

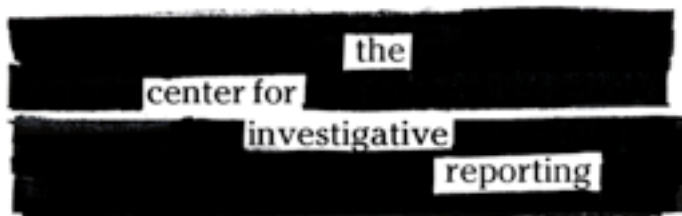
From Storytelling to Solutions: Why Capital Public Radio is Embracing Community Engagement



CAPRADIO.ORG/HUNGER

Bringing the community together to share stories and experiences.

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How do we more deeply involve the **public** in ***public media***?

What happens when a public radio station engages with a community – not necessarily its core audience – to help inform, steer, and develop stories? This is the question Capital Public Radio explored over the past two years, with great success. While station leadership recognizes the ethical challenges community engagement poses with regard to upholding journalistic principles, they have worked through these difficulties to create a framework for this type of work that strengthens community networks, results in real changes in CapRadio audiences, and enhances the station's content production.

Capital Public Radio's award-winning multimedia documentary series, *The View From Here* (TVFH), has historically produced one-hour public radio documentaries, with accompanying long-form articles published online. However, CapRadio

leadership, including Senior Editor for Innovation and TVFH producer Catherine Stifter, had a strong desire to make the program more inclusive and based on deeper public engagement.

In striving to be a public media station that represents the diverse public of the greater Sacramento region, CapRadio contracted with participatory media maker jesikah maria ross in the summer of 2014 to further explore ways to integrate community engagement (CE) into the documentary radio production process. In this evaluation, we will consider the transformative influence of the Hidden Hunger¹ project on participants, CapRadio's audience and on the station itself.

¹ When we refer to Hidden Hunger, we are talking about the project as a whole. Particular CapRadio broadcast programs and/or segments will be italicized throughout.



The Challenge:

Hunger in Sacramento County

Despite Sacramento County's agricultural abundance, hunger is a central issue for an estimated 245,000 households in the region, including 88,000 children. Each day, 50,000 residents in Sacramento County struggle to find their next meal. From July 2014 through July 2015, CapRadio worked together with community partners to address this challenge through the Hidden Hunger project. This project tells stories of people who face food insecurity and those working to alleviate hunger through deep community engagement, extensive content production and public events.

CapRadio engaged with a diverse group of community stakeholders working to alleviate hunger in Sacramento County to determine the community's information needs with regard to hunger, define project goals, and develop strategies for content production, distribution, and engagement. CapRadio defines community engagement as working collaboratively to discover, understand, and voice community needs, concerns and aspirations.

***Community engagement:
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Ultimately, the Hidden Hunger project has:

- **Strengthened relationships** among CapRadio, the community, and the station's audience;
- **Increased awareness** about hunger in Sacramento County;
- **Catalyzed new alliances** among previously siloed anti-hunger groups and **strengthened existing networks** working to reduce hunger in Sacramento County;
- Established **community engagement as an integral component** of both documentary projects and Capital Public Radio's broader mission; and
- **Generated a model and methods** for engaged journalism that can contribute to real world change.



Project Outcomes

Capital Public Radio's Hidden Hunger project is a model for community engagement before, during, and after the traditional reporting process. It serves as an example for how a news organization can partner with community members and community-based organizations to develop deeply reported, informative, emotionally captivating, and impactful content.

