



## Barclay Information Ecosystem Assessment March 2017

### I. Introduction

The goal of the Baltimore Information Ecosystem Assessment is to uncover the underlying information and community needs in one Baltimore neighborhood. **The project aims to identify opportunities to support communities and media producers to (1) provide communities with the information they need on an ongoing basis and (2) sustainably elevate community voices, through media, in conversations and collective problem solving about the future of the city.**

This research, focused on one neighborhood in Barclay, sought to answer two questions: (1) Are Barclay residents getting the information that they need through the local media and information sources they have access to? (2) Do Barclay residents have the opportunity to make their voices heard and to shape the information and conversations in and about their community? In local media and information sources?

Media engagement strategies are a critical tool that can provide communities with information they need and can move key community stakeholders from low to high levels of engagement, visibility and participation in the narrative and conversations about the city's future. Current information needs in Baltimore include core topics like policing, housing, and gun violence. Those issues are being debated at the city, state, and national level, as leaders consider approaches and resources to address these underlying problems.

Rather than working with a single organization or media institution, we conducted this survey with a team of researchers and sought to interview and speak with a variety of media producers and community groups. We selected Barclay as a focal point because of its vibrant and diverse community groups; the fact that it is a part of the city seeing lots of housing and infrastructure development and thus a critical place to understand if and how community voices are being incorporated into decision-making; its central location; and the services (such as Parole and Probation) that are located in Barclay and bring people from across the city into or through the neighborhood.

## **II. About Barclay**

Barclay has a total population of 3,810. More than one third of its residents are between the ages of 18 and 24, which is nearly three times the average for Baltimore City:<sup>1</sup>

	Barclay	Baltimore City
0-17	8.3%	21.6%
18-24	33.9%	12.5%
25-44	30.7%	28.8%
45-64	19.9%	25.2%
65+	7.2%	11.8%

**The median Household Income for the neighborhood is \$30, 311** (vs. \$44,165 for Baltimore City), and Barclay has a higher percentage population living below the poverty level than the Baltimore City average (37.1% in Barclay vs 22.9% in Baltimore City). The percentage of single-mother households is higher than the Baltimore City average (29.5% vs. 19.75%), while the average value of homes in Barclay is lower than the Baltimore City average \$63,567 (vs. \$172,409 for Baltimore City). In terms of educational attainment, Barclay has a higher percentage population that has not completed High school than the Baltimore average, and a lower than average percent population that has completed High school:

	Barclay Average	Baltimore Average
Less than Highschool	27.7%	15.3%
Highschool or Equivalent	14.7%	29.9%
Less than 1 year College	4.8%	5.2%
1 or more year of College	16.7%	15.2%
Associate Degree	8%	4.5%
Bachelor's Degree	15%	16.6%

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Barclay-Baltimore-MD.html>

### **III. Methodology**

This research combines quantitative data collection (surveys and background data) with qualitative in-depth interviews with key influencers as well as a focus group. Barclay was selected because of its relatively central location, the existence of several key state institutions in the neighborhood (meaning it has a high volume of human traffic in and out and therefore interaction with people from other neighborhoods), and because it has ongoing development initiatives. The high volume of human traffic in and out of the neighborhood made it difficult to get interviews/surveys with just residents.

**Surveys:** For this research, we surveyed a total of fifty-two respondents in the Barclay area. Of the respondents, some lived in Barclay while others were passing through, lived nearby, or said they came to Barclay regularly. Critical to note is that while one of the reasons we selected Barclay was for the large volume of human traffic in and out of the neighborhood in comparison to other Baltimore neighborhoods (because of key services, from clinics to Parole and Probation, located in Barclay), this made it difficult to limit our surveys to only residents of Barclay.

**Key Influencer Interviews Summary:** We interviewed key influencers, including news producers, community leaders, and one state legislator. We conducted a total of eleven key influencers (seven community leaders, three news producers, and a state legislator).

**Focus Group Summary:** A focus group was held at the Nate Tatum Center in Barclay. The focus group was mostly older residents who are engaged in the community.

**Staffing:** In order to conduct this research, we assembled a team of researchers with different skills and social capital. The team included (1) Rachel Brown, Director of Sisi ni Amani International and Meryam Bouadjemi, founder of Jean Hill Studios, who has extensive experience in media production and working in different communities, led the project; (2) two students, from MICA and Morgan State, studying journalism, helped conduct surveys and interviews; and (3) a community leader and organizer, Muhammad Najee-ullah, conducted surveys and interviews. This team enabled us to gain access and insight to a variety of groups. Both Muhammad Najee-ullah, and Meryam Bouadjemi had access to significant social capital which was a tremendous asset to the project and created access to several key interviewees. At the same time, working with students outside the structure of a class or internship (and rather, as independent contractors), proved challenging: this project was not a priority for them, and they often missed deadlines or had competing class priorities. While their skillsets were valuable, we suggest adding a layer of accountability when engaging students in the future by working through partnerships with Professors or specific courses and tying the project to their schoolwork.

### **IV. Information Landscape**

*Access to Information: Broadband and Connectivity*

Barclay is a predominantly black neighborhood where over a third of the residents live below the poverty line. Based on a [PEW report](#) published in January 2017 that studied the issue of connectivity using those demographic indicators, we can infer that residents of Barclay enjoy far lower access to broadband than the national average.

Percentage of US adults who are home broadband users, by race:

White	Black	Hispanic
78%	65%	58%

Percentage of US adults who are home broadband users, by income:\*

Less than \$30,000	\$30,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999
53%	71%	83%

\*Note: Barclay **median** income is \$30,311 and 37.1% of individuals **live below the poverty line**. We can therefore infer that 50-30% of Barclay residents do not have access to home broadband. A different study conducted by PEW found that households earning less than \$30,000 were more than 8 times more likely than affluent adults to not use the internet.

Percentage of US adults who are home broadband users, by education level:

Less than high school	High school graduate	Some college	College Graduate
34%	62%	80%	91%

\*Note: 42.4% of Barclay residents have either not completed or only completed high school, whereas only 15% have completed college.

[Access to Information: Smartphone Access<sup>2</sup>](#)

While smartphone adoption (and therefore connectivity access) paints a slightly better picture, individuals that fall along Barclay’s demographic lines still enjoy less access than the national average.

