

Borderless Magazine

CASE STUDY | JANUARY 2025

BORDERLESS
MAGAZINE

Northwestern | MEDILL
Local News Accelerator

BORDERLESS MAGAZINE

How Borderless Magazine expanded its field canvassing program to reach Chicago's diverse immigrant community, distribute resource guides and expand newsletter subscribers.

As a result, Borderless Magazine,

- added a total of 468 newsletter subscribers
- gained a better understanding of its audience's interests and needs
- came to understand the value of creating multilingual content to establish trust in the community
- distributed over 1,400 resource guide

A brief history of Borderless Magazine in relation to the community it serves.

Launched in October of 2019, Borderless Magazine is a non-profit, online magazine focused on journalism for Chicago's immigrant communities. The publication believes in the power of immigrant voices, often overlooked or ignored in mainstream media. Borderless Magazine seeks to provide representative, diverse coverage that centers these community perspectives. The publication also works to train BIPOC journalists through its "Immigration Reporting Lab" with a goal of further diversifying the media space and empowering reporters to tell their stories.

What problem was Borderless Magazine trying to solve, and why was solving this problem strategically important for the news organization?

Borderless joined Medill's Local News Accelerator cohort hoping to expand its field canvasser program, which began in 2022. The program takes a grassroots approach, interacting and engaging with potential subscribers at various community events. The field canvasser is key for the publication's efforts to engage the community. The magazine focuses on content production and social media engagement, while the canvasser program aims to take this content directly into the community. The staff views the field canvasser program as a worthy endeavor because it allows Borderless Magazine to meet face-to-face with potential audience members who might not come across the organization's content online. This allows Borderless Magazine to build more trust between the publication and the communities it aims to serve.

Ultimately, Borderless Magazine strove to convert the development of this program into three primary successes:

1. Empower Chicago's immigrant communities through relevant journalism
2. Increase opportunities to distribute information from the publication with the hope of converting some of these contacts into subscribers
3. Crowdfund ways the organization could better serve its target communities

Borderless Magazine's Initial Goals

Borderless Magazine hoped to use the expanded field canvasser program to reach a wider audience and grow its subscriber base. The organization initially entered the program to distribute its resource guide flier to 300 newly-arrived immigrants. After attending and tabling at 45 events across Chicago, Borderless far exceeded this goal by distributing fliers to the hands of over 1,400 community members.

How did Borderless Magazine go about solving its project?

Throughout the course of the project, the group was guided by four key components:

- Community-centered journalism
- Building trust
- Resource accessibility
- Data-driven engagement

Borderless Magazine used a “field canvasser diary” for its canvassers to keep track of the events they attended and to gather information that will help inform future approaches to canvassing. The “field canvasser diary” was previously developed in 2022 as a way of documenting information that field canvassers gathered on the ground. However, this updated version allowed field canvassers to fill out a Google Form on their own.

Field Canvasser Diary

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Field Canvasser Diary

Borderless Magazine is an online, nonprofit news outlet covering immigration and immigrants in the Midwest. The magazine is free to read and offers every story in English and Spanish. Just under half of our audience reads our stories in Spanish.

diane@borderlessmag.org [Switch account](#)

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email _____

Name: *

Your answer _____

Date *

MM DD YYYY
/ /

Event name: *

Your answer _____

Event location: *

Your answer _____

Time of arrival: *

Time
: AM

Time of departure: *

Time
: AM

Who was the main point of contact for the event? (if applicable) *

Your answer _____

How did you get to the event location? (I.E. Car, train, bus, iber) *

Your answer _____

Main immigrant communities there: (I.E. Lebanese, Mexican, Latinx... or whatever * you noticed)

Your answer _____

Languages they spoke if applicable:

Your answer _____

What was Borderless' participation? *

Your answer _____

How many people did you speak to? *

Your answer _____

Did anyone tell you anything that stood out? *

Your answer _____

How many people subscribed to our newsletters? *

Your answer _____

How many Spanish resource guides did you distribute? (if applicable)

Your answer _____

How many English resource guides did you distribute? (if applicable)

