

La Voz del Paseo Boricua

CASE STUDY | JANUARY TO MAY 2025



Northwestern | MEDILL
Local News Accelerator

Background

La Voz del Paseo Boricua is a free, bilingual print newspaper based in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood and published by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC). Since 2004, it has covered news, programs and events relevant to Chicago's Puerto Rican community, the broader Puerto Rican diaspora and the island of Puerto Rico itself.

The paper is produced by a small paid staff that includes an editor and a community reporter. Distribution is handled by staff and supplemented by volunteers, who deliver issues to locations within Humboldt Park, including local businesses, grocery stores, gas stations and senior housing. La Voz primarily serves older print readers.

During the program, Xiomara Rodriguez was the paper's editor (and had a larger role within PRCC as director of the organization's Digital Presence Initiative), and Alonso Vidal was its dedicated community reporter.

Their main objective as part of the Medill School of Journalism's Local News Accelerator (LNA) was to strategically streamline the paper's distribution from over 200 locations to fewer than 40. The project team wanted to use data-driven decision-making to make these distribution choices to minimize costs and operational overhead (including volunteer workload) and create a more impactful presence at a more manageable number of anchor distribution sites. Shortly after the program kicked off, budget cuts that reduced the paper's run and scope (from 24 pages to 16, then 12) added additional urgency to their distribution site optimization goal.



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

From	To	To (future)
200+ distribution sites with unclear pickup rates and stretched volunteer capacity.	A refined and more cost-effective distribution strategy that helped them focus from 200 drop-off locations down to the 40 most efficient ones, raising their pickup rate from under 50% to above 75%. Through the project, they achieved clearer vision of who the readers of La Voz are, the abuelos of Humboldt Park living in senior housing, thus adding a new service at home drop-offs.	A sustainable distribution model that demonstrates clear value to sponsors and funders, enables a stronger on-site presence for the paper at selected locations (e.g., signage, displays), and supports more direct engagement by the paper’s community reporter with senior readers who often read the paper where it’s picked up, and receiving a \$65,000 grant after the program from the Field Foundation, providing funding La Voz never had before.

Highlights

The LNA helped La Voz move from instinct-driven decisions to a more strategic, data-informed approach to distribution. It also supported the development of new content features, including a monthly local event calendar, that reflects audience interests (as identified in the Medill-funded survey), creates new sponsorship opportunities and provides structure that makes it easier to produce the paper and deliver useful content within a smaller format.

Among their key outcomes were:

- Refined distribution from 200+ to 33 high-priority sites
- Increased minimum pickup rate threshold from 50% to 75%
- Piloted new senior housing distribution at four locations
- Netted \$65k in new philanthropic grant funding

“The coaches and leaders of the LNA make the work digestible and straightforward, but the outcomes are profound and, for many of us, truly life-changing,” said Xiomara Rodriguez, the editor of La Voz. “I was surprised at how capable and empowered I felt coming out of the LNA.”

Added La Voz’s coach, Andaiye Taylor: “The program helped La Voz build on its existing strengths by shifting to a more intentional, data-informed distribution model that created new capacity for sustainability and growth. It also reinforced Xiomara’s leadership, giving her additional tools and momentum to make confident, thoughtful decisions that advanced both the paper and her vision for its future.”

The process

Initially, La Voz aimed to streamline its extensive distribution list to optimize operational overhead without sacrificing community reach. In making these choices, they were guided by the 80/20 rule: The goal was to figure out which few dozen dropoff sites provided the majority of the value, and cut the ones that encumbered the operation without contributing meaningfully to readership or community connection.

La Voz’s objectives remained consistent from the start of the program, but circumstances raised the stakes: Soon after the January kickoff, budget cuts significantly reduced both the print volume and page count, which shifted their goal from being a strategic adjustment to a mission-critical optimization.

“The coaches and leaders of the LNA make the work digestible and straightforward, but the outcomes are profound and, for many of us, truly life-changing. I was surprised at how capable and empowered I felt coming out of the LNA.”



Xiomara Rodriguez
Editor of La Voz

Research insights

The survey results emphasized grocery stores, cafes and restaurants as preferred pickup locations, aligning well with the team and their volunteers' on-the-ground observations. Although the **research skewed younger** than their organic audience, responses from a handful of older respondents reinforced choosing accessible, high-traffic locations and directly influenced the addition of senior-specific content and new distribution points at senior residences.

