Listening Playbook for Actionable News Strategies
About RJ Media Group

RJ Media Group is an innovative, audience-focused news organization based in Meriden, Connecticut, with a rich history as a 155-year-old, family-owned company. Our publisher and executive vice president Liz White is the 5th generation family owner, and our president Eliot White is the 4th generation family owner.

We have grown and evolved along with the towns we serve. We are a local family business. We care about and participate in the communities where we raise our families. Through our news coverage, our role as a leading employer, and our support of countless clubs, organizations, and causes, our goal is to promote and foster an informed community of people so we may grow stronger together.

Our company is committed to providing quality local journalism and fact-based reporting that informs and empowers our community. Our company mission is: to be the primary catalyst that motivates people to contribute to the intellectual, civic, and economic vitality of our communities.

At a time when news consumers face unprecedented challenges evaluating the credibility of ever-increasing amounts of information, our reporters and editors remain committed to the essential cause of quality journalism. Our reporting is built upon credible information gathered free of obligation.

We publish the Record-Journal – a daily newspaper, eight weekly newspapers, and two websites, which combined reach 265,000 people and 100% of the homes in 9 towns weekly. We also have a full-service digital agency.

The Record-Journal created a Diversity and Inclusion Committee in 2020 in order to make focused improvements to our workplace and products. The Diversity and Inclusion committee’s mission is: to take actions that will create and support a workplace and products that are inclusive, diverse, and representative of the communities we serve.

This project was transformative for our company, our community, and our industry because it built upon the foundation and momentum of our Latino Communities Reporting Lab launch in 2021 and brought together an unprecedented collaboration between journalists, data experts, a network of community leaders, and technology partners to understand the needs of our local Latino communities and build trust through deep community listening and data gathering.

We are excited to share this model with the industry. Thank you for the opportunity.

Introduction

When we embarked on our initial listening tour, we knew we had a lot to learn from and about Latino communities, a population that has grown significantly in our market over the last four decades.

The Latino Communities Reporting Lab has been successful because it is grounded in community listening. We are fortunate to have so many community members who provided feedback, helped us build the vision, and continue to provide ongoing feedback so we can provide trusted local news and information that our community wants and needs. The Record-Journal is thrilled to do this important work with and for our community.

We feel that the reporting will resonate and have a broader impact by bringing to light the contributions, needs, resources, and challenges of Latino residents and how we can all respond to strengthen our communities. We believe other legacy media companies across the country can replicate this model, as the Latino demographic shift in Meriden and Wallingford is similar to the shift occurring over the last few decades throughout Connecticut, New England, and the United States.

We thank the Google News Initiative Innovation Challenge for funding the Latino Communities Listening Playbook for Actionable News Strategies. Their support highlights on a national scale the importance of listening, community engagement, and inclusive reporting, and that this model can be replicated.

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Note from the Publisher

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Liz White Notarangelo
Publisher & Executive Vice President and Owner
The 2020 Census shows that Connecticut’s total population increased by 1 percent, but the number of people of Hispanic origin increased by 30 percent, or 144,206 people, which drove the population increase across Connecticut. The population of Latino residents in Meriden grew by nearly 27% between 2010 and 2020, mirroring Connecticut’s statewide trends, according to an analysis of census data.

Within the ten years between census counts, Meriden’s population of Latino children under 18 grew by nine percent. We see Meriden as a microcosm for the Latino demographic increase happening in many other towns and cities in Connecticut, New England, and the United States.

The past 50 years have seen explosive growth among the Latino population in Meriden, Connecticut. The city’s general population has hovered around 60,000, but the number of Latinos has increased dramatically.

### Latinos in our Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Meriden, CT</th>
<th>Wallingford, CT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Latino Population Increase Over the Past 4 Decades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Meriden, CT</th>
<th>Wallingford, CT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>8.23%</td>
<td>2.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Connecticut</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>17.29%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DataHaven, Community and Neighborhood Profiles
### About The Lab

The Record-Journal founded the Latino Communities Reporting Lab in March 2021 as a long-term initiative guided by the voices of the Latinos in our communities.

Our bilingual team currently consists of one editor, two full-time reporters, and one intern. The team proudly reaches out to their Hispanic-Latino roots and experiences as they craft every story.

**The Lab News Team includes:**
- Editor: Claudia Hilario-García
- Reporters: Crystal Elescano and Lau Guzmán
- Intern: David Matos
- Listening Project Coordinator: Julio Panduro
- Listening Project Contractor: Ericka Salazar

**The Lab's mission:** To amplify the voices of Latinos in our communities.

- To showcase the successes and contributions of Latinos as a way of inspiring young people to expand what they consider possible.
- To shine a light on injustices and inequities to promote greater understanding and a more inclusive community for everyone; and
- To provide empowering, fact-based news, information, and resources for our Latino communities;
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Since the Lab’s launch, we've told hundreds of stories and produced dozens of videos documenting the contributions and impact of our local Hispanic-Latino communities, along with the traditions, culture, challenges, and inequities they face.

The Record-Journal Latino Communities Reporting Lab Fund's fiscal sponsor is the Meriden-Wallingford Community Foundation, a Section 501(c)(3) charitable trust.

Carrying out our mission relies on the support of individuals, the community, businesses, organizations, and agencies who believe in our work. The Lab is funded through a combination of philanthropic funding for journalism, sponsors, and advertisers. All funds raised directly support Latino Communities reporting to provide local, trusted, fact-based news coverage.

The Lab has a dedicated web page [www.myrecordjournal.com/Latino-reporting-Lab](http://www.myrecordjournal.com/Latino-reporting-Lab), a web page for Latino news [www.myrecordjournal.com/latino-news](http://www.myrecordjournal.com/latino-news), and produces a weekly Spanish language news video, Miércoles Latino. Additional platforms include print, video, email newsletters, social media, and text messaging.

### About This Project

The Record-Journal was selected among 18 media organizations in the U.S. to receive funding for projects as part of the Google News Initiative's 2021 Innovation Challenge.

With this funding, the Latino Communities Reporting Lab hired a full-time bilingual editor to oversee the team of reporters and launched a yearlong, in-depth listening, engagement, and data-gathering project. The new data-gathering project builds on a five-month listening tour conducted by the Record-Journal in 2020-2021, which included conversations with more than 80 Latino community stakeholders before the Latino Communities Reporting Lab launch.

Beyond expanding the Latino reporting lab’s capabilities and increasing public access to valuable data, the Record-Journal’s selection highlights on a national scale the importance of listening, community engagement, and inclusive reporting.

The project is in partnership with the public service non-profit DataHaven of New Haven, Connecticut. For more than 25 years, DataHaven has partnered with local and state agencies, academic and health care institutions, foundations, and community organizations to collect, share, and interpret public information about Connecticut.

> “We believe that information is as vital to communities as any other infrastructure, especially high-quality information that is meaningful to local residents and developed with their input. Kudos to the Record-Journal and Google Innovation Challenge for working to ensure that people of all backgrounds in Meriden and Wallingford have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in community information, and that they have the tools they need to advocate for improved equity and well-being.”

> - Mark Abraham, Executive Director, DataHaven

Through listening and data gathering, the community will help us determine the next phase of the Latino Communities Reporting Lab brand and formats, whether it is a website, app, print product, or social site.

