

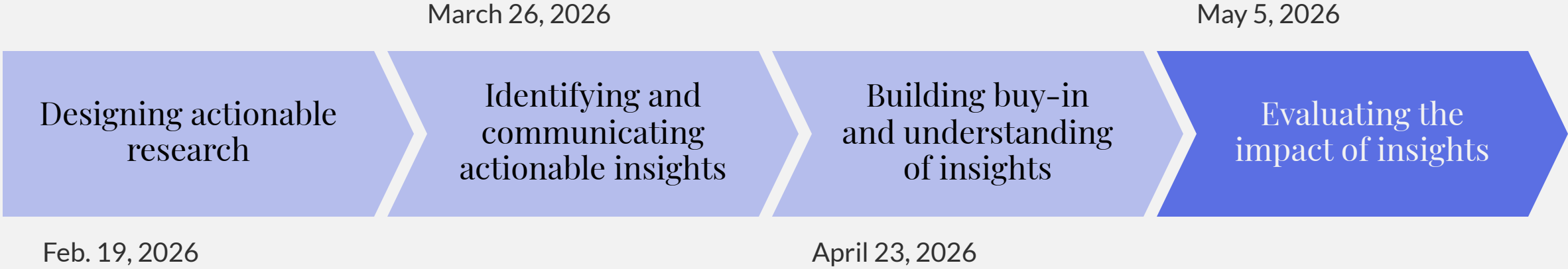
LENFEST INSTITUTE FOR JOURNALISM AUDIENCE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

