



## Overview

Reimagine Arkansas is a statewide listening channel that amplifies underheard voices in order to build a more just and joyous future for *all* Arkansans.

Bird's Eye Creative designed and implemented the digital engagement strategy for Reimagine Arkansas. This included website design and management, social media administration, social listening and data analysis. In addition, Bird's Eye Creative led the engagement with creatives to design the open source art made available by Reimagine Arkansas.

To date, we've held 12 conversations with 55 participants representing community advocates, frontline healthcare staff, teachers and school staff, housing advocates and regional artists. We've engaged 15 creatives from NWA, West Helena, Conway, Little Rock, and Maumelle that resulted in more than 75 graphic design concepts inspired by the conversations. We've released 3 "constellation kits" which includes an audio synthesis of the conversations and associated graphics. **Content from those kits has reached over 350,000 people.**

## Description and performance of the distribution strategy

Unlike targeted campaigns with clear audiences and calls to action, Reimagine Arkansas set out to build the narrative and audience scaffolding required for future equity-focused campaigns and efforts. As such, the goal for content distribution was to enlist particular voices and storylines to *draw in* audiences across a multitude of communities, professions, and psychographics using a "mirrors and windows" framework and sustain their engagement over a long period of time.

A mirror is a story that reflects your own culture and helps you build your identity. A window is a resource that offers you a view into someone else's experience. For example, if our content was based on conversations with educators throughout the state, we would target that content towards teachers, principals, etc. From there we would broaden our audience to include audiences from previous conversations and/or related affinity groups, primarily on Facebook and Instagram.

Based on engagement and website analytics shared below, we believe this proved to be a successful strategy.

<b>Website visitors</b>	1,892
<b>Audio plays within constellation kit</b>	1,051
<b>Time on page</b>	2:28 (high benchmark is 2 minutes)

<b>Facebook/Instagram impressions</b>	351,071 (7,111 engagements)
<b>Video/Audio plays on social</b>	9,828

### Top performing posts on social

<b>Twitter</b>	Our top performing post on Twitter came early with a RT by @ArkansasCOVID. The video on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Marshallese community was viewed 3,400 times on Twitter and an additional 2,671 times on Facebook.	<a href="https://bit.ly/38mTk9Z">https://bit.ly/38mTk9Z</a>
<b>Facebook</b>	The Marshallese video also held the top spot on Facebook for video views followed by the animated graphic with audio of the teacher and coach from Rogers, Arkansas. His voice was played 1,152 times.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3n0mkbS">https://bit.ly/3n0mkbS</a>
<b>Facebook</b>	The top performing post overall was the 'Question the Systems, Not the Symptoms' collection of graphics by artist Coco Lashar. This post was placed in the context of the George Floyd protests with a voice from one of our early conversations with community advocates. It generated over 16,000 impressions and 1,188 engagements.	<a href="https://bit.ly/36hQAZ4">https://bit.ly/36hQAZ4</a>
<b>Facebook</b>	This post was followed by our constellation kit based on our conversations with frontline healthcare workers which generated over 900 engagements.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3i5IXfB">https://bit.ly/3i5IXfB</a>

<p><b>Instagram</b></p>	<p>Our top performing post on Instagram was our 'Filipino Nurse' graphic collection by artist Sara Melby. This post was based on a conversation with 3 Filipino nurses in Central Arkansas and centered on the contribution of Filipinos nurses in America anchored by the voices from this conversation. It generated 17,884 impressions with the help of sponsored ads.</p>	<p><a href="https://bit.ly/3l5DAvF">https://bit.ly/3l5DAvF</a></p>
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**Demographic analysis**

While social media platforms do not give many specifics related to demographics, we are able to see that our audience is primarily composed of women at just above 65% on both Facebook and Instagram. Looking at our top locations by Facebook, our average daily reach in Arkansas was around 1,283 people split evenly between Central Arkansas and Northwest Arkansas at 46% with an 8% reach into East Arkansas.

The predominance of women in our audience could be attributed to the themes of our initial constellation kits— healthcare workers and teachers—which skew towards women in those professions. Additionally, conversation participