

Connect Puerto Rico

CASE STUDY | JANUARY TO MAY 2025



Northwestern | MEDILL
Local News Accelerator

Background

Connect Puerto Rico (CPR) launched in September 2024 as a mission-driven newsletter covering Puerto Rico’s clean energy transition. The newsletter was born out of founder Jillian Melero’s reporting trip to the island in 2019, where she saw firsthand how slow the island was recovering two years after Hurricane Maria. Melero, surprised by the lack of progress, began to explore the root causes: outdated infrastructure, a workforce shortage and a lack of local knowledge among energy companies doing business on the island.

A journalist and proud Nuyorican, Melero launched CPR to inform readers and connect them to solutions. The newsletter seeks to explain how U.S. policy affects Puerto Rico’s infrastructure, energy systems and workforce development. She refined this vision through programs at CUNY and Google before launching CPR as a free, monthly newsletter on Beehiiv in September 2024.



Hurricane Maria (2017)

- **Longest blackout** in U.S. history
- Nearly **3,000 lives lost** due to **power outage**
- Still **no stable grid** 8 years later
 - outdated **infrastructure**
 - insufficient local **workforce**
 - outsourced workforce with **no local knowledge**



A man walks past destroyed homes in Catano, Puerto Rico, on Sept. 21, 2017. Hector Retamal / AFP - Getty Images file

The “From/To/To” statement guiding the team’s work was:

From	To	To (future)
Beginning the LNA with a small base of about 100 subscribers and having a loose understanding of defined customer segments, their pain points and how to best reach them.	Doubled the number of subscribers to about 200, maintaining an open rate of 58% and was featured in a national newsletter. Also, determined processes for publishing and onboarding support as a solopreneur.	Continuing to refine customer segments by determining their desired content and pain points to guide Connect Puerto Rico’s business and editorial strategy and offerings.



Highlights

Melero's main goal during the Medill School of Journalism's Local News Accelerator (LNA) was to grow CPR's audience, and initially, her target was to increase the subscriber base from about 100 to 500 readers to create a strong audience foundation for testing content and revenue strategies. Midway through the program, she recalibrated this goal to 200 subscribers, a more realistic benchmark for CPR's early stage. This shift allowed Melero to focus on building out key systems to support editorial operations, strategies for growth and tools that would serve the newsletter long-term.

By the end of the program, CPR more than doubled its audience, reaching 198 subscribers while sustaining an open rate of 58%. CPR also built an evergreen content library and developed strategies for editorial production, promotion and contributor onboarding.

The LNA gave CPR structure and accountability to document, test and refine processes that she had previously managed ad hoc. It also helped Melero get accepted into the Going Solo creator journalism workshop, where she developed tools such as a referral program, author bio and founding member survey. These outcomes set the foundation up for long-term growth and revenue generation.

CPR was also awarded a new \$20,000 grant from Listening Post Collective to support community listening work and build on its audience research conducted as part of the LNA.

The process

CPR entered the LNA focused on subscriber growth. This goal, inspired by a previous program, was to scale the audience to 500 subscribers to support revenue experimentation. However, the early stage of CPR and the realities of being a solo founder made it clear that a more holistic foundation was needed.

Midway through the LNA, Melero shifted the focus to quality over quantity. The revised goal: grow to 200 subscribers, maintain at least a 35% open rate and concentrate on editorial consistency, audience segmentation and system-building. This allowed her to dedicate time to creating sustainable workflows and shaping CPR's brand and messaging.



Key strategic shifts included:

From/To/To

From	To	To (future)
100 subscribers	500 subscribers	200 subscribers, while maintaining an open rate of 58% (depth over volume)
No audience insights	Assumed audience personas	Defined personas informed by survey data A more professionalized, structured and multi-layered operation, allowing for richer content, focused reader engagement and strongly-defined marketing strategies
Aggregating content each month	Curated content with original quotes, visuals and framing	
Passive subscriber list	Engaged readers through polls, surveys and CTAs	
One-off publishing	Established production workflows and editorial calendar	
No promotion strategy	Weekly LinkedIn posts and a referral push and fresh marketing materials	
No partnerships	Successful cross-promotion	



Research insights

Originally, Melero had identified the following consumer segments she assumed would be her audience, based on her reporting and research: Energy or tech business owners interested in expanding to Puerto Rico but who may not be familiar with the island or speak Spanish; U.S. policymakers whose decisions impact Puerto Rico; the Puerto Rican diaspora; and Puerto Rican community advocates and experts.