Percentage of US adults who own a smartphone, by income:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/>

Less than \$30,000	\$30,000-\$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999
64%	74%	83%

Percentage of US adults who own a smartphone, by education level:

Less than high school	High school graduate	Some college	College Graduate
54%	69%	80%	89%

In terms of print media, several newspapers serve Baltimore. This includes The Afro Newspaper (with local and national news, it is the oldest Black, family-owned newspaper in the country), the Baltimore Sun, Baltimore Gay Life, Baltimore Out Loud, City Paper (scheduled to shut-down by end of 2017), The Daily Record (which gives statewide business, government, and legal information), The Jewish Times, and Press Box (with local sports News).<sup>3</sup> The Baltimore Sun readership is 706,619 on Sundays and 368,084 daily. The readership is 45% male and 55% female, with 63% of readers having a college education or more. 331,259 readers have a Household Income of \$75,000 or more, while 30% of readers have a Household Income of \$100,000 or more.<sup>4</sup> There are also several magazines in Baltimore: Baltimore’s Child (a monthly magazine serving parents), Baltimore Magazine, Baltimore Style, JHU Gazette (a monthly Johns Hopkins publication distributed on campuses) and SoBo Voice (a magazine that “supports the diverse and growing South Baltimore Peninsula area which is among the city and region’s most affluent and well-educated communities in Maryland”).<sup>5</sup> Finally, there are a variety of blogs and online magazines serving Baltimore. Many are run by local organizations and/or focus on specific topics. This includes Audacious Ideas, Authentic Baltimore, Baltimore Brew, Baltimore Fishbowl, Downtown Baltimore Family Alliance Blog, Gutter Magazine, Radar Redux, Technical.ly Baltimore, and What Weekly. See Appendix A for further description of each of these blogs and online magazines.

**V. Information Production & Movement**

Our interviews covered multiple types of media outlets. We spoke with Laura Smitherman, at the time an Assistant Managing Editor at the Baltimore Sun, Omar Jimenez of WBAL TV, and Aaron Henkin of WYPR and the show *Out of the Blocks*. We noted that different outlets have different motivations and constraints. Overall, with the exception of in-depth efforts to understand particular communities from a narrative perspective, we did not find structured and continuous community engagement. In addition, news stories are identified through existing networks – whether community sources or simply individuals’ social networks, meaning that

<sup>3</sup> <https://livebaltimore.com/city-living-essentials/local-media/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://placeanad.baltimoresun.com/announcements>

<sup>5</sup> <https://livebaltimore.com/city-living-essentials/local-media/>

stories may be biased towards issues that are relevant to reporters' own demographic and social groups.

One interviewee noted that community engagement, while considered a plus, was not considered a priority, with the exception of cultivating sources. One suggestion was that more quantitative information that could help segment and understand different groups within the "community," which is often treated as a homogenous group, would be helpful. While news producers often get "both" sides of a story – for example, if there is a shooting, they will interview someone to represent a police perspective and someone from the community for a community perspective – the treatment of the community as a homogenous group may lead to a lack of perspectives. More quantitative data through things like community polling (for example, a breakdown of the percentage of community members with different opinions) could be the quickest way for community opinions to gain reference and exposure in major stories. Online programming, such as Facebook Live streaming and engagement strategies like polls and questionnaires, provides additional opportunities for engagement.

In terms of openings within mainstream media production, different shows/times of day may offer more opportunities for proactive reporting and the highlighting of community voices and perspectives. For example, at WYPR, we discussed the radio station's programming in general and the *Out of the Blocks* program in particular. Mid-Day is a live show five days a week, and in terms of how they find stories, the producers "have a voracious news diet" and are plugged into the non-profit PR community. On the Record is also five days a week and is pre-recorded. Across producers, there is also special programming. For example, Omar from WBAL did a special series on "Dirty Jobs." Opportunities for this type of special initiative are interspersed throughout the year, and may be especially encouraged during Sweeps Week in February, May, July, and November.

In terms of how stories are identified and built, one news producer we spoke with noted that he wished his outlet found stories in a more scientific way, but that it's more random than that. He said he keeps his ear to the ground and people approach him with stories, for example at the grocery store. Another interviewee explained that, in general, despite efforts to balance programming to include stories about local issues in neighborhoods, it is a challenge to diversify the audience. In other words, there was an attempt to diversify stories and the voices being amplified through the media, but there was a lack of successful strategies to diversify the audience.

*Out of the Blocks* tells stories, focusing on a geographic location and community rather than an issue area. At the same time, by staying in a community over a long period of time (1-2 months) for a single episode, Aaron builds relationships and gains credibility. He said he starts with the people who are more willing to talk to him. Then people start to see that he knows some people, and are more willing to talk to him; he gets introduced by the people he already knows; then eventually he reaches key influencers who get him more fully into the door. This trust building takes a long time. He noted that his partner Wendel Patrick takes portraits of each of the people on the block, so as he starts showing photos and portraits, it also gets people excited. He also

noted that his program, *Out of the Blocks*, attracted listeners from the blocks where the stories were told, as people were excited to hear themselves on air.

The Baltimore Sun does in-depth community coverage, including a recent story about collateral damage of violence for children, for which they had a community meeting with more than 300 people in attendance. This included pastors, lawmakers, and community groups focused on the issue. They also published a series on [rent court](#) in 2017 that included a variety of online and offline outreach strategies to connect with communities around Baltimore.

Overall, in our interviews, we noticed that stories tend to be produced based on the sources that journalists have access to. While this is in some ways democratizing – normal citizens can pitch stories – it is also inherently biased in that it biases the stories and knowledge of people who live in the same social, economic, and geographical spheres as news producers.

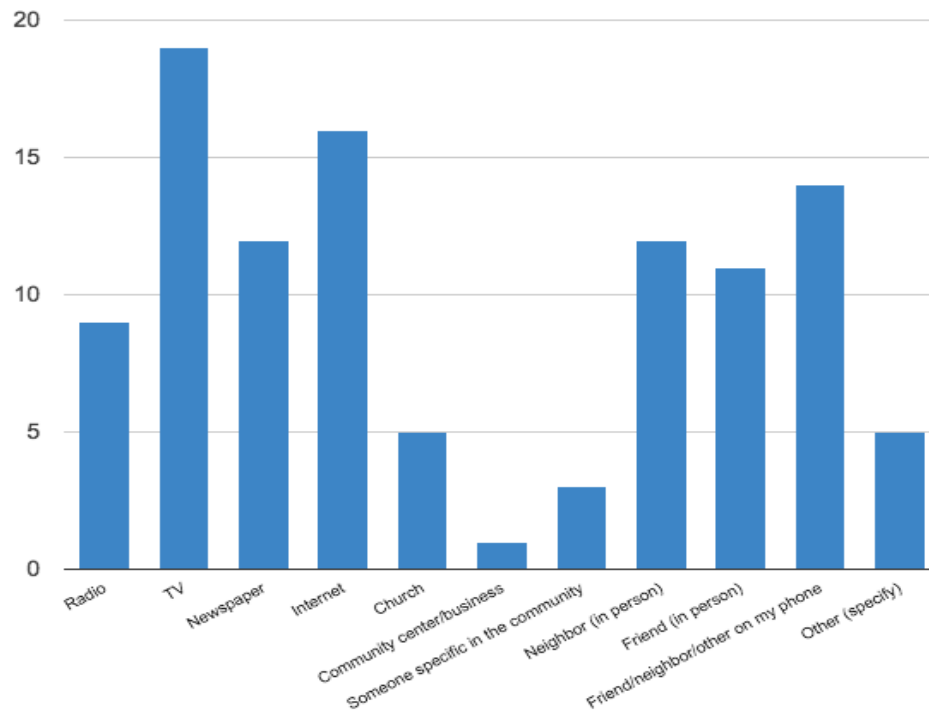
Finally, news is also produced at the very local level: the Nate Tatum Center provides residents with several types of information. They advertise their own events and activities through things like flyers, but also often make flyers for services and events that other organizations in the area are providing. For example, they printed up information on opportunities for seniors. They also do a quarterly newsletter and make a monthly calendar of events. Sometimes, they even create a “News You Can Use” newsletter for the community. This summer, they plan to write about garbage disposal and youth activities. A news start-up called [United News Network](#) seeks to shed positive light on Baltimore communities and local solutions, and, according to its co-owner, gets community support and buy-in when they explain that they are an alternative to mainstream media and aim to be a news organization for the people, to tell news that other organizations overlook, and share positive things that are going on in the community.

## **VI. Information Access & Consumption**

### **Sources of Information**

**Word of Mouth, Neighbors, and Community Spaces:** Word of mouth appears to be a prevalent main source of information. In the survey, television, newspaper, and the internet were the most mentioned when it came to mainstream news. Friends and neighbors in person or by phone, when combined, are by far the most common way that people get information, emphasizing the importance of local media:

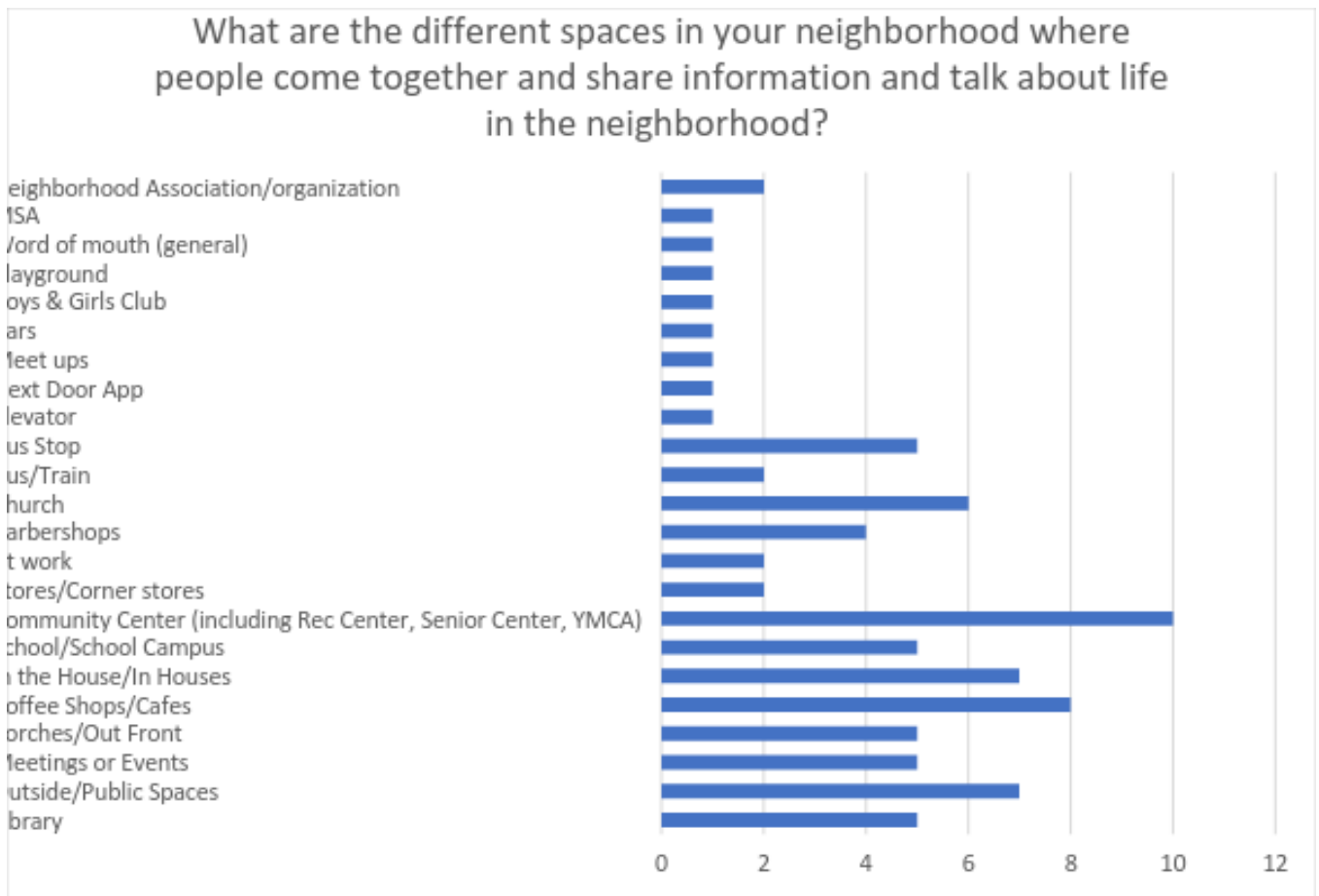
**Where do you get news about your community in general?**



Our researchers observed that people seemed to find out about news happening around the city from TV and radio stations, while they learned of more local or intimate happenings on social media or by word of mouth. Participants in the focus group got their news through mainstream media (television came up often), but got information about the community through their neighbors, family, and friends, and from the community center where the focus group was held. When prompted about how they shared this information, phone calls and in person conversations were two of the main ways mentioned. Many participants also mentioned that their children or grandchildren would look things up online (through Google).

In terms of where people commonly meet and discuss news and information, places that appeared prominently were on porches, in houses, in open public spaces, at community centers, barbershops, and by public transportation (on the bus/train or at bus stops):





**Flyers & Table Cards:** Focus group participants said that in addition to learning about local information from neighbors, they learned about it from fliers around the community. Aaron Henkin explained that when he was recording *Out of the Blocks*, he noticed that in every shop there were always different card flyers (for example, on every table in a restaurant). These fliers were bright colors and design, and were for things like DJ shows, club cards, with portraits, etc. Building on this, *Out of the Blocks* made stacks and put them up and down the block so that people would pass them around in advance of the show. They also recorded people from the block saying “you’re listening to WYPR,” which showed people it was official.

