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Impact Focus Groups:

How to organize discussions
about your solutions journalism
— and why you should



Introduction	3
Why run a focus group?	4
Setting a goal	4
Recruiting for a solutions journalism focus group	6
Preparing the group	8
Technical setup	9
Length and schedule	10
Facilitating a discussion	11
Exercises to encourage discussion	12
How to analyze the results	14
Post-group communication	15
Sharing analysis internally	15
What next?	16
Useful resources	18

Introduction

If you're trying to better understand the impact of your solutions journalism, focus groups can offer invaluable qualitative insights.

Running focus groups before reporting can help you understand how your communities and your audience might define impact as well as aid you in determining the direction of reporting that would most resonate with them. This can provide crucial information for **your impact hypothesis statement**, which will shape how you track and measure impact.

Holding focus groups after stories have been produced can uncover how your communities and your audience understand your stories and what they mean to them.

While analytics can give you a sense of reach and engagement, and surveys can provide some insights into feelings of empowerment or action, a focus group can offer a deeper view into what impact means for your communities and your audience, and how they feel after reading your stories. These groups can provide perspectives and insights that complement data from analytics and surveys.

This guide will help you prepare, run and analyze the results of a focus group to plan or capture the impact of your reporting.

For the purposes of this guide, we're not talking about market research groups that are traditionally used by companies to gather feedback on a product or consumer trend. Impact focus groups will give you feedback on specific stories, projects and editorial products, but they are also listening exercises to deepen your understanding of particular audiences and communities. This means smaller groups too.

Impact Focus Groups guide is a public resource produced by Fathom with the Solutions Journalism Network.

Consult [SJV's website](#) if you have outcomes to share from using this guide or questions.

Why run a focus group?

To assess whether a focus group is the right tool for your newsroom or a particular reporting project, consider the following questions:

- Do you have a clear sense of **your impact hypothesis** and goals for your reporting project?
- Would speaking with a broad section of your community help you define these?
- Do you want to understand how your community, readers and viewers might define impact?
- Would a focus group help you set the direction of your reporting?
- Do you want to build greater connections with a particular community or group within a community?
- Do you have lots of superficial data on a topic or community but want to go deeper?
- Do you have ideas or assumptions about a reporting topic that you want to test or challenge with the help of a wider range of perspectives?
- Is your community or audience's input crucial to how you will measure and track the impact of this reporting project?

If any of these questions are important to you, a focus group can help you get an answer.

Setting a goal

What is your goal for this research? What are you trying to get out of it and why?

Your **intended impact goals** should connect with your organizational objectives and may already have been determined ahead of other work you've done to build community connections and understand your audience, such as audience surveys. Look at these goals and the outcome of any existing audience research to determine the goal for your focus groups.

For example, your focus group goal may be to test an idea that was raised by a post-reporting survey embedded in a series of articles.

Setting a clear goal may help you decide:

- Who needs to be represented in the focus group;
- The questions or discussion topics that take priority;
- How best to explain the focus group to participants.

Think about:

- How you will use the information that you collect (to make changes, inspire new stories or products, solve problems or make decisions).

Examples of focus group goals:

- The goal of our focus group is to understand what solutions identified in our reporting are most accessible to agricultural workers in Montana and what barriers to taking action remain.
- The goal of our focus group is to gather feedback and ideas on how we could better distribute our solutions reporting on economic opportunities for the Latinx community to members of that community.
- The goal of our focus group is to gather post-reporting feedback on our solutions series focused on affordable housing in Santa Fe and the real-world actions taken by readers.
- The goal of our focus group is to help us decide how to advance our solutions reporting on democratic and civil rights in Mississippi by reviewing three different editorial plans.

