



Community Listening Ambassadors:

**Vital Partners in Guiding
New Funding for Local News**

About the American Journalism Project

The American Journalism Project is a venture philanthropy dedicated to local news. We believe in civic journalism as a public good and are reimagining its future by building a model to finance and sustain the local news our democracy requires. We make grants to local nonprofit news organizations to build their revenue and business operations, partner with communities to launch new organizations, and mentor leaders as they grow and sustain their newsrooms. To learn more about the American Journalism Project, visit theajp.org.

About the Author

Fiona Morgan directs community listening at the American Journalism Project, where she works on research for local partners and coaches newsroom grantees. A former journalist, she is the founder of Branchhead Consulting, which works with philanthropic funders and journalism organizations to strengthen local news and information ecosystems through research and engagement. She lives in Durham, North Carolina.

Contents

Introduction	1
Determining the role of community listening in your newsroom.....	2
Focusing on communities that are hardest to reach.....	4
What makes a good community ambassador?	5
Ten steps to a community ambassador program.....	6
Spotlight: Documented.....	9
Spotlight: VTDigger	10
Resources.....	12
Goals Worksheet	13
Community Listening Airtable Template	16
Sample Recruitment Flyer	17
Listening Worksheet.....	18

Introduction

Community engagement programs represent a powerful model in journalism, allowing local newsrooms — and their philanthropic partners — to create two-way conversations with communities yet unreached by traditional engagement methods.

But what is a community ambassador, exactly?

Community representatives, which are sometimes referred to as ambassadors, connectors, etc. help to make communities better by leading and supporting such projects as peer education campaigns, public health initiatives, community safety efforts and other social service programs. In whichever field they work, community ambassadors connect people with information and guide them to services, programs and other resources. These are the people to whom everyone goes to find out what's going on in a neighborhood. Working alone or in teams, as volunteers or paid workers, community ambassadors can even become the public face of a cause or campaign, tapping into their interpersonal networks to spread a message and raise awareness.

In journalism, local news organizations are taking a similar approach and are finding ways for people who may have no journalism background to take part in assessing and serving local information needs.

[City Bureau](#) (an American Journalism Project grantee) does this through its [Documenters](#) program, fellowships and public newsroom. The [Listening Post Collective](#) (which is working with American Journalism Project grantee [Documented](#) to reach Chinese-speaking and Black Caribbean immigrant communities in New York City) frequently works with local people on its information needs assessments. And the Maynard Institute's [Oakland Voices](#) trains local residents to tell the stories of their neighborhoods. Two other AJP grantees, [VTDigger](#) and [The Beacon](#), are developing their own community ambassador programs. Each of these efforts taps into the power of community engagement and organizing to build better local news organizations. (See our sidebars on some of these newsroom-led programs.)

Community ambassador programs are a key component of our [Local Philanthropy Partnerships](#), where we work with civic leaders, place-based funders and community foundations to identify and address information gaps in their communities. Community listening ambassadors guide our team and our local foundation partners as we make decisions about how to fund and grow local news. These programs allow us to understand the lived experiences of residents. During a pandemic, community ambassadors were able to reach people without being in the same physical space. The role of the community listening ambassador is to help us hear from people we otherwise might not, and more importantly, people whose perspectives have historically been underrepresented in local news narratives. As of the beginning of 2022, we've worked with

The role of the community listening ambassador is to help us hear from people we otherwise might not, and more importantly, people whose perspectives have historically been underrepresented in local news narratives.

more than 60 community ambassadors in six regions to do nearly 500 community listening interviews and 20 focus groups in four languages. When we make a commitment to listen, people open up and share what they wish others knew about their community, what their experiences are with being interviewed by journalists, and who else we should be talking to.

This guide is a resource for organizations to create opportunities for people who don't work in the field of journalism to have an active role in its future. We've assembled the lessons we've learned to help news organizations, place-based foundations and local leaders develop their own community ambassador programs to help rebuild local news across the United States.

Determining the role of community listening in your newsroom

Community listening can play an integral role in understanding your constituency. For reporters who have traditionally relied on tips, sources and their own observations to guide news coverage, community listening broadens their understanding, shifts their frame of reference and makes their reporting more transparent, which leads to more accountability to the communities they serve.

Listening can serve a deeper purpose as well. It helps us understand what sort of news people want and expands our thinking about what local news can be when reimaged as a



COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROFILE

Kimberly Bowie

“The stories I found out from people I’ve known my whole life, things they had experienced, especially during the civil rights time, it was very cool.”