**Apps:** The Nextdoor App was mentioned in several conversations, specifically as a way to share neighborhood-level information about crime. This app crowdsources local information at the neighborhood level, and in this way builds on social networks and trust. Since crime was one of the topics that respondents seemed to feel was most immediately relevant to them, this may be particularly important. At the same time, it was mentioned that Nextdoor did not have a Barclay group (there is now a Barclay Nextdoor page). One medium we learned about from Aaron Henkin that could be interesting to explore further but was not reportedly used by anyone we spoke with is [izi.travel](http://izi.travel). Aaron Henkin was using this app, for tourists visiting a city to be able to

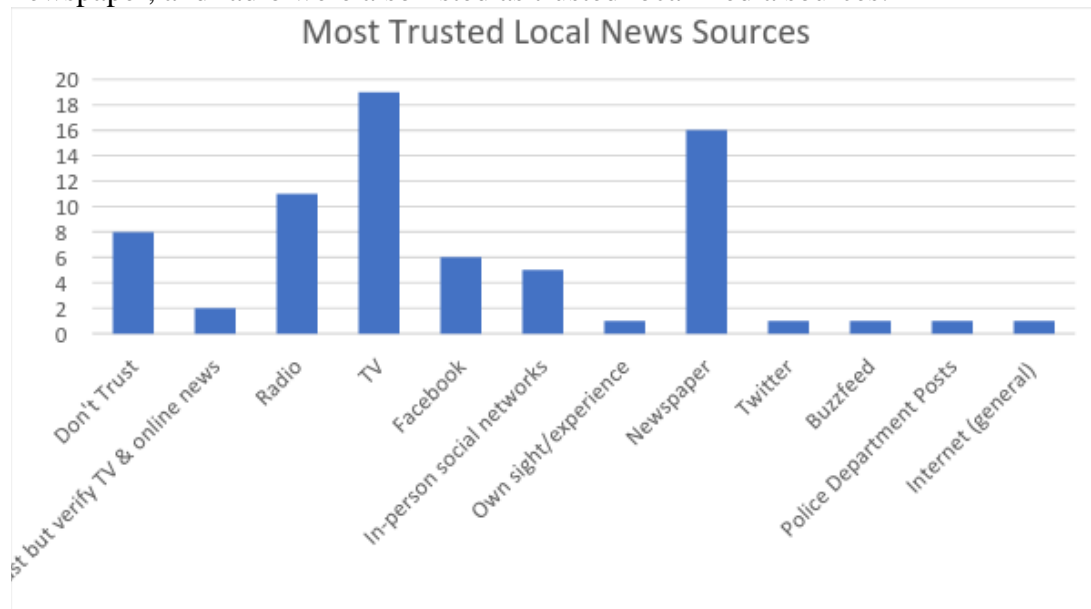
access information about things to do, to upload and geo-tag audio from *Out of the Block* so that people could go into a neighborhood, click on a point, and see the stories.

In addition to barriers to access identified in the above section on the information landscape, Keisha noted that barriers to access, in her opinion, include apathy, under-education, and people’s inability to find anyone credible, so they don’t know what is going on and get desensitized. This suggests that there is a need for much deeper engagement with community members – in terms of education, trust building, and identifying causes of apathy.

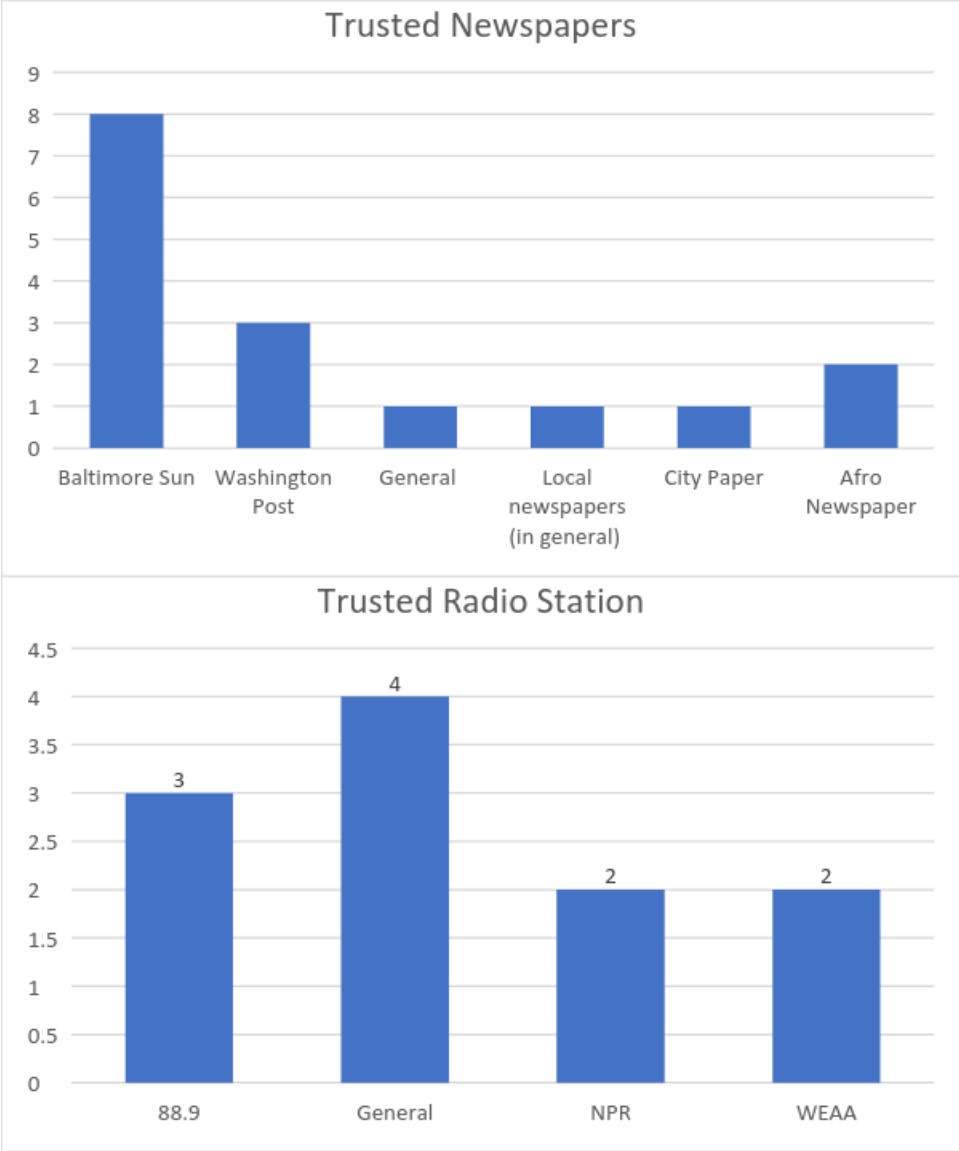
### **Trust (Social Trust, Influencers, and Sources)**

Overall, we noticed was a high level of distrust in the media, and a reliance on social relationships and word of mouth.