In order to learn more about the motivations and interests of these potential customer segments, the LNA conducted an audience survey that screened broadly for interest in Puerto Rico, climate and equity. The survey, which yielded about 380 responses, uncovered various insights as well as challenges. Notably, most respondents didn't identify with CPR's original customer segments, and over 80% of respondents are not currently paying for news products or subscriptions.

Because of these findings, Connect Puerto Rico and the Local News Accelerator are continuing to work together on a follow-up survey that has specific screeners and seeks deeper insights. This includes questions to better understand the respondents' backgrounds and personal and professional interests in the topics; their pain points, including challenges in accessing information; buying behaviors and motivations; and deeper questioning to gauge what audiences are willing to pay for.

CPR, however, was able to act on insights gained from the first survey. For example, the survey revealed that 60% of newsletter-preferring respondents wanted email updates at least weekly, laying the groundwork for plans to expand beyond monthly publishing. In addition, the survey revealed that many respondents had below-average knowledge of Puerto Rico's energy system, leading Melero to shift her editorial strategy to include explanatory content in the newsletter.

To build CPR's foundation, Melero had to first focus on internal workflows. She worked to document systems for editorial production, contributor onboarding and publishing. Working with two Medill fellows forced her to think like an editor-in-chief for the first time – assigning tasks, reviewing work and refining ideas with others. The fellows helped create an evergreen content library, including explainers, glossaries and Q&As with industry professionals, that can be used for future newsletters, as well as social media assets for future engagement plans. In addition, thanks to the LNA program, Melero was able to create fresh marketing materials to share at events:



