

Opening Up Journalism

Community Engagement for Local News

NPCA 2018

Melanie Sill with Mark Schultz, Laura Lee and Fiona Morgan



National Archives Archaeological Site, public domain via Wikimedia Commons

Welcome: Quickly introduce Laura Lee from Education NC, Mark Schultz from the Herald-Sun and Fiona Morgan from Free Press and its project, News Voices North Carolina. We'll hear a bit more about them as we move through this discussion. But to start: The phrase community engagement might seem like just the latest buzzword. For many local journalists, this has been part of the core. And it's probably a necessary part of the future, which we'll get into. But let me also say what it isn't.



Morton Wuff via Flickr/Creative Commons

It's not just feel-good talk. It's not about gathering around the campfire to sing songs and roast marshmallows, though that's ok too. This is about the core purpose of what we do: serving communities. It's also about survival. So I think community engagement should be top of mind if you consider two key questions:

1. Do you need **direct support** from your community / audience to keep producing news and information?
2. How should you be operating today and in the next few years to **earn and keep that support?**

What's new about “community engagement?”

- Andrew DeVigal's engagement as “continuum” and Membership Puzzle Project's mega report — News orgs are **learning together** and sharing in public
- From reporter outreach to subscription asks: Engagement means being **intentional** about relationships with community and audiences
- Distinguish from digital engagement **metrics** (though those also matter, and are related)

These aren't brand-new ideas but there are many new efforts to consider audiences not as general users of your content but as specific stakeholders you serve: whether those are subscribers, members or just readers and viewers. Know what you want from that relationship. Someone called it thinking of audience as friends and family: how do you communicate, keep them posted, keep up the relationship?

Ways to think about engagement:

- Considering news and information as **service** (public service/ mission, and practical service/ value)
- Considering **community / audience as starting point** vs. afterthought
- Building communication and process into a larger idea of an ongoing **relationship**: set of tools and practices, not just one tactic.
- All or none of above: **Specific** to you and your mission/ community/audience

Here are a few thoughts: We use the word service a lot for news. I like it because it works both for mission and for the business. We serve the public interest, or we should. But we also deliver a service that people will fund if they find it valuable. It all has to start with the needs of the community and the audience (whether that's geographic or community of interest). It's part of a larger idea. It's specific to your organization's role and mission. And it's an active pursuit, not passive behavior assuming your audience is interested

.



Let's begin with Mark Schultz, who is managing editor of the Herald-Sun in Durham. Marks' a veteran journalist who worked in Chapel Hill and Durham for the Herald-Sun and The News & Observer for years before McClatchy bought the Herald-Sun a few years back. Since I've known him Mark has had strong habits of reaching out and talking to community. So I've asked him to talk now about a project his team is doing on gentrification.

**Phillip Seib** The Human Relations Commission of Durham has an ad hoc Committee on Affordable Housing and Gentrification Abatement, of which I am the chair. We have had conversations with several community groups.
My suggestion is to connect with the leadership of ... [See More](#)
8
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**Rochelle Sparko** All of this.
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**Mark Schultz** Thanks Phillip Seib. I have watched Mel's talk on youtube twice. Learned a lot. Appreciate these thoughtful suggestions.
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Write a reply...

**Ken Larsen** Let's take the case of the DOLRT (Durham-Orange County Light Rail) project. One of the touted benefits of DOLRT is that it will be used to shuttle low income people to and from their jobs. Well, that benefit is only valid if the low income people and... [See More](#)
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Mark will describe.

cal Mubanga takes the reins of the Durham Public Schools this week.

Mubanga will be sworn in as superintendent at 8:30 a.m. Monday at the Fuller Administration Building, 511 Cleveland St. He was hired last month to replace Best U. Henson, who retired after just over three years on the job.

Mubanga, who was hired away from Franklin County Schools, has a reputation for improving low-performing schools and academic outcomes for boys and young men of color, men leaders here have valued the school district for as long as anyone cares to remember.

"I am ready to get right to work," Mubanga said.

In North Carolina schools are considered low-performing if they received a state performance grade of "C" or "D" and a school growth score of "not expected growth" or "did not meet expected growth."

