Changing the chip: What would journalism look like if it was generated from within communities?

‘Look around the room; these are your people. You have to have people you can trust and people you can call up. That’s why it’s so important to build a community of practice.’

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INTRODUCTION

What would journalism look like if it was generated from within communities rather than for communities? Using this central question to guide us, the Engaged Journalism Accelerator convened 30 European practitioners – including journalists, editors, researchers and representatives from communications agencies and civic society associations – in Madrid in December 2018 for a two-day workshop.

The overarching goal of this gathering, and of the Accelerator events that will follow in 2019, is to connect people who are working in and who are passionate about the role of communities in journalism, and the role of journalism in democracy. By facilitating knowledge-sharing across borders, organisations and areas of expertise, we strive to establish the foundation of a community of practice for engaged journalism in Europe that will thrive beyond the duration of this programme.
The group who joined us in Madrid came from organisations with different approaches to and levels of community engagement. They were part of the categories of engaged journalism organisations we identified in the field research conducted in the planning stages of the Accelerator:

- **Early innovators** – a small but influential group of organisations with a high appetite for change and tolerance of risk, that can provide case-studies and mentorship
- **Early adopters** – a group that has learned from the early innovators but is more judicious in their adoption decisions and play the role of opinion leader in the social ecosystem (this group is the focus of direct funding, coaching and support from the Accelerator)
- **Early majority** – the next wave of engaged journalism organisations
- **Late majority** – traditional news organisations with proven attempts to revamp their engagement strategies

The discussions, sessions and activities that participants contributed to and led at the workshop were key to informing the contents of this report, including providing insights, tips, themes, examples, tools, frameworks and recommendations. The report is not only reflective of the event itself, but it also provides a narrative for practitioners about the engaged journalism ecosystem within Europe.

### Recommendations

1. **Make internal culture change a priority**
2. **Face value speaks louder than online tools alone**
3. **Simplify the language you use and enhance accessibility to your work**
4. **Avoid parachuting into communities**
5. **Undertake research and development (R&D) on the link between trust and revenue / resilience**

*An in-depth look at the recommendations can be found on page 30.*
WHO IS THIS REPORT FOR?

This report is designed for journalists and their colleagues who are already taking an engaged journalism approach to their work, and is based on the premise that readers will have at least a basic understanding of what constitutes engaged journalism. It will also be beneficial for you to be familiar with the type of news organisations the Accelerator is currently supporting, and with the work undertaken so far by the programme in identifying and showcasing best practices for community-driven journalism in Europe. If you don’t feel you are familiar enough with the Accelerator, consider pausing, and have a read of the following materials before reading the rest of the report:

- Engaged Journalism Accelerator story (July 2018)
- 100+ European news organisations that will inspire your community engagement work (August 2018, updated in February 2019)
- Why European journalists struggle to engage with their communities (September 2018)
- Reflecting on seven months of accelerating engaged journalism (December 2018)
- This is why we’re funding these eight news organisations doing engaged journalism (February 2019)

The report does not aim to ‘make the case’ for engaged journalism or convince those who are skeptical about its benefits. As a participant in Madrid noted, the report is for practitioners – journalists, editors, engagement managers, researchers – who already “buy into engagement”.

Practical tips, takeaways and examples are highlighted throughout, and our goal for journalists and news organisations – both those who were present at the workshop and those who were not – is to refer to the insights and recommendations when developing and working with their own communities.

APPROACH

To design the programme for this workshop, we collaborated with Fiona Morgan of
Branchhead Consulting. Fiona is an engagement specialist with a background in journalism, research, and community organising, most recently with the News Voices initiative at Free Press.

We wanted to create an environment where each participant felt comfortable putting forward a session and leading it. Our goal was for people to approach the workshop with the confidence that they had something to share and teach, as well as with the mindset that they can learn from others. Another important aspect was explaining what we were doing – for example setting up for Open Space or Pro-Action Cafe – as we went along, so that people could replicate it when organising similar events in their own communities. A useful resource we referred to when putting together the agenda is the Journalism for Democracy and Communities framework developed by Journalism that Matters.

When in a position of convening people, it can be easy to struggle with the idea of an open versus closed gathering. Should an event be invitation-only, or should it be open to the public? Careful curation equals higher chances of having a productive conversation, and people are more likely to commit their time if they feel like their presence and expertise is truly valued. However, a closed-door gathering means not everyone can benefit first-hand from that knowledge (although we hope this report will bring you at least one step closer), and the aim of the Accelerator is to fly the flag for engaged journalism in Europe and inspire organisations through this work.

In her book, The Art of Gathering, Priya Parker explains how sometimes, wanting to keep the doors open to everyone is one of the obstacles in what she calls “gathering with a purpose”. Instead, she makes the case for “generous exclusion”, which she defines as a way to “bound a gathering that allow the diversity in it to be heightened and sharpened rather than diluted in a hodgepodge of people”. Because we wanted this event to be the first step in creating a community of practice for engaged journalism in Europe, we decided to keep the workshop as invitation-only.

