



Navigating Media Coverage in the Context of Neighborhood Change: A Food & Beverage Media Town Hall

Event Recap

In 2021, Studio ATAO launched [The Neighborhood's Table](#), an initiative that aims to create a responsible, actionable, and replicable framework for hospitality businesses to organically connect with their local community, collaboratively combat displacement, and invest sustainably in their neighborhoods.

Media plays a unique role in the cycle of gentrification. It can inform public perceptions about what happens when gentrification takes place; it can also reinforce a neighborhood's image through its curated selection of "Best Restaurants" or coffee shops to work in – or lack thereof. As such, we see media as a critical stakeholder in this conversation, with the potential to influence the speed, direction, and nature of neighborhood changes.

Our research methodology has always centered on community participation; on May 24, 2022, we hosted a Town Hall where ~50 media workers, hospitality workers, and folks in the wider FBH community gathered to discuss how food & beverage media can consider and examine neighborhood change in its coverage. We hope to open up communication channels between media organizations and the wider FBH community. Together, we can design principles that center on community care and encourage media to evaluate businesses with social impact at the forefront.

We will continue reiterating key requests in our conversations with media organizations and sharing these ideas with our wider FBH network. We hope implementing these town halls will continue to be a vital and valuable part of the change process. For more content like this, head to [our Resources Library](#).

Part I. When a publication covers a hospitality business in a gentrifying area for the first time (e.g., a restaurant's opening), how should that business be evaluated?

Proposed Actions:

1. Examine the language your media organization uses to describe hospitality businesses amidst neighborhood change. Incorporate guidance into style guides.
 - In *Harlem Is Nowhere*, “Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts points out that whenever a neighborhood gentrifies, you hear white people and the media using phrases such as ‘People are starting to move to that neighborhood,’ or ‘No one used to go there, but that’s changing.’ The implication is that before these places gentrified, no one lived there, or at least no one of importance.” - P.E. Moskowitz, *How to Kill A City*
2. Consider the history of your media organization around the topic of gentrification, and if there any past missteps may need to be either [publicly or privately addressed](#).
3. Formally define (and explain internally) what your organization considers “cool” or “trendy.” How is your organization thinking beyond trends to cover long-time businesses that are important to the local economy but have not received coverage?
4. Reach out to a business **before they open** to interview them and ask these questions about community engagement preemptively. These answers should be built into the DNA of a business if they hope to contribute and be a part of the community.
 - a. What do you know about the community in which you are opening? What connections, background knowledge, and/or passions connect you to the people who have been here? How have you researched the food & beverages to offer to the local community, and how did you find that information?
 - b. Have you hired locally? When defining your wage structures, how have you considered local socioeconomic demographics (cost of living, poverty levels)?
 - c. Beyond charity (e.g., donations to a food bank), are there ways you have engaged with the community? Or if charitable donations are the main avenue for giving back, how have you developed that relationship further? Are you engaging in any form of advocacy (that is not necessarily partisan)? For example, one restaurant actively participated in campaigns to build a bus stop in front to ensure easier access and commutes for their employees.

Part II. How should the media evaluate a hospitality business's long-term impact and/or investment in its community?

Proposed Actions:

1. Acknowledge that both the media and hospitality businesses are part of a larger ecosystem of actors, influencers, and systems. While that does not relinquish anyone from their responsibility in the context of gentrification, it does mean that we must think beyond siloed definitions of media as only print/digital journalism (e.g., Yelp, SEO) and businesses as only about the food/beverage they serve.
 - a. Both media organizations and hospitality businesses have a responsibility to educate their teams on what gentrification is, how the cycle works, why it's a systemic issue, and how the organization (as well as individuals) play a part.
2. Similarly, acknowledge that journalists may be limited in what they can say about specific topics (due to investors, advertisers, etc.) – but investigate what those limits may be right now to understand better.
 - a. Media organizations need to make these limits clear to their internal team.
 - b. Hospitality businesses have a right to know what organizations are affiliated with what brands and advertisers (disclosed before interviews) so they can decide if they do want to be part of the reporting.
3. “All good food & beverage media reporting is real estate reporting.” Incorporate information about the land and development within coverage.
 - a. Ask if businesses own the building they operate in or have otherwise engaged in planning processes around them.
 - b. Investigate whether the business owner and staff are aware of how they contribute (positively or negatively) to local economic development or how they are generating revenue for specific actors (e.g., major developers).
 - c. For example, is the business aware of how they may affect transit patterns to the neighborhood, such as by encouraging more commuters in an area that does not have inclusive public transit options? Or are they abetting the actions of a prominent developer to *limit* and *privatize* options (e.g., build a parking lot that forces residents to purchase subscriptions)?

