Taking Care

A Guide for Participatory and Trauma-informed Journalism

Acknowledgements

This guide is dedicated to the survivors who collaborated on After the Assault: Aurora, Erin, Jesa, Laura, Maddie, Monica, Annie and Penny. Their courage and honesty made this project possible, and their stories continue to create ripples of change. Thank you.

Thanks also to the Sacramento Assault Response Team (SART) and Marci Bridgeford, who helped create a caring atmosphere that encouraged us all to believe in the possibility of healing, justice and resilience. Thanks also to Former Citrus Heights Police Chief Ronald Lawrence for helping pave the way for other law enforcement to engage.

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About the Center for Cooperative Media

As a program of the School of Communication within the broader scope of Montclair State University, the Center is situated within the University's mission, vision, and values. Therefore, it's important to note the definition of the Center's own vision and values should be seen through the narrower lens of the Center's mission, which is tied to local news and information, and not outside the scope of the University's overarching guidance.

The mission of the Center for Cooperative Media is to grow and strengthen local journalism and support an informed society in New Jersey and beyond.

Content Warning

This guide tells the story of a public radio project that explores what survivors experience in the aftermath of sexual violence and during police investigations. It includes links to clips of survivors sharing their painful experiences.

If you need support at any time while reading this guide, contact RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. You can talk with a trained staff member 24/7 at 1.800.656.4673 or online at rainn.org or in Spanish at rainn.org/es.

About the Author

jesikah maria ross creates participatory media projects that generate public dialogue and community change. Her work brings reporters and residents together, creating a path and a plan that changes how we collect, tell and share the stories of our communities. jesikah specializes in leading place-based storytelling initiatives and designing live public events. She's developed her expertise over 25 years of working with newsrooms, universities, media centers, development organizations, community groups and independent media makers around the globe. She makes media work. For change, for social justice, for art, for everyone.

About the Editor

Angilee Shah is an editor and coach for news organizations and journalism change makers. She specializes in helping build narratives that empower, training, building teams, budgets and editorial strategy that help reimagine news. As a reporter and editor for 20 years, her work has been read and heard around the world, including building immigration coverage in national public media, a book about everyday lives in China and a trio of investigative stories about the end of Sri Lanka's 30-year civil war. Shah is the CEO and Editor-in-Chief of the nonprofit news organization Charlottesville Tomorrow, in Central Virginia, where she is putting the work of building equitable local news into action.

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Introduction

Reimagining newsroom norms

In the spring of 2019, Nick Miller, CapRadio's managing news editor, called me over to his desk. Standing up, elbows propped on the ledge of his tall cubicle, I listened as he told me that he and our health care reporter, Sammy Caiola, had spoken with a sexual assault survivor who had a horrendous experience with the Sacramento Police Department. The survivor told them that if they wanted to get the story right, they'd have to give survivors agency over how the story got told. She said that the newsroom would need to "share power" with survivors.

As CapRadio's Senior Community Engagement Strategist, I talked about agency and power sharing often in our newsroom. I'd worked with a diverse range of communities that felt misrepresented in traditional media and wanted a say in telling their story. These ideas usually didn't gain traction in my newsroom, though.

I was often told a variation of: "That's not what we do here." Some reporters felt involving sources in shaping any part of the editorial process transformed it into advocacy or social work. Others believed it would discredit their reporting. A few felt it was their role to find the story and parse the truth, and worried that inviting community members to help frame issues would make them come off as a mouthpiece for a particular agenda. Those who were curious about the framework of participatory journalism that I proposed didn't have the bandwidth to try something new while juggling multiple, pressing deadlines. Editors, even those who wanted to move in this direction, couldn't make it a priority by providing the time and resources reporters needed to do it.

But when Nick heard a survivor talk about "sharing power," he knew I'd be a resource for this project. And he had recently stepped into a leadership position that enabled him to give projects more resources. This time, he asked if I could help get the project started.

I was often told a variation of: “That's not what we do here.”

I said yes, and not just because this request matched my journalistic approach. The confusion and shame you experience after sexual violence, and how diminishing if feels to even talk about it, is something that I understood.

I had barely broken free of an assault in the late 1980s while studying politics at the University of California, Davis. I was 21 and on a weeklong trip with fellow students to the Big Mountain Reservation, where Navajo and Hopi residents were fighting against environmental devastation, cultural desecration and even forced relocation brought on by increased coal mining. (Here is a paper about the struggle from 2013, and here is more recent coverage by the New York Times).

A campus group had organized a trip to go witness and help set up for a large inter-tribal ceremony designed to build solidarity for local protests. Two men around my age invited me out one evening on a walk to see more of the desert landscape.

In the immediate aftermath, I blamed myself for getting into a bad situation. I questioned if I had somehow given off the wrong signals. One of the men actually tracked me down to urge me not to tell anyone. I worried what would happen if I spoke out because I was there as a guest to support people whose lives and livelihoods were at stake, not create more problems.

So I stayed quiet. This was years before #MeToo. Openly speaking about sexual assault wasn't exactly encouraged, and survivors weren't often believed and supported.

Eventually, though, I started telling a few friends. I was shocked to find that they all had assault stories. I started talking to more friends and discovered that nearly every one of my female friends — and I had a big friend group — had been assaulted. It’s also how I began to understand that virtually

all of us were keeping quiet because we considered the violence some kind of personal failing, not something to be shared with others.

Realizing how widespread the issue of assault — these days, advocates estimate that one out of every six women in the U.S. experiences a completed or attempted rape in their lifetime — led me to create my first video documentary which covered the Take Back the Night (TBTN) movement in my college town.

Making that documentary is what made me want to become a journalist. I'll never forget the rush I felt, sprinting down different streets with a bulky video camera on my shoulder, throwing myself down on my knees in the middle of an intersection cordoned off by police to capture the best angle on the seemingly endless flow of people marching by. They were chanting for change at the top of their lungs. I felt so powerful taking the media into my own hands to record the voices and stories that I hadn't heard, that I felt needed to be heard.

Now when I look back, I realize that I never told anyone in my newsroom about my personal experience with the topic until after we dropped our last podcast episode in the project we ultimately called After the Assault. My newsroom, like so many others, embraced the idea of objectivity and encouraged us to keep a distance between the subject's experience and our own. It wasn't something explicitly stated, but certainly felt, influencing the kind of stories we pitched and who stepped up to report them.

I vividly remember a newsroom meeting, for instance, where I suggested a specific reporter cover the firebombing of a local synagogue. She was Jewish and her beat explored trauma and how it played

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I saw first-hand the transformative power of collaborative reporting.

out among marginalized communities. I thought she'd bring the kind of insight and expertise that would produce original and thoughtful storytelling. Not to mention that she likely would have more sources open up to her. She revealed to me afterward that she worried that if she did the story, she'd have to put a disclaimer in her report about her cultural heritage and that might discredit her in the eyes of editors and audiences who expect neutrality.

This version of objectivity — the implicit understanding in many newsrooms that you have to be separate from the communities you cover — is what almost pushed me away from journalism completely.

As an ambitious and earnest college graduate, I wanted to tell stories that changed the world. I figured that the best way to do that was to involve people at the center of an issue in the production. I got jobs making public access television programs and independent films, bringing community leaders in as advisors, collaborating with non-profit organizations and teaching community members how to produce their own videos.

I saw first-hand the transformative power of collaborative reporting: how listening and responding to people's needs validated their experiences, raised awareness, sparked conversations and generated hope. I witnessed how stories made by and with communities took root and created impact. And I recognized that lower-income communities of color were usually the ones most impacted by social issues and felt the least welcome in mediamaking circles, not to mention the halls of power.

I had a vision and a method but needed more skills to realize my dream of storytelling with communities. I applied to journalism graduate programs across the country. One faculty member told me that my journalism was "tainted," that involving sources in any way was wrong. Another

said collaborating with non-journalists was advocacy and that I'd need to be more neutral. A third faculty member told me that I wasn't "a fit" for the journalism field.

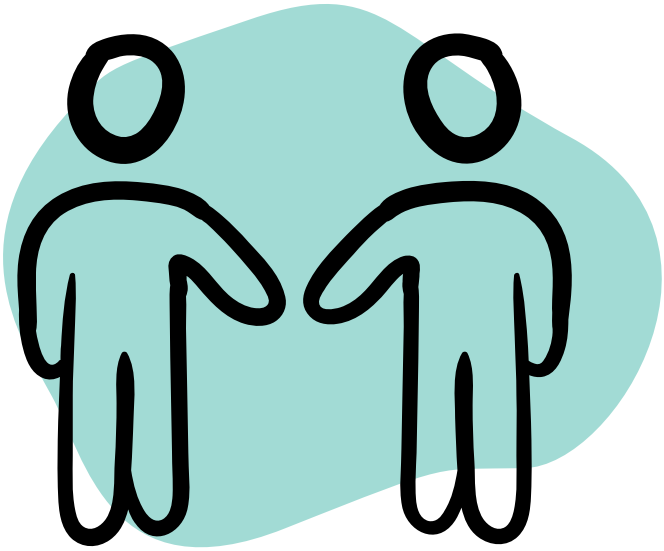
I was crushed. Journalists are not separate from the communities where we live and work. Our well-being is intimately bound up in the overall health of the places we call home. It usually doesn't serve us or the people whose situations we are trying to improve to keep a "critical distance" and "healthy skepticism" about their lived experiences. In fact, it just makes people on the other side of our microphones wary of our intentions and less willing to engage openly or honestly with us.

Many journalists — Lewis Raven Wallace, Wes Lowery, Candice Callison and Mary Lynn Young to name a few — have made compelling cases for why and how "objectivity" is problematic, especially for communities of color. They point out how objectivity has been conflated with white perspectives, sometimes even standing in as a Trojan horse to reinforce white supremacy. They also note how we all come at a story through the lens of our experience. We frame it based on our background, who and what we know. Having biases is human. Not being Jewish or not having experienced sexual assault would also affect the way a journalist approaches stories about these communities.

Assuming that we can somehow remain unbiased is wrongheaded. What we can do is be aware of and transparent about our biases, stay open to people who help us see them and use our life experiences to test our assumptions to produce better reporting.

So when my CapRadio colleague Nick invited me to "share power" with the survivor for her story, I welcomed the chance to get involved and eventually asked to lead the effort. It was a chance to help, and push our newsroom — and maybe the industry — forward.

That work became After the Assault, a participatory journalism project that



explores what survivors experience in the aftermath of sexual violence and during police investigations. This guide is an explanation of how we did it, with ideas for how you can involve your community in your reporting, especially when it involves trauma or marginalized people. Along the way, I advocate for a participatory journalism that privileges an ethic of care before, during, and after the reporting process.

Where participation meets care

When I say participatory journalism, I'm talking about three things:

- Selecting and developing stories in conversation with the communities most affected;
- Designing a reporting process that generates understanding, connection and trust;
- Strengthening existing networks and forging new alliances that build community resilience beyond the reporting.

In 2020, I wrote "JMR's Participatory Journalism Playbook " with the media development organization Listening Post Collective. The playbook digs into how to operationalize those three foundational concepts. The After the Assault project pushed my work to a new level by integrating trauma-informed approaches, foregrounding systems thinking and, most of all, centering care.

Care involves the ability to hear, understand and recognize others' needs and feelings. Centering care, though, goes one step further by taking on the work of looking after and providing for the needs of others.

In a journalism context, sometimes that's just witnessing and being present. Other times, it's helping to connect people with resources and services. It can also happen by reporting a story and trying to leverage that reporting for individual and community change.

When people feel cared about, they are more likely to engage with reporters.

When you combine the ethic of centering care with tactics of participatory journalism, you work collaboratively with sources, partners and stakeholders to discover and do what is best for their well-being in your reporting. It's about taking responsibility for the physical and psychological health of others and staying attuned to how our journalistic process impacts them.

More simply: When it's time to make choices in the reporting project, the team asks, "How does this show understanding and create support for the people involved?"

Why is this kind of care important? First, because it helps protect people who have experienced trauma from further harm. And second, because it leads to the kind of trust and investment that produces what so many people in our field see as the holy trinity: better reporting, more sustainable news outlets and greater community impact.

When people feel cared about, they are more likely to engage with reporters and be honest, even vulnerable, about their experiences. That's crucial to help reporters "get the story right." And 85% of adults, according to a 2016 Media Insight Project study, say that accuracy "is the most important factor in gaining trust, regardless of the topic."

Vulnerable sources who experience care from news organizations are also more willing to connect with us over time and provide candid feedback. This generates compelling stories that are more nuanced and reflective of people's lived experiences.

All of this translates to greater organizational sustainability, in the form of audience growth, revenue generation, in-kind resources, community ambassadors and partners. People invest in what they value and value what meets their needs.

Sustainability, though, shouldn't be our north star because sustainability, by defini-

tion, focuses on maintaining what we have. And what we have is a news industry in freefall, newsrooms full of burnt out journalists and audiences who feel overwhelmed by our relentless coverage of bad news or don't trust us.

And that's just inside our buildings.

Outside there are climate catastrophes, politically polarized communities, racial reckonings, a housing crisis and any number of wicked issues that require deep understanding and collective effort to resolve. News organizations can help build communities that make things better.

From sustainable to regenerative

Last year, a death in my family catapulted me into taking over our family walnut farm that sits along a bend in the Stanislaus River in Oakdale, California. In doing so, I learned about a concept called regenerative agriculture.

Regenerative agriculture works to renew and revitalize the entire ecosystem through restorative practices. It takes a systems approach, acknowledging that all the natural and human components of the enterprise are interdependent. Replenishing any aspect of the system — soil biodiversity, clean water, farmworker livability — thus contributes to the wellbeing of the whole.

It's about ensuring that the entire ecosystem is resilient and improved for future generations of all species. And it struck me as a great metaphor for our news ecosystem. If we shift our focus from deadlines, products and profit margins to our role in building up the ecosystem we work within, we can help our communities grow and thrive.

Futurist Jessica Clark explained the concept this way in a 2022 prediction for NiemanLab: "Regenerative industries and processes focus on developing self-renewing systems that take both natural and

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human resources into account. They recognize that both are finite, and that healthy ecosystems are based on interdependence. They move beyond the frame of 'sustainability' into a mode of 'circular design,' which posits that nurturing the wellbeing of both employees and communities can in turn strengthen businesses and products."

How can we shift toward regenerative journalism? One way is by centering care in our reporting process and adopting a set of care practices that restore, renew and ultimately improve the ecosystems of the communities we serve.

Why a guide about care?

This guide provides an intimate and detailed account of the After the Assault project. I break our reporting process up into five steps to illustrate where and how we centered care. Along the way, I reflect on challenges we faced, and how we navigated them. After each step, I offer specific care practices you can use along with additional resources. Each step also includes some of the impact we made, to help you make the case in your own organizations to build care into your work.

