

**GET BACK RELEVANCE**

BE THE COMMUNITY FORUM

# ABOUT THE RELEVANCE PROJECT

- o Initiative of Newspaper Association Managers.
- o Focus: Telling the true stories about newspapers and their transformation.
- o Uplift.
- o Three priorities in 2021:
  - o Launch the Community Forum strategy.
  - o Amplify the RP Revenue Resource.
  - o Score funds to sustain the project.

**COMMUNITY FORUM,  
ANYONE?**

**FORGIVE ME...**

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY  
NEWSPAPERS IS IN PERIL.

# THE PROBLEM

- o Others control the narrative.
- o Our industry response remains fractured (getting a bit better). Too many groups?
- o Obsession with "Big Media."
- o Trusted local journalism needs greater community support to adapt, survive and grow. Can't do it alone, aloof.

# SQUEEZED!

WEDGED BETWEEN PRINT & SOCIAL MEDIA

# WE THINK WE'RE RELEVANT

- o We report news, provide information and publish commentary on current events.
- o We hold the powerful accountable.
- o We're LOCAL, LOCAL, LOCAL.
- o We are the traditional gatekeepers of information that government, institutions want distributed.
- o We cover politics at arm's length.

# THE BIG "BUT..."

- o Our Relevance needs revamping.
- o Digital and social media have more than disrupted newspapers. They've changed how information is sourced and distributed.
- o They also changed behaviors and attitudes when it comes to news and information.
- o Big ? : Have we changed accordingly?
- o Our Wild Card: Surviving the pandemic.



**THERE'S HOPE...**

...BUT WE NEED A STRATEGY

# OUR HISTORY IS OUR GUIDE

- o We reflect our communities.
- o We provide useful news, information.
- o We entertain and enlighten.
- o We're a reliable source/resource.
- o Our work can bring people together.
- o Our work could help solve problems.

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# KEEP THESE FOLKS

- o People who care about good government.
- o People interested in crime and justice.
- o People who want to check obituaries.
- o People who like the arts.
- o People who enjoy a feature about someone from their town.
- o People who follow high school sports.
- o People interested in local schools and education issues.
- o People interested in social justice.
- o People who care about their community.
- o People who read.

# ATTRACT THESE PEEPS

- o People who don't care about OUR government coverage.
- o People who have tuned out divisive politics.
- o People who don't like to read.
- o People who never subscribed or read a newspaper.
- o People who rely on social media.
- o People from communities we overlook or ignore.
- o Young people.
- o People who don't know anyone whose name or picture has been in the newspaper.
- o Activists.

# A PIVOTAL TIME OR CRISIS?

- o OUR SECRET: That's when we do our best work.

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# COMMUNITY FORUM INITIATIVE

BIG IDEA:

A National Conversation,  
amplified by local events.



# THE STRATEGY

- REASSERT RELEVANCE: Remind people about the value local journalism brings to our society and our democracy. Don't assume.
- RE-ESTABLISH CONNECTIONS: With all. Not just traditional newspaper readers.
- REFRESH OUR CREDIBILITY: Use our reputation, our expertise and our established information-gathering framework to expand our Relevance to new audiences.

# AN ACTION PLAN

- o Research and Set A Course
- o Invite
- o Educate/Report
- o Hold Forums
- o Collaborate
- o Innovate & Experiment
- o Expand

# A NEW, WIDER LENSE

- o Reinvigorate communities & THEIR newspapers.
- o In turn, strengthen an informed democracy.
- o Launch the Community Forum strategy.
- o Unleash press associations to further boost sustainable support for the local newspapers. Collaborate to instruct how to flourish as a dependable Community Forum.

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# PLANNING TBD

- o Enrich solution-seeking communities throughout North America by conducting town halls -- The Community Forum -- about the uncertain future of local news and the related dangers.

# THE GOAL

- o Seek to raise awareness.
- o Inform.
- o Listen.
- o Learn.
- o Enlist supporters to help communities and their newspapers adapt in a digital world.

