

Community

Interests traditionally converge around shared geography — in a city, say — to form a community. In the age of the Internet, communities form around specific topics of fascination. How do you stay in dialogue with the communities you serve — and still manage to run a news organization?

Jay Harris

News people generally do not spend nearly enough time talking to the people in the community that they cover. They tend to talk to their friends. Too frequently they tend to talk to others who are similarly situated ... in the newsroom. That is their whole world.

With the executive committee, we used to have monthly off-site meetings. We would hold them in the offices of nonprofit groups in the community, places where none of us would have gone. There was a wonderful organization called Parents Helping Parents that essentially was a parent support group for parents of seriously physically or mentally challenged children.

And we would invite the staff in for the lunch. We would learn about them.

Nancy Maynard

Have regular public meetings with readers and let people come in. Have an array of decision makers there and let them go at it with readers and stakeholders. We had advisory committees around our market. I know that WNBC does this here (New York). Now that its (former) news director is in L.A., they're doing it there as well.



My husband had this line for a publisher's relationship with politicians; it was "Arms-length. Handshakes. No hugs and kisses."

Alberto Ibargüen

It's useful periodically to bring in community leaders ... who may not have an issue at that particular moment ... and just come in and talk. Most of the time, those are far

more interesting, far more productive sessions than the ones where a particular senator or councilman comes in trying to sell a particular point of view.



(On recreating *El Nuevo Herald*), I wanted a newspaper that could not be confused with *The Miami Herald*. I wanted a newspaper that really reflected and spoke to the sensitivity and the sensibilities of a Latin community that had just arrived and that was changing dramatically.

Sandy Rowe

I don't think journalists have been particularly good at leading communities or society, and it's not our usual role. Are we smart enough to ask the right questions, and to ask the right questions of a wide enough group of people? Is our coverage going to be complex enough?

You must do these journalistic things well. And in that way, sometimes I think you can lead a community.

I remember when, in Norfolk years ago, the school board filed a case to end school busing, which of course had been the law of the land. We were very concerned. We already knew what was happening in Boston and some other communities. It was a time when there could have been great racial strife, where there could have been

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misunderstanding. And one of the things I'm proudest of was that the day the suit was filed, we gathered key reporters and editors, (saying), "This is not just a big story for us this week or every time there's an incremental development. This is a story where we have a choice of either shining light or reflecting heat, and really being able to lay bare everything about all sides of this issue, the complexity of it, and its potential impact on the community, in a way that helps the community know how to respond, without having any particular conclusion ourselves."

Jack Fuller

You obviously can't take your community and simply speak to it as it would prefer to be spoken to, because then you're doing the opposite of helping the community innovate ... adapt itself or grow or improve, become more humane.

On other hand, if you go too far out from where your community is, you render yourself irrelevant. So I think you get down in the end to gut — and gut with a pretty

fair dollop of courage. Gut in which you're prepared to err on the side of leading, rather than err on the side of staying out of trouble.

Monica Lozano

We did something very interesting a few years back, and we're still trying to decide whether or not it was the right move. ... We have a very small staff. It's a major metropolitan newspaper in an urban environment like L.A. County. But in terms of our staff, it's relatively small and we have to think cleverly about how to apply those resources.

So we pulled all of our reporters out of city hall. And we deployed them into communities where Hispanics are rising segments of the population and tried to understand the issues that affect their daily lives, the quality-of-life issues that determine whether or not you feel like government is responding to your needs. So rather than reporting on government from the halls of government, we report on government from the streets of L.A. And that has been a real move.

It is revolutionary. You need to be vigilant and you need to have that sort of oversight — to say this is what people are saying about not having a stoplight or trash pickup, as mundane as that sounds. Those are basic, fundamental services government is responsible for. And if you are not doing it, this is the impact on communities, and this is how they organize and this is how they eventually will vote you out.

Responsiveness has been great. Our ability to report on L.A. has been based on our ability to communicate to an underserved community. ... Not a day goes by when we are not communicated with by the mayor, the city council person or assembly people, et cetera. They feel like our connection with people is what they have to be accountable to, and (they) use us as a way of communicating back to that population.

Tim McGuire

I'm an editor. I get my hair cut in a barber shop. I believe in barber shops and supermarkets and the neighborhood PTA. I believe both I myself and my people get our best stuff from those kinds of places. As we hear readers discuss them and as we encounter problems ourselves, we get a wonderful sense of what are really the important issues that we ought to be covering.