EQUALLY INFORMED PHILLY

MIDTERM REPORT
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RESOLVE PHILLY
MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant consequences have resulted from a trust gap between our neighbors and news and government institutions. Accurate, accessible, and regularly updated information is essential to our collective survival.

Large scale investments in news and information access and delivery are rarely at the forefront of a crisis response strategy, but as Philadelphia prepared herself for unprecedented economic and social impact of the pandemic, our partners at Independence Public Media Foundation made a commitment to change that. Recognizing the importance of journalism in responding to a crisis, while acknowledging the tension between media organizations and mis-/under-/unrepresented communities, IPMF charged Resolve Philly with bridging this life-threatening information divide, with an information access intervention focusing on those most at risk.

Accurate and culturally-affirming news and information give people the power to make informed decisions. Through this pandemic, Resolve Philly was given an opportunity to engage differently with the community and our newsroom partners, working collaboratively to deliver useful news and information to our neighbors in a time of great need.

CASSIE HAYNES
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JEAN FRIEDMAN-RUDOVSKY
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INTRODUCTION
As a direct response to COVID-19, Resolve Philly launched Equally Informed Philly (EI), a community-powered journalism initiative that bridges the information divide by providing life-saving, -sustaining, and -affirming opportunities to those who are most vulnerable\(^1\) to the physical, social, and economic impact of the pandemic. EI aims to reduce the barriers preventing access to trustworthy info, which we know is vital to survive—and thrive—in our new reality.

Over the past four months, EI has evolved into four interlocking strategies: 1) a text-based Community Info-line, 2) a place-based mechanism for information delivery and engagement, 3) personal storytelling and story collection, and 4) culturally-affirming public health messaging. There’s so much that our team has learned through the first phase of this intervention. Over the next several pages, we’ll present an in-depth look at our strategy, our planning process, successes, and some of our key learnings thus far.

OVERVIEW
We’ll discuss the below in more detail throughout the report, but we’ll start with an overview of each of Equally Informed Philly’s strategies.

Community Info-line
Resolve Philly is now managing two SMS/text message community info lines, one in English and one in Spanish. These info lines are personalized Q&A services shaped by and for residents. Members of the community can text in questions related to living and working in the city during COVID-19—from how to fight an eviction, to where to get tested. Our team will gather and vet answers from the city’s most trusted newsrooms, independent journalists, and community organizations. The text lines also serve as a community engagement

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\(^1\) Used throughout this report, Resolve Philly defines the term “vulnerable” in one of two ways: 1) an individual, household, or community within one of census tracts with a high COVID-19 Vulnerability index, as assessed by the COVID-19 Vulnerability Tool, created by the Social Progress Imperative ([http://us-covid19-vulnerability.socialprogress.org/](http://us-covid19-vulnerability.socialprogress.org/)). 2) an individual, household, or community aligned with one of the following groups: Black people, immigrants, Latinx people, people with disabilities, people in unsafe or unstable housing, people working low-wage jobs.
tool, as well as a mechanism for encouraging local newsrooms to do more service and community responsive reporting. We’ll continue to build the depth and breadth of information we’re able to provide, eventually launching a series of topical news and information text-based “newsletters” that will cater to specific information needs of individuals -- from job-seekers, to small-business owners, to parents who are looking for information on school reopening plans.

**Place-based Information Delivery + Engagement**

We believe it’s our responsibility to -- literally -- meet people where they are at with useful news and information. As such, Equally Informed Philly has worked to identify place-based opportunities through which we can provide engaging service journalism and meaningful opportunities for community storytelling. Examples include pop-up newsrooms in partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the distribution of two issues of a print newsletter to 90,000 vulnerable households via Play Streets and food distribution sites, among other place-based engagement activities. This place-based work provides space for Resolve’s team -- and newsroom partners -- to have direct conversations with members of our community about what’s top of mind, which then encourages more community responsive reporting across the local media ecosystem.

