

THE LISTENING POST COLLECTIVE PLAYBOOK

This playbook is designed to help journalists, newsroom leaders, and community groups listen to and engage with their communities.

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Whether you are a journalist, media outlet or civil society group, these steps will get you into a flow of listening to your community, creating stories that resonate, and fostering an ongoing conversation with people.

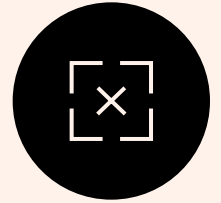
This playbook is designed to help journalists, newsroom leaders, and community groups:

- Listen to and engage with their community
- Better understand the needs of residents who aren't getting the information they need or whose voices aren't being heard
- Create sustained two-way conversations with citizens around essential news and information.
- Create journalism that highlights a diverse range of voices and experiences and makes local media representative and accountable to the community it serves.
- Collect and analyze project data that helps track trending topics and citizen engagement.

Walk through the playbook at your own pace. Check out our toolbox of resources and learn how partners across the country have used these strategies in their own communities.

STRATEGY 1

CHOOSE A COMMUNITY



Which neighborhoods or populations in your community are covered by the media in a one dimensional way or not at all? Which areas are accustomed to journalists parachuting in, extracting a few quotes, and then leaving? These are the neighborhoods that most need news they can use, sustained engagement, and a platform to voice concerns, needs, and goals.

TACTICS

- **Research a community:** Take a look at a map of the area you're interested in. Note defining features like parks, schools, restaurants and bars, main avenues, community venues, places of worship, transport hubs, health clinics, grocery stores, and libraries you'd like to check out. Identify local organizations, activists, charities, meetings and community events. Check out local government websites and social media (twitter, facebook, instagram) to get familiar with local leaders, their thoughts, and their initiatives.
- **Identify** local leaders. Think broadly, everything from a city council member to a barber and trusted organizations in the community. Let them know you'd like to stop by and say hello and learn more about information needs in the community.
- **Question** your own motivation. Take time to establish relationships with people in the community who share your vision and who can confirm that there is a real need for such a project. If there's an existing project with similar goals, ask how you can support their work first, before exploring your own ideas.



IN ACTION

Minneapolis

Minnesota has the largest Somali diaspora in the United States, but there is a lack of understanding between the broader population and the refugee community. The Star Tribune, the state's largest news outlet, wanted to find a way to build a dialogue with Somali Americans to hear their perspectives and learn about issues they'd like to see covered. The news organization also wanted to explore new ways of delivering news to the Somali community, including publishing some content in the Somali language.

Through their reporting, a group of news staffers, including a newly hired Somali reporter, made inroads the community and into a neighborhood that has come to be known as "Little Mogadishu." It held community conversations with local Somali leaders, and at one they debuted a Listening Post to allow people to share their thoughts in their own words. After President Trump signed an executive order restricting immigration and travel from several Muslim-majority nations, including Somalia, the Star Tribune brought the Listening Post to a local Somali-owned café to hear their takes on the travel ban.

STRATEGY 2

VISIT AND LISTEN



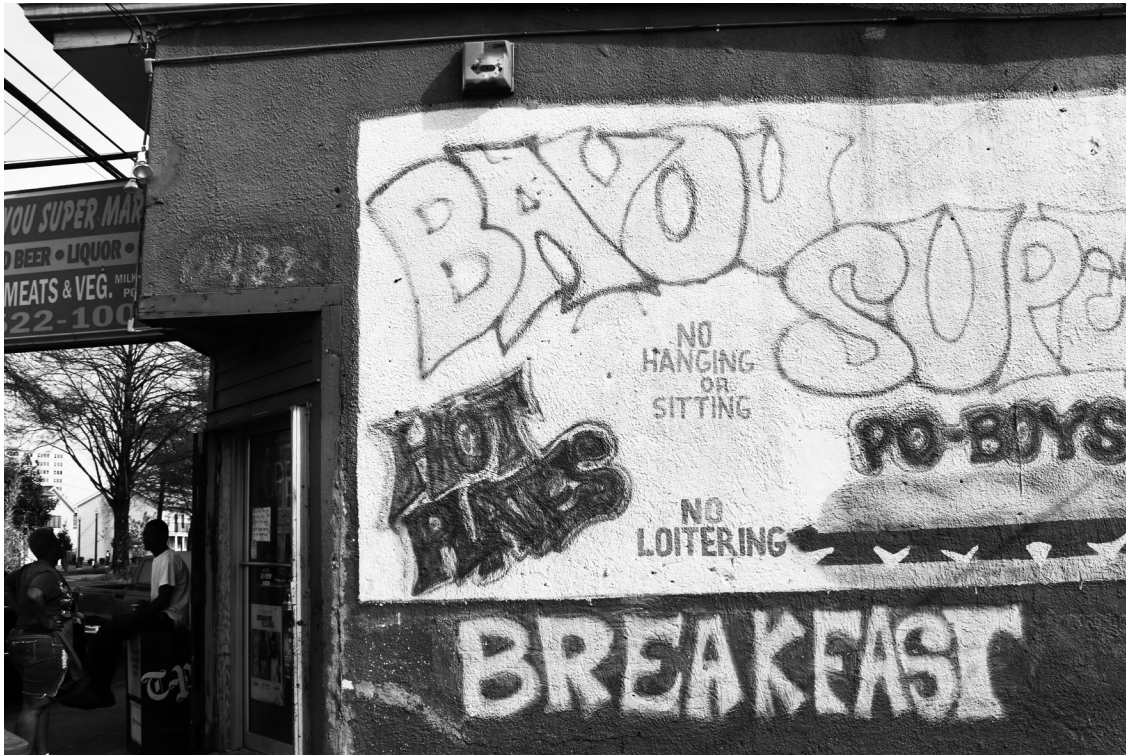
Go for a walk in the community, but leave your microphone behind. Pay attention to where people hang out and how information is shared in popular locations like churches, grocery stores, libraries, community centers, and government offices. Sit down at a restaurant, strike up a conversation, look for local signs posted in the neighborhood. Search for community bulletin boards. The point of all of this is to catch people in their daily comfort zones. Eventually you'll find ways to share important information through these spaces and networks.

TACTICS

- **Observe information flow.** Where and how is information being shared? Do you see the local newspaper? Do you hear people listening to the radio? Are people on their cell phones? What community messaging do you see—signs, billboards, public art, official government notices? What are they referring to?
- **Meet with community leaders** and ask about what they are hearing from residents about their needs and priorities. Ask leaders how they get the word out in their area.
- **Go to events.** Neighborhood watch meetings, religious services, community markets, festivals, etc. What's the focus of the event? What's the turnout? How did people hear about the event?
- **Go online.** Where is a community sharing information with each other online—Facebook groups? Non-profit websites? Community connector websites like Next Door? Email newsletters?
- **Notes,** take lots of them, and get contact details from people!
- **Photos,** take lots of them, especially images of the various ways information is getting shared e.g., photos in peoples windows, flyers at a local grocery store, community signs on telephone poles, newspapers on stoops, or messages on local church signs.

Examples

[Photo archive from Baltimore](#)



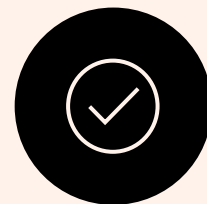
IN ACTION

New Orleans

The day after reporter Jesse Hardman arrived in New Orleans, he went on a walk through the Central City neighborhood without his microphone, and without his notepad. Central City is a tight-knit, historic community in the heart of New Orleans. Hardman stopped into an old barbershop and bought some peanuts, the establishment's side-hustle, chatting with the barbers about the neighborhood. He walked past a row of blighted homes, stepping around potholes filled with stormwater. He chatted with the owner of a dance studio about her Mardi Gras dance team. And he talked to customers at a corner store, down the street from a slew of recent shootings. Later that week he went back to the neighborhood and sat in on a church service. The pastor, who had recently died from cancer, was a local advocate for stopping gun-violence, and his death was a big loss to the community, where shootings happen sometimes daily. After the service he spoke about this with the interim minister and congregation members. Later, after all the walking, Hardman entered all of his mental notes in a Google document.

STRATEGY 3

SURVEY AND DOCUMENT



Once you've got a basic understanding of the community landscape, it's time to get a deeper understanding of how local information flows. Craft an information needs survey to explore how people access and share information, which local sources they trust, and which issues they feel most passionate about. The results of the assessment will serve as a blueprint for your engagement work.