**TIP 1: Define the purpose of your event and what outcomes and actions you want participants to undertake, before deciding whether it should be invitation-only or open to everyone.**
Most of the participants had never met each other, so a couple of weeks before the gathering, we paired them up based on their roles and interests, and asked them to do an optional exercise – interview each other answering three questions:

- ‘What is one thing you hope to learn at the workshop?
- ‘What work have you done with communities in the last five years that you’re particularly proud of?’
- ‘What was the most challenging thing about doing that work?’

This not only helped us gather data for the post-event reporting but also helped establish some confidence and sense of comfort.

**TIP 2: Establish familiarity through a pre-event exercise to encourage people to approach the event with an open mind and the confidence to share.**

Half of the participants chose to do the exercise, spending more than 15 minutes with their interviewee. Here are some of their responses:

**What is one thing you hope to learn at the workshop?**

...Learning from the talent and experience of others, learning from those outside the industry, we really need this. I need open and candid feedback to challenge my point of view and my approach.

...I would like to see similar examples in other newsrooms, learn potential formulas to try to get my newsroom invested in doing more of this kind of work. It's not a challenge to get our audience to participate. It's a challenge to get my newsroom to adopt this as a regular practice.

...Learn from other experiences how we, as journalists, can engage with our audience but not only through social media; to learn how to ask readers questions that allow them to follow an investigation without giving all the context all the time, but giving them the voice to demand investigations of us (not just pay to read them).

...I feel like an "old school journalist" who has always been focused on the quality of editorial. I hope to learn methods and to get feedback about meaningful ways to engage readers (...) and to make a shift, trying to add value to journalism by asking people to contribute to reporting.
“The conversations got so deep so fast because everyone in this room buys into engagement.”

What community-focused work have you done that you are particularly proud of?

Diario de Navarra, a 115 year-old regional newspaper in Spain, has been trying to reframe its relationship with readers through its project ‘DN más cerca’, by co-designing meetings with citizens and “listening for insights like beliefs, dreams and challenges, rather than answers” when asking questions.

Another Spanish newspaper, DiariAra, last summer embedded two journalists with a Catalan NGO rescuing refugees crossing the Mediterranean by boat. The journalists answered questions from readers via a live blog while on the ship, and more than 100 people sent questions through WhatsApp. After the reporters returned, a dozen readers who had interacted with them through the live blog came to the newsroom to meet the journalists face to face.
Romanian magazine Decât o Revistă (DoR) has been hosting live journalism events in theatres over the last three years. The theme of a recent DoR Live was ‘training for change’, and upon arrival, the 900 participants were prompted to fill out a two-part card: on one side, they could offer their skills and time to help out one of the 5 NGOs present at the event, while on the other side they could leave their details to go out for coffee with a fellow attendee they had never met before.

“Global public good is a term that could be used in journalism – it stands for something that people want but the market for it isn’t available.”

What was the most challenging thing about doing that work?

Participants said things like: lack of resources (time, staff) to implement community engagement ideas; realising, as journalists, that “our best marketing tool is the journalism we do, and we should convince people our job is important for democracy”; shifting the internal culture of the organisation to understand that “interacting with readers is a valuable exercise to learn their concerns and needs”; finding a “meaningful pathway to engagement” by helping members understand they “may add a unique value to journalism”; making reader call-outs for contributions more prominent and accessible to all.

On day one, we asked four attendees from non-journalism organisations, such as social innovation, academia, communications, to kick-start the workshop with short catalyst talks. The goal of catalyst talks is to spark ideas based on examples of the roles communities play in other fields (for example groups of people who are really into craft beer).

Following the talks, we used methods including Open Space Technology and Pro-Action Cafe to enable participants to put forward topics and ideas and to run small breakout sessions over the course of the two days.

**TIP 3:** Use non-journalism case studies to start conversations and spark ideas. Enable attendees to pitch focused sessions on the topics they either want to get feedback on from peers, or on the issues they feel like they can add valuable contributions to.
Halfway through the second day, we put up an ‘Ask and offer’ board and encouraged participants to write down one thing they could use support on from someone else in the room (e.g. integrating CRM with membership engagement data), and one thing they could help others with (e.g how to ensure organisational buy-in about engagement activities). We reminded them to check in throughout the day and make notes of who they wanted to reach out to after the workshop. We also sent a document containing the asks and offers to participants after the event, to prompt them to get in touch with each other.

However, despite our best efforts – including establishing a Google Group for participants to keep in touch – this activity hasn’t proved as successful as we’d have hoped, as to date, as far as we know none of the participants have followed up with each other regarding their offers of support.

