A Toolkit For Transformative Community-Centric Environmental Journalism

Land and Partner Acknowledgements—

As students at the University of Michigan, we recognize the historical and ongoing harm committed by the university against the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples, upon whose land this institution is built. We are deeply grateful for the generous contributions of our community partners and contributors (those listed below and those who chose not to be), whose insights, experiences, and feedback have been invaluable to our project's development. This project would not be possible without their collaboration and willingness to share their expertise and lived experiences with our team throughout the entire project process, from interviews to providing us feedback on our final report and toolkit drafts. We would also like to thank our project advisor, Dr. Mike Shriberg, who has been an instrumental mentor from the onset of our project.

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CONTRIBUTORS

- Alex Ghenis: Accessible Climate Strategies
- Dr. Andrea Wenzel: Temple University
- Amy Boal: River Network
- Anna Sysling: Great Lakes Now
- Ariel Zirulnick: LAist
- Ashley Williams: Just Transition Northwest Indiana
- Bernadette Woods Placky: Climate Central
- Bridget Thoreson: Institute for Nonprofit News
- Carolina Ortiz: Communidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina (COPAL)
- Clio Soiffer: Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)
- Fara Warner: Metcalf Institute, University of Rhode Island
- Finn Ryan
- Gillian Gainsley: Great Lakes Now
- Gwen Winston: Wisdom Institute
- Hannah Mico: River Network
- Huda Alkaff: Wisconsin Green Muslims
- Jena Brooker: BridgeDetroit
- Jim Malewitz: Wisconsin Watch
- Judith McCray: DePaul College of Communication, Juneteenth Productions
- Bishop Marcia Dinkins: Ohioans for Sustainable Change, Black Women Rising
- Marisha Davis: Groundwork Ohio River Valley
- Monica Lewis-Patrick: We the People of Detroit
- Dr. Nichole Keway Biber: Anishinaabek Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party
- Nina Ignaczak: Planet Detroit
- Piper Carter: Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
- Shea Howell: Riverwise Magazine
- Susan Thomas: Just Transition Northwest Indiana
- Tiana Starks: We the People of Detroit
- Timna Axel: Earthjustice

Student Team Acknowledgement

To critically assess our role as outside researchers engaging with communities that have experienced past harm by academic institutions (including the University of Michigan); decolonize our research methodology and approach, and acknowledge the generous contributions and support of our stakeholder partners – without whom this project would not have been possible – our team established and committed to upholding the following responsibilities:

1. Talk to and engage with as diverse and representative individuals as possible throughout the Great Lakes Region.
2. Commit to the principles of environmental justice and community-based participatory research by engaging in decolonial practices as much as possible (given our position at the University of Michigan) and embodying non-extractive, co-produced, and reciprocal relationships.
3. Create a body of work in collaboration with our stakeholder partners that directly serves their needs and priorities and provides value to various potential users.

We sincerely hope that this toolkit will be an important tool for inspiring and fostering change within an industry that is critical for supporting communities fighting for environmental justice.

Hira Ahmad: *M.S. University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability*

Francesca Levethan: *M.S. University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability*

Hannah Rieders: *M.S. University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability*

Madeline Rieders: *M.S. University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability*

Kausthubh Sumanth: *M.S. University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability*

About This Toolkit

Introduction

Local journalism is essential in empowering communities, particularly those facing environmental justice issues. Community leaders recognize the value of local news in disseminating vital information, forging connections among individuals affected by problems like ecological contamination, climate change, biodiversity loss, and broader environmental injustice, and heightening awareness of their stories. Nonetheless, research suggests a pressing need for journalism to transform, emphasizing the rejuvenation of local reporting and restoring trust within the media landscape. Heeding these insights, a growing interest among philanthropists to support local media outlets has emerged, recognizing their pivotal role in strengthening community ties, promoting equity and diversity, and initiating community engagement (Trusty, 2020). Over the preceding five years, donor investments have increasingly aimed at aiding local news operations imperative for the civic framework and addressing the needs of communities of color (Bauder, 2023). This philanthropic trend paves the way for media organizations to bolster community engagement by aligning funding requests with strategies to diversify their newsroom personnel, audience base, and outreach activities, among other community-centric practices (America Amplified, 2022).

While existing resources for inspiring organizational change are abundant — including articles, toolkits, and guides — on community engagement and environmental journalism, our toolkit addresses the significant disparity in recommendations tailored to organizations' current funding. We have curated our toolkit by integrating insights and lived experiences from diverse stakeholders: community organizations, media outlets, industry experts, and financial patrons in journalism and community relations. We conducted 42 interviews [17 community organizers, 13 journalists and media professionals, 9 experts in community engagement, and 3 funders]. Our comprehensive toolkit thus provides a resource for newsrooms to reflect and collaborate toward their overarching goals and further contributes to revitalizing and strengthening the local news ecosystem.

This introduction skims the surface of the challenges within the journalism sector and outlines recent research findings and philanthropic movements in journalistic endeavors. For an in-depth examination, refer to the "Introduction" and "Literature Review" sections of our report, "Media with Impact: Building A Community-Driven Model for Environmental Justice Coverage in the Great Lakes Basin."

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How to Use This Toolkit

1. Answer reflective questions on pages 2-3 of the workbook.
2. Using answers as a guide, identify one priority from the following list:
3. Choose 2-3 goals under the chosen priority.
4. Select corresponding actions under each goal based on individual, organizational resource and capacity considerations.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

The connections and interactions that media organizations foster with the viewers, listeners, readers, and consumers of their content in order to build reciprocal learning and mutual trust.

Goal C: Increase The Ease Of Access And User-Friendliness Of Content For Diverse Audiences

Goal D: Cultivate Strong, Trust-Based Relationships With Audiences

Goal E: Establish Co-Production And Community Partnerships

Goal G: Utilize Journalism As A Catalyst For Community Change

ADVOCACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In order to support community efforts in fighting environmental injustice, media organizations must create mechanisms through which to assess and track their own progress in centering diversity, equity, and inclusion as an organization.

Goal A: Foster And Uphold A Culture Of Accountability And Dedication Within The Organization

Goal B: Enhance Organizational Structure, Operations, And Culture

Goal D: Cultivate Strong, Trust-Based Relationships With Audiences

Goal G: Utilize Journalism As A Catalyst For Community Change

Goal H: Transform Existing Paradigms Within The Industry

COLLABORATION AND PEER LEARNING

Partnerships between media organizations that drive change toward non-extractive practices in journalism and foster cooperative efforts and knowledge-sharing practices which provide mutual benefit.

