

LENFEST INSTITUTE FOR JOURNALISM AUDIENCE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Designing actionable research

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As an audience and product strategist, I help newsrooms...

- Design and execute research and engagement initiatives to uncover community needs
- Transform those needs into editorial and product strategies

Priors

- Director of News Experimentation, LAist
- Membership Puzzle Project
- Director, The New Tropic

Tell me about a time...

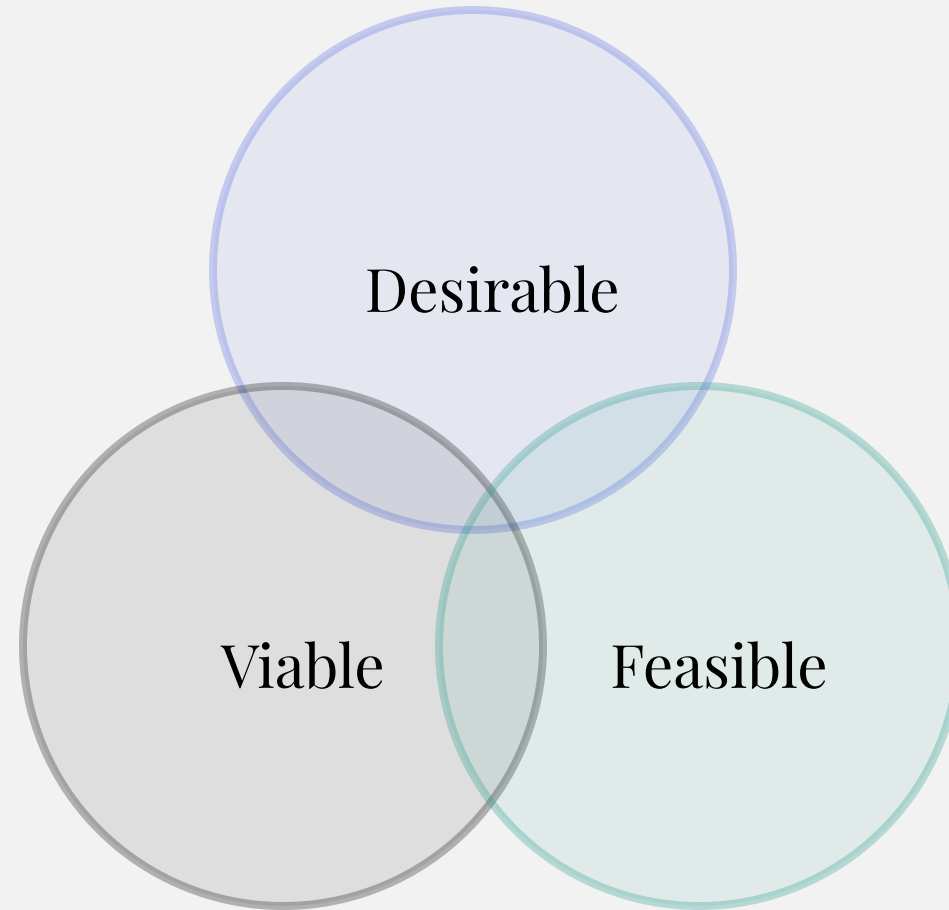
When research has been actionable

When research *hasn't* been actionable

Why does audience research matter?

- ★ It helps you use your resources more effectively.
- ★ It helps you make things people actually want.
- ★ It can reduce the number of things you have to try before you get it right.
- ★ It makes this work less of a guessing game.
- ★ It's the simplest form of audience participation you can offer.

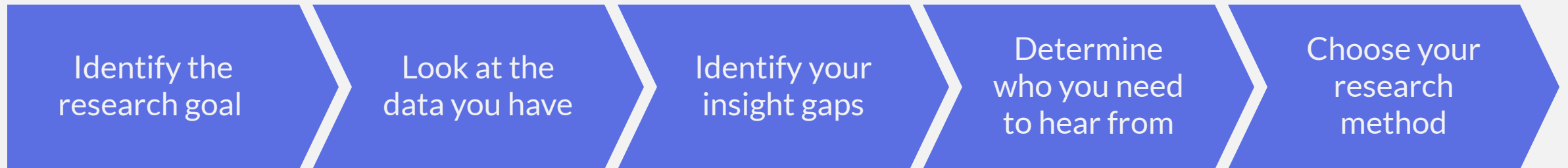
Human-centered design innovation



When *not* to do audience research

- When your data can answer the question for you
- When tests would work better (such as using an A/B test to choose a send time for your newsletter)
 - Prototyping
 - Launching an MVP (minimally viable product)
 - A/B testing
- When what you're really looking for is praise. Ask for testimonials instead.
- When you don't have a plan or capacity to use the findings

The key steps to designing a research sprint



Section 1

Setting research goals

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.

