

tips for successful news
publishing partnerships



NEWS MEDIA
ALLIANCE

introduction



**“Collaboration”
has become a new
buzz term in the
journalism world.**

With many local newsrooms trying to do more with less these days, looking outside your newsroom to partner with other local news publications can have the effect of having a larger, more diverse staff that can cover more topics, more areas of your region, and be more representative of your community.

There are many benefits to partnering with another newspaper in your community. However, partnerships take work, and dedication and care must be given to choosing the right partner and to cultivating a productive and trusting relationship.

In this guide, we will walk you through key questions to ask when considering a partnership, as well as ideas and tips for success and best practices for cross-newsroom collaboration. We will also profile a successful partnership between the newsrooms at *The Dallas Morning News (DMN)* and *Texas Metro News (TMN)*, outlining how they did it, from the formal arrangement to working together on stories, events and more. We provide examples of the opportunities their partnership has provided, as well as the challenges they had to overcome. Insightful commentary from both publishers offers the keys to their success.

The *DMN/TMN* partnership is the perfect example of successful collaboration in which the two organizations make each other better. Their journey provides a useful road map for other newsrooms who are looking to expand their coverage, as well as ensure their reporting is more inclusive and representative of their community.

Recognizing that you can't do it all isn't always easy. But once you make that realization, you will open up to the possibilities of everything that a great news partnership can do for you.

why partner with another news publisher?

1 Provide coverage that is inclusive and representative of your community.

2 Fill in gaps in coverage.

*leverage your partner's strengths
(e.g., perspectives, insights)*

3 Reach new readers with relevant content.

cross-promotion

4 Grow subscribers, revenue.

how do I know if partnering is for us?

Think about goals and objectives you can't attain on your own that a partner could help you with.

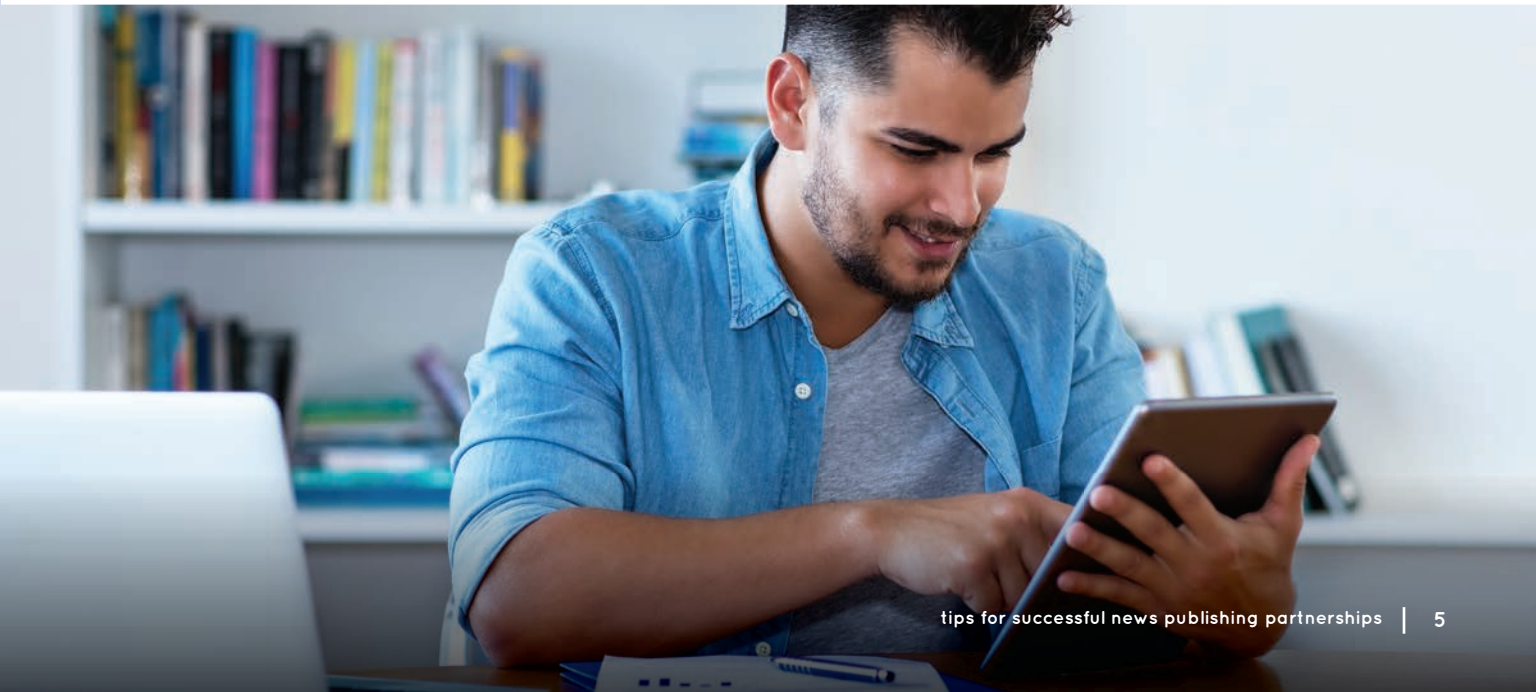
ask yourself:

- Are there groups of community members not being represented in your coverage?
- Are there readers you want to reach, but don't know enough about their interests or don't have relevant content to attract them?
- Is there another publisher covering those groups or reaching those readers?



tip:

Identify shortcomings and/or gaps in your coverage.



worksheet

Groups not currently represented in our coverage:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Readers we want to reach:

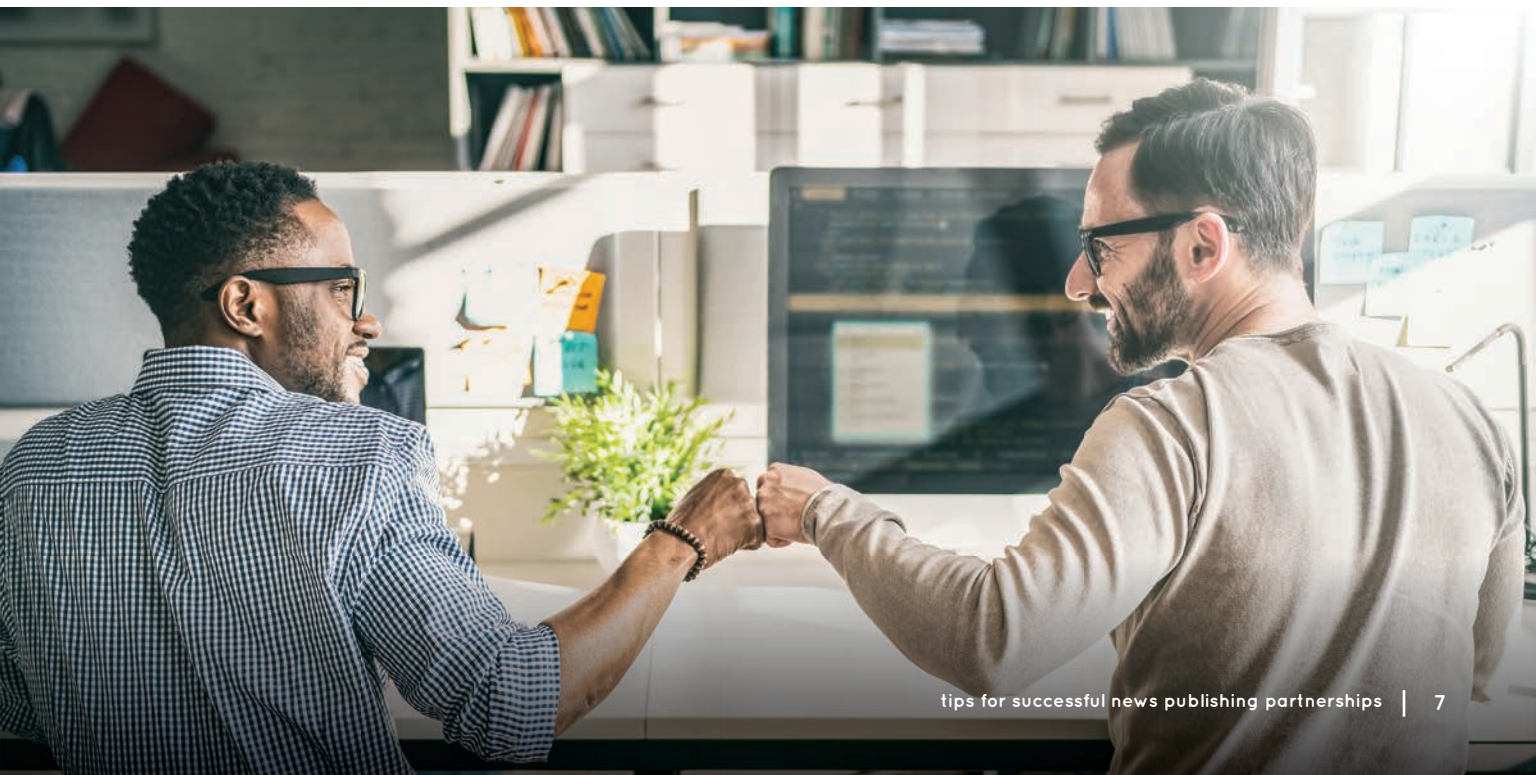
Publishers already reaching them:

getting started - hold an exploratory meeting

Get a feel for the personality and tone of your prospective partner.

ask yourself: ?

- Is there good energy and a positive outlook about the idea of collaborating?
- Is the partner deeply committed to journalism and “getting things right”?
- Are you on equal footing in terms of commitment and goals? The best partnerships come when the people involved view one another as equals and each brings something valuable to the partnership.



Potential partner screening questions:

1. What are your publication's main objectives / priorities?

2. What is the demographic make-up of your subscribers / readers?

3. What communities do you primarily target / reach?

4. What are the topics of your most popular content?

5. What is your editorial / fact-checking process?

6. How many reporters, editors, photographers, etc. do you have?

7. What do you hope to gain from our partnership?

8. What unique contributions can you bring to the partnership?

Notes:



“If the collaboration is limited to the newsroom, we are not utilizing this endeavor to its fullest capacity – then, it seems somewhat superficial and lacking in depth and commitment. We’ve had discussions about everything from building relationships with churches and community organizations to reach their audiences, to developing engaging eblasts.”

Cheryl Smith, Publisher, Texas Metro News



tip:

Communicate the goals of the partnership throughout your organization. Everyone, from advertising executives, customer service representatives, delivery workers and sub-contractors should be clear on the message that readers, viewers and community residents should hear and know.

Open communication between both news publishers is critical.

Be sure to:

- ✓ conduct training sessions with employees from both publishers.
- ✓ network and get to know each other.
- ✓ hold regular meetings.
- ✓ set the proper expectations. Be clear about what both parties will contribute to the partnership.



out in the community

Maximizing reach and diversity allows you to be more representative of your community.

ask yourself: 

- Are your speakers reflective of your community?

Different voices are needed to ensure the same voices are not presented all the time, which gives perception that the media has deemed them untouchable.



tip:

Get input from partners about panel line-ups, etc.

The Dallas Morning News Metro News

Know about it. **Vote about it.** The Dallas Morning News

A digital town hall to discuss how to make your vote count in 2020.

Panelists for Know About It/Vote About It

- J.J. Koch, DALLAS COUNTY COMMISSIONER
- Hinder Garcia, TARRANT COUNTY ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATOR
- Ashley Moss, HOST, TEXAS METRO NEWS
- Eric Cedillo, VOTING RIGHTS ACTIVIST
- June Jenkins, PRESIDENT OF NAACP COLLIN COUNTY
- James Barragan, DALLAS MORNING NEWS POLITICAL REPORTER
- Nic Garcia, HOST, THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Use this space to brainstorm ideas for joint events you could co-host with your partner for the community.

not “one and done”



idea:

Do a staff exchange where one member from each organization’s staff works at the other organization for 30 days. An exchange allows staff to understand and start thinking more like the other partner.

The term “partnership” implies a relationship. Relationships aren’t just “one and done” – they go on for as long as you nurture them. So, in addition to your present aspirations, plan for how you will work together in the future.

ask yourself: ?

- Where does the partnership fit into my organization’s long-term goals?

but aren't we still competitors?

Just because you compete with your partner in some ways doesn't mean you can't collaborate for mutual benefit.



tip:

Identify areas that are off limits and focus on areas where collaboration is mutually beneficial.



tip:

Be respectful about sharing information:

the organization that got the scoop should break the news, unless you have both decided that it is better for the other organization to break the news.





"There are just fewer journalists on the street these days. It's a basic and unfortunate fact. But that means that we all work together to collaborate and get the best stories out there and tell the best stories to our audience to help them live better lives and know about their communities. And if the best way to do that is to collaborate with each other ... rather than compete with each other, then that's what we do."

Jamie Hancock, North Texas editor, The Dallas Morning News

talking publicly about your collaboration

Your readers and members of the community may develop false perceptions about your partnership. Talk with your Communications/PR staff about potential concerns and how you will address them.

ask yourself: ?

How does your collaboration help the community?

In the end, it has to be about providing a better experience for your readers and helping members of your community be:

- better informed
- more engaged
- able to act

ask yourself: ?

Who is in a better position to bridge the gap, to spark the dialogue to report on and share to the masses, and to dispel myths and stereotypes?

tip:



Develop messages and talking points that both news organizations can use to respond to concerns and criticisms.

idea:



Promote your collaboration, such as in staff email signatures. In some circumstances, each publication's staff might consider introducing themselves as representing both publications or both online products, to set source and reader expectations about the collaboration.



worksheet

brainstorm:



List the ways in which your collaboration helps the community:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now think of potential concerns a reader or member of the community may have with your partnership and write it down, along with how you would respond. It doesn't matter how trivial or unlikely it is to become an issue – it is always best to be prepared for the worst!

Concern #1:


Response:

Concern #2:

Response:

Concern #3:

Response:

A woman with dark braided hair, seen from behind, is speaking to a group of people in a meeting. She is wearing a green top and has her hands raised as if gesturing. The background shows several other women sitting in a circle, some with laptops and water bottles, in a bright room with large windows.

case study:
*The Dallas Morning
News and Texas
Metro News*



“There are so many stories to tell. And I’ve come to the realization that I can’t [cover them all] on my own. But guess what? Between the two of us, we can do a whole lot more.”



Cheryl Smith, Publisher, Texas Metro News



“It has become increasingly important for us at *The Dallas Morning News* to represent our entire community, not just a portion of it. It is because of this desire that we decided to partner with journalists who are well-sourced and trusted in communities of color. The partnership has equally benefited both organizations in ways we could not have imagined when we started the discussions.”

Grant Moise, President & Publisher, The Dallas Morning News

background



Identifying gaps in coverage that the other could fill, *The Dallas Morning News (DMN)* and *Texas Metro News (TMN)* decided to collaborate.

The Dallas Morning News

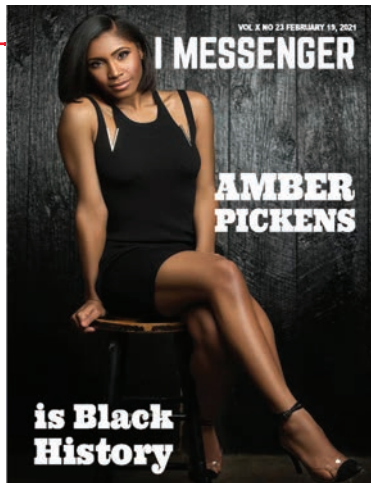
DELIVERING NEWS YOU NEED
Texas MetroNews

content sharing

Both organizations share content in a collaborative fashion.

- Texas Metro News publishes DMN stories in its print publications and has a tab on its homepage with short story blurbs and links to recent DMN stories that may interest their readers.

Cover story from DMN



Co-branding in TMN newsletter (right); DMN Stories tab on TMN website (below).



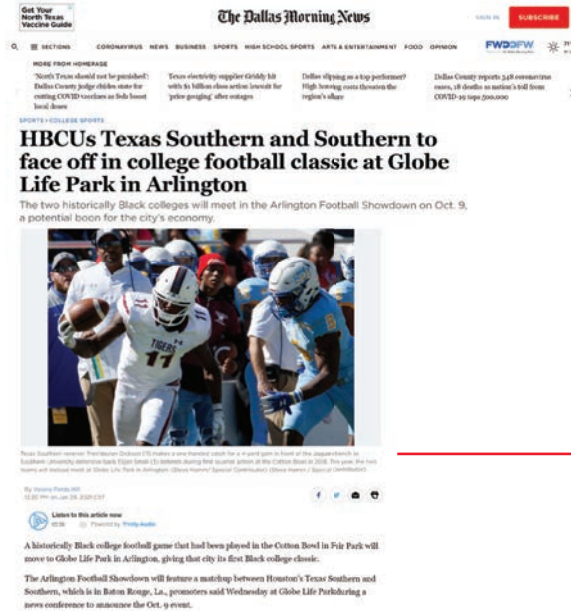
content sharing

- The stories also appear in the daily e-newsletter and as well as the *Garland Journal* and *I Messenger*.



