
CTN Community Dialogue Toolkit

The Laconia Daily Sun
Richland Source
Charlotte Journalism Collaborative
FunTimes Magazine
BBC

SOLUTIONS
JOURNALISM
NETWORK

Congratulations! Your newsroom is Complicating the Narratives! You're using looping* in interviews, listening for deeper meaning, and you're exploring the complex sides of the issues that you're covering. You are creating better journalism: stories that lead to understanding and respect for the views of others, rather than contributing to polarization.

But what about your community? Surely the people you serve want to be able to talk about difficult subjects with civility and rediscover the lost American art of listening to people with different beliefs. Hosting such a community conversation is a fresh way for your newsroom to engage people.

If you've thought about holding such a conversation but didn't know where to start, this little toolkit will help. We talked to five very different newsrooms, which held five very different types of community conversations. You'll see exactly what they did and why, how much time and money these events cost, and what they learned.

The Laconia Daily Sun in New Hampshire convened its frequent letters-to-the-editor writers for a Zoom looping workshop. Later, the paper hosted two Zoom "Tolerance Forums." In March, 2021 it is readying to launch a "Virtual Public Square."

The Richland Source in Mansfield, Ohio, hosted "Shop Talk," a series of socially-distanced conversations on race, gender and reconciliation held in a Mansfield barbershop.

The SJN Charlotte Journalism Collaborative (which includes Charlotte Observer, La Noticia, QCityMetro, QNotes, WCNC-TV and WFAE-FM) partnered with Queens University and the North Carolina Humanities Council to host a two-day event (pre-COVID) called "Can We Talk? It Is Possible to Disagree with Grace Again." About 200 people in Charlotte learned and practiced looping.

FunTimes, a magazine for Philadelphia's Black community, brought together African-Americans, Caribbeans and Africans for two Zoom conversations called "The Diaspora Disconnect: Listening to Understand."

BBC radio matched listeners from various parts of England who disagreed for one-on-one conversations, which it reported on over the course of one week. It also brought 50 people from all over the UK to Manchester (pre-COVID) for "Crossing Divides Live:" training and practice in "deep listening."

*Looping is a communication technique developed by Gary Friedman and Jack Himmelstein of The Center for Understanding in Conflict. SJN incorporates this technique in Complicating the Narratives.

A Refresher: What is Complicating the Narratives? Why do it?

Complicating the Narratives (CTN), a project launched by the Solutions Journalism Network, helps journalists to learn new ways to report on controversial and polarizing problems. It draws on the experience of experts in conflict mediation. When reporters use these strategies, they listen better, ask more revealing questions, effectively introduce opposing viewpoints, and embrace nuance in their reports. They tell more accurate, richer, and fuller stories.

The Solutions Journalism Network offers training in Complicating the Narratives that is tailored to news organizations' needs. These training sessions focus on techniques and strategies connected to the 4 pillars of CTN, specifically how to:

- Pillar 1: Listen differently when covering a contentious, polarizing issue
- Pillar 2: Go beneath the problem (to uncover motivations, not just positions)
- Pillar 3: Embrace complexity when reporting on divisive issues
- Pillar 4: Counter confirmation bias (and any biases journalists may bring to a specific topic/issue)

Complicating the Narratives can help news organizations produce stronger, more inclusive reporting on challenging issues. We believe it will help audiences understand opposing views and engage more with the news. And our hope is that it will help lead to a healthier political debate and healthier democracy.

Here are resources on Complicating the Narratives.

1. [Complicating the Narratives. What if journalists covered... | by Solutions Journalism | The Whole Story](#)
 - a. Video: [Amanda Ripley: Complicating the Narrative](#)
2. [22 Questions that 'Complicate the Narrative' | by Solutions Journalism | The Whole Story](#)
3. [Complicating the Narratives: How we're moving this work forward](#)

Examples of Community Conversations

The Laconia Daily Sun

The Laconia Daily Sun
Laconia, NH

What

The paper did CTN training for frequent letters-to-the-editor-writers
It hosted two Public Tolerance Forums with panel discussions about racism
An ongoing Digital Public Square seeks civic dialogue

Resources required

Time: Medium
Money: Minimal

How it began

The Laconia Daily Sun had a long-standing policy of publishing nearly all letters to the editor. But as at many other news outlets, the letters were descending into name calling and vitriol. “The personal attacks were very concerning to us,” said Julie Hirshan Hart, the paper’s digital editor. “People were going at each other instead of the issues.” In April, 2019, a frequent letter-writer (who had declared his intention to run for public office) wrote one denying that the Holocaust existed. The paper debated whether to publish it, finally deciding that people had a right to know the beliefs of their neighbors, especially a candidate for office. It published the letter, receiving much criticism from the community.

A bit later, two regular letter writers — Eric Herr, a liberal, and Bruce Jenket, a conservative — decided to meet for coffee to hash out their public debate about tax policy “which would have risked boring readers to tears,” they said. They wrote a joint letter to the paper about their meeting in January, 2020. They had a civil conversation and from there, developed a cordial relationship, which they both said they valued.

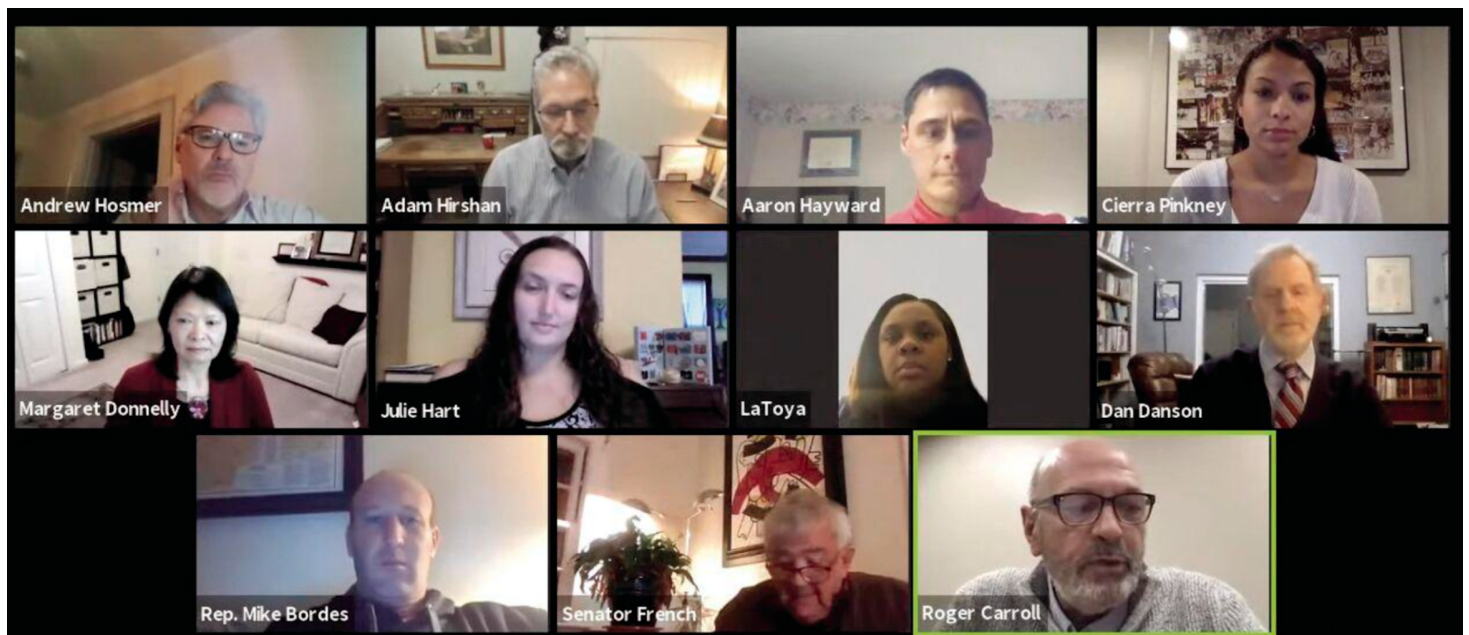
What happened

Herr and Jenket's new relationship inspired the Daily Sun to introduce other pairs of letter-writers. Hart invited eight frequent letter-writers to a virtual meeting in May, 2020. Six of them — three on the left, and three on the right — showed up for the two-hour session.