DPS currently has 18 schools deemed low-performing by the State Department of Public Instruction. Black and Hispanic male students fall at the bottom when it comes to student

SEE DPS, 4A

Want to go?

WHAT: Swearing-in ceremony for Rasoul Mubanga, superintendent

WHEN: Monday, Nov. 27

TIME: 8:30 a.m.

WHERE: Fuller Administration Building, 511 Cleveland St.



Ann Reardon/Pleades Modern

New homes in the Pleiades Modern pocket neighborhood in Old North Durham. "We really want to create something that benefits not only the people who buy our homes, but the larger community as well," says developer Adam Dickinson.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

A modernist moment in a changing Durham neighborhood



BY MARK SCHULTZ

She is sweeping dirt off her small porch when I walk up.

"I like growth, but the thing that's killing me is the noise," Amanda Stanfield says. "I open my mail, and I say, 'Whoa!'"

I've pulled onto Glendale

Avenue to see the new modernist homes. The developer is holding an open house I've seen on Facebook. I park in the circle at the end, across from the four new homes at the end of the street, a few blocks from Motoco and Fullsteam Brewery.

Stanfield's home is 1,000 square feet. It's worth \$445,000, according to county property records, up from \$27,500 when she bought it in 2006.

She works in security and is wearing faded jeans and a gray Duke sweatshirt. She keeps her eyes on the cement floor as she

sweeps, tolerating the reporter in her front yard on a Sunday afternoon.

I ask if she's been to see the new homes on her block. She hasn't. I tell her they're selling for \$495,000.

"What?" she says, pulling up her eyebrows.

"Really? Oh my God."

She turns and goes inside. I think the interview might be over. But she grabs her keys, comes back outside and heads down the steps.

As we walk down the street, we pass a group of Latino men grilling in their driveway.

"How y'all doing?" Stanfield

shouts out and smiles. "Sendis great."

PLEIADES MODERN

Realtor Adam Dickinson stands in the kitchen of the furnished model home at 804 Glendale, brochures fanned out on the table.

He, his wife and partner are developing the nine-home project called Pleiades (PLEE-uh-deez) Modern, as Vickers Ventures LLC.

I high-five through the 1,600-square-foot model home. The glass front door opens onto

SEE NEIGHBORHOOD, 7A

Mark will describ.

I head up a regional, pro-growth organization - Triangle Community Coalition. It's been around for nearly 20 years. Our membership is quite diverse and is made up of many individuals and companies who are interested in development and economic growth. I saw your post on facebook about gentrification. If there's anything I can do to help, please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

I invite you to check out our website for more information about TCC - www.tricc.org.

Looking forward to talking with you soon. Merry Christmas!

Jacob C. Rogers
Chief Executive Officer
Triangle Community Coalition
[919-901-6378](tel:919-901-6378)



Dear Mark,

I was encouraged to see your column announcing the beginning of the Herald-Sun's project on gentrification in Durham.

I am the co-chair of the Strategy Team of Durham C.A.N. (Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods). As you probably know, Durham C.A.N. has been engaged in an affordable housing campaign for the last several years in an effort to respond to the displacement of working class people of color from downtown neighborhoods. The Herald-Sun has covered the work we have been doing with affordable housing projects on Jackson St. and at Fayette Place. If you wanted to engage with our leaders or organizers as part of this new series on gentrification, I am sure they would be open to that.

My only piece of substantive advice for you is exactly advice you already gave yourself in a column last week: [until we talk about race, we're all dead in the water](#). This advice is particularly important when it comes to gentrification. To have a clear understanding of what is happening in our city in regards to housing and displacement, we have to look directly-as you say-at "how people of color are doing compared to white people." Otherwise, we will be left scratching our heads and saying "it's just such a complex issue," while day after day people are watching themselves as other people are being the roofs over their heads.

If you ever wanted to chat further about any of these issues, I would be happy to talk.

All the best,
Matt Jantzen

Good afternoon,

I saw your article on gentrification in Durham and thought you might be interested in a paper (not published or peer-reviewed) written by myself and some colleagues titled **Examining**

Mark will describe.