TACTICS

- **Download** our information needs survey template.
- **Localize your survey.** Not all questions are appropriate in all communities. Edit and insert questions that will resonate in your area.
- **Collect contact information!** The information needs survey is the first exercise in trust and community building for your project. Make sure you collect names, emails and cell-phone numbers if people are open to that. This enables you to get back in touch with your growing network.
- **Reconnect** with community leaders and organizations you visited on your walk. Ask them to help you develop and distribute the survey and offer to share the results as part of that partnership. Ask them to connect you to community events or meetings where you can distribute the survey.
- **Revisit** locations from your walk where people were hanging out and connecting (eg. corner stores, barber shops, coffee shops, health centers). Be prepared to engage people in conversation and fill out the survey for them while they are talking; that's often the easiest, and fastest way to get the work done.
- **Create a team** to help you collect surveys. Local organizations interested in your work may help distribute and collect surveys. Check with local high schools or universities to see if there are groups interested in helping.
- **Host a meetup** and invite local media, civil society leaders and interested citizens. Workshop your survey questions. This is a good way to inform your project and build a community of future partners, collaborators and participants.
- **Leave your comfort zone** and find residents who are not part of your known

audience. Make sure your results are representative of the entire community. Translate your survey into multiple languages if need be.

→ **Create an online version** of the survey as well (SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, Google Surveys). Circulate it on social media and via like-minded local organization websites.

Examples

Mapping your community's information ecosystem

TOOLS

INFORMATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Download, adapt and distribute this survey to better understand how people access and share information, which local sources they trust, and which issues they feel most passionate about.

SEE TOOLBOX

**IN ACTION****Baltimore**

After an initial walk, and a series of conversations with local leaders in Baltimore's Barclay neighborhood, a team of local journalists and journalism students interested in creating a Listening Post project began to draft a basic information needs assessment. Questions centered on identifying spaces in the community where people traditionally share news and information, what kinds of topics are most on the minds of community members, and the extent of people's access to technology (i.e. smart phones, computers, regular cell phones, etc.).

After the survey was finalized, copies were made, and a small team of five community members were hired to help get the survey into Barclay residents' hands. They took the survey home to their families, brought them to work, passed them around at church and were able to get a wide range of responses from more than 80 participants, a good sample size considering only 3,000 people live in the Barclay neighborhood.

STRATEGY 4

CRAFT QUESTIONS



This step is crucial to the engagement process. Make sure you set aside some quality time to focus on what you really want to know from the community you're engaging. Your goal is to make questions simple, inclusive, and relevant to the experience of residents. Here's a [guide to crafting good questions](#).

TACTICS

- **Pick an issue** that was mentioned frequently in the information needs survey and initial listening process.
- **News peg.** Research any current conversations or happenings related to this topic; a city council debate, a forum, a new law, an effort by a local non-profit, a recent report or release of data that pertains to the topic, either nationally, or locally.
- **Develop 2-3 questions** for each topic that will get people sharing their own experience and anecdotes. Start simple with a question anyone can answer, and work your way towards something a little more in depth. See examples [here](#).
- **Make it personal.** Get responders to share personal anecdotes and speak from experience. Not, "What do you think?" as much as, "What did you experience? The goal is to get participants sharing personal examples, representing what they witness in their own lives.

Examples

[Planting Questions in New Orleans](#)

TOOLS

GUIDE TO CRAFTING GREAT QUESTIONS

Use these tips to craft simple, inclusive and relevant questions that get community members speaking from experience and foster meaningful conversation.

SEE TOOLBOX



GGB NEWS DONATE

Listen Live

Crime, Cops and Community: One Mother's Changing Take On Guns

By GRANT BLANKENSHIP • MAR 23, 2016

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Marciarea Torney-Daramanu says she taught her oldest son to stay away from guns. When he was killed by a gun, she decided to change how she will raise her remaining children.

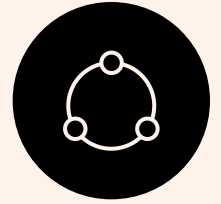
IN ACTION

Macon

A Listening Post project in Macon, Georgia wanted to find a way to make the national debate around gun control and gun violence feel local and tangible. Conversations around gun control online often devolve into emotionally driven arguments between folks at extreme ends of the spectrum. To contrast these conversations, they used Listening Post strategies to ask residents to share their experiences rather than their opinions. They did this by asking simple and straightforward questions (Do you or someone in your family own a gun? What have you experienced that has shaped your opinion towards guns?). By approaching the questions in this way the project in Macon was able to gather deeply personal stories about fears and hopes around gun ownership and violence and received nuanced and varied answers. They heard from hunters who'd grown up with a deep reverence for guns and young mothers who'd lost children to gun violence. Regardless of experience or opinion, responses were well thought out and respectful.