Hélène Biandudi Hofer, SJN's program manager for Complicating the Narratives, and Leah Todd Lin, SJN's Northeast region manager, participated as well. Biandudi Hofer and Todd Lin

demonstrated looping. Then Hart put the participants in breakout rooms, in pairs, to discuss issues they had earlier said were hot-button, both local (affordable housing) and national (media treatment of President Trump and the election).

At the same time, the paper changed its letters policy, requiring tighter, more focused letters, and limiting the number published by each writer. It turned the focus to local topics, and solicited new local voices.



Next, the Daily Sun took its efforts public. Its first Tolerance Forum took place on December 23, 2020 — shortly after Dawn Johnson, a state representative and local school board member, posted an anti-Semitic meme from a neo-Nazi website. The Democratic mayor and a Republican state senator both participated, and the city government hosted the forum. (The paper invited Johnson but she did not attend.) Some 80 people attended on Zoom (epic turnout

for Laconia), watching and asking questions as Roger Carroll, the paper's managing editor, moderated a panel of eight discussing how tolerant the region was to people of varying views and what the community could do to allow people to increase their tolerance.

The next forum, in January, was more contentious and debate-ish, and fewer people attended — about 50 or 60, Hart said.

A third event, planned for this spring, will take a different format, Hart said. Before that event, the paper plans to identify pairs of people who hold opposing views on subjects such as school funding, and train them in looping. (The first two panels did not have training.) During the event, each pair will talk, modeling civil dialogue about difficult issues. "It's important for the community to see people just like them having a conversation," Hart said.

The paper has started yet a third new activity. In February 2021, it set up a pilot online forum, which it calls a Digital Public Square, and invited everyone who wrote letters or attended earlier events to participate. About 50 people comment, blog, and discuss a topic of the week in real time. It is a closed group, but if it is successful, the Daily Sun plans to make it public. The paper will also teach participants looping and upgrade the software.

Resources

Hart said she spends a few (enjoyable) hours a week on the project. She also has occasional volunteer help from Eric Herr. There were no costs aside from a Zoom subscription. If the paper chooses Discourse software for the Public Square, that will cost \$100/month.

Impact

Hart believes Laconia residents are striving to understand each other. "I've been constantly surprised at the continuous momentum we've had since we started," she said. "It's carried us all the way through to the place where we have an online dialogue of people who really want to know what people on the other side think, and understand them. We've certainly seen people ask better questions. Some speakers I'm not sure we could have gotten into a room together otherwise."

She said that the number of letters with personal attacks the paper receives has dropped by half. She said that the community reads and engages with letters to the editor more now.

And the project has helped the paper as well, Hart said. Overall, the Sun's audience has expanded. (There might be other factors contributing to that.) "I did see comments during the forum that were very positive about the paper stepping up to be a facilitator of this work.

Others said, 'why are they getting involved in this?' Someone else said 'someone's got to and you're not doing it. "Being a community newspaper, sometimes we have to remember the word community before we remember the word newspaper," she said.

What Hart would do differently

Hart said that she should have given a brief looping training and demonstration at the first two Tolerance Forums. "That would have helped them understand what we were looking for," she said.

More advice

Make community dialogue an outgrowth of a new opinion section. She wrote an essay for the American Press Institute that said: "For other small papers considering changing the format of their opinion pages, consider ways to model constructive dialogue between groups in your community. Maybe that means changing your editorial submission guidelines, offering training in looping, or dedicating your opinion section to local issues and reducing national political content.

"The past year has brought an underlying goal into clearer focus: to be a place where our communities might turn in their search for solutions to issues that polarize our region."