Your answer _____

What was the overall atmosphere? *

Your answer _____

Did you feel safe the whole time? *

Your answer _____

Suggestions for next time? *

Your answer _____

Submit

Clear form

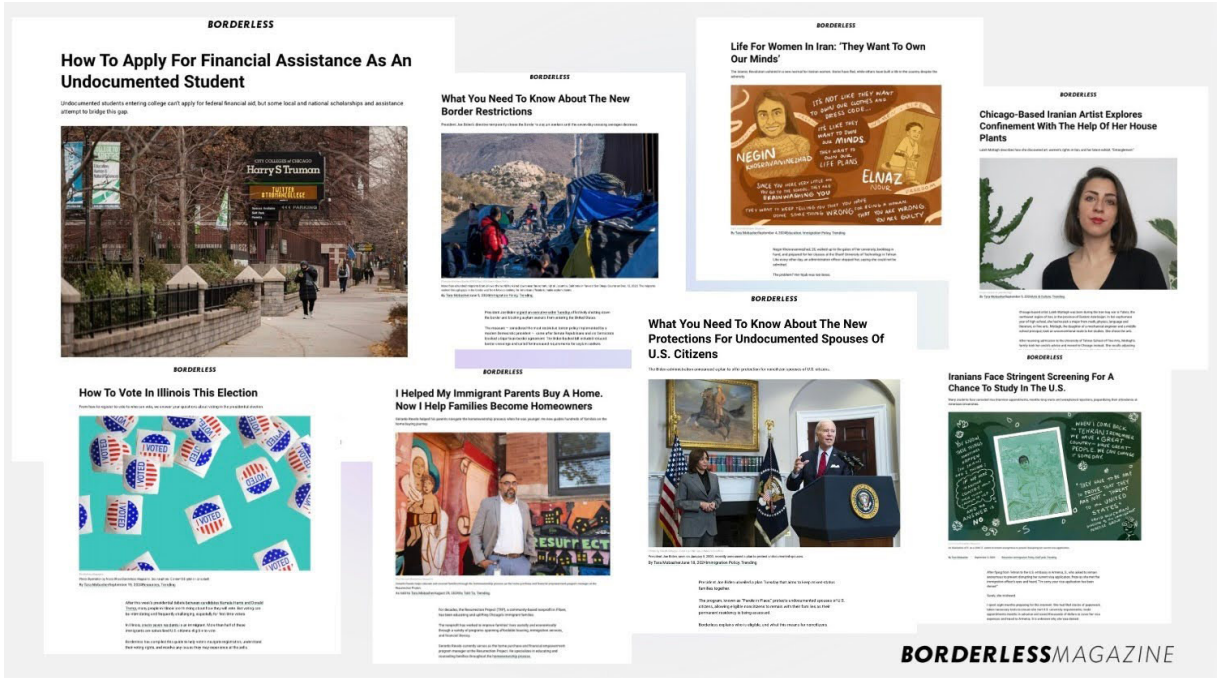
Attending canvassing events was mainly aimed at building personal connections with people in the community, especially immigrants and first-generation Americans who would most benefit from Borderless Magazine’s resources. The organization’s secondary focus was to grow its subscriber base to allow them to reach more people consistently.

People who interacted with the canvassers were asked to subscribe to the newsletter, and the canvassers gathered their contact information to follow up with them through email.

Borderless Magazine trained 15+ canvassers and distributed 1,460 of 2,000 resource guides to help immigrant community members navigate life in Chicago. These resource guides include subjects ranging from ‘How to Find an Immigration Lawyer’ to ‘Where to Get Free Food by Neighborhood in Chicago.’

Through attending 45 events across Chicago– such as farmer’s markets, public libraries and writing festivals– the organization aimed to connect with its target audience, learn issues of importance, distribute the resource guides and build trust and relationships in communities that might not receive as much attention from other media organizations.

As an ancillary benefit, Borderless published eight stories based directly on interactions with people at the various canvassing events.



To help achieve these goals and reflect on experiences, Borderless Magazine used a Learnings + Impacts chart.

LEARNINGS	IMPACTS
Which events are most efficient for tabling	Helps BM better understand where to focus our tabling/canvassing efforts.
What resources newer migrants are most in need of	Helps BM know what would be best to focus on in resource guides/stories
Better practices for interacting with/reaching migrants	After trial and error, BM now has a better understanding of how to reach migrants with resources.

Results

Digital Subscribers: Borderless Magazine went from gaining 60 subscribers a month to 144 subscribers a month and added a total of 468 newsletter subscribers over the course of its involvement in the Local News Accelerator.

Audience Insight: By attending events and collecting information, Borderless Magazine gained a better understanding of their audience's interests and needs, especially as it related to stories that spoke to their everyday concerns. They also came to understand the value of creating content in different languages to better serve different audiences and develop more trust in their coverage.

Flier Distribution: After attending and tabling at 45 events across Chicago, Borderless exceeded its original goal of distributing the resource guide flier to 300 community members. Borderless ended up handing out over 1,400 fliers.

The outcomes of Borderless’s efforts during LNA programming are summarized in a From/To framework, exhibiting the publication’s transformation:

FROM	TO
A small field canvassing team	A more robust field canvassing team that expanded out-reach to community members
Gaining 60 subscribers a month	Ended the program with gains of 144 newsletter subscribers a month and 460 subscribers overall
Minimal information on how to best serve various communities	Gathering detailed responses on what people want to learn about from the publication

What worked?

The Borderless team found most value in the presentations each outlet gave during LNA programming.



I heard other people’s insights and they inspired me to understand how to process the information that we gathered this summer in order to keep it sustainable and reach out to folks and create a system to stay in touch with everyone we met through field canvassing. I think the feedback system LNA provided really helped.

- Diane Bou Khalil, marketing and engagement manager



What didn't work? What would the organization do differently now?

Borderless Magazine didn't quite reach its goal of adding 500 subscribers. Tabling events varied in subscriber generation, leaving numbers relatively unpredictable from month to month. As such, the publication wants to create a more streamlined follow-up system, including surveys, to stay in contact with people encountered at canvassing events and understand their thoughts on Borderless Magazine's content and what made them want to subscribe.

What was surprising or challenging?

Attending all of these different events in person required a significant investment in time and physical labor, so balancing the publication's day-to-day operations alongside this project occasionally proved challenging.

What are key takeaways or advice for other news organizations to learn from and/or apply to their own LNA experience?

Borderless Magazine emphasized the value of having a realistic timeline for every project they decide to undertake. The group learned the importance of taking time to figure out where to prioritize sending canvassers. They also found immense value in documenting the work and lessons learned at each canvassing site.

“Determine the scope of the work you want done.

Plan a realistic timeline for the work.

Decide where you want the field canvassers to go.

Hire field canvassers.

Decide which locations, events or organizations you want to prioritize.

Document your work and learnings.

Iterate as you go.

Cross the finish line!” – Diane Bou Khalil, marketing and engagement manager

Where is the news organization going from here? How will Borderless Magazine apply what it learned in LNA moving forward?

Borderless Magazine is looking to receive more funding, bring on a larger group of canvassers, launch a year-long canvassing program, and invest in newsletter ads to grow its audience. The Magazine plans to continue implementing the feedback and business strategies the team learned throughout LNA programming.