Although I present the reporting steps and care practices in a linear fashion, they can (and often do) happen in a different order, repeatedly and iteratively. I offer them as a template to adapt in ways that make most sense for your projects involving people who feel marginalized and especially those who have experienced trauma. A lot of what I write about could easily go under another bucket like community engagement, trust building or collaboration. I'm using care as a frame because it feels so resonant with what communities need now in this era filled with so much uncertainty, divisiveness, social isolation and loneliness.

After the Assault includes a podcast, radio features, talk show segments, web

stories and resource guides. The project took place over two years (most of it during the COVID-19 pandemic lock-downs) and involved a cohort of survivors, a cohort of law enforcement, healthcare practitioners and advocacy groups and an external project evaluator. The project team included a lead reporter, data reporter, podcast editor, digital content editor, an intern and me, the project director. We collaborated with colleagues from many of CapRadio's departments, including digital content, marketing, fundraising and news, to tell the story on multiple platforms and generate resources to help meet the information needs of stakeholders. It cost about $20,000, which was raised through a combination of grants and individual donors, on top of two years of existing salaries and a lot of above-and-beyond commitment.

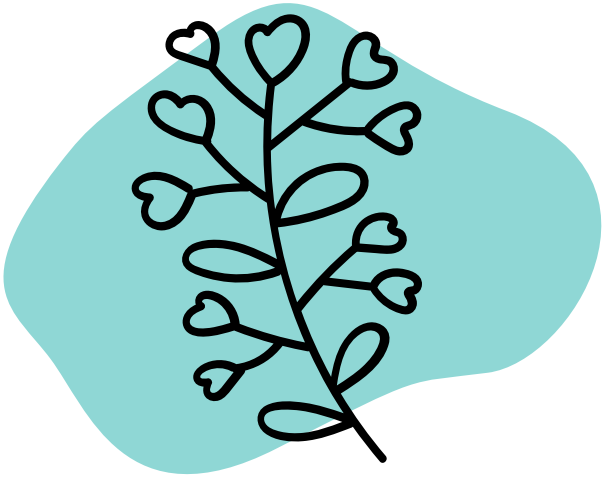
When I started doing "community engaged journalism" (also referred to as community- centered journalism, people-powered journalism, participatory journalism, service journalism, audience engagement and more) in a public radio newsroom a decade ago, I yearned for detailed case studies about engagement methods and outcomes. These days, as a participatory

journalism consultant, I field calls from managing editors, reporters and engagement specialists across the country looking for trust building tips and effective ways to listen to and "report with" the communities they serve. I wrote this guide, in part, as a way to help meet both needs. I also wrote it as a way to contribute to the evolving conversation about care in journalism.

Right now, there is a big push to create newsroom cultures that care for their staff, especially in the form of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging initiatives. There are also scores of blog posts, conference sessions and studies about reporter burnout and ways to advance journalists' self-care. Both of those efforts are critically important. After all, how can you extend care to others if you aren't, on some level, cared for in your own organization and attending to your own well-being?

On the deepest level, though, I'm writing this guide as a way of working through for myself why care is so important in our reporting process and how to go about it. What made After the Assault both successful and also so difficult? In this guide, I explore my struggles not just with newsroom norms but also with the very real challenges that come with collaboration and co-creation. My goal is to give back to all the journalists and newsroom leaders working so hard to make good on the promise of public service journalism.

I have been told throughout my career that I need to choose between community development, documentary and art as a field of practice, and that I should focus on product over process, quality and efficiency over reciprocity. Writing this guide has been an act of resistance and a lesson in vulnerability. But I figure things out by workshopping ideas and getting feedback. I welcome yours and hope to hear it.



More resources on care – in journalism and for yourself

In this guide, each section has resources for you to engage more deeply with the theories and practices discussed. Here are a few other broader resources you might draw on.

* In How Journalists Engage: A Theory of Trust Building, Identities, and Care, journalism scholar Sue Robinson takes us on a deep dive into how and why "trusting relationships around news can happen only through caring and being cared for, informationally." Along the way, she identifies four new roles for journalists that center care: relationship builder, community collaborator, conversation facilitator and professional network builder. She also spells out eight skill sets needed to do this work - radical transparency, power dynamic accounting, mediation, reciprocity, media literacies, community offline work, needs/assets/solution analyses, and collaborative production.

* In chapter four of Meaningful Inefficiencies, civic media scholars Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar explore the crucial role that care plays in a democracy with case studies illustrating different ways newsrooms operationalize care through their journalism.

* Check out Global Press's Duty of Care and the ways the organization weaves it throughout their reporting process, from newsroom to journalist to source.

And finally, as you get started on your journey, here's something I wish I had known earlier: As managing editors or project directors, it's also critical to care for the journalists reporting on trauma, and for oneself.

Early in the After the Assault project, I met with both woman reporters separately to discuss how their work could be retraumatizing or generate vicarious trauma. I pointed out that since roughly one in four women have experienced sexual violence, it was likely that someone on our team had direct experience with the topic. I invited them to let me know any time they felt they needed a break or support. I told them that I'd also be proactive about offering help, since in my experience most journalists don't recognize the early warning signs of vicarious trauma. Throughout the project, I continued to check-in with them, probing to see if they were feeling overwhelmed, sad or just fatigued from grappling with the content. They always appeared to be fine and never requested help, so I didn't push it.

And I never sought help either, even though I was clearly experiencing burnout by the end of the project.

If I were to do a project like this again, I would structure in more education and support, starting with a workshop on self-care while covering trauma. I'd also structure in quarterly self-assessments and debriefs for everyone involved. And I'd ask my supervisor to keep tabs on me, bringing forward any issues or resources during our regular one-on-ones.

As we embark on incorporating care into our journalism, it's crucial that we also care for ourselves and each other. You can learn more about secondary trauma and find resources for self-care at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.

Bring care into the reporting process

STEP 1

Involve stakeholders from the start

Develop reporting around the questions, needs and aspirations of key stakeholders. Ensure that the reporting process engages with diverse perspectives, particularly voices that your organization's coverage often leaves out.

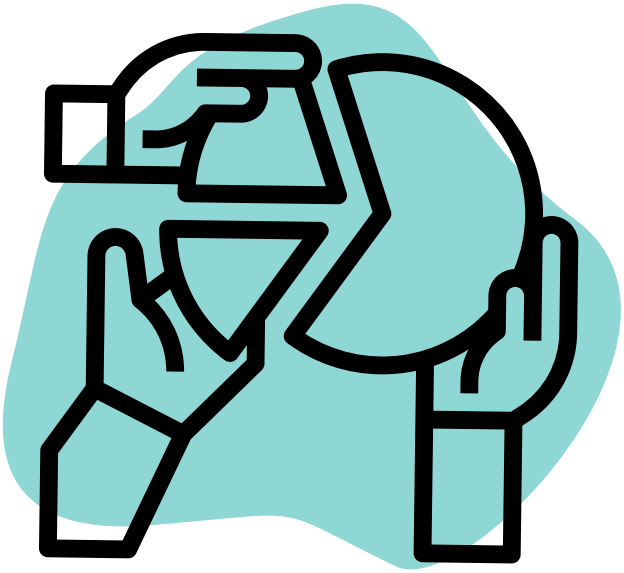
We began After the Assault with two stakeholder listening sessions, one with institutional experts and advocates and another with survivors, to better understand the steps and barriers in the legal reporting process for sexual assault.

To determine who to invite to our institutional stakeholder session, health care reporter Sammy Caiola, participatory journalism fellow Erica Anderson and I did what most reporting teams do: we made a spreadsheet! First, we created a column that listed the different categories of people involved in the sexual assault legal reporting process, such as police officers, district attorneys, rape crisis advocates and medical examiners, staff at violence prevention organizations and social service providers. We also added categories for communities we wanted to be sure to hear from, like BIPOC, trans or youth.

Then we created a second "invite" column that listed people we knew in each of those categories. Sammy, for example, already had good relationships with several community health experts we could invite and knew a few different law

enforcement representatives to include. I added contacts for non-profits serving specific cultural groups, like the Sacramento Native American Health Center and My Sister's House, which provides social services to Sacramento's Asian American communities. Erica researched Sacramento area organizations focused on sexual violence and added contacts. After that, we each looked over the invite column and found contacts for the few gaps we had left.

Like most newsrooms, we didn't have a lot of time to plan, or a big budget for food and meeting space. Ultimately, we had about 45 people on the invite list, which we pared down to 25 by selecting for a good balance of genders, cultural backgrounds, professional roles and types of service.



Stakeholders from agencies, institutions and non-profits who are paid for their work typically respond well to emails. We sent them email invitations to an off-the-record lunch conversation to better understand the issues and possible solutions in the legal reporting process for sexual assault. We told them that we had invited community members, government representatives, health workers and organizers and that we were conducting a separate listening session for survivors as well.

We ended the email by putting a stake in the ground about our values: "We believe that bringing community stakeholders together with journalists can generate storytelling that has greater impact in our communities. And we want to figure out how public radio can make a difference on this topic."

Everyone we invited quickly RSVP'd with a yes. A few asked if they could bring a colleague.

Eighteen local law enforcement representatives and their Public Information Officers, healthcare practitioners, crisis support providers and community advocates attended the meeting. We first invited them to introduce themselves and share why they said yes. This simple introduction provided a way to build rapport

Once participants articulated some of the barriers, we invited them to think about solutions.

and find alignment among stakeholders who sometimes don't get along.

Sammy walked through a sketch she had drawn on the white board that outlined our understanding of the legal reporting process for sexual assault in Sacramento County. The group confirmed that the steps and associated activities we mapped out were technically correct, but that it is difficult to create any kind of "roadmap" for this process because every crime is different. They told us that what we presented is ideal, but far from reality because there are so many survivors who don't report, and because there is often a lack of evidence. They also noted that the number of prosecutions is very different from the number of assaults that get reported.

After going over the legal reporting process, we asked stakeholders to think about barriers to justice and healing, and where those barriers appear in the sexual assault reporting process drawn on the whiteboard. We asked participants to write each barrier on a single blue Post-it and place it on our timeline of the assault reporting process.

Once they articulated some of those barriers, we asked the participants to think about solutions. We invited them to write each idea on a yellow Post-it and place it with a related barrier or specific part of the process. We encouraged participants to think about solutions that were aspirational, practices other cities or agencies employ or a creative response they wanted to see implemented.

This process led to an incredibly rich dialogue that laid the groundwork for our entire project. The group shared details on everything from incident reporting, investigations and medical exams to communicating with survivors, connecting survivors with resources and understanding what to

expect during prosecution or when a case doesn't go forward. In this initial meeting, the group helped name and frame specific barriers in the legal reporting process, identify solutions and build good will toward working with each other and our public radio station on this issue.

In these ways, we fact-checked our understanding of the legal reporting process with people working on the front lines and gathered key information to shape the next steps in our investigation.

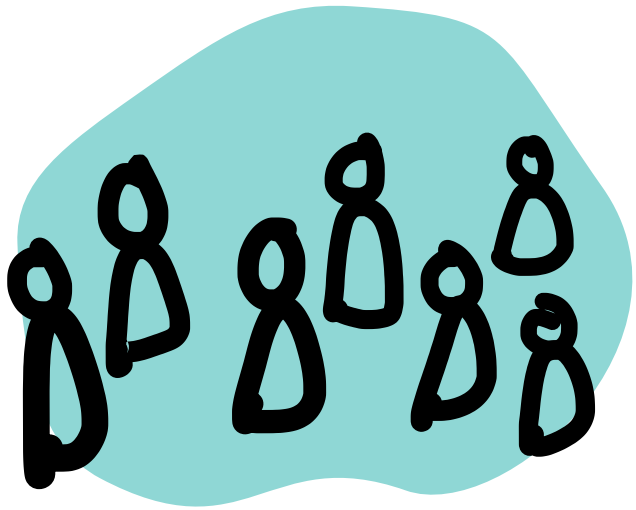
Connecting with people who've experienced trauma

Our team hadn't engaged in trauma informed reporting before or worked directly with victims of sexual assault. To prepare for our listening session with survivors, we spent time educating ourselves by reading victims' stories, learning about the legal process and looking at the local resources provided to community members. We also asked social and legal service providers about best practices for working with people who have experienced a sexual assault.

We heard that it's best to have a trained professional participate in early

conversations with survivors to meet any emerging needs. We invited Marci Bridgeford, a trauma-informed peer counselor from Sacramento's rape crisis center, to attend the listening session should any of the survivors need additional support. Marci also helped us guide the conversation in ways that would help survivors feel safe and supported.

Sammy did the heavy lifting to identify and invite survivors to our listening session. She started by reaching out to the woman who originally contacted CapRadio about her experience reporting to the police. That woman helped Sammy locate other survivors who were interested and emotionally ready to talk with us about their experiences. Sammy also asked her contacts in Sacramento's sexual assault support circles to help reach out to other



survivors, keeping an ear open for those who reported their crimes to police and hit a dead end. She wrote language about the project that local organizations circulated in newsletters and flyers.

Our plan, she told them, was to produce stories that explored ways police, medical professionals and loved ones could better support survivors on their journeys toward justice and healing. She asked them whether they'd be interested in attending a meeting with other survivors to help shape the project — they all said yes.

The survivor listening session was powerful because it laid the groundwork for the rest of the project. The convening involved eight Sacramento area women, ages 30 to 50. They were Black, white, multiracial, Latina and Asian American and all cisgender.

We intentionally tried to create a space that made them feel cared for. We designed a two-hour dinner meeting that included providing healthy food and drinks, using decorative table settings and placing candles and Kleenex tissues around the table along with toys for people to play with in case they became anxious. We invited survivors to sit wherever they wanted, help themselves to food or step out of our meeting room to take a break in the lounge, with support from a counselor.

We opened the conversation by inviting the group to share their names, pronouns and one thing they hoped to walk away with from our time together. We knew coming to talk to us about the worst moments in their lives would likely bring up painful memories. We wanted to find out what would make it worth it for them to do this so that we could make adjustments to our plans to meet their needs.

So we spent most of the session exploring how survivors might collaborate with us on this reporting project and what would feel safe, relevant and empowering for them.

We started by setting community agreements. These included:

- You are in control. We invite survivors to share as much or little as they like,

respond to questions as they wish and let us know what they need as we go.

- Make space, take space. We hope to hear from everyone when they feel ready.

- Assume best intent. We are all here to improve outcomes for survivors. Our reporting team is entering new territory both in terms of this topic as well as how to involve survivors in the reporting process. As we travel along this learning curve we ask that if we make mis-steps that you call it out in a kind and generous way.

- Confidentiality. Use the stories, but not names, when sharing information from this meeting.

- Closing remarks. To wrap up our time together, share a short meditation, poem or quote to transition from this project back to our personal lives.

Then we asked about their goals for this collaborative work, specifically what impacts they'd like this public radio reporting project to have on them, organizations and systems, or the wider public. To do this, we passed out Post-its and pens and asked the survivors to write responses to the question: "I hope this reporting project results in…" We encouraged them to write as many ideas as they wished, with one idea per Post-it. We then clustered the notes on a board and discussed their ideas.