Contact

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richlandsource

Richland Source
Mansfield, OH

What

Shop Talk was a series of community conversations in a local Black-owned barbershop

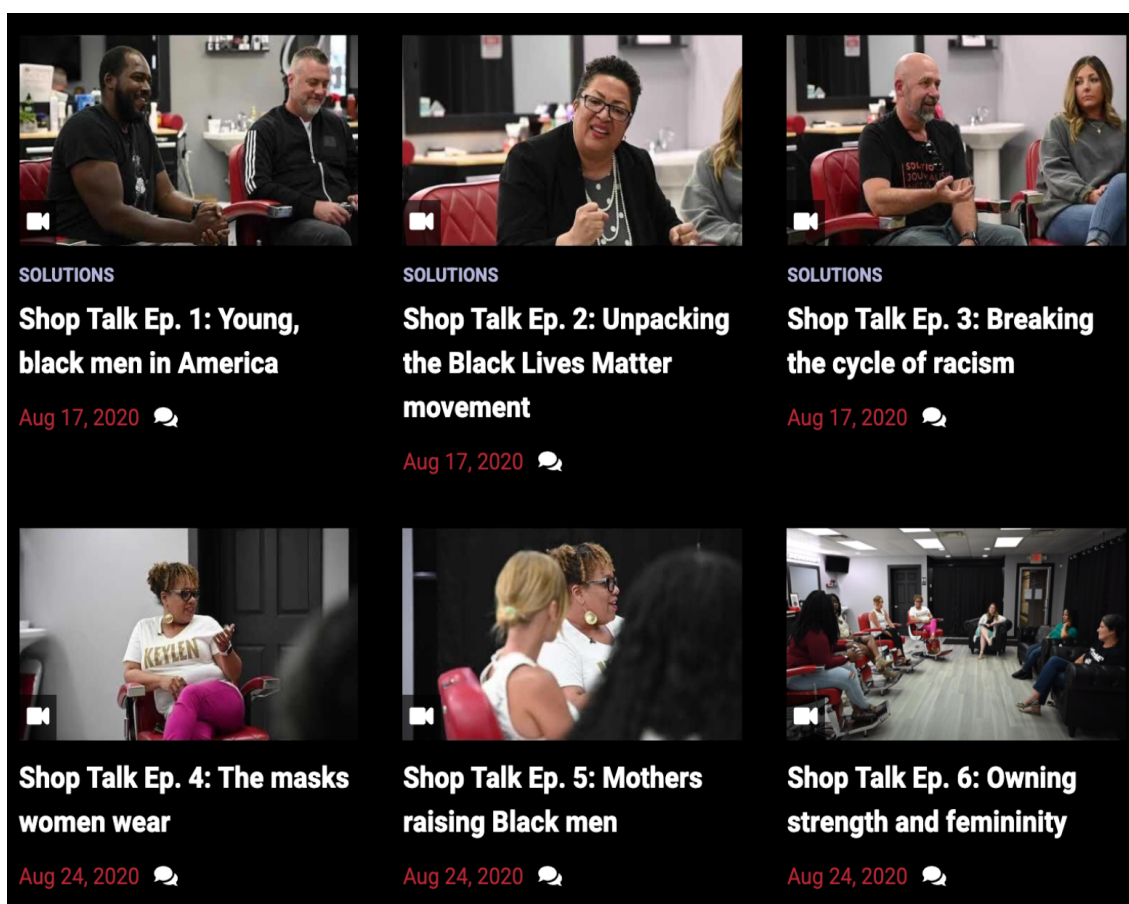
Resources required

Time: Minimal for the paper, as a partner did the community work

Money: About \$25,000, for high-quality video

How it began

The idea came from Damien Beauford, owner of 419 Barbershop in Mansfield. After George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, many people Beauford knew needed to process their thoughts. “Not necessarily about that event, but about life in the community,” he said. The answer, for him, was communication. “All I know how to do is talk to people. One of my mentors told me life moves at the speed of relationships,” he said.



Beauford called Jay Allred, the Source's publisher — and five days later, on May 31, 2020, opened his barbershop on a Sunday night for the first conversation. It was the day after Mansfield's only Black Lives Matter protest. Allred moderated a small group of people talking about race, sitting — six feet apart — in barber chairs and on a bench. Beauford recruited a friend to film it.

"We could have sat there for literally hours," Beauford said.

"It's really powerful, and something we should be a part of," Allred recalled thinking at the time. He immediately went to Complicating the Narratives resources. The whole newsroom knew about CTN, and two staff members who had attended a training by Amanda Ripley had trained their colleagues. Allred suggested that the next conversation use Ripley's list of [22 Complicating the Narratives questions](#), such as: what is oversimplified about this issue? What do you want the other side to know about you? What experiences have shaped your views?