Goal A: Foster And Uphold A Culture Of Accountability And Dedication Within The Organization

Goal D: Cultivate Strong, Trust-Based Relationships With Audiences

Goal F: Facilitate Organizational Transformation

FOSTERING AND INSPIRING CHANGE

Journalism's dual function of championing environmental justice causes and ensuring institutional accountability for systemic issues. Driving the industry towards more ethical, sustainable, and community-centered approaches to news production and distribution.

Goal B: Enhance Organizational Structure, Operations, And Culture

Goal E: Establish Co-Production And Community Partnerships

Goal G: Utilize Journalism As A Catalyst For Community Change

How to Use This Toolkit

RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

ADVOCACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

COLLABORATION AND PEER LEARNING

FOSTERING AND INSPIRING CHANGE

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GOAL A

Foster And Uphold A Culture Of Accountability And Dedication Within The Organization

GOAL A—
FOSTER AND UPHOLD A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEDICATION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Assess past engagement strategies by engaging in self-reflection and acknowledging impacts on historically disenfranchised communities.

ACTIONS

1. Conducting interviews with staff and journalists to identify knowledge and information gaps. ●
2. Disseminating surveys to evaluate the community's existing relationship with local media. ●
3. Facilitating focus groups with community members to identify strategies that will further strengthen their relationship with media. ●

STRATEGY 2

Recognize and acknowledge the historical and current power dynamics between media and communities it serves.

ACTIONS

1. Being mindful of language or accessibility barriers when interviewing community members. ●
2. Centering consent in interactions with community members and being transparent about intentions from the onset. ●
3. Being conscious of the differences between journalistic models and existing community dynamics. ●

Unequal power between media and communities facing environmental justice issues can be further perpetuated through differences in socioeconomic status, race, culture, gender, and political power.

One of the current strains on the media industry arises from a conflict between rapid media frameworks aimed at efficient story publication and the slower deliberate pace required to foster relationships and trust, which are essential to the functioning of community organizations.

GOAL A—
FOSTER AND UPHOLD A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEDICATION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 3

Determine the organizations' existing audience and prospective audiences they aim to engage with.

ACTIONS

1. Mapping existing community partners and outlining current engagement efforts. ●
2. Reaching out to prospective community partners through existing connections. ●
3. Designing a plan to incorporate the information needs of specific, targeted audiences and implementing this plan. ●

STRATEGY 4

Developing an internal accountability mechanism aimed at ensuring alignment with DEI/EJ missions and initiatives.

ACTIONS

1. Conducting routine internal meetings to evaluate and adjust current community engagement practices as necessary. ●
2. Creating self assessment tools to track gaps and progress. Eg. Google Forms, Audience Surveys, Staff check-ins, Focus Groups. ●
3. Creating opportunities for interviewees to provide feedback and address any areas for improvement. ●

EXISTING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Incompatibilities between journalistic norms and justice-centered engagement approaches.
  - The urgency of journalism's culture that is focused largely on numbers and end products can be a barrier to equitable engagement efforts.
- Resource and capacity limitations can prevent journalists from covering specific stories and spending time in areas they are not from.
- Structural racism's entrenchment in media coverage and media-related institutions is depicted in the victimized narratives of communities of color, which fail to represent community joy and strengths accurately.

I would like to see a shift in this all sense of urgency in the media, because a lot of times we have to reach out very last minute and get a last minute response. And I know that puts stress on the person on the other end of that ... And I wish that there was another way around that but it's just kind of hard sometimes..."

—REPORTER FROM THE GREAT LAKES REGION

GOAL A—
FOSTER AND UPHOLD A CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND DEDICATION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 5

Formulate a strategy for organizational transformation.

Allyship from white journalists is critical to collective change in organizations.

2. Allocating significant resources to building relationships and partnerships with communities. ●
3. Repurposing media organizations and newsrooms to educate communities about climate change and environmental justice issues. ●
4. Accepting and adopting a cultural shift to slow down, adapt, and embrace the process. ●
5. Shifting away from a scarcity model to instead focusing on an abundance model that recognizes the great quantity of story ideas within the communities. ●
6. Shifting from a product-oriented organization/newsroom to a deliberative process-oriented one. ●

ACTIONS

1. Redesigning mission statements to align with DEI/EJ principles and weaving these into everyday organizational practice. ●

Shifting away from perfectionism standards prevalent in journalism to an approach more grounded in principles of equity and justice.

7. Investing in individuals' and community members' lives and well-being to achieve institutional change across organizations and industries. ●

STRATEGY 6

Implement training initiatives for staff focusing on anti-racism, environmental justice, and relevant subjects.

ACTIONS

1. Utilizing available resources for staff training, including online modules, self-assessment tools, and certifications. ●
2. Holding internal training sessions on accurately covering climate change and related events. ●

Focusing on community-led solutions while drawing connections between communities facing climate and environmental issues.

3. Hosting training sessions on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Environmental Justice, offering self-reflection and staff engagement opportunities. ●

GOAL B

Enhance Organizational Structure, Operations, And Culture

GOAL B—
ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, OPERATIONS, AND CULTURE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Evaluate the demographic composition and primary concerns of the community.

ACTIONS

1. Conducting stakeholder mapping to discern demographic information and unique characteristics of the community being covered. ●
2. Initiating the process of identifying pivotal leaders and primary contacts within communities. ●
3. Actively participating and leveraging social media platforms to identify prevalent discussions among community members and common concerns. ●
4. Allocating time and resources to engage with the community beyond reporting duties to understand community priorities and needs. ●

STRATEGY 2

Uncover and understand the systemic origins and interrelated nature of issues affecting various communities.

Failing to draw connections between rural and urban environmental justice concerns results in communities being left out of the conversation and further exacerbates existing news deserts.

Importance of media organizations to recognize the interconnection of "isms" that are constantly harming, and no one's writing about that. The environmental connection to socialization, classism, and racism, no one's writing about it in a way that is actually causing any equitable matrix to take place, right?"

—ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZER FROM THE GREAT LAKES REGION

ACTIONS

1. Promoting community-driven solutions rather than depending on solutions or narratives driven by extractive industries. ●

   "Many times it waits for all of these metrics of testing by universities and corporations and other political interests before anybody pays attention to what [the] community has said. Like we were telling folks years in advance that we have found through community level reporting that Detroit was still cutting water off."
   —*Environmental Justice Organizer in the Great Lakes region*

2. Bridging local and national and/or global issues to showcase potential solutions. ●
3. Strengthening existing community networks by demonstrating the interconnectedness of issues and solutions. ●
4. Examining and emphasizing the structural causes of harm while holding institutions accountable, refraining from framing these issues as individual experiences. ●

GOAL B—
ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, OPERATIONS, AND CULTURE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 3

Implementing techniques that avoid narrative tropes by accurately representing the lived experiences of community members.