# Operationalizing and evaluating the impact of qualitative research

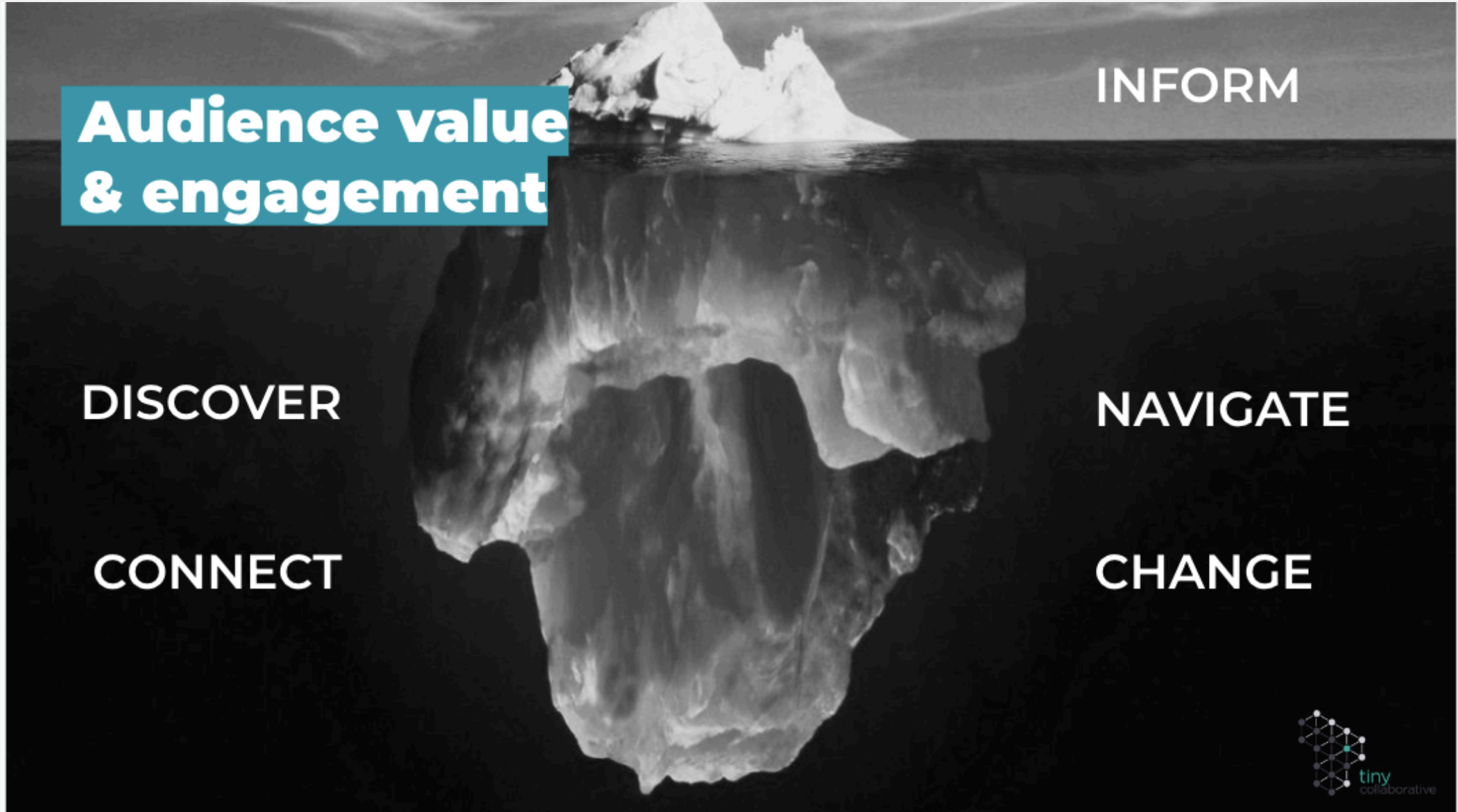
May 5, 2026

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# Mastering qualitative audience insights



# LAist's "Modes"



*Key takeaways so far*

# Research should be connected to a goal

START HERE.

What is your business challenge?

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE.

I wish we knew how/why/what our audience ...

GET SPECIFIC.

What behaviors do you want to understand?

Who is the audience you want to understand? Be specific.

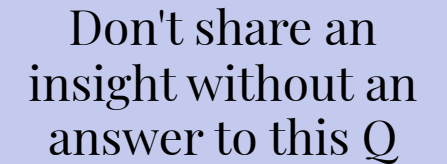


An actionable insight is  
a piece of information  
that can **move a  
product forward.**

# For every insight you want to share, ask yourself...

- ✓ What is happening?
- ✓ Why is it happening?
- ✓ What can someone do with this information?

Don't share an insight without an answer to this Q



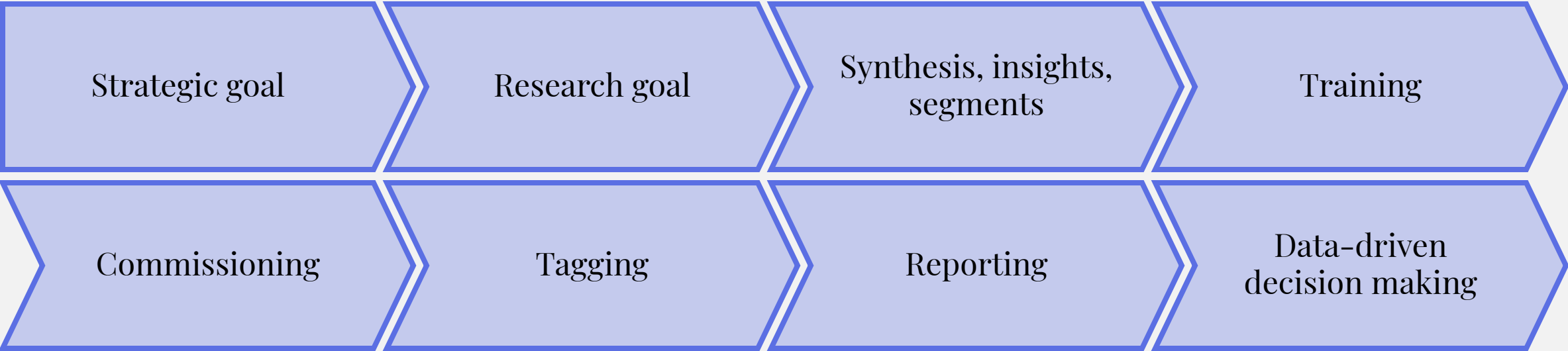
# Operationalizing Audience Insights

# The research → application cycle

*(In an ideal world none of us live in)*

- Strategic differentiation in a crowded local market
- Audience-first framework for editorial decisions
- What motivates Angelenos to engage with the city
- What information they need when doing so

The Modes



Some newsrooms might start tagging and reporting past content first, then commissioning

# I think about operations in three buckets.

*Credit to Lillian Ruiz for this taxonomy.*

## Outputs

How will you integrate the insights into the products you make for your audience members?

Identify what you hope will change

## Metrics, measurements, and financials

How will you measure progress integrating the insights and their impact on performance?

Identify how you'll know it changed

## Processes

How will you integrate the insights into your decisions and workflows?

How you'll make sure the outputs actually change

Acting on audience  
insights is a  
fundamentally  
disruptive act.