**Personal Storytelling, Story Collection, and Media-making**

Our engagement team has identified a deep desire among members of the community for personal storytelling from those with limited access to mechanisms for media production, and who feel that local media do not fully represent their perspectives or interests. We are developing several channels for personal narrative creation and amplification, including “Pass the Mic” opportunities on social media, sponsored content in partner publications, and publishing youth reporting and art work in our newsletters. Resolve Philly continues to partner with Fill the Walls with Hope, a community art initiative that sprung up in the early weeks of the pandemic to beautify the boarded up windows of closed
businesses, to amplify public health messages woven in with beautiful, local visual art. The work of talented, local artists from underrepresented communities can be found on Play Streets, at food distributions sites, and on the exterior walls and windows of buildings across the city.

**Culturally-affirming Public Health Messaging**

Equally Informed was developed as a response to COVID-19 and one of the primary objectives is to amplify the latest public health directives in simple, catchy and culturally affirming ways. We hope to achieve this through a variety of visual and digital tools, in addition to outreach partnerships with community-based organizations and multicultural newsrooms. Our aim is to reinforce masking and social distancing in ways that affirm—not shame or ignore—communities’ needs to earn a living and stay connected. To this end, we have developed a series of physical and digital creative assets-- signs, murals, social media graphics-- that contain vital public health messages displayed in the languages of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection for all to share.
90,000
issues of the Equally Informed Community Newsletter distributed to Philadelphians most vulnerable to COVID-19

92
community partners across 14 Philadelphia zip codes actively engaged with Equally Informed

218
SMS subscribers to the Equally Informed Community Info Line

6,712
posters, yard signs, and sidewalk decals printed with culturally-affirming artwork and health messaging, designed by local artists
PROJECT PLANNING

Co-Executive Directors, Jean Friedman-Rudovsky and Cassie Haynes, started a weekly goal-setting process the week the $1M funding was awarded. This allowed the team to scale quickly while staying on track.

The first phase of the project centered around planning and the rolling launch of Equally Informed Philly. Between April 4 and June 12, 2020, 114 goals were set in the following focus areas:

- FAQ Development
- FAQ Content
- FAQ Distribution
- Engagement and Outreach
- Translation
- Campaign Content
- Newsroom Stimulus
- Reporting Collaborative
- Documentation and Evaluation
- Logistics and Operations

Of the 114 goals, 66% were met on time, 17% were met on a delayed timeline, and 17% were nixed or reframed. Throughout the first 11 weeks of this project, Team Resolve focused most heavily on Engagement and Outreach, Campaign Content/Creative, FAQ Development, and Documentation and Evaluation.

As we entered the second phase of the project in mid-June, our team began to shift from planning to execution and iteration. Since June 16, 2020, 96 team goals have been set across the following, revised, focus areas:
Of the 96 goals, 81% were met on time, 17% were met on a delayed timeline, and 2% were nixed or reframed.

Our project-planning began as directive, out of necessity, particularly as we worked to quickly scale up our capacity, adding a half-dozen new staff in a matter of weeks. For the first 11 weeks, Jean and Cassie would set the program priorities and goals. However as the work on Equally Informed transitioned from the planning to the execution phase, our process shifted from high-level directives established by the Co-EDs to a programmatic agenda and departmental milestones that are set and executed on by the team.

As we entered the second phase of our work, it also became clear that it was time to reassess our strategies. We welcome change and growth, and expressly communicated the goal of iteration to our team at the outset of this project. In Phase II, you’ll note that there’s a more even distribution of goals and a significantly higher percentage of our weekly goals are met on or ahead of time. We believe that this is due to: 1) more cohesion and collaboration among our staff as we’ve gotten into the swing of working as a new, virtual team; 2) More staff ownership over workstreams; 3) More autonomy in the execution of activities; 4) Increased clarity on how Equally Informed dovetails with/reinforces Resolve’s other initiatives and the shape and scope of the project as we move toward the end of 2020 and into 2021.

**PROGRESS + LEARNING**

Resolve’s initial proposal to Independence Public Media Foundation centered around creating a collection of the most critical COVID-19 information, based largely on reporting done by our newsroom partners, that didn’t bounce people around the internet like a ping-pong ball and wasn’t limited to one organization’s output. The FAQ would be one slice of our coordinated, city-wide crisis response to the pandemic.

