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What I Wish I Had Known - A guide by and for entry level Latinx Journalists

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Community of focus: Journalists who identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, Hispanic, Chicano etc. in their early career years. **Main community product:**

 WHAT I WISH I HAD KNOWN - A guide by and for entry level Latinx Journalists

Introduction: For years now, if not decades, newsrooms have felt the pressure to diversify their newsrooms. There are national and regional organizations across the country that support marginalized groups and continue to push for more People of Color in newsrooms.

Diversity reports and studies across the country show [more non-white people are entering journalism](#) positions, but there is still so much room for growth and support. Editors and higher-ups are sometimes just thinking about fulfilling the need to hire POC staff but not go further to make sure they can retain them. There clearly needs to be support to make sure journalists feel comfortable and are not just treated as a necessary diversity hire. There also needs to be room for growth/promotions and not just keeping journalists of color at a barely livable wage. And there have been serious problems in some newsrooms invoking racism and/or abusive behavior.

Since George Floyd's murder sparked a national dialogue across the country, legacy newspapers like the LA Times, New York Times and Philly Inquirer have made it public they've been having some emotionally heated/heavy conversations about how the staff feels in their newsrooms. These discussions have largely been shaped by POC coming together in their newsrooms and by really bad/public/controversial headlines and stories where the outlet's employees are pressured to speak up for themselves.

Furthermore, what about journalists of color who've had to cover social justice protests — sometimes resulting in violence — affecting the communities they identify as a part of?

Through [private groups](#) and public columns, journalists shared their stories of reaching new levels of frustration with the lack of diversity still present in their newsrooms staff and coverage. And newsrooms [started to listen](#) — becoming more and more transparent about the makeup of their newsrooms staff and their plans to change.

As newsroom leaders figure out how to hire and retain more journalists of color and JOC's navigate conversations in the workplace of how diversity can be expanded in whose stories are being told and who is telling their stories — spaces of support and to vent are essential.

This year is a moment where we, as young journalists of color, can elevate our voices more than ever before and document our experiences early on in the industry. I've never been alone in feeling the need for more support. This is a community I am part of but have still learned a lot from.

My decision to choose this community was made to support the already existing journalism groups advocating for Latinx journalists and be purposeful about adding something new and useful to this very active community.

Background:

After seeing concerns and those being vocal on social media about their safety, mental health and overall distress working during a pandemic and social unrest, I reached out to early career journalists of color to see what their biggest concerns were.

In May of this year alone, there were over 800 assaults, arrests, and other obstructions to journalists covering Black Lives Matter protests—according to the [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#). The Committee to Protect Journalists and other non-profit orgs have come together to offer resources for journalists nationwide but every major company, non-profit newsroom and other publications across the country have their own plans/process of protecting their reporters. Some have their own unions or are part of the News Guild, others don't have that kind of support.

The first thing I wanted to find out was what journalists needs were in the current moment and what sort of experience they were having:

Excerpts from interviews

Julio Cesar Chavez, 26, is a Mexican-American Multimedia Journalist/Producer for Reuters. He is based in Washington D.C. but is often sent out to breaking news assignments across the country with very short notice. This summer, he covered the aftermath of George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis. When he was there, he was shot with rubber bullets by the Minneapolis Police Department. One rubber bullet punctured his left arm and one hit the back of his neck.

“Reuters provides us with hostile environment training, which provides us with knowledge of what to do when we're in a dangerous situation. We rely on previous training and go into autopilot to get ourselves out of the situation safely. I don't think other journalists are prepared the same way, that haven't gone through a training like this. I think all journalists that might be exposed to violent situations need a form of training to make sure they can make it out safely.”

Q: How have you been trained to protect your physical wellbeing?

- How to look for exits
- How to put on gas masks and when to put them on.
- How to gauge where the smallest crowds are because you don't want to get caught up in a crowd crunch.
- What to have in a fanny pack medical kit.

Mion Edwards, 23, is a Black News Associate at NBC. She rotates through different broadcast shows every few months. Her tasks include news gathering, finding archive footage, conducting interviews and producing. She's currently working remotely.

“I've always felt safe physically. I never felt threatened by anyone. One of the most difficult weeks for me was when all of the George Floyd protests were happening. I was working with

the TODAY show crash research team and for two or three weeks that was all we were talking about. Yes, I was happy to get coverage and assist our producers but it was the most mentally draining thing I've ever had to do."

"I had to watch videos over and over again and see the images and videos of people that look like me getting slaughtered and killed on screen, and having to censor it, I have to cut the video up until that happens. People were peacefully protesting and next thing you know they're bleeding. Even though we were virtual, I had two people checking in on me more but I kind of went into a mood of just "I gotta get it done" but it was so depressing."