STRATEGY 5

ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS



Now it's time to get back out into the neighborhood and ask your questions. Get creative, get offline, and make sure people have a way not only to answer your questions, but also to let you know how best to get back in touch with them. SMS is ideal.

TACTICS

- **Revisit your survey and walking notes.** What stands out? Who do people trust to deliver information? Where do people go to share or receive local information, offline as well as online? Use these findings to establish your outreach methods.
- **Pick outreach methods.** We recommend a mix of face-to-face opportunities, online outreach and mobile messaging. Check out our [Listening Post activities list](#) for some other ideas.
- **Develop partners** in the community to help you promote the project and bring your questions to their networks.
- **Create a rolodex.** Make sure you build in a way to stay in touch with participants in your project. Your surveys and ground research gave you a nice head start on gathering some contact data for community members. Create a system for organizing your contacts and make sure you update it as more people join.
- **Follow up with especially active participants,** get a coffee with them, and establish their interest in being an ongoing source. They can help you expand your project and alert you to important things happening in the community.
- **Be patient.** Community engagement doesn't happen overnight—it takes relationship building, trust, consistency, and time. Not everything is going to work, so don't be afraid to experiment and try new creative ways to get out into your community.

TOOLS

**ENGAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES GUIDE**

This guide features engagement activities for you to try in your community. Highlights include setting up recording devices, hosting events, posting public signs, messaging via SMS, and more.

SEE TOOLBOX

SMS GUIDE

There are a number of inexpensive options for sending out SMS messages to your community, hearing back from them, and collating and analyzing all their feedback. Here's our comprehensive guide to some useful SMS platforms.

SEE TOOLBOX

RECORDING DEVICE BLUEPRINT

Want to build your own Listening Post community recording device? Here are the blueprints that outline the specs, and a form if you'd like to order a custom built device.

SEE TOOLBOX

COMMUNITY SIGN TEMPLATE

Want to design and hang up signs around your community? Download and adapt our sign template to start building a physical presence in your neighborhood.

SEE TOOLBOX



IN ACTION

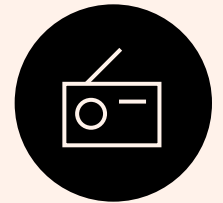
Macon

Meeting people where they are is a crucial part of good engagement. One way to do that is partner with established and trusted community groups. The Listening Post project in Macon, Georgia was looking to grow participation in its community media initiative. It decided to team up with one of the city's most beloved annual civic events, April's Magnolia Soap Box Derby, and pitch a mutually beneficial engagement collaboration.

Thousands of locals come to see fellow residents race homespun cars. The Listening Post project wanted to tap into that audience, so they offered event organizers the opportunity to use a cell phone based platform to facilitate voting via text message for the Best in Show prize. As Derby goes voters voted via their phones, they also received a text message asking them for their feedback on the event. The Listening Post Macon team shared that valuable information with the Derby organizers. Participants then received a short text description of the Listening Post and were asked if they would like to participate in the ongoing project. 400 new participants joined via the Soap Box Derby event, and stayed part of the project, giving them access to conversations on topics ranging from education to gun control.

STRATEGY 6

CREATE CONTENT



The questions, comments, and experiences you are hearing from your community are a great source of material and story ideas. Use community feedback to identify new leads or new angles on trending issues—or ones lacking media attention—and produce items for your outlet that speak to the concerns and questions you are hearing.