**Distrust in the media:** When asked “what local media outlets do you trust most?” eight of the fifty-two respondents said they did not trust any outlets, while two said that they trust but verify television and online news, and another respondent said he/she only trusted “my own experience.” This is a high amount of distrust – more than one fifth of respondents Television, newspaper, and radio were also listed as trusted local media sources:



Many respondents who identified television, radio, or newspapers as trusted sources of news specified which networks, stations, or newspapers they trusted:



Several respondents mentioned that the news is biased or has spin – both in surveys and key influencer interviews, noting profit-based or other ulterior motives. For example, when asked about why she chooses certain information sources, Marilyn said: “I don’t want the spin, I want the news.” The frustration with spin was true for Keisha (President of the Community Association in Greenmount West) too – she described being disillusioned with mainstream media and she advocated for the need for balanced information that includes multiple perspectives and doesn’t gloss over major issues. She said, “I don’t believe mainstream news media anymore, I pay attention more to twitter than anything, which is sad but I get access to information faster and it just seems true.” She noted that on Twitter she follows specific people she respects.

**Social trust and diversified information sources:** Whether by phone, on social media, or in person, trusted sources and social connections appear to be critical for how information is spread in Barclay. Focus group participants described a high level of trust between neighbors, and talked about getting community information and making sense of national news through conversations. One woman explained that her aunt, who is older and does not leave the house but has lived in the neighborhood for a very long time, always knows what's going on, because she's watching through the window or talking to friends on the phone. Other participants agreed with this assessment, that there are some people who just know everything that is going on. One woman, who was new to the neighborhood, said that even though she had moved there recently, she already got news from her neighbors. The participants did not seem to view mainstream news as useful – many got information about events from the television, but had criticisms about how the information was covered, when they got information they needed, and the quality of the news. Some participants talked about wanting the news to be more responsible, and had feedback they would give to news channels if given the opportunity. Overall, the participants did not seem to see the mainstream news as usable in their lives, and for usable information they tended to turn to neighbors or the community center.

Many key influencers noted that they get information through social relationships, the networks they are engaged in, and specific news sources (many were also suspicious of mainstream news). For example, one [BMOG](#) (Barclay-Midway Old Goucher Coalition) member, gets information from the Nextdoor App for Gwynn Oaks, but there is no Barclay group on the app. He follows some online sources like Baltimore Brew, but not a lot of mainstream media; only NPR which he says is most trustworthy when it comes to news. He doesn't watch TV because it is "too commercialized." He doesn't share news about the community with his friends, and participates in community coalitions in the greater Greenmount area and in Gwynn Oaks. He finds out about development information through his involvement in the BMOG group, and was the first to know about the new low-income housing developments by Telesis.

Another example is Marilyn Wu from [CAPSOC](#) (Creating a Profound Sense of Community),<sup>6</sup> who said she mostly gets her information "from people." She noted that she also looks at news websites 3-4 times per week or listens to public radio while she is driving, but that the most important way she hears about the "latest important news" is when "people will say, 'did you hear about...?'" She noted that she gets "fed up" with the media because there is bias and spin. She also noted that she reads print media – from magazines like Time and the Economist to things she picks up at coffee shops. She also noted that she uses local papers, like the Charles Village newspaper to find out what is going on locally. Another source of information she trusted for local information was bulletin boards at coffee houses like Red Emma's. Keisha explained that she listens to/engages with very specific news outlets (and even specific anchors she trusts to research and provide factual information – Karen Hunter and Joe Madison from Sirius XM and Amy Goodman from NPR). Beyond those media outlets, she talks regularly with her circle and shares news and information with her circle and anyone she cares about. She also mentioned Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle as an organization that is working to get critical information to

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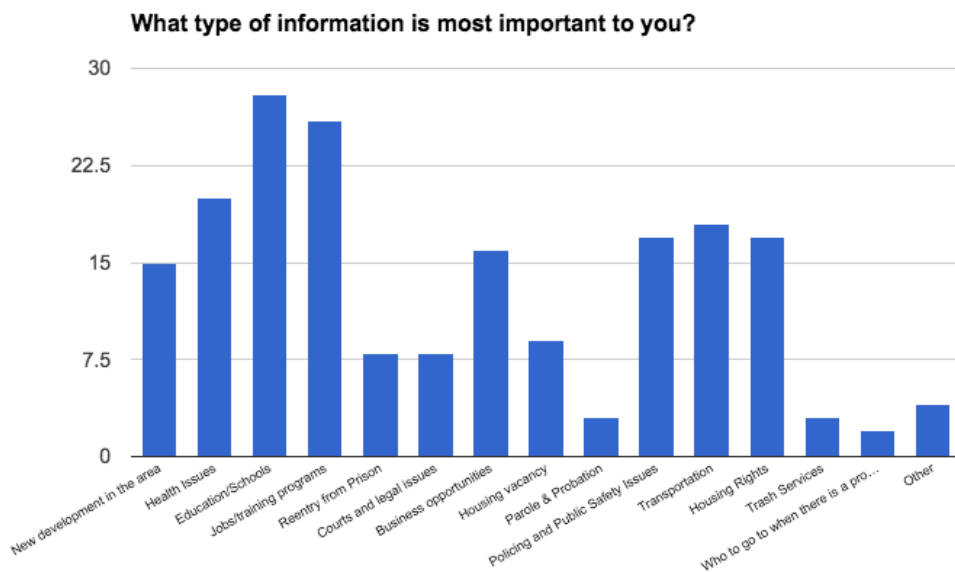
<sup>6</sup> <http://www.capsoc.info/>

the community. As an educator, she is an example of someone with a large social footprint in the community – she interacts with students and parents regularly and at different schools.