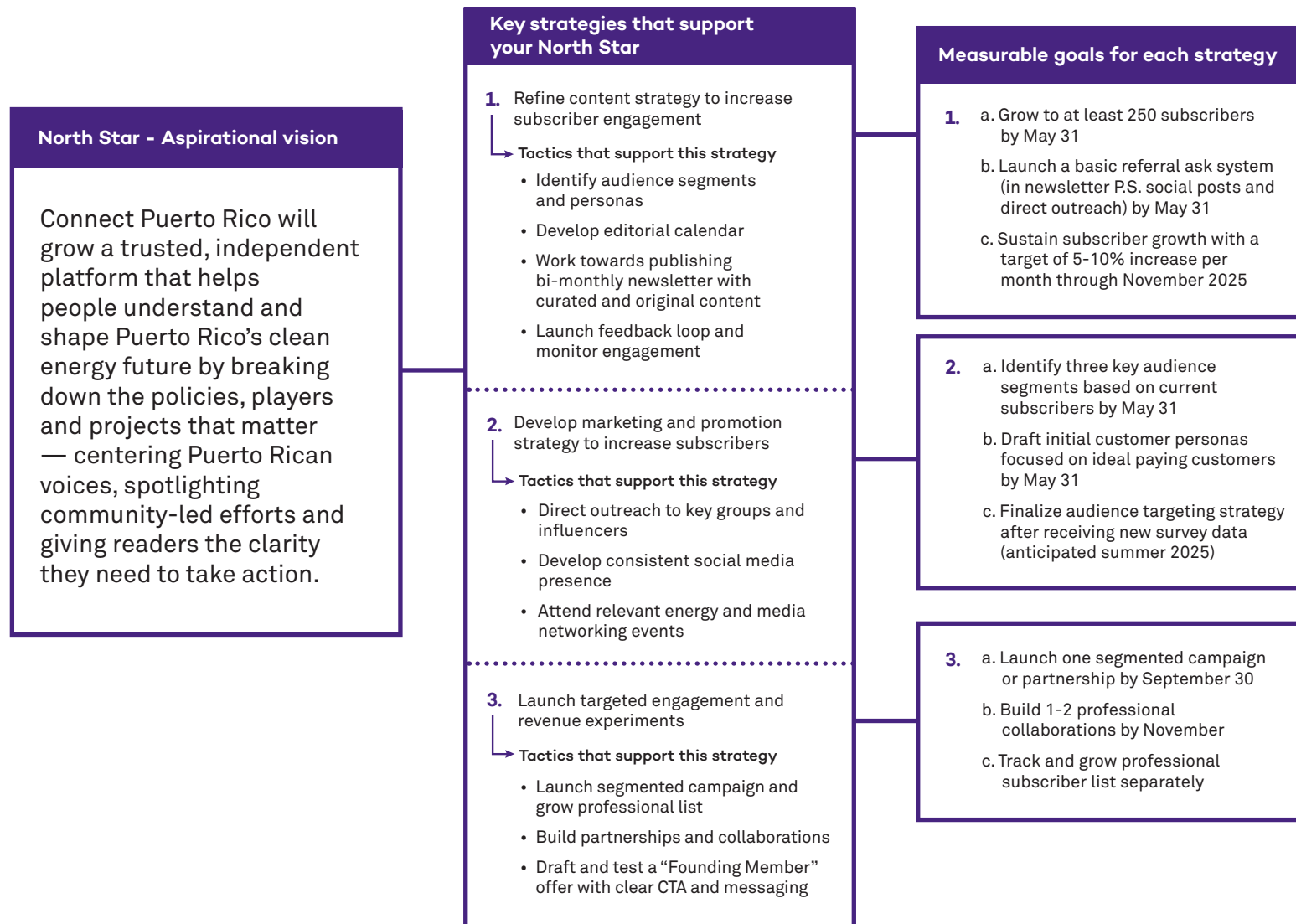


Business strategies and tools

Melero also worked through strategic tools including CPR's From/To Chart, which helped her visualize where the project was headed, and the North Star and three-part project statement, which helped her sharpen CPR's mission. These pieces, coupled with a new founding member survey and referral system developed through the Going Solo program, laid the groundwork for future revenue experiments.



Three-part project statement



Throughout the project, Melero also clarified CPR’s core personas and two main priorities, which will be the basis for the second survey:

- 1. **Mission alignment:** People who care about Puerto Rico’s renewable energy, infrastructure and workforce development.
- 2. **Revenue alignment:** People most willing or able to pay for content, services or strategic insights.

Persona Name	Primary Goal	Mission Aligned	Willing to Pay
Policy Strategist	Influence national climate policy and PR materials	✓	✓
Federal Implementor	Translate policy into action through agency programs	✓	✗
Diaspora Civic Leader	Advocate for PR’s wellbeing from the mainland	✓	✓
Investor/Advisor	Identify ESG/clean tech opportunities in Puerto Rico	✗ /Partial	✓
On-Island Expert	Ground conversations in lived experience and equity	✓	✗

Our North Star & LNA Goal

✨ North Star

- Connect and collaborate with **“changemakers”**
- Inform **policy**, drive **investment** in renewables

🎯 LNA Goal

- Grow our **subscriber list**
- Survey for **pain points** to guide **strategy** and **services**



Maria Pérez Lugo talks “more than energy reform” at the Pontifical Catholic University School of Law in Ponce, Puerto Rico, 2019.





The results

While the program was fast-paced, and the demands of building a newsletter alone were significant, Melero emerged from the LNA with personal and professional wins that reshaped CPR's future. She shifted CPR from a one-person passion project into a structured, scalable news product. She developed editorial systems, led a team for the first time and expanded CPR's public footprint through events, interviews and partnerships.

Key outcomes for CPR include:

- Growing the newsletter from 110 to 198 subscribers
- Achieving a 58% open rate
- Publishing monthly newsletters (Feb-May) and starting plans for a bi-monthly cadence
- Building an internal content library with explainers, reusable templates and onboarding flows

Melero refined CPR's messaging, documented key strategies and developed a data-informed roadmap for growth, outreach and engagement. Notably, Melero built an outreach strategy that helped CPR and its mission gain visibility, while also building her confidence in public speaking. She appeared on the *Speaking of Phenomenal* podcast and she gave guest talks at The New School, Northwestern and News Night Chicago. She attended Canary Media Live in Chicago to build industry relationships and get real-time feedback from stakeholders. And finally, a major outcome was when CPR was featured in *The Latino Newsletter*, a national platform focusing on the Latino community from influential journalist Julio Ricardo. The newsletter has about 2,600 subscribers, an audience that potentially includes several of Connect Puerto Rico's customer segments. The feature resulted in several new subscribers and national visibility for Connect Puerto Rico.

Additionally, the LNA program provided Melero with several valuable insights, with the first being the importance of starting with systems, not output. She learned the importance of building a foundation first, from workflow to how to onboard fellows, in order to create space for strategy, consistency and collaboration. Among other lessons learned that Melero shared:

- Campaigns are not the same as content calendars; she wants to focus on evergreen, mission-driven content to resonate more deeply with the audience than reactive or topical pieces.



- Peer learning is important: working alongside other LNA participants helped Melero surface blind spots and refine ideas more quickly than working in isolation.
- There's value in pacing: scaling prematurely can undermine quality, while focusing on high-caliber execution builds stronger, more sustainable foundations.