Insights from Detour Detroit's impact focus group

When Detour Detroit, an independent local journalism organization, ran a focus group to better understand the impact of a reporting series on social mobility, it found that:

- Solutions reporting provides people with something they can't find elsewhere;
- Solutions journalism helps people feel connected to the community;
- People want a clear call to action;
- Solutions reporting gives deeper insights into problems

Recruiting for a solutions journalism focus group

You will also want a target number of participants, which brings us to recruitment. Opinions vary about the optimum size of focus groups where the objective will be an open discussion and a listening exercise. Between six and 10 people in a group should be straightforward to moderate and provide valuable insights. More than this could dilute the insights you get and be harder to manage. Groups of three to four people can work, but you will need to create an environment where participants don't feel pressured to fill air time.

Participants shouldn't know one another, but might share connections, such as where they live, the sector they work in or their values.

There are two important factors to consider when recruiting for a focus group. One is the practical side of distributing and promoting a call for participants. The other is ensuring the recruits are either representative of your audience and the communities with which you are trying to build connections or able to answer the questions posed by your research goal.

For example, if the goal of your research is to better understand the impact of your reporting on local initiatives aimed at increasing skills and employment, you might expect to see the following people participating in your focus group:

- Local employers
- A participant in one or more of the programs
- Job seekers
- School graduates or those entering the labor market

Think about the other demographic details that will give you the richest discussion and outcome from your focus group. Do you want participants:

- From a range of ages?
- To reflect a diversity of gender identities?
- To be representatives of a particular community, demographic group or geographical area?
- To be regular readers or viewers of your publication?

These factors may determine how you distribute the call to participate in your focus group(s). If you are looking to run a workshop with members of a particular community, where do they get their information? Where will they see a call to participate in a focus group? You need to be visible there.

For the sign-up page, consider using an embedded form (such as a Google Form) with a brief description of the focus group and what it's for. For an impact focus group in 2022, Detour Detroit asked for the following fields in its sign-up form and kept it very simple:

- Email address
- Name
- ZIP code
- One sentence on why this opportunity interests you

Asking for someone's ZIP code, for example, is an easy-to-answer question that provides several layers of geographic data, from a regional area in a specific state to a group of delivery addresses in that region. Other demographic information may be gleaned from the ZIP code, too, such as whether the respondent lives in a rural or urban area; public sources of socioeconomic data for a given location can also yield more insight.

When it comes to distributing the call for focus group participants, options may include:

1. An announcement embedded on your homepage or in articles online and in print;
2. An additional question at the end of an impact survey;
3. A social media campaign promoting a sign-up sheet and more information;
4. A promotion in your regular newsletters or dedicated mailing;
5. Flyers and posters distributed in certain areas or communities or to community groups;
6. Working with a third-party recruiter or a community organization (useful if you are not looking for regular readers or viewers).

Choose the combination that best meets the habits of your target participants in the focus group(s).

Aim to promote the sign-up sheet, form or contact details at least two weeks in advance of your preferred date (ideally further ahead) to give participants fair notice and allow you to gather enough people.

Preparing the group

1. Timing

Think about the needs and lives of your focus group participants: Do they have children? Are they shift workers? Considering these needs will influence your choice of proposed time and day for the focus group. Pick the option that is likely to boost attendance and minimize no-shows.

If you have enough flexibility, you might suggest a range of times and dates for your participants, but setting the date in advance may save time.

2. Briefing the participants ahead of time

Explain how the focus group will run, where it will take place, what it's for and what's expected of participants in advance, via an email, phone call or other contact with invitees. Give them a chance to ask operational questions in advance to save time during the session. Be clear about how the conversation may be used; for example, let them know if you are planning to use a quote as a testimonial or as part of an impact report.

3. Participation incentives

A hard incentive, such as a gift card for a local store, voucher, discounted subscription or cash, may encourage sign-ups to your focus group or be useful to reward participants for contributing their time. A caveat: You may need to do additional screening of participants if a hard reward is in place to ensure people aren't signing up just to get a prize but have engaged with your reporting, newsroom brand or the issue at stake.

An alternative reward for participation could be involving the journalist or editor who worked on the story in the focus group for a Q&A. This can be a great draw for those interested in participating in a focus group, but it may also make participants wary of sharing honest and open feedback if the reporter of the story is there. If you're worried that the journalist's presence will limit people's willingness to contribute or give feedback on reporting, ask the journalist to join after part of the session is complete.

