

# La Raza

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CASE STUDY | OCTOBER 2023

**LaRaza**

Northwestern | MEDILL  
Local News Accelerator

# LaRaza

**How La Raza focused on diversifying revenue, aiming for a younger Latino audience**

La Raza's older, Spanish-speaking audience finds news in print, but its future is digital, from younger readers to revenue.

## What problem was La Raza trying to solve, and why was solving the problem strategically important for the organization?

Like many legacy media entities, La Raza's traditional audience is older and relies on the print newspaper, written in Spanish, to provide critical information to its audience. While keeping and growing the core audience, the publication wants to secure its future and knows it has work to do to create a digital experience that appeals to a new audience of younger Latinos. Growing its digital presence, La Raza also will offer advertisers fresh, new multi-platform options. In Chicago's crowded media landscape, La Raza stands out as a brand that Latinos know and trust. By increasing its audience, the news organization will continue to serve needs often ignored by other news outlets well into the future.

## What was the process for solving the problem?

La Raza joined the Medill Local News Accelerator, which is part of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. As part of the program, leaders clarified their goals – reach a younger audience and diversify revenue – and framed them as a three-part challenge statement:


- **Part 1:** The vision, an aspirational statement of what they want to achieve.
- **Part 2:** Concrete measurements, both quantitative and qualitative, that describe success.
- **Part 3:** Strategies and tactics. These are major themes and specific actions that ensure the newsroom realizes the vision.

Here is La Raza’s first vision statement, one of its strategies and the tactics that support the strategy.

**Our vision (aka what we’ll do)**

La Raza will position itself for future growth as a “by Latinos, for Latinos” led media organization while honoring the 53 years of success that got us to this point. La Raza will identify key research from readers and clients that will be used to diversify and increase revenue by growing our number of second-generation digital readers, improving our content strategy to be more relevant to current and new readers, and providing improved multi-platform advertising opportunities to clients. Between now and October, we will make a series of changes that will enable this vision to come to fruition in the next three years. This will ensure La Raza’s future—both its financial success and its vital importance to the Hispanic community in Chicago—thrives in the decades to come.

**Strategies & tactics (aka how we’ll do it + how we’ll know it worked)**



**Strategy 3: Product Development (Newsletter)**  
We will revamp the appearance and content of our current newsletter (with 537 subscribers) to focus on the needs and interests of second-generation readers and the businesses who seek to reach them.

**Supporting tactic 3A:** By July 28, we will have a rough mock-up of what the improved newsletter might look like, the features it might include, and a vision of who the target reader is.

**Supporting tactic 3B:** By early August, we will have a beta version of this improved newsletter that we will show to 10 non-customers (10 non-La Raza, second generation readers and 2 La Raza advertising clients). We will use their feedback to make at least three major changes to the newsletter before we launch it.

**Supporting tactic 3C:** By September 29th or earlier, we will launch the redesigned newsletter targeted at the needs and interests of second-gen readers and advertisers. Based on signups in the first two weeks, we will grow signups 10% compounding, each month through the end of December.

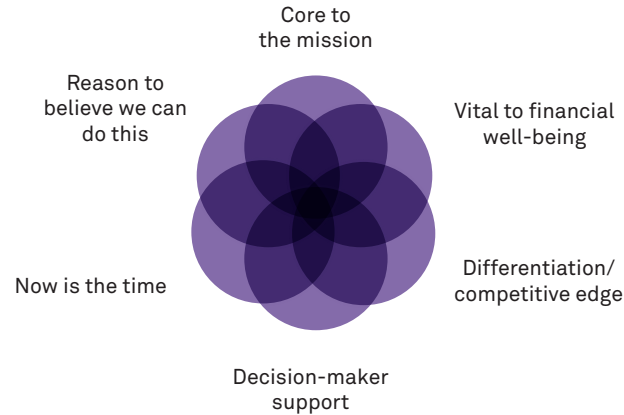
The vision and strategies evolved during the five-month Local News Accelerator program, with a continued emphasis on a younger audience, using audience research to create the strategy around revamping its newsletter.

La Raza also used SMART goals to ensure the goals were more than wishful thinking. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Aspirational yet achievable, Relevant and Timebound. Here’s how it worked:

- **Specific:** La Raza will improve content strategy to grow younger digital readers and will diversify revenue by providing multi-platform advertising opportunities to clients to ensure its future as the first stop for news “by Latinos, for Latinos” in the next three years.

- **Measurable:** La Raza looked at two newsletter metrics: growing newsletter subscribers and increasing open rates. And they set goals based on percent increase.
- **Achievable:** La Raza believed it could achieve its supporting tactics in the timeframe it set.
- **Relevant:** The goals of growing a new audience segment and diversifying advertising revenue aim to secure its future.
- **Timebound:** The overall vision gives La Raza three years to accomplish the strategies.