What they came up with probably won't surprise you: They wanted policy change

When you involve vulnerable people in the reporting process, you don't want to ignore what they say they want from the project, but you also don't want to encourage them to think that you are trying to meet goals when you know you can't. What to do?

“What happened to me makes me so angry, but I want this story to help other people.” —sexual assault survivor

and changes in how police handle assault cases. They wanted people to better understand what they’d gone through, to find a way to heal and to help other survivors.

This was the first challenging moment of the project. Here we were enlisting their hopes and, implicitly, exploring what would make it worth going through the pain of sharing their stories with us. Then they named ambitious goals — like police reform — that we couldn’t promise to deliver. Or wishes that were so deeply personal, like healing and feeling whole again, that seemed beyond what we can manifest through a news project. We could feel the pain in their voices, and we could hear the anger, too.

When you involve vulnerable people in the reporting process, you don’t want to ignore or quash what they say they want from the project, but you also don’t want to encourage them to think that you are trying to meet goals when you know you can’t. What to do?

I started by acknowledging the pain in the room, the wrongness of it. I spoke about how what they'd shared makes so much sense and gave us a clear picture of what would make this project meaningful to them. I also talked about how effecting change to policy and institutions like law enforcement would be a high bar to reach for in a public radio project and my concern about setting that as a goal. I couldn’t promise we’d achieve it. It sounded to me that they had been let down by others (law enforcement, advocates, family, friends) who had either not heard them or made false promises. So I asked if they would be open to reshaping their ideas into statements that I felt more confident about accomplishing.

It felt like walking on a tightrope. After all, I wanted to build trust and motivation to engage with us, but also not do anything that would bring more harm.

I didn’t want to blow it.

Being clear, kind and transparent

worked. It helped manage expectations but also set a tone of care. With more discussion, we came up with these initial project goals:

- Help others by publicly telling our painful stories.
- Raise awareness about what it's like to be traumatized and what happens to your brain.
- Build understanding of what victims go through in the aftermath of an assault.
- Make change in the legal reporting process, which includes advocacy, medical exams, incident reporting and investigation, to improve outcomes for future survivors.
- Engage in advocacy as a form of healing.

After that, we dug into questions like: What would make participating in this project meaningful, transformative or worthwhile for you? What would help make you feel ownership over your story?

They told us clearly that they wanted us to tell THEIR story. They wanted us to share their experiences without softening their language. "Don't sugar coat it," one participant said. Listeners should "know about how I can't go to the grocery store anymore and that sometimes I have to pull my car over because I can't stop crying," said another.

"It's not just about the incident, it's the thing that lives inside of us. I'm never going back to the old me," another participant told us. The survivors weren't just referring to their assault: "The rape is almost secondary. I feel revictimized by my experience with law enforcement."

Most of all, they wanted to have a seat at the editorial table: "There are tons of decisions that get made. What gets included and what doesn't. I want to be a consultant."

This had a lot to do with their concern about misrepresentation: "This is scary, to talk with journalists, and people can take

your voice and say it the wrong way."

Then we opened up the floor for their questions, which included: what was the project timeline? Would we be talking to detectives working on their specific cases? What trauma-informed training do police officers get? What other personnel should be trained as well? We promised we would not be talking to any detective without first consulting with them. Though we weren't able to answer all of those questions at the time, we did note them and then got answers to share back later in the project. We wrapped up by asking if they would be interested in continuing to meet with us to shape the project. They all said yes. As one survivor put it: "I want to be involved in the process. All along the way."

After the survivors left, we debriefed on how it went and what we heard. We also asked Marci to share what she thought we could improve on, and spent time talking about how we felt, too. This impromptu processing session gave us a way to care for each other, and ourselves.

Care practices for involving stakeholders

Research the community you'll be working with

Spend time learning about what's already out there. Reach out to professionals and community members about the best ways to interact with and care for the communities you want to work with and use that to inform your initial outreach and design.

Create an environment of care

Consider gathering in places that are most accessible and welcoming for your sources, like a public library, community center or neighborhood meeting room. If possible, provide childcare and transportation and have translators or support staff join you. Arrange seats in a circle – with a

view of the door for survivors – or use colorful tablecloths if you'll be seated around tables. Play culturally relevant music as people arrive, greeting them personally, orienting them to the space (including bathrooms) and offering them something to eat or drink. Many sources find it calming to see an outline on a white board or in a handout of what you'll be doing during your time together. It can be helpful to send an agenda, questions or themes in advance so participants have the option to prepare should they want to. Be sure to let them know that advanced preparation is not required.

Make space for people to learn who is in the room and why

Thoughtful introductory activities give people a sense of the perspectives and needs in the room, which helps build connections and align expectations. If you need to keep the introductions short, you can simply invite participants to share their name and what motivated them to attend the meeting. If you have more time, consider adding a prompt related to the

topic or place you'll be exploring or that taps into their aspirations. For example: "What do you appreciate most about [the topic or place]?" "If you could change one thing about [the topic or place] what would it be?" Or, "what is one thing that you hope for [the topic or place]?"

Set community agreements

Establishing guidelines for group work helps create an atmosphere where all participants feel comfortable and motivated to engage with each other. For people who have experienced trauma or are wary of journalists' motives, creating these agreements demonstrates that you are attentive to their concerns as well as invested in

determining how to support their individual and collective success. You can establish agreements by inviting participants to respond to a prompt like: “What would help you feel more comfortable and motivated to participate in this conversation?” Or you could suggest a few guidelines like, "Share the lessons, but leave out details" and, "Be critical of the process, not of individuals or groups," and then invite input. Journalists should participate as community members, following the same guidelines and participating as they’ve asked others to do.

Understand participants’ goals

Reporters and editors are often goal-oriented. We want results from our storytelling efforts. But we don’t often ask sources and collaborators about their goals for our journalism, not to mention intentionally fold their aspirations into our editorial vision. Hearing the goals of those impacted helps you better understand how your journalism can make a difference in their lives. Hearing goals from diverse communities on a particular issue can help you to focus your project where it can make the biggest impact.

Prompts you can use to elicit stakeholders goals include: What would motivate you to get involved in this effort? What would make being involved in this project worthwhile for you? What would you like to see happen as a result of our storytelling? How could a reporting project make a difference on this issue? What kind of impact do you hope this project has on your community?

Consider using different activities to explore these prompts (such as small groups that report out, or brainstorming using sticky notes) to ensure you are including everyone's voice in the mix.

More resources on listening to stakeholders

- MuseumHack offers a great list of virtual and IRL icebreakers and Rob Walker curates an on-going list of icebreakers he collects via his Art of Noticing newsletter.
- The National Equity Project provides an excellent short guide on how to develop community agreements, including helpful definitions, steps and even scripts!
- FormShift sketches out a useful list of what should go into an MOU (as well as when and how to use).
- My 2020 In 2020 "JMR's Participatory Journalism Playbook" published by the Listening Post Collective has many examples of ways to facilitate group conversations, have meaningful introductions and create inclusive, open spaces.

Bring care into the reporting process

STEP 2

Form project advisory groups

Involve key stakeholders to build understanding, give input on content and develop the editorial vision. Along the way, provide the practical and emotional support people need to participate fully.

At the end of the listening session with survivors, the group decided to meet regularly to collaborate with CapRadio. We formed a "survivor cohort" which met in person six times before the pandemic lockdown, after which we transitioned to monthly virtual gatherings. In total, this cohort came together with our reporting team 21 times over two years. For the in-person meetings, we provided food and funds for childcare and transportation. We sent everyone food delivery gift certificates for the first few virtual meetings, but cohort members often didn't access or use them, so we stopped. We originally imagined meeting with survivors only a handful of times, so we did not plan to pay them for their time directly.

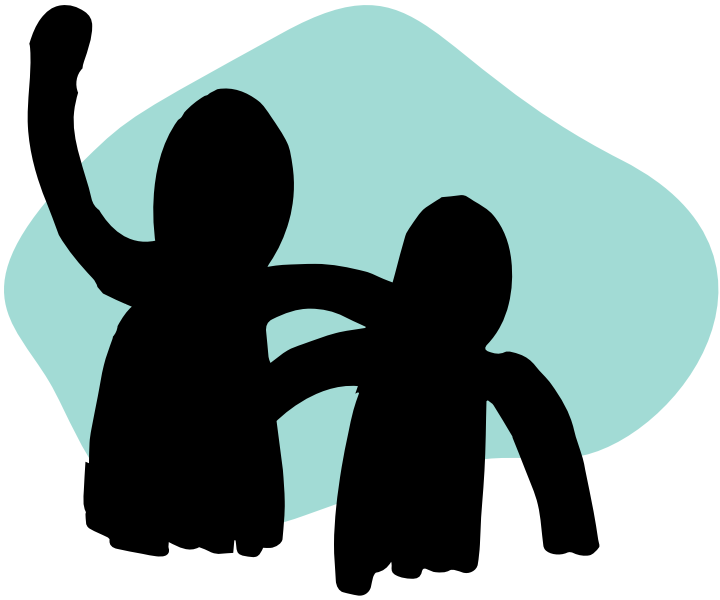
As the project director, I designed and facilitated the gatherings. Sammy gave feedback on meeting design and led a "reporter's update" section of each gathering where she went over what she was investigating, shared information that she thought the survivors would be interested in (or, later, that they asked for) and answered questions. Marci Bridgeford, the mental health counselor who attended our initial meeting with survivors, volunteered

to attend the regular cohort meetings to provide trauma-informed support, such as answering survivors' questions about trauma and healing, or stepping out of the room with a survivor to provide counseling if needed.

The in-person gatherings were two hours long and held on weekday evenings. We invited survivors to come and go as they pleased or take breaks as needed. In each session, the reporting team encouraged survivors to share whatever parts of their stories they felt comfortable telling, at their own pace, or to simply listen.

We began around a large conference table in CapRadio's community room and, after a few meetings, I recommended that we begin recording their conversations.

For the next four gatherings, the cohort started off in the community room to check in with each other, engage in group building activities and give input on our reporting updates or session agendas. After about 30 minutes, we'd transition to the talk-show studio for about an hour-long recording session that we all agreed could be used in the final podcast and broadcast pieces. Then we'd return to the community room for snacks (survivors told us they were too nervous to eat before talking about their experiences)



and to debrief, and also for them to suggest ways we could improve the sessions.

We brought each gathering to a close with a short meditation or reading on self-compassion or resilience (usually brought by a cohort member) to transition back to daily life.

The first time we met in the studio, we toured the control room and our engineer, Sally Schilling, showed the cohort how she'd be operating the soundboard. I went over how the mics work, did sound checks and reminded them that they were welcome to respond to Sammy's questions or to simply listen. I told them that if they wanted to say something for the group but not for the general public to please say, "This is off the record," and we'd edit those parts out. Otherwise, we'd assume that we

The women began talking to one another more than us, exploring how they grapple with shame, their anger, what triggers them and what they do to recalibrate.

could use what they said in our reporting.

We began inviting the group to bring questions for each other, and over time shifted from an interview format to more of a group conversation. The women began talking to one another more than us, exploring how they grapple with shame, their anger, what triggers them and what they do to recalibrate. Many asked questions we wouldn't have dared to pose, like "How do you learn to love again?"

Most of these women had been dealing with their trauma alone for many months. The cohort gatherings became a place to find community. At the same time, they gave Sammy an unprecedented level of access to learning about sexual trauma, which down the line helped her formulate nuanced questions to ask law enforcement, researchers and advocates. These recordings also helped put listeners in survivors' shoes in a way that most published media on assault rarely does.

We continually improved our process, too. For example, members of the cohort told us that some of the survivors preferred to share a mic with someone more outspoken, to make it easier if they didn't want to talk or to provide support through physical proximity. So, before each of the next recordings, I invited the group to come up with a seating chart. This simple act gave the survivors more agency and support in the process for telling their stories .

Stuffed into our small talk-show studio, the survivors explored different topics with us, like misconceptions about rape, the effects of trauma on memory, navigating the justice system and healing from sexual violence. The women built on one another's ideas as they answered our questions. These conversations were so revealing, so confessional, so honest yet also hopeful and supportive. They were what listeners to public radio often call "driveway moments," the kind of story

you stay in your car to hear even after you've parked.

We created a space for survivors to talk openly with each other about experiences they wanted to explore. You can hear some of these intimate conversations by clicking on the podcast episode below and advancing the player to the timestamp provided.

Episode 5: Grief and loss 3:58 - 5:00
Episode 6: Healing takes time 4:46 - 5:46
Episode 6: Loving again 16:36 - 20:14

Creating a cohort when power imbalances exist

To grapple with the complexity of sexual assault, we also formed a cohort of stakeholders from Sacramento County's Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). This 10-member cohort included detectives and sergeants from the Citrus Heights, Elk Grove and Sacramento police departments, a deputy district attorney, crime lab staff, healthcare providers and rape crisis center advocates. In addition, we invited Citrus Heights Police Chief Ronald Lawrence to join the group.

For this group, which we started referring to as the SART/LE cohort, we took a different approach than with sexual assault survivors. I started by organizing and facilitating three 90-minute virtual convenings with our reporting team, which now also included data reporter Emily Zentner.

Several of the law enforcement agencies were initially reluctant to work with CapRadio, not only because of the usual "journalist as watchdog" tensions but also because our project got rolling after the highly publicized murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis Police Officer in 2020. They were wary of any reporting that might put their agencies in a negative light. They were also concerned that further negative portrayals of law enforcement would deter future survivors from reporting.

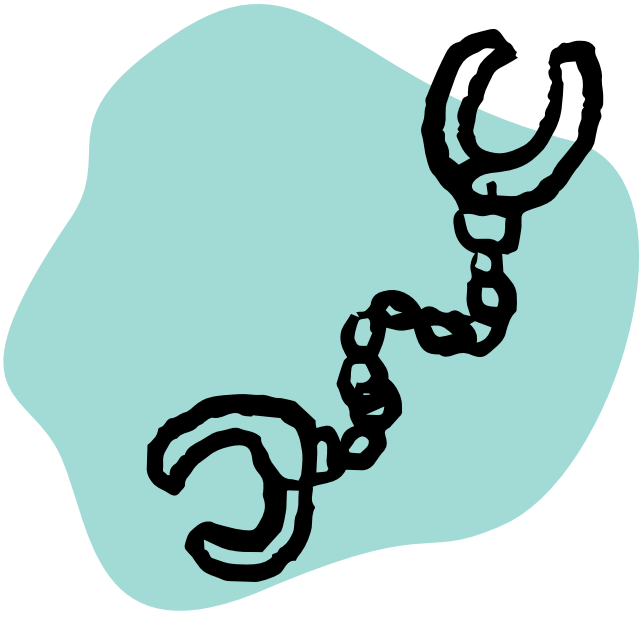
To acknowledge and diffuse that tension, I told them in the invitation email that our goal was to improve outcomes for survivors in Sacramento County and that we viewed their frontline experiences as crucial. I let them know that the meeting was on background (not for direct quotation) and provided a list of questions we'd be

exploring and information on the project to date.