4. Ask factual questions in advance

Whether through a recruitment form or as a follow-up, it's best to collect answers to factual questions — name, age, location, occupation — in advance so you can get straight into discussions during the session.

Technical setup

An in-person focus group may work best if you are workshoping with members of a specific community — and host the group in a location convenient to this community, improving attendance and participation. In-person will also work best if your target group has limited or low access to technology or the internet.

In most situations, however, a focus group hosted online is likely to increase its accessibility, especially as it reduces travel time for participants. You might use a virtual meeting platform like Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet.

Most of these platforms will allow you to schedule email reminders for the focus group meeting and create calendar invites.

As the host, you should log in to the virtual meeting room early to welcome any participants who arrive ahead of time. At least one colleague should be on hand to support any audiovisual issues, take live notes, start closed captioning and monitor emails and chat discussions in case participants have technical issues. In addition, online focus groups can be recorded using your videoconference platform, which allows you to use a transcription tool like Otter.ai, Rev, Temi or Trint to generate a transcript. This can be useful when it comes to writing a report, as you can find relevant quotes and themes to highlight key findings from the session.

“I like that the stories are tied to real people with real drives, initiatives, passions [...] — you know, interest in the city and in growing the community.”

— Participant in Detour Detroit’s solutions focus group

Length and schedule

Draw up an agenda in advance to help you keep the session on track. In general, online focus groups shouldn't last longer than 90 minutes, while in-person focus groups can last up to two hours. Plan your schedule, with timings, in advance and be sure to capture all the key discussion questions you want answers to ahead of time. For a 90-minute focus group, aim to run three of the exercises suggested below, with 15 minutes allocated for the exercise and 10 minutes for additional discussion.

Here's a draft schedule — the names of the exercises are explained below.

Time/activity	Time (Total)	Activity
10 mins.	10 mins.	Welcome, Intros & House Rules
15 mins.	25 mins.	Rose, Thorn, Bud (<i>in breakout groups</i>) Gather the group's opinions on things about the stories that were positive, negative or had potential.
10 mins.	35 mins.	Discussion (<i>whole group</i>)
15 mins.	50 mins.	Problem Tree Analysis (<i>in breakout groups</i>) Assess the group's understanding of the causes and effects of the problems being addressed in reporting.
10 mins.	60 mins.	Discussion (<i>whole group</i>)
15 mins.	75 mins.	Crazy Eights (<i>in breakout groups</i>) See whether the solutions reporting stimulated creative ideas for other ways to address the challenges highlighted in the reporting.
15 mins.	90 mins.	Discussion & Wrap-up (<i>whole group</i>)

Facilitating a discussion

Welcome and intros (7 minutes)

When all participants are present, start the focus group with a round of introductions, beginning with yourself and any newsroom colleagues. Call on participants to introduce themselves in turn, but keep it structured by suggesting the format for their answers; e.g., name, where they are from and why they signed up to attend or what they hope to get from this focus group. The host(s) should keep an eye on the clock at this stage and gently move the introductions around the group if one participant is dominating.

House rules (3 minutes)

Explain any house rules for the discussion. Anticipate what the conversation may cover and any sensitive issues or likely talking points and use these to inform your discussion guidelines.

Rules for the focus group may include:

- *The focus group will be recorded or live transcribed.*
- *Allow others to contribute if you have had the floor.*
- *This is a space for civil, constructive discussion. If disagreements arise, keep them polite and centered on the topic of the focus group.*
- *If the moderator of the discussion feels it's going off-topic or the group needs to move on to another exercise, please respect that decision.*
- *If your connection drops, just reconnect and we will let you back in. If you are experiencing technical difficulties, let us know via chat or email.*
- *If discussion rules are broken, the moderator may mute you or ask you to leave the focus group.*

With a good recruiting process and well-briefed participants, it's unlikely you will need to invoke this final rule.