4. For media organizations to adequately cover gentrification requires up-to-date understanding of real estate developments *around* the hospitality businesses being covered? How is that competency and knowledge being learned and maintained?
 - a. For example, is that business a part of a large developer's plan in a community? Have real estate development patterns changed after that business' opening and/or success? Pay attention to large, conglomerate developers who own a lot of property in the communities you report in.

Part III. What are the challenges and opportunities facing media organizations to provide hospitality coverage along the lines discussed so far?

In this section, the Studio ATAO / JBF team asked editors to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do media organizations face in providing hospitality coverage along the lines discussed so far?
2. What lessons have your organizations learned about what it means to cover a neighborhood holistically, and how have those been integrated into your processes?
3. How does media increase equitable access to coverage that is behind paywalls, such that neighborhood and working folks can access it? How do we reconcile this with the current state of media (where many folks do not want to pay for content)?

Key Themes:

1. The fast-paced nature of media makes it difficult to do the in-depth research often required for this work. Most media teams are also relatively small, so media organizations can better prioritize and delegate labor. However, organizations must directly address specific barriers. E.g., if you are covering neighborhoods where communities do not speak English as their first language, hire multilingual folks.
2. Media organizations can create a “living document” on their website that describes the organization's stance and views on gentrification, which gets linked to their “Best New Restaurants” lists and other coverage.
3. Food + beverage media *can* be more than critical reviews, openings, or closings; media that reflects a critic's cult of personality is not in service of the industry. Ask:
 - a. What position or role does a restaurant serve in the community? Does it have a place in the community, whether or not it has the best food?

- b. How can food media more effectively *honor* the people who form the industry, e.g., workers and owners with thoughtful workplace practices?
- 4. Web traffic may always be a necessary metric to hit – but covering neighborhoods thoughtfully *can* lead to traffic by bringing in audiences neglected in the past.
 - a. Considering a different audience may mean writing a different headline.
 - b. “If we start thinking about the people we have underserved as a media conglomerate, we can win more eyeballs, and more eyeballs ultimately can translate to more ad dollars. We must continue to think holistically about who we talk about and who we include in the conversation.”
- 5. Equitable access to media is an ongoing conversation, in terms of the platforms that media organizations optimize for, language justice issues, and paywalls. Paywalls, while controversial, are a reflection of the skill and energy that goes into journalism.
- 6. There are ways to ensure community members can access paywalled coverage, e.g., publications can partner with libraries to distribute access via library cards.

Part IV. Panel / Community Talkback & Closing Thoughts

In this section, community members engaged directly with panelists.

Key Themes & Lingering Thoughts:

- 1. What assets make a good story and engage readers? Consumers pay for media when they know it supports “better” and more equitable journalism.
 - a. Narratives, art, photography, and quotes that center on people. Stories about the “best cheesecake ever” flatten the *people* who make it the best.
 - b. “When we put people back into those stories, we understand that communities are at the heart of restaurants, recipes, and more.”
- 2. Media and business owners share the responsibility to build relationships over time. Both can consider how conversations can roll out over months or years.
 - a. “We just need to make sure that we're taking the long road approach instead of trying to condense it all in one story.”
 - b. There’s room for food media to think both locally and globally and be proactive in considering the interconnectedness of food systems.

Summary: A Rubric for Media Organizations / Publications

Does your style guide include:

- Your organization's stance on gentrification, e.g., what language can writers use to discuss gentrifying neighborhoods and businesses in them?
- Your expectations of stories that cover "trends" and their influence on the industry and neighborhoods around cool/trendy businesses?
- Resources for writers to understand the holistic cycle and impact of gentrification?

For stories about hospitality businesses:

- Does your publication begin interfacing with and investigating a hospitality business before they open to learn about how they've invested in the community?
- Do your stories about hospitality businesses address the following questions:
 - What do you know about the community in which you are opening? What connections, background knowledge, and/or passions connect you to the people who have been here? How have you researched the food & beverages to offer to the local community, and how did you find that information?
 - Have you hired locally? When defining your wage structures, how have you considered local socioeconomic demographics (cost of living, poverty levels)?
 - Beyond charity, are there ways you have engaged with the community? Or if charitable donations are the main avenue for giving back, how have you developed that relationship further? Are you engaging in any form of advocacy (that is not necessarily partisan)?

Across the content from your organization/publication:

- Does your publication follow real estate developments *around* the hospitality business that you initially focused on or covered?
- Does your publication cover more than just destinations or crucial moments (e.g., openings, closings, awards) in a business's lifecycle? Does your publication encourage coverage or context about a neighborhood around the business of focus?
- Are your teams set up to learn more about the communities, diners, and employees of a hospitality business? Why or why not?