I concluded by saying, “We understand this is a tough moment for law enforcement, with calls to ‘defund the police' and the backlog of work you likely have due to the pandemic, racial tensions and the presidential election. This gathering is designed to create a supportive space to share your knowledge, concerns, hopes and recommendations. We hope you’ll join us.”

I have to admit, this part of the collaborative work was uncomfortable for me at first. I’ve had my own negative experiences with police and felt shaky about how to manage the power dynamics among reporters, editors, survivors and the law.

But there was another tension. I also never used the word “collaborate” when I talked about our work with this cohort during the project — only after. That’s because the prevailing view in my newsroom was that you can never collaborate with anyone involved in your reporting. You needed to maintain a “firewall” between you and the people who give you information. If you didn’t, you’d risk your journalistic credibility. Exceptions are sometimes granted if sources are on the downside of power, like assault survivors or people experiencing homelessness. But otherwise the line is pretty strict. And to some degree, I’d internalized this perspective.



I get why this can be necessary. You don’t want to team up with corrupt officials or organizations you are investigating for wrongdoing, nor do you want to be seen as their mouthpiece. But, my position is that you can collaborate with stakeholders and retain journalistic integrity — we do it all the time with economists and scientists when we ask them to explain difficult subjects. And in this case, collaboration helped create nuanced and reflective reporting on the difficult subject of sexual assault.

Although CapRadio’s Nick Miller, the managing news editor overseeing the project, and the reporting team encouraged me to lean into my participatory journalism approach, I knew several of my

other colleagues questioned my credentials. I'd heard whispers that I was an "advocate," that I did "outreach" not journalism. Some colleagues said openly in meetings that I should be in the marketing department, not the newsroom. I felt like I needed to play it safe by using language that didn't raise eyebrows.

But I didn't see how we would meet the survivors' goals, not to mention our own, if we didn't find a way to involve police officers transparently and authentically throughout the project. After all, we didn't really have any leverage to encourage institutional change. We'd have to work for it by building bridges and finding common cause.

It also felt inconsistent to treat law enforcement differently than we were treating survivors and community advocates. Yes, there is a huge discrepancy in the amount of power a survivor, an advocate and a law enforcement official wield. And yes, police and legal processes had undoubtedly harmed survivors and frustrated advocates in their efforts to help victims find healing and justice. But we had made a decision to "start by believing" survivors. Shouldn't I extend the same courtesy and agenda with law enforcement? And if I didn't, wasn't I letting my biases get in the way of good reporting? If I believe that we can retain our journalistic integrity while navigating power differences, then don't I need to walk my talk with all groups?

If I had treated the SART/LE cohort members with the distance that would have felt more comfortable to some people in our newsroom — and me — I doubt they would have come back to the table. It was a difficult leap to make, but one that I'm glad I worked through.

This is all to say, it took a long time to write that email to law enforcement. I had to walk the line between transparency and respect, while making sure everyone

I didn't see how we would meet the survivors' goals – or our own – if we didn't involve police officers transparently and authentically throughout the project.

understood that we had tough questions to explore. Fortunately, Sammy and Emily provided feedback on this and all future communications with the cohort.

To further build rapport, I designed the meeting to lift up what was working in the legal reporting process and what law enforcement needed to do their best work, before diving into identifying the barriers and pain points. I also asked the group to tell us how our journalism might help people better understand the legal reporting process and, in particular, what survivors and allies needed to know.

The group discussed challenges in assault cases, like the lack of evidence or eyewitnesses, the high threshold for proof and delays in survivors' reporting the crime. They spoke about how long the legal process takes, communication protocols that worked against transparency, and why these challenges can be hard for survivors to understand.

Everyone agreed journalism that better-informed survivors and the public about what to expect when reporting sexual assault would be beneficial to all parties. Chief Lawrence said in the first cohort meeting that there were clearly "areas of improvement" and that a media project could help law enforcement agencies

understand and address them.

Lawrence's buy-in paved the way for other police personnel to open up and to come back for two more convenings, along with medical staff, service providers and crisis advocates. During these next two meetings, we played survivor audio clips, asked questions and explored solutions.

Care practices for collaborating with advisory groups

Use invitational language

Many people we connect with through our reporting — people experiencing homelessness, natural disasters, violence or other kinds of trauma — have had their choices taken away. And even in situations that aren't that dire, it's comforting to feel you have some control over what's happening around you. Invitational language offers options and encourages people to do what is best for them.

Leadership Coach AX Mina suggests starting your interviews with, "Is this a conversation we can have today?" or, "Would you be open to talking about this topic right now?" or, "When would be a good time to ask a few questions about your experience?" Giving people options signals that they have decision-making power in the process, which creates greater psychological safety. "From a practical perspective, the hardest thing is to balance invitational language with, say, a tight, high pressure deadline," Mina says. She suggests setting up your own library of phrases to have at the ready to lead conversations in a trauma informed way. That muscle grows over time.

Involve an expert to support your collaborators

While our project required expertise in working with assault survivors, any journalism project will benefit from having people who work with the community involved in your reporting to help provide context and guidance. These partners often have insights and networks your reporting team doesn't, and they will use your journalism long after publication to continue working toward positive community change.

Help the group the bond early on

People open up when they feel safe and have a chance to get to know one another on a personal level. Start advisory group meetings with a short check-in to gauge people's emotional state before digging into the agenda items. If there are challenges or rough patches, acknowledge them and offer a kind word. Make quick adjustments to your approach based on what you hear.

Then engage in a warm up activity that helps people get to know one another in new and personal ways. Since we were often discussing power and healing in After the Assault, we used prompts that helped us launch into the topics in a low-stakes and interesting way. Here are some examples: "If you were a vending machine, what advice would you dispense?", "If you were a superhero, what would your superpower be?" and "If you were a wrestler, what would your entrance theme song be?" (This question is a favorite because you can make and share a playlist!)

Codify agreements

Early in the project, write up a vision statement, memorandum of understanding or community benefits agreement that documents the group's understanding of project goals, roles and activities. It's also helpful to include information on timelines, communication methods and benefits for participants and organizational partners. Creating and workshopping this document brings everyone on board and focuses energy and effort. It also helps manage expectations by providing a shared reference point for discussion if tensions emerge.

Hold space

Holding space in a journalism context involves creating a process for people to feel seen, heard and supported as they explore their hopes and struggles. It's about building a supportive container where they are able to voice differing opinions and engage, if desired, in finding common ground or constructive disagreement.

This might be the hardest and most crucial practice for journalists. It requires having patience, being mentally and emotionally present and staying flexible – all of which are challenging when juggling deadlines. It takes time and skilled meeting facilitation, which can be in short supply in newsrooms. But this work is crucial because it builds mutual respect and trust to work across differences.

Meeting regularly and over time holds the space for people to get to know each other beyond the surface level. It helps you understand their context and needs, and gives you a chance to show them how you are bringing their perspectives into the reporting process. When people know each other better they are often able to be honest, vulnerable and open to perspectives different from their own.

Make sure to hold space for stakeholders to ask each other questions and to ask reporters questions as well. Create an atmosphere that welcomes questions and a culture that uses what you learn to change course. Even when it's hard.

More resources about working with stakeholders

- Stephanie Castellano's "Forming a community advisory board for your newsroom" explains what advisory groups do and why they are important. It is packed with tips on everything from recruitment to running effective meetings.

- "How to create a functional, effective advisory committee" — the title says it all! A short, super practical guide from the HealthCare Consultants Link.

- The Gender and Sexuality Therapy Center offers a useful definition of what holding space means and five tips for how to do it.

- Here is the initial After the Assault plan we developed with survivors and institutional stakeholders, and here is a memorandum of understanding I created with stakeholders when I was making a documentary on housing affordability. These documents go into detail about roles, responsibilities, decision making and communication.

Bring care into the reporting process

STEP 3

Share power in the editorial process

Work with project collaborators to develop lines of inquiry, topics and content.

At our first cohort meeting, we presented the group of sexual assault survivors with a handout listing the topics we'd heard during the initial listening session and asked them to gut check if we got their ideas right, add any that we missed and prioritize which ones they wanted to see covered in our reporting. We used their feedback to narrow the topics we focused on and shape the questions we explored in the recording sessions. Based on the recordings and some additional research, we generated an outline for a six-part podcast. At our final in-person cohort gathering, group members annotated the outline, commenting on the titles, thumbnail descriptions and anything else.

This felt very tricky. None of us had shared this level of detail of our reporting process with sources in a public radio project. We had no idea of how it would go. It ended up making our reporting so much richer.

While discussing the podcast outline, for instance, one group member noted that although we had incorporated all of their ideas, there wasn't an episode that addressed sexual assault as a community problem that required a community response. Another suggested that we include a vision for the kind of future survivors wanted: one that prevents assaults from happening in the first place.

The pandemic erased our production timelines overnight. Meeting monthly over Zoom with no deadlines liberated us from our newsroom norm of pushing as fast as we could. Cohort members and reporters alike had time carved out each month to get to know one another and explore ideas.

This discussion led to us adding a seventh episode in which survivors, advocates and researchers examine how to break through the systemic barriers to justice and healing and share their visions for how we can work together to make that future happen.

Then COVID-19 hit.

We'd built deep relationships with the cohort. They'd opened up to us about the worst moments in their lives. They'd also become more invested in the effort and more hopeful about possible outcomes, including their own healing. We had a co-created podcast plan and we were steeped in their stories. In short: we had huge momentum. But on March 20, Nick told us we had to put the project on hold. Sammy, our station's health care reporter, needed to pivot 100% to covering the pandemic.

That decision made sense given the situation. But it would also replicate how survivors said law enforcement had harmed them: they'd tell their painful stories and then the people they told them to would disappear for months, leaving them feeling vulnerable and in the dark. If survivors asked for updates, they'd often be told that staff were busy triaging huge workloads and that they would hear back if there is any information to share. In other words, they were not the priority.

Deprioritizing them again is what we were being asked to do.

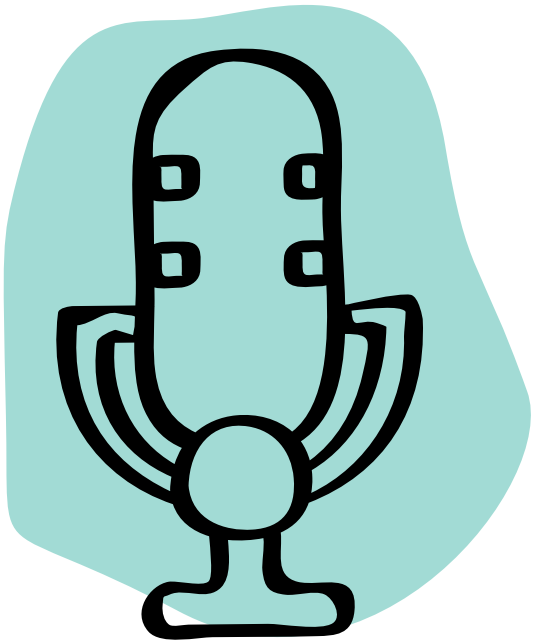
I couldn't do that, nor could Sammy. Cutting off communication ran the risk of re-wounding the survivors, not to mention damaging the trusting relationships we had so intentionally built. It also seemed out of step with the "do no harm" ethic we had adopted.

This was the only time in my public radio career when I simply didn't do what I was told by a manager. I transitioned our cohort meetings to Zoom and did all the prep work so that Sammy and Emily could just show up if their workload allowed. Although Sammy was reporting around the clock on the coronavirus, she gave input on my meeting agendas and showed up to lead a part of each virtual gathering. Emily also provided feedback and attended meetings when she could, helping with meeting notes and monitoring the chat.

From April through October, 2020, we worked under the radar of the newsroom, meeting virtually with the cohort each month. During these gatherings, we invited group members to weigh in on every aspect of the podcast — what to name it, what should be in it, questions we should ask experts, solutions to propose. This level of involvement gave them a greater sense of agency, not just of their own stories, but of the whole reporting project. I noticed that with each meeting the women became more responsive and confident, and our process more collaborative.

This approach to involving people in determining content and editorial direction is often referred to as "sharing power." Sharing power doesn't mean people outside the newsroom have final say, but it does mean that they have opportunities to give input, ask questions, make suggestions and co-create or even contribute their own content.

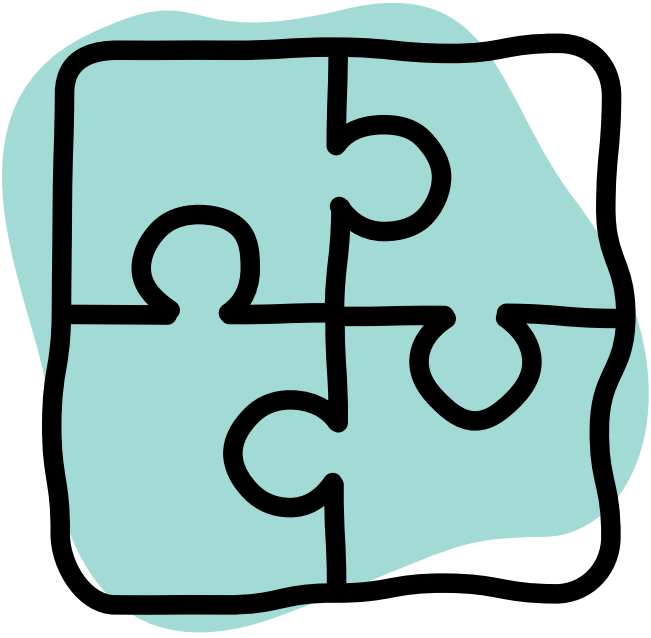
The more power that's shared in the editorial process, the more rewarding and relevant the reporting tends to be for project stakeholders. But sharing power is hard for newsrooms because it takes more time — more time to think through how to meaningfully involve sources, more time to communicate roles and perimeters and more time to set up and manage feedback loops. (We'll go more into feedback loops in Step 5.) It also requires skills that usually aren't taught in journalism schools, such as effective meeting design and facilitation.



And it requires checking in with yourself, caring for yourself and your colleagues, to forge ahead.

Early in the pandemic, I (and everyone else involved) viewed being told to pause as a big hit to the project. But looking back, I see how slowing down turned out to be a rare and amazing gift. The pandemic erased our production timelines overnight. Meeting monthly over Zoom with no deadlines liberated us from our newsroom norm of pushing as fast as we could toward producing content. All of a sudden, cohort members and reporters alike had time carved out each month to just get to know one another better and explore ideas.

A prime example was a session we did with the cohort to identify solutions to problems they experienced in reporting their assaults to law enforcement, clinics or community organizations. We had always planned to report on ways to solve problems by interviewing researchers and law enforcement officials from other states on best practices. We couldn't do that while our project was officially on hiatus. But we could ask the experts we had in the room: the survivors.