**TIP 4**: If you want participants to actively connect with one another after an event, put in place a plan to ensure these connections happen. For example, appoint someone to curate online groups and communications, or find an online platform that event participants already (or will) use for building connections.

We concluded the workshop with a closing circle and with a fun exercise – after discussing their takeaways, each person in the room was given a postcard to write a commitment they were making to themselves after the event, whether it was to follow up with a person or a project, or to share something back in their organisation. The postcards were mailed to them a few weeks after by the Accelerator team. This proved to be a worthwhile exercise, not only for the participants (some who tweeted positive words about receiving their postcard) but also for the Accelerator team, as we received words of gratitude about the event.

**TIP 5**: Identify a way to remind participants of the actions they said they would take or the case studies they seemed interested to follow up on after the event.
KEY THEMES

In this section we outline the topics that participants focused on exploring at the event, and in line with these, the recommendations that we have drawn from the discussions, sessions and activities for engaged journalism practitioners to benefit from and apply to their own organisations.

The topics that participants were keen to explore can be divided into two main themes:

1. establishing and managing the engagement process (including using engagement to draw wisdom from the community, how to reward engagement and how to engage in the long run), and
2. **making the business case for engagement** (including how to identify and navigate a resilient business ecosystem, how to figure out impact and measure success, how and why to scale engagement).

We go into detail about both themes in the sections below.

**ESTABLISHING AND MANAGING THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

**Using engagement to draw wisdom from the community**

Many of the participants came from organisations that focus on investigative journalism, in countries including Spain, Belgium, UK and France. Investigative reporting is one of the most impactful types of engaged journalism and it is key in building trust when we report in the interest of the public, as demonstrated in the examples below – but practitioners noted it can sometimes be tricky, due to risks or personal safety, to be fully open about why, who and what they are investigating, and bring readers into the process.

There are different ways to involve users, depending on whether an investigation starts from a topic a publication deems as important, or if it starts from a premise or tip-off suggested by the community. However, journalists could start by explaining more clearly what an investigation is. As someone at the event flagged: “We start with a hypothesis...and we should tell people ‘we will work on X thing and (...) this investigation might not lead anywhere or we may not find answers to our assumptions, but we want to be transparent about why we think this topic / story is important and why we think we need to investigate.”

Participants also suggested starting by asking people to “ask a lot of questions rather than asking people to come up with ideas [of topics to investigate], which can lead to more bias”. Another way to open up the process is to publish a smaller or initial story related to the hypothesis of the investigation, in order to “build traction to develop the story further and to gain traction with users to contribute to it.”

Journalists working for German magazine [Krautreporter](https://krautreporter.de) often post a story idea in the [Krautreporter Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/krautreporter/) to get feedback from members before starting to work on it. Recently, a reporter asked members of the group what questions they had about Germany’s yellow vest movement, ahead of a protest the journalist was going to attend.
There were only a handful of replies, and Krautreporter's interpretation was that the community either “didn't know much about the topic or doesn't care about it yet”, so the job of the reporter was to find out whether it was one or the other in order to frame the story accordingly and provide the necessary information.

In the US, ProPublica has established a model of people-powered reporting for investigative projects including ‘Lost mothers’ and ‘Reliving Agent Orange’, by publishing reader call-outs explaining what topic they are about to investigative and asking people to contribute their experiences (they recently published a post explaining what issues its reporters are covering this year, with a statement from each one on how the public can help).

Bureau Local has built a network of more than 800 members across the UK – some are journalists but most are lawyers, technologists, teachers and other members of the public. The Bureau announces a new issue they are looking into (they recently announced they were looking into the sale of public spaces by local authorities in England) then bring the data and the journalistic know-how to collaborative hack days, in person or on Slack,
where they work with people in their network to dig into the information and find stories. They have also started holding regular ‘open newsrooms’ on Slack for members to solve a problem together or enable them to ask for help or offer a specific skill.

In Belgium, magazine and cooperative Médor tried an “open investigation” in 2018, inviting people to complete a questionnaire about their alcohol consumption habits with the view of looking into where and how alcohol is consumed in the country. And Krautreporter asks each user to fill out a profile when they register, answering five questions, including ‘what do you study?’, ‘what is your field of expertise?’ and ‘where do you have people you can contact in different countries?’, which enables them to find sources of expertise within their own member database. They also survey members regularly, with a simple question: “What is it that you don't understand?” People are given type-forms with 160 characters to broadly outline an issue, after which they get 500 characters to flesh out their question. Krautreporter conducts the surveys on its website, as well as on Facebook and Twitter.

**TIP 6**: Start by asking questions and asking users what they want to know about a particular issue (similar to Hearken’s approach) instead of getting them to come up with specific ideas of topics that should be covered (which may come from a particular bias or agenda).