// Kimberly Bowie, Wichita

Kimberly grew up in Wichita’s North Side, historically home to the Black community, where her grandparents were educators. Today, Kimberly is a performer who teaches with her husband at the local music school they run. As a community listening ambassador, Kimberly interviewed more than 100 people in town. She was especially motivated to capture the experience of Black Wichitans. “The Black community here is pretty close and they talk to each other, but they don’t see representation of themselves or their stories in the news, so they don’t trust it.” Many of the people she spoke to brought up local history that’s been forgotten but feels to them like vital context in understanding our present day. Kimberly’s work contributed to AJP and the Wichita Community Foundation’s decision to fund the expansion of nonprofit news organization The Beacon so it could open a newsroom in Wichita.

Photo credit: Fernando Salazar

public good. It creates an opportunity for journalists to move out of an extractive mindset to a more collaborative one. And the process of listening helps show the value of local news to the well-being of communities, equitable access to news and information from health and education to neighborhood issues, and lifting up local voices to improving the quality of civic participation.

To understand the local news and information ecosystem from the point of view of people who live there, we start our community listening with four fundamental questions:

- 1. How do you get the information you need to live your life?**
- 2. What sources of information do you trust, and why?**
- 3. If you're not getting information from local journalism outlets, why is that?**
- 4. Where else do you turn for information you trust about your local community?**

At the core of any community listening project is the awareness that every community has vital assets and grassroots leaders. Sustainable local news requires that we cultivate, support and listen to those leaders.

Focusing on communities that are hardest to reach

Community listening ambassadors help overcome the limitations of other listening methods, like online surveys and focus groups, because they are aware of accessibility issues in harder-to-reach communities. They conduct interviews, help us recruit focus group participants, make introductions to people they think we should talk to directly, and check in with our team frequently to debrief, share insights, and give us feedback on our research as we go.

Ambassadors can help reach people in a diverse set of neighborhoods. They reach residents who may have been harmed by the way local news ignores their neighborhoods except to cover crime. They help us hear from people in immigrant communities in their preferred languages. They help us hear from people who don't trust the media, those who used to subscribe to the daily newspaper but don't anymore, and those who may not bother to answer a survey about local news but are willing to speak candidly to a friend or neighbor.

What we hear is nuanced, complex, and heartfelt. A college student did interviews in Khmer with monks from her Buddhist temple. Another ambassador interviewed people at the urban garden where she volunteers, documenting their thoughts on what local news misses about their historically Black neighborhood. A violence interrupter helped us hear from formerly incarcerated people about the information they need when they reenter the community.

Each one is a vital partner, so we pay them for this work. Paying people who already provide vital information to folks in their networks to work with us is part of our investment in a community.



COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROFILE

Julie Tran

"I felt like I was doing something for the community, actually listening to people."

// Julie Tran, Wichita

Julie became a community listening ambassador shortly after her 18th birthday. She interviewed classmates at her high school and people she knows through her involvement in Vietnamese dance. The process of talking to people about local news made her think about the kinds of local news available to immigrants, and she and her friends began working on a project to translate local news stories into Vietnamese and Spanish to address those needs. Julie's work also contributed to the decision to fund The Beacon's Wichita newsroom.

Photo credit: Courtesy Julie Tran

What makes a good community ambassador?

Community ambassadors are the kind of people other people turn to.

Ambassadors reflect the diversity of the community and help us reach networks of people that reflect the diversity of the community. We've worked with chefs, community organizers, school bus drivers, music teachers, social workers, freelance writers, public relations professionals, coaches, and high school students. They've ranged from 18-year-olds to retirees. Each brings different strengths, interests and ideas about journalism.

Many of the community ambassadors we work with have already played that role with some other organization.

By the end of the listening process, we have a group of people who are connected, knowledgeable, and invested in making the local news ecosystem stronger. As residents of the community, they make a much better case than we can about what's needed and why — and what difference it will make to their lives. And when we share the results of our research with our local partners, they're not hearing from us but from their own community. We even see community ambassadors stay engaged, ready and willing to work with the new or expanded local news organizations that emerge.

All of this helps our partners see how local news can be more essential, and — as we've seen in place after place — it attracts new funding for new and growing local news organizations.



COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROFILE

Sandra Edwards

"I love being an ambassador. I get to talk to the community, find out what's on their mind, what their needs are, what their wants are."

// Sandra Edwards, Houston

Sandra is no stranger to the role of community ambassador. She's part of a grassroots community group called Impact Fifth Ward, formed by neighbors who are directly affected by creosote contamination. She's been interviewed by reporters too many times to count. Sandra assembled her neighbors to participate in a focus group where they reflected on the news coverage of their environmental justice case as well as public safety and local politics. Sandra's work contributed to the establishment of the Houston Local News Initiative.

Photo credit: Michael Starghill

Ten steps to a community ambassador program

We're sharing our distinct approach to community listening in the hopes that it will help other researchers, newsrooms, local funders and engaged journalism efforts. Below are the steps we follow and links to resources that you are welcome to use and adapt to your own needs.

- 1. DECIDE WHAT YOU'LL DO IN RESPONSE TO WHAT YOU HEAR.** Engagement doesn't work unless you create a continuous feedback loop, so make a commitment at the outset to incorporate what you hear into the work you plan to do. If you're working in a newsroom, that means establishing workflows that are responsive to what the ambassadors share with you. How will the findings of community listening influence story assignments, the reporting process, formats, and distribution?
- 2. SET YOUR COMMUNITY LISTENING GOALS.** Define the geographic area you're interested in — is it a city or a county or a metro? Are you most interested in specific neighborhoods or cultures within the community? Next, start with what you know: What can data tell you about the demographics, economics, and cultural resources in this place? Then figure out what questions you have that community ambassadors can help you answer. What do you most want to know? Are there people you want to hear from but don't have connections to? Remember, ambassadors are most helpful in filling the gaps that traditional methods like surveys don't cover. If your goal is to hear from a representative cross section of the community, think of ambassadors at the people who can help you reach the people least likely to be represented. Next, consider what networks exist that you can reach out to for recruiting.



RESOURCE LINK → [Goals Worksheet](#)

- 3. BUDGET.** Consider paying ambassadors \$20 per hour for up to five hours a week for approximately 8-10 weeks. At the outside, this can add up to \$1,000 per community ambassador but in reality, most ambassadors work fewer hours than that, so the typical cost is more like \$400 per ambassador. Internally, you'll also want to budget for the time and capacity it takes to run the program. In our experience, the hiring process is the most time-intensive.

- 4. RECRUIT.** Create a one-page flyer that can be emailed as a PDF or linked to as a read-only Google doc. You can also make shareable graphics for use on social media. These materials describe who you're looking for, what they'll do, the time frame of the project, and how much you pay. The documents should all point to an interest form on Airtable or Google Forms that has more detailed information on the work and the commitment. The form itself can ask prospective community listening ambassadors for some basic information, including what neighborhood or town they live in and what networks they are connected to. We recommend not asking for resumes or cover letters so the program is maximally inclusive.



RESOURCE LINK → [Sample Flyer Template](#)

- 5. WORK WITH PARTNERS.** Community organizations that have experience working at the grassroots level can help kick start your community ambassador search. Chicago-based City Bureau, for example, **partnered** with NeighborUp in Cleveland to expand its Documenters program. You can start by connecting with community-based organizations and key contacts and letting them know about your project and its goals. If your mission aligns with theirs, ask if your community ambassador program feels like an opportunity they will want to share with their constituents. If so, ask for their help putting out a call for community listening ambassadors and sharing your flyer with the networks they're connected to. Partners will likely want to know up front if you'll share your findings with them, and how your findings will be used.
- 6. HIRE YOUR AMBASSADORS.** Once you've looked at the responses, set up a Zoom call with those who seem to be a good fit. You may be looking for a balance in geography or be highly interested in working with BIPOC, LGBTQ, rural, immigrant, or other communities. Most people who express interest get a call, and most of those folks are invited to participate. It's a good idea to hire more people than you think you'll need because life happens — this is a part-time commitment and things like job deadlines, health issues and general stress will come up. It's better to keep the door open to allow people to participate as much as they can than demand consistency and limit whom you hear from. They sign a simple contract and W9 form, and you can get started.
- 7. INTERVIEW TRAINING.** You can start by talking with ambassadors about who they might want to interview. Starting with two or three interview subjects, the community ambassadors reach out using a form to conduct the interview and take notes on it. The form enables you to collect interview responses in a more standard way. It also asks the ambassador questions about how the interview went and how long it took, so when we debrief we can check in with them about the experience. We continually invite feedback on those interview questions, which has helped us improve what we ask and how.