We did just that, creating a database of questions that Philadelphians were asking about COVID-19 along with answers from our Broke in Philly news partners, government sources like the CDC, and community organizations that provide specific support, like Community Legal Services. Then, in partnership with the super tech geniuses at Distributed Media Lab, we created a site that could be embedded anywhere on the internet and that, when interacted
with, wouldn’t redirect users to a different page. Our goal was to have the FAQ embedded on the websites most frequently visited by Philadelphians, especially those most vulnerable to COVID-19 and the long-term economic and social fallout of the pandemic. In this way, we hoped to meet people where they already are with life-saving and life-sustaining information.

We believe this was a really good idea; the problem was, by the time we got it up and running, news and information flow and distribution had changed. We learned a lot of lessons during this time, the most important of which was when to stop putting work into something that wasn’t working.

By June, the information needs we were looking to meet in the immediate aftermath of local lock-downs had changed in a way that couldn’t be served with the centralized FAQ we had envisioned. First, newsrooms citywide were producing vastly more service journalism than ever before and community-based organizations proved their strength as key and effective information messengers. This is a good thing — a great thing — but it meant that the gap we sought to fill with our FAQ didn’t exist in the same way. We often felt like we were stepping on toes when talking about our work and at Resolve we are steadfast against doing work that feels like it reinvents the wheel or is in competition with newsroom or community partners. Given this, it suddenly felt clear that the intense work required to maintain the FAQ with up-to-date information was no longer a good use of our time.

Enter Reach, the digital platform designed for direct community engagement through text messaging. Through the use of Reach, we’re able to engage in personalized 1:1 communication and put service journalism into the hands of Philadelphians via their mobile devices, “smart” or not. When we started our work with Equally Informed, we positioned Reach as a way to gather questions that residents have about life and work in Philadelphia during COVID-19. Those questions became the backbone of our FAQ website. When it became clear that the FAQ was not serving its intended purpose, we transitioned into direct engagement with those asking questions. As we receive questions through our the Community Info Line, our team sources newsroom partner reporting and verified government sites to answer these questions. These answers often contain additional links, in the form of trackable Bit.ly links, that direct participants to relevant applications for resources or relevant assistance related to their personal question. We receive questions on a range of topics, from where to get tested for COVID-19, to unemployment benefits, workers’ rights, social distancing practices, and more.

As we continue to build our base of numbers and spread the word about Equally Informed, we can continue to reach more Philadelphians with news and information through a weekly mass text sharing local service journalism. Our strategy with Reach has evolved, and along
with it, our understanding of the needs and concerns facing community members. This process is enabling our entire team at Resolve to better understand what effective engagement and information dissemination looks like will only continue to inform our work.

**Newsroom Stimulus**

Another focus of the initiative was to efficiently inject much-needed funds into local newsrooms during the COVID-19 crises to a) help them weather the difficult time and b) continue to provide information to Philadelphians who need it. We allocated $255,000 specifically for placing ads across Broke in Philly partner publications, in whatever way made sense for that newsroom.

The challenge we faced was that each newsroom operates differently when it comes to Ads - some work in impressions, some on social media, one was a brand new website, and some don’t sell ads at all. We knew we needed to create a custom plan for each newsroom, while also creating a structure that enabled us to track the impact of our ad dollars across outlets. Initially, we thought hiring a firm to steer the ship for us was the best approach, but it soon became clear that our unique situation required a different type of thinking.

One of the first hires we made at the outset of Equally Informed Philly was an exceptionally talented project manager, who felt confident leading the newsroom stimulus work, with support from Resource Media, a nonprofit firm serving as our media and communications consultant. In depth conversations resulted in an advertising spend divided among three groups of newsrooms:

- **BIPOC Saturation and Priority Community Focus** ($13,000/newsroom)
  One of the major goals of Equally Informed Philly is to make sure everyone is informed. Reaching people who are excluded from or ignored by more mainstream news outlets is important, so newsrooms that reach these demographics were given a higher priority.

- **Niche Focus/Civic Urbanist** ($7,000/newsroom)
  Several of our newsrooms speak to very specific audiences that span demographics, such as technology lovers or parents of school aged children. A smaller amount of
money would go a long way in these organizations.

