

Use National Newspaper Week To Launch A Community Forum

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The Relevance Project

It's now or never.

Local newspapers should use National Newspaper Week to start a vital conversation about Relevance.

Theirs, and the communities' role in supporting the trusted news provider.

What's at stake is the opportunity for newspapers to get back Relevance for a sustainable future by becoming THE Community Forum.

Here's the Bigger Idea:

Many local conversations turn into a national dialogue, where forums are being held throughout the country -- Canada, too.

One conversation leads to another. And another.

Newspapers, working with their trade associations, report on their discussions and the resulting findings are then woven into a dynamic narrative about the state and value of local news.

The insights spark positive change and momentum.

After nearly two years of dealing with a stubborn pandemic and continued political division, all of us who love newspapers would benefit from learning about ground-level trends, new opportunities. and audience advice that combine to better power a transformation of local news media.

The Relevance Project, an initiative of Newspaper Managers Association, stands ready to help advance community newspapers.

In its second year of operation, The Relevance Project is working with associations across North America to help their member newspapers become THE Community Forum.

The Forum represents an umbrella strategy to improve connections with a newspaper's overall audience. Its chief catalyst is the use of town halls to foster civil, civil discourse.

Live exchanges.

Intense listening.

With respect.

The overall strategy has three goal for newspapers:

Reassert Relevance: Use every opportunity to remind people about the value local journalism brings to our society and democracy. Don't assume it's known.

Broaden Connections: Think intensely about ways to reach the entire community. Not just traditional newspaper readers.

Refresh Credibility: Use newspapers' trusted reputation, its expertise in reporting on a community and its established information-gathering framework to expand Relevance to new audiences and reassure longtime loyal supporters.

The conversation sparked by National Newspaper Week should be about newspapers. If the Community Forum is a new strategy for a newspaper, consider framing the dialogue along one of these questions:

- *How can we improve our mission?
- *What is the future of local newspapers?
- *How can we better serve you, our readers?
- *How do we build greater trust with our news coverage? (Or: Why should you trust us?)
- *Here's how we cover the news -- How can we strengthen our report?
- *And my favorite: How can we be more Relevant to you?

If a newspaper and its community want to build on an ongoing conversation about local journalism, then here's an additional batch of topics to consider:

- *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. Are you concerned?
- *How do we stand up for the truth? (Is there more we can do?)

And this:

- *Open Mic: We want to hear what you think about us. Better yet, tell us YOUR story.

The newspaper as THE Community Forum is the definition of Relevance.

The newspaper as moderator of purposeful civil, civic discourse is the caretaker of an enlightened democracy.

This National Newspaper Week, dig in with conversations about newspapers.

Then, with experience using the Community Forum strategy, orchestrate and moderate dialogue that nurtures improving communities.

That's Relevance at its best.

Start the conversation.

Be THE Community Forum.

Take action.

And, remember this brutal fact:

Silence is deadly.