That turned into a [series of Sunday night 90-minute gatherings](#). Different groups talked about how society perceives young Black men, the Black Lives Matter movement, the masks women wear, mothers raising Black men, the possibilities for reconciliation — and, of course, potential solutions. The moderators were Allred, Source editor Larry Phillips, city editor Carl Hunnell and Brittany Schock, the Source's engagement and solutions editor. Another Source reporter sat in the corner and covered each session.

The Source relied entirely on Beauford, a born connector, to recruit participants. He said that recruiting was just a matter of sending texts — and that after the first session, people started to contact him. He tried to balance the group by age and race. It was less balanced ideologically, which is perhaps inevitable for conversations about race in a Black barbershop. "There was one man I think was anti-protests, and some who misconstrued 'defunding the police,' and opposed it," Beauford said. "But everyone was there with an open mind." Participants did not get looping training, but they were told the purpose was to listen. With some exceptions, they did.

Resources

The time required was minimal. This was in part due to Beauford's connections, but it was also because the project got going in a hurry. "We were trying to take advantage of the moment," said Schock. "We felt we can't get bogged down in planning and logistics, because it has to happen now. We didn't take a lot of time to weigh the pros and cons. Beauford said planning took almost no time — the group held one brainstorming session to choose topics.

Schock said that for Source staff, most time was spent on distributing media of the conversations. In some ways, the newsroom treated the conversations as another thing it covered. But it was special content. The conversations were not aired live. Instead, a local digital media company, DRM Productions, recorded each session with multiple cameras and good sound, then edited the sessions for sound and visual quality (not changing the content), producing in total ten videos. Richland Source staff did spend time reviewing each video with DRM.

“It was more intentional and thoughtful than video of a city council meeting,” said Allred. “We wanted to create something that could live and be useful beyond the summer of 2020.” The paper created a Shop Talk YouTube channel, and a playlist on its own channel. They stripped the audio and made a podcast. They paid to boost the videos on Facebook and YouTube.

The video was the only costly part — and the Source paid nothing for it. The paper raises a lot of money from the community. DRM had pledged \$25,000 in in-kind services, and the paper decided to use it on Shop Talk.

Impact

The videos did not attract a wide audience — not surprising for such a heavy topic. “They did okay,” said Allred. “Measuring purely by how many eyeballs they reached, they were not successful.”

But the Source wasn’t looking for eyeballs, it was looking for understanding, and there are indications that Shop Talk has produced some. (It’s hard to separate the impact of Shop Talk from the killing of Floyd, the protests, and everything else going on.) Participants lingered after each conversation to chat and exchange contact information. Allred said he has talked to at least five big local employers (“these were people who were not under any outside pressure to change,” he said) who have changed their hiring practices and their employee development policies. At least one resident recruited five friends to watch the videos at the same time, and then talk about them. The paper made an effort to get school district leaders to watch — and now the principal of Ontario High School is beginning similar conversations inside the school. Beauford said some people told him that Shop Talk had helped them hold difficult conversations at home.

What they would do differently

At the time, it was the right decision to rush, to take advantage of the moment. But if there were more time, Schock said she would use it to strategize.

Her big regret was that the two local police chiefs declined her invitation to participate. Schock said the project could have benefitted from more participants in power — people whose choices affect the Black community. There were people who turned us down that we would have loved to be there,” she said.

Also, Beauford and Schock both said the moderators needed more training. Some just ran down the list of 22 questions to get through them all, rather than actively listening. “It’s very different than how we do interviews as reporters,” Schock said.

More advice

Partner with the community. In this case, it is more accurate to say that the community partnered with the paper. Beauford made the planning sound easy: “It was a couple of texts. I asked, and they showed up,” he said.

“But that’s because they know Damien and know where his heart is,” Schock said.

“Understand that you don’t have to know how to do this,” Allred said he would tell news organizations. “But you need to think about who to do it with.” People in the community know how. Find them.

Helpful Links

- [Podcast site for Shop Talk](#)
- [Shop Talk: Panel addresses how to continue uncomfortable conversations](#) (one of the first articles about Shop Talk)

Contacts

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Charlotte Journalism Collaborative
Charlotte, NC

What

“Charlotte, Can We Talk? It is possible to disagree with grace again” was a two-day event at Queens University that trained 200 city leaders, concerned citizens, students and journalists in deep listening for understanding (aka looping).