They used a feasibility filter to test their vision. The news organization knew the vision was central to its mission, key to its financial well-being, aspirational and specific. They were ready to go, and the scope was big enough to make a difference.



Another useful framing for change and to identify gaps is a “from/to statement.” For example, La Raza wants to move from a print-centric business model to a business model that emphasizes print and digital equally.

Here are some specific examples from La Raza’s leadership team:

Early in the process, La Raza identified a considerable gap: It knew the audience it wanted to grow but did not know enough about how to attract and engage those readers. The team initially focused on younger readers, and asked: How do younger readers consume news? What content interests them? La Raza sought qualitative and quantitative input to learn about their audience. A survey developed by Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism offered details.

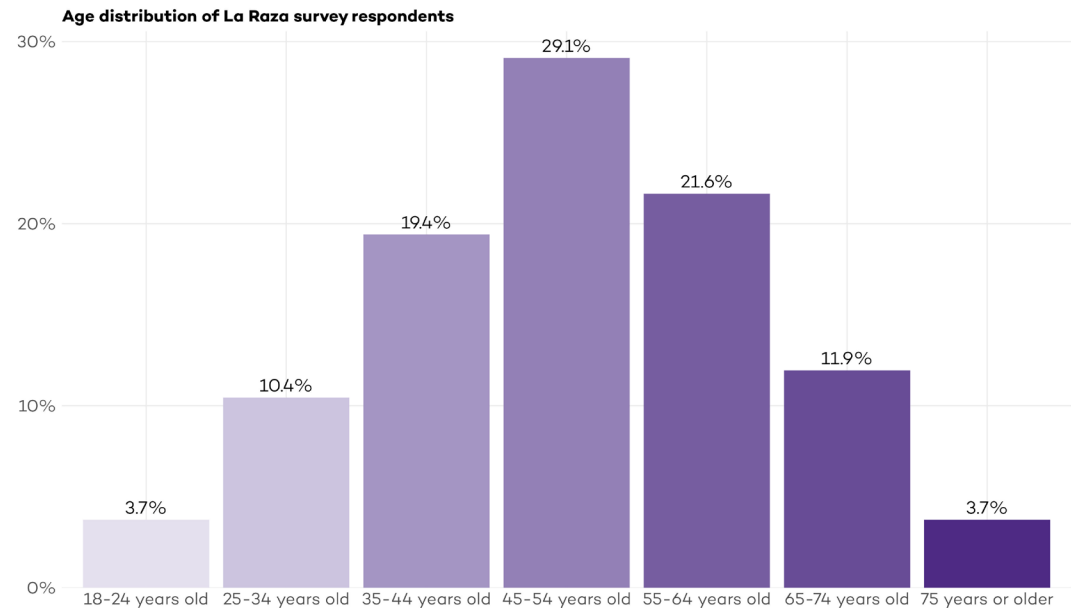
### Articulating Gaps

FROM	TO
45 to 65-year-old loyal readership	35-55-year-old younger readership
Spanish language website	Bilingual website reaching younger audience
Minimum engagement with our readers	More engagement, where our community feels heard and seen
From not knowing how or having a strategy to grow their audience	To have a strong audience strategy plan that all staffers are familiar with

### Understanding audience

The research survey was designed to help La Raza learn new details about the behaviors and desires of its readership and, importantly, its potential readership. The survey was conducted in Spanish and English, with 110 respondents in Spanish and 34 in English. Researchers also conducted five hours of deep-dive interviews with 11 La Raza customers. These conversations provided rich qualitative color that added context to the survey results.

Through La Raza’s partnership with the Medill Local News Accelerator, the publication’s main focus was growing readers who are 25-34 — an economically upward, culturally vibrant segment with deep roots in businesses, schools, houses of worship and other institutions.

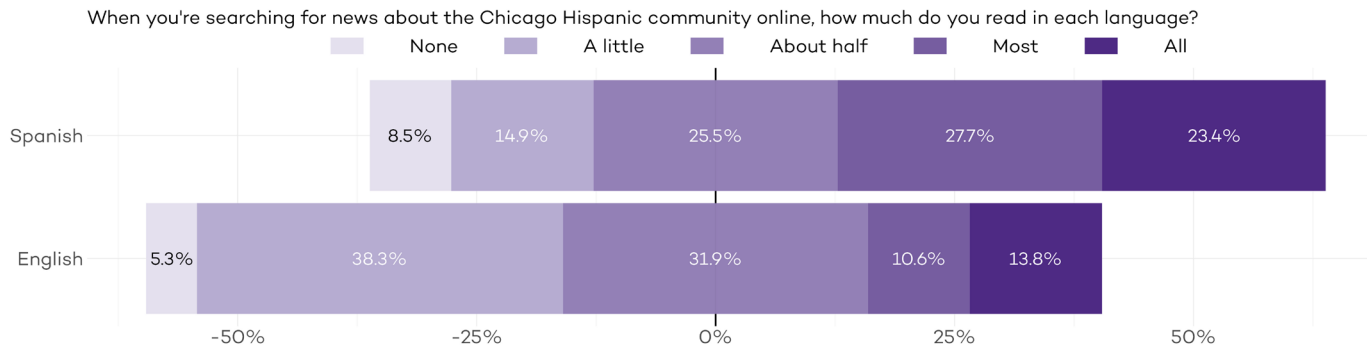


Just over half of survey responses (50.7%) came from the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups, reflecting much of La Raza’s core audience. Their original target audience, 25-34 year-olds, comprised 10% of the survey responses; however, about one-third of responses fell in the wider 18-44 age group, leading La Raza to broaden its definition of a “younger” audience.

The survey was encouraging: Respondents reported being highly engaged with local news. Nearly 80% reported reading news about their community at least once a day. Spanish respondents reported a slightly higher interest in international news, highlighting how many Spanish-speaking readers have ties through themselves or their families to their countries of origin. Second-generation customers make a point of maintaining links to their family’s past. Qualitative interviews indicated that many Spanish-speaking respondents or their families have family, business or other external connections to their countries of origin.

Although more than half of La Raza’s readers reported reading in Spanish, about one-third read in both languages, providing insights into the bilingual reader community and the potential to tap into English content.

Almost 60% of those surveyed said access to Spanish news about Chicago’s Hispanic community was either very or extremely important to them. Of those who said they read La Raza’s newspaper, 62% reported it does very or extremely well in providing news and information about Chicago’s Hispanic community, indicating that La Raza has a high level of trust with its readers. La Raza’s website also engenders trust: About half of respondents reported reading it, and most said it does very or extremely well at providing them with information about the community.



In addition to the survey, La Raza hosted virtual interviews with readers to learn more about what content they wanted to consume and how they consumed it. By placing QR codes on the front page and promoting it on social media, the organization hosted 11 one-on-one interviews. Although most of the interviews were with those older than the targeted age group, La Raza found that readers’ desires and hopes for the publication often aligned with those in the younger generation.

For example, a younger reader in college expressed an interest in finance due to her major and wanted to see more about Chicago businesses.

Almost all the readers La Raza interviewed also said they would like to receive a newsletter with important stories to get a quick idea of what’s going on in their community. Most respondents also want to listen to podcasts or audio-based content.



Alma Martinez, sales account executive at La Raza, presents a sample of the QR code placed in local restaurants which attracted new signups to the paper’s reimaged newsletter.



**Personally, I would say I [am most drawn to] the economy. I know that that’s a nerdy thing coming from me, but that’s my major, so I’m drawn towards that. Like in Chicago, I know small businesses are a huge part of how it impacts the state economy and, eventually the federal economy. So that’s what I focus on.**



Melynna Hakim Arreola-Quiroga, 19, first-generation Latina living in Chicago’s north side



The three topics La Raza is investing new resources into covering — homeownership, community safety, and democracy — were all well-supported by interviewees as topics they'd like to see covered more. To begin to provide content for a younger audience, La Raza is working on evergreen content that will resonate. The newsroom learned that younger audiences are interested in education coverage. In response, La Raza created new coverage such as tips for Latino high schoolers applying for scholarships.

### What worked?

**EMAIL NEWSLETTERS:** One of La Raza's key strategies was revamping its email newsletter with links to LaRaza.com to serve all its digital readers, especially younger readers. Respondents to the survey said they would be interested in a newsletter, confirming work already underway.

Along the way, they learned:

- Revamping the email newsletter wasn't just about redesigning it.
- La Raza needed to analyze and provide varied content to power the newsletter.
- The staff had to produce enough content.
- The content had to flow on the website on time for the newsletter.



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**The redesign of the newsletter is more than  
changing the template of the layout.  
We analyzed content, topics, frequency and timing.**  
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Jesús Del Toro, La Raza Director General / General Manager & Editor in Chief

La Raza realized that it would need to revamp its editorial schedule and workflow, from how many articles were on its website to when they were published. All this attention to its website would enable the organization to publish an email newsletter to help readers learn a little and click through for more.

The result: La Raza's earliest SMART goal set a measurable goal of increasing sign ups 10%. They far exceeded the goal, increasing sign ups 120%. One reason is that they started with a low number of newsletter subscribers, so achieving a higher percentage wasn't as hard as they thought. Another reason is that the changes and promotions worked far better than they had hoped. But the growth was not just in the number of subscribers: the open rate of the redesigned newsletter grew 19 percentage points just in the first month of newsletter publication compared to the average annual open rate.