Engagement is part of a national conversation on how independent journalism can survive and thrive

I thought I'd share a few examples outside North Carolina to give you a sense of how engagement is being woven into the core of news and sparking new initiatives and also some new revenue models.

Impact

We measure the success of our work by impact, by which we mean real-world change spurred by our reporting. A fuller exploration of how ProPublica thinks about impact can be found in our white paper, [Nonprofit Journalism: Issues Around Impact](#). Examples of how our stories have produced such change — from the resignation of corrupt officials to the passage of new laws — are compiled in [our annual reports](#). We also report on the impact of our work throughout the year. The latest stories are available below.

FEATURED



Red Cross General Counsel David Meltzer Resigns Over Handling of Sexual Assault and Harassment Allegations

by Justin Elliott and Ariana Tobin, Feb. 1, 11:35 a.m. EST
The Red Cross's CEO, Gail McShawin, announced Meltzer's resignation this morning following a ProPublica story last week.

ProPublica has built engagement into its core over 10 years, lots of experiments and with increasing success — including a jump in individual donations.



Help Us Investigate Pregnancy Complications in the U.S.

ProPublica and NEA fund your help in understanding why so many women have serious and costly deliveries of pregnancy and childbirth. Share your story.

Small Updates

Sign up to get ProPublica's regular investigations delivered in your inbox.

Get Involved

Participate in ProPublica's Reporting

ATTENTION



Have You Seriously Considered Filing for Bankruptcy?

by ProPublica Staff, 11:00 a.m. EST
If you're really thinking about filing for bankruptcy, ProPublica wants to hear from you — see [BANKRUPTCY](#).

Health Insurance Is Big and Complicated. Help Us Understand It.

by ProPublica Staff, 11:00 a.m. EST

ProPublica is the national leader on engagement, in my view — if you look at their site you'll see their invitations to get involved, and also a whole section that reports on the impact of their stories. They've seen a large bump in individual donations, which is helping them grow, do more work and raise more money.

How The Tennessean hosts meetings with alienated audiences to listen and understand

BY DAVID PLAZAS

PUBLISHED 01/30/18 6:00 AM



Focused listening

Overview

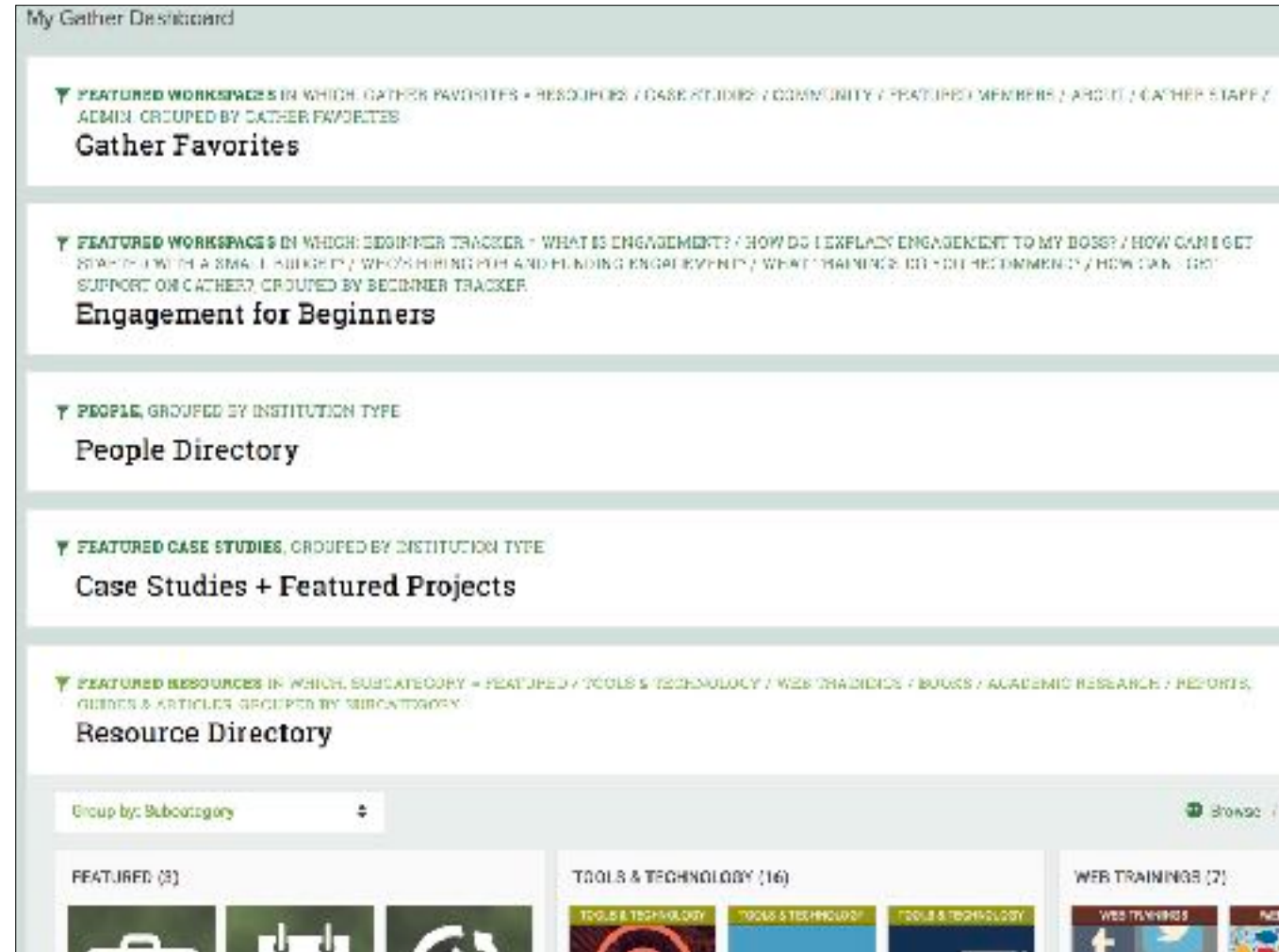
How The Tennessean hosts meetings with alienated audiences to listen and understand