For online focus groups, you may wish to explain whether you are using the chat function of the meeting platform. Additional house rules may include:

- *Mute your microphone when not speaking.*
- *Videos on.*

Exercises to encourage discussion

The following exercises can be used to encourage structured discussion and require 25-30 minutes each (15 minutes per exercise plus 10 minutes for group discussion):

Rose, Thorn, Bud: To gather the group's opinions on things about the stories that were positive, negative or had potential

Abstraction Laddering/5 Whys Analysis: To assess the group's ability to define the root problems being addressed in reporting

Problem Tree Analysis: To assess the group's understanding of the causes and effects of the problems being addressed in reporting

Crazy Eights: To see whether the solutions reporting stimulated creative ideas for other ways to address the challenges highlighted in the reporting

For running these exercises online, use a whiteboard tool like Miro that you set up ahead of the focus group with the exercises. It's up to you whether you give the participants access to the Miro and ask them to complete the exercises in breakout groups, or whether the facilitator shares their screen to show participants how the discussion is being captured. Templates for the above exercises are available on Miro [here](#). If you're running an in-person workshop, you can prepare a physical whiteboard using the templates as a guide.


Rose, Thorn, Bud


Step 1: As individuals
On the virtual Post-Its, write down roses (things that worked about the story: **red** Post-Its), thorns (things that don't work about the story: **blue** Post-Its) and buds (things that could be developed: **green** Post-Its). Try and capture roughly even numbers of roses, thorns and buds.

Step 2: As a group
Try and group the roses, thorns and buds into groups that deal with similar ideas or themes.

Step 3: As a group
Discuss your findings.

Roses Thorns Buds





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Ideas for discussion questions post-exercise

As well as summarizing the conversations happening during the exercise and using issues raised as starting points for further discussion, you can help structure the discussion after each exercise with the following questions:

- Have you read other stories and reports on the issues highlighted in Our Title's stories?
- Does the way Our Title covers these stories seem different from other reporting you've read on these issues — i.e., do people notice when they are reading solutions reporting?
- How did reading about [name topics] make you feel?
- Did the stories resonate with your personal experience? Why or why not?
- If you were to tell a friend about the stories you read, what would you say?
- Have you shared the information from these stories with friends and family?
- What was the thing you liked/disliked most about the stories you read?
- How did reading the Our Title stories change how you think about the problems of [X, Y and Z] in [location]?

You'll want to keep questions open-ended to encourage participation and interaction. You can use more direct questions if the conversation is going off-topic.

Don't ask leading questions or hint at certain information you're hoping to glean.

Keeping to time and endings (15 minutes)

Keep a clock or timer running somewhere off-screen and ask a colleague to keep tabs on your running order and timings. Allow 15 minutes for a summary of the focus group, closing statements from participants and a chance to highlight any forthcoming reporting, projects or events, as well as the next steps.

Let participants know how they can keep in touch with the newsroom and say thank you.

If you are running an in-person group, participants may wish to discuss specific newsroom or reporting issues with you, so make sure you've allowed time for one-on-one feedback.

How to analyze the results

Make sure to have an initial debriefing with any colleagues present at the focus group(s) to collect general impressions and feedback while they are fresh in your mind.

Focus groups can provide a lot of unwieldy data. Overall, you should be analyzing the data generated with your impact goals at the forefront of your mind.

If you have recorded audio or video of your focus group, you may wish to transcribe it to add to your live notes. Creating a searchable transcript or notes document can be valuable for analysis. Transcription tools may be useful if you want to transcribe entire sessions.

One approach is to start your analysis by identifying the major themes emerging from the focus group discussion. You may wish to color-code different sections from your transcript or notes according to these themes or create a spreadsheet where you can copy and paste quotes by theme.

Another approach involves looking at the responses to each question or exercise and grouping or labeling the answers to see where trends or themes emerge. What does each group of answers tell you?

For both approaches, ask:

1. How does the information help me meet the objectives of this research?
2. What theories or ideas can I develop from this data?
3. What quotes best summarize these ideas or themes?
4. What responses are outliers, and which support trends?
5. What does this data mean for future solutions journalism work?
6. What have we discovered, and what is still unanswered?
7. Did the focus group confirm or challenge any assumptions?