RESOURCE LINK → [Listening Worksheet](#)

8. **REGULAR CHECK-INS.** Check in with the ambassadors every week or two as the project progresses. Sometimes the most effective way is to set up a call with the full group of ambassadors so they can meet one another and discuss what's come up in interviews. For example, ambassadors may ask for resources and share tips for dealing with misinformation they were hearing from family and neighbors. These calls provide tremendous insight into the experiences people have in different neighborhoods and coming from different backgrounds. Ideally, ambassadors themselves can get some value out of connecting with each other, too, and some ambassadors have traded contact information so they could keep supporting each other's neighborhood efforts.
9. **EQUIP AMBASSADORS TO DO OUTREACH.** After the interviews are done, community ambassadors help with other parts of your community listening program, such as by sharing a digital survey with their networks and recruiting participants for listening sessions or focus groups, which are even better when ambassadors are laying the groundwork beforehand. You can better equip ambassadors to share any additional calls to action by providing sample language they can use in emails and text messages as well as shareable graphics for social media. Ambassadors also have the best sense for which day or which time of day will be most accessible to the people they're recruiting, so you may want to follow their lead in scheduling.
10. **SHARE YOUR FINDINGS.** Once you've combed through all the material you and the ambassadors have gathered, pick out the key findings to present back to your newsrooms and the people who took the time to participate in your listening program. Invite ambassadors to review your findings and to respond with a gut check that you got it right. Then use the information to set priorities for the next steps in your work in the newsrooms!



RESOURCE LINK → [Sample Presentation Template](#)

Documented

Documented, a nonprofit news site devoted to covering New York City’s immigrants and the policies that affect their lives, has developed a strong Spanish-speaking audience by publishing and engaging through WhatsApp, a social networking platform especially popular with Spanish-speaking immigrants. Engaging with the audience in this way has led to story tips and reporting leads and helped Documented strengthen community trust in its coverage.

In 2021, Documented’s editors considered whether to expand coverage to two new audiences – Chinese New Yorkers and Black Caribbean immigrants. They worked with the Listening Post Collective to do an information needs assessment of those communities. Listening Post Collective hires members of a local community when assessing its community needs, so Documented worked with two New Yorkers with deep ties to these communities: Nancie Adolphe, a community organizer in the Black Caribbean community, and Melody Cao, a reporter

“[Journalists] tend to look for stories or for quotes, because that’s the way we’re trained,” he said. “We’re not looking for stories for now, we’re looking for a map of what the community looks like, and we’re looking for pain points.”

Nicolas Rios // Documented Audience Editor

for a Chinese-language TV station. Each brought local knowledge, contacts, and relationships that helped Documented understand how community members seek out information, what information they most cared about and what challenges they face accessing it.

Audience Editor Nicolás Ríos explained that people don’t need a reporting background to do this work, and in fact, it can help to come from a different perspective. Journalists “tend to look for stories or for quotes, because that’s the way we’re trained,” he said. “We’re not looking for stories for now, we’re looking for a map of what the community looks like, and we’re looking for pain points.” In November 2021, Documented announced it would begin creating news for Chinese and Caribbean immigrant communities.



VTDigger

VTDigger is the primary source of news for most Vermonters, reaching approximately 350,000 readers every month—in a state with a population of 620,000. In 2020, the organization began a community listening effort to deepen its relationships with readers and reach those Vermonters who haven't been traditionally well served by local media. Libbie Sparadeo, who directs community engagement and strategic partnerships at VTDigger, embraced the idea of establishing a role for community members who could be “trusted connectors.”

“I really wanted to make sure we're hearing from communities of color, and from communities that have been traditionally underserved by Vermont media,” Sparadeo said. Working with ambassadors proved to be “a grassroots and genuine way to tap into people's social networks with a level of credibility and context you just can't replicate when you're sending out a survey or meeting with someone for the first time.”

“I really wanted to make sure we're hearing from communities of color, and from communities that have been traditionally underserved by Vermont media.”

Libbie Sparadeo // VT Digger

She and her colleagues put up flyers around Burlington, shared the call on social media and reached out directly to community organizations. Five people formed VTDigger's first cohort of community ambassadors. They conducted interviews with a range of residents, including people of color, people with disabilities, people in the LGBTQ community, low-income people and people participating in the mutual aid community. Two Spanish-speaking ambassadors coordinated with a migrant farmworker group to conduct interviews on site at dairies.