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**SEPT 2020**
- Accepted into Local Media Association’s Lab for Journalism Funding

**OCT 2020**
- 5-Month Listening Tour included 82 conversations, 4 focus groups, 51 survey responses

**2021**
- Invested in hiring the first Latina Reporter for the Lab

**MARCH 2021**
- Launched

**APRIL 2021**
- One of the Top Winners in the LMA Lab for Journalism Funding
- Launched Latino News Now Text Message Platform & Email Newsletter

**MAY 2021**
- Received Diversity & Inclusion Award from Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce
- Completed grant-funded 12-Week Vaccine Information to Latino Communities Project “Providing Trusted Covid-19 Vaccine Information to Latino Communities”
- Hired second and third Lab team members thanks to successful fundraising efforts

**JUNE 2021**
- Launched Community Advisory Board for Reporting Lab

**JULY 2021**
- Received Diversity & Inclusion Award from Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce

**AUG 2021**
- Launched Community Advisory Board for Reporting Lab

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Please note: the text and video links in this document will open in new browser tabs by right-clicking them.
Working Group

The Lab working group is a cross-departmental team that meets weekly to support the efforts of the core Lab editorial team. This structure has helped the Lab integrate into our overall company across departments.

The working group utilizes cross-departmental resources in several ways:

- Brainstorming, planning, coordinating, and building upon initiatives brought to the working group from core Lab members.
- Working on revenue streams, content streams, and marketing streams with an eye toward the long term.
- Helping coordinate the future sustainability of the Lab by building and implementing any new products, content changes, and sponsorship efforts the core Lab team has deemed vital.
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The Lab’s working group is comprised of the following individuals:

- Liz White, Publisher & Executive Vice President and Family Owner
- Dave Pare, Senior Vice President, Chief Operating Officer
- Ron Rainey, Digital Director
- Erik Allison, Creative Director
- Dundee Benson, Strategic Sales Leader
- Jeff Kurz, Editorial Page Editor
- Eric Cotton, Managing Editor
- Claudia Hilario-García, Latino Communities Reporting News Editor
- Richie Rathsock, Assistant Managing Editor, Digital Content & Analytics
- Ralph Tomaselli, Senior Vice President & Editor
- Luke McIvor, Digital Content & Analytics
- Claudia Hilario-García, Latino Communities Reporting News Editor

Community Partners

The following organizations in our community have become valuable partners with the Latino Communities Reporting Lab efforts through our listening projects.

- Casa Boricua • Ctown Supermarkets
- Community Health Center Inc. • Fosdick Corporation
- Hartford Healthcare
- Hartford Healthcare’s Midstate Medical Center
- Hispanic Outreach Leaders in Action (HOLA)
- Midstate Chamber of Commerce
- Liberty Bank • Meriden Farmers Market
- Meriden Public Schools • Meriden Racial Justice Initiative
- Meriden Senior Center
- Meriden-Wallingford Community Foundation
- Meriden YMCA • Middlesex Community College
- Most Holy Trinity Church • Nucor Steel • Pino Travel
- Puerto Rican Festival • Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce
- Rivas Meat Market • Spanish Community of Wallingford
- St. Rose of Lima Church • Ulbrich Stainless Steel
- United Way of Meriden and Wallingford • Wallington
- Wallingford Adult Education
- Wallingford Community Resource Alliance
- Wallingford Public Library • Wallingford Public Schools
- Wallingford YMCA • Women & Families
- Puerto Rican Festival • Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce
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- Wallingford Community Resource Alliance
- Wallingford Public Library • Wallingford Public Schools
- Wallingford YMCA • Women & Families

Recognition

- Diversity and Inclusion Award - Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce, June 2021
- First Place for Combating Misinformation and Restoring Trust for the project “Providing Trusted Covid-19 Vaccine Information for Latino Communities” - New England Better Newspaper Competition, May 2022
- First Place for Excellence in Revenue Collaboration & Partnerships - New England Better Newspaper Competition, May 2022
- Second Place for Innovator Award for the Latino Communities Reporting Lab - New England Better Newspaper Competition, May 2022
- Shining Star Award - Midstate Chamber of Commerce’s HOLA (Hispanic Outreach Leaders in Action) Group, October 2022

Lab news team members accepting the Shining Star Award on October 7. (left to right): Lau Guzmán, Claudia Hilario-García, Crystal Elescano and David Matos.

The Lab celebrates its one year anniversary!

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Why a Listening Tour?

We learned the importance of community listening through our participation in Local Media Association’s Lab for Journalism Funding, which we participated in from September 2020 through April 2021. As our local Latino communities have grown over the last few decades, we felt it was essential to better understand their news and information needs and get feedback on what the Record-Journal was doing well and where we were missing the mark.

“Too often, newsrooms assume they know what their communities need. A strategic approach to community listening allows a news outlet to learn from and better serve its audiences, and sets the foundation for securing philanthropic support.”

- Frank Mungeam, Chief Innovation Officer, Local Media Association and Director, Lab for Journalism Funding

Resources

Local Media Association Case Studies
• The Power of Listening: 6 Lessons from the Lab for Journalism Funding
• Built to Last: Record-Journal Creates Latino Communities Reporting
  Lab funded with philanthropy

American Press Institute
• How to listen to your audience and learn from them

Listening tours are essential for establishing open channels of communication between the newsroom and the communities it seeks to serve through the community-funded model for local journalism.”

- Joaquin Alvarado, Co-Founder & Executive Producer at Studiotobe and Coach, Lab for Journalism Funding

Early in the process, we identified three key stakeholders for the listening project who were invaluable resources.

One of the first people we contacted about listening to our Latino communities was María Campos-Harlow, Executive Director of the United Way of Meriden and Wallingford and Secretary of the Meriden-Wallingford Community Foundation. The Record-Journal and United Way of Meriden and Wallingford have built a great relationship spanning three generations. The United Way brings local non-profit organizations together and supports them on many levels. The summer before the listening tour, the Record-Journal partnered with the United Way to implement free marketing campaigns for 40 non-profit organizations utilizing grant funds received from Facebook.

As a Latina herself, Maria was excited because it is important to understand the community that you are looking to serve. “Latinos are very diverse in many ways. It is important to understand who we are, where we come from, and our interests.”

Maria was instrumental in connecting the Record-Journal to the right people and organizations in our community. With her assistance, we developed a list of community stakeholders that included educators, non-profit leaders, community members, chambers of commerce, community leaders, business owners & businesspeople, church leaders & members, politicians & government officials, and foundations.

Adriana Rodríguez, Executive Director of the Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW), was also instrumental in this project phase. SCOW’s mission is to help Latinos succeed in U.S. society and maintain and share their rich varied cultures with the broader community. It provides new Latino community members with the proper tools to use community agency services and assists individuals in finding education, work, housing, as well as health, immigration, or legal services. The support of the Spanish Community of Wallingford as we embarked on our listening tour was vital, as it provided our work with a certain level of trust within the community.

“There is nothing more effective than truly understanding the community that you’re looking to serve. It helps break down the stereotypes. It helps to understand who we are, and it just gives a beautiful perspective about the tapestry of our community that is growing so much in our area and that in a few years it will be probably a majority in the demographics.”

- Maria Campos-Harlow, Executive Director, United Way of Meriden and Wallingford

“Listening tours are essential for establishing open channels of communication between the newsroom and the communities it seeks to serve through the community-funded model for local journalism.”