ACTIONS

1. Creating narratives grounded in factual evidence to challenge harmful narratives. ●

   "So the media knows that most people don't want to know the facts. They want the story. And they want the story told to them in a fantastical way... So they're always going to try to give you the most fantastical story, the most fantastical angle."
   —An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

2. Consistently prioritizing community members as experts and actively seeking their input and perspectives. ●

3. Treating community members as valued collaborators with individual agency rather than merely as sources of information. ●

An activist pointed to Bell Hooks' writing on representational justice as informing their approach to working with community members:

"Bell Hooks writes about the importance of people as subjects of their stories and not objects of their stories. So for instance, in this initiative, everyone that we interviewed is a collaborator, not just an interviewee."
—An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes Region

4. Embracing representational justice in reporting by amplifying underrepresented communities' voices and enabling them to share their stories on their terms. ●

   "When you are doing the work of making visible communities... [that] have been invisibilized" within the broader narrative/public imaginary due to a lack of coverage or attention, "there's even greater danger of misrepresentation because what you're creating can become the single story that exists and the danger of the single story [is that] it becomes the one thing that people imagine."
   —A Journalist from the Great Lakes region

5. Confronting problematic dominant narratives that rely on trauma and actively incorporate diverse perspectives and worldviews. ●

This is an example of a narrative trope that distorts community members' experiences.

"I opened up a grocery store called ___ on __ Street. And they did, they did a piece on us and when we went when I went home to see the news, they said, what they say, a blessing they got a grocery store at ___has a grocery store. I'm like, 'Well, what is the blessing?'... This is something that's supposed to be in every community."
—An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes Region

6. Challenging journalistic ideals, such as objectivity, when necessary and prioritizing building relationships with communities. ●

GOAL B—
ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, OPERATIONS, AND CULTURE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 4

Create stories and narratives tailored to meet the informational needs of community members.

ACTIONS

1. Utilizing a survey to assess community members' most pressing needs. ●
2. Reporting on community-initiated actions and efforts, especially during times of crisis, alongside holding larger institutions accountable. ●
3. Crafting narratives that meet the community's information needs and avoiding the creation of inaccurate and one-sided narratives. ●
4. Empowering communities to shape narratives rather than imposing newsroom agendas. ●
5. Practicing journalism with a "low-ego, high-curiosity" approach, prioritizing community needs over journalistic preferences. ●
    a. This might entail occasionally prioritizing community needs and interests over quick turnarounds or sensationalist reporting.

Even journalists of color or those not embedded within the communities they cover can inadvertently perpetuate harmful narratives. This underscores the critical importance of recognizing the diversity within the concept of "community."

Assessing potential harm before covering a particularly delicate story is essential in protecting communities and individuals.

"You come in, you get the story, you post a story, and then that particular individual organization or entity receives negative retaliation regarding that story, that's ultimately that journalist, that media, that entity who reported they should have some ownership and responsibility, right."
—An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

GOAL B—
ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, OPERATIONS, AND CULTURE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 5

Showcase community highlights and strengths.

ACTIONS

1. Showcasing efforts by community organizations advocating for and working towards justice. ●

   "A lot of the way to change happens by helping people see themselves as agents of change. And so the best way to help people see themselves as agents of change is to show them people like them that have taken on issues."
   —*A Journalist from the Great Lakes region*

2. Emphasizing positivity and hope when covering and collaborating with Environmental Justice (EJ) organizations. ●

3. Providing context to issues being covered by emphasizing the systemic causes and institutional actors responsible. ●

4. Actively exploring undercovered topics through reporting. ●

5. Building trust within historically marginalized communities by reporting on their strengths and assets rather than solely focusing on deficiencies. ●

   "There is quite a bit of inventiveness that happens in communities. But then the inventive mind is not sexy. It's like, if you murder someone, you get to see our front page for months and months. If you embed something that is a benefit of people, there is no recognition. So we get to stay in. We get to stay in disparity and bias, intentional and unintentional is what the mainstream media prefers. Because it's a matter of capital."
   —*An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region*

6. Organizing events that unite the community, offering resources and activities to foster community joy. ●

GOAL B—
ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, OPERATIONS, AND CULTURE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 6

Hold powerful institutions accountable.

Use collective power and calls to action to shape people's conscious and unconscious understandings of the world.

PARACHUTE COVERAGE

Many community leaders discussed experiencing a phenomenon known as "parachute coverage," in which reporters lacking experience or ties to a community are sent to cover major news events and then exit the community after securing a story. Once a community is no longer deemed "newsworthy," reporters can fail to reciprocate/maintain communication with affected individuals and cover meaningful issues to the community. In this way, media outlets often fail to maintain bidirectional, mutually beneficial relationships with community members.

ACTIONS

1. Consistently covering Environmental Justice issues to increase public awareness. ●
2. Highlighting and giving precedence to the experiences and viewpoints of communities grappling with Environmental Justice (EJ) issues, rather than depending solely on statements from corporations and government agencies. ●
3. Engaging and strengthening community communication networks by involving the community in producing media that portray their experiences. ●
4. Using news coverage and investigative reporting to call out powerful institutions in stories or on social media to pressure them to address their harmful actions. ●
5. Establishing alliances and collaborations with fellow media organizations to tackle a region's systemic Environmental Justice (EJ) issues. ●

STRATEGY 7

Feedback and improvement mechanisms involving the community.

ACTIONS

1. Utilizing social media and other online forums to solicit community feedback on stories and gather ideas for future coverage. ●
2. Actively edit and revise community stories based on interviewee feedback while transparently communicating when revisions are not feasible. ●
3. Hosting community events focused on enhancing understanding of the community's unique information and other requirements, ensuring that media coverage aligns with these needs. ●

GOAL C

Increase The Ease Of Access And User-Friendliness Of Content For Diverse Audiences

GOAL C—
INCREASE THE EASE OF ACCESS AND USER-FRIENDLINESS OF CONTENT FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Understand how communities receive/share information.

Social media is a communication tool that supersedes many socioeconomic barriers other forms of media cannot.

ACTIONS

1. Asking community leaders preferred methods of communication used by community members. ●
2. Staying informed about the languages spoken in the area. ●
3. Gathering information on technological or other relevant access barriers in the community. ●

STRATEGY 2

Ensure language accessibility of media to local communities.

Including audio and visual formats in communities with strong oral cultures and making these accessible in locally spoken languages when possible.

ACTIONS

1. Gaining a deeper understanding of local languages, cultures, and traditions through research and conversations with community leaders and members. ●
2. Providing translation services in local languages. ●
3. Investing in extensive translation services in multiple formats to serve specific community needs. ●

GOAL C—
INCREASE THE EASE OF ACCESS AND USER-FRIENDLINESS OF CONTENT FOR DIVERSE AUDIENCES

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

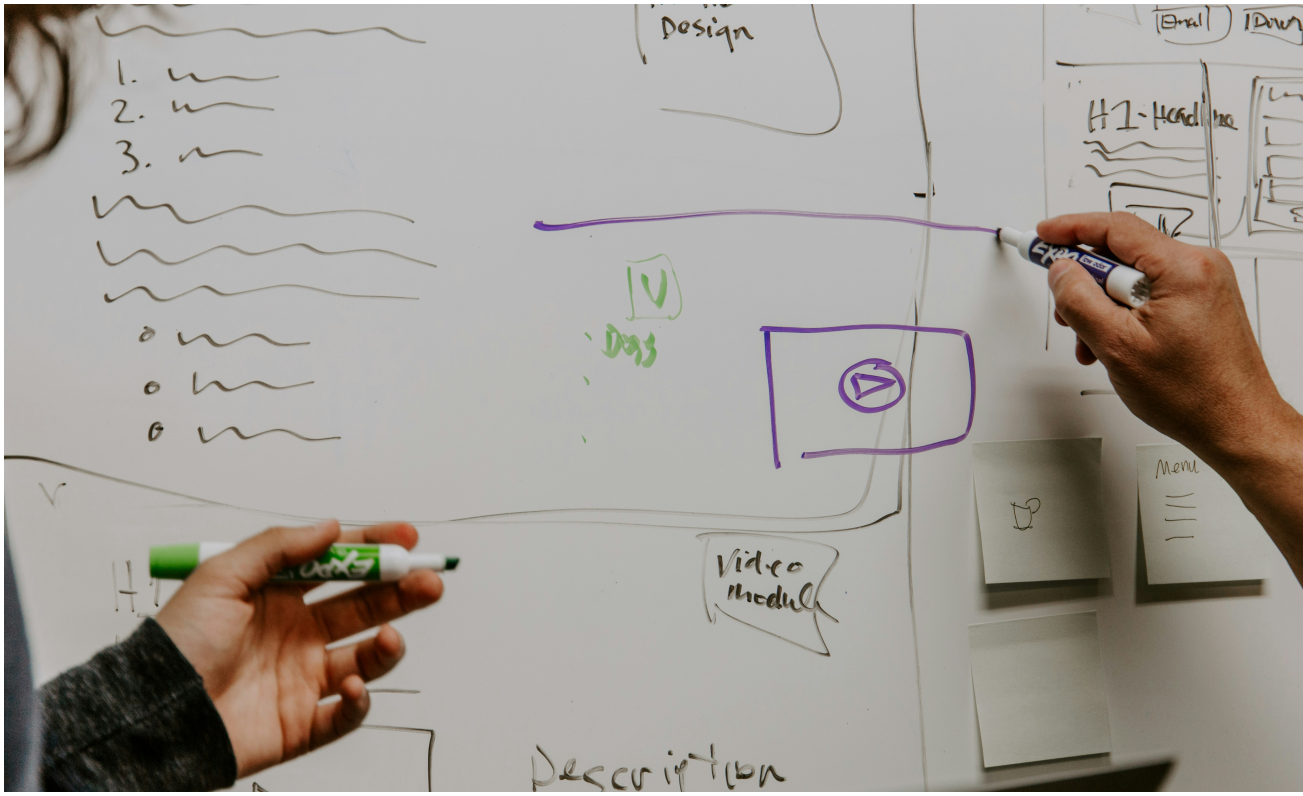
STRATEGY 3

Enhance media accessibility by employing a diverse range of communication channels.

Establishing a sense of community across the Great Lakes region, particularly concerning water-related and other environmental justice issues, is crucial for raising awareness and supporting community well-being.

ACTIONS

1. Assessing preferred and commonly utilized methods of communication in a community. ●
2. Guaranteeing media accessibility by considering disabilities and common impairments. ●
3. Executing communication strategies to facilitate increased community engagement with media. For instance, utilize a broader range of communication mediums, including audio stories, visual content, and written materials. ●
4. Gathering feedback on current communication strategies and identifying areas for improvement using diverse methods such as texting services, community events, and monthly forums. ●
5. Increasing financial and resource investment in translation services and expanding disability access. ●



GOAL D

Cultivate Strong, Trust-Based Relationships With Audiences

GOAL D—
CULTIVATE STRONG, TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Assess the demographic composition of the community and identify prominent community leaders.

COVERING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITIES

"We're still giving too much of the official point of view, or the western point of view. But I think whenever I finish is, journalists are to give voice to the voiceless and, and help give people a voice and Native communities, they were here first and I'm not sure if they're taken seriously on issues such as traditional ecological knowledge and knowledge about the environment."
—A Journalist from the Great Lakes region

Staff education is essential for fostering understanding and respect for the history, culture, language, and traditions of the community they serve. Relying solely on dominant Western narratives hinders meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities and limits perspectives. To address this, media organizations and journalists must gain insight into Indigenous cultural traditions and knowledge to comprehend larger systemic issues. It's crucial to use appropriate vocabulary and language when discussing specific topics and to incorporate Indigenous ecologies for accurate representation. Creating a platform for Indigenous voices and practices is vital, as Western media often falls short in accurately portraying Indigenous knowledge.

ACTIONS

1. Acknowledging and addressing the absence of diverse representation among community members and experts featured in the media. ●

Prioritizing white voices over others obstructs equitable participation.

"Is that too often in problems-focused journalism and solutions-focused journalism, we tend to give greater weight to white people. We give greater weight to people who wear suits, and people who have official titles... those people may be important, but they are not the most important people, particularly when you're thinking about responses to solutions to the climate crisis."
—A Media Expert in the Midwest

2. Developing comprehensive stakeholder and network mapping strategies to survey and analyze community diversity, utilizing current and historical data. ●
3. Engaging directly with community members and leaders through immersive experiences and conducting interviews. ●

GOAL D—
CULTIVATE STRONG, TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 2

Establish an active community presence that extends beyond journalistic obligations.

Participating in tabling events demonstrates media investment and engagement with the community.

Committing to comprehensively understanding and reporting on a community's strengths and assets involves shifting focus from what the community opposes to what it stands for.

Amplifying community experiences entails highlighting their causes and issues to foster solidarity with those outside EJ-affected communities. This can be achieved by raising awareness about community priorities and confronting prevailing narratives about a community or area.

ACTIONS

1. Engaging with a diverse range of individuals within communities, rather than solely relying on "community spokespeople" commonly featured in stories. ●
2. Collaborating with journalists and storytellers from the community being covered to gain insights into lesser-known issues and narratives. ●
3. Consistently participating in community-led events to offer assistance and support. ●

"Debra Taylor worked for months and months and months to organize with the people of Flint...Dragging back and forth from Detroit to plan that, if had not been for her to insist on those people's stories being lifted, and then at least getting those few journalists to even show up on a Saturday morning with over 100 people telling their story. really made a significant shift shift and the conversation about the Flint water crisis."
—An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

STRATEGY 3

Ensure language accessibility of media to local communities.