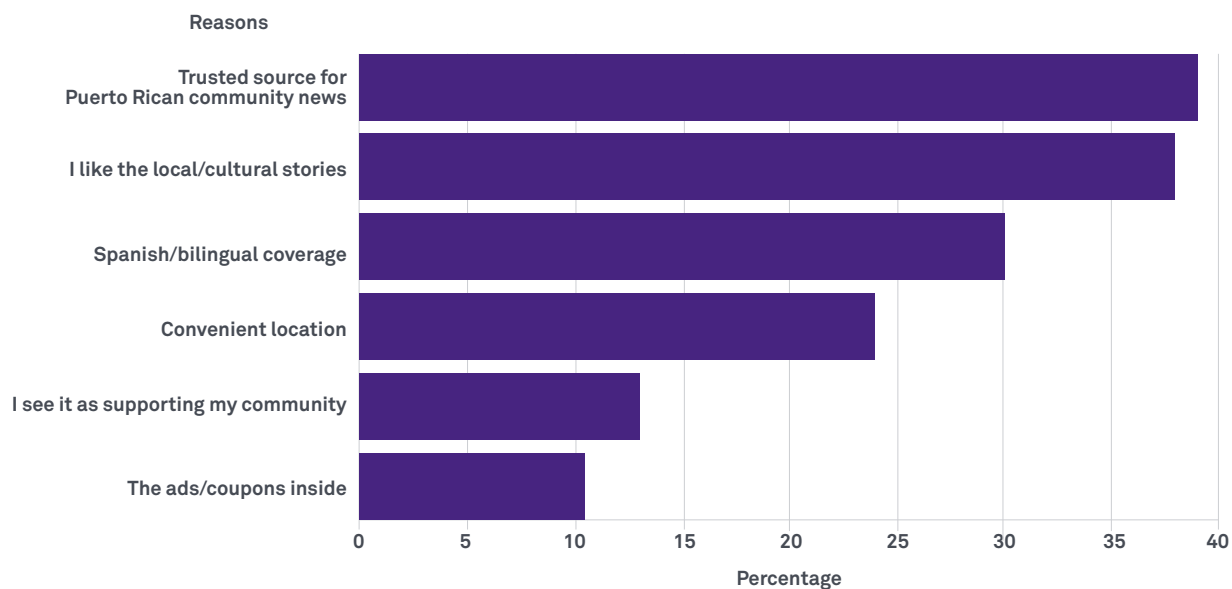
Based on survey responses, the team also uncovered a potential opportunity to capture younger audiences by experimenting with digital/social media content. The team chose to stay focused on its site distribution goal with the neighborhoods' seniors as a focal point (recognizing that deepening engagement with this core audience was the most immediate and mission-aligned priority).

Informed by the research, La Voz took the following approach:

1. They began by removing entire corridors from their distribution list, eliminating sites along Kedzie, California, Western, Kimball, Milwaukee and a few other scattered locations. They retained sites along Fullerton, Armitage, North and Division—four main streets where the paper had historically performed well.
2. Starting with the February drop-off, they introduced a 50% pickup rate threshold to identify and cut underperforming sites on those remaining streets.
3. To improve and standardize data collection, the team created and piloted volunteer pickup tally sheets. Adoption varied, but the tool still provided useful insight into site performance. (This experience also identified that more volunteer training, incentives and/or leveraging staff time would be key to getting consistent monthly pickup rate data.)
4. Between the March and April drop-offs, Medill students conducted a mid-cycle count of leftover papers at dropoff sites. This offered a more detailed view of pickup velocity and helped identify higher-performing sites where papers were running out early.
5. After the program's April convening, the team raised the pickup rate threshold to 75% to guide their final round of cuts.
6. With papers freed up from site reductions, the team launched a senior residence pilot in May, delivering directly to four new locations serving older residents.

Among 88 respondents, the main reason readers pick up La Voz is because it is a trusted source for Puerto Rican community news

38% said they like the local/cultural stories and 30% responded they enjoy Spanish/bilingual coverage.



A snapshot of data La Voz received through LNA research.

Business strategies and tools

Throughout the LNA, La Voz found tremendous value in variety of tactics and strategies to help the team achieve its goals:

- **From/To(/To):** Helped the team stay clear on the bigger picture they were working toward. It gave them a way to consistently connect their highly tactical objectives (getting to the right mix of distribution sites) to long-term goals around sponsorship and sustained community reach and engagement. The idea: By focusing on high-performing, high-visibility locations, the cuts would make it easier to demonstrate the paper's impact to potential funders and allow for deeper business and reader relationships with the sites that remained.
- **Personas:** Personifying their target readers using this tool helped the team 1) stay focused on the older Puerto Rican residents in Humboldt Park they were serving, and 2) make confident decisions about news content and distribution. Especially at a time when many newsrooms have pivoted to digital and are trying to attract younger audiences, the marketing persona work gave La Voz the clarity to double down on print and prioritize the senior readers who rely on them most.