You should read the data and analyze it with demographic information in mind, too. For example, are there any patterns between answers from respondents of a certain age, gender identity or location? Review the results of the focus group with a colleague to see what they pick up and how it differs from your analysis or interpretation.

Use existing data

If your focus group develops on themes that have emerged from previous audience research, you may wish to use this earlier data to provide a baseline against which to measure the focus group's responses. For example, does what your focus group is saying support or challenge the views or suggestions from a post-reporting impact survey?

If you are trying to gather feedback on views and opinions of a topic in your focus group, there may be publicly available data you can use as a baseline or interesting comparison point.

Post-group communication

Send a thank-you note to participants along with a reminder of other ways they can engage with your newsroom or whatever relevant stories are still to come. You may wish to share some highlights from your findings or ideas that you plan to pursue thanks to the focus group.

Sharing analysis internally

Create a presentation of the results of your analysis, including the themes that emerged in the focus group and a set of lessons, potential experiments or changes that your findings support. Share this with your wider team or newsroom and save it for future reference.

You don't need to follow the order of the focus group's schedule in your presentation; just start with an executive summary and include the most interesting findings. Be careful not to generalize what an individual said in a focus group to cover an entire community.

What next?

Use the findings of your focus group(s) to inform your next wave of solutions journalism reporting or product development.

Devise additional community-focused research to extend insights into the most interesting ideas raised in your focus groups. This might include using surveys to generate broader data, polling on certain issues in collaboration with community groups or in-depth interviews with community representatives.

Use the data from your focus groups in presentations and funding proposals, as well as reports to audiences and annual or impact reports. You may wish to share some highlights with community leaders if they are relevant to their work or change initiatives.

Journalism brings people together.

OUR TALK THE VOTE AND MEET THE CANDIDATES SURVEY SHOWED:

- 70% found Talk the Vote to be useful or very useful
- 80% of respondents felt more aware of local issues on some level
- 70% connected with a candidate
- 80% more likely to vote in local elections in future
- 100% were neutral or positive about their experience
- 95% are likely to attend a similar event in future

(Survey with 100 initial respondents (20% of attendees))

FUTURE THINKERS
We worked with **Kenyon College** to host two webinars on the local news crisis and its future with 160 participants.

AFTER HOURS
Hundreds of people gathered at **Idea Works** for four Newsroom After Hours events to dance, rock out, have a beer and enjoy the music. **Mechanics Bank** powered the events dedicated to elevating local musicians.

COMMUNITY CONVENERS
We hosted a webinar on the **future of work** that offered unique insights from an economist, workforce specialist, community foundation officer, small business owner and large construction company for nearly 50 participants.

THOUGHT LEADERS
We worked with the **Richland County Foundation and Richland County Development Group** to open up the discussion on **American Rescue Plan** funding to over 150 registrants. This innovative concept was replicated by another independent newsroom in Louisiana.

Our newsroom has always strived to be part of the community, not simply observers on the sidelines. We take every opportunity to invite you into our world, and listen to each other to solve problems, inform and even throw a concert or two.

Talk the Vote was epic this year. The listening events took place in Mansfield's six wards and expanded to Ashland and Knox counties. Voters shared issues most important to them and informed multiple Citizens' Agendas that will be presented to elected officials.

“I was going to vote regardless of attending the candidates night, but it was really good to listen to each set of opponents talk to the crowd. Carl and in particular, each other. Despite the “less than friendly” political atmosphere that persists, all candidates were respectful to each other. Found that refreshing.”
— Talk the Vote attendee

09. | 2021 IMPACT REPORT: MOVING FORWARD

10.

Ohio publisher SourceMedia, for example, features quotes and follow-up surveys from its listening events in its [annual impact report](#). The same format could be used to feature focus group findings and highlight what has happened since the sessions.

The American Journalism Project has summarized grant themes from its audience research, including focus groups, in its [annual Impact Report](#).

Investing in revenue growth

Our grantees represent a variety of business and editorial models and organizational life stages, and we provide each with tailored support based on their needs and biggest strategic challenges. We work as a team with our grantees, opening our networks and partnering with each leader to help them strengthen and scale their organization.