We wondered what the cohort would come up with if they could build a sexual assault reporting system from scratch. I designed a worldbuilding exercise that walked group members through different parts of a reporting process, from incident reporting and rape kit exams to investigation, prosecution, support groups and beyond. At each step, we invited the women to imagine how the reporting process could be. They came up with a wide array of specific, actionable insights. Sammy reflected on what came out of this solutions-centered experiment in an article for the Kettering Foundation. We not only folded the survivors' innovative and practical recommendations into the podcast but also ended up sharing them directly with law enforcement at their request. (There's more on that in Step 4 about using your power.) The survivors' ideas resulted in some of the biggest institutional impacts of the project; it changed the way prosecu-

“I always appreciate the seriousness you all have taken on this project, on our expressions of grief and pain and trauma. You just have put such investment and emotion from yourselves, all of your team, into this.” —survivor cohort member

tors and patrol officers in Sacramento County interact with survivors. (There's more about that impact in the last section, Evolving our journalism - with care.)

About eight months into the pandemic, we got the official go-ahead to resume working on After the Assault — and we were ready.

Sammy and Emily began doing in-depth, one-on-one interviews with each of the cohort members. They also interviewed law enforcement, criminal justice scholars, trauma researchers and sexual assault victim advocates about some of the patterns that were emerging through their interviews with survivors and what we'd learned through the many cohort gatherings.

Later, Emily walked survivors through the data she collected. Sammy spent 30 to 45 minutes with each survivor to review specific details of what she was including in the final scripts to verify tone, context and accuracy, and get their consent on the level of detail and language used in telling their stories.

As Sammy wrote in another article about the project for the Center for Health Journalism, “The last thing I wanted was to surprise someone or misconvey their experiences in a way that might re-traumatize them. So instead of the normal fact-checking process (names, dates, places) I called each survivor and walked them through what parts of their story I used, and how. If I summarized something from an interview, I read it back to them to make sure it rang true.“

This step is necessary when reporting about and with people who have

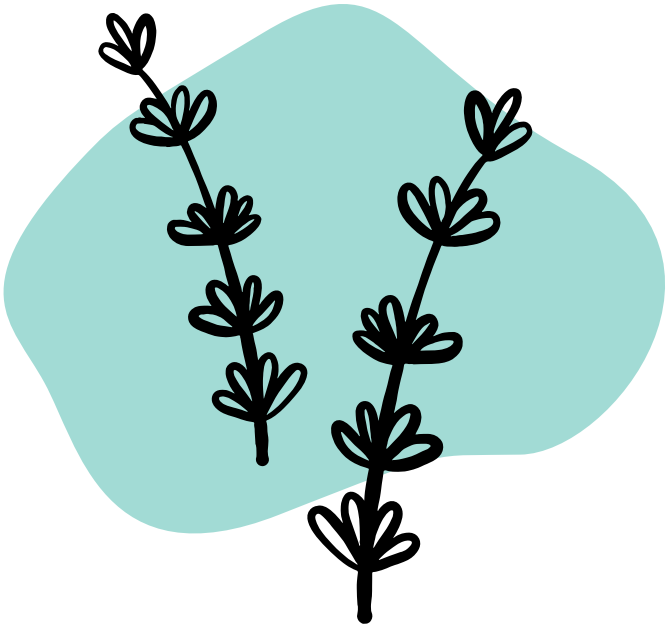
experienced trauma, many of whom will have their names published.

In addition to interviewing survivors, we invited them to contribute their own content by interviewing loved ones. We started by discussing the potential benefits (understanding, healing) and challenges that might arise through these conversations and how to get support before and after. Sammy put together a primer on interviewing family and friends, including sample questions, and spent about 30 minutes coaching each survivor who opted in. The resulting tape is hands-down some of the most powerful in the podcast series. And the survivors who conducted interviews told us their conversations were transformative.

Listen to the survivors interview their friends and family by clicking on the podcast episode below and advancing the player to the timestamp provided.
Episode 6: Erin and Aliyah 6:39 - 10:49
Episode 6: Annie and Alvin 20:38 - 24:58

As we got closer to publication (nearly two years after we started), we began to share project images, promo spots and even podcast clips with survivors during our monthly cohort gatherings. At first we shared rough drafts to give the women a chance to hear their stories reflected back to them and provide any final feedback. Later, we played them finalized radio spots, podcast clips and even showed them ads we were placing in magazines so they wouldn't be surprised (or triggered) by this marketing if they came across it. Both the marketing director and managing news editor expressed concerns about doing this. It was totally unconventional, and they worried we'd be opening a pandora's box by sharing content before publication. What if the women objected to the images or voices? What if they didn't agree with our framing?

I'll admit, I was worried too. But I was far more concerned about the kind of harm we might inflict by NOT sharing work in advance, talking it through and preparing the survivors. As co-creators, survivors should be the first to experience the project. I also believed that by seeing and hearing bits in advance, they'd be much better positioned to take the best care of themselves as the flurry of content — pod-



cast episodes, talk show segments, radio features, digital stories, Instagram series — rolled out.

As it turned out, because we had continuously kept survivors in the loop on every aspect of the project, they consistently approved of everything we shared with them. That doesn't mean they agreed with every turn of phrase or placement of a quote. But they trusted us. As one survivor told us: "You took our feedback at each and every one of those checkpoints… And we really see that with the final result."

As we got closer to publication, we noticed how stress levels were ratcheting up among the group. So we focused our final cohort meeting before the project launch on making safety plans. Marci Bridgeford, our organizational partner from Sacramento's rape crisis center, led the group in discussing two questions: How can we take care of ourselves as the project rolls out and how can we support each other as the project rolls out? The group generated a list of ideas which we wrote down and emailed back to them. They also invited one another to call or visit if needed. Marci gave out her cell phone number and encouraged group members to call her any time.

Involving people already in power

Sharing power in the editorial process with the SART/LE cohort looked a lot different than what we did with the survivor group. That's partly because we started working with them about halfway through the project. But it's also because we were investigating the agencies many group members represented.

During our first gathering over Zoom with this cohort, we'd found alignment on three core ideas: First, everyone in the room — law enforcement, advocates, reporters — was passionate about supporting survivors and committed to public service. Second, there were areas for improvement in the the legal reporting

The conversation gave the group a chance to offer additions and corrections, talk through their concerns and be part of a discussion on how their profession would be represented. In an interesting way, it gave the cops the chance to feel seen and heard.

process for sexual assault, from incident reporting to medical exams, investigations, prosecutions and counseling. And third, After the Assault aimed to provide information and stories that support healing and improve outcomes for survivors.

To execute on that third idea effectively, we needed to all work together.

That's why we designed the second Zoom convening with the group to review and discuss our reporting plan. We wanted to build their confidence in our journalism along with a shared understanding of the issues and possible solutions.

We started by showing the group the same podcast outline we had reviewed with the survivor cohort, highlighting the survivors' suggestions and where we'd integrated them. To be transparent, I told the group that we wanted more of their feedback to help ensure our journalism is both accurate and reflective of multiple perspectives. I also said that we had identified, through expert and survivor interviews, some gaps in the system and that we wanted to get their take on how to improve survivor outcomes and facilitate healing.

Then we opened the floor for their input, which Emily documented in real time on the podcast outline using a shared screen.

The conversation gave the group a chance to offer additions and corrections, talk through their concerns and be part of a discussion on how their profession would be represented. What came up in the conversation and the examples shared generated insights that helped us refine our reporting plan. In an interesting way, it gave the cops the chance to feel seen and heard. One law enforcement official observed, "Oftentimes with the media it's a

very short term relationship, so an incident will happen and they want information to get on the 5 o'clock news, or what have you. And so they're scrambling for data or perspectives and it's in a very short period of time. This project was purposeful and meaningful, and you took the time to slow down and do it right."

Next we did something really unconventional for our newsroom: We played them a series of clips illustrating survivors' harsh experiences with law enforcement.

Before playing the clips, Sammy explained why we wanted to listen together. She told them how we want to explain what agencies can and can't do, and bring forward ideas for improvements. She wanted them to not be surprised by the accounts as well as have the chance to help us better understand them.

She started by playing a montage of survivors' voices that detailed their frustration and shame. Then she played a clip of a survivor talking about her horrible experience interacting with police followed by a clip of a sergeant discussing how her role in sexual assault investigations wasn't to believe survivors, but to collect the facts.

We played interview clips for law enforcement, healthcare providers and rape crisis advocates to generate discussion on police behaviors, survivors' experiences and what could be changed. You can hear two of these clips by clicking on the podcast episode below and advancing the player to the timestamp provided.

Episode 1: Survivor's sense of safety destroyed 3:48 - 4:33
Episode 1: Sergeant says "it's not our job to believe" 25:17 - 26:20

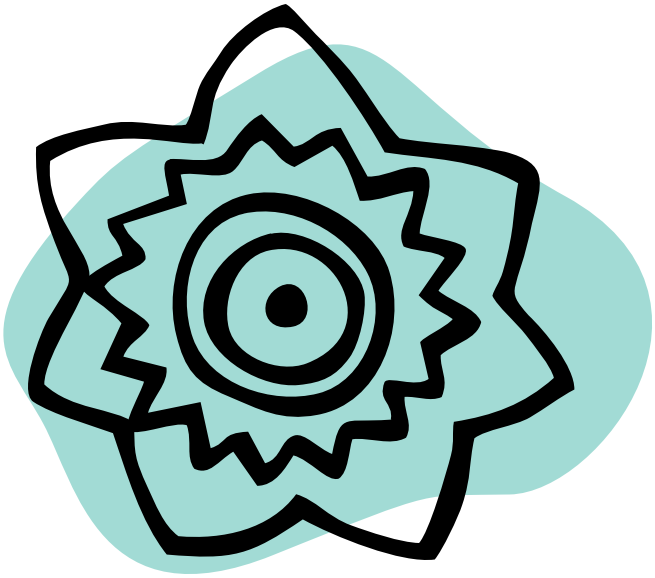
"This has been a great example of how you can bring diverse groups together and come out with not only a common understanding but a common bond." —Ronald Lawrence, former Chief of Police, Citrus Heights

After playing the clips, Sammy asked: What do people need to know to understand these clips? What context would you add to describe your end of this interaction? What other questions or comments do you have?

Advocates were not surprised by the stories, but the law enforcement officials in the group were genuinely shocked.

For this group, as it was with the survivors, sharing the reporting plan and intentions all along, and incorporating the feedback, meant that no one flatly rejected what they heard or read in advance.

Listening to the survivors (whose identities weren't revealed) speak openly about their bad experiences with law enforcement prompted the deputy district attorney to say, "To hear how victims perceive what's happening when we believe in law enforcement that we're doing a really good job for them… I think that's really important information that needs to be passed along to everybody along the chain of the sex assault case."



Sammy's questions opened up space for law enforcement and advocates to talk to one another and to us about the constraints and complexities of the system at a level of detail that gave our team incredible insight into why barriers exist and the kind of questions we might ask to discover creative solutions. Their conversation and suggestions also helped us figure out what information we could include to help survivors and their loved ones better understand the system, and how to best navigate it.

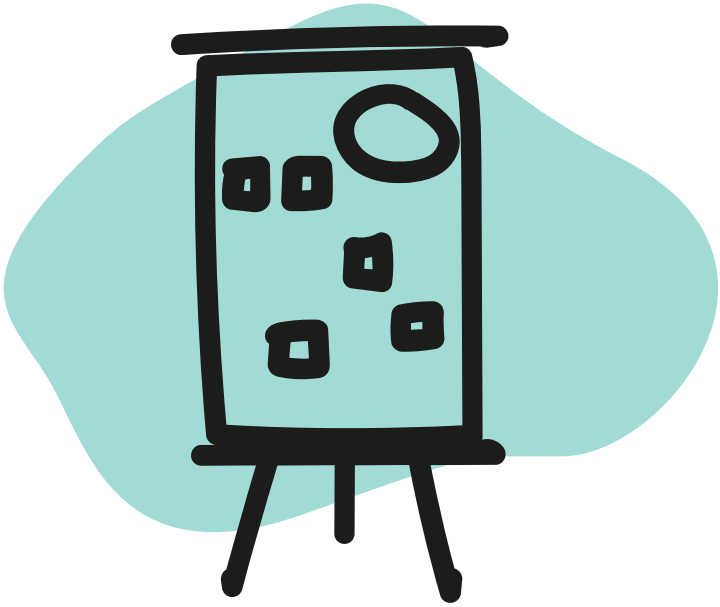
Through the conversation, the SART/LE cohort members also identified areas they could work together on to improve their processes. Those included encouraging more survivors to report sexual assault; collaborating with the local rape crisis center to ensure necessary support for survivors; better educating employees on sexual trauma and trauma-informed interviewing; and reducing instances in which law enforcement re-traumatize survivors.

One law enforcement officer summed

it up like this: “We all have things we do very well, and we all have things we can improve on individually, as an agency, and as a community partner. Let's listen without judgment, provide understanding to specific examples of why we work a certain way, and explain our roles and the laws and policies we must follow. This will help us educate the public on the complexity of a sex assault investigation and prosecution and provide better healing to the victims.“

We used our third and final convening with the SART/LE cohort to talk through desired changes to the legal reporting process for sexual assault and ways their agencies might implement those changes. We also wanted to find out how our reporting might help move the needle. We planned to use what we heard to flesh out our reporting, but it ended up leading to so much more.

We structured the conversation using a five-page Jamboard, a free online collaboration tool. At the top of each page, we put our cohort's shared goal: "SART/LE improves its approaches to the sexual assault reporting process in Sacramento County to be a better, more trauma-informed experience for survivors."



In a section titled “What would be different?,” we listed stakeholders' specific recommendations on bright orange sticky notes. We invited the SART/LE group members to read each recommendation and use virtual sticky notes to respond to two prompts: "What could be done to make this change happen?" and "What content/convenings/events would help achieve this change?" (i.e. what’s in CapRadio’s wheelhouse to do). We encouraged them to take a “possibility” mindset and generate ideas without worrying about resources or red tape.

This simple activity turned out to be incredibly powerful. It gave the SART/LE new, important information they needed to improve their processes. It also created a space to workshop solutions and generate buy-in.

Being transparent, sharing actionable information and engaging the SART/LE in our editorial process generated a lot of good will.

One advocate, for example, wanted to develop a training on trauma-informed incident reporting for patrol officers, and the police chief gave her the greenlight to make it happen. As the group discussed how to address inconsistencies in how police interact with survivors, a sergeant came up with the idea of providing a checklist for patrol officers "to ensure they're giving the survivor the documentation they need to get resources or help and make sure the officer is doing everything they can from the criminal standpoint."

Being transparent, sharing actionable information and engaging the SART/LE in our editorial process generated a lot of good will. It also clarified how we could work together on the shared goal of providing information that supports healing and improves outcomes for survivors. One detective summed it up this way: "When this [project] first started, we had concerns about what the focus was, where this was going. And I am just so amazed at how much everybody listened and everybody opened up and shared… I think it just shows what an awesome collaborative effort we were able to do, even though at the beginning we didn't think we saw eye to eye."