**To do so consistently,  
you have to break  
and rebuild outputs,  
processes, and  
metrics.**



Section 1

# Outputs

# Return to this communications framework

## **What?**

What happened or what is going to happen?

I'm going to share the results of some research we did with voters about how they make decisions on their ballot.

## **So what?**

Why is it important or why does this matter?

The research gave us useful insights into what information voters find most useful and what they're struggling to understand or find.

## **Now what?**

What will we do next or what should we do moving forward?

This will help us decide how we want to iterate on our election strategy for the midterms.

# Outputs

How will you integrate your audience insights into the products they're supposed to influence?

User stories

Value proposition statements

# Outputs

What products should the insights influence? How will they influence them?



## Stories

Content mix

Approaches and framing

Format choices

Headlines and labeling



## Newsletters

Value prop

Tone

Features



## Events



## Homepage



## Social media



## What else?

# User story

A framework for distilling a person's needs so that you can solve for them with your product

When

-----  
(situation)

I want to

-----  
(motivation)

So I can

-----  
(expected outcome)

# Value proposition statement

The first half of the statement is a recasting of the user story. The second half articulates your strategy for acting on the JTBD.

**Our**

products/service

**help**

user segment

**who want to**

user jobs to be done

**by**

verb (e.g. reducing, avoiding)

a user pain

**and by**

increasing, enabling

a user gain

Section 2

# Processes

# Processes

How will you integrate the audience insights into your decisions and workflows?

## Identify the "scenes"

Scenes are the places decisions are made about your products (and I'd count stories as a product).

## Identify what type of support will be most useful for each scene

- Is it hands-on/active support, such as training?
- Is it passive support, such as documentation?

# How we integrated the Modes into processes

- **Modes office hours**

Followed the morning news meeting three days a week

- **Modes Menu**

Tackled everything from headlines to infoboxes, organized by Mode

- **Added to key planning documents and tools**

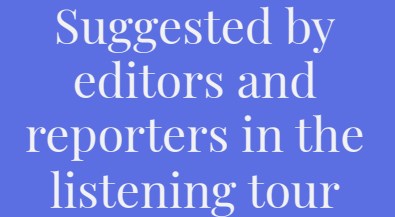
Editorial planning tool, project pitch form, etc.

- **Created a Modes library for all materials**

- **Made the "Mode" field a required field in the CMS**

Only after a couple months of training and experimentation

Suggested by  
editors and  
reporters in the  
listening tour





- Choose an output in your organization
- Identify when decisions are made about that product
- How could you bring the insights into those decisions?

# Go on a listening tour

## NAME IT

Identify what you're trying to accomplish and what you need to learn.

By the end of this tour, I need to understand [BLANK] so that I can [BLANK].

## SHAPE IT

Decide who you need to hear from

You might need to hear from a few different types of stakeholders.

## SCRIPT IT

Decide what you'll ask.

A couple questions is enough.

Section 3

# Metrics, Measurements, and Financials

Evaluation starts with being  
able to answer this question:

What impact are you hoping  
the insights will have?

# Metrics, measurements, financials

How will you measure the progress integrating the audience insights and their impact on your business challenge?

## Soft outcomes

- These measure culture change and organizational or individual learning
- Could also measure effect on audience members

## Hard outcomes

- These are usually related to sustainability
- Metrics such as story performance, revenue (member conversion, new grants)

# Examples for the Modes

## Soft outcomes

- Organizational alignment
  - Are the Modes centered in decisions across all departments?
  - Do core products reflect the Modes?
- Enthusiasm for the Modes
  - Attendance at office hours
- More efficient use of resources
  - Killing non-Mode stories
  - Smarter story distribution
- More distinctive journalism
  - 75% of stories each month serve one or more Mode

## Hard outcomes

- Story performance
  - Typical story performance metrics
  - Total users by Mode vs number of stories by Mode
- Membership conversion
- Newsletter conversion
- Referral sources by Mode

If you're unsure where to start with hard outcomes, look at organizational goals and the funnel

# Tracking soft outcomes often starts with tracking small wins.

## Categories of small wins

---

- Curiosity and enthusiasm
- Guiding decisions
- Course correction
- Digital performance
- Industry recognition
- What else?



# Hard outcomes

How can the insights move you toward your goals?

Stuck? Consider what stage/stages of the funnel are relevant.