Engaging in story coverage solely to benefit from a current event is a form of extractive media practice.

"Sometimes it did feel predatory. It was like, Do you have anybody that we can talk to? That's experiencing this right now but not really with very little concern about that person?"
—An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

ACTIONS

1. Demonstrating awareness of the sensitivity of the issues or stories being covered. ●
2. Allocating ample time and resources to engage with community members responsibly and respectfully. ●

"Anytime there's like a specific story that we know the community is very sensitive to because they feel like a news organization has misrepresented them in the past, we know that we're going to have to dedicate extra time around community engagement to do that story properly."
—An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

3. Consistent follow-up and follow-through after covering an important story/issue to ensure ongoing engagement and trust-building within the community. ●

GOAL D—
CULTIVATE STRONG, TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 4

Gain insight into how information is shared and received within the community.

Sharing images represents a powerful means of conveying individual stories.

ACTIONS

1. Analyzing how communities receive and share news information, tailoring their storytelling and dissemination strategies accordingly. ●

   "I printed the story out and actually hand distributed it, which I think is another really useful tool that more newsrooms could be doing because almost no one has a print newspaper anymore and a lot of Detroiters don't have internet so they're not reading the news."
   —*A Reporter from the Great Lakes region*

STRATEGY 5

Evaluate the informational and resource needs of the community.

ACTIONS

1. Utilizing readily available technology such as the 211 system, online surveys, and text messaging services aids in understanding community needs and preferences. ●
2. Reconceptualizing and personalizing complex subjects like climate change by offering factual context and narratives that address the diverse needs of stakeholders. ●
3. Initiating, facilitating, and participating in community events such as forums and town halls while inviting key stakeholder groups to grasp community dynamics and dialogues. ●

GOAL D—
CULTIVATE STRONG, TRUST-BASED RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 6

Offering essential resources and support to the community in a reciprocal manner.

ACTIONS

1. Providing communities with essential information, regardless of whether or not a story can be produced. ●
2. Remunerating community members for their time and efforts when engaging and collaborating with media organizations. ●
3. Implementing a "Board of Community Experts" within media organizations to influence strategic decisions at a high level and providing resources such as equipment and educational support to empower community members to engage effectively. ●
4. Establishing an "annual or quarterly give back" policy within media organizations to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships with community organizations. ●

EXTRACTIVE REPORTING PRACTICES WHICH PERPETUATE HARM

- The practice of extractive reporting diminishes stakeholders' interest in interacting with the media and enhances mistrust. A staff member from a community organization recounts how certain journalists impose excessive expectations on community members while creating their reports/stories.

  "Then there's reporters who, in the middle of the spectrum, demand a lot of help from us, like they want to talk to all our clients and set up long interviews with folks who are really really freaking busy and burdened by all sorts of things that people like me don't face...and then they either don't ever publish anything, or the story they publish doesn't have any of our clients' perspective in it. And that's extremely disappointing and just feels wasteful. "
  —An Environmental Justice Advocate in the Midwest

- Taking quotes from their original context and leaving out sentences or the broader situation continues to cause damage.
  - Empowering community members to control their own stories, rather than misrepresenting them through out-of-context quotations, enables the audience to develop their informed perspectives on situations and scenarios.

- Another harmful dynamic emerges when reporters exert pressure or retaliate against community members who fail to meet their expectations, fostering long-term distrust.

  " I do have reporters sometimes who are very frustrated with communities who are not well resourced. Tribes, for example, and they get extremely touchy that the tribe may not be able to get back to them in a week...reporters have told me, if you don't give me this information, I'll go to the extractive company, to the mining company, for example, and get the information from them, or what have you. And they'll have published a slight dig even at _____ or at the tribe in the article."
  —An Environmental Justice Advocate in the Midwest

GOAL E

Establish Co-Production And Community Partnerships

GOAL E—
ESTABLISH CO-PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Determine community information requirements and pinpoint current resource deficits.

Reliance on the perspectives of the elite neglects to incorporate the voices of historically marginalized communities into broader environmental discourse.

"Frustrated with how kind of elite centered like public media was in the US, in terms of like, you might be reporting about communities of color or about communities that have been disinvested, but you're usually reporting for a community that's majority white and often very privileged."
—A Media Expert from the Midwest

ACTIONS

1. Selecting environmental story ideas informed by community newsletters, opinion pieces, communication channels, and feedback mechanisms. ●
2. Ensuring in-depth reporting by offering comprehensive context and bridging knowledge and information gaps. ●

   "It's all basically the same newsroom that they publish under a few different outlets. And those folks tend to just be, I don't know, very surface level news. They don't really want to go deep with us or future like, like stories that have much depths and they also tend to, I don't know, to fall into some of the usual traps of of the big media conglomerates."
   —An Environmental Organizer from the Bay Area
3. Engaging in dialogue and amplifying the perspectives of community members most affected by environmental inequalities. ●
4. Allocating resources to report on issues that are underrepresented in other media outlets. ●
5. Leveraging community connections to gain a deeper insight into the challenges faced by community members. ●
6. Utilizing established communication channels to increase awareness of environmental justice concerns. ●
7. Supplying and collaboratively creating educational content to meet the informational needs and fill the knowledge gaps within the community. ●

   a. For example, strategies for protecting one's family from an extreme weather event in a coastal area.

GOAL E—
ESTABLISH CO-PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 2

Maintain openness and clarity at every stage of media content creation.

ACTIONS

1. Diligently upholding transparency in securing consent, and continually reassessing to confirm ongoing approval, especially if any alterations arise during the storytelling process. ●

2. Evaluating a potential interviewee's past interactions with media and any concerns they might have by clearly articulating the role and responsibilities in straightforward terms, steering clear of media-specific language. Ensuring that the interviewee comprehends every step in the process of crafting the media content for the ongoing story or project. ●

    a. A document detailing media basics can help clarify common industry practices that may be unfamiliar to someone outside of the media field.

3. Enhancing media literacy among communities to overcome long-standing skepticism and mend past strained relations. ●

    "More education for community members about how media works, like sometimes I just don't think that I don't think people really understand that often. Like, like, I think it's both we need to stop perpetuating this false sense of urgency, but community members, it would also be good if they could have more understanding of how the process works, that we move fast."
    —*A Reporter from the Great Lakes region*

STRATEGY 3

Emphasize the expertise and lived experiences of community members throughout the entire story production process.