Resources required

Time: Considerable

Money: Considerable

How it began

The idea for “Charlotte, Can We Talk?” came from Rick Thames. He had been executive editor of the Charlotte Observer. But by the time he read Amanda Ripley’s Complicating the Narrative essay in 2018, he had retired from the Observer and was teaching at Queens University. “It made all kinds of connections for me,” he said of the essay. “I grappled with that many times in my career — what can a journalist do to be more helpful in these [divisive] situations? She had a fresh take.” He thought the university could invite Ripley to speak.

In the back of Thames’ mind was the fact that Charlotte — a very blue city — was to host the Republican National Convention in 2020. “From talking to city leaders, I knew they were nervous,” he said.

The university was interested. So was the North Carolina Humanities Council — Thames sits on their board. The Council had a grant from the Mellon Foundation for a program involving civic dialogue and perhaps journalism. Thames also invited the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative — he’s a member of that, too — which includes the Charlotte Observer, La Noticia, QCityMetro, QNotes, WCNC-TV and WFAE-FM. It also has three community partners: Queens University, the non-profit organization Free Press and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library. With help from the Solutions Journalism Network, the Collaborative members report on affordable housing. The Collaborative became the third host, but its members, besides Thames, did not actively help with planning. Michael Davis, SJN’s Southern region manager, said that the Collaborative had an advisory role. “The event took place early in the CJC’s evolution, and the partners were just getting to know one another,” Davis said.

The group discussed whether to hold an event for journalists or the general public and decided on both. Participants would work in groups with others in their profession. And any Charlotte resident who “respects the deeply American tradition” of listening to others with opposing views was welcome. Informational material stressed the event was non-partisan and “[t]he point is NOT to change one another’s views. It is to understand how we can make conflict useful, rather than toxic.”

What happened

The event took place over two days. On Thursday evening March 14, 2019, Ripley gave a keynote address, followed by a reception.

Friday’s portion started with a sit-down lunch for about 200 people. Prominent Charlotte residents with experience in conflict resolution told stories, including the mayor. Then participants went to different rooms, broken out by profession: journalists, concerned citizens, civic and business leaders, students, government officials. Each room had trained facilitators who taught the principles of CTN and then paired off people for looping. Then the group reconvened and people reported back on what happened in their breakout rooms.

Resources

Most of the money came from the North Carolina Humanities Council’s grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The major expenses were the reception and lunch, and Ripley’s speaking fee — which she lowered for the event. Queens University donated all the facilities. The facilitators received small (and unexpected) stipends at the end.

A simpler version of “Can We Talk?” would have been possible on a smaller budget. Thames was planning exactly that (it didn’t happen, because of COVID). It would have gone from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on a single day, with no reception, an informal lunch, and a less expensive speaker to kick it off. “There are many people who can talk about this,” Thames said. He was thinking of doing it himself.

Planning the event took Thames a great deal of time. He first met with the Humanities Council and the university nine months before the event. Logistics, facilities, publicity, training of facilitators and reservations all had to happen. Thames could manage it because he was only teaching one class at the university.

Impact

At the closing gathering, many people said the experience had been meaningful and eye-opening. Some said they would use it in their jobs (as a minister or teacher, for example).

Thames has heard of many incidents of people using looping at the university, especially by people who had been facilitators.

Thames said the group whose participation most disappointed was journalists. He invited dozens, and only about two dozen turned out.

“There was good participation from the Charlotte Collaborative,” he said.

The Collaborative members and a few guests shared a restaurant dinner with Ripley before her speech (paid for by SJN.) That allowed them to talk privately and ask her direct questions, helping them to understand this valuable interviewing practice. Davis said that the event really put the Collaborative on Charlotte’s map, as well.

What Thames would do differently

He would have done more to get journalists to participate — the invitations to journalists should have been more direct about how they could benefit, especially with the Republican convention coming. “The trick for journalists is for them to see this is something they can truly use in their reporting,” he said.