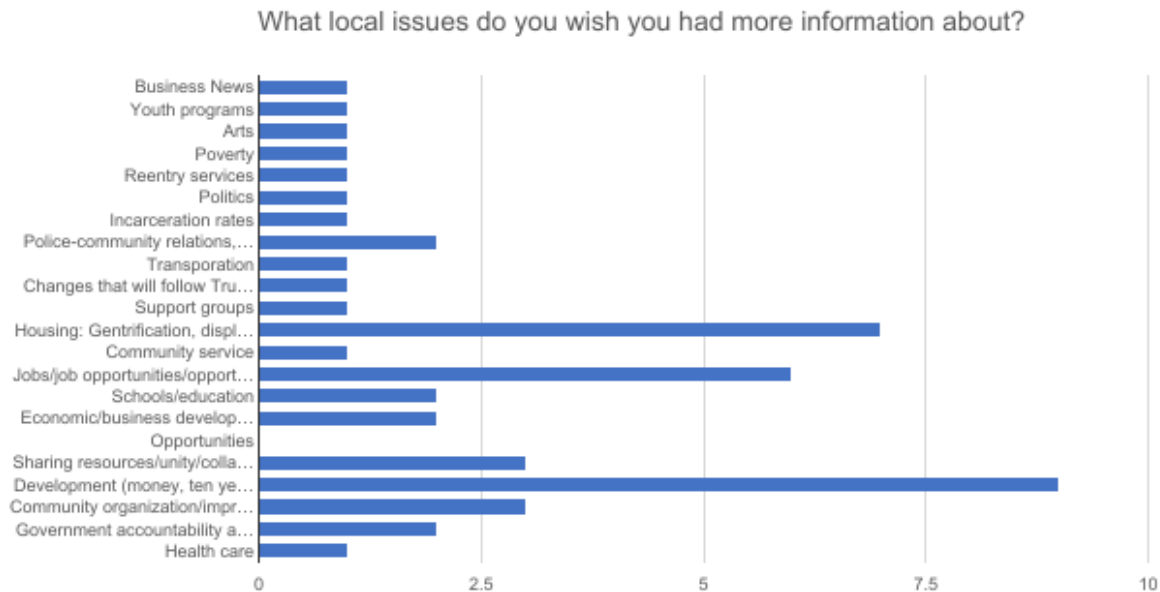
**Difficulty of building trust:** While interpersonal trust and social networks were identified as key for sharing and spreading news and information, key influencers explained that building trust is difficult. We experienced this first-hand in our research: it took us several months to set up a focus group, in part because local community organizations felt that they had recently had an “over-saturation” of similar research without seeing results. Chris Wilson (founder of [Barclay Investment Corporation](#), previously an organizer for the Greater Homewood Community Corporation) and Karen Stokes (CEO of [Strong City Baltimore](#)) both described an intensive investment necessary to build trust: going door to door, meeting people, and being there consistently over time. Chris explained the importance of his relationships with key community members, and gave the example of a well known older woman who is often on her porch and knows everything that is going on around her block. He and Muhammad (one of the community researchers) agreed that there is often an older person on a block who knows what’s going on. This can be a key person to build a relationship with on a particular block or in a particular area when it comes to information. Aaron Henkin from WYPR explained a long process of spending time in the communities where he worked on his show, and that he built trust by first creating relationships with key influencers in the community, then slowly reaching out to the rest of the community.

## Information Needs

In a multiple-choice question about issues people wanted information about, education and schools, jobs and training programs, and health issues were most commonly mentioned:



In interviews and the focus group, as well as the open-ended survey question, community members wanted practical information about things that impacted their day to day life (for example, crime information), while groups/organizations generally wanted to increase their reach and public participation in their events. Survey data showed a variety of types of information that people cared about, but housing rights, gentrification, and displacement rights as well as development plans and job opportunities were the most commonly cited local issues that survey respondents wanted more information on:



**Education, Healthcare, Housing, Youth Opportunities, Violence, and Police Brutality:** In the focus group, several key topics came up as important to residents. One was education. One woman explained how it was hard to get accurate information about education that she could trust, unless she went herself into her children’s school. Participants also wanted information about opportunities for young people, and many were concerned about the lack of support (through the education system, community centers, and other types of programming) for young adults. Many participants talked about a decline in quality of the education system and support infrastructure for young people. Federal changes to the Affordable Care Act was mentioned, and one participant said she wanted to know how the changes would impact her. Other participants agreed. After the focus group, one participant pulled me aside to say she wished we had talked more about insurance and low-income/affordable housing, both of which are very important to her. Finally, violence and police-community relations were issues that mattered to the focus group participants. Participants talked about the long-term nature of police brutality and

misbehavior, citing several examples and giving opinions on how it could be fixed while asking how and why it was possible. One resident, who was previously a corrections officer, talked about his own experience, and had gone to Central Booking to share his opinions on how people in custody are treated, and even considered writing a petition. Violence and safety also came up. One woman wondered how she could explain to her children what they see on the news or in the community (black and yellow tape, why they can't go to a certain place where there was a shooting or is some danger). One participant explained that for her, stories about this overshadowed news about other things, because how could you pay attention to those things when this type of police brutality and violence was going on constantly?

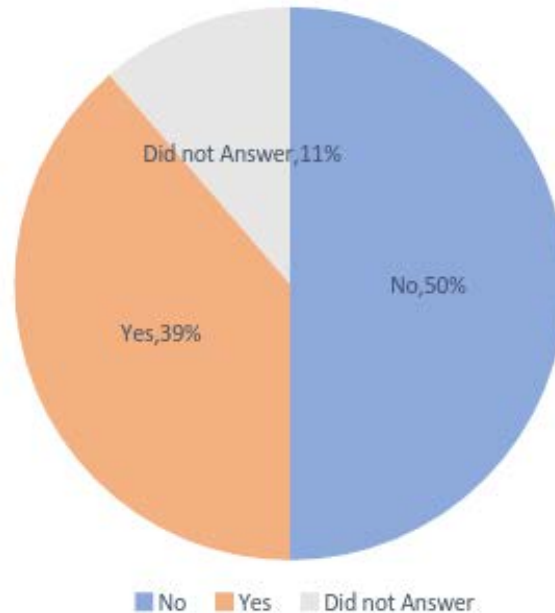
**Information about violence or urgent events:** One of our researchers noted that as she talked with different people, they described talking to people about news only when something that personally affected them happened – for example, a fire, robbery, or other event. The need for information about crime came up several times. Keisha explained an urgent need for information about violence in communities. She described a recent increase of violence in the community, and said she did not believe a community can thrive with so much violence. She usually finds out information about violence from being in the community, witnessing and hearing it, and through the Nextdoor App. She saw the need to get information about crime to the community as so urgent that she suggested building a team of people throughout the city who can act like a “town crier” and let people know what is going on, whether by sending texts, a public alert (like an Amber Alert), handing out flyers, standing on the corner. She said there needs to be a level of urgency around distributing information, especially as it relates to violence.

**Institutional transparency:** Marilyn from CAPSOC also wanted more information about institutions and how they react to or deal with events and information. She was specifically interested in the BPD reaction to the DOJ report and the things that are being put in place. She would like media to give transparency to agencies that are serving the public, because as of now she says there is not enough transparency. She specifically used the example of community-police relations, and said that there needs to be a viable way for communities to be in partnership with local law enforcement agencies to “create a viable and thorough way of having the police departments be the officers of peace.”