After 10 weeks, the ambassadors celebrated over lunch at VTDigger's offices. They talked through themes that emerged in their interviews, coverage they hoped would result from their efforts, and feedback about the ambassador role at VTDigger. Sparadeo shared the ambassadors' findings with the newsroom throughout the process, which sparked enthusiasm and support among reporters and editors. The next step, she said, is to integrate this input into newsroom workflows and establish an ongoing feedback loop with the community.

Photo credit: Courtesy Libbie Sparadeo at VTDigger





COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROFILE

Damian Calvert

“They were able to speak in their own words, to their own interests. It was very cathartic to me.”

// Damian Calvert, Cleveland

Damian reached out to people directly affected by the justice system, pulling together focus groups where people spoke candidly about their experiences. Some were victims of crimes or had lost loved ones to violence or incarceration. We heard from police officers, corrections officers, community advocates and people who had just left prison and were in a precarious state of transition. They talked about the information people need to navigate the justice system, bad actors the community would like to see journalists expose and what impact it would make to tell the stories of unsung community heroes

Damian’s networks run deep because of his own experience. While serving a 20-year sentence, he began to dedicate his life to making a positive impact. He mentors people reentering life outside, works with gangs doing mediation and de-escalation and provides on-site community support at crime scenes.

“Part of the work I do is helping people reclaim their narratives and tell their story, because that’s the only way they can take control of their lives,” he says. “We understand there’s a dominant narrative of us as so-called ex-felons, as Black, as coming from communities of color and poverty. That narrative is hostile, and it’s further shaped and weaponized against us through conventional media.” Damian’s work informed The Marshall Project’s investigation into Cuyahoga County’s Criminal Courts, and contributed to the establishment of the Ohio Local News Initiative.

Photo credit: Courtesy Damian Calvert



Resources



Goals Worksheet

Step 1 → Purpose

- a. What do you plan to do with what you learn? Are you a newsroom trying to diversify your sources and make your audience more representative of your community? Are you a funder looking to make the case to internal stakeholders that funding journalism is an important way to respond to community needs?
- b. One of the first questions people will ask during the research process is “What are you going to do with this information?” So think carefully about the use you want to put this research to, how you’ll want to share it and with whom.

Step 2 → Place

Define the geographic area you’re interested in — is it a city, a county, or a metro area? Are you most interested in specific neighborhoods? You may struggle to answer this question at the outset, or you may change the desired scope during the project. Feel free to revisit this question as you work.

Step 3 → People

Understand who lives in your chosen areas. Find any indicators available—for example income, poverty level, language preferences, Internet access, literacy rates, etc.—that can provide some context for how their experience may differ from other communities, or your state.

Step 4 → Assets

- a. Think positive: What organizations exist within this place that serve people’s needs and help them connect to each other? These may include civic organizations, social service agencies, voluntary groups, block clubs, etc. What needs do they serve?
- b. In what way do these organizations’ goals align with yours? How might you communicate those common objectives, so that these organizations might be interested in helping you reach out to potential ambassadors?

Step 5 → Priorities

What do you most want to know? Are there people you want to hear from, but don’t have connections to? If your goal is to hear from a representative cross section of the community, think of ambassadors as the people who can help you reach the people least likely to be represented.

Step 6 → Allies

- a. What networks are your organization already connected to that you can reach out to for recruiting?
- b. How might you be able to partner with people and organizations you identified in Steps 3 and 4? Do you have any contacts there, or do you know someone who could make an introduction?
- c. Before you ask for help, consider: How can you ensure that your community ambassador program is an opportunity trusted people and organizations will want to share with their constituents? What are you willing to commit to in advance in terms of what you'll share with your partners, and with the public?

For more tips on how to set community listening goals, check out this extra resource: Democracy Fund's [Guide to Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem](#).