How a Fresno nonprofit newsroom started its listening by popping up where people live and play

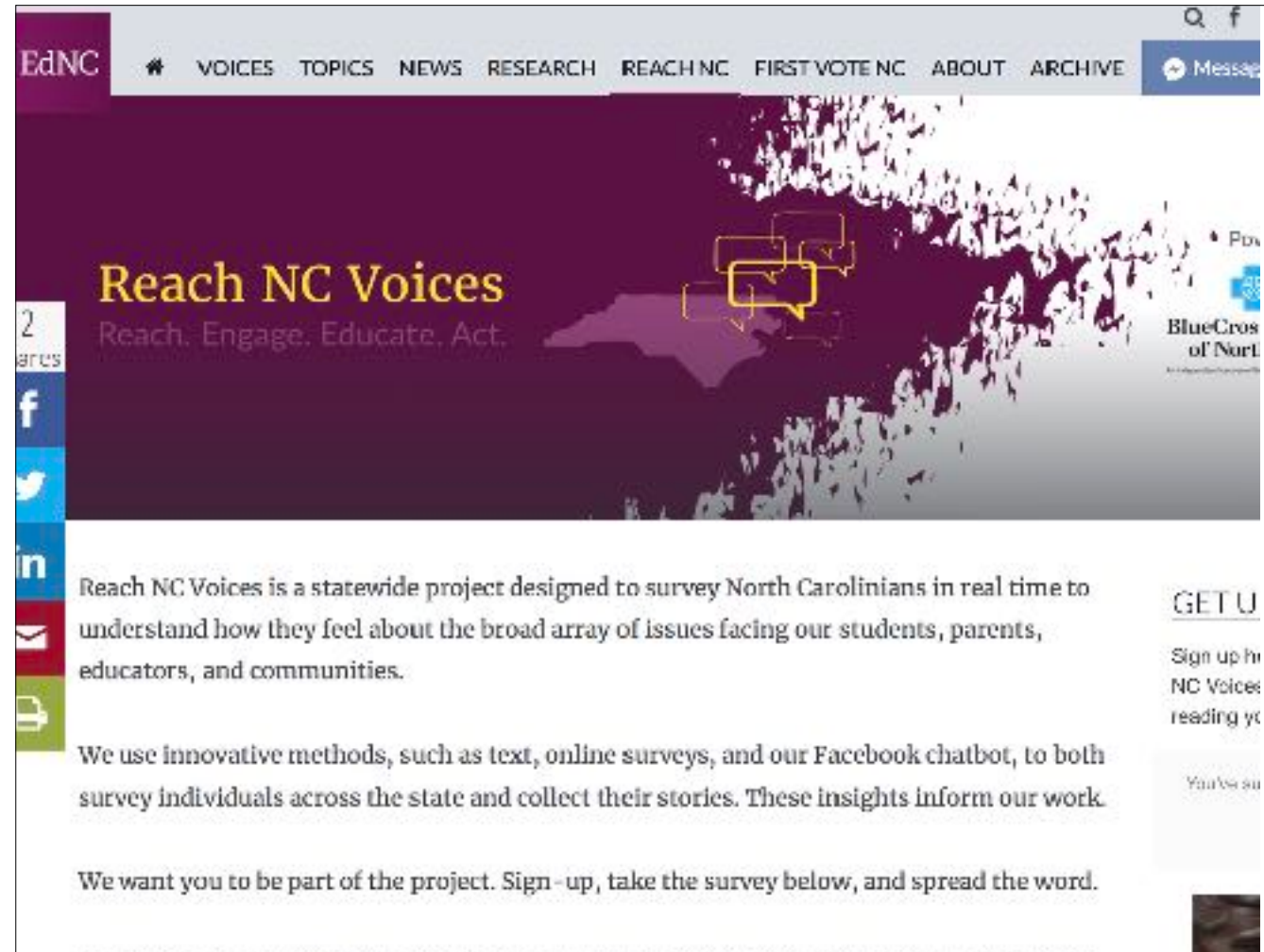
How Richland Source held an event to serve local mothers — and listened, too