- **Large Footprint daily/weekly ($10,000/newsroom)**
  While we wanted to ensure people who needed the information most were prioritized, we also wanted to create a ‘surround sound’ in the city with our messaging, so the larger papers with a broad audience were included in the stimulus. We also needed to make sure the amount of money we invested in these publications would give us the exposure we wanted, since typically the larger audience constituted a higher price for ads.

We’re so pleased with the model we developed -- and our partners are too!

**Playstreets**

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) started Playstreets more than 50 years ago. The program closes hundreds of designated streets to traffic each summer so that kids have a safe place to play when school is out. Resolve approached PPR soon after the pandemic began, in partnership with Fill the Walls with Hope, to talk about leveraging the talent of local artists to help communicate important public health messaging through beautiful artwork. The gorgeous result of this partnership can be seen on 306 playstreets across the City.

A key component of Playstreets, each of which are captained by a neighborhood volunteer, are the meals and snacks provided to kids, of particular importance during the summer months when school meals are not available. An additional part of Resolve’s work with PPR has been to make sure that the participating Playstreet blocks are “Equally Informed,” particularly as we move into a school year and an unprecedented presidential election season, while navigating a pandemic with massive health, economic, and social consequences.

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2 An initiative driven by the People’s Paper Co-op, more information on Fill the Walls with Hope can be found here: [https://coverthewallswithhope.weebly.com/](https://coverthewallswithhope.weebly.com/).
Resolve Philly is engaging with Playstreet Captains across the city via its Community Info Line, with the goal of paid relationships around information engagement with hyper-local “info captains” across the city. In addition to trust-building actions on behalf of Playstreet captains (ex: last week we asked Playstreet Captains what they wanted the new Managing Director of Philadelphia to know about their block/neighborhood and our team will compile responses in a letter that we will send to him), we send out actionable information in the following categories:

- Civic Engagement
- Wealth Building
- Health (includes mental health)
- Utilities + Rent
- Employment
- Small Business Ownership
- Kids + Families

Examples of actionable information in these categories have included the link and phone number to participate in the census and a link for participating in a local utility relief program. Follow up prompts and questions are sent to Playstreet Captains to help them in sharing and engaging in conversations about the actionable information with folks on their block. Resolve then asks a series of questions to the Captain to assess the impact of increased access to the information.

Playstreets is a seasonal initiative, but Playstreet Captains are often home childcare providers, block captains, election chairs, and ward leaders and they invest in their blocks every day of the year, not just during the summer months. Our goal is to build on the trust and the relationships that already exist between Playtstreet Captains and the families on their block, developing a corps of year-round “information captains” as conductors of life-saving, life-sustaining, and life-affirming information and opportunities.

Community Newsletter

There is a strong and understandable desire to focus entirely on virtual strategies for information delivery during COVID-19. With much of our time spent engaging via the internet, it feels like the best way to connect, particularly for local newsrooms. However, in a city where close to a quarter of the population does not have access to the internet, we would not
Community Info Line Engagements
April - August 2020

"Are there new jobs openings with organizations that help with COVID-19 relief?"

"Does my job need to provide a mask?"

“This is my first time doing Playstreets and it is such a beautiful experience for the children. What is important to me on my block is that children have a nutritious meal to look forward to on a daily basis, and that these children are safe.”

“Is there somewhere I can find remote local volunteer opportunities for tutoring? I tutor reading development, literature, writing, and test prep”
be positioned to reach those most vulnerable to COVID-19 exclusively through digital channels.

We came up with the idea of putting a short newsletter into food boxes distributed throughout the city. As our partnership grew with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, we realized we could also distribute the newsletters at Playstreets. Our engagement team ensured that content was focused on topics beyond COVID-19; by June people had begun feeling totally overwhelmed by pandemic-focused information. With the census having been buried in the news, we chose this as the theme for the first issue. We partnered with Healthy NewsWorks (a nonprofit organization that empowers elementary and middle school students to become researchers, writers, critical thinkers, and confident communicators who advance health understanding and literacy through journalism) to provide content.