- She would feel comfortable asking for the day off if needed

"I felt like my first instinct was to not look inward into the newsroom but to look outward and ask my grandparents how they survived times like this. As far as work wise, I do feel ok talking to Black journalists at NBC. We have groups like the Black Employee Network and we would send each other resources."

"When you're Black you have to not just make sure you're doing a good job but that you're doing an excellent job to push back the stereotype of being "an angry black girl." Someone told me in the company, a producer who's sweet, said to 'come in and be yourself and be polite but also be yourself. If they think you're mean or crazy or hold stereotypes in their hearts—they're always going to. There are times where you have to speak up.'"

Jasmine Aguilera, 27, is a Latina reporter covering immigration at TIME. She's been at the company for less than a year but feels generally supported since it's encouraged to speak up.

"I would advocate for myself in my newsroom but only because it's encouraged by my editors to do that. If that weren't on the table to be able to advocate for ourselves, I probably wouldn't. I think the default, culturally, is for us to keep working and to keep proving that we deserve to be in the newsroom. Our instinct, as entry-level people of color, is that we're at the bottom of the totem pole."

Key numbers:

- In May of this year alone, there were over 800 assaults, arrests, and other obstructions to journalists covering Black Lives Matter protests—according to the [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#).
- Non-Hispanic whites account for about three-fourths (74%) of newsroom employees ages 18 to 49, and they represent 85% among those 50 and older, according to [Pew Research Center](#). Disclaimer: this is a 2018 Pew analysis of 2012-2016 data and may be slightly out of date.
- A [Knight Foundation](#) study found that, overall, 69% of Americans say that reflecting the diversity of the U.S. population is a "critical" (35%) or "very important" (34%) role for the media. Black (50%), Hispanic (43%) and Asian people (41%) are more likely than white people (30%) to say the media's role in reflecting diversity is "critical."

After learning what I did from the one on one conversations, I then sent out a survey to 15 other Latinx journalists to find out what kind of support they were receiving/seeking and ideas on what could be improved.

First survey:

- **Name**
- **Position Title**
- **Years Working in a newsroom**
- **Do you have a support team you can count on in your newsroom? If so, what does that look like?**
- **What would you do if you are feeling physically unsafe in the field? (If applicable)**
- **Are there any outside organizations you feel comfortable reaching out to for support? List any that apply.**

After collecting these responses there was an overarching theme in the responses — everyone had a lot to say about what they had learned in navigating their newsrooms in just a short amount of time.

At first I considered a newsletter: “**Resources for entry-level Latinx Journalists**” — a bi-weekly newsletter that highlights resources, updates and motivation for young Latinx journalists looking to improve their work/life balance and physical/mental well-being. However, this proved to not be a sustainable idea. Community members I spoke with said they receive plenty of newsletters as is and it’s unlikely the categories would have a substantial amount of updates.

Someone suggested I think about a guide to navigating newsroom culture early on.

This turned into the idea for a “**conversation starter kit**” where I would crowdsource general concerns and create a list of solutions on how journalists can advocate for themselves. Although a unique idea, this also was not a practical framework.

Instead of being told what to say, journalists I spoke with said they would prefer to share what has worked for them and things they learned that may or may not be applicable to everyone.

What did the community need? A safe space to share experiences as they experience them.

The approach for this practicum:

WHAT I WISH I HAD KNOWN

Inspired by the success of [Real Media Salaries](#), a space where journalists could be transparent about their salaries and remain anonymous, I wanted to create a product that was also as accessible as a google spreadsheet where journalists could share their experiences (as they said they wanted to) and was easily accessible.

Most, if not all, of the journalists I talked to use their google drive on a daily basis.

After redistributing the survey with more specific questions:

- **What advice would you give yourself if it was your first day in your newsroom all over again?**

• **When you need a break from working on assignments that may be traumatic or hectic, what are your ways of taking a step back?**

• **Is there anything you would want entry-level Latinx journalists to know?**

These three questions, added to the original survey, had the longest answers and I was able to work with those who submitted to come up with three main umbrellas:

Advice to younger self | Safety | Self care | Affirmations | Resources

Examples of excerpts from submissions to support each section:

Advice to younger self:

- *“Accept that you’re going to make mistakes sometimes and that’s okay,” - Elizabeth, 23*
- *“It should not only be **our** responsibility to bring up issues, and the onus should not just fall on Latinx journalists (and more broadly journalists of color). Our opinions, voices and lived experiences matter, so share them,” - Lauren, 29*

Safety

- *“When I was reporting, if a source or environment made me feel unsafe I would excuse myself and call a close friend or family member,” - Tori, 25*
- *“Leave. Safety is always a main priority. This is also something that should be planned for, if able to, ahead of time before going out on assignment,” - Joel, 24*

Self Care

- *“After particularly traumatic assignments, sometimes the best remedy is to cry about what you’ve seen or heard (because you are a human, after all), then remind yourself that the journalism you produced is crucial in telling the story for the community,” - Lauren, 29*
- *“Create for yourself. Take ownership of ideas you have as you begin to learn more,” - Lyanne, 27*

Affirmations

- *“Though many publications are only now realizing it, you are an asset and you should absolutely see yourself that way,” - Jasmine, 27*
- *“Believe in yourself. Bet on yourself. Trust yourself. Say it out loud as many times as you need to until you believe it and others call it into question,” - Isabeth, 28*

Resources brought up more than once in survey entries:

- The National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ)
- [Journalists of Color Slack](#): A Slack workspace that is completely off the record and dedicated to growing and expanding the community of journalists of color.
- [Latinas in Journalism Mentorship Program](#): A mentorship for Latina women and non-binary Latinxs working in news and seeking mentorship from fellow Latinas in the industry.

All submissions in the doc are currently publicly anonymous. This was done so everyone who initially participated was able to be as transparent as possible. Going forward, journalists will have the option to publicly add comments to the doc, still submit quotes anonymously and share short stories in the doc.

Who I learned I might NOT be serving: Going forward I would try to reach out to more groups that aren't just the main diversity initiatives working to support Latinx journalists. More specifically, I would reach out to college journalism programs and ask them to share the doc with students who are just about to go into the field. This way they know what other early career journalists have gone through and also know that they have that sort of support set up.

Metrics, outcomes and impact:

This project, and the work I've done talking to the 30 journalists I did, is just a very small part in what needs to be done to create consistent support for journalists of color but it's another approach.

I reached out to a handful of journalists who interacted with the guide to see how it can be improved and how they felt using it:

Qualitative feedback:

"We should be sharing what we go through with each other so this is a start."

"I thought it was cool. I had never seen a survey focused specifically on early career Latinx journalists."

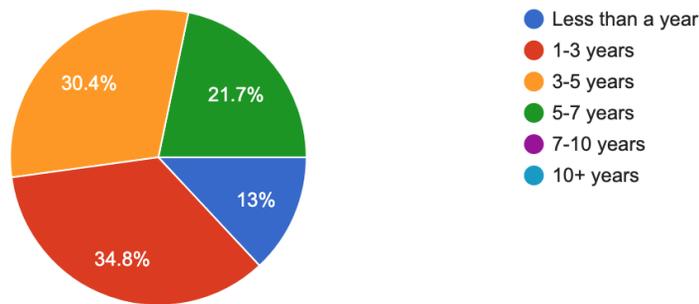
Quantitative analytics:

Of the **30** journalists who interacted with the doc, they were 65% male and 35% female.

Job titles included:

- Bilingual Multimedia Journalist
- Reporter
- Editor
- Digital Producer
- News Producer

I originally set a goal of 100 journalists but I think only having 30 was an easier size to crowdsource and allowed me the bandwidth to follow up with any clarifying questions. I also thought I would only have journalists under 5 years in the field, but a handful of journalists who participated were in the 10+ years category.



Reflecting on the bigger picture

Having a late start from switching communities at the start of this final semester, made one of the biggest challenges of this project was time management. I spent too much time caught up on not producing something that wouldn't be useful to this community or had been done before when I should have been spending time actually trying out different products.

Although I did not create any social media accounts to promote this project, it's something I wish I would have done. I've done work on social strategy for three different newsrooms (THE CITY, El Paso Matters and the San Francisco Chronicle) while being a part of this program. Links to my work can be found at michaelabot.com

Aside from social media, future goals for this guide would be to set up an alert system.

What I learned from this project

- Journalists are going to have different experiences depending on their location, newsroom size, years in the field and how heavily they're affected by doubt and imposter syndrome.
- It's REALLY hard to start from scratch and feel like you're doing good engagement work.
- Any form of support is appreciated.
- Everyone's time is sensitive so make sure they understand the full weight of why their voices and stories matter and what it will be used for
- I was glad to see so many journalists appreciated this space. This is a start.
- I'm proud to even have 30 participants.
- If I could do this all over again I would partner with organizations from the get go.

What I learned from social-j

- Changing your community, let alone in a pandemic, is challenging but doable especially if something is more timely and/or you feel like you're forcing the space you're in.
- Listening and adjusting your service/product for a community based on what is most practical and useful is KEY.
- Understanding how to be patient is important.
- Not everything has to be a story. Journalism can come in many forms.
- Community events work.

- The communities you report for want to see the faces behind the reporting and know you for you, not just your stories.

Best practices for Engaging Latinx journalists

- 1) **Be open to new ideas:** Everyone is going to have different experiences. If someone wants to talk or expand on a certain concern they have in journalism or a specific newsroom, hear them out and see how you can offer them resources on an individual level.
- 2) **Be mindful of those in that space:** There have been plenty of Latinx journalists working on support and diversity initiatives for decades. Run ideas by them and be sure to always collaborate when possible.
- 3) **Meet people where they're at:** The reason this was in the form of a google doc was because it was practical for the community. It's easily accessible in a space they already are and work in.

Course Appendix:

Over the course of this program, I switched my community twice. After attending a press conference on living improvements needed in the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Smith housing complex, I met advocates who serve as liaisons between the government and residents. I thought this would be a good community but came to realize I was forcing the idea that there were other liaisons and people in need of resources in these spaces. In the fall semester, I worked with another student on a documentary about a rat infestation in the Prospect Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn. This led me to switch my community to neighborhoods organizing around rat infections. When the pandemic changed everything, I let go of this community to pursue one I knew well and was timely. I learned so much from these different spaces and although difficult to continue to start over, I still produced work for our courses that proved to be effective to my understanding of good community reporting and products.

Here is some work I'm proud of:

[The Texas Tribune's Engagement Producer Evlia Limón shares how she started working in engagement and how she measures impact](#)

One of my favorite courses in this program was Metrics and Outcomes. Learning how to measure impact both quantitatively and qualitatively, is so essential to good audience engagement/development work. This is the course where everything we study, and realizing what I can bring to this industry, clicked in my head. One of our assignments was to find someone who works in audience engagement and ask them about their methodologies of measuring impact.

Learning from those whose work we can learn from has been essential to getting the most out of this program and I also feel like this piece also showcases my writing and interviewing skills.

This was my pitch for this report: *I'm interested in doing my paper on Elvia Limón, Engagement Producer at The Texas Tribune.*

Elvia started off as a community engagement reporter in Dallas and then moved to Austin to work on engagement state-wide. I think it would be great to hear about the difference in these two roles and the ways to focus on engagement hyper locally and on a state scale. I'd also like to learn more about her use of engagement through social media and newsletters at the Tribune. She manages their daily newsletter "The Brief", talks in Facebook groups to readers and works on crowdsourced explainers with reporters. I would also ask her how she organizes all the crowdsourcing data and her approaches in conversations and building relationships with communities. Talking to a fellow Texas Latina, it would also be great to hear if/how they serve the state's 40 percent hispanic population through engagement.

[The Prospect Heights Rat Task Force](#)

This is a video I produced with my classmate, Peter Senzamici, in our intro to Video and Audio course our first semester. Although not a core course of the Social Journalism program, I still used this assignment to practice listening to a community and verifying the community's concerns with those who need to be held accountable.

Working on this video led me to change my community from social workers who work with NYCHA residents to New Yorkers organizing around rat infestations. I went on to [report on this topic and these community concerns](#) and keep this as my community up until the end of the second semester.

[THE CITY Brooklyn Coverage \(group presentation\)](#)

In this Metics & Outcomes assignment, we were asked to work as a group to analyze findings from data pulled from THE CITY's Facebook analytics. This gave us the chance to question the data, dive deeper into pivot tables, create visuals from our findings and present our suggestions on what could be approved to the engagement editor, who just happened to be our professor.

[Learning to make Twitter threads](#)

When I thought my community was going to be NYCHA-related, it was around the same time we were asked to create a Twitter thread for an assignment in Social Media Tools. At this event I practiced live tweeting for a community. Since this, I've produced countless Twitter threads for multiple internships I've held this year that have become stronger overtime.

[Journalists covering communities with Rodent Infestations](#)

Ethical guidelines written in our Ethics to Consider course, when my community was people organizing around rodent infestations.

[Newsletter: Rat Alert](#)

At the end of our Advanced Reporting course, we were asked to create a product to serve our community. I had always been interested in newsletters and saw this as a chance to try one out. The Rat Alert newsletter was created with the idea of being both fun and informative and would come out on a monthly basis.

[Final product developed in Startup Sprint](#)

In this course, we not only pitched a product idea for our community but also discussed how to figure out if the product is sustainable, potential revenue streams and what a growth approach would look like. This medium post is a synopsis of the collaborative google doc I discuss in this report, and how I fleshed out the idea for the product from start to finish.

This report has been summarized in [this final Medium report](#).

The report was presented to the public: here are the slides.

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