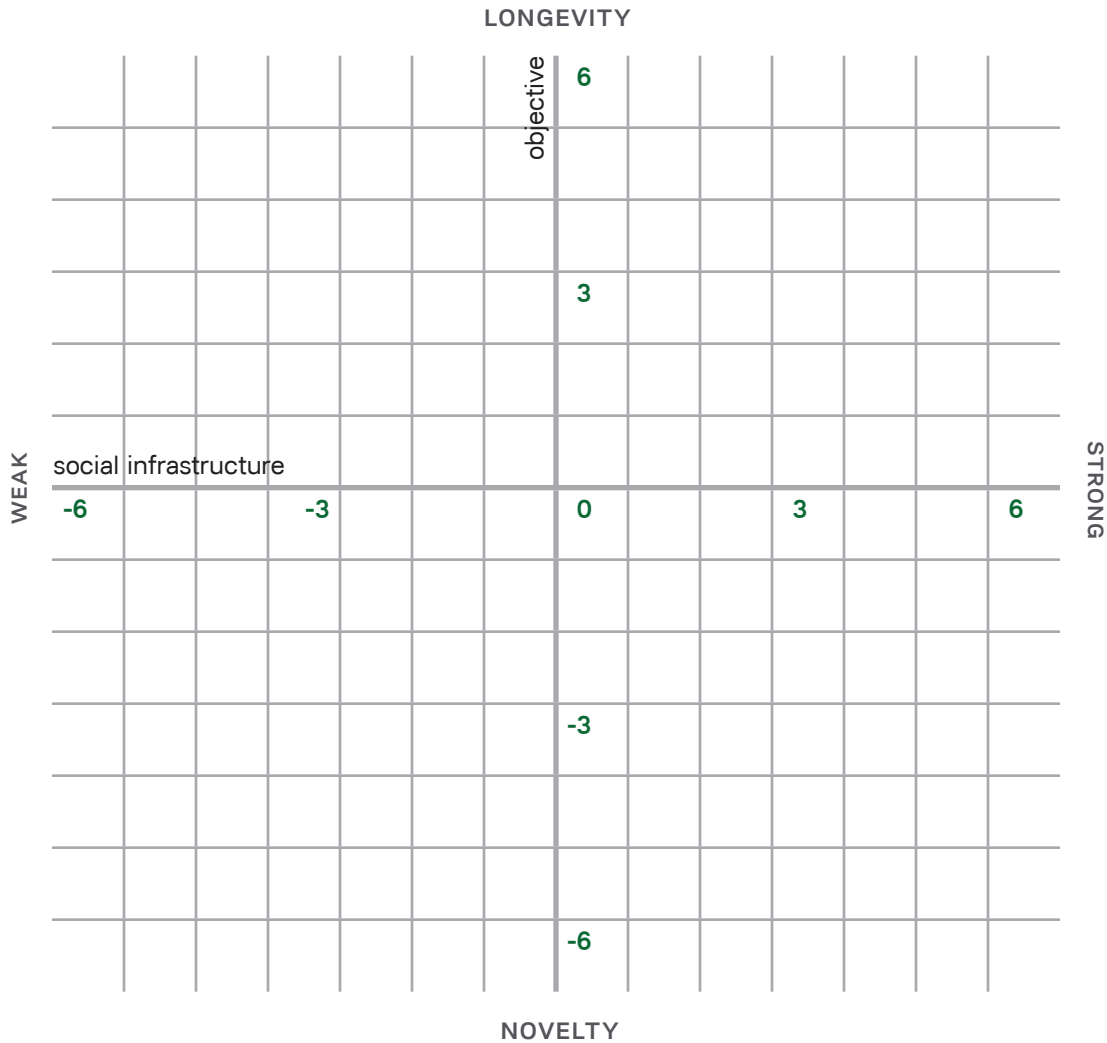
11. You and your project team are more able to listen and respond to your participants.



12. You have built more trust with the people with whom you are working.



Survey responses generate x (social infrastructure) and y (project objective) coordinates to plot on the chart below (Figure 2). Coordinates are calculated through a simple algorithm (see Table 1). $X = \sum b Q1-5+11-12$. $Y = \sum b Q 6-12$. These x, y coordinates mark a moment in time. That moment is plotted on the chart. When the survey is taken again, the second and perhaps third moments are plotted and a line is drawn between the points. A positive slope of the line suggests progress towards strong social infrastructure and longevity and serves as a quantified representation of the often intangible work of engaged journalism. The recommendation is to display the chart in plain view during the project's duration so as to make one's progress a matter of open discussion.



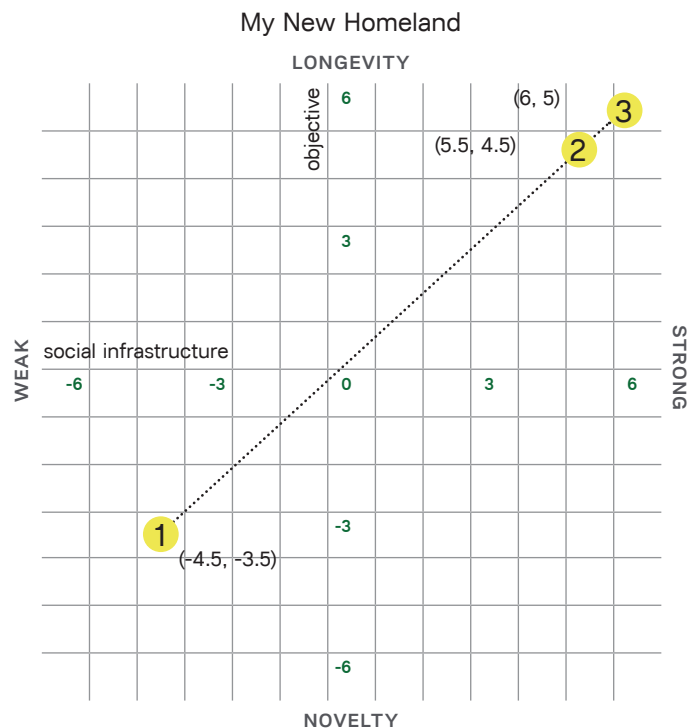
Survey Response	Variable b
1	-2
2	-1
3	1
4	2

Table 1: Calculations for x,y coordinates.

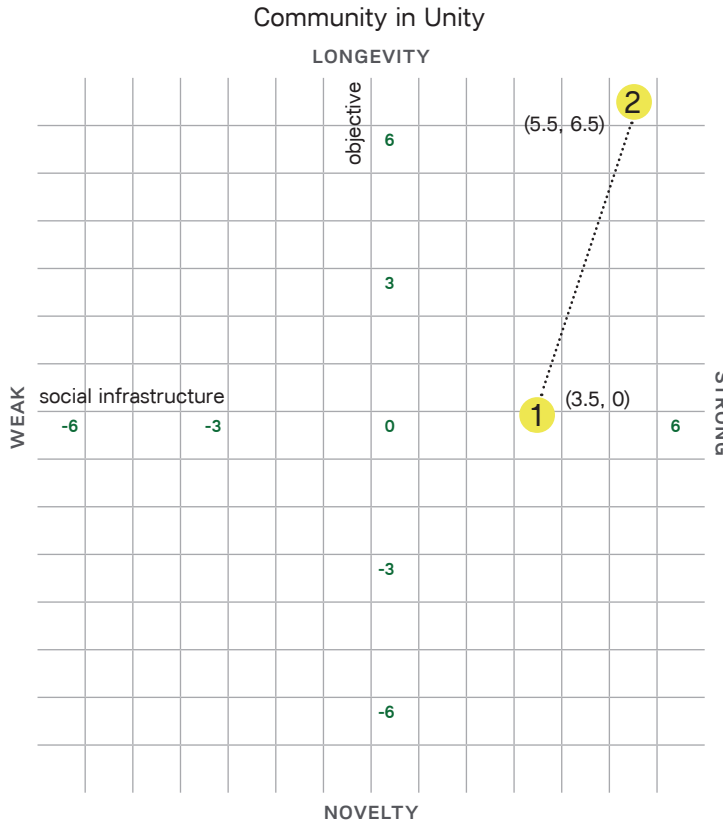
This graphical representation of progress is not scientific, but dialogic. This is a self-administered survey that is meant to invite conversation among practitioners and between practitioners and managers or funders. In the tradition of empowerment evaluation, which is a participatory approach to evaluation that grew in popularity in the 1990s emphasizing capacity building and institutionalization of processes and values, the RPG provides inroads for journalists to not simply evaluate past work, but to identify generative actions and explore their sustainability. In the context of emerging communities of practice, where there are often few resources devoted to formal evaluations, this kind of process is not only desirable, but necessary.