Our first run of 80k in English and 10k in Spanish are now being distributed throughout the city in food boxes that are distributed by the City of Philadelphia and community organizations like Share and Philabundance. Additionally, newsletters are being distributed via hyperlocal businesses and organizations including laundry mats, bodegas, and community support groups. You can catch Spanish newsletters when you’re picking up your take-out at Tierra Colombiana in North Philly, or you can keep your eye out for an Equally Informed newsletter carrier (that’s right, we’re bringing back Newsies) making their rounds in your neighborhood.

While we originally envisioned this as a temporary plan of two issues for the summer, we now believe that a youth-produced community newsletter for families will be a lasting part of Equally Informed Philly. The partnership with Health Newsworks has been tremendous, and we’re looking forward to adding The Village of Arts and Humanities, Carver High School, and Franklin Learning Center to this youth journalism collaboration. We’ve gotten great feedback on the first issue, what worked and how we can improve. We expect the next issue to “hit the stands” in September.
Community Stimulus, or, “Spreading the Love”
Resolve’s Community Engagement team was given a budget of $50,000 to support the work of grassroots community groups that are engaged in existing projects that align with Equally Informed Philly’s mission of deep community engagement around information, specifically around COVID-19. Two examples illustrate this approach:

1. YEAH Philly is a youth organization that works with mainly young Black folks in North, South and West Philly. In order to keep kids off the streets during stay-at-home measures and now with schools not in session, they host online sports tournaments that are hugely popular. Resolve sponsored a June tournament and in exchange, all participants had to complete a short survey that we crafted. It was very insightful. We saw quickly that mental health was a huge issue among the young folks who took the survey. This prompted us to push out resources for free and affordable mental health services through our community info-line and in the first issue of the Equally Informed Community Newsletter.

2. The Center for Returning Citizens has long been a close ally of Resolve. For the past several months, they have been carrying out meal distribution across North Philly. We found that the best way to work with them and to support their efforts was for a couple of our community engagement team members to spend time at their sites, stuffing Resolve’s newsletters into the food boxes and helping to distribute the meals. TCRC is particularly aware of how the pandemic has impacted the employment status of many of its constituency (those who were formerly incarcerated) and so for the next phase of this partnership, Resolve will compensate TCRC members $15/hr to distribute the newsletter in the neighborhoods we’ve identified as high priority based on the COVID vulnerability index, serving both the objective of getting cash in the hands of people who are lacking income because of the pandemic, as well as our mission of distributing life-saving, life-sustaining, and life-affirming information and opportunities to those who might not otherwise have access.

Engagement with Immigrant and Non-English-Speaking Communities
As Resolve Philly continues to develop resources in English and Spanish languages, it is incumbent that Equally Informed also engages with non- or limited-English and Spanish language immigrant communities in Philadelphia. Our approach is built on understanding of the distinctiveness in communication behaviors/patterns of various immigrant groups. This is in recognition that these are communities that do not interact with “mainstream” information, such as public resources (e.g., City websites, calling 311, etc.) and local news outlets (i.e., English language newspapers and radio stations). While language barrier is a
primary contributor to lack of engagement, trust and perceived credibility also informs how and where (sources) vulnerable communities interact with information.

To address this, we have identified a number of local immigrant-serving, community-based organizations (CBOs) with whom we have partnered with. We prioritize BIPOC-led/serving organizations and focus on those that will make the most immediate, visible impact if provided a financial stimulus or other incentive. Considerations are made to ensure diversity in both ethnic representation and geographic reach. Our partners are not only well-regarded by the respective communities they serve, but also within the larger immigrant-serving CBO landscape. These organizations have established effective communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp chat groups, phone trees, etc.) which allow them to disseminate critical information that addresses emergent community needs.

It is also important to acknowledge Resolve’s role as a conduit for local English-language news outlets that historically do not benefit communities served by these CBOs. Genuine and purposeful relationship building is crucial in establishing successful partnerships. Initial contact with any potential partner is approached with curiosity and empathy. Each partnership is unique to the work of the organization. We allow our partners to guide how Equally Informed can meaningfully engage with their communities.