TACTICS

- **For traditional media, digital content creators and other citizen journalists:**
We believe it's most powerful if community participation is framed within actual journalism, as opposed to a stand-alone vox-pop, and that the citizens that engage with you can be considered not only sources but also experts when it comes to their specific experience with a particular issue in the neighborhood.
- **For non-journalists:** If your job involves advocacy or other kinds of public outreach to media, local government or policy makers – the community voices you tap into can provide you with great material for your outreach. Depending on the focus of your community work, a Listening Post Project can be a great way to crowd-source data regarding employment, health needs, housing issues, and more. This can help you determine how effective some of your work is, and help you either shift your efforts, or confirm that you're on the right track.
- **Make a point of challenging stereotypes** about topics and communities in your target area by highlighting the voices of residents who are experiencing these issues. If a neighborhood is being generally cast in a negative light, reach out to people who live there, and see how they define and experience where they live.
- **Based on what you have heard**, seek out other sources and experts on the topic to learn more about the issues. Whatever you hear can be featured in your stories, advocacy outreach or shared with project participants.



89.9 WWO New Orleans Public Radio

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The Listening Post

The Listening Post Asks: How Affordable Is Your Housing?

By JESSE HARDMAN • JUN 2, 2016

Tweet Share Google+ Email

IN ACTION

New Orleans

When the Listening Post project in New Orleans wanted to tackle the increasingly contentious issue of affordable housing, it was important to avoid retreading the established narrative—that white outsiders were buying up neighborhoods and pricing long-term residents out. They placed a trio of community recording devices in neighborhoods with varying real estate costs, and asked, “What percentage of your income goes to housing?” And, “What would you miss most if you were priced out of your current neighborhood?” To balance out this community feedback, project members went on a ride-around with a local housing expert and real estate agent, an expert in a more traditional sense. They also followed up with a community member who sent the project a text message. She shared her unique example of home-ownership in a neighborhood that is rumored to be the landing spot for families priced out of their traditional areas. The end result was an informative radio segment that was journalistically sound, and reflective of the experience of community members.

STRATEGY 7

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING



Stay in touch with your citizen networks. Make it a priority to provide them with information on the topics they said mattered most. Providing feedback to your participants is a key step to building trust and sustaining a conversation in a widening constituency of Listening Post participants. The community needs to see that their contributions are utilized.

TACTICS

- **Partner and collaborate** with other media (community radio, alt-weeklies, neighborhood groups with Facebook pages) who might have a direct connection to the communities you are looking to work with. If it's a print article, make copies and pass them out at a community meeting. Make them available in the community spaces that you identified in stage 2 of this process.
- **Community Data to Power.** Look for opportunities to share your findings more widely (local government, elected officials, corporations, nonprofits) and ask them for their feedback that you can then share with your participants. It is important to lower the barrier for people's ability to access the results of the news conversation you start.
- **Use a variety of methods for sharing your work.** If you are a media outlet, share it online, on the air (TV or radio), or in print. If you are an individual or organization: use Twitter or Facebook to spread your finding and ignite new conversations and inputs! If you have a print article, make copies and pass them out at a community meeting. Make them available in the community spaces that you identified in stage 2 of this process. If a non-news media outlet, e.g. music radio station, has substantial audience ratings, and reaches a wide group of people, find a way to partner with them.
- **Information Needs Assessment.** Return to your survey, look at the list of media people shared, and what modes of information sharing were listed as most effective. Make sure you employ a few of these in your attempt to connect back to the community.
- **Be consistent.** Make sure you keep an eye on the conversation you started, and have some kind of regular check-in with your audience so they know you are on top of things, and that you are professional. This may mean texting new questions every Wednesday at 2pm, or having monthly meetings with local neighborhood associations. Whatever engagement methods work best for you, make sure you stay consistent.