ACTIONS

1. Placing the stories and real-life experiences of communities at the forefront to fairly and precisely elevate their voices and viewpoints rather than depending exclusively on scientific statistics or other types of quantitative data, which often lack detail and context. ●

2. Presenting community members as experts throughout the reporting process on environmental justice issues and in media representations. ●

    "When engaging with community members, reporters and media outlets should approach these interactions with the goal of wanting to tell community stories in the most genuine way possible... centering community expertise rather than editing in community input to further a predetermined narrative."
    —*An Environmental Organizer from the Great Lakes region*

3. Conducting in-depth interviews with individuals 'on the front line,' gaining a clearer picture of a person's daily life beyond specific incidents, and understanding the broader systems at play that impact their experiences. ●

    "The media doesn't take the time to interview those who are on the frontline. Usually that doesn't happen...it takes some research by reporters to discover voices other than those in power."
    —*An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region*

4. Moving beyond one-off news reporting by fostering ongoing partnerships with capable individuals and focusing on sustained engagement. ●

    "Community members are partners... It isn't just about getting a quote."
    —*An Environmental Organizer from the Great Lakes region*

GOAL E—
ESTABLISH CO-PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 4

Offer chances for community members to take on roles as story gatherers/tellers.

ACTIONS

1. Establishing channels for community members to select and suggest urgent issues on media platforms or through text and mail services. ●
2. Developing programs to educate and compensate community members who collect and share stories by participating in public forums and local events. ●
3. Offering platforms for community engagement in every phase of the storytelling process, from idea submission to feedback provision on narratives. ●

Community Advisory Boards Act as Powerful Tools for Gathering Feedback and Promoting Ownership

"I think the best way to engage a community advisory panel is to really take something that you're working on, and they haven't come at it rather than just having a general kind of, you know, brainstorming session."
—A Reporter from the Great Lakes region on how they approach community advisory panels

Guaranteeing that people of different ages, backgrounds, and viewpoints are included on a community advisory board enhances the diversity of feedback. It prevents the portrayal of a community through a single narrative lens.

STRATEGY 5

Involve and empower youth in engagement efforts.

ACTIONS

1. Employing part-time youth who can adeptly leverage social media platforms to boost the visibility of media organizations' activities and expand their outreach. ●
2. Establishing internship programs, educational workshops, and training opportunities to actively involve students and young members of the community. ●
3. Developing pathways for interns to transition into full-time employment within the organization. ●

SOCIAL MEDIA SERVES AS A POTENT TOOL FOR ELICITING FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY AND ACTIVELY INVOLVES YOUNGER GENERATIONS

- Social media has the potential to level socio-economic differences by disseminating information within a community and broadcasting significant issues to a broader audience.

  "It is a luxury to be able to get a subscription. So they're really relying on social media, they're relying on word of mouth, because it is free and easy to be able to you know, get whereas yeah, a lot of those traditional publications that everyone was able to partake in are no longer financially feasible."
  —An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

- Nevertheless, it's crucial to acknowledge the limitations of short-form content in adequately providing context for complex issues.

  "Headlines can be very misleading and a lot of times what gets shared is the headline without any additional information. And so people may think they have the information they need, but not really. And people do not like to read up a whole lot since you have a lot of misinformation that comes in there."
  —An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

GOAL E—
ESTABLISH CO-PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 6

Being open to community input and prepared to make revisions to stories prior to releasing them.

ELEVATING COMMUNITY-CREATED MEDIA AND CONTENT

- Media should collaborate with and elevate community organizations' storytelling efforts to enhance their work, productions, and resources.
  - Providing community organizations with platforms to highlight important issues is one approach to achieving this.

    "We've been able to develop local relationships with journalists. And you know, had the ability to, you know, reach out to them to say, hey, we'd like to share this, you know, story with you... So it just depends, some people, they know you if they reach out to you, others just give you access, you know, within which to utilize that platform or the outlet in various ways."
    —An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes region

  - Equitable content co-production is contingent on recognizing and being mindful of the community's challenges and assets.

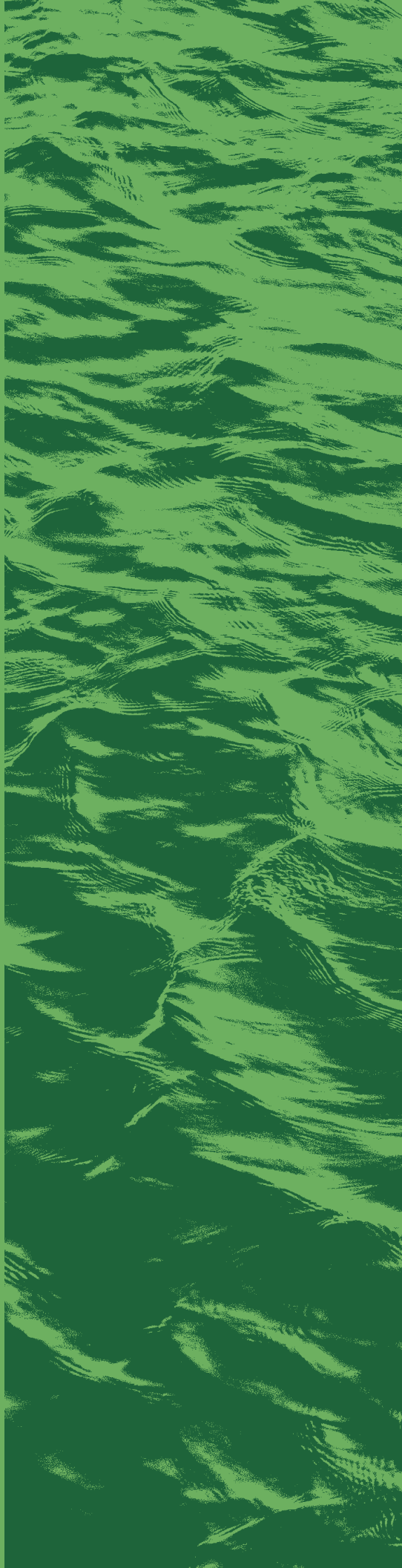
    "It takes a different kind of view of the world to say, there must be something I can do about this, there must be some way to address this. And so we try to catch those stories and we look for them...The other day I was driving down and I made a wrong turn on the ___ and I turned into this beautiful garden. I didn't know it was there. There was no way for, you know, but there it was. Now that place might end up in a story, because it was an effort to create something magnificent in this little spot somewhere."
    —An Environmental Reporter in the Great Lakes region

ACTIONS

1. Accurately depicting the real-life experiences of community members, particularly those within Black, Brown, and Indigenous populations. ●
2. Implementing thorough verification methods to ensure information is presented accurately and comprehensively. ●
3. Establishing avenues for community members to review media content before it goes public. ●
4. Placing high importance on community feedback during both the content creation and distribution phases. ●
5. Emphasizing a reciprocal approach by amending, modifying, or retracting stories in response to community input. ●

GOAL F

Facilitate Organizational Transformation



GOAL F—
FACILITATE ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Create internal mechanisms for ensuring accountability.