- Joaquin Alvarado, Co-Founder & Executive Producer at Studiotobe and Coach, Lab for Journalism Funding
Listening Tour
Where to Begin?
continued

“I think that taking the opportunity to step back and hear from the community is such a vital and important piece to have a successful Lab and to be able to move forward with content, with information. And I love how it’s an opportunity for us to get to know the community. Getting to talk to them in English and Spanish and showing them what we could, with their feedback, accomplish together.”

– Adriana Rodriguez, Executive Director, Spanish Community of Wallingford

Lastly, we engaged Evelyn Robles-Rivas, Ph.D, Supervisor of Languages and Community Partnerships, Meriden Public Schools. Evelyn is a former principal, member and volunteer at the Holy Trinity Church in Wallingford, a board member at the Spanish Community of Wallingford, and a former board member at Junta for Progressive Action.

“I think it’s important that we as leaders understand that Latinos are coming from different places. They have different cultures and different ways to approach the educational system. Families have different priorities and we need to support them. We must empower families to be part of the educational plans for our students.” – Evelyn Robles-Rivas, Ph.D, Meriden Public Schools

Listening Tour Questions

We prepared a strategic list of open-ended questions that focused not on our needs and concerns as a media outlet but on the Latino communities’ needs and challenges.

The questions were intentionally designed to discover what we didn’t know rather than to confirm existing assumptions.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are another great tool for listening to the community. In this setting, participants were guided through a facilitated discussion with open-ended questions.

The following organizations hosted focus groups for our initial listening tour:

- Spanish Community Of Wallingford & The United Way of Meriden and Wallingford
- St. Rose of Lima
- Hispanic Outreach Leaders in Action (HOLA)
- Midstate Chamber of Commerce
- Fosdick Corporation

Questions

• Explain background and provide a brief overview of the initiative. With this in mind, what topics would be relevant for us to cover?

• Can you share relevant information about our local Latino communities that you think would be helpful for us to know and learn more about?

• Where are you (or our local Latino communities) getting information now?

• What are the most important issues affecting this community?

• What’s not being covered enough?

• Where could we have the most impact?

• What would be an outcome for your community that you think would be meaningful and matter to people?

• What are we doing well?

• What can we improve on?

• Who else do you recommend we speak to?
Key Learnings

Diversity of Latinos in the Community

Meriden and Wallingford are home to different generations of expatriates and people who have recently settled in the area because they find a community and social fabric where they feel they belong.

We learned quickly that Latinos in our area represent many nationalities and should not be treated as a “monolith,” many people told us, and we cannot lump everyone into one bucket. People hail from different family places of origin, including Puerto Rico, Mexico, Columbia, Ecuador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and Peru. There is also a diversity of income levels and education levels.

The various Latino nationalities represented in our community are proud of their cultures, traditions, bilingualism, and hard-working mind-set.

While there may be differences within the cultures, there are also shared experiences, such as arriving in the United States, moving to the Meriden and Wallingford community, or starting a local business.

Education

Education was a topic that came up in almost every conversation. We heard how non-native English-speaking parents struggle to navigate and understand the local K-12 education system. Other common themes were children learning to code-switch between home and school and the digital divide that stems from access to broadband internet.

There is a lack of understanding of post-secondary options, such as adult education or college, and how to get into the trades or start a business.

Latino Youth

Since the Meriden school system is 58.9% Latino, engaging with youth is essential. Respondents encouraged us to take advantage of structures already in place in the school system such as sports, clubs, and curriculum.

We must consider how this group consumes information since traditional news channels may not resonate. We were encouraged to find ways to connect with and inspire Latino youth, perhaps through social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or even gaming.

Share Latino Success

It is important to share the success stories of local Latinos, highlighting the different paths they may have taken to get there. We need to give people a sense of what is possible despite any challenges they may be facing. Success stories can also inspire and empower Latino youth to impact change.

News Consumption

Several participants said they actively try to consume less news recently because the news scares them. They prefer having balanced news and reading about things they can do or control.

“The feedback was eye-opening, and after taking over 100 pages of notes, we organized the common themes into two pages of takeaways that continue to guide the Lab’s news coverage every day.”

- Claudia Hilario-García, Latino Communities Reporting Lab Editor

The Record-Journal’s listening tour spanned five months (October 2020-February 2021) and included:

82 Conversations  4 Focus Groups  51 Survey Responses
Topics of Interest

**Latino-owned businesses**: There was an interest in learning about Latino-owned companies to support and sharing available resources with business owners.

**Healthcare**: Latinos like to hear and see doctors or medical staff that look like them. Specific topics of interest include aging, mental health, substance abuse and domestic abuse.

**Latino celebrations and customs**: More coverage of the festivals, traditions, and food specific to each Latino nationality, like the Day of the Dead and religious feasts.

**Community Events**: There is an interest in more information about events happening in the community, particularly family-friendly events.

**Housing Challenges**: Navigating rental assistance, mortgage applications, and home ownership.

**Economic Empowerment**: An understanding of financial literacy topics such as budgeting, saving, investing, and credit, specifically for the Latino community.

**Employment**: Bring local businesses and employers into conversations with an employment series.

Unanticipated Outcomes

We developed a great partnership with the Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW) through this exercise. After the Lab launched, the organization began translating our news stories into Spanish. We heard many times on the listening tour how important thoughtful translation with context is, rather than using an automated translation, which is why we partnered with SCOW for translation.

Our “Providing Trusted COVID-19 Vaccine Information for Latino Communities” project exemplifies how community listening helped lay the groundwork for a large, impactful project. In 2021, the Record-Journal was awarded grant funding from the Connecticut Health Foundation to target Latino communities locally and statewide with trusted COVID-19 information. We brought together an unprecedented collaboration between journalists, medical vaccine experts, Latino community stakeholders, and media. Together, we helped create equity in the rate at which Latinos received the COVID-19 vaccine compared to white residents locally. Since we had already built relationships and trust with community stakeholders, they were more willing to partner with us on the endeavor.

Reflections

It proved challenging to get participants comfortable with sharing feedback or criticisms. It often took more probing questions to gather the type of feedback we were looking for. We reminded participants that we wanted their honest thoughts for improvements so that the Record-Journal could meet the Latino communities needs.

Many of the individuals in the initial listening tour were long-time or frequent Record-Journal readers. We know that there are many Latinos who are not yet reading or engaging with our content.

We were surprised to learn many Latino community members were already reading our content. Specifically, we heard that the Spanish Community of Wallingford was using our paper in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Also, many interviewees talked about reading the Sports section to read articles about Latino student-athletes that were family members and friends.

Putting Into Action

The first listening tour gave the Latino Communities Lab team insight to better understand our audience. When reporters are brainstorming story ideas, they return to the takeaways. The team utilizes a shared spreadsheet document where they can find ideas and inspiration to craft new stories. There are many examples of this including highlighting the business community and success stories, and covering topics such as housing, financial literacy, jobs, and employment. The tool serves as a reminder of the direction that our editorial content should take to continue serving our communities, increase engagement, and be relevant for our audiences.

“The entire process was incredibly enlightening. As an editor, we often get wrapped up in the day-to-day news coverage from our own perspectives. Hearing directly from the audience on what we do well and where we could improve helped not only shape the Lab but also in how I think about our general news coverage.”