As a result, five SART members — a detective, sergeant, clinician, crime lab specialist and advocate — raised their hands when I asked if anyone would be willing to work with us to develop a online Guide to Reporting Sexual Assault in Sacamento County. We pitched it as a "one-stop shop" laying out the legal reporting process and answering questions survivors and their loved ones often have in the immediate aftermath of an assault.

Sammy and I met with this subcommittee twice for two hours each. I mention this because that is a lot of time for these professionals to give, so it feels like a testament to the level of investment they developed in the project. The subcommittee fact checked, step by step, how

Sammy summarized the legal and medical reporting processes, one sargeant going so far as to conduct independent research to answer a very technical point Sammy had gotten wrong. The group explained in excruciating detail the complexities of the process and defined important terminology, which turned out to be crucial in producing an accurate and useful guide. Involving these key stakeholders also increased the likelihood that they would champion and use the guide in their workplaces.

During the final subcommittee meeting, the detective requested that we remove the information about what pretext phone calls are and how they work. These are tape-recorded calls, text or social media messages between the victim and the suspect designed to obtain incriminating statements by setting a trap in which they admit to the assault. It's one of the few tools investigators have to gather evidence for prosecution. In fact, the detective told us it is their most effective way of catching perpetrators.

We explained how we included this information because a member of the survivor cohort had spoken in detail about how painful it was to make a pretext phone call. Had she known what it entailed, she told us, she would have thought twice about doing it. We thought spelling out what to expect would be useful to other survivors.

But the detective argued that if we document and circulate how it works in the guide, we'd be revealing to criminals the best method of catching them, and how to avoid it. Other law enforcement in the group agreed.

It was a tough call for two reasons: First, because it feels wrong to remove important procedural information upon the recommendation of the

It took sharing power in the editorial process with people closest to the issue to help us think through all the angles before deciding what was best.

police, whose process we were reporting on. And second, we knew it would be helpful information for survivors. Yet we also understood that survivors want justice, and helping perpetrators better understand how law enforcement tries to catch them works against that goal. We took it out.

Looking back, I'm reminded of how Sammy and I would have never thought of this. We would have put out information that goes against the survivors goals, and our own. It took sharing power in the editorial process with people closest to the issue to help us think through all the angles before deciding what was best.

Connecting community organizations to editorial production

In addition to the rape crisis center advocates who are part of the SART, we engaged a number of other regional advocacy organizations in the project's editorial process. This happened initially when I invited about ten advocates to the first institutional stakeholder convening back in July 2019. The reporting team looped back to invite those same individuals plus about 10 more to a follow up convening in April 2021, after we concluded our meetings with the SART/LE cohort. The team intentionally invited advocates from BIPOC-, immigrant-, queer- and trans-led organizations to ensure that project content would be relevant and useful for a wide range of survivors and support groups. SART members were also invited to join this meeting, and one sergeant and two detectives did attend, which was unexpected but resulted in cross-sector conversations where law enforcement and advocates (many of whom are survivors) could openly ask each other questions and explore ideas.

During this convening, the full group listened to audio clips, provided feedback on them and generated ideas on how their organizations could use the audio stories in community education and survivor support efforts.

The brainstorming that resulted from this convening led to the creation of Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault: A Conversation Kit, which features audio clips from survivors and other experts that advocacy groups and law enforcement alike can use to generate dialogue in their presentations, trainings and counseling sessions. Sammy and I produced the kit in consultation with two area advocacy organizations.

Care practices for sharing power

Ask what to ask

Survivors helped our reporting team craft questions for law enforcement, medical staff, trauma researchers and rape crises advocates. Inviting survivors' questions demonstrated a level of respect by recognizing their expertise. It also led to questions that we wouldn't have thought of. Inviting and using stakeholder questions in your journalism shows that you are creating news with and for communities, not just about them. Be sure to circle back with answers to close the loop!

Let sources set the pace

To help community members feel comfortable and motivated to engage in the reporting process, give them the space to tell their stories in their own way and on their own schedule. Take care to avoid conveying a sense of urgency or authority, even though this is the norm for many newsrooms! When conducting interviews, let sources pick the locations and bring friends or family members to provide support. While these are considered best practices in trauma-informed reporting, they are useful for all community sources.

Offer script walk throughs

Most people have never interacted with a journalist and don't understand the potential consequences of having their statements, experiences or images made public. When possible, run key quotes or sections of your story by sources before publication or broadcast. This opens up space for helpful feedback on tone or phrasing, and helps catch inaccuracies. It also gives your sources opportunities to process the story before it goes public. This can be especially important if you are reporting about communities that are vulnerable, in conflict or feel harmed by past media coverage.

Be sure to let them know up front what kind of input you are asking for and the extent to which you (or your editor) is open to making changes. Although you might not be able to address all of their con-

cerns, or make all their suggested changes, talking them through the report shows that you care about how you are portraying their experience and the impact publishing it might have on them.

Equip collaborators to tell their own stories

If you are doing a long-form reporting project, consider teaching project collaborators how to record their own stories or conduct interviews. Whether or not you publish the content, training builds media literacy and gives people the skills to produce the stories that are important to them. This might consist of informal instructions on how to do peer interviews using cell phones, like we did, or more structured training workshops with editorial support.

Make a plan for publication

If your sources have suffered trauma, I strongly recommend that you take the time to help them create a self-care plan prior to publication. Over and over again I see how unprepared people are for the range of public (and family) responses to their stories. Usually, it's just unsettling to have your life laid bare for others, no matter how much you want your story to be told. Helping sources prepare for these and other scenarios mitigates harm and builds resilience.

Even when the response is positive, a source can become the unanticipated poster child for an issue. Other times, they struggle to navigate the fact that their experiences become the subject of conversations at work or at home. Plans to cope might include making lists of friends to call, organizations that provide support services, self-compassion practices or actions they can take to feel empowered (exercise, journaling, singing, cooking, etc.). I also like to invite sources to find images and quotes that bring them a sense of strength that they can place on their desk or nightstand as needed.

More resources about power sharing

- This Trust Kit from Trusting News is packed with information on what to go over with sources, and how to earn their confidence during the reporting process.
- The Storytellers Bill of Rights from Immigrants Rising provides a useful framework for sources, reporters and news organizations.
- The Relate Lab also uses a Storytellers Bill of Rights, and takes it one step further with an appearance release form.
- Practical Powersharing by P. Kim Bui presents a wide range of models, methods, definitions and techniques that illustrate what power sharing can look like in journalism.

Bring care into the reporting process

STEP 4

Use your power to meet needs and build bridges

Hold space, in person or virtually, for diverse stakeholders to hear different perspectives, reconsider their own views, envision solutions and consider how they can play a part. Leverage the reporting process to create relationships, networks and capacity that build community resilience beyond the project.

People often respond to invitations from the news media to get their voices heard or tell their side of a story for the public record. They understand how news organizations wield power to shape public opinion and the narratives about their work, lives and communities.

We can leverage this power to bring different groups together. That's what we did through After the Assault.

We used our convening power to hear from very different stakeholders and paid close attention to what stakeholders wanted to achieve as a result of this project. We listened carefully for the ways our reporting could make a tangible difference on the issue for each group.

There were many more needs and desired outcomes than we could accomplish in one reporting project. And many of them were beyond a public radio station's mission, like providing direct services, mandating trauma-informed training for police or changing medical exam procedures.

To focus our efforts, we identified where stakeholders' needs overlapped and which of them were in CapRadio's wheelhouse to address. We looked for the information the different groups all wanted or

needed to get their desired outcomes. Through that process, we came up with five project goals:

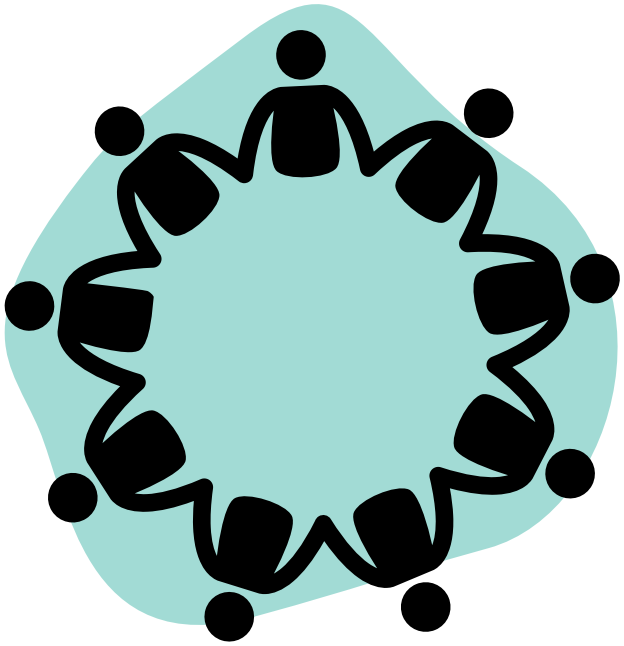
1. Survivors, their loved ones and the wider public better understand the legal reporting process, its challenges, and how to navigate the system to support survivor healing.

2. Law enforcement and the wider public have a better understanding and empathy for survivors' needs and experiences.

3. The Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) improves its approaches to the legal reporting process in Sacramento County to be a better, more trauma-informed experience for survivors.

4. Organizational stakeholders have more resources and stories to advance their goals in helping survivors heal and find justice.

5. CapRadio creates processes and platforms where stakeholders feel heard and help shape solutions to issues in the legal reporting process, building a stronger relationship with the station.



Why was this goal development process important? People feel seen on a deep level when they hear their ideas integrated into the project plan. It's a game-changer. These goals demonstrated that we not only listened to our cohorts but were centering their needs in how we proceeded with the project. And that makes people feel not just seen but supported, even cared about, whether you're a survivor, a cop, a doctor or a crisis counselor.

The goals articulated how we intended to meet our stakeholders' shared needs and measure the project's success. It spelled out what CapRadio held ourselves accountable for and what we'd be asking partners to help accomplish. Even more, it highlighted how everyone's needs are interrelated and how we could all work together. It enabled everyone to see their

It gave us a north star that everyone was behind — police, survivors, service providers, reporters. They were all invested because our success would advance their own goals.

piece as part of a bigger effort toward systems change.

In short, it gave us a north star that everyone was behind — police, survivors, service providers, reporters. They were all invested because our success would advance their own goals. Everyone cared about the project because we showed care. As Police Chief Lawrence observed, "In a world that's really so divided right now, it was really nice to see a team that really has a common goal, and you were able to meet it even though everyone had different perspectives."

Create spaces for dialogue and problem solving

Journalism organizations can also use their convening power to organize bridge-building events where people with different views gather to explore issues and discuss solutions.

Sometimes, though, it's not wise to bring people on opposing sides of an issue face-to-face, in person or virtually. That was the case for After the Assault.

Some of the survivors asked to attend the SART/LE cohort meetings to speak directly to the police. The SART/LE cohort also asked to meet with survivors to hear directly from them about their experiences. This was the only time in the project where I turned stakeholder requests down.

I thought bringing survivors together with law enforcement risked creating more harm. A few of the survivors had open cases with agencies that would be in the room, and I knew they wanted to ask specific questions that law enforcement would not be able to address in public, if at all. While law enforcement wanted to hear from survivors, I wasn't sure how they would take very pointed and angry feedback. Or how their neutral, policy-informed responses might land for survivors. I felt it could completely break down the brave

space we'd worked so hard to create with each group.

So we did something I'd never done in my participatory journalism practice: we became proxies, bringing information back and forth for each group.

With the survivor cohort, for example, we invited them to create a list of questions to ask law enforcement, and brought back answers for them to discuss. A few who experienced months-long gaps between hearing from detectives wanted to know more about the average length of time a sexual assault investigation in Sacramento County takes. Others wanted to know whether investigators were required to report back to survivors with the status of their cases, and if so how often. Data reporter Emily and Sammy continually gathered the information and presented it back during monthly survivor cohort meetings.

A couple survivors also wanted to know more about their cases, in particular where the case was in the investigation process. Emily obtained their case files, reviewed them, gathered additional information and joined Sammy to meet with these survivors individually to go over what they found.

That's how our reporting team discovered that one of the survivors, Annie Walker, had her case closed, though she had not been notified. Emily and Sammy took on the job of speaking with Annie to share the hard news, including explaining how her case had been cleared by exceptional means. As the team later reported, "Exceptional clearance is something that law enforcement agencies can use when they know who committed a crime, where that person is and have enough evidence to arrest them — but they say they can't take action for reasons outside their control…. It's a fairly specific set of circumstances, and is rarely used by law enforcement agencies." Sometimes the perpetrator dies or can't be extradited, for example.

Taking the time to meet information needs as requested, instead of producing public-facing news content to "feed the beast," is an act of care.

But Sammy and Emily's conversations with Annie led them to uncover that the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office "cleared about 81% of sexual assault cases by exceptional means in 2019, and about 57.9% in 2018. In comparison, the department cleared 13.6% of cases by arrest in 2019 and 10.8% in 2018. Walker's case was one of many cleared by exceptional means during those years." The numbers of cases that used this rationale were unusually high.

According to a SART/LE cohort member, our accountability reporting caused the sheriff's department to reconsider their use of exceptional clearance. It also motivated them to begin working more closely with Sacramento's rape crisis center to embed advocates into their legal reporting processes.

The SART/LE cohort wanted to hear from survivors about the challenges they face going through the legal reporting process and how it could be improved. We had explored some of this terrain with survivors but delved deeper with them knowing the information would be tremendously helpful to institutional stakeholders as well as to our reporting effort. We distilled what we heard into a document that spelled out survivors' suggested changes to specific steps in the legal process, and another document that compiled the ideas of both cohorts. The two documents illustrated each group's ideas, revealed commonalities and shared actionable information that SART/LE members could bring back to their departments.

It's worth pointing out that these are just Google Docs, not radio pieces, online written reports or podcast segments — our usual news products. Taking the time to meet information needs as requested, instead of producing public-facing news content to "feed the beast," is an act of care. And it ended up having a huge impact.

The Supervising Deputy District Attorney in the Adult Sexual Assault Prosecution Team, for instance, enacted virtually all of the suggested changes regarding her agency's communication with survivors. "We've come a long way for survivors, but it's very clear that there is still a long way to go… How survivors are treated, and whatever we do with every survivor, whether there's a case filed or not, has an impact in a way I didn't appreciate before," she told our project evalua-

tor. “We all have learned that the preconceived notions that each of us came in with were not the full picture, and that there were ways to look at things differently. Learning how to communicate better, but also how to hear and listen.”

The SART/LE cohort also asked to hear more audio clips with survivor voices, so we started allocating chunks of our convenings to listening and discussion.

In one SART/LE convening, after hearing survivor stories, I invited the group to brainstorm ways they could use our reporting to advance change. The police chief mentioned that he could arrange for the podcast to be used in officer training to address some of the issues and areas for improvement that the survivors identified. A detective suggested inviting the survivors to come speak at their annual training. An advocate discussed using podcast clips in her organization’s rape crisis training and counseling. Other suggestions included hosting a series of panels where survivors could ask questions of officers in a safe and moderated setting or bringing together law enforcement, advocacy groups and survivors to collaborate on a toolkit that gives survivors a road map for navigating the legal reporting system.