How Alabama Media Group uses simple text-messaging to listen to diverse voices

This is the Tennessean in Nashville, which created a staff role for diversity, inclusion and engagement. This included meetings with “alienated groups” - Among them, local Muslims, gun owners, others. Series on cost of change in Nashville grew out of these meetings. Ongoing.



And this is a new platform called Gather, which has many more examples of innovation and engagement along with a raft of resources and a robust conversation about what works and what doesn't.



Education NC in our own state has put engagement in the middle of its efforts to convene conversations and reporting on education issues. I'm going to ask Laura Lee, who is a lawyer by training and has worked at NPR and WUNC before coming aboard at WUNC, to not just talk about but also demonstrate a text-message tool called Reach NC Voices.



**What perspectives do you bring
to your community?**



Fiona Morgan is a former journalist who reported for the Independent in Durham and has worked as a researcher, reporter and facilitator on many projects at the intersection of journalism and public policy. Fiona is journalism director for a nonprofit called Free Press. She also has worn other hats — and produced a big report on North Carolina’s local news scene for Democracy Fund. She’s here to talk about an engagement project that is based in the community with outreach to journalists. It’s coming at these questions from the community, and I wanted her to share what she’s heard along the way about how people view local news and what they want.



Engagement means listening and responding to what you hear





freepress

News Voices: North Carolina

- Community-based engagement
- Bringing communities into conversation about news
- Focus on underserved
- Fostering healthy news environment
- Not just audience, but constituency for local news



Community engagement for local news: Resources

- Join **Gather**, a collaborative platform with case studies, resources and more: <https://www.letsgather.in>
- Membership Puzzle Project's **Guide to Audience Revenue and Engagement**: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/guide-to-audience-revenue-and-engagement.php
- American Press Institute's **Better News** (comprehensive set of resources, ongoing): <https://betternews.org> and understanding **why people subscribe** <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/news-subscriber-types/>
- Democracy Fund's **Local Fix** weekly newsletter: <https://tinyletter.com/localfix>
- News Integrity Initiative's **"Year of Listening"** resources: <https://theyearoflistening.org/author/theyearoflistening/>

I've left handouts at the back of the room and will share my deck with Phil Lucey for anyone who wants it. I'm also at melanie.sill@gmail.com if you'd like to talk further about these ideas or Democracy Fund's work in North Carolina. Thank you!