- Richie Rathsack, Assistant Managing Editor, Digital Content & Analytics

Part 2: Initial Listening Tour Takeaways
Part 3
Lab Naming, Branding, and Mission

Naming The Lab

We wanted the name to be inclusive. It was important to reference Latino “communities” since we had learned so much about the diversity of nationalities and cultures in our initial listening tour. As we started to develop the idea of creating a new initiative to better connect with the Latino members of the community, Latino Lab became a placeholder name we used internally. The term “lab” came from the notion that we were experimenting with something new and different, similar to how other news organizations have initiatives like Investigative Reporting Lab or Education Lab to reflect the research and learning that goes into the reporting on a specific topic.

When we started the listening tour, we changed the name to Latino Community Reporting Lab, as another placeholder, that was also more descriptive of what we wanted to do. We always envisioned coming up with a different name, but needed something to call the initiative. We thought using the word lab with a group of people could have negative connotations.

As we used the placeholder name during the listening tour, the word community changed to communities to reflect the diversity within the Latino community.

At the end of the listening tour, we held another brainstorming session with some of the community stakeholders about the name/branding for the initiative. They were very adamant that they liked the name Latino Communities Reporting Lab, saying it sounded like something new and exciting that made it clear what it was. So, in the interest of listening to the audience we’re trying to reach, we kept the name Latino Communities Reporting Lab.

Branding The Lab

Our creative process for the Lab branding involved a team approach with brainstorming and research sessions. The Record-Journal’s creative team worked up several options based on the Lab working group’s suggestions. Particular attention was paid to Latino culture, visuals, texts, and other pieces that identify the community.

Utilizing the whole creative team, we explored several approaches and styles relatively quickly. The length of the name and the bilingual aspect certainly posed some design challenges. Upon presenting our initial ideas, we agreed that the logo and branding needed to be expressive, exciting, colorful, memorable and genuinely resonate with our Latino communities.

Selection of the final brand was collaborative and involved receiving feedback from the Lab working group and our local partners in the Latino community. The logo selected was described by our key stakeholders (María Campos-Harlow, Adriana Rodríguez, and Evelyn Robles-Rivas) as:

- inviting and exciting
- appropriate for any audience you’re trying to reach
- caught our attention right away
- love the colors, nicely represents Latino communities
- will stand out when reaching out to the community and funders
- easy to read, serious (the colors are representative of Latinos, but not too bright, like festive bright yellow)
- saw it and felt happy, it’s “us”
- fits with both positive stories as well as those on inequities and injustices
Developing the Mission Statement

The feedback from key members of the local Latino communities was crucial in forming the mission statement and the Lab as a whole. This is not a project where we create content we THINK the Latino communities needed and wanted. We had to learn more about these communities to authentically represent them and deliver the content they need and want.

Turning the two pages of takeaways into a coherent mission statement took a few brainstorming sessions with the Lab working group. We wanted the mission statement to serve as a guide for how the Record-Journal could put into practice what we heard from the audience.

Our simple mission statement—To amplify the voices of our local Latino communities—is a great rallying cry and focus to help drive our efforts forward in a coordinated vision. But it leaves out the how and the why—the actionable methods. That is why we found a 3-part statement to be effective. It leaves room to add metrics and methods and can really ground a mission statement into a statement that includes the means to achieve your goals. The three parts of the mission statement were built from key themes we heard from the listening tour.

Mission Statement

The mission statement we landed upon states what the Record-Journal is trying to do and resonates with our readers.

Our mission is:

To amplify the voices of our local Latino communities, including:

• To provide empowering, fact-based news, information, and resources for our Latino Communities;
• To shine a light on injustices and inequities to promote greater understanding and a more inclusive community for everyone;
• To showcase the successes and contributions of Latinos as a way of inspiring young people to expand what they consider possible.
Part 4: Creating a Community Advisory Board

Goals

The main goal of the advisory board was to have local Latino community members provide direct feedback on the Lab’s coverage, including critiques and new ideas for better serving Latino communities.

We wanted to build trust with the Latino community through our monthly discussions. We hoped local Latino community members would share their insights, opinions, and interests with the community advisory board members if they did not feel comfortable sharing directly with the newspaper.

Ultimately, we wanted the community to feel that the Latino Communities Reporting Lab and the Record-Journal were being transparent in how we approach news coverage and how we grow the Lab in the future. In addition to providing us with insight into the community, the diverse backgrounds of board members could also help us reach more of the community on a regular basis. They could have discussions about the Lab and content in their different social circles to increase the Lab’s visibility and demystify news processes by sharing what they learn on the board.

Considerations

Before Launch

The Lab Working Group spent three months discussing the best way for the advisory board to operate. Our considerations included:

Board Makeup and Type
- Editorial vs. Advisory

Board Member Expectations
- Time Commitment
- Volunteer vs. financial incentive

Staff Time Commitment
- Who’s running the meetings?
- Who attends the meetings?

Meeting Format
- Frequency
- Format (in person, virtual, hybrid)

We ultimately determined:

Board Makeup and Type
- 12-person board, knowing that typically 6-8 will show up at any given meeting
- Advisory in nature
- Volunteer

Board Member Expectations
- One year term
- 1-hour meeting each month
- Read Latino Communities Reporting Lab stories throughout the month
- Keep eyes and ears open to gather informal feedback from the community

Staff Time Commitment
- Who attends the meetings?
  - Latino Communities Reporting Lab Editor
  - Assistant Managing Editor
  - Lab reporters
  - Publisher occasionally

Meeting Format
- Monthly meeting
- Hybrid format (offer both in-person and Zoom options)
- Leader of the meeting: Editor
- Provide food from local Latino restaurants
- All newspaper staff are welcome
- Agenda
  - No agenda - to keep meeting informal and allow for open flow of conversation.
  - Ask specific questions to gather individual and community feedback:
    - When you read the paper, what did you tear out? What do you like? What don’t you like?
    - Do you have ideas for future stories?
    - Are there upcoming Latino community events we should be aware of?

Why An Advisory Board?

After concluding our initial listening tour, we knew it would be critical to build ongoing engagement and responsive efforts within the Latino Communities Reporting Lab. We wanted community listening to be an ongoing process and not end with the conclusion of the initial listening tour. Our first step was creating a volunteer-based advisory board. According to a September 2020 American Press Institute article on community advisory boards -- “[they] can point you toward stories that have gone uncovered and people whose information needs are not being met. And they can help you build — or repair — relationships with groups that are often marginalized or misrepresented by the news media, and perhaps by your own newsroom.”
In August 2021, we launched a Community Advisory Board of 11 local Latino community members, which will help us deepen our community listening further throughout this project.

**Recruitment & Timeframe**

We started by reviewing the community stakeholders list that we had compiled for the listening tour. We also reviewed the listening tour feedback for the question, "who else do you recommend we speak to?" Two key stakeholders, María Campos-Harlow and Adriana Rodríguez, assisted with Board member invitations and encouraged those identified to join the advisory board.

- **July 2021 - Invited Participants**
- **August 2021 - Orientation Sessions**
  - Tour of the office
  - 5-minute presentation about the Record-Journal and Lab
- **September 2021 - First Advisory Board meeting**

**Inaugural Community Advisory Board**

**Part 4:** Creating a Community Advisory Board

The members of the Community Advisory Board have been a critical piece in the Lab’s success. This feedback from local Latino community members and leaders provides reporters with direct insight beyond story analytics and data. They are the people, often leaders in their respective areas, who know in depth what is happening daily in their communities. We interact with them regularly, either by email, personally or by phone, to find out about a lead or contact as we gather information for the stories we produce.