(The police chief ended up moving to another city but the detective did start inviting survivors to participate in her department’s annual training. The entire podcast is now required listening as part of the rape crisis center’s staff training program, and a subcommittee of the group collaborated with us to create a digital Guide to Reporting Sexual Assault in Sacramento County.)

Chief Lawrence summed up the process of listening this way: “What I gained out of this is just a reminder of how powerful, emotional and tragic some of this trauma is. And it's important that we hear that because it keeps us on track to be empathetic and making sure that we're doing the listening that we need to do.”

This is how journalists can use our convening power to build bridges that create a "third space" for community dialogue and problem solving. It's a space that's not in public, where news organizations are used to being, nor is it siloed and private, the way groups that have often had traumatic interactions often end up.

These actions and activities – from careful planning, listening and meeting information needs to holding space for people to explore challenging information and determine a way forward – are all forms of care.

"Being the liaisons between survivors and law enforcement has allowed us to transition what started as an adversarial relationship to a potentially productive one," Sammy reflected in her article published by the Kettering Foundation. "Ultimately, the project makes me a different kind of journalist, one who not only exposes what problems need to be addressed, but helps all sides find a shared space so, together, they can find solutions."

Embrace reflexivity

"Journalists are supposed to keep a distance from their sources. It's a golden rule… We're supposed to stay at arm's length," Sammy wrote in a lessons learned article about our project. "The women I interviewed for After the Assault were so open with us, so real, so relatable. I found it impossible to maintain the level and detached demeanor that I use for news reporting. I had to show them some of myself, and I had to tell them that I cared about them. It was the only way to build the trust that generated the powerful content at the heart of the project."

What Sammy is talking about here is embracing reflexivity. It's a term I first encountered in a visual anthropology class as an undergraduate student dreaming of becoming a documentary filmmaker. But it's also used in many different disciplines,

both in the social sciences and the humanities, as well as in various industries.

"The idea behind reflexivity," wrote Madeline Fink in her Everyday Anthropology blog, "is that the researcher (in this case, the anthropologist) should reflect on their identity and the role that this identity plays in the society that they are researching within." It involves, "examining your relationships with informants; the people who give you the data and insights you need for your research. It also involves taking into consideration the traits that you have, and how these traits shape the way others may see you."

In other words, how a researcher — or journalist — is perceived influences the kind of information that she gets.

This doesn't just mean things like gender, race, sexuality, faith, education and socioeconomics, though those are all important. It also includes thinking about our power and privilege in relationship to our sources, and how sources perceive that power and privilege. And it means acknowledging how all those unspoken dynamics can impact how sources feel about sharing their experiences during the reporting process and afterward. Reflexivity also offers an opportunity to consider how the journalist's own work changes the story and its outcomes.

It's not rocket science, I know, but practicing reflexivity isn't something journalists are typically taught. If anything, it's discouraged by the still dominant ethos of objectivity infusing most newsrooms and journalism schools.

Being self-reflexive — considering your role and being transparent about it — can help reporters and sources create a sense of reciprocity, that each will benefit from the interaction in a way that is meaningful. And it can help ensure that sources don't walk away feeling like you are extracting information or exploiting their trauma. In this way, reflexivity is a proactive form of care.

Survivors said that the project helped them heal from the trauma of sexual assault and the legal reporting process.

I think of reflexivity as the fruitful path between objectivity and subjectivity.

For After the Assault, we practiced reflexivity by paying attention to how we were perceived early in the process and addressing it head on.

We consistently acknowledged the power dynamics in the room: who had it and who didn't, systemic discrimination and legacies of harm. We named how we planned to address these dynamics in our journalism, even though it was often very uncomfortable.

With survivors, we talked about how we as journalists have the power to tell their stories to the public and they have the power to decide what and how much of their experience they want to include in the narrative. We discussed how our best intentions may still generate harm (which it did, as they pointed out), and invited them to direct us in how to support their healing journey during and after the reporting.

With the SART/LE cohort, we often lifted up the "defund the police" moment we were operating in, fueled by police violence, and why police might be wary to talk openly with us. We conducted all SART/LE convenings on-background to transparently shift our power from reporting on to reporting with them and create a braver space for tough conversations that they knew we'd be bringing into our reporting. In the process, law enforcement asked us to report on what was working in their efforts as well as not working to avoid giving a one-dimensional representation of their profession, which we did.

Naming the elephants in the room, like the power imbalance between a reporter and survivor or growing anti-police public sentiment, invited shared responsibility to find ways to navigate the challenges.

We engaged both the survivor and SART/LE cohorts in group building activities throughout the project as another way

to practice reflexivity. These exercises, which ranged from the silly to the serious, gave us all a chance to get to know each other beyond our titles, like journalist, survivor, cop, doctor, lawyer or activist. More importantly, the activities surfaced how we are in relationship to each other, including who had more influence than others in any given situation, differences of opinion or commonalities.

Sammy described one of these exercises in her reflection for the Center for Health Journalism:

> "One of jesikah's icebreakers involved having everyone in the room write down something that made them feel strong. They wrote things like 'faith', 'self-compassion' and 'nature'. I wrote 'leaving home.' I was in the middle of a separation from a long-term partner, and I was drawing on the cohort members for strength — whether I realized it or not. Watching them speak up and fight for change after everything they'd been through made me feel that I too could get past my (much less significant) adversity and work toward a greater good. Their courage inspired me, and I told them so.
>
> That was the most open I've ever been with my sources. It felt strange in the context of my career, but important for the open and supportive environment that jesikah created in those meetings. It was a truly safe space for them, which is not something journalists typically create. Having that space in which to share stories turned out to be a major emotional support for the survivors, and the key to the best material in the series."

I think of reflexivity as the fruitful path between objectivity and subjectivity. It invites us to put ourselves in our source's shoes to better understand their situation and attend to their hopes or concerns. It's a way to bring our full selves to our journalism and invite others to do the same.

Care practices for bridge building and problem solving

Practice identity aware care

One way to lean into reflexivity is by practicing what journalism scholar (and former reporter) Sue Robinson calls "identity aware care" in her 2023 book How Journalists Engage: A theory of trust building, identities and care. This involves journalists not just considering their race, class, and gender — and how they have been sculpted through personal, professional and civic experiences — but explicitly activating those identities as they engage with sources. One way journalists can do this, Robinson says, is by carving out 10 minutes before an interview to invite sources to ask questions and talk together about the journalism process, which most people don't understand. She recommends starting the conversation by saying, "You might want to know why I'm doing this story and why I want to speak with you. Or how I'm going to use your words."

Robinson encourages journalists to go even deeper in this pre-interview conversation by acknowledging their background and how it shapes their understanding of a story. For example, a white reporter might say to their Black interviewee: as a white person I'm never going to understand the Black experience. That's why I want to go over with you the questions I have and the story I'm thinking about, and find out what questions you have about the kind of story you think needs to be told, so that together we can report a story that is real and meaningful.

"People do not trust journalists for reasons caught up in their identities," Robinson writes. They don't believe journalists who don't look like them or who come from outside their communities really care about them. Owning and exploring your identity as part of your reporting helps others see where you are coming from and the ways you might care differently

about the topic, place or situation given your background. And it allows you to explain that you are open to new ideas when telling a story that involves them, which shows you care. Robinson says that this practice of an "identity-aware care" results in trust building.

Lean in to reciprocity

Sources often put in a lot of time to help advance our journalism. They might have their own reasons, but their participation is often emotional, unpaid labor. We can help make the effort mutually beneficial by producing information or resources that would be useful to them. That might look like an email to a source that answers a question or provides useful data. It could be creating a list of resources that a partner organization needs but doesn't have the time or know-how to create. Or it might be networking experts with one another or hosting a gathering to help people connect and share information.

Create pathways forward

When you've worked with a group over time to create a public service — a podcast, an event, a listener guide — you've helped build a network that is poised to continue collaborating for community benefit. So it's important not to just end the group when the newsroom is ready to move on to the next project. Instead, show care by organizing a wrap up meeting that addresses what, if anything, the group wants to do to continue working together. And when possible, provide resources and initial support as they transition to facilitating the effort. For example, after our After the Assault podcast series dropped, we brought the survivors together to debrief their experiences and discuss how they might move forward together. The survivors decided to continue meeting without us and identified who would coordinate the next gathering and when.

More resources on reflexivity and reciprocity

* In How Journalists Engage: A Theory of Trust Building, Identities, and Care, journalism scholar (and former reporter) Sue Robinson explains how identity aware care (a form of reflexivity in my view) builds trust, and shares ideas for how reporters can do more of it based on extensive research.

* Indigenous botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potowatomi) illustrates and celebrates the role of reciprocity in ecological systems in her article The Serviceberry and her book Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants.

* Journalism scholar (and former public radio producer) Andrea Wenzel wrote two books on how journalists can work in collaboration with communities based in reflexive reciprocity: Community-Centered Journalism: Engaging People, Exploring Solutions and Gaining Trust and Anti-Racist Journalism: The Challenge of Creating Equitable Local News.

Bring care into the reporting process

STEP 5

Create feedback loops and over communicate

Get input on your process, content or products from stakeholders and intended audiences. Decide how you will address their feedback, and then report back to them about it.

Feedback loops build trust. Collecting and responding to people's concerns and suggestions shows that you care about how your reporting reflects and impacts them, and how their contributions have made a difference in your journalism. It also shows that you prioritize answering questions they have, getting them information they need or surfacing stories they want told. In other words, they help position journalism as a public service.

Reporters don't always ask for stakeholder input or loop back to sources and collaborators unless they need to check facts, gather follow up information or share a link to the completed product. That can leave community participants feeling in the dark about how their stories will be used and what might result from their interactions with journalists.

We tried to flip that script by building feedback loops into every stage of After the Assault. While our strategies worked especially well with trauma survivors and wary law enforcement, they can be adapted to support reporting efforts with any community.

After our initial listening sessions, for instance, we generated robust convening reports for institutional stakeholders and survivors laying out what we heard, and invited their additions or corrections. We

sent the initial reports as drafts and after gathering and incorporating participant input we sent out a final version. This was a time consuming effort, like any piece of good reporting, because I had to compile, edit and provide context to make the meeting notes understandable (with thanks to Erica Anderson who did the first pass on this while interning with me). And I'll be honest, I always find this part of my job a bit tedious.

But doing the work demonstrates that you are not just listening, but also transparent about what you heard and open to changes. In our case, for instance, the Supervising Deputy District Attorney for the Adult Sexual Assault Prosecution Unit reviewed our draft report and made a handful of very technical corrections to how we had described the legal reporting process for sexual assault. Not only did that help us parse some difficult terminology, it gave her a sense that we would go the extra mile to be accurate, which she told me later made her feel more confident about participating in the project.

Early on in our meetings with the survivor cohort, we asked the women what we might do to improve the experience of getting together with reporters to share their painful stories. They told us it would lessen their anxiety if they knew the questions we planned to ask in advance.

I, maybe like you, was taught never to do this, the conventional thinking being that you don't want to "show your hand" to give yourself flexibility in the interview as well as prevent sources from scripting answers that sound leaden. It wasn't typical practice in our newsroom, but we honored their request by emailing survivors a meeting reminder a few days in advance with a sketch of what we hoped to discuss in that session. This included the broad topic and sample questions we intended

"It's one of the most important things I've ever been a part of. It's truly humbling and heartwarming to learn of the journalistic process along the way." —Aurora Jimenez, survivor cohort member

to explore with the caveat that we might go in new directions based on what felt best for the group — we wanted to be able to suggest new topics if questions occurred to us or if the group started heading into a different direction.

We discovered that sharing topics and questions in advance gave survivors a chance to decide beforehand what they wanted to talk about (or not) and emotionally prepare themselves for our time together, which they told us made them feel much more relaxed.

At all of the 21 survivor cohort gatherings, we took detailed notes on a Google Doc (here's an example with feedback loops in the notes!) and then sent them to members afterward for review and comment. Survivors told us that this really helped them feel like they didn't need to take notes themselves and that they'd be able to track conversations across our meetings, or if they had to miss one. It gave them a record that could access at any time of what we'd discussed. And it gave us a way to point back to ideas that we heard and were folding into our expert interviews and scripts.

This task ended up actually taking a lot of my time and after the first year of working together we asked the group if they felt they still found receiving detailed meetings notes very useful. They told us that, in fact, they had pretty much stopped reading them since they trusted us with their stories and felt comfortable with our process. That allowed me to spend less time on something that felt a bit tedious and more time on other project needs. I'm so glad we asked for this feedback!

We also emailed meeting reminders and shared meeting notes back with the SART/LE cohort for input and then closed the loop at the next meeting by thanking

them for their input and going over any suggested changes. With the SART/LE group, who in many ways were more wary of journalists and our process, we used Jamboards to create our meeting notes with transparency, and also to make them shareable with colleagues and public information officers. (Here's an example of a meeting Jamboard.)

We created mechanisms for the SART/LE stakeholders to give input in between meetings, including a Google Doc where they gave input on the podcast outline and episode descriptions, and invited clarifications on convening notes.

Before publishing our Digital Guide to Reporting Sexual Assault in Sacramento County, we invited survivors to user-test it and incorporated their feedback to help ensure that it met their stated information needs. Half of the survivors participated in this user testing and their input was key to making changes that made the guide more accessible, supportive and used the least harmful language. We were really concerned about asking survivors to take on the additional emotional labor involved in this user testing. We knew that it was triggering, on some level, every time that they interacted with us. But they told us that reviewing the resource guide gave them the sense that they were meeting their project goal of helping other survivors. As one woman put it: "It is honestly the exact kind of resource that I had hoped existed when I first reported."

As part of crafting Supporting Sexual Assault Survivors: A Conversation Kit, we organized a meeting with area advocacy groups to workshop the kinds of stories and resources their organizations needed to help survivors heal and find justice. We

"A great thing about this setup was you guys, as a media outlet, taking the time to hear all sides of the story. You're not just focusing on a victim or law enforcement or advocates, you're weaving them together."
—Sergeant Eric Dias

had previously convened some of these organizations, but the majority were from BIPOC and trans serving groups whose voices we felt had been underheard in our process. We then worked more closely with three of these groups to identify the most useful content and structure to make it easy to fold into their training programs and community presentations. The three groups reviewed a final draft, catching a few spots that needed more or better context. We sent the final kit and a thank you note to all the organizations we connected with throughout the project and encouraged everyone to share it with their networks.

We also circled back to the advocacy organizations to co-create the Support Organization section of Digital Guide to Reporting Sexual Assault in Sacramento County. Digital guides require brevity, so we had to summarize these group's missions and services in one sentence. That's a tall order with a wide berth to get it wrong. So we sent a draft to the groups so they could see how we represented them, offer edits and let us know if there are other groups we should include. This not only built interest in using the guide but conveyed our respect for their work and how it gets framed to the public.