1. Basic Information	2. Psychographics	3. Pain Points/Unmet Needs
Name: (Give your persona a name to make them feel real) Aurea Fernandez Age: (Approximate age range) 65+ Gender: (Male, Female, Non-binary, etc.) Female Location: (City, state, country) Chicago, Hispanic Housing Senior Buildings Income Level: (Low, mid, high-income) low-mid income Education Level: (High school, college, postgraduate) Most likely high school or less Occupation: (Job title/industry) retired	Interests & Hobbies: (What do they enjoy? Fitness, gaming, fashion, etc.) Coffee, news about Puerto Rico, health & social services, cultural events (Bingo, Misa Jibara) senior citizen Values & Beliefs: (What matters most to them? Sustainability, innovation, affordability, etc.) Affordability, religion, gentrification, property taxes, Puerto Rican food, Art, cultural Events Lifestyle: (Busy professional, student, active parent, etc.) retired, grand kids Personality Traits: (Competitive, trendsetter, analytical, social, etc.) Social, gossip	What struggles do they face related to your product/service? Access (mobility issues), font size & color, language What problems do they need solved? Navigating technology, social services aspect, putting in requests with city services, social gathering for people their age (gathering a monthly calendar of events)
4. Goals & Motivations	5. Buying Behavior	6. Preferred Channels (Where to Reach Them)
What drives their decisions? (Performance, affordability, exclusivity, convenience, etc.) Accessibility (physical accessibility & language), affordability What are they trying to achieve? (Better health, professional growth, social status, etc.) health, quality of life	Where do they shop? (Online, in-store, brand-specific retailers, resale markets, etc.) in person How do they research products? (Reviews, influencers, word-of-mouth, product demos, etc.) Word of mouth, commercials on Telemundo & maybe QVC What factors influence their purchasing decisions? (Price, brand reputation, recommendations, etc.) price & recommendations	Social Media Platforms: (Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) Facebook to keep in touch with family and whatsapp Websites & Blogs: (Fitness blogs, sneaker news, tech reviews, etc.) Religious groups & Spanish speaking facebook groups, whatsapp groups Email & Newsletters: (Do they subscribe to brand updates?) Some connected to their churches and elected officials Influencers & Communities: (Who do they trust for recommendations?) They trust their churches, priests, community organizers

An example of a marketing persona
La Voz developed during the LNA.

- **Business Model Canvas:** Helped the team step back and see how all the parts of their work fit together: how they serve readers, how they work with partners, and how money comes in. It also helped them see that their pickup sites are potential places to build community relationships and show value to sponsors and funders.

Business Model Canvas

Customer segments	Puerto Rican Diaspora interested in news about Puerto Ricans; Spanish-speaking community in Midwest in need of social services; social service agencies wanting to reach Spanish speakers
Value propositions	We want to connect PRs in diaspora to culturally relevant news and content to fill a coverage gap for them; For folks who need social services, we have direct contact with social service agencies and can offer exclusive access to services
Channels	Print distro; social media IG:200. FB: 26; media partners; guest columnists and CPI; distro locations/local businesses
Customer Relationships	How do we establish, maintain, and grow relationships with our customers? Right now, our value resides in the information we provide in the paper. If you were to activate your locations when you get to 30, then experiences at your locations would become a new way we relate to them.
Revenue streams	Philanthropic organizations who want to make sure Spanish-speaking alternative news sources exist; sponsor like social service agencies who want to connect with our audience and improve health, financial, and housing access; major donors in Puerto Rican Agenda
Key resources	Community journalist; guest writers and columnists; our printer; the PR Cultural Center that funds us
Key activities	Reporting and community storytelling; designing newspaper layout/printing
Key partners	Distributing newspaper; connecting with key partners
Cost structure	Printing; community journalist; editor; volunteer support

These business strategies and tools helped La Voz establish the following skills and frameworks:

- **Using data to drive decisions.** The team felt more confident making changes, like cutting distribution sites, because they had real numbers to back them up.
- **Align content with both audience and sponsor needs.** They implemented new content ideas, like the event calendar, both because they served their senior readers' preferences and because they opened the door for mission-aligned sponsorships, key to sustaining the paper.
- **Build repeatable systems.** The team developed a clear process for 1) tracking pickup rates and 2) using that data to make distribution decisions. They saw the value of this almost immediately: when Vidal left in May to pursue graduate school, new community reporter Zulema Herrera was able to step into the role and support Rodriguez using the same system.

The results

By the end of the LNA, the La Voz team accomplished several milestones:

- Refined distribution footprint from 200+ to 33 high-performing locations.
- Validated a 75% minimum pickup rate standard.
- Secured \$65,000 in grant funding.
- Developed and pitched a concrete annual sponsorship strategy targeting Hispanic Housing (\$30K or \$50K annually).
- Launched new, recurring content pillars directly aligned with audience and sponsor interests, including a senior-focused event calendar. The team is also exploring additional print-friendly formats, such as a crossword puzzle, that could engage older readers and attract sponsor support.

This project helped La Voz achieve its immediate objective, but more importantly, it introduced operational and data discipline the team can use to guide future experiments and decisions. These tools will be critical as they navigate budget cuts and think through how to sustain — and eventually grow — the paper's footprint.

The team sees the LNA work and results as foundational, but not final. Their next goal is to leverage the capacity opened up by streamlined distribution to pursue their follow-on funding and community engagement objectives.

A snapshot of La Voz's wins

Process	Insight	Capability	Outcome
Created a repeatable process for tracking pickup rates and a rubric for using that data to make distribution decisions. Also developed tools (a tracking sheet), training (of volunteers/staff) and in-field procedures to support ongoing data capture.	Seniors are their core audience; building and optimizing for them is the right priority for now.	Equipped La Voz staff to confidently manage data-driven distribution.	- Met the goal of reducing to 33 effective distribution sites and successfully piloted delivery to four senior housing locations. While these may be considered process or capability wins in another context, they represent key outcomes for this phase of La Voz's transformation work and lay the groundwork for more traditional outcome wins ahead: increased sponsorship revenue and deeper audience engagement with the paper. - Secured \$65,000 in philanthropic funding from the Field Foundation, financial support beyond the scope of anything La Voz had previously received.

A Q&A



Andaiye Taylor, coach:

What was most helpful in achieving your original LNA goals?



Xiomara Rodriguez, La Voz editor-in-chief:

I think you and the program leaders like Mackenzie (Warren), Yazmin (Dominguez) and Fran (Scarlett) were the most helpful, because their check-ins, support, availability, feedback, Fran's office hours, etc., really helped to keep us on track.

Knowing I had weekly meetings with you forced me to make sure I was dedicating a good chunk of time each week to our project, and having your feedback each week gave me new ideas, helped me through obstacles and inspired me to keep working towards our goal.



Taylor:

Did you need to pivot during the project, and why?



Rodriguez:

We did not have to pivot, but we did have to set new and more ambitious goals. Our original goal was to have a pick-up rate of at least 50% at each distribution location, and within one month, we achieved that goal and started working towards a pick-up rate of at least 75% at each location.

Additionally, when we did our field interviews and got the research back, we were able to use those insights to develop a plan for an annual sponsorship opportunity for institutions that serve our readers. This was not part of our original goal, but was a huge win for us as it has created an opportunity to develop more diverse & sustainable revenue streams.



Taylor:

How might other news organizations benefit from the LNA?



Rodriguez:

I believe any news organization would benefit from the LNA. The way that the LNA forces you to meticulously analyze your organization's strengths and weaknesses while also providing you with the tools to address any weaknesses is incredibly empowering. Since being connected to Medill's Local News Accelerator, I was able to use the tools they taught me to obtain \$65,000 in philanthropic grant funding, which was a revenue stream La Voz never had before.

I was also able to grow the La Voz team, which gave me the time to build new partnerships, leading to our first-ever youth journalism program happening this summer in collaboration with Puerto Rico's El Centro de Periodismo Investigativo and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School. Participating in the LNA benefited La Voz as a news organization, but it also opened up opportunities to benefit our community as a whole. The best part is that, leaving the LNA, you will have a toolbox and a network of support that will continue to benefit your news organization long after the program ends.



Taylor:

Where is La Voz headed next, and what key lessons will you carry forward?



Rodriguez:

La Voz has big plans for the future. We are very excited about our new partnership with Puerto Rico's Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (CPI). We are working to train journalists in our community to start doing investigative reporting for La Voz and developing media literacy and citizen journalism programming for young students in our community to ensure we are preparing them to navigate this new media landscape filled with disinformation and censorship. We are using CPI's medioscopio programming as a model for this work. The LNA helped us to ensure our day-to-day operations were running smoothly and not draining our financial resources, and now we are using the research we got through the LNA to refine our content pillars so they respond to exactly what our readers wanted to see more of, and to go after institutions that serve our readers (identified in the research) for annual sponsorships.