Identify the questions you need to answer with data

- How do the Modes perform relative to Inform?
- How do the Modes perform relative to each other?
- How do Modes perform at each stage of the funnel?

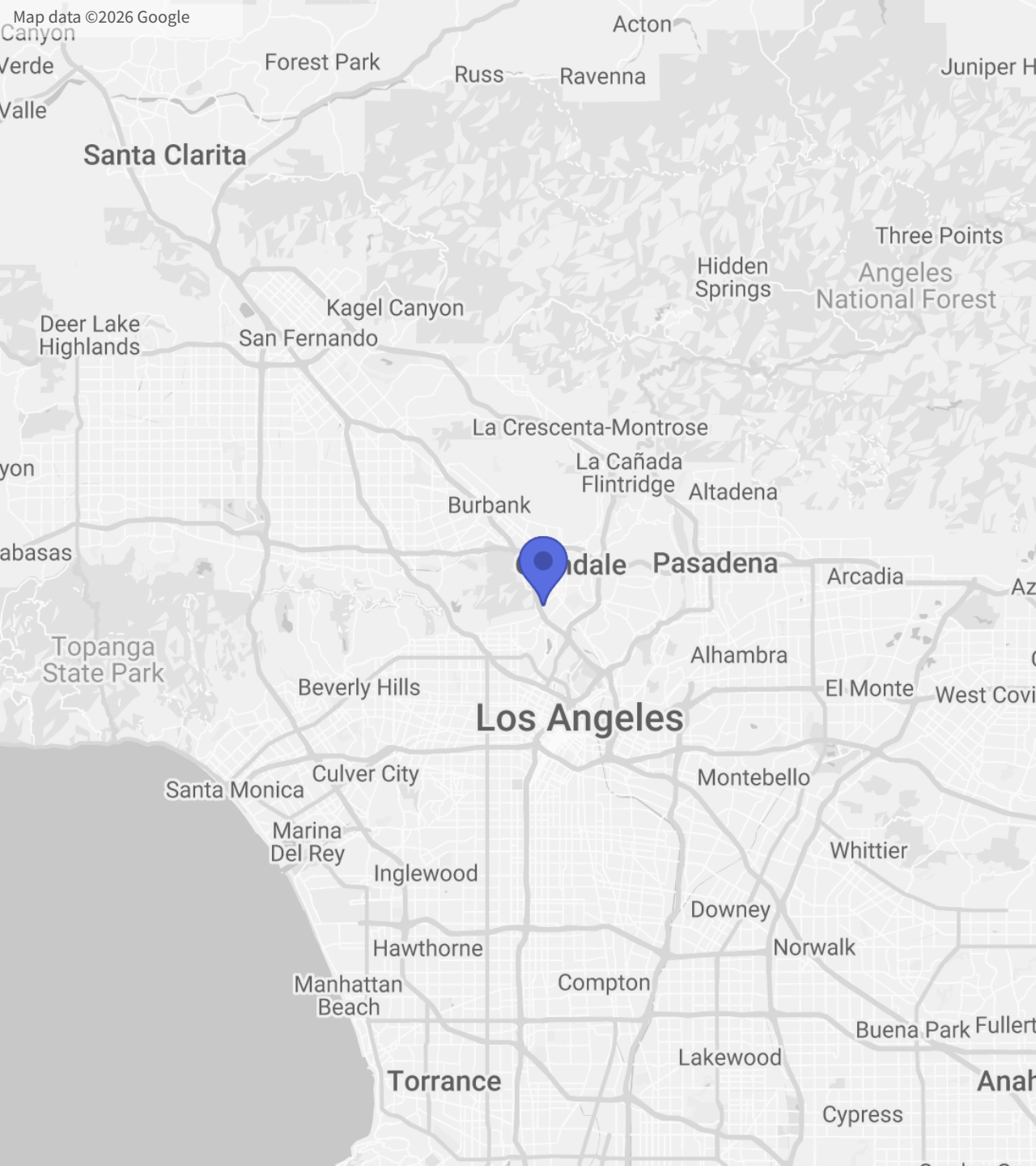
Will monitoring or testing and experimentation answer your question?

If we [action], then we will see [improvement] as measured by [metrics].





If we align stories with the Modes, then we will see stronger story performance as measured by page views, views over time, and performance down the funnel.

If we align membership messaging with the Modes, then we will see stronger membership performance as measured by number of contributions and average size of contribution.

Questions?



# Stay in touch.

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I have office hours every Tuesday from 10 to 11 PT. Find the link on my website.