RESOURCE LINK → [Goals Worksheet](#)

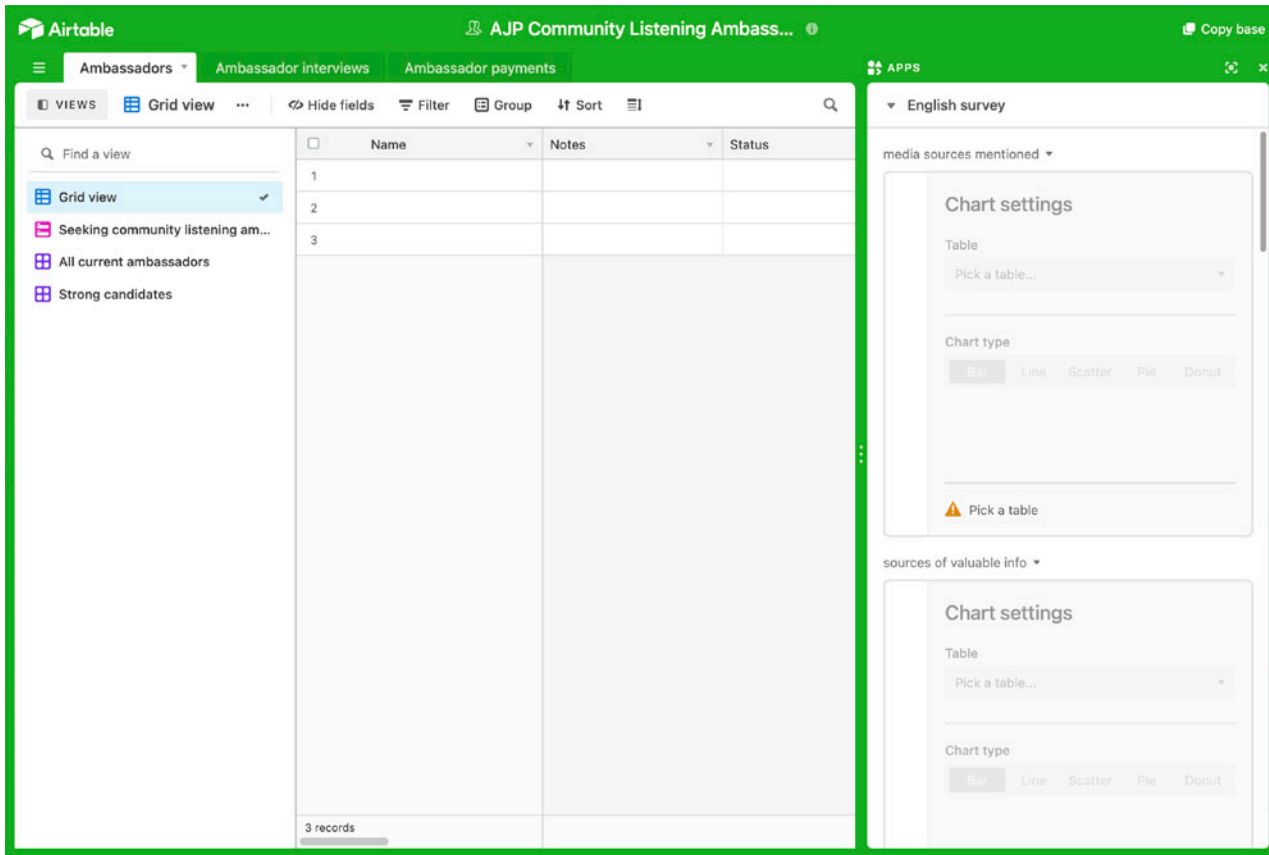
RESOURCE



Community Listening Airtable Template

We've created an Airtable template that organizes all our Community Listening work, from community surveys and ambassador outreach to focus groups and text messaging.

We invite you to make a copy and use it in your own community if it's helpful.



RESOURCE LINK → [Community Listening Airtable Template](#)



Sample Recruitment Flyer



Use a photo or simple graphic that communicates something positive about your community. You can find public-domain photos online; be sure to give credit at the bottom of the flyer.

Seeking community listening ambassadors

Help us make local news and information better in Wichita



How well does local news serve you and your community? What news sources do you trust, and why? What do you wish journalists understood about your life? We want to know.

The **American Journalism Project**, in partnership with the **Wichita Community Foundation**, wants to learn how people in Wichita get the news and information they need. We're hiring **community listening ambassadors** to help us. This is a **paid** opportunity. If you're interested, please fill out this form: <https://bit.ly/ICTListen> or email Fiona Morgan at fiona@theajp.org by August 21, 2020.

If you have a partner who's well-known in the community, it's a good idea to mention them, both for transparency and name recognition.