The result has been growth across the portfolio.¹

American Journalism Project grantees grew by an average of 47 percent in the first year of their grant, and are on the path to double their revenue by the third year. Grantees who have been in the portfolio for at least a year are on track toward a 500 percent return on investment, which represents \$10 million in new resources available for local news in the next five years. Every grantee in our portfolio is currently on track to meet the growth targets we set at the beginning of the grant. Most are on track to far exceed them.

Among the notable outcomes, every grantee in the portfolio for 12 months or more has grown its budget by at least 25 percent while median annual growth is 40 percent. Four grantees have crossed the threshold of \$1 million in annual revenue, which we believe is a critical milestone in operating capacity and program impact and puts them in the top 20 percent of nonprofit local newsrooms.² Grantees are also diversifying their revenue, which we believe is critical to sustainability: 35 percent of grantees have seen growth in one revenue stream; 33 percent have seen growth in two or more revenue streams; and 25 percent of grantees have added at least one new revenue stream since receiving their grant.

¹ Figures in this section do not include revenue from the American Journalism Project to grantees.
² 20 percent of nonprofits and local newsrooms had budgets of more than \$1 million according to the Institute of Nonprofit News Index 2021.

Figure as of end includes AJP funding. Public media and philanthropic revenue are not included in this chart.

Building exceptional and diverse teams

We invest in the business and operational capacity that enables nonprofit local news organizations to build sustainable and scalable models to serve their communities. Growing the business and operations side of news organizations means hiring and building strong teams, positioned to take their organizations to the next phase.

Our funding is supporting the addition of more than 100 revenue and operations roles across 32 grantees, including founders, directors of revenue, and other business staff. These roles are specialists in fundraising and development, business and revenue planning, audience development, and more. Grantees are attracting not only qualified candidates with media experience but also leaders from outside media — people who bring experience from the corporate world and other kinds of civic and entrepreneurial organizations.

Through the end of 2021, half of these positions have been filled and the retention rate for new hires is 90 percent. The portfolio is on track with anticipated hiring timelines.

Here are five themes we see from across our portfolio:

- For newer organizations that haven't yet invested in revenue teams**, the first revenue roles hired should address the most needed core competency and revenue priorities, typically foundation or major donor fundraising. Revenue roles often evolve over time, and successful organizations resist the allure of hiring a "top it off" position at first.
- For larger and more established organizations**, hiring has focused on a strategic revenue leader, such as a chief revenue or experienced development officer, to help set strategy, orient data for decision making and guide overall growth.
- Revenue roles are a pipeline for new talent** into organizations and a source of fresh, creative ideas.
- New hires in a growing organization** will change the organization and existing roles. Understanding how a team will evolve and how and where current leaders have to give up some control and let the new hires do their jobs is critical for success.
- Establishing scalable and sustainable systems** is the most important responsibility for new business teams; revenue will flow from functional internal systems, which include but are not limited to a well organized customer relationship management system.

The Real News Network includes quotes from viewers of its Police Accountability Report in its annual Impact Report. With the permission of focus group attendees, a similar use of quotes could be included in your annual reporting.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Taya Grahams and Stephen Janis' weekly **Police Accountability Report** has become a force to be reckoned with on YouTube—now with eight videos that have been viewed more than a million times each. One, **highlighting police abuse of power during an LA traffic stop**, has reached 57 million views and counting—and, as we learned recently, is helping public defenders push back against the notoriously violent Los Angeles Sheriff's Department.

Taya and Stephen's work standing up for the victims of police violence continues to have a meaningful impact, even years after publication. A case in point: their early, on-the-ground reporting on the killing of 19-year-old Anton Black, who died in police custody on Maryland's Eastern Shore in 2018, was **recently highlighted** by NBC's Dateline in a special report by Lester Holt on Anton's family's continued fight for justice.