**TIP 7**: Tell community members what hypothesis or issue is being investigated or explored and acknowledge it might not lead anywhere, but be transparent about why the journalist or organisation deems it important.

**Rewarding engagement and participation**

People have different motivations for supporting an organisation, and based on that, there will be various ways in which they look to contribute: for some, financially supporting a publication through a subscription or a donation is sufficient, and they do it because they believe in its mission. It can be because it's a much-needed investigative journalism outfit, or a magazine focused on explanatory and collaborative reporting, or one of the few independent organisations exposing wrongdoing in a country where press freedom is under threat.

“People might support your work for reasons you
Others are also interested in participating in other ways: by volunteering time, skills such as legal expertise or coding, acting as marketing ambassadors on behalf of the publication, or becoming members of a cooperative, which also enables them to have a say in decision-making, from what topics are covered to how budgets are spent.

The Membership Puzzle Project has identified [25 jobs community members can do for an organisation], broken down into categories according to motivation: to learn something new, to have a voice, to show a ‘superpower’, to get the inside scoop and see behind the scenes of the process, to feel like they are part of a movement, community or something bigger.

A non-journalism example mentioned by one of the workshop participants is the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), which recently introduced a new membership programme called [LACMA Local], designed to build a community and encourage people to form new friendships using the “museum as a catalyst”, and giving them access to events and “parts of the museum that are otherwise off-limits or sold out”.

[Image of people in a meeting with a flip chart]
Bureau Local has surveyed its 800+ members and found three main ways in which they wanted to be involved: to contribute (give their time or experience to local investigative journalism), to network (access a community of peers or potential collaborators) and/or to learn (gain new skills or knowledge).

“We’re not building new communities, we’re tapping into existing ones, seeing how people mobilise, and building different skill-sets and knowledge (...) to enable them to take on specific problems and questions.”

There is sometimes, but not necessarily always, an overlap between people who give money and people who want to be involved in other ways, and acknowledging and rewarding their engagement is an important part of maintaining a relationship based on trust. For those who are happy to make a financial contribution to support the democratic function of journalism, the reward is knowing they have contributed to the endurance of that organisation and to the fact that more people can now have access to quality information.

What are some other tangible ways to recognise and reward engagement?

Superpowers and expertise titles

Maldita.es, a non-profit organisation that fights disinformation and promotes transparency through fact-checking and data journalism techniques, calls members of its community “malditas” and “malditos”, which fosters a sense of belonging. People not only send in hoaxes via WhatsApp and Telegram for the team to fact-check, but also take it upon themselves to maximise the impact of the debunks by sharing them back with their own networks. Recently, Maldita surveyed its users and asked them ‘what is your superpower?’ – people put forward skills they could help the team with (Maldita even asked if someone could help fix their office door).

**TIP 8**: Survey your community to understand what value they derive from your journalism, as well as to identify what strengths they have and can contribute to your organisation.
Elsewhere, De Correspondent has legitimised contributions of expertise and experiences by introducing expertise titles for its members, which can be anything from PhD student to teacher, law professor or parent (and members can also switch between their title depending on the story they are contributing to).

Giving back through training and tools

Both Bureau Local and Maldita have created and open-sourced toolkits for investigative journalism and verification respectively, which is a good way to give back to the community and empower them to do this work themselves. In the US, City Bureau is ‘democratising journalism skills’ through the Documenters programme and platform, training and paying Chicago residents to document public meetings.

“There’s an outer circle of things we feel comfortable with the public taking a role and that boundary is moving inward in many sectors.”

Other rewards mentioned by participants in this session included gifting subscriptions to
people who are contributing time but are not able to provide financial support; elevating very active users to the position of moderators or ambassadors, and/or awarding them membership based on that; or the Echo ‘economy of hours’ concept, where people trade their time in skills in exchange for Echo currency and then spend that on the platform’s Marketplace.

“We know we’ve reached all the people we could out of pure ideology, so how can we reach that second layer, what motivates them? What’s the reward? How do we find a good motivation without being too transactional?’”

Two important concerns were raised in this discussion:

- A few of the participants expressed concern that it might seem unfair and exploitative to solicit or allow contributions (in the form of time or expertise) from people who are experts in their fields if there is no financial remuneration involved. Which is why it is important for the expectations, rules and benefits of engagement to be clearly outlined from the beginning. If people know what is expected of them and what they get in return (be it a free subscription, a special title or an acknowledgement when a piece is published), they have the information necessary to make an informed decision about the type of contribution they want to make.

- Any reward system should be devised empathetically and based on the value that it’s adding for the user, otherwise it risks becoming transactional and you might end up looking like an ‘askhole’, a term coined by Jennifer Brandel, co-founder and CEO of Hearken: “We ask for [people’s] story, we extract their experiences and concerns, and then we package and polish them up to share with audiences for our own financial gain. We don’t follow up. We don’t thank them. We don’t ask what they need. We just ask for what we need from them”, she explains in a Medium post on the ethics of engagement.