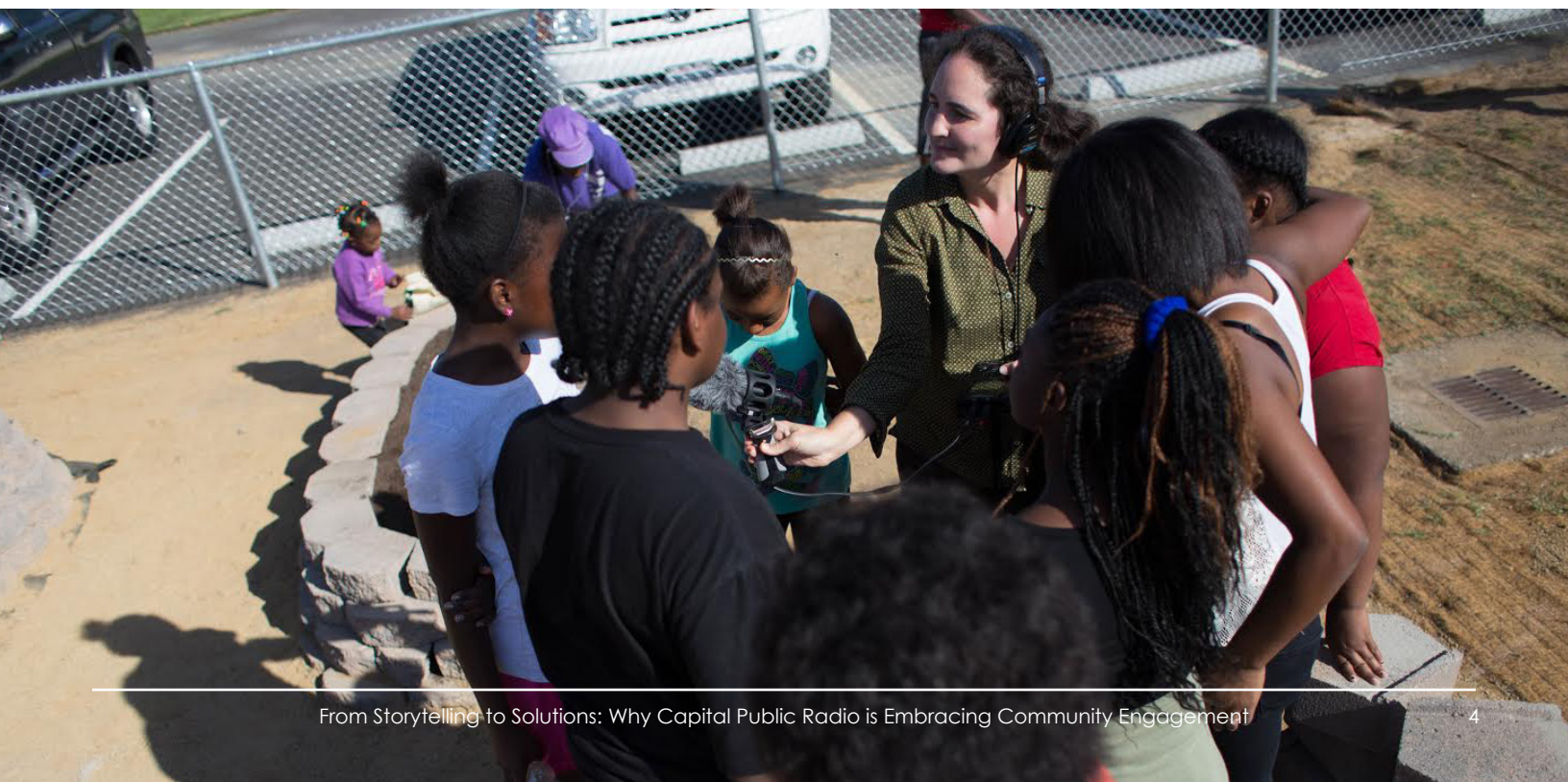
This model and the lessons it provides can serve as a starting point for continued and deepened community engagement at CapRadio. However, this model requires an investment in human and material resources dedicated to community engagement, as well as a unique mindset that values community partnerships.

The model can also serve to inform the current national conversation about the role of journalism – and particularly of public media – in a participatory media era. Specifically, this project is an example of a process through which journalists

can help surface community level solutions to pressing civic issues.

During the Hidden Hunger project, CapRadio participated as an equal partner with community organizations and networks focused on addressing hunger in Sacramento County to shape the story that the station ultimately told through its high quality audio productions. Furthermore, CapRadio invited community members to tell their own stories through the [Hidden Hunger Storybooth](#).

By highlighting voices, organizations, and experiences not often broadcast on public radio airwaves, CapRadio demonstrated to community members that it is a station striving to be truly public, in the deepest sense of the word. This effort increased trust and deepened relationships between CapRadio and its audiences, both old and new.



CapRadio's community engagement included in-person events. At these events, CapRadio generated new networks by linking previously disparate communities. These networks of policymakers, business leaders, local residents, CapRadio listeners, and community leaders are now working together to address hunger in Sacramento County.

And the increased awareness and discussion of solutions has led to real world change, as exemplified by the case of John Still K-8 school. In this case, CapRadio's audience has taken action to contribute to solving the problem of hunger in their community and developed strong, collaborative relationships that span cultural, economic, and racial divides.

Through this process, CapRadio has designed an effective mobile storybooth unit and process, elaborated a strategy and methodology for hosting dynamic public conversations, and proactively worked to assess the successes and challenges associated with community engagement. In fact, the response from the community and the station's experience has been so overwhelmingly positive that CapRadio has rebranded its documentary unit to reflect the value of community engagement.

To ensure CapRadio's continued success in developing and implementing community engagement we recommend the following:

1. Continue commitment to CapRadio's community engagement and allocate resources to this endeavor.
2. Involve CapRadio staff reporters more deeply in community engagement.
3. Broadly communicate CapRadio's model of community engagement with the Sacramento community and beyond.
4. Report on more solutions.
5. Engage in the national conversation and field building around community engagement.

Capital Public Radio Community Engagement