LAist Example

BUSINESS CHALLENGE:

We need a source of strategic differentiation in a crowded local market and a framework for making daily audience-centric decisions in the newsroom.

I WISH WE KNEW HOW/WHY...

Angelenos interact with their community.

Access and use local information.

Angelenos' personal motivations intersect with the city.

BEHAVIORS TO UNDERSTAND:

When do they engage with people, information, and institutions beyond their job and family unit?

Why are they engaging with them?

What info do they need? Where do they go for it?

TARGET GROUP

Angelenos, primarily people for whom LAist is not a primary source

Other questions to guide you

- What are our organizational goals, and what insights are we lacking that would help us meet them?
- What decisions do we need to make, and what do we need to know in order to make them?
- What core assumptions are we making about our users, and how can we test them?

Your turn

START HERE.

What is your business challenge?

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE.

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

TIP: GET SPECIFIC.

What behaviors do you want to understand?

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

Check your data

1 Analytics can point you toward behaviors and preferences that you can learn more about through audience research

2 Check market research and community data to explore benchmarks and behaviors in the community

Section 2

Designing the research

Choosing your audience research method

Choose surveys when...

- A large or geographically distributed sample is more important than detail.
- You need quick, specific feedback on a work-in-progress
- You need quantitative data.

Choose interviews/focus groups when...

- You need to understand habits, motivations, or attitudes.
- You need new ideas.
- You need to be very intentional about who you get feedback from.

Deciding what questions to ask

- What decision(s) do you need to make?
- What information do you need in order to make that decision?
- Can you get the information another way? Check your data. Consider a test.
- If not, what question(s) will elicit that information?
- Can you imagine yourself making a decision with the responses?

Winnowing your questions

Question	What I want to learn from this question	How I will use the results from this question
Write your question here	Repetition here signals an opportunity to cut	Repetition here signals an opportunity to cut

Hypotheticals vs indicators

Hypotheticals

- Would you listen to a weekly podcast on this topic?
- If we launched a membership program, would you be willing to pay to join?
- How much would you be willing to pay?

Indicators

- How often do you listen to podcasts?
- What types of podcasts do you enjoy?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend us to a friend?
- What other causes do you financially support?

Section 3

Best practices

Align stakeholders with a research brief

Identify your stakeholders

Who sets strategic goals?

Who develops product strategy?

Who engages with your audiences most often?

Who will be executing the research?

Write a research brief with input from your stakeholders.

The research brief is a way to align people at all levels of the organization on the research goal and how you will act on it.

What a brief covers

- Research goal
- Relevant background
- Timeline
 - Design
 - Execution
 - Synthesis
 - Deployment
- Method(s) you'll use
- Survey/interview scripts

Best practices

- Always do it in connection with an organizational goal
- Recruit thoughtfully and inclusively, design with accessibility in mind
- Own your assumptions – and then set them aside
- Keep cultural context in mind
- Be clear about how you will store and use the data

“Your audience is not a monolith. It is composed of different sub-communities or segments, and until you discover those segments, you don’t really know who your audience 'is' and you can’t take any action. When you can accurately segment your audience, **it means you know something vital about them.**”