Like so many other feedback tasks we took on, it took additional time and felt a bit edgy: What would we do if they came back at us with requests we couldn't handle or suggestions that didn't fit? But that didn't happen, in part because we were transparent about our editing process and the word count. It also helped that we had built a track record of listening and incorporating requests when possible, and communicating when we chose not to and why.

Feedback loops are a tradeoff. They take time, effort and a degree of emotional availability. But they result in insights and impacts you wouldn't otherwise get. And most importantly, they build trust.

Care practices for project communication

Provide updates

Keep collaborators apprised of what you're up to, whether it's data you're collecting, an interview you've done or even conversations you are having in your newsroom. It gives people the sense that you are following through and builds understanding of the journalism process. This is particularly important if the story angle shifts or there are important new developments. You can do this informally, via an occasional text or email to a source, or make it a regular practice like sending a monthly project round up to everyone involved. The more consistent your communication, the more people feel acknowledged, valued and in the loop, which not only builds rapport but also provides opportunities for corrections, additions and tips.

Honor commitments

Newsroom culture is often very fluid, with everyone buying into the norm of shifting priorities and meeting times depending on what's emerging. That's not usually the case with community members, who are typically taking time off of work, family or personal schedules to meet with us. If they've set aside time to talk to you, they've probably spent some mental energy preparing for it. This is especially true for people who have been harmed and might feel reluctant to talk. That's why it's important to keep appointments with them, even when editors suggest otherwise. Making game day changes can signal a lack of respect for their time. If you do hit a snag or the story gets put on pause, tell your sources what's happening and why. Invite them to discuss options and articulate their concerns. This shows them that they can count on

you to be open and take their needs into account when the project hits bumps.

Go beyond informed consent

People who talk with reporters usually want to tell their story to help others or feel heard. But they often aren't fully aware of the possible consequences, whether that's becoming a beloved local hero, a target of criticism or just feeling exposed in ways they hadn't foreseen. That's why it's important, especially with vulnerable people, to talk with them about how their image, voice or information could be used in your reporting and on what platforms. Explain the difference between being on the record, on background or anonymous. Make clear your newsroom's editorial policies about corrections or removing personal information after publication. Ask about any concerns that they have and share ideas on how you might address them. For those who have experienced trauma related to the topic you are reporting on, help them prepare for their private experiences to be shared publicly by letting them know publication dates, linking them with resources for professional support and encouraging them to make a self-care plan. If at any time your sources decide they would prefer not to be included in your reporting, honor their wishes and remove their information.

Share back learnings

Share what you learn and what you'll do with that information back with sources, partners and networks. Share notes that list out responses to questions or surveys, from group meetings, or production outlines and calendars. Give sources what you know, regardless of if it will be part of your published or broadcasted report.

For example, at the end of your first meeting with potential collaborators you might ask: what would keep you motivated to continue participating in this project? You could then compile and share back responses, pointing out ways you plan to incorporate their ideas into the project process. Or you could ask: what would success look like for this project? And then gather and report back what you discovered and how you plan to fold their ideas into your project goal setting.

More resources on creating feedback loops

- This primer from the Community Roundtable lays out how to create a positive feedback loop in simple four steps.
- Listen4Good recommends a five-step process for creating feedback loops to improve a non-profit's services while building community.

Evolving our journalism – with care

I've poured myself into creating this guide as a way of answering some big questions for myself, and I hope to offer something back to the field in the process.

That's why I nerd out on evaluation. It's a way to figure out if and how our methods work, and what difference it all makes. Like journalism, evaluation is best as a structured process guided by a code of ethics to explore questions and report learnings.

For After the Assault, I worked with our development department early on to fundraise and hire project evaluator Dr. Yve Suskind. Yve practices developmental evaluation and worked with Journalism That Matters on a handful of evaluation initiatives, including the creation of a civic communications framework.

Evaluating a two year, multi-platform reporting project like After the Assault can be costly. Like most newsrooms, we needed an evaluation that we could afford. We also needed an evaluator who would work in close collaboration with me to ensure that participants felt safe to share their reflections and to help interpret what we were learning.

Yve helped narrow the scope of the evaluation to what was most important to the ongoing development of participatory journalism at CapRadio for $16,000. Dividing up evaluation activities between us helped lower the cost. We collaborated on evaluation planning and developing tools while I took on tasks like administering surveys, running focus groups, creating accurate transcriptions, compiling data and scheduling logistics. Yve did the coding, data analysis and synthesis of initial findings. We partnered on making sense of what the findings meant and then Yve led on the report writing. If your newsroom is hard pressed to raise the kind of funds most evaluators charge, limiting the

scope and sharing tasks is a creative way to do it on a budget.

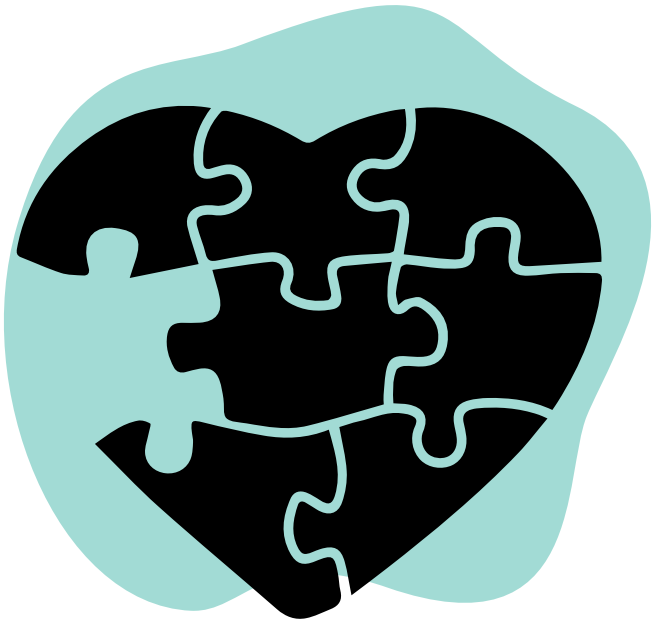
The After the Assault evaluation is a newsroom leader's dream. It offers an outsiders' perspective on the impact of the effort, and documents the processes we built.

My key takeaway from the report: it was the care we took in listening, building trust, collaborating, power sharing and communicating that resulted in:

- Content that key stakeholders and public radio audiences find compelling, important, eye-opening, empathetic, destigmatizing, inclusive, accurate and practical;
- Healing, empowerment and a sense of justice for those most impacted by traumatizing, difficult social issues;
- New connections across civic networks that strengthen possibilities for ongoing systemic change;
- Meaningful steps toward institutional changes necessary for solutions;
- Changes to newsroom culture and practices that simultaneously support quality journalism and demonstrable community benefit.

Survivor cohort members said that being involved in the project helped them heal from the trauma of sexual assault and the legal reporting process. Equally important, they gained a more expansive sense of justice through their role as project co-creators. Rather than being trapped by the unachievable belief that justice necessitated that their perpetrator would be found guilty in court, survivors now saw that justice could take different forms, including their own role in fixing the justice system.

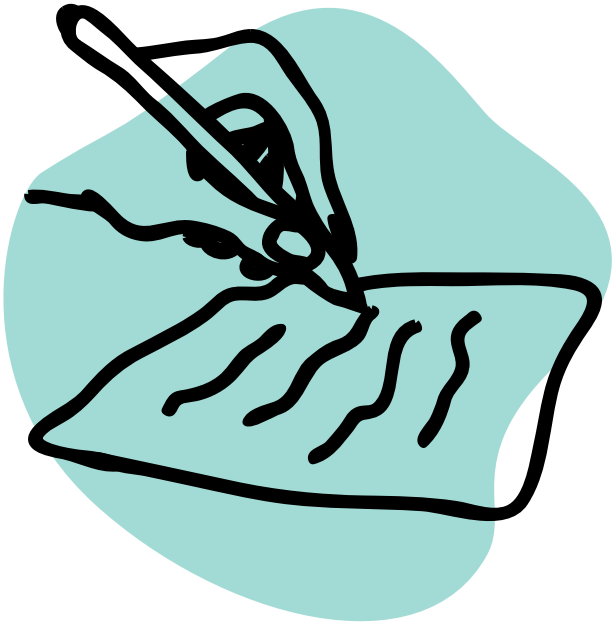
One woman put it this way: "The justice system doesn't ever really set things right. You can have a trial and a sentence and then someone gets punished, but that doesn't right anything. But through



this project, things can actually be righted. And so I think this project for me represents the best that I can get at moving toward justice."

Regional advocacy groups told us the project not only met critical information needs, but also improved communication between advocates and law enforcement. Several described a new shared understanding about what survivors experience when reporting their assault where there had been previous disregard and divides.

Institutional changes have been made as well. WEAVE, Sacramento's rape crisis center, now requires all new volunteer and paid staff to listen to the entire After the Assault podcast and a deputy attorney uses it to onboard new attorneys who will be working with survivors. And three police departments started developing new trainings as a result of the project.



Moving toward practicing care in journalism

We know a lot about what our communities in Sacramento did because of After the Assault. The question is: what do we as journalists do with this information? We know practicing care makes good on the promise of public service journalism on multiple levels, but it is time and resource intensive. It might require different skills and approaches than most newsrooms are used to.

I think every reporter and editor has to answer that question for themselves, since we all come from different backgrounds and work in different contexts. Newsroom managers, though, could lead discussions on what an "ethic of care" looks like now in their journalism. What newsroom norms could we shift in order to build more care into our workflows? What would success look and feel like? Just as many of us have done recently with source diversity audits and building

more meaningful diversity and inclusion practices, we can all play a role in improving our journalism by practicing more care and finding ways to formalize and resource it.

And let me say here that you don't need a participatory journalism specialist like me or a community engagement reporter like Sammy to do care-centered journalism. Nor do you need a ton of funding or a wholesale change in newsroom culture. What you do need, though, is a champion. Someone with decision-making authority who genuinely embraces centering care as a core approach to journalism and is willing to remove blockers to head in this direction.

Yve and I came up with a handful of recommendations based on evaluating After the Assault. Here are three that stick with me. They all relate to something that inevitably arises doing this participatory journalism: the tension between providing information and providing a direct service.

- Doing community-centered reporting is not just assessing people's information needs and how we meet them. It also considers communities' experience with that information. This kind of journalism creates experiences like being seen, heard and supported, the sense of feeling attended to, considered and consulted. Communities should feel that their stories and legacies matter, that they have value.

- These experience needs aren't usually articulated, but they determine why and how people talk to us and what they say or don't say. They shape how we build trust together and co-create a way forward.

- Bringing care into every step of the reporting process helps meet these experience needs. And in meeting people's experience needs, we build the kinds of relationships that enable us to effectively meet their information needs. That's the take home message of this guide.

But there is another, tougher nut to crack. What happens when we succeed? What happens after we've created buy-in from partners to leverage our reporting in new, maybe untraditional ways?

By the time our podcast dropped, project collaborators were energized to push forward a range of direct services, including providing new materials to Sacramento County patrol

officers, setting up a survivors speakers bureau and hosting a "solutions summit." And our reporting team was perfectly positioned to help manifest these services.

But our newsroom and marketing department were pivoting to the next project on their list. No amount of my advocating to keep the project going worked. I watched all our momentum, everything we'd all been working toward, all that possibility, just fizzle out on our end.

It felt like running top speed into a brick wall.

Which brings me to sharing some hard-earned lessons.

- **Create a community-based, cross-department distribution plan.** It's important to plan, but also to realize that when you involve stakeholders, you might need to change your plans for distribution of a project. You might even find that the co-creative process leads to products that were not part of the original plan to begin with. Create workflow flexibility so that the reporting team can collaborate with other departments and community partners to design effective mechanisms beyond station channels for outreach and distribution.
- **Adopt organizational structures that allow projects to have a "long tail."** Think of publication as the mid-point, instead of the end-point, of a reporting project. When a report is published or broadcast is precisely when you usually have created the relationships and partnerships to leverage your reporting into products and forums that can really move the needle. Give these projects a flexible end point. Structure workflows to allow the reporting team to support stakeholders' needs that might extend beyond the reporting phase of the project. Some of the work of this "long-tail" may require flexibility in other departments as well (e.g., marketing, product development). Or it

might be giving reporters or engagement specialists time to transition the networks they helped build to become self-managed, or to close out well.

This means newsrooms need to build in some flexibility in timelines, staff assignments, editorial vision and products. That is a BIG ask, I know, which is why it's crucial to discuss and design for it from the get-go.

Turning news into a regenerative resource

After college, I was told that I didn't belong in journalism. So instead of focusing on typical newsgathering, I set out to learn things that would help me do the empowering, participatory storytelling I believed in. I learned about facilitation, group process, collaboration and organizing.

After the Assault enabled me to bring all of those non-traditional reporting skills into a "capital J" journalism project. It was the ultimate do-over. I got the chance to direct a journalism project in the way I was told was "tainted" all those years ago. That healed a rift I'd always felt between how and why I wanted to tell stories and what being a journalist entailed.

That's not to say it didn't feel hard the whole way through. Co-creating journalism with people on the frontlines of a wicked issue is tough. There is no way around that. And not just because it goes against the grain of most newsroom habits. Holding space for brave conversations among stakeholders with very different perspectives takes a lot of emotional energy. Threading the needle between the needs of your newsroom and the needs of your collaborators requires on-going attention, as the goals and resources for all parties often shift during the reporting process.

Helping people feel cared for and, in turn, helping them to care about themselves, others and the wider world is a double helix that propels the sense of connection, belonging, healing and hope.

And supporting reporters and editors while they lean into reflexivity or try out new care practices takes patience and perseverance. But I think all of these challenges will become less difficult with more practice.

These are new muscles I'm building — maybe new muscles you are building too.

Care-centered journalism will always require more time, intention and attention than other kinds of reporting, but I think that doing this work will become easier and more supported over time, especially when we are reporting on traumatic events.

And the rewards will be off the charts.

I think journalism is for making the world a better place, especially for people who've been marginalized by unjust systems. That's what called me to the field in the first place.

What's new is my understanding of the magnitude of what's possible when journalism goes beyond reporting. When our work not only expands understanding or builds empathy, but shares power and builds bridges, when we sustain that work even when it's not directly producing content.

Most of all, I've realized that it all comes down to care. Helping people feel cared for and, in turn, helping them to care about themselves, others, the place they call home and the wider world. It's a double helix that propels the sense of connection, belonging, healing and hope that ripples out. Care is a renewable resource.

That's why centering care in our reporting process is so important. It's regenerative. Care practices help restore what feels missing or broken, revitalizing civic engagement and invigorating our appetite for change.

Writing this guide got me to figure out why I think care is so important in our reporting process and start articulating ways to go about it. There is a lot more for me to figure out as I keep learning from other scholars, journalists and civic media practitioners who geek out on care theories and practices. I look forward to delving deeper and continuing the exploration.

In the meantime, I hope that this guide helps you move deeper toward your own understanding and practice of care in journalism.