TIP 9: Publicly acknowledge and reward community contributions empathetically, based on people’s motivations for supporting your organisation. A ‘superpower’ or expertise title might be best for users lending their skills, whereas for someone spending their time to
help sift through a dataset, the best reward could be an investigative journalism toolkit that will help them learn.

Engagement for the long run

A commitment to the communities that we serve means doing the opposite of extracting experiences, packaging and sharing them for financial gain. A commitment to engaged journalism means doing this work for the long run, by having a clear mission, purpose and sense of the impact this work can have on the people we serve.

What does the ‘long run’ mean? It can mean the continued and evolving involvement of a community, whether it’s geographical, topical or otherwise, in your journalism over an extended period of time. It can also mean empowering people to participate in other ways or aspects of society, for example, starting their own fact-checking arm, or volunteering for a charity or non-profit that helps survivors of domestic abuse after collaborating in an investigation about it, or running for a local councillor position after learning more about how local budgets are spent in their area.

It also means going back to the people who contributed to a story or project and updating them on the outcome: the published piece, the reaction from other officials or organisations, whether measures are being taken in response, or whether there will be a follow-up.

“To avoid parachuting into communities, when we initially go to them to ask ‘what are you frustrated by / what can we do to help you?’, we need to keep linking this local story to other communities with the same story or with national stories, and make the effort to build bridges between those communities.”

In June 2018, Civio published an article about the number of households in Spain who were not claiming electricity subsidies despite qualifying for it, and the risk of no longer being able to claim once the new system would be implemented in October 2018. Civio, together with the CNMC, developed a web application where users could find out if they were
eligible for electricity subsidies by answering a few short questions. Civio also arranged a meeting with government representatives to communicate findings from their investigation and highlight the considerable number of people who were qualified for the subsidies but had not applied for them. In October 2018, the government announced it was going to allow people who changed to the new system before 31 December 2018 to retroactively receive the subsidies, and that electricity companies were obligated to contact all their consumers within 15 days to inform them about the required change to the new system. Civio wrote a story about it, bringing the engagement process full circle from identifying the issue, to providing a service for people, to updating them about the impact of the work they had contributed to.

In other cases, what if a user is already highly engaged in an organisation’s fact-checking community, what is the next level they can advance to? Is their super-power their subject matter expertise or their ability to fact-check quickly and accurately?

Participants brainstormed ideas such as finding certain themes that come out of a debunking process and use those discussions to keep people connected, or linking up
different communities (for example researchers or scientists and immigration experts) so that they can help each other, or ‘graduating’ users from one group to another (a doctor trying their hand at legal fact-checking). Some users might find it valuable to be able to demonstrate proficiency in a certain area after engaging with the organisation, through a certificate or a certain status.

“Is your goal for that community to keep them on, or to empower them to the point that they no longer need you but they bring new people in?”

Earlier in February, Maldita.es launched La Buloteca, an online space and tool for the community to search through debunked claims, or submit new claims for fact-checking. The invitation for people to participate asks Maldita.es members to “report and collaborate on debunking. We will verify using our methodology but we need you because often you know more than us about a specific topic.”

It’s also important to respond and follow up with people once a call-out has been put out, or the journalist has prompted users for feedback on a story idea, or people have been asked what issue they think is insufficiently or not well enough covered. A few of the participants mentioned not being able to always manage in an efficient and timely manner the amount or types of contributions received or interest expressed. “The big question is, if we don’t call people for six months, how will they feel about it?”, someone said.

Another person suggested that giving users a timeline (e.g. ‘share your experiences with us – the story will be published next month’) also means you are giving yourself a hard deadline which should be prioritised and it is something people will hold you accountable for.

“How can we measure whether the engagement process we’ve developed has worked and how can we replicate it? What sort of messages do I need to send to my community to make them continue to feel involved?”

This is how a participant phrased it: “It’s kind of about the energy in that moment. If you respond to my offer to help within 24 or 48 hours, that keeps my energy. So even if you
can't do anything with that person right away, you can thank them and ask if they want to receive the newsletter or participate in monthly webinars.”

“We tell members we’re working on something (without being too specific) and that right now we don’t need their help but at some point we will need their feedback,” said another attendee.

**TIP 10:** Determine your long-term goal for working with a community or group and tailor the engagement strategy accordingly. If the goal is to empower people, provide them with training, tools or information so that they can take action. If the goal is to tap into their skills or expertise again in the future, acknowledge when and how their help might be needed.

**THE ‘BUSINESS CASE’ FOR ENGAGEMENT**

As we mentioned above, all the participants who came to this workshop already buy into the value of community-driven journalism, so there was no skepticism around “why are we doing this, and is it worthwhile?”