Emily Goligoski and Emily Roseman, The Membership Guide

Additional resources

[Planning Effective Product Research](#) | News
Product Alliance

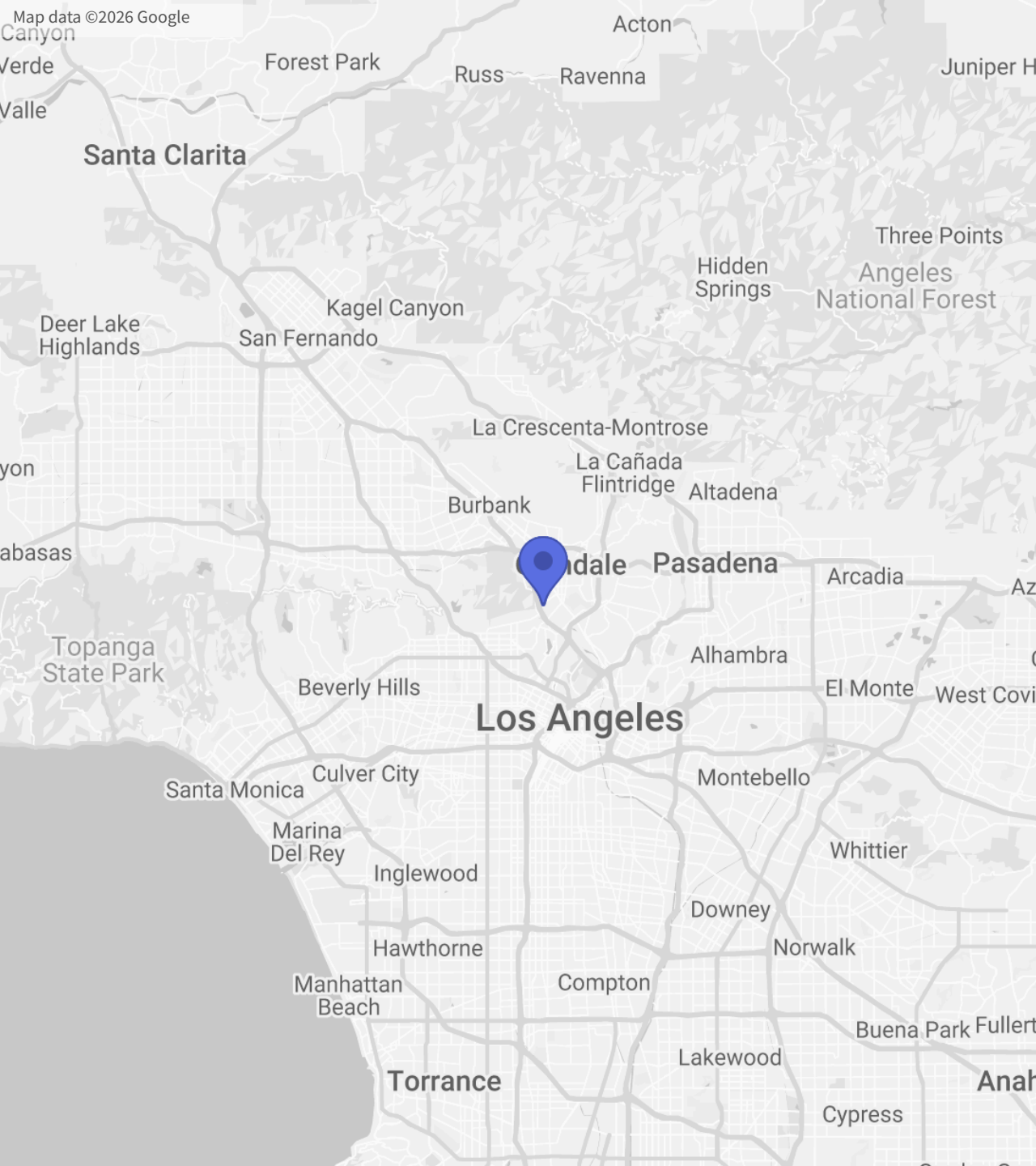
[Conducting Audience Research](#) | Membership
Puzzle Project

[Information needs assessment survey and
Guide to crafting great questions](#) | Listening
Post Collective

[Supporter Survey Question Bank](#) |
Membership Puzzle Project


The Audience Research Series

- 1 March 26: Extracting and communicating research insights**
Separating the signal from the noise when you're done with research
- 2 April 23: Building buy-in and understanding of audience insights**
Tips on getting all levels of your newsroom bought in
- 3 May: Evaluating the impact of research**
Track the impact of audience insights on understanding and performance




Stay in touch.

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