# IN THE PROCESS...

- o Improve citizens' news literacy and uplift community journalism's positive impact on an inclusive democracy.

## **BONUS**

- o Consider using National Newspaper Week (October) or News Literacy Week for coordinated discussions throughout North America.



# RELEVANT OPPORTUNITY

- o For Community Newspapers and their Press Associations, it's all about reasserting and expanding RELEVANCE to our audiences.

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# RELEVANCE PROJECT STEPS

- DEVELOP IT
- TEST IT
- EXPAND IT
- FUND IT
- AMPLIFY IT

# PHASE ONE TOPICS

- WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF LOCAL NEWSPAPERS?
- HOW CAN WE BETTER SERVE OUR READERS?
- HAS THE PANDEMIC CHANGED US FOR THE BETTER (AS A TRUSTED NEWS SOURCE)?
- HOW DO WE BUILD TRUST WITH OUR NEWS COVERAGE? (WHY SHOULD YOU TRUST US?)
- HOW CAN WE BE MORE RELEVANT TO YOU?
- HOW WE COVER THE NEWS -- HELP US STRENGTHEN OUR ...

# PHASE TWO TOPICS

- HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR COMMUNITY'S NEWS LITERACY? (IT IS IMPORTANT TO A VIBRANT DEMOCRACY)
- YOU SAY "THE MEDIA." WE SAY, NO, WE'RE LOCAL NEWS. WHO IS RIGHT?
- THE DISINFORMATION ERA: THE MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE.
- HOW DO WE STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH? (IS THERE MORE WE CAN DO?)
- OPEN MIC: WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY.

**STOP!**

DON'T LET OTHERS CONTROL  
OUR STORY.

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# YOUR ROLE: HELP...

- o Develop
- o Test
- o Do
- o Build up



# TOOT OUR OWN HORNS

- o Regular columns discussing local newspaper's role.
- o Series on First Amendment from a local perspective.
- o Encourage other public forums on local journalism.
- o Publication of civic lessons.
- o Take News Literacy training into the schools, clubs, neighborhood organizations, civic groups.
- o Post mortems: Find ways to let readers know when coverage has made a difference.

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# AN EXAMPLE

○ SOUTH DAKOTA  
NEWS WATCH



# MY BIAS

The  
Public  
Square  
Experience



# ABOUT THE PUBLIC SQUARE

- RTD INITIATIVE IN CIVIL, CIVIC CONVERSATIONS ON ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE.
- MODERATED 78 PUBLIC SQUARES (2005-2019).
- 90 MINUTES.
- MOSTLY IN OUR 185-SEAT AUDITORIUM.
- ALL SORTS OF TOPICS, FROM THE CONTROVERSIAL TO THE FUN AND OFFBEAT.

# CONCLUSIONS

- MADE US A BETTER NEWSPAPER.
- DEMONSTRATED THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING.
- EXCELLENT WAY TO SHOWCASE OUR JOURNALISM.
- PEOPLE WANT TO BE HEARD.
- FEW PLACES EXIST WHERE PEOPLE FEEL SAFE EXPRESSING VIEWS.
- PROVE IN A DIVISIVE WORLD CIVIL DISCOURSE IS POSSIBLE.
- PENDING: MOVE FROM CONVERSATIONS TO SOLUTIONS.

# FORMAT

- PICK, INVITE, INFORM, CONDUCT, REPORT, TRANSCRIPT.
- PUT YOUR TOPIC IN A QUESTION
- ORGANIZE THE SEATING AROUND A SQUARE.
- MIX IT UP -- DEBATES, PANELS, PRESENTATIONS, OPEN MIC
- 30-30-30 OR 45-45.
- MAKE SURE PEOPLE CAN HEAR.
- INVOLVE YOUR JOURNALISTS; DEMONSTRATE INTERVIEWING.
- DON'T BE AFRAID TO PROMOTE.

# RP OFFER

HAPPY TO HELP ALL AND ANY COMMUNITY FORUM PIONEERS.



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