But as an industry, we struggle to make the business case for engagement and draw clear links between trust, participation, revenue and sustainability, because we still have trouble defining the impact of our work, measuring its success, and relating that back to the business model.

One participant said: “We struggle with finding the one measure for engagement, and finding shared metrics that everyone agrees to, as if somehow they’re more credible if we all agree to them. But it’s more about measuring what matters to you and your organisation.”

We emphasise the Accelerator’s mission to support early adopters of engaged journalism to achieve, or make significant progress towards, becoming resilient. By resilience we mean an organisation is not only able to sustain its current structure, workflow and content production, but it is able to make profit and/or grow and scale over time, as well as adapt quickly to changes.
Clare Cook, co-founder of the Media Innovation Studio at University of Central Lancashire, guided workshop participants through an exercise designed to help them identify the key components of a resilient business ecosystem that could work for their organisations. Cook pointed out that for an organisation to move between ‘sustainable’ and ‘resilient’ they would have to identify their ‘dependants’: the people who really need the product or service offered by a particular publication.

In groups and with their organisations in mind, participants mapped out: who is cooperating with them (formally or in a serendipitous way); who is competing against them (directly or indirectly); who they are dependant on (internally or externally); and who is dependant on them (internally or externally).

In figuring out who fits in this last category, we tried to answer questions including: what do you produce or offer that is radically different from what is out there already? What needs are you serving, and whose needs? How can you know better the needs of those you serve? What new habits can you see forming? How can you prepare for change? Identifying these aspects helped set the stage for our next discussion on impact.

**TIP 11:** The methodology above is just one approach that news organisations can use to prove their business case for engagement. Whichever approach you take, it’s important to agree on and align a framework and metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) for both the impact you’re aiming to make in your organisation and the impact you’re aiming to make for your community.

**Figuring out impact and measuring success**

It’s important to distinguish between the impact an organisation wants to have, and the corresponding KPIs (quantifiable values) it sets to measure its progress/ success. Impact can be broken down into these categories:

- internal within the organisation (for example, increase financial revenue, advance product development or R&D, improve cultural change or improve operational effectiveness, productivity and efficiency)
- or external (enhance engagement with/ participation and contribution from your community, influence public discourse and community attitude/cohesion, instigate
social change (policy change and/or civic action) that leads to one or more outcome such as improved economic growth, infrastructure development, environmental development, improved health and wellbeing, advancement of education, etc.)

Hearken has also written about meaningful and countable metrics for journalism, and in trying to pinpoint these metrics, they also separated “goals” from “impacts”: “Goals are the things you want to have happen as a result of doing this work. Impacts are the things that actually happen, which may not be tied to any goals or metrics you set.” Hearken broke down impacts into three categories: audience loyalty, civic engagement and institutional change.

On the second day of the workshop, we took part in an exercise with Jon Alexander, co-founder of social innovation consultancy New Citizenship Project, which equips organisations to be more participatory and involve people as citizens not consumers (they have developed a toolkit for ‘7 modes of everyday participation’). The focus? Working back from impact, to identify the mission and outcomes of an organisation before mapping out metrics for success and ways for community engagement.

“Ask yourself what is so big that you can’t do it on your own and you have to do it with people?”

We tried to answer the following questions: What is the purpose that we need others to get involved in? How do you provide a platform for people to work on the purpose with you? How do you go about proving that the organisation can do this?

BrewDog for example, a Scottish craft beer company, has built a community around craft beer. Having a clear goal (to make everyone as passionate about craft beer as they are) means the potential outcomes of what they do, including open-sourcing their recipes, setting up a crowdfunding, opening a hotel - can be separated into how people think (they identify as craft beer lovers), how people feel (involved, valued, part of a community), what people know (for example, how the monopolies are killing beer) and what people do (buy BrewDog and other craft beer).
Krautreporter, which has more than 10,000 members paying between €5 and €9 a month, looks at article conversions to membership as its main KPI. Other secondary metrics include article engagement (shares/comments), log in and return frequency, session length and pages and articles read by guests vs those read by subscribers.

For a fact-checking organisation, a KPI could be the number of collaborations with and citations in other media, or the number of shares of a debunked claim or image compared to the number of shares of the original hoax. For Greek organisation Solomon, which trains people in writing and storytelling, photography and filmmaking through its LAB programme, a KPI can be the number of students who complete the courses, or the number of people who are offered positions in the organisation’s magazine team, or the number of student who graduate from the course and continue their journalism career in other organisations.

“Deriving benchmarks from the mission is good but sometimes hard to measure. Our mission is to help
our community understand. What is the KPI for understanding?”

Ukraine-based Tvoe Misto held an event with their community at the end of last year, inviting people to give feedback about the work of the organisation, and they heard some interesting ways in which people perceive parts of their reporting. For example public officials receive Tvoe Misto’s weekly newsletter, which is divided into topics. A participant working in the healthcare sector said that if they only see one story about healthcare in the newsletter, they see it as a KPI that their department has done something wrong, or insufficient. Indirectly, that can become a KPI for Tvoe Misto, as this means people take action on the back of content produced by the organisation.