In a survey of **Police Accountability Report** viewers in February 2022, **The Real News asked whether our show had inspired them to take action in their community**. **61% of respondents indicated that it had!**

"By filming any chance I get and make sure all police should now know they have accountability. Which is something they should all be aware of since taking the job but in reality they have been working with impunity for far too long. Now this nation is screaming for change. It's screaming loud too!"

"I've introduced family members to your reports. Your comprehensive approach really pulled the blue tinted glasses off me and my family!"

"It has taught me to video record every interaction with the police and to file police misconduct complaints (if necessary) I also learn from your programming some of my rights as a citizen in regards to some of the things that I am not required to do or say when being questioned by law enforcement."

"Yes, as a veteran soldier, I have talked to other veterans in my neighborhood to issue [sic] someone is present while any type of police investigation is happening."

"Started doing public record requests for police complaint data."

"Recording any police encounter I see, and voting for leaders in my community who believe in police accountability, reform, and defunding."

"I started attending local civilian review board meetings to hold them accountable."

"Every time I see anyone pulled over I stop and record. I will not leave until they are back on the road."

2022 BY THE NUMBERS

Our videos were watched over 27 million times—our best year ever on YouTube.

We added more than 160,000 subscribers to our YouTube channel.

And we grew our number of monthly sustaining donors by over 25 percent.

In the section of [its annual Impact Report](#) called **"Bringing People Together,"** The Beacon, a nonprofit regional news network serving Kansas and Missouri, highlights the importance of its listening groups:

NEWS YOU CAN USE

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Fact-Based Facebook Group: Kansas City Coronavirus Updates

On March 12, 2020, we started a Facebook group called **Kansas City Coronavirus Updates**. The goal was to create a **fact-based environment about local COVID-19 information** and to share community resources.

It quickly grew to **more than 5,000 members**, and moderating posts became a 24/7 job. So we asked other journalists and trusted community members to help fact-check and approve posts. The group became a place for journalists to share our ongoing COVID-19 coverage, ask people what they wanted to know and find sources for stories.

We shared this idea with other nonprofit newsrooms. **More than a dozen replicated it in their communities.**

Listening Sessions

Small-group engagement sessions are the foundation for The Beacon's community understanding and editorial strategy. To date, we have **connected with more than 300 community representatives** in these sessions.

Often hosted virtually, we invite **civic, neighborhood and business leaders, educators and nonprofit professionals** to discuss community information needs and potential opportunities.

Speaking Engagements & Education

Beacon teammates have been invited to speak at **more than two dozen** conferences, libraries, radio and podcast interviews, journalism classes and more.

In March 2022, The Beacon's Founder & Publisher Kelsey Ryan will appear on a panel at SXSW in Austin discussing the launch of startup newsrooms and connecting people with their communities.

Journalism organizations nationwide have hosted us for conversations about our launch, our approach to diverse sourcing and lessons on revenue. Telling our story helps journalists at other newsrooms across the U.S. learn from our early work, **strengthening the local news ecosystem.**

Beacon reporters serving as Report for America corps members volunteer their time in support of student journalism and other service projects. The projects **amplify the voices of young people, support media literacy and help develop the next generation of journalists.**

Coverage-Related Events

To date, we've hosted 20 events attended and viewed by thousands of people. Our goal with events centered around our journalism is to **build trust, reach new audiences and connect journalists with the community.**

We've collaborated with community partners to present events **digging into COVID-19's impact on nonprofits, mobilizing voters in a pandemic, racial justice protests in small towns** and many more.

Community Building

Our readers are fun, and so are we! We celebrated our Wichita newsroom launch with an **outdoor party with tacos and cake pops.**

Kansas City Friends joined us for a **"newshound and watchdog" meetup at a dog park.**

And we celebrated Kansas City's community of journalists with a **happy hour** to launch the Kansas City Media Collective.

Useful resources

[Focus group report template](#) — Demand Metric

[Advice on note-taking methods](#) — Hugo

[Note-taking tips for focus groups](#) — Learning for Action

[Best practices for interviews and focus groups](#) — Membership Puzzle Project

[Helpful hints for conducting a focus group](#) — Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, Central Connecticut State University



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