## **Voice**

Most respondents had not been to a community meeting: only 39% reported that they did:

## Have you ever been to a community meeting?



Respondents who explained why they did not attend meetings said it was because there was “no need – everyone around here talks to everyone”/“you hear about things anyway) (two people), because they don’t hear about them or know where they are (two people), because they work during meeting times/don’t have time (2), and aren’t interested or engaged (3). People who did go to meetings went to meetings about housing (2), communication (1), church-related (1), development-related (2), or about crime/a death/the riots (4).

Only twenty-seven respondents said that they sometimes had a strong opinion or idea that they would like to include in local media. They specified topics as health care (2), community college/education (2), media accuracy and accountability (1), mass incarceration/criminal justice reform (2), the arts (2), love (3), personal business goals (1), community work (1), corruption (2), education (2), gentrification (1), new presidents (1), development (1), public safety (1), employment (1), family (1), positive views of the community (1), working together/the community working together (3). It is interesting to note that one of the most mentioned categories was about finding ways for the community to work together more.

**Lack of positive stories:** Several key influencers did not believe that positive stories about Baltimore are sufficiently covered in the press, while negative coverage is often out of proportion or inaccurate based on what is actually happening in the community. Both Marilyn and Keisha spoke about the national coverage of the Baltimore Uprisings following the death of Freddie Gray as an example when the national media did not report accurately on what was happening in Baltimore – Marilyn called the coverage vs. reality “night and day.” Keisha explained that it gave a negative view of Baltimore and that critical details – such as why



students were at Mondawmin in the first place – weren't explained. She said that it was painted as young people being problematic when in reality it was an expression of pain and discontent about what has been going on in communities in Baltimore. Marilyn from CAPSOC said that she believes that it is critical to give voice to what is happening in neighborhoods on the ground level. One thing that CAPSOC does is to do "man on the street" video interviews, which they promote at community forums to encourage people to get involved. For example, they did interviews after the DOJ report was released at Penn North to get feedback on what people thought about it. She noted that you especially don't hear "the authentic voice of communities" on "national airways." The BMOG member we spoke with believed that coverage of work in the community and media exposure for projects are critical for getting work funded and garnering support for community projects. He agreed that there was a need to get out information about community meetings for better attendance, and a general need to make sure the community is being heard. Tahran Harris (Resident Services Coordinator at the Nate Tatum Center) likewise believed that there was an overrepresentation of negative stories from the community, and noted that he thinks this contributes to distrust of mainstream media.

Several focus group participants had gone to government institutions to share their opinions or ask questions. One man had considered starting a petition about an issue that mattered to him. Many focus group participants were unhappy with comments by elected officials and the way certain stories (specifically, the trials of the police officers involved in Freddie Gray's death and the uprising/rioting).

**Local leaders are providing channels for community voices:** Key influencers tended to have a strong sense of how to engage with the government if they had issues or needs to address. Marilyn Wu explained a strategy of finding someone/people who knew the relevant government official to find out their general stance, then based on that knowledge find the right person within the office to talk to. Keisha, as the president of the Community Association in Greenmount West, reaches out to the councilperson, board, state senators, all the way up the chain – she makes sure she is contacting the right person or department to address her issue. Tahran Harris explained that the Nate Tatum Center organized a trip to take residents to the state legislature and get them involved. Lottie, the community organizer at the center, has also been working to encourage residents to participate in local meetings with city council members. Tahran explained that when there was an issue about a street in the neighborhood not being paved, and a dispute over responsibility (between the city and the private developer), they helped residents put together a petition and the road was quickly paved.

**Community voices in nonprofit and private development:** Finally, in addition to making community voices heard in the media and by government, there is a need to bring community voices into conversations around philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, and private development. One community interviewee noted that she believes trust is lacking between the nonprofit sector and the community. She explained that nonprofits are often led by white women who are not connected with what is going on in the community but have "major power over us," which is problematic because they develop programs and get funding based on the "demographics of our community, but it's not trickling down," because they are doing things "on behalf of us" without

really understanding what is going on. Since they don't understand what is going on, they make decisions that have "little to no impact for those they claim to be working on behalf of." She said there is limited opportunity to participate in activities and program design, and that a lack of "capacity" in the community is often given as the reason. She emphasized a need for sustainable funding for programming that helps people thrive – physically, emotionally, educationally, and occupationally, and that this type of programming needs sustainable and consistent funding.

Some local non-profits have worked extensively to engage the community and build a strong relationship with community members. Karen Stokes described the importance of getting community input and feedback for the development project they are undertaking with Telesis. She explained that Strong City made a big investment in building in-person communication and feedback loops around development work they are doing in the area. Tahran Harris explained that the local developer for the North Barclay Green apartments engaged residents extensively in discussions and decision-making around the development.

While facilitated consultation, such as that which has happened through Strong City, can lead to community consultation on development, this is not always the case, and sometimes engagement can fall short. For example, one community leader (from a neighboring neighborhood) who is consulted on development said she believes that the consultation is selective. As president of a community association, she is consulted for different developments (they present their plan, funding plan, timeframe, how to access information, and then the association shares it with the broader community), but she thinks that when the community is asked for their thoughts it is usually because there is a problem, generally around race or socioeconomic status.

**Elected official perspective:** As a state legislator and non-profit sector leader, one interviewee noted that finding young people who are not in school and capturing their voices is a challenge. In general, he said that he gets frequent communication from constituents, mostly over email, and sets up structures (like community meetings or visits to particularly constituents, for example at elderly homes, who are less likely to use email) to regularly meet and hear from constituents. He also proactively looks for and attends or sends representation to existing community meetings.

## **VII. Analysis**

### **Summary of Findings**

The information ecosystem in Barclay is dependent on communities and social circles and built on trust, relationships, and sharing information that enables people to make day-to-day decisions. Certain community members are key networkers and sources of information, and existing community institutions, such as the Nate Tatum Center, intentionally provide information to the community based on their knowledge of community needs. There are weaker flows of useful information between communities and mainstream media outlets, and distrust of mainstream news is coupled with a perception that the news provided by mainstream news is not often useful

to communities. On the other hand, news outlets that want to do more to engage communities in their news production lack proven processes and resources to do so.

There are opportunities to strengthen information flows by:

(1) Supporting locally trusted and networked sources of information with more useable news. This can be done through additional support to produce this news through the channels they are already using (such as flyers and newsletters) or by providing them with new channels and access to mainstream media.

(2) Creating spaces and processes that facilitate information exchange of information between mainstream news producers and communities (both in terms of information needs of community and elevating community voices). This may mean providing safe spaces for the community to share their opinions and needs with local media so that the media can provide more relevant information. Through this, it will also be important to elevate community stories and opinions into the mainstream media dialogue.