**TIP 12:** Work back from the ideal impact you aim to have for a community. Write down what it is that your organisation cannot do by itself to achieve that impact, and pinpoint the groups of people of other organisations who can help.

**TIP 13:** Brainstorm ‘participation pathways’ based on the impact you aim to achieve, and attach quantifiable values (your KPIs) to each impact category. Some KPIs will be more straightforward (number of people trained in fact-checking or photography skills), while other KPIs will have to be put into context with other qualitative data, such as surveying members.

**How (and why) do we scale engagement?**

A participant inquired what the next step would be for an organisation that was started from the ground up by a handful of people to foster the sustainable development of a local community.

For such an organisation, scaling could mean building on the ways of participation to attract new users. It could be experimenting with a first or a new model of reader revenue. It could be replicating its model in a different city or country.

People in the room expressed concern that to increase the quantity and frequency of community engagement initiatives, and to enlarge that community by adding new members, would result in a decrease of the quality of that engagement. “Would we still be
able to meet our readers face to face and have that personal relationship with them?"
For those in attendance, scaling did not mean pursuing new, passive audiences or reaching more people for the sake of having more eyeballs on the content they produced – it meant working with a community to fill a need.

Spanish organisation Datadista, focused on investigative and data journalism, in 2017 published ‘Playa Burbuja’, a book about their investigation into the real estate bubble on the Mediterranean coast. Datadista crowdfunded €11,000 for the book from more than 250 people. A community of locals, activists, business owners has formed around the book and the team has travelled to various locations to meet with people and explain what happened in that region, as well as drawing parallels between similar cases in neighbouring regions. The team keeps in touch with these communities but they also feel like they have “filled a need” in informing them, so what would be the next step in maintaining and evolving that relationship?
Similarly, Diario de Navarra in Spain and Tvoe Misto in Ukraine are looking at how they can replicate their models for community engagement in other cities. Both news organisations sit outside the capitals of their countries – Diario de Navarra’s pilot, ‘DN más cerca’, has been taking place in San Adrián, a small town of 6,000 inhabitants in the province of Navarra. However there are 272 small towns in the region, so the paper is thinking of how they could replicate the model. “How can we scale in a place but not abandon people? Scale is to find a model that supports you, you can grow without scaling.”

Tvoe Misto, which is based in the Ukrainian city of Lviv, has been considering the idea of replicating its model of community engagement in another city. Like Diario de Navarra, they acknowledge a lack of resources in doing so, and an awareness that each community has different needs, so the model would have to be adapted.

One way is to partner with an organisation that is based in that city, and supporting them to tailor and implement the model in a suitable way (franchising could also become a revenue stream for your organisation later on). For example, The Bureau Local model of collaborative, country-wide reporting, will be replicated in Germany by investigative non-profit Correctiv.

“We have a weapon that big media doesn’t have. We don’t compete anymore, we are cooperating between us, the small ones. And that’s also a great message to ‘sell’.”

Another option – although likely to be more resource-intensive and to require training – is to empower one of your organisation’s ‘superfans’ or ambassadors to reproduce some of your community engagement approaches in their city. In the Accelerator community call we hosted in January, Yohann Koshy, co-editor of New Internationalist, said the magazine has had members of its community (shareholders or subscribers) in Japan and Sri Lanka volunteering to translate the magazine or to market and distribute copies of New Internationalist because the title was not stocked in local bookshops.

“Think of your work as building a constituency of partners rather than consumers.”
There is a need for more qualitative data and research around the link between trust, engagement and revenue - Hearken has been documenting it; over at Impact Architects, Lindsay Green-Barber and Eric Garcia McKinley recently published a new report focused on the practices of 4 US news organisations to connect the dots of engaged journalism, building trust, generating revenue and fostering civic engagement; and our own Accelerator case studies aim to demonstrate that too.

One significant finding from the Impact Architects research: “organisations that are able to clearly articulate a shared mission with their communities have the strongest foundation upon which to build relationships”.

“Do you share your goals with the public? Maybe involve them by sharing those goals (...) and ensure that those are also their goals.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **Make internal culture change a priority**
   1.1. Focus on establishing and articulating your organisation’s values and bringing your community with you to continually meet these values
   1.2. Think of your community not merely as choosers of products and services, but how you can catalyse them to shape those products and services, and use them as active citizens. Have a desire to shift from community as “subject” (obey/receive), to consumer (demand/choose), to citizen (participate/create)
   1.3. **Transparency and accountability** go hand in hand – focus on ‘showing’, not ‘telling’ your community that you are creating transparency around editorial and journalistic processes
   1.4. Enable everyone in your organisation to be accountable for community engagement – it’s not only one person’s role
   1.5. Learn from other industries. Undertake a mapping exercise within your organisation of local or national initiatives and organisations that you have come across / read about that are innovating with engagement, and connect with them to understand what you can apply to your own organisation and community. For
example, one local council in the UK recently developed a new ‘social contract’ to overcome financial struggles. They held public events and asked, ‘what do you need us to do and what are you as citizens willing to do to get there?’ ‘We will do X (provide these services) if you do Y (recycle properly e.g.). (Also refer to the other examples on page 24.)