And he would have devoted more time to practice looping. The participants got to loop twice, once as practice on a non-controversial subject and the second time for real — but both times with the same person. He thinks it would have been important to give people the chance to practice with at least two different partners. “The first time, people walk away dazed and not sure they buy into it,” he said. “But if people get to try it out a couple of times, the light bulb goes off.”

More advice

“This could be done over Zoom,” Thames said. “It’s a little harder. But then you can involve people who otherwise couldn’t be involved.”

The importance of getting local partners can’t be stressed enough. A media organization should pair with a college, community organization, civic foundation, public library, Kiwanis Club, business council — be creative. (Almost) everyone wants people to start talking civilly to each other again.

Helpful Links

- Slide deck from event
- A forum teaches us how to disagree once again. Gracefully. (video interview w/Amanda Ripley and one of our partners, Rick Thames from Queens University)
- Think that as a journalist you're a great listener and questioner? Think again - then do something about it. (write up by event attendee from Poynter)
- Can we talk? - Bitter Southerner (write up by another event attendee)

Contacts

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FunTimes Magazine
Philadelphia, PA

What

“How Diaspora Disconnects Can be Bridged with Listening” was two Zoom conversations to promote understanding between groups in the Black community

Resources required

Time: Minimal

Money: Minimal

How it began

FunTimes is a Philadelphia magazine with the mission of “Celebrating Africa and the diaspora.” Publisher Eric Nzeribe said that the community experiences communications challenges which he calls the “diaspora disconnect” — prejudice and misunderstanding among African immigrants, Caribbean immigrants and African Americans.

EST. 1992
FUNTIMES
CELEBRATING AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

FRIDAY HAPPY HOUR

THE DIASPORA DISCONNECT

Listening to Understand

How Diaspora Disconnects can be bridged through listening.

FRI. NOV. 20, 2020 | 6:00 - 7:30PM | ZOOM

HOST:
JENNIFER K. SMITH

HÉLÈNE BIANDUDI H. MIKHAEL SIMMONDS
Manager, Complicating the Narrative Project
Solutions Journalism Network

DR. TAHIYA MCCOY N.
Professor of Behavioral Sciences,
Global Governance and International Economics

DR. YOMI GARNETT
CEO
Royal Biographical Institute

DR. KARRÉN DUNKLEY
Northeast Representative,
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Phone: (215) 954 6300 WWW: funtimesmagazine.com

What happened

The second event, on January 20, 2021, had a different structure (NOTE: the recording is not the full event, intro + looping demo only, they stopped recording during breakout rooms). There was no panel; instead, about 35 people participated. (Nzeribe said that after the first event had introduced the concept, volunteers were plentiful.) Biandudi Hofer and Simmonds demonstrated looping. Then the host paired participants in breakout rooms to share how the disconnect in the African diaspora has had a personal impact on their lives. Participants looped their partner's experience. Then the group came back together to share learnings from the breakout room conversations. This event lasted for 90 minutes.

Resources

CTN Community Dialogue Toolkit

Impact

Nzeribe said he knows of “one or two people” who changed their opinions as a result of the events. Several participants announced they would use the techniques at home with family. People met each other who wouldn’t have — “with intention to set up a working or business relationship,” said Nzeribe.

What he would do differently

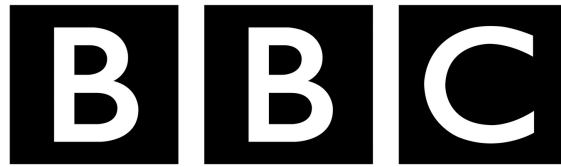
“I would advertise the first event more,” Nzeribe said. “Bridging the community and connecting is such an important part of what we do as a magazine. We wanted a lot more people to participate. The Facebook video reached more, of course, but these viewers couldn’t ask questions.”

More advice

Just do it as a community service, urged Nzeribe. “Journalism per se wrongly benefits so much from controversy and sensationalism. But CTN takes you in the other direction. “We can solve a lot of problems and differences in society if we listen to understand, then inform and educate rather than contest or argue.”

Contact

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BBC

What

The BBC-wide “Crossing Divides” project featured reports from around the world. In England, radio stations produced local one-on-one “deep listening” conversations. The “Crossing Divides Live” festival in Manchester, England brought 190 people together in person for deep listening training and practice.

Resources required

Time: “It took bloody ages.”