Board members have proven to be significant partners. They are incredibly knowledgeable about the community, and they serve as sources or guides to other potential sources for stories. They’ve provided insight into the local Latino communities and the struggles they, their families, and their friends face.

Members have volunteered to help attend local community events on behalf of the Lab.

"I love that we have a diverse group of community leaders ranging from clerical to church to business partners, Spanish Community of Wallingford, the United Way, it’s a diverse group of people who come together, unifying the voices of our communities, and understanding first-hand the stories that our community really wants to learn about to feel connected."

- Marissa Cardona, College and Career Coordinator, Success Academy, Meriden Public Schools

"We take that community input and then we go ahead and we try to say, okay, this is what we’ve heard and how do we take the information that we’re hearing, whether it’s the news articles, whether it’s the videos that it’s out there, the community events, and then we try to take that information from the meetings and see how we can move it forward, provide better content and more where they can more engagement with the community."

- Efraín Valentín Jr, Owner, Valentin Karate

**Monthly Meeting Discussions**

During our monthly meetings with the Community Advisory Board, we ask for feedback on the previous month’s stories and find out what is new and happening in the communities. Specifically, we are interested in learning which stories resonated, what they heard from the community, story ideas, and events or celebrations we should attend or cover.

We provide updates on the in-depth community listening project, such as the status of survey collections and survey results. We involve the board in the process, asking for their thoughts on the survey results and practical feedback, such as where we should go to collect surveys.

At one of our first meetings, we had an intensive discussion on Latino vs Latinx and which one we should use. Ultimately, it was decided to stick with AP guidelines and try to use a more specific identification when possible, such as Puerto Rican, Ecuadorian, etc., but otherwise the use of Latino is acceptable.

If a source prefers the gender neutral term Latinx, it should be confined to quotations by people who request it and be accompanied by a short explanation.

At another meeting, our Editorial Page Editor talked about the opinion page and how we’d like to see Latino voices in that section.
In January 2022, staff from the Record-Journal and DataHaven met to brainstorm the kind of information that would be collected from readers and community members to support the Latino Communities Reporting Lab. Surveys were determined to be the best way to collect information on an ongoing basis.

Monthly meetings on survey findings would help uncover the stories and content of interest to the community. Springtime meetings were used to further refine and translate the survey from English into Spanish. Later meetings were used to present summaries of the survey responses to stakeholders, and to guide additional analysis that would help answer the Record-Journal’s questions about the community. Additional focus groups were conducted to bolster responses from underrepresented groups, such as teens.

This approach ultimately did help us discover what was important to the community and allowed us to use several demographic breakdowns to better understand how various groups felt about news media or what they found interesting. However, we have more to uncover in the future about how social media plays a role in the way people access information and what kind of news is presented to them in that format.

A total of 2,043 responses were collected, in addition to information from two youth focus groups, exceeding our goal of 2,000.
Goals
When embarking on this project, our goal was for the Latino Communities Reporting Lab to become data-driven and progress from making news decisions using assumptions based on little data to making informed decisions based on data. This would enable us to make content and product decisions for our Latino audience based on data.

As we gathered information and data from our in-depth community listening and engagement activities, we aimed to:

1. Use research to create comprehensive guidelines for news coverage for more inclusive reporting that represents the diverse communities we serve with our Latino Communities Reporting Lab and the topics most important to them. We will reference the guide during our Lab team’s weekly and daily meetings to orient our coverage.

2. Use feedback to guide our product format and distribution decisions in our cross-departmental team’s weekly meetings. The format will be bilingual and multipractical to meet the community where they are, including in print, digital, video, email, social, and text, prioritizing based on community feedback.

3. Create a source audit dashboard using the Source Matters technology tool to ensure our sources reflect our Latino communities through all our reporting. Having a tool dedicated to source auditing will get us actionable data about our sources much more quickly than dedicating staff to do manual source audits.

Ultimately, this will help us produce more inclusive reporting that represents the diverse communities we serve, help us tell untold stories and tell stories including different perspectives that represents the diverse communities we serve, help us tell untold stories and tell stories including different perspectives that represents the diverse communities we serve, help us tell untold stories and tell stories including different perspectives that represents the diverse communities we serve.

Response Collection
Survey links were posted on the Record-Journal website through links in articles both in print and online, through social media and boosting to reach Latinos, through our email database, and utilizing the Subtext text messaging platform. We created a video in Spanish with English subtitles to explain the study, its importance to the community, and the ease of filling it out.

The survey was promoted through our Latino Communities Reporting Lab print spadea, Latino News email audience, Miercules Latinos weekly video news segment, Latino News text audience, and widgets on our website in lab articles. As time passed, we also increased social media promotion and distributed postcards at local restaurants, businesses, and non-profit organizations.

Survey collection provided another opportunity to resume conversations with the stakeholders we identified in the initial listening tour. These Community Partners helped identify community events for survey collection and brainstormed ways to get the most significant survey responses and reach a good representation of the residents.

The Lab Team worked together to create an extensive list of survey collection opportunities, including school and community events, vaccination fairs, meetings with our community partner network, and setting up a regular table at Meriden’s annual Puerto Rican Festival. These Community Partners helped identify community events for survey collection and brainstormed ways to get the most significant survey responses and reach a good representation of the residents.

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We hired a coordinator and a contractor for the Listening Project. The project coordinator was responsible for coordinating the survey collection calendar and collecting survey responses. The contractor was responsible for collecting survey responses at events and locations around the community.

"We all know the adage that the ‘customer is always right’. In media that’s listening to the audience to better understand their needs, interests and where we can best support them. There are lots of ways to do this and meeting the audience where they are, whether it’s on the street, via SMS or through reader surveys takes time and effort.”

- David Cohn, Chief Strategy Officer & Co-Founder, Subtext

Puerto Rican Festival
Meriden’s annual Puerto Rican Festival presented an opportunity to reach a number of potential respondents. The Latino Communities Reporting Lab was a presenting sponsor of the event, and our booth was alongside the Spanish Community of Wallingford’s booth.

This festival is one of our community’s greatest events that annually draws over six thousand attendees to enjoy a day of live Latin music, a variety of vendor booths, cultural food, amusements for the children and a cultural tent featuring an assortment of Puerto Rican customs, artists, and native fruits and vegetables. It is an event full of pride and a gathering of family and friends. We have been told by experienced Latino Festival goers that the Meriden festival is the most organized and successful Latino Festival in the region. This event demonstrates the strength of our community’s diversity.

For this event, we duplicated our Google Form surveys and dropped the coupon incentive in lieu of a package vacation incentive for respondents who filled out the survey and provided an email address. A total of 117 responses were collected during the event and 87 percent provided an email address.

We built excitement around the survey with giveaways and a grand prize trip to the Dominican Republic (worth $2,000). Giveaways included Lab beachballs, backpacks, notepads and pens.

To collect as many surveys as possible, all Lab staff attended the event, as well as the publisher, assistant managing editor, and contracted employees hired specifically for survey distribution.
Focus Groups

We conducted a focus group at the Spanish Community of Wallingford as well as a Youth Focus Group held in partnership with the Meriden Racial Justice Initiative and the National Conference for Community and Justice.