Reflective Survey Use by the Finding Common Ground Projects

For the Finding Common Ground project, cohort members were instructed to complete the online survey following each of their sessions using the RPG. When reflecting on her My New Homeland project, project lead Ina Daniel communicated through her first round of survey responses that there was plenty of room for improvement—specifically that she wasn't yet building a network that communicates without her mediating role and she wasn't yet sharing the processes, outcomes, successes and failures with her project participants and



larger network. Taken together, her survey responses subsequently plotted the project in the lower-left quadrant of the graph. By the time Ina completed her third RPG session and took the online survey once again, she had made huge strides in the problem areas she identified before and also signaled that she had worked to strengthen the project network and build trust with people involved. Her survey responses subsequently plotted the project high on the upper-right quadrant of the graph.



Anne Hillman conducted two reflection sessions for the Community in Unity project. During the first session, she described that she still had work to do in sharing the process, outcomes, and failures with the project participants and her larger professional network. She also admitted she wasn't confident the project network would maintain their connections beyond the life of the project. Taken together, her survey results plotted her coordinates at (3.5, 0) on the chart. During her second reflection, she identified a marked improvement in those areas, and indicated that she strengthened other aspects of the

project, such as ensuring participants were broadly representative and could take up elements of the project themselves. Her survey responses subsequently plotted coordinates at (5.5, 6.5), documenting a trajectory towards the upper-right quadrant.



Conclusion

As trust in media has dramatically declined and media outlets of all kinds strive to forge closer connections with the communities they serve, they will need ways to capture the work that goes into community engagement projects, and to assess the impacts of that work. The Reflective Practice Guide presented here offers one way for project teams and the organizations they are embedded in to understand the hard work of relational engagement and to show its value in more tangible terms. Indeed, the work of Network Building, Holding Space for Discussion, Distributing Ownership and providing for Persistent Input can create the kinds of journalistic behaviors and news content that audiences see as markers of trustworthiness. Transparency, authenticity, diversity, and a sense of shared mission can be the visible manifestations of the background work of building community networks, convening dialogues that honor differences, and collaborating to create more meaningful community news. The elements of the RPG, in other words, provide a potential roadmap for building greater trust.

The RPG focuses on relational rather than transactional engagement, and on longer-term versus short term impacts. In this critical moment for journalism, impactful, relational engagement offers a path toward greater public trust and by extension, long-term sustainability.

Each of the projects that participated in Finding Common Ground represents important facets of relational journalism. From building new connections across communities in rural Kentucky, to making productive and trusted spaces for dialogue in Sacramento, California, to assuring continued conversation between those in and out of prison in Alaska and Lithuania, journalism today is not just a matter of telling stories about communities, but building and maintaining ongoing partnerships with communities throughout the news-making process. The Reflective Practice Guide outlined in these pages provides valuable documentation of relational engagement as a trust-building innovation, and offers a method for journalists to increase their own capacity for this work and to demonstrate its value.

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