Money: Enormous

How it began

Emily Kasriel, the BBC’s head of editorial partnerships and special projects, has long been interested in Complicating the Narratives-style practices and bringing people together across divides. Through that work, she has become increasingly interested in ways for people with different perspectives to connect and understand each other, and thus has been focusing on Deep Listening, conducting research into Deep Listening as a Practitioner in Residence at the London School of Economics. In March, 2021, she even trained 200 Lebanese citizens in deep listening, part of a partnership between the BBC World Service and the British Council.



Manchester-based illustrator Myro Coates (@MyroDoodles) recorded the events at [#CrossingDividesLive](#) on the window of the BBC office. ✨

She gathered quotes from our participants and speakers, and turned them into art. 🎨💡

More 🗨️: bbc.in/crossingdivide...



Kasriel was also inspired by the German national news site Zeit Online's Germany Talks, (which has now gone international as My Country Talks). Zeit's project linked volunteers who were politically far apart but geographically close, so they could get together to discuss contentious issues.

What happened

The conversations also grew out of the journalistic series "Crossing Divides" that Kasriel began shepherding in 2018. All production areas of the BBC, from local radio to the World Service, created stories on people bridging divisions. (Here's a video interview with Kasriel about the project.) Examples: two former Indonesian child soldiers from opposite sides in conflict who met and became friends, or the story of two Egyptian women, one Jewish and one Palestinian Muslim, who meet weekly to clean, rescue and repair the country's endangered Jewish

synagogues, cemeteries and libraries. A reporter brought prominent anti-Brexit activist Gina Miller together for a conversation with her troll, who had sent her death threats on social media. (He apologized.)

BBC Two has even produced a reality show: the network is airing its third season of Pilgrimage, which follows seven "celebrity pilgrims" as they journey together to promote tolerance for all faiths and cultures.

The network also ran service pieces on such topics as the benefits of talking to strangers and how to get on with someone you hate at work.

As part of Crossing Divides, Kasriel trained all 39 local BBC radio stations in England to find three local divides and put together a pair to talk about each issue — 117 conversations in total. Topics ranged from Brexit and immigration, to Ubers vs black cabs, to whether a statue of Margaret Thatcher should go up in her hometown. BBC aired stories about the conversations during a single week in March 2019 across all the stations.

On March 5, 2020 — 6 days before the World Health Organization declared that COVID was a pandemic — the BBC's national radio service "5 Live" brought 50 people from all over the UK to its offices in Manchester for a day-long festival-like event called "Crossing Divides Live."

Kasriel conducted training in deep listening. The group practiced, and then broke apart into duos for conversation. In the afternoon, 140 diverse Manchester residents joined them.

Resources

Colossal. But since Crossing Divides was a company-wide reporting initiative, costs were spread as well.

The Crossing Divides Live event itself encompassed lunch, cake, an artist, a speaker from Denmark, security and travel for participants from various parts of the UK. Well, it is the BBC.

It was no less costly in terms of time. “I had my researcher for months working with community groups to source people from very diverse communities,” Kasriel said. “It took bloody ages.”

Impact

The Crossing Divides stories were frequent features on the BBC; anyone in Britain or users of the World Service wondering how to build relationships with people who were different could find plenty of useful lessons and examples.

The Crossing Divides Live event was covered all day by 5 Live and the BBC News Channel as well as featuring on the BBC World Service Outside Source radio show.

Did all this make England more empathetic and tolerant? Perhaps some people. We know it helped the people who participated. After the festival, feedback evaluated by academics demonstrated that participants felt that they knew better how to listen properly to people with opinions different from their own, were more confident about talking to people they disagreed with and could feel more empathy towards them.

And there was another victory: “Nobody took offence and attacked anyone,” Kasriel said of the Manchester event. “That was one we had identified as being a possible problem.”

What she would do differently

“Not have a global pandemic.”

More advice

There is a lot of value in bringing people together.

“It is great to have an inspiring speaker for a live event, who themselves has crossed divides, to inspire others to make the journey,” Kasriel said.

Helpful links

- [A BBC / Twitter summary of the deep listening event for Crossing Divides](#)
- [An SJN interview with the BBC's Emily Kasriel](#)