Analytical Approach

This section summarizes the approach to the analysis rather than the findings from responses. While waiting for the first survey responses to come in, we looked at select, basic demographics of Meriden and Wallingford (the two primary towns in the Record-Journal’s readership area), as well as Connecticut as a whole using American Community Survey data. These include the population identifying as Latino by age, sex by age, and foreign born population by age. Given the constraints of time and budget, as well as the fact the Latino Communities Reporting Lab has an explicit focus on Latino stories and voices, a representative sample of the overall population was not the goal of the survey. However, a baseline understanding of the community was an important first step for adding context to the analysis. Given the methods used to collect survey responses (see Response Collection above), we ultimately oversampled Latinos, women, and 30-40 year olds.

DataHaven developed parameterized code for the analysis that could easily be re-run with new data that generated new charts and tables to facilitate conversation around findings. This was written in R, an open-source coding language with an emphasis on exploratory data analysis, statistics, and data graphics. Because the survey was available in English and Spanish, much of the translation to align all the survey responses into English had to be done manually. At the time we conducted the analysis, we were not aware of any R libraries that satisfactorily translate word strings.

Once the survey languages were aligned, some demographic groups collapsed to create sufficient subpopulation for disaggregation. For example, respondents were sorted into age groups of 0-29, 30-49, and 50+ rather than the 10-year age bands used in the survey. Additionally, some word mining was used to standardize similar terms in write-in answers, for example “Face book” and “Facebook.”

DataHaven ultimately generated four R Markdown notebooks with graphics and tables summarizing broad themes in the data (demographics, news topics, news habits and media preferences, and trust in news media) which became the content presented at each monthly check-in meeting. As the response pool grew larger, more disaggregation could be done, and more topics explored. With a final pool of more than 2,000 responses, DataHaven is able to explore trends in the data in fairly granular detail.

"This year, we are also pleased to partner with Meriden’s family-owned record-journal newspaper and digital company as the Title Sponsor of the event, providing extensive coverage in both print and digital media support. The Meriden Puerto Rican Festival enjoys a fifty-plus year history of promoting and supporting our diversity, and the Record-Journal Latino Communities Reporting Lab helps amplify the voices of our local Latino community and helps to advance racial and social equity in the Meriden community.”

- Michael S. Rohde, Meriden Puerto Rican Festival Committee member

"A lot of times, Latinos don’t know about these businesses unless they see it in the Latino section in the paper. A lot of families told me they saw it in the paper and they will go and try it out, whether it’s a restaurant, or whether it’s a store. It’s a positive thing.”

- Hector Cardona, Chairman of the Meriden Puerto Rican Festival Committee; retired Meriden police chief

Events

Community Events
Annual Puerto Rican Festival • Celebrate Wallingford
Meriden Daffodil Festival • Latino Expo
Latino Winemakers Event • Mexican Soccer League
Meriden Farmers Market • National Night Out
Summer Concert Series

Local Businesses, Corporations, and Non-profit Organizations
CTown Supermarkets • Fosdick Fulfillment
Hartford Healthcare • Meriden Senior Center
Meriden YMCA • Nucor Steel • Rivas Meat Market
St. Rose of Lima Church
United Way of Meriden and Wallingford • Valentin Karate
Wallingford Community Resource Alliance
Wallingford Public Library

School Events
Kindergarten Information Night, Meriden School Back to School Event, Meriden Public Schools Community Resources, Maloney High School Hispanic Heritage Month Event, MxCC Platt High School Saturday Blitz, Maloney High School Learning Expo, John Barry School

Health-related Events
Alzheimer’s Awareness Event Midstate Chamber of Commerce, Health & Wellness Expo Provider Networking Open House, Wallingford Community Resource Alliance, Youth & Social Services

Spanish Community of Wallingford
Bike Raffle • Día del Niño • International Night Spanish Class • Vaccination Clinics

Part 5: In-Depth Community Listening, Engagement & Data Gathering Project
Challenges

The main challenge was convincing respondents that the survey would ultimately benefit the Latino community with targeted reporting. We often heard individuals say that this type of research benefits those who gather it, not those who answer the questions. In general, people were initially hesitant to fill out surveys. Having a dedicated project coordinator and survey-gatherers employed for this proved critical to do this grassroots survey gathering because having our team members interact face-to-face with people in the community was the most effective way to gather survey responses.

This hesitation provided an opening for survey collectors to share details about the Latino Communities Reporting Lab more generally and then specifically about the goals of the Latino community listening project. We focused on the opportunity for their voices to be heard. It also helped that those collecting the survey looked, spoke, and came from similar cultural backgrounds.

Early on, we recognized that the digital divide would provide challenges with regards to survey collection. Some Latino community members are not digital natives or did not have internet access. At one point, a paper survey was suggested, but we determined that having a paper option would complicate the data collection.

Additionally, newsrooms do not traditionally handle survey and data collection. Our team was not experienced in handling the logistics of a data gathering project of this size. It was also more grassroots than we anticipated, and it took a lot of time and energy to collect surveys.

Spend more time in the beginning to work out logistics - particularly dividing up who will be responsible for the different tasks. We spent a lot of time doing this as we were implementing the project and experienced several setbacks due to unforeseen circumstances.

Takeaways

Some of the major takeaways from the project include:

- One benefit of our choice to use so many demographic questions in the survey is that we were able to disaggregate by several factors, including ethnicity, language spoken at home, and place of birth.
- Similarly, by including more than 20 selectable topics of interest, we were able to look more closely, for example, at the respondents who care most about education or local events.
- Latinos were significantly oversampled as a result of the purpose of the survey, the content on which it was promoted, and the events where outreach was targeted. Since Latino voices are those we wanted to reach, this was not an issue. In fact, had the Latino response rate matched the regional share of Latinos, we would not be able to properly disaggregate by ethnicity.
- Grocery store outreach and $10 coupons (vs. $5 coupons) greatly improved response rates, but concentrated them among certain demographic groups, particularly women and adults ages 30-40. We could have done more to reach out to men, youth, and seniors earlier on.
- Focus groups, particularly among youth, needed slightly different questions than the survey. What we realize is that we may have designed the survey with more traditional news reading habits in mind. We could have prepared a more tailored set of questions for that focus group, or involved a young person in the design of the survey to ensure we used language and terms that young people recognize.
- Throughout the survey, we asked whether people “use social media” for news. In hindsight, that was much too general. We could have done a better job tailoring questions or doing additional focus groups to better understand social media usage for news.

Insights

Implementing surveys involves designing the right questions to address the topics of interest for the study. Those questions should be understandable to a broad range of respondents, and the answers provided should be simple enough to compile into a valuable dataset for analysis.

Since this was not the Record-Journal’s area of expertise, we leaned on DataHaven during the survey creation phase since their staff has the skills and experience to design and interpret surveys.

It was critical to have dedicated employees focused on survey collection instead of utilizing existing staff members. Since we could not have a paper option for the survey, we had a staff member with an iPad present at all survey collection events assisting participants with the survey. This personal interaction also provided an opportunity to share more information about the Latino Communities Reporting Lab. We found that having two contract employees with different schedules allowed us to reach the biggest audiences, as there was flexibility to attend both day time and evening events. When there was a large event, both contractors would attend.

The most successful survey collection venues were the massive fairs (Puerto Rican festival, Celebrate Wallingford), Hispanic businesses (CTown Supermarkets, Rivas Meat Market), and Catholic Mass in Spanish.

