

HOW TO BECOME A LISTENING NEWSROOM

3 STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LISTENING SESSION

Plan a listening session.

Set a foundation to actively engage with the communities you serve.

Listen to community.

When people see your effort to understand the issues they face, it builds trust.

Unpack what you learned. Let community listening direct your newsroom's solutions coverage and generate story ideas.



ENSURING THAT EVERYDAY CITIZENS HAVE A VOICE IN THE CRUCIAL DECISIONS THAT SHAPE LOCAL MEDIA TAKES INVESTMENT.

1. PLANNING A IN-PERSON OR VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION SETS A FOUNDATION TO ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITIES YOU SERVE.

- Create Intentional Goals – Work with your team to define why the listening session is needed. Consider how different stakeholders might benefit from the session. Define a focus for growing community understanding, for example, you might want to learn from a specific audience or about information needs around a certain beat.
- Recruit Attendees
 - Step 1: Define preliminary solutions communities of focus. What types of stories are you hoping to uncover? What people might be in the closest proximity to existing community solutions related to your focus area?
 - Step 2: Share your listening session invitation. You may choose to publicize your upcoming listening session in your newsroom’s existing channels. This is a great way to keep your loyal readers abreast of the investment you’re making in community listening and solutions journalism.
 - Step 3: Use this time to think about how you can reach people who are closest to the topic. Does your newsroom have community partners, board members or other civic engagement leaders who have previously raised their hand to help your newsroom? Is there an organization you could partner with to gain trust and credibility? Pro tip: Look for community partners who have community engagement efforts of their own.
- Set an Agenda – Create a schedule and a list of questions for a guided conversation that keeps the listening session on track.
- Draft Community Agreements – Co-create a place for community members to feel comfortable sharing their experiences.



2. LISTENING TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS HELPS BUILD TRUST. AS THEY SEE YOUR EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES THEY FACE AND THE SOLUTIONS THEY MAY ALREADY BE IMPLEMENTING.

- Guided Questions – Ask guided questions and actively listen to responses.
- Seek to understand, not to respond – Follow-up with additional questions to further understand their experiences, perspectives and opinions.
- Investing in each other – Allow the conversation to flow naturally while facilitating the conversation and engaging others throughout the process.

3. UNPACKING THE MEETING WILL HELP DIRECT YOUR NEWSROOM'S SOLUTIONS COVERAGE AND GENERATE STORY IDEAS TO CREATE FURTHER IMPACT.

- Review community comments – Take a look at notes from the listening session and note potential solutions.
- Editorial planning – Create a plan to produce stories ideas that directly came out of the listening session. If efforts don't close the loop on community understanding by integrating community needs into editorial strategy, then the engagement process will only be extractive and, worse yet, could further marginalize the communities we aim to serve.
- Evaluating the meeting – Talk about what went well and what could've gone better to improve your next listening session.
- Share your takeaways – Once you've digested all the information, share what you learned and your planned next steps with people who attended. Show people that you actually listened.

TIPS:

- Make it your own! (Fun, structured, facilitators, using sticky notes, food, etc)
- Always have a team to help you! (colleges and/or community partners)
- Consider how you can continue to engage community members after the listening session! (join your community advisory board, interview for a story, ask to stay engaged for future tips, etc.)



EXAMPLE:

The Kansas City Beacon hosted a labor and transportation listening session in the fall of 2022 as part of the Solutions Journalism Network Labor Cohort. Mili Mansaray, the Beacon's housing and labor reporter, wanted to involve the voice of the community in her reporting. For the online listening session we recruited and involved Kansas City residents and advocates and asked about buses, streetcars, sidewalks, charging stations, and anything that assists or makes it difficult for residents to get from one place to the next. Many things came out of this active conversation, including a set list of potential story ideas that directly came from the community, including the history of the public transportation system, safety, and how transit, housing, jobs, education, recreation and life interconnect. Next we began reporting on these ideas from the listening session. Below is an example of a solution story that came from a resident with concerns about bus driver shortages.

KCATA tackled its driver shortage. Now, bus drivers want to see more change

The local operator union and KCATA came to terms on a new base pay and added benefits. The experienced drivers organizing for change say these new terms are just a start.



by Mili Mansaray

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Reggie Hall, LaVale Smith and Will Howard are all members of the Amalgamated Transit Union 1287 as well as longtime drivers for the KCATA. (Zach Bauman/The Beacon)