- The Dallas Morning News* has worked with *Texas Metro News* to source stories and has cited their reporters on some of their local news.

- The stories include a tagline about the partnership and a link to the story on the *TMN* site. The *DMN*'s Product Team is in the process of creating a *Texas Metro News* tag to be able to generate a homepage presence.



Partnership language on *TMN* news articles that appear on *The Dallas Morning News*' website:

This story originally published in *Texas Metro News*, has been reprinted as part of a collaborative partnership between *The Dallas Morning News* and *TMN*. The partnership seeks to boost coverage of Dallas' communities of color, particularly in southern Dallas.

content sharing: handling breaking news

- In the case where one outlet gives the other a tip, the two publications talk about who gets to break the story.
- **Example:** When a local mayor died, *TMN* offered the tip but allowed the *DMN* to publish the story online first, linking to the *TMN* story once it was posted.
- When the two talked about how to handle breaking news in the future, *DMN* shared tips for navigating print versus digital, which was important because for Cheryl's entire career, the Black Press operated as a weekly news organization, but *TMN* is daily (24-7), which calls for a change of mindset.



tip:

**Consider platform
type and frequency.**



training sessions

Both publications participate in staff development training that has included sessions on leadership skills, solutions journalism, sourcing, storytelling and how to handle coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice.

Trainings covered a variety of topics, from how to cover certain types of stories to finding new sources and covering current events like COVID and the new civil rights movement.



"I'm really happy that we have Cheryl's voice and the voices of her team members in the room when we have these training sessions, because it really matters to us that we get it (coverage of the Black community) right."

*Jamie Hancock, North Texas editor,
The Dallas Morning News*



"We're having some really good conversations. When we get out of these sessions, we're talking about what we learned, what we need help with, and we're sharing different perspectives."

Cheryl Smith, Publisher, Texas Metro News

specifics of the partnership

The publications drafted a contract that was reviewed by both publications' legal counsels to establish terms and formalize the partnership.

Financial arrangement

- *DMN* pays *TMN* a monthly fee for weekly meetings that help with sourcing and story generation, as well as separate fees for any *TMN* content published on *dallasnews.com* or in print.
- *TMN* can publish *DMN*'s stories in print at no charge.

Improving Coverage Through Partnering with *Texas Metro News*



"We don't want there to be issues with our coverage. We want to speak to the community and hear from them before we even cover a thing. So that's part of why we're in this partnership. I think it's going to strengthen the coverage of the Black community in Dallas. And that's something that's really important for us going forward."

*Jamie Hancock, North Texas editor,
The Dallas Morning News*

challenges

The *DMN/TMN* partnership faced a few false perceptions about their relationship, but both news publishers were confident and firm in their perspectives when addressing rumors:

- 1 Perceptions that *DMN* was trying to “take over” *TMN* and reach out to the Black community because of recent events: *TMN* was growing and receiving more acclaim. Being a Black-owned publication, would people think the collaboration came about after the civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020? Both publishers are clear that this partnership is not an effort by *The Dallas Morning News* to reach out to the Black community because of recent events – they discussed the partnership at the beginning of 2020, before Floyd’s murder.
- 2 Perceptions that *DMN* was using the situation to avoid hiring more Black journalists: Efforts are still underway by *DMN* to identify, recruit and employ a diverse workforce.



“We were doing good journalism before, and it’s only getting better.”
Now, when asked about the collaboration, “I tell people, ‘Oh no, to the contrary, I bought *The Dallas Morning News!*’”

Cheryl Smith, Publisher, Texas Metro News

Key takeaways for helping ensure your partnership is set up for success:

- Think strategically when looking for local partners.
- Communicate early and often to build trust and solidify the partnership.
- Schedule regular check-in meetings to discuss stories, how the partnership is going, etc.
- Set the proper expectations and be clear about what both partners will contribute.
- Put the reader and the community first (along with providing high-quality journalism), and collaboration and partnership will naturally follow.
- Use the partnership to improve your own reporting by diversifying your sources.
- Use the partnership as a way to better your business model in all areas/departments.



tip:

If the partners use a tool such as Slack, extend invitations to join each other's workspaces.

contact us



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