2. **Face value speaks louder than online tools alone**
   2.1. Asks and offers, and ‘commitment promises’ that you encourage your community to make, have increased effectiveness when you bring people together through **face-to-face events**, and in specially dedicated safe spaces.
   2.2. Community members are more likely to connect online after they have connected in-person first, but you also need to **continually show your face** (in person or in online groups / platforms) in order to encourage community members to keep showing theirs.

2.3. **Examples of tools and initiatives** that can be beneficial to help you bring people together, collaborate and keep momentum going include*:
   - Online engagement: loomio.org, info.confers.com, citizenlab.co
   - Face-to-face engagement: 4sc.io, civilsocietytoolbox.org, sparkcollaboration.com, newcitizenship.org.uk, dhyaandesign.com

*This is not an exclusive list and we encourage readers to share any tools or approaches they have used for community engagement and collaboration.

3. **Simplify the language you use and enhance accessibility to your work**
   3.1. **Explain the craft of journalism** such as what journalists can and can’t do (compared with the public). For example, going to courts and knowing what you can and can’t report publicly on, and what the risks are if you report incorrect or prejudice information.
   3.2. Measure your success or progress based on **how your community talks about you** – what language they use to describe you and how they feel about you.
   3.3. Use language in your content production and in your engagement with your community that is reflective of your **commitment to a different approach** to working.

4. **Avoid parachuting into communities**
   4.1. Establish ways that you can keep linking each topical or local story with national stories, or to other communities that have the same story or experience. And
4.2. Embed engagement into your organisation for the long run including into a **long-term business strategy**

4.3. When you look to determine what impact your organisation is aiming to achieve, and how to measure progress towards this, think about benchmarks or KPIs that derive from your mission and values. And create a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) ‘impact statement’ to continually refer to.

4.4. Ensure that the impact you’re aiming to achieve is reflective of both **internal for your organisation, and external with and for your community**, and that these are aligned.

5. **Undertake research and development (R&D) on the link between trust and revenue / resilience**

5.1. The journalism industry as a whole, never mind individual news organisations, struggles to identify ways to understand if there is a direct return on investment (ROI) on engagement with increased revenue and enhanced resilience. Therefore, news organisations should undertake their own R&D, and also collaborate with each other and with research partners in order to **develop a longitudinal research framework** to explore this.

**CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

This workshop further cemented the fact that engaged journalism in Europe takes many forms, but organisations are working towards a shared goal: empowering communities to be better informed, and building bridges between those communities by using journalism as an instrument.

The format of this event enabled a hands-on exchange of knowledge between individuals and organisations that are trying to answer some of the same questions about collaborating with communities. The format also demonstrated the benefit of a tailored participatory, facilitator-led workshop, as opposed to a conference, as people felt able to be candid about their challenges (both personal and professional), about their successes and also about the inner workings of their organisations and team.
“I will never go to a conference after this. This is very practice-oriented and you get ideas from everyone.”

The most significant benefit of participating was the access to likeminded people, and the ability to share hypotheses, test ideas, receive feedback and even kick-start potential collaborations. Based on suggestions from attendees, we have launched monthly Accelerator community calls, for everyone doing, or interested in doing, a more participative kind of journalism to come together and discuss the topics they care about.

In the post-event evaluation survey, participants said at future events they would still like the focus to be on practical exercises, as opposed to standard presentations. They also expressed a desire to spend some time working through how they will present what they learned to their colleagues and managers, and we are incorporating this feedback in the design and programme of the next Accelerator workshop.
The Accelerator will be hosting three more events in 2019: our next convening in Birmingham on 12 March, will again be smaller and invitation-only. The theme, building on the Madrid workshop, will be ‘Building power for more informed communities’.

The remaining two events will take place in June and October 2019, in Central and Eastern Europe. In June, we are planning a ‘show and tell’ event, showcasing case studies and examples of engaged journalism in Europe and hosting some practical masterclasses on topics such as funding, leadership, impact. In October 2019, we will gather for a final ‘learning and reflection’ to share our learnings from the Accelerator programme.

We will announce the dates and locations soon on our website and in our newsletter, Engagement Explained. If you would like to participate or to suggest topics we should discuss, get in touch with us at hello [@] engagedjournalism.com.