### **Next Steps (OPTION 1)**

Any project undertaken will need to prioritize building and maintaining trust within the community. Before jumping fully into a project, trust will likely need to be built slowly and through building relationships with key community leaders.

One short term idea would be to follow up on this assessment with a community event to talk about some of the realities of information flow in Barclay, and discuss some of the major issues that people would like to hear more about from local media, and be heard from concerning these issues.

### **Next Steps (OPTION 2)**

Any project undertaken will need to prioritize building and maintaining trust within the community. Before jumping fully into a project, trust will likely need to be built slowly and through establishing relationships with key community leaders. With this in mind, we have identified three potential (and potentially inter-linking) projects that could increase engagement with news and decision-making in Barclay or in Baltimore more broadly while also elevating community voices into the news. These two projects can serve as initial steps to build trust and ramp up towards larger engagement.

With any of these project, it will be necessary to focus on 2-3 issues that have been identified as important to communities as a starting point (jobs/development, education, housing, and safety/policy-community relations are potential candidates).

Some longer term engagement ideas include:

**Support Community Center to Increase Information Flows:** Given the existence of community networks and information providers, and the strength of the Nate Tatum Center as an institution, it would be possible to provide support directly to the Nate Tatum Center to build their capacity as a local news producer, and enable them to ramp up their provision of regular newsletters and flyers in response to community information needs. The support could also be in terms of human resources to regularly go out and gather anecdotes from the community about their information needs, and to support them to connect more directly and consistently with mainstream news outlets. This could be done in complement with option (2), especially to address the risks that come along with supporting a single institution in a community.

**Mobile Listening Posts:** This project would be a way to build trust by providing a needed service and impact to key organizations working in Barclay. A mobile listening post kit would be created and used to support both organizations and media outlets: it could be requested by local organizations and brought to events or used on the streets to capture community voices. This would create an anonymous space of trust for community members to share their opinions and needs, and would create a channel to get this information to the mainstream outlets. Flyers and newsletters could be available at the listening post, and as content is collected (and information needs gathered), in the long-term there could be consideration of having an IVR system where people can access info or share their thoughts with different specific govt agencies, etc. The aggregator partner could then take that information to the relevant govt agencies/entities/media nicely packaged on a regular basis

This could be done in conjunction with option (1) to enable the Nate Tatum Center to collect information from broader community events/around Baltimore and to create a safe space for people to share their stories, build its credibility, and have more things to go to the mainstream news with. Even with Nate Tatum Center as a primary partner and user of the mobile listening post, it may be important to have this information collected and curated by an agnostic media developer and given to or pitched to different news sources for dissemination to a variety of outlets (or in partnership with a single outlet). The benefit of having an independent curator would be the ability to pitch across mediums and potentially to reach a cross-section of media providers, as well as to provide the service of the listening post to a variety of organizations and groups. For this to work, the listening post would need to be run by an organization with the capacity to manage relationships with media outlets, community groups, government representatives and institutions, and the philanthropic community and to produce and publish content (for example, on Facebook) that is not picked up by media outlets but would be useful for community organizations. One option would be to work with Jean Hill Studios, an impact media firm run by Meryam Bouadjemi (who played a leadership role in this research). Jean Hill created and runs Close Up Baltimore, which uses photography to tell stories of Baltimore residents. In addition to their media capacity and ties to diverse groups throughout the city, through Close Up Baltimore, Jean Hill has a network of photographers who live and work in neighborhoods throughout the city and could be a key network to engage, especially if there are later opportunities for scale-up.

This project would be flexible, adaptable, and very hands-on to build trust with a variety of stakeholders while also increasing community-level engagement through existing channels and local leaders. Importantly, it could also be used in support of new initiatives – for example, if a new development is beginning or if, as we have heard, the Mayor’s office begins to implement a “Transformation Zones” strategy with high levels of investments in key areas to reduce crime and improve police-community relations. In our opinion, this is the most promising potential project strategy because it will provide immediate value to key stakeholders, build trust, and be able to interact with and engage a wide variety of stakeholders. This project would also create an initial building block that could easily be added to and supported with additional mediums – for example, as people participate in the listening post, they could give their phone numbers or other contact information.

Finally, this project could build onto existing community-produced news sources (like the Nate Tatum Center newsletters), giving them greater capacity, visibility, and ability to influence mainstream news coverage, especially since they already have reach within the community. When residents identified key issues they wanted information about, additional leverage could help bring coverage from local media, and support could be given to the local news producers to research and provide additional needed information.

**Building on *Out of the Blocks*:** A third project option would be to build on Aaron Henkin’s work with *Out of the Blocks* by building physical and digital infrastructure to continue to engage the residents with whom he has already built trust, understanding, and a relationship. These residents have also already experienced having their stories and views broadcast and therefore may be more motivated to participate, having already experienced potential rewards. The set-up could include listening posts in the communities and various forms of outreach and outlets along with them (posters/flyers advertising weekly/monthly themes, a call-in or text-in line, a place to write and submit something). This would require Aaron’s buy-in.

**Community Newsstand:** Another thing to consider would be to create a newsstand, which would serve as a consistent location people knew would have local information. It could offer local newspapers, have a radio playing NPR, have some spaces to sit/hang out and pass information, and could even sometimes serve snacks/food. It could bring key people in for “question” days/hours (for example, a lawyer to talk about expungement or eviction and housing rights), who would be at the booth (or dialed in on speaker phone) to answer questions from community members. The person running the stand could collect information from the community and turn that into a weekly bulletin that would be shared around the community and with local media outlets. This stand would also serve as a location where local media could come by to take questions, listen to concerns, and learn about the neighborhood.

## APPENDIX A

- Audacious Ideas (hosted by Open Society Institute: ‘A site created to stimulate ideas and discussion about solutions to difficult problems in Baltimore’)

- Authentic Baltimore (Developed in consultation with local museums, restaurateurs, hoteliers, and tour operators to help visitors discover unique experiences that reflect the character of the historic city)
- Baltimore Brew (A daily online journal featuring independent reporting and informed commentary about greater Baltimore)
- Baltimore Fishbowl (Reports the fun, factual and sometimes controversial scoop on local schools, real estate, money and power, culture, lifestyle and community)
- Downtown Baltimore Family Alliance Blog (As an independent nonprofit alliance, we partner with local government, business, and nonprofit organizations to develop family-wise programs and policies)
- Gutter Magazine (Founded to highlight fashion, arts, and underground or street culture that was missing from most B-more area media outlets)
- Radar Redux (A collaborative online arts and culture magazine with a specific focus on the eclectic Baltimore arts community)
- Technical.ly Baltimore (A news organization and community builder that has covered technology issues in the Baltimore region)
- What Weekly (“Baltimore’s Best New Magazine” that works to rebrand the city by documenting the Baltimore Renaissance)