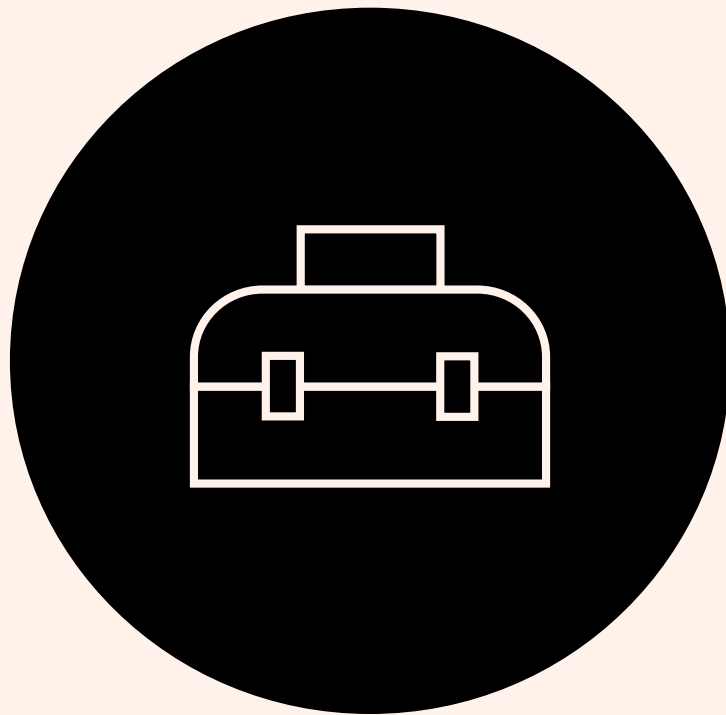
IN ACTION

New Orleans

This is an ongoing process! Every time you set out to inform and engage your community, try to incorporate something you learned from the previous attempt. The best way to make sure you are improving is to check in with the community to be sure you are doing right by them. Put out a call to communities and project participants every few months asking them what's on their mind. Keep a running list of topics and questions that the community shares with you, and work those into your project. Let the community know when you use one of their ideas. And keep trying new and creative ways to engage offline with residents first, before trying to communicate with them online.

As part of its reporting on incarceration rates in Louisiana, the Listening Post project in New Orleans partnered with a youth media organization, Re-Think, to brainstorm community questions around the query, "What do jails and prisons do?" Some of the workshopped questions included, "How do we begin to heal and transform trauma violence in our communities? Would you invest in this community? Why and How? Why does the mass media criminalize black youth?" Students then brainstormed where in the community they would plant these questions. If you engage the right people, they will help you expand the conversation organically.

TOOLBOX



Our toolbox includes guides and templates you'll need when creating your own project as well as resources to help you keep organized and learn from your work.

As you take steps to establish your project, we recommend you keep organized and conduct data analysis for the following reasons...

→ **Track evolving community insight:** Once your assessment is done, and your content production and engagement phases are underway, your network of contacts is going to start growing. The information moving back and forth between you and your participants will be happening through a mix of channels, will grow in volume and will likely diversify in content as new angles and topics arise in the conversation.

Rather than keep multiple lists and logs that may become confusing over time, try using a simple spreadsheet or two that can capture and track this matrix of contacts, channels, topics, questions, answers and other outputs from the start.

→ **To share with local stakeholders:** Your recorded responses, produced content, and data will show the full picture of your project. Having this information at your fingertips will be important when you're looking for funding for your project, finding new partners or interest groups, or sharing your results with local stakeholders and decision makers.

→ **Adaptive project management:** What worked and what didn't? What topics resonate with the community? Who are you hearing from and who is still left out? Your data can uncover answers to these questions that can help you make informed project adjustments in the future. Learn more about how to analyze your data in the Data Analysis section.

→ **Community engagement learning:** Your experience implementing this project is incredibly useful to other people establishing Listening Post projects across the country. We want to know what you're working on, what you're capturing, what's working and what's not so the community of Listening Post projects can learn with you along the way.

KEEP ORGANIZED



The key to successful data organization is preparation. As you roll out your own project, we suggest keeping track of the following:

- **Photos:** These will remind you of the various ways information is getting shared on the ground in your community and will serve as inspiration for your engagement strategies throughout the project. See examples from Baltimore [here](#).
- **An ongoing list of community topics:** As described in the playbook, prior to engaging with your community you will survey your community and determine what issues, concerns, or topics may be of importance or relevance to potential participants. Make a list of these findings and keep it accessible. As you begin to map out and plan your approach to engage the community with questions, your list of issues concerns topics will be the baseline of your organizational approach. For more tips on crafting questions please see the [Guide to Asking Good Questions](#).
- **Survey results:** Your survey will uncover important topics, ways that people receive and exchange information, and who they trust. After completing the survey, write up an executive summary of your findings. This will continue to inform your project design throughout implementation.
- **Contact management:** Your participants are the most important focus when building a community engagement project. Make sure that you collect contact information in a formalized manner that will allow you to grow your list and reach out efficiently. Many SMS platforms/services offer Contact Management Software (CSM). For more information on SMS platforms, see our [SMS Guide](#).
- **Questions asked:** Keep track of the questions you ask your community. You can do this in the Keep Organized template attached. When tracking questions on your data collection sheet, we suggest tagging each question with a topic under which you can collate all responses, stories, conversations and other materials. This will help you track your topics and trends over time.
- **Community responses:** You will be receiving community responses from a number of different channels (SMS, audio, social media, in-person). Organize this information together, this is your rich community content. Tips for organizing this data can be found in the tips section below.

