



REVIEW OF NEWSROOM PROJECTS, ACADEMIC LITERATURE FINDS BEST PRACTICES ON HOW TO ‘MAKE STRANGERS LESS STRANGE’

Austin, TX – November 14, 2018 – In the aftermath of the 2018 midterm elections, it is clear that our country is divided. But best practices are emerging from both academics and journalists on how to bring diverse groups together, according to a new report from the Center for Media Engagement (CME).

For this report, titled “Making Strangers Less Strange,” researchers at CME reviewed examples of newsroom projects that aim to build tolerance, as well as academic literature on best practices for doing this type of work. This project was funded by the News Integrity Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York.

After conducting both forms of research, the CME team put the two together, identifying paths that have – and have not yet – been tried by newsrooms, and paths that have – and have not yet – been evaluated by academics.

“It’s clear that something needs to be done to help bridge the divides in our country,” said CME Director Talia Stroud. “It is our hope that this report will help generate new ideas at crossing lines of difference, both by newsrooms and academics.”

Some of the takeaways from the report include:

- Journalists and academics agree that several elements are critical:
 - Diversify who is reached by efforts to bring diverse groups together
 - Explore both mediated and face-to-face efforts
 - Create contexts that allow for positive interactions
 - Analyze the effects
- Newsrooms should consider several academic insights:
 - Identify strategies to encourage a receptive frame of mind among participants
 - Make sure community members from different groups are seen as typical group members so that effects from a particular project translate outside of the project
 - Use mediated and imagined contact creatively
- Academics should consider several newsroom insights:
 - Evaluate contexts and activities that promote greater tolerance
 - Examine whether the novelty and uniqueness of the experience matters
 - Test effective moderation strategies for newsrooms hosting these projects

“What we found in reviewing 25 newsroom engagement initiatives through the eyes of academic research is that these initiatives are doing many things right. But, there’s still more that can be done, both by academics and newsrooms, to promote understanding diverse views,” said Caroline Murray, CME research associate. “Hopefully our report can provide inspiration for both groups.”

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The Center for Media Engagement, part of the Moody College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin, provides research-based techniques for engaging digital audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at mediaengagement.org