ACTIONS

1. Developing comprehensive strategies for feedback and review following news cycles to pinpoint shortcomings and opportunities for enhancement. ●

    a. An environmental justice reporter details the setup of a texting service that allows readers to receive updates on significant events and information and also enables them to submit questions.

    "I mean, we just do those types of basic needs, text messages out to the community. And then we do different community events where we're just out like, really talking to our readers. Our communities. And we also do monthly gatherings where we kind of do the same thing."
    —An Environmental Reporter from the Great Lakes region

2. Establishing internal procedures, such as a harm matrix, to maintain journalists' accountability to the communities they serve. ●

UTILIZING A HARM MATRIX TO PRIORITIZE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Evaluating the possible damages to a person, organization, or broader community from publishing a story versus its advantages is crucial for prioritizing the welfare and security of those interviewed over other results.
    - One professional describes the very real risks associated with telling individual stories

    "I have to continue to remind myself and be conscious of that while I understand because I do marketing and communications myself, like I understand how certain stories will sell and maybe generate more clicks and attention. At ___, we do our best to try and be like, an initial like protection for our clients, even the ones who want to share and are willing to share this like news organizations and we would never impede any of that. It's just like out of the most care conscious perspective we can have."
    —A Justice Professional in the Great Lakes region

3. Dedicating effort and practical measures to prioritize marginalized voices and challenge prevailing cultural norms rooted in white supremacist tactics. ●

GOAL F—
FACILITATE ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 2

Recruit a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities covered by newsrooms.

ACTIONS

1. Acknowledge deficits in diversity and outline goals to partner with reporters and freelancers deeply connected with the communities being covered, particularly when immediate hiring of diverse staff is not viable. ●
2. Engaging with coalitions and organizations led by people of color by offering collaborative opportunities to these journalists. ●
3. Employing individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in permanent roles rather than solely as contributors. ●
4. Establishing pathways to empower individuals from minority groups to attain leadership roles within institutions. ●

BIPOC LEADERSHIP IN ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA

- It is crucial to enlist journalists with Indigenous backgrounds and expertise in tribal affairs to authentically represent Indigenous communities' culture, traditions, and governance. This strategy seeks to engage with and report on Indigenous communities fairly and equitably. Additionally, integrating Indigenous perspectives into environmental stories, even if not directly related to justice issues, is essential.
- Recognizing that the perspective and approach to telling environmental justice stories depend on the storyteller. Being transparent about one's position can foster trust among reporters and audiences, especially when covering emotional subjects.

STRATEGY 3

Collaborating with experts in community engagement.

ACTIONS

1. Creating participatory community models that are not exploitative, extractive, or exclusive through constant accountability and maintenance. ●
2. Seeking guidance from professionals in the community engagement field to foster interaction with local communities. ●
3. Creating a board of community experts and strategists to assist with story production and dissemination. ●
4. Employing a team focused on community outreach to increase participation in local events and deepen their integration within the community. ●

GOAL F—
FACILITATE ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 4

Disassemble hierarchical workflows and address unequal power dynamics.

ACTIONS

1. Engaging in self-reflection to understand an individual staff member's power and positionality with respect to a community. ●
2. Recognizing and acknowledging existing power dynamics between the media organization and community members. ●
3. Disseminating the organization's mission, values, and DEI initiatives to community members and other media organizations fosters transparency and accountability. ●
4. Addressing power dynamics by stepping back and allowing community members to lead. ●
5. Implementing fair compensation policies for both interns and full-time employees. ●
6. Providing staff with training in ethical reporting practices, fostering commitment to community involvement, and advancing understanding of community media. ●
7. Ensuring the creation, implementation, and maintenance of consistent community engagement protocols. ●
8. Modifying and tailoring community engagement guidelines to demonstrate the organization's dedication to identifying and dismantling power imbalances. ●

FOSTERING COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF MEDIA

- Efforts that prioritize community members as story collectors and narrators have aided media organizations in building trust and expanding the variety of stories and narratives they share.

  "We now will hire some of our community story gatherers to go down to our riverfront and gather stories from these immigrants and I think it's a really, I mean, that gets me super excited because it's starting to position our communities in and members as leaders, right and being in places where they normally wouldn't feel like they were welcomed to go, but not only are they welcome to go there, we're paying them to go there and listen and collect information from other folks."
  —A Journalist from the Great Lakes region

- Establishing and upholding a system to regularly collect input from the community strengthens their sense of ownership over the narratives that depict their stories.

GOAL G

Utilize Journalism As A Catalyst For Community Change

GOAL G—
UTILIZE JOURNALISM AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Evolving journalism into a public service rather than merely a commercial enterprise.

Reliance on the perspectives of the elite neglects to incorporate the voices of historically marginalized communities into broader environmental discourse.

"Frustrated with how kind of elite centered like public media was in the US, in terms of like, you might be reporting about communities of color or about communities that have been disinvested, but you're usually reporting for a community that's majority white and often very privileged."
—A Media Expert from the Midwest

ACTIONS

1. Reflecting on and explicitly delineating the possible risks or adverse effects of a news report on a person or community. ●

2. Implementing a standardized approach to solicit community input on stories that have been released, as well as to gather their questions and issues that require further exploration. ●

3. Minimizing and reducing the frequency of media content that invokes fear, perpetuates harm, propagates racism, and relies on stereotypes to portray people or events accurately. ●

4. Ensuring stories or segments focusing on trauma or heavy emotional content are not routinely positioned at the start of a segment merely to capture attention. ●

   "I mean, we both can see it, you know, we're caught in this trap of journalism being seen more as a way to evoke response, rather than, you know, whether it be anger, angry response or something. It's really not there to provide context or help or like point the way to what we should be working on. I think solutions journalism is the answer to that."
   —An Environmental Reporter in the Midwest

5. Promoting and sharing methods for engaging in community causes and/or organizations dedicated to justice, as well as distributing their stories in a way that is easily accessible and reaches the intended audience effectively. ●

GOAL G—
UTILIZE JOURNALISM AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 2

Understand and address the interconnected environmental justice issues faced by various communities.

ACTIONS

1. Highlighting important issues to foster unity with those outside of environmentally impacted communities who might not directly relate to their experiences. ●

    a. For instance, concern for one's safety or the safety of family members is a universal experience that can serve as a common ground to unite people.

2. Identifying the root causes contributing to an issue while reporting on a current event or narrative. ●

INCORPORATING LGBTQIA+ NARRATIVES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COVERAGE

- Media often sensationalizes stories concerning LGBTQ individuals rather than addressing the underlying systemic issues. There is a necessity for the media to identify and discuss the systemic origins of problems that negatively impact LGBTQ communities rather than merely sensationalizing their experiences.