Who we're looking for:

- Wichita residents with deep ties to the local community
- Good listeners who are respectful, caring and curious
- English fluency; proficiency in other languages a plus
- Experience with neighborhood community building and/or community organizing a plus
- We're especially interested in people who are networked with Black/African American, Latinx/Spanish-speaking, Indigenous/Native American, and/or immigrant communities

What you'll do:

- Reach out to people you know in whatever way is best for them (phone call, text message, email, social media)
- Take notes and share what you learn with our research team
- Make introductions, share surveys and recruit folks to participate in focus groups
- Share ideas and feedback about who we need to hear from and what we should ask
- All work can be done remotely while observing social distancing
- Earn \$20 per hour. Average commitment 5 hours per week or less

Create a simple form for people to apply. We created a shortened URL to lead to that form. And don't forget contact information and a deadline, if only to nudge people who are deadline-oriented to apply.

Photo by Krista Hansen, licensed under Creative Commons

We use the term "networked with" deliberately, because while representation is important, each person can only really represent themselves. The networks are what will power this work through the ability to connect with people from many different perspectives.



RESOURCE LINK → [Sample Recruitment Flyer](#)



Listening Worksheet

Instructions

Use this form to record what you learn in conversations with community members. You will fill out this form separately for each person you speak with.

The first three questions are basic background on whom you're talking to.

The next 10 questions are the ones we'd like you to ask. If you don't manage to ask all of them, that's OK. If the conversation goes off in unexpected directions, you can add notes about that at the end.

The last questions help us get a sense of how the interview went. Please let the person you're interviewing know that we will not share their name or contact information with anyone outside our small group of researchers, and that nothing they say will be published with their name attached to it.

Listening Form

1. **Your name**
2. **Name of the person you're talking to**

The next 16 questions are questions you will ask during your conversation. That's why they're in quotation marks.

3. **"Where do you live?"**
We'd like to know the town or neighborhood
4. **"In general, how do you get information you trust about the place where you live?"**
This can mean news outlets, like newspapers, radio, TV etc. Try to keep the conversation local and ask them to be specific. For instance, if they say "Facebook," please ask them if there are specific people, groups, or organizations on Facebook.
5. **"Besides news media, are there other local sources you turn to? Like neighborhood newsletters, church bulletins, etc.?"**
Please try to get them to be specific.

6. “Why do you trust these sources of information?”

This includes not just the media sources they named but perhaps groups or people on Facebook, or other social media channels, or organizations, any place they name as a source of information.

7. “Do you see yourself or your community represented in local media? If so, is that representation accurate?”

The word “community” can mean a lot of things, so invite the person to define it as they see fit.

8. “Have you ever been interviewed by a reporter?”

A short answer is fine, but if there’s a story there, see if they’ll share it with you. If they have been interviewed by a reporter, ask them about the experience. If they used to be a reporter, please note that.

9. “What do you wish people knew about your community?”

However people define “community”

10. “Finish this sentence: I wish the local news would...”

“Now I’m going to ask you some questions that will help us make sure we hear from people with as many different types of experiences as possible.”

11. “What zip code do you live in?”

They aren’t required to answer any of these questions, but zip code is most useful.

12. “What do you do for a living?”

13. “What is your race or ethnicity? Choose all that apply”

Black / African American

Indigenous / Native American

Latino / Latina / Latinx / Hispanic

White

Asian

Middle Eastern

Something else — if so, how do you identify?

Prefer not to answer

14. “What is your gender?”

15. “What is your age? You can give a range.”

Under 18

18–24

25–44

45–64

65+

Prefer not to answer

16. “Is there anyone else you think I should talk to?”

If they have ideas, ask if they would be willing to introduce you.

17. “If our research team wants to get in touch with you, what’s the best contact information for me to give to them?”

This is not required, but see if they’re willing to share an email and/or phone number so we can follow up if necessary. Let them know that their contact information will be kept confidential and not shared or sold.

18. “Would you be interested in being part of a digital focus group to talk more about local media? You would be paid for your time.”

Ask this question if the conversation is going well and you think the person might be interested in staying involved in the project.

These questions are for you to fill out once the conversation is over.

19. About how many minutes did this conversation last?

20. How did you reach this person?

Phone call? Zoom? WhatsApp? If the conversation takes place in person, please be COVID-safe.

21. How did the conversation go?

Was the person eager to talk or was it hard to get them to open up? What else was memorable about it?

22. Notes.

Use this space to take additional notes about what you talked about, or anything else you want our research team to know.



RESOURCE LINK → [Listening Worksheet](#)