Raffles, coupons, and giveaway items were great incentives for collecting surveys. We hosted a bike giveaway at the Spanish Community of Wallingford and a Dominican Republic vacation giveaway at the Puerto Rican Festival. CTown Supermarkets provided a coupon to all survey respondents which bolstered the response rate from our anticipated 1,000 to more than 2,000. All individuals who received coupons via email were also entered to win a gift card to CTown Supermarkets. Giveaways included backpacks, notepads, straws, pencils, and pens.
Putting It Into Action

Taking the time to listen to our audience has been extremely insightful and helps with outreach to readers. We’ve created new bridges with key stakeholders in our community. Many of the people who were part of our listening tour still regularly keep in contact and reach out with questions or suggestions.

More than that, editors and news staff feel more confident in implementing news strategies and going after different types of stories knowing what kinds of content will benefit our readers since we heard it directly from our readers. Lab stories continually have impressive engaged time on each story and advisory board members share first-hand the content’s impact.

“I’m always looking for stories that can benefit the Latino community. I see that many locals are looking for local and national news. I try to include some Latin America issues into my reporting, such as mental health, disappearances, politics, and immigration.”

- Crystal Elescano, Reporter, Latino Communities Reporting Lab

Audience Insights

With the second round of survey data, we are increasingly refining the type of content the Lab offers based on audience insights:

- 46 percent spoke a combination of English and Spanish at home, 32 percent spoke Spanish only, 22 percent spoke English only, and 4 percent another language. People who spoke Spanish only at home had a strong preference for TV news, specifically Telemundo.

- About 40 percent of respondents overall preferred bilingual news content. Students had low shares (10 percent or less) who preferred news in Spanish only. Fewer than 10 percent of foreign-born Latinos preferred news in English only.

- Overall, respondents had high levels of trust in local and national news sources, and slightly lower trust in social media news.

- 46 percent said local news covers issues important to them, 45 percent trusted sources of news about their community, and 32 percent said local news reflects their beliefs and values.

- Most respondents have a strong preference for local news, followed by state news. Spanish speakers also expressed an interest in international news.

Recent Changes

Increased coverage of local events

We received feedback that the Latino communities want information on local events. We have incorporated a weekly event listicle and routinely ask our Community Partners to add their events to the calendar. The Lab team discusses community events at weekly Lab meetings and maintains a calendar of upcoming events. We also highlight and recap events in Miércoles Latinos, our weekly Spanish language news video.

Interest in Latin American News

On September 20, 2022, we started our “5 Things to Know From Latino America and the Caribbean this week” section. We decided to create this section due to the need already expressed in the survey responses. Our Latino communities care about staying informed. In addition to local, state and national issues, they want to know what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean. We decided to create this content to be part of our agenda on a regular basis.

Increase coverage of State Issues

In 2022, we tackled news about midterm elections and participated in political debates with questions that directly impacted our Latino communities. In addition, we have been able to better connect with many other members of the community that we otherwise would not have, thus moving us to produce stories that tell of their achievements and challenges.

Content Interests

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Open-Ended Feedback

Respondents provided numerous topics of interest through the survey’s open-ended question.

According to some write-in responses from the English and Spanish surveys, the community would like to see more stories about mental health, immigration laws, the Latino diaspora in New England, LGBTQ communities news, investigative articles, high school students’ news, opinion columns as part of their news contents and stories to fight racism and discrimination.

See full list in Appendix C.

Bilingual Content

When the Lab launched, we made an effort to publish the articles in both English and Spanish because of the feedback we received on our initial listening tour. Survey feedback confirmed that we should continue to provide bilingual content, as 60 percent of respondents preferred bilingual news content, and 46 percent speak English and Spanish, 32 percent speak Spanish only and 22 percent speak English only.

“Anticipated Changes

Reaching younger audiences

We also heard a need to explore more short-form video to reach younger audiences. A focus group with teens revealed they largely do not pay attention to traditional channels, but do frequent social media like TikTok or Instagram. We plan to initially explore ways of repurposing existing content to reach those channels and brainstorm other ideas for content.

Refining Social Media

As indicated in the survey responses, a lot of local Latinos get their news and information through social channels. We created a Facebook page a while back, but also want to explore other platforms to make sure we are making an effort to reach the audience on the social platforms where they already are such as Instagram, TikTok, etc. Also, we plan to experiment with paid posts to ensure we’re reaching the targeted audience as we look to grow our social media presence.

Structured news on a weekly basis

Because the news that matters to our Latino audiences range from topics on health and education, business profiles, gastronomy and cultural events, a way of addressing them is by giving better structure to our content. For example, we see ourselves giving local residents more of a voice, by conducting informal surveys on issues of importance and interviewing subject matter experts who can provide their perspective on an issue of public discussion, on a weekly basis. Also we will continue our business profiles and events coverage, two of the most requested pieces of content from our audience.

Additionally, our audience has expressed that their main interests are news related to health, education and local events. We plan to increase our news coverage to include more of those topics, as well as music, arts, culture, local business, community resources and sports.

What’s Next

DataHaven Report

The DataHaven report includes analysis of survey responses collected and provide additional insights based on analysis conducted throughout the project term. Summaries provided in the report will describe the respondents’ demographics; news habits and preferences, including preferred languages and sources of news; general topics of interest; and respondents’ overall trust in local news and news media. Where possible, these will be disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity (whether the respondent identifies as Latino/Latina/Latinx), and whether the respondent is a foreign-born or US-born Latino.

Source Audit

We view the audit as a key way to hold ourselves accountable for reflecting the diverse voices in our communities. We joined a cohort of other news publishers seeking to implement Source Matters. In the cohort, we will meet monthly to share experiences implementing the software and how we plan to use it.

We need to work out logistics of how to gather the information on sources, create a script for staff to discuss the audit while talking to sources, train staff on how it will work and how to view the results, then make time to discuss and make adjustments based on the findings.

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“I also really like that our stories are bilingual, because I can share them with sources that have not usually seen themselves represented in news. I talk to a lot of sources that have okay English, but that is not their most comfortable language, or I have sources that I talked to that don’t really speak very much English at all. And so I think it’s very, very cool that I can go back and be like, ‘Hi, this is the thing that I wrote about you.’ And so that they can see their own words in their own language. In print, I think it means a lot to people.”

– Lau Guzmán, Multimedia Reporter, Latino Communities Reporting Lab

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Once data about sources gets logged into the software, we can view the reports to see how the demographics of the sources we currently use match up with the demographics of the community and make changes to make sure they better reflect the community.
"Kudos to the Lab team for going above and beyond. I’ve seen their dedication and hard work again and again. I see them at events here at SCOW and throughout the community sharing the Lab’s mission, explaining the importance of hearing from the community in both Spanish and English. It is bringing so much value to this project."
- Adriana Rodríguez, Executive Director, Spanish Community of Wallingford

"There is nothing more effective than truly understanding the community you’re looking to serve. It helps break down the stereotypes. It helps to understand who we are, and it just gives a beautiful perspective about the tapestry of our community that is growing so much in our area and that in a few years it will be probably a majority in the demographics. (The Lab) has fulfilled its mission of highlighting the voices of Latinos. It has done a beautiful job of showing, how immersed Latinos are in the community, how diverse we are and is just really has had a very positive impact not only for the Latino community, but for the wider community."
- María Campos-Harlow, Executive Director, United Way of Meriden and Wallingford

"The Latino Reporting Lab is making a great positive impact on the community. But I think that the more we educate our community with factual information the better it is going to be, especially when people are making decisions that impact our people. I think that it is imperative to educate our community about what it is that it is impacting not only our Latino community but the community as a whole. The more we educate people, the better opportunities we’re going to provide for them."
- Evelyn Robles-Rivas, Supervisor of Languages and Community Partnerships, Meriden Public Schools