Here was La Raza's specific goal that they executed by the end of the Local News Accelerator:

**By October 27, 2023, La Raza will launch a reconceptualized Friday morning newsletter to engage younger Latinos to our digital platforms, with the goal of increasing our subscriber base by 10%, as a first step to growing our digital readership, increasing our sustainability options, and diversifying revenues.**

In another example of a From/To, the newsletter went from a list of stories pulled automatically and chronologically from the website to a dynamic newsletter created by staff, with larger photos and engaging features, a letter from the editor and more.

**REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION:** The other priority for La Raza was to diversify revenue. They began by creating a pitch for multiplatform, bilingual sponsored/branded content. In homeownership, for example, the pitch was tailored both to the younger audience and to immigrants who come from a country with a different system for becoming a homeowner. La Raza acquired a grant that will fund the core of the content, and the sponsored/branded content will run beside the text. The goal is that the sponsored content will be useful to readers and appealing to advertisers, and will be a way to diversify revenue. By the end of the Local News Accelerator program, they had a pitch ready, and they had identified the blue-chip advertiser they would approach.

#### NEW TOPICAL FOCUS

- Homeownership
- Community safety
- Democracy

**What didn't work?**

**Overall slowness:** Progress was slower than anticipated. La Raza leaders were ambitious when they defined what they would do. In some areas, they made progress, but they also had to learn how to use and control their newsletter management system.

**Qualitative research delays:** The logistics of scheduling interviews for the qualitative research caused delays, which didn't work well with the program's short time.

**Social media:** Improvements to La Raza's presence on social media, where it knows many younger people find news, have taken a back seat to other priorities, such as reworking the newsletter.

**What was surprising or challenging?**

**Bilingual readers:** La Raza also has a strong base of bilingual readers, with almost a third of research respondents reporting they read the news in both English and Spanish. La Raza's content is currently all in Spanish, but this response highlights the untapped market for English content among La Raza's audience.

**Staffing:** La Raza's team is small, with much of the work to change falling to one person, which shows a need for professional development so others can take on some of the responsibilities.

**What did the news org learn?**

Often, in news organizations, leaders and staff operate in "urgent" mode and don't make the time to explore strategic thinking and change management techniques to propel the organization forward and secure its future. La Raza leaders said the Medill Local News

**Medill Enterprise Sustainability Assessment (MESA):  
La Raza's growth in five pillars of the Accelerator**

RESEARCH & INSIGHTS	+25%
CONTENT STRATEGY	+27%
BUSINESS STRATEGY	+14%
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	+48%
LEADERSHIP	+30%
OVERALL	+28%

The Accelerator measures its partners' mastery of these five competencies through a partner self-assessment fielded at the beginning, middle and end of the program.

Accelerator offered a framework to conceptualize and then turn concepts into plans with input from other teams as part of a cohort, experts, and coaches.

Members of the La Raza team were accustomed to working in silos, dealing with just their part of the organization. But during the accelerator, they gained perspective about the organization as a whole, which has been enriching for them. Several ideas La Raza is pursuing came from the group. Their work in the accelerator highlighted the need to offer more leadership opportunities to continue their career development.

The Medill Enterprise Sustainability Assessment, which is a diagnostic tool used at the beginning, middle, and end of the Local News Accelerator program, showed how each team rates its competencies, La Raza grew most in product development followed by the leadership category, which bears out the news organization's realization of leadership's importance during the program. Team members independently rated several leadership-related competencies, from La Raza's leaders reflecting its audience to leaders seeking new revenue streams and audiences. The overall leadership score rose 30% from the beginning of the program to the end. No other team in the program grew its perception of leadership competency as much as La Raza.



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**The Local News Accelerator was a catalyst to start doing things in a different way. We were able to clarify strengths and challenges. The groups, the gathering, the methodologies and the experts were critical.**

Jesús Del Toro, Director General / General Manager & Editor in Chief

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### What are key takeaways for other news organizations?

**Have the data:** Change needs to be informed by data, and La Raza found both the quantitative research (survey) and qualitative research (1-on-1 interviews) helpful. Hearing from actual people was very important.

**Team dynamic:** Motivate and accelerate your team. You can use data to ensure you go beyond simply having an idea for change.

**Clearly state goals:** One of the keys to change is to ensure you have clearly stated goals. In the case of La Raza, they are legacy media with a new media component. They needed to evolve to be sustainable for the future of the publication.

**Trusted partners:** La Raza found that working in the Accelerator gave them access to experts who are knowledgeable about the current state of the media. Even if a news organization doesn't have that as part of a program, you can still reach out to academics or other editors for their insights if the newsroom is embarking on a change.

### Conclusion

One of the biggest takeaways for La Raza is the high level of trust readers have in its ability to give them quality news coverage. As La Raza continues to work on growing its digital audience and improving its email newsletter, the willingness, and desire of respondents to subscribe to a newsletter and read LaRaza.com highlights substantial opportunities for La Raza to grow its engagement.