- Media often depicts the LGBTQ community as separate from other marginalized groups who are susceptible to climate change and environmental injustice. There is a requirement for the media to reframe LGBTQ communities as having intersectional identities that are integrally linked with the broader climate and environmental justice movements rather than isolating the LGBTQ community's experiences.

"We have decades of research about the increased exposure to environmental harms among Black, Indigenous and poor communities and increasingly now people with disabilities as being some of the most vulnerable... I encourage media organizations to emphasize that there are LGBTQ+ people among all those groups that we already considered vulnerable. So that that to me is kind of like a rhetorical shift that I've been encouraging because I think it that it helps with that intersectional framing, especially when I'm talking with people in disaster management... to highlight what we do know about climate injustices, and environmental justices and just really hammering home the fact that LGBTQ+ people are there too."

—A ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZER FROM THE GREAT LAKE REGION

3. Establishing links between various issues ensures no individual or group is marginalized from the broader environmental justice movement. ●

    "I think it's so funny because air pollution and water pollution, none of these do not understand a boundary or a state line. What happens in Gary happens to Chicago, it happens to Michigan City, it happens to the National Park... You know it's all connected."
    —An Environmental Organizer from the Great Lakes region

GOAL G—
UTILIZE JOURNALISM AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 2 CONTINUED

Understand and address the interconnected environmental justice issues faced by various communities.

Employing solutions journalism offers a method to combat response-centered reporting, which prioritizes eliciting reactions from the audience without sufficiently providing context for the issues at hand.

ENHANCING THE VISIBILITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL NARRATIVES THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF DISABILITY

- Insufficient media attention to the distinct experiences of disabled individuals with respect to climate change is an existing issue.
  - The limited media coverage that does exist tends to concentrate on the impacts on individuals rather than tackling the obstacles that prevent the disability community from achieving environmental justice collectively.
- Seeking out experts who focus on disability-related matters to obtain their insights on stories about climate and environmental justice.

  "I'd be ecstatic to talk to people and help put some of this stuff in context. So I think that the media that they're welcome to, you know, I will say they're welcome to realize they darn well should realize that like, you know, there are experts here that are willing to talk and share insights and help put these things in context."
  —*An Environmental Justice Organizer from the Great Lakes Region*

- When discussing disaster relief and climate mitigation, it's essential to incorporate the viewpoints and real-world experiences of individuals with disabilities not merely as supplementary input but as a vital perspective.

4. Expanding the scope of reporting within the country and internationally to meet the informational requirements of the communities they report on. ●

GOAL G—
UTILIZE JOURNALISM AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 3

Encourage and support community members in becoming more active in civic life, providing resources for voting and prompting audience involvement through calls to action.

ACTIONS

1. Incorporating details about community-led groups when reporting on environmental matters and highlighting events or opportunities for viewers to participate or offer support. ●
2. Promoting media content created by the community on social platforms or including it as supplementary material to a news story or report. ●
3. Timing the publication and composition of specific stories to coincide with seasonal discussions (such as extreme heat in the summer months) is imperative for enriching ongoing conversations and addressing community information needs in real-time. ●
4. Delving into a more comprehensive examination of subjects or issues significant to the audience to provide additional context. ●
5. Personalizing environmental topics for the audience is essential for tailoring coverage to the local context and attracting viewers. ●

GOAL H

Transform Existing Paradigms Within The Industry

GOAL H—
TRANSFORM EXISTING PARADIGMS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 1

Foster peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing between media organizations.

There is a need for media organizations to form more partnerships to improve the reach of their stories. As more and more individuals rely on influencers for news, exploring potential partnerships with them is essential. Additionally, partnerships with community organizations are crucial for addressing critical issues effectively.

"Partnering with other newsrooms, I think is really important so that you're not siloed and then so that you can like, collaborate and just produce better stories."
—A Reporter from the Great Lakes region

ACTIONS

1. Identifying peer media organizations covering similar stories or in a close geographic range. ●
2. Amplifying peer media organizations' stories and content. ●
3. Partnering with media organizations with robust community engagement programs. ●
4. Creating coverage niches to avoid duplication of stories and competition with similar organizations. ●

   "We've been able to let go of... doing the heavy lifting, because we've been able to find, for example, _ or [other] media channels that we trust and that we have built a relationship" with over "years of working together."
   —An Environmental Reporter in the Great Lakes region
5. Refraining from competing with similar organizations for grant funds and instead working collectively to obtain funding for combined initiatives when possible. ●
6. Creating mutually beneficial relationships based on equal exchange while partnering with other journalists/media organizations. ●
7. Tracking organizational progress with peer media organizations in terms of equity and engagement. ●

   "When we bring these newsrooms together, even you know, from the Great Lakes where you think there wouldn't be a ton as a variety necessarily, just to hear them, start asking each other questions about the issues they're facing and how they're addressing it in their communities and see them learning like just really learning on the spot and getting ideas... "
   —A Media Expert from the Great Lakes region

GOAL H—
TRANSFORM EXISTING PARADIGMS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

● LOW RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● MEDIUM RESOURCE/CAPACITY
● HIGH RESOURCE/CAPACITY

STRATEGY 2

Facilitating lower barriers to entry for community member participation in media by supporting journalism education, training, and hiring of community members.

ACTIONS

1. Funding newsrooms beyond specific projects - to build operations and capacity, particularly through opportunities that provide funding for hiring community members. ●
2. Involving community members within grantmaking and funding processes to ensure equitable funding to grassroots organizations. ●

STRATEGY 3

Decrease burdensome grantmaking application process for media organizations.

ACTIONS

1. Increasing the time windows for grant cycles and expanding particularly the time between an application opening and concluding. ●

   "The work doesn't end when the grant cycle does all the time... funders need to provide either longer time windows or find other sources of unrestricted funding to make sure they can keep doing the work that emerges."
   —*A Funder in the Great Lakes Region*

2. Leveraging social media and other widely used communication channels to increase awareness about funding opportunities instead of depending solely on email or word-of-mouth. ●
3. Expanding how media organizations can utilize grant funding to increase support for capacity and resource building. ●
4. Guaranteeing the availability of funding aimed explicitly at organizations led by BIPOC and those focused on justice to bolster their efforts. ●
5. Streamlining grant application processes to make these accessible for under-resourced newsrooms or community organizations without designated grant writers. For example, limiting the required written materials and consolidating forms when possible. ●

   "One of our audience members on a microphone in front of a room of 400 people asked someone from the EPA, why is your funding so complicated that I need to attend a workshop to know how to access it."
   —*An Environmental Organization in the Great Lakes region*

6. Expanding the pool of grants accessible to organizations by making application processes publicly available instead of exclusive invitation-only opportunities. ●

Thank You