- **Community engagement methods and results:** How are you reaching out to people and asking questions? How many responses do you receive per outreach method? Collecting this information each week will help you refine your outreach methods and tune into what resonates with your community.
- **Content created:** What content has your Listening Post project produced or contributed to the production of by any of the partners (media, bloggers, other content creators) in your network of partners? Keep track of this important content.
- **Learning and results:** Has your engagement produced any new initiatives or dynamics in your community or changed your own organizational approach? Track this learning and share it with our community so that we can all improve our work.

Keeping it together:

We recommend organizing your incoming data and responses by topical folders and subfolders. These folders will contain a general aggregation of all data collected for each question within the duration of the project. A folder structure might look like this again, with all materials associated with a given question located within the subfolders:

Top Folder- Government

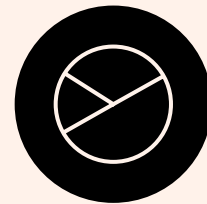
- Subfolder 1- Question 4.22.17- Mayors Wish List
- Subfolder 2- Question 5.12.17- Voting Registration
- Subfolder 3- Question 6.24.17- What Would You Ask City Council

TOOLS

KEEP ORGANIZED TEMPLATE

This data collection template is an example of how you can collect and organize your work. Adapt it to your inputs and needs.

SEE TOOLBOX



Want to learn from all the data you are collecting? Here are some tips on how you can organize and analyze data to inform your project.

The following items are meant to provide a basic foundation for analysis in the absence of other analytic tools that may be available. Many SMS platforms in particular provide robust analytic utilities (SMS Guide), but if you are not using such a platform or if you want to do a baseline analysis on participant contributions such as audio or in-person interviews, you may find these suggestions useful.

These are columns or items you can add to your original template to support your data analysis process:

- **Completed responses** — This figure specifies how many times participants answered each of the questions within a given post (only applicable to posts that contain more than one question).
- **Completed responses to participants' ratio** — divide the number of completed responses by the number of unique participants to get a ratio that illustrates what percentage of participants took the time to answer each of the questions you posed within a given post.
- **Average number of responses per participant** — This figure shows how many times participants are responding to posts with multiple questions. Ideally this figure should be compared with the number of questions within the post to gauge the level of participation.
- **Quits** — this figure simply shows how many respondents indicated that they are no longer interested in participating in the project or initiative. Posts that contain a high number of quits should be closely analyzed to determine what could have been done differently. Note that certain topics (such as children/education) may not appeal to all respondents. Quits apply in particular to SMS engagement as it is unlikely that someone being interviewed or contributing audio or social media information would quit during the process of relaying feedback. However, should that occur, it's important to ask the participant why they are declining to participate further so that you can gather information regarding how better to engage your community in the future
- **Level of engagement** — this can be somewhat subjective, but can give you a good idea of which posts are generating the most engagement. Read the responses and

other inputs that you've collected to gather a loose impression of just how often participants are contributing valuable feedback. Those posts that are deemed to have high engagement (as opposed to medium or low), should be further scrutinized in an effort to determine what exactly resonated with the participants. It can be the question type, the topic or other variables that should be noted and remembered for follow-up questions or lessons learned as they pertain to other posts.

- **Notes**— It's a good idea to jot down some thoughts or takeaways from posts while they're still fresh in your head. As posts accumulate, it's easy to lose track of which posts really worked as well as details regarding the participant responses. You might consider adding information regarding individual contributions for follow up or news stories that might be created down the road.
-

TOOLS

DATA ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

This template is an example of how you can organize your data for analysis. Adapt it to your inputs and needs.

SEE TOOLBOX

DATA ANALYSIS GUIDE

Examples of ways to organize and analyze your data if you are not using an SMS platform with built-in analytic functions.

SEE TOOLBOX

Want direct support and mentoring?

Our team offers assistance to help you start and sustain your community media engagement ideas and projects.

Contact us to learn more.

Send us an email

Listeningpostcollective@internews.org

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