A snapshot of Connect Puerto Rico's wins

The chart below illustrates the wins Connect Puerto Rico achieved throughout the LNA:

Process	Insight	Capability	Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built referral system • Created publishing and collaboration workflows/ systems for publishing, on-boarding and workflow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission-aligned most likely to pay, broader support strong • Strategy matters more than speed • Audience data allowed us to refocus on quality over urgency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifted from solo founder to team leader/led team • Developed a formal editorial strategy and content systems/built infrastructure • Repped the brand (public speaking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grew from 100 to 198/ nearly doubled subscribers • Gained national visibility through The Latino Newsletter



The CPR project surfaced broader takeaways for the LNA program for supporting solo founders and early-stage media ventures. Timing matters. CPR may have been too early-stage to fully implement some of the LNA's business frameworks. Without an established audience or revenue baseline, some tools were premature – but still valuable for future planning.

Going forward, Melero will build on her LNA momentum with a summer audience survey to better understand her customers' motivations, interests and willingness to pay. She plans to roll out a welcome/onboarding workflow, finalize her editorial calendar and continue experimenting with referral and revenue strategies. Her goal is to position CPR for its next stage of growth by the end of 2025, with the goal of seeking out her first grants over the summer. Melero said her ability to apply for grants has been “directly shaped by the clarity and confidence I gained through working with” the LNA program.

Roadmap for 2025

-  **Growth & Revenue Tests**
 - **Founding Member survey**
 - **Tiered referral program**
 - **More socials & creator partnerships**
-  **Evergreen Content**
 - **Glossary + mini explainers**
 - **Q&A series with Puerto Rican experts**



Public Thank-You in the Newsletter
You will be publicly acknowledged in an upcoming referral shout-out section.
ⓘ **Disclaimer:** This recognition is shared once in the newsletter. First name and last initial will be used unless you request otherwise.
0/2



Top Referrer Recognition
You will be recognized in a "Top Referrers" section of the newsletter with your name and an optional short quote or title to spotlight your support.
ⓘ **Disclaimer:** Recognition may be posted monthly or quarterly. We may reach out to request a short quote or title.
0/5



Invite to a Private Community Input Session
You will be invited to a private community input session — a space to hear what's next for Connect Puerto Rico and share feedback to help shape its direction.
ⓘ **Disclaimer:** Sessions will be held with a small group of top supporters. You'll receive an invite by email with the opportunity to share what you'd like to see from Connect Puerto Rico.
0/10



A Q&A



Rachel Aretakis, coach:
What was most helpful for Connect Puerto Rico in helping you achieve the goals you set at the start of the program?



Jillian Melero:
I didn't achieve the goals I set at the start of the program. (Which I'm fine with, and I'll get into as we move along.) However, the LNA did give me some tools and frameworks to continue to set new goals and work toward them.



Aretakis:
Did Connect Puerto Rico have to pivot? If so, what led to the change?



Melero:
I wouldn't say I had to pivot exactly, although many of the organizations did, and many had to do so more than once. I think the most significant change in approach happened right away, and that was relaxing our original goal of subscriber growth, because with the LNA's support we were able to work on the underlying and more important goal of gathering audience data to help inform how we want to grow and what we want to develop.



Aretakis:
What did you find the most surprising and/or challenging throughout the process?



Melero:
I think the most (pleasantly) surprising element of the LNA for me as a solopreneur was how much support I received. Going from running things as one person to running things and having two fellows and a coach to work with was a big shift. And, as mentioned, having the ability to conduct research, field and analyze survey data is probably the most valuable thing to us as we chart our path and set new goals.





Aretakis:
How would other news organizations like yours benefit from participating in the LNA?



Melero:
The LNA was a unique opportunity for an organization like mine which is, one, run by one person, and two, is focused on one geographical location but is meant to speak to a national audience, an audience outside of that location. So I would advise anyone in that position with this opportunity to “be greedy,” be ambitious and take full advantage of the team and resources available to work toward those ambitions. I think the most helpful framework is to think of it as a rapid testing ground, not be afraid to experiment, to let things be messy or imperfect, to pivot, to test something temporary and let that inform something bigger longer term.



Aretakis:
Where is Connect Puerto Rico headed from here? What are the biggest lessons you learned through the LNA that you will apply to future projects?



Melero:
The biggest lesson from LNA is one I keep relearning, which is that you don’t have to have all the answers before you get started. You can test and learn things in real time. And that win leads to other wins. Specific to the LNA, that wins can be more than just outcomes. They can also be related to processes, insights and capacity, and those are all things we gained from the LNA by setting this challenge for ourselves. And the steps we used to get there are all things we can repeat at any time to get us further along, or take us to a new place.



How You Can Support Us

- **Subscribe and share** the newsletter
- **Connect us** with funders, sponsors, or collaborators
- **Reach out** if your work aligns!



Scan and Subscribe!

JillianMelero@Connect-PuertoRico.com