"You’re a role model for other media companies. You’re bringing everyone to the table to listen and hear our voices."
- Marisol Rodríguez, Chair of the Hispanic Outreach Leaders in Action Group in the Middletown Chamber of Commerce

"(This project) is meaningful because it finally gives the voices of a lower economic and oppressed group a voice, and a platform to say, this is who we are; this is what we represent, and we want to share this with you, too. Because of this beautiful thing that they’re doing at the Meriden Record-Journal with the Lab, it’s actually giving these underrepresented people an opportunity to shine."
- Karisma Maldonado, Multilingual language teacher, Sheehan High School (Wallingford, CT)

"The most impactful outcome I feel is on my end is seeing a presence at our school events, learning from our students. We have a lot of students that are coming here to the United States from different Latin American countries. They don’t really understand all of the resources available in our community. So having them being there listening to our parents providing that information, allowing them to listen to the news stories on Facebook, in their native language is something that has really made a great impact in our community."
- Marissa Cardona, College and Career Coordinator, Success Academy

"This Lab is giving the Latino community a place in the media. We are giving them a platform to share their voices."
- Crystal Eslonaco, Reporter, Latino Communities Reporting Lab

"The Lab is a chance to correct some of the historical imbalances in media coverage. I think that oftentimes Latinos are not represented in the same way in the media than other groups. The Latino Communities Reporting Lab is a chance to right some of the historical imbalances that have been present while telling stories about the Latino community."
- Lau Guzmán, Reporter, Latino Communities Reporting Lab

"In my short time at the Latino Communities Reporting Lab, I’ve learned so much about a variety of different communities, backgrounds and cultures. Being given the opportunity to tell those stories at the Latino Communities Reporting Lab is humbling to say the least."
- David Matos, Intern, Latino Communities Reporting Lab

"Our community has embraced the content we provide and I’m proud to be a part of helping to represent our ever-growing Latino communities. It has also provided a different avenue for our advertisers, many of whom consider the Latino communities a strong target audience."
- Dundee Benson, Strategic Sales Leader

"The Lab is many things, among them an acknowledgment that as a news organization and an industry we have not always succeeded in reflecting the diversity of local Latino communities in our coverage or the makeup of our staff. The Lab is also a recognition that by better representing and serving local Latino communities through high-quality news and information, we as a company can build new audiences and a more sustainable business model."
- Eric Cotton, Managing Editor

"As a relatively small family-owned company that is not backed by a behemoth media conglomerate, we have been fortunate to have big and small businesses support our coverage. I am also grateful to see our readership grow. I believe that a written record of our history is crucial to advancement in society. Holding people accountable for the good and the bad that they do also helps us grow."
- Erik Allison, Creative Director

"The Lab is a great example of how organizations that focus on local news can educate the public about the general benefit of journalism while being very specific about a goal. Enhancing voices is what it’s all about."
- Jeff Kurz, Editorial Page Editor

"The Lab is a great opportunity to learn about the needs of the Hispanic community in the cities of Meriden and Wallingford. It was comforting that many people, despite their status as immigrants and undocumented, have developed economic enterprises and contribute to the development of the city. Telling face to face with these people was interesting because that’s what journalism is: telling face to face, and not calling from a phone sitting at a desk."
- Julio Panduro, Project Coordinator, Latino Communities Reporting Lab

"Our work is not only for the Latino community. I like to consider the initiative as a window as well, through which the Anglo audience of the Record-Journal can learn more about the contributions of the Latino community. We want our readers to be inspired, fight stereotypes and stigmas, educate themselves and learn about various issues that may affect their life in the United States."
- Claudia Hilario-Garcia, Editor, Latino Communities Reporting Lab
“It was encouraging and exciting to know that even as a small family-owned media company, we found a way to expand the ability to amplify the voice to a wider spectrum of residents in the communities we serve.”

– Dave Paré, Senior Vice President & Chief Operating Officer

“The Lab is so important for our community so we can amplify the voices of our local Latino communities. To me, the Lab is special because it has been built with the help of feedback from our local Latino communities. As a 5th generation publisher and family owner, I see the Lab as a long-term initiative designed to provide trusted local news and information that our community is asking for, wants, and needs.”

– Liz White Notarangelo, Publisher & Executive Vice President and Owner

“The Lab is a celebration of community and culture. It’s informative, well-covered and well-produced content. One of the best things about the Lab is how many opportunities it creates. It has an amazing ripple effect, touching so many people in our community and well-beyond.”

– Mark Dullea, Art Director

“To me, the Lab represents the future of local journalism. We made strong efforts to better understand our audience in order to create news content for the audience to help better navigate life in the local communities.”

– Richie Rathsack, Assistant Managing Editor, Digital Content & Analytics

“The Lab is a chance to realign our content with the needs of these new audiences. It helps to ensure our content is relevant to our communities and, hopefully, generates new readers and engagement.”

– Ron Rainey, Digital Director

Appendix B: What The Lab Means To Our Staff

• Security in Meriden
• Local News / Small business
• Diverse topics / coverage about different topics
• Resources for youths and their parents
• CT is getting expensive
• Culture
• Economic crisis
• Education opportunities for low income families
• Racism
• Politics, young leaders, contributions
• Held activities/events
• Where to find resources for drug addicts and homeless
• Investment opportunities beyond real estate
• Access to local communities news / how the decisions have been made at a local level
• Record Journal should be free on the website
• Where to vote / news about rallies
• Spiritual and moral values
• Help for seniors
• Criminal rates in CT and U.S.
• Sports
• Immigration and DACA
• Education / Meriden Board of Education
• Health / Medicines / workouts / mental health / nutrition / vaccines
• Streets in bad shape
• Translation services, help for people who do not speak English, legal help
• Housing information
• Bullying
• Pantries programs
• Not bias information
• Shootings news, because it happens
• Medicaid another great opportunity for our medicare providers
• Recreational programs for kids and teens
• Offers, special sales where to find them
• News related to Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic
• Employment opportunities

Appendix C: Open-Ended Respondent Feedback

Respondents provided numerous topics of interest through the survey’s open-ended question.

• FBI Documentaries
• Scholarships for undocumented students
• First Latino diaspora in New England area
• Opinion columns
• Investigative articles
• Positive news, good news
• Retirement information
• Kids with special needs, waiting list to get help
• Technology topics
• Embassy information
• Environmental news
• Mental Health due to stress of student life
• Something to warm seniors about the scam people around
• Stories to fight racism and discrimination
• More articles on Lyman Hall high school
• Alternative Health
• Homeless people
• Low income homes
• Job opportunity
• Honest news
• LGBTQ communities news
• Mexico
• Sports for kids
• See more media representation of children “of color”
• SCOW events
• A good newspaper should have all the sections so that people can choose, that’s why I checked all the options. It should also be published in both languages because this country is on its way to becoming bilingual.
• Interesting study. We want to see the results of the survey on your website and social networks
• Record Journal should be more involved in cases that the police ignore, they do not give importance to cases involving Hispanics
• In a bilingual country like the United States, all news should be published in both languages
• World news
• Popular culture
• Food cooking recipes
Mission: To amplify the voices of our local Latino communities

Photos by Richie Rathsack, David Zajac and Aaron Flaum
Videos by Crystal Elescano