As an example, in addition to the fieldwork described above, we are producing a series of videos easily disseminated on social media (a preferred medium of the Latinx community) -- and at the airport! Philadelphia International Airport liked one of our public health videos so much, it’s looped on screens throughout the terminals! The approach with the community is one of trust-building. We regularly take empanadas and coffee to places where the Latinx community is concentrated. While they sip coffee and eat empanadas, we talk about what’s going on in the neighborhood. This physical approach includes volunteering with hosting groups and other mutual reinforcement of organizational mission -- in this way, the relationship is not extractive.

The pandemic emphasized the importance of having reliable Spanish language media outlets to provide life-saving information, which is why Resolve Editorial Associate and translator
created the Spanish Translation COVID-19 Style Guide, a 13-part guide that uses examples to explain many different aspects of translation, from grammar and punctuation to the correct way to translate proper nouns, races and genders. This document met the immediate and important need for comprehensive, standardized guidelines that can meet the needs of diverse Spanish audiences.

**DOCUMENTATION + EVALUATION**

We’ve engaged GoodCompany Group to work with us on building a model for projecting the social impact of our work. Using a handful of data points that Resolve and GoodCompany have worked together to identify, the model draws from the highest standard of data and research to forecast the mechanics, dynamics, scale and value of Resolve's social impact potential. This relationship has enabled Resolve Philly to develop and identify and adopt metrics and data-collection tools and workflows that optimize our impact, collect primary impact data over time, and rigorously articulate the full potential of our innovative information access work to partners, funders, and community members.

The primary objectives of our evaluation work are to develop focused impact metrics for Equally Informed Philly that can be tracked over time, and to aggregate a research base to inform expectations & understanding of the role of journalism in a crisis response strategy. Deliverables resulting from the impact evaluation will include a presentable overview of impact claims, key impact outcomes, valuation of each, and summary data, in addition to an independent validation of the data.

We'll share the report widely, though it’s important to note that sharing our learnings and documenting our process has been an important component of Equally Informed Philly since the beginning. We have a weekly logging/reporting process that each member of our team engages in, which has allowed us to document the project at the individual level. In addition, we started a Medium blog geared towards an industry audience. We’ve done a lot of public reflecting through the planning and implementation of this intervention and will look forward to presenting a deliverable, format is to be determined, at the end of 2020 that will hopefully serve as a learning resource for other newsrooms and collaborations as they continue to respond to the evolving community needs around the COVID-19 pandemic and future crises, regardless of scale.

**STAY TUNED…**

While the grant period ends at the end of 2020, Equally Informed Philly has developed into a permanent intervention within Resolve Philly’s portfolio. We’ve created several permanent positions to ensure our organizational capacity to carry this work forward into 2021.
history-making election in just a few months and well-founded concerns around voter engagement and suppression in the midst of the pandemic, we’re currently exploring how EI can leverage its SMS communication platform, in partnership with voting rights organizations, to provide information and answer questions, in real-time, in the days leading up to, and on, Election Day. We have two more issues of our Community Newsletter slated for 2020. The next issue will focus on information surrounding the November election and voter suppression -- we anticipate a similar distribution (90k) as the first issue.

Additionally, we'll continue to invest in ad buys among our partner newsrooms through the end of the year. In fact, this strategy has been so successful in both promoting culturally-affirming public health messaging and injecting capital into the local news ecosystem, that we’re exploring what it would look like for Resolve to continue buying advertising as part of the organization’s ongoing strategy with its newsroom partners.

Launching Equally Informed Philly with the Resolve staff, our newsroom and community partners, and alongside Philadelphians who love this community with an unparalleled ferocity has been an incredible process. We’re proud of what our team has accomplished, we stand in awe of what our neighbors have done together, and we’re going to keep driving towards equity in information access.
1,259 individuals reached to date via Equally Informed Community Engagement Programming, (ex. Sound Off events, Epanadas y Cafe, and food distribution).

$162K disbursed to newsrooms as part of our ad-buy stimulus strategy. By the end of 2020, Resolve will have distributed over $300,000 to its newsroom partners.

$24K disbursed to grassroots community organizations doing life-saving, life-sustaining, and life-affirming work during the pandemic. By the end of 2020, Resolve will have distributed over $200,000 as part of this strategy.

4.7M impressions of culturally-affirming public health messaging. At the end of 2020, we estimate this number will have surpassed 12 million.

7 new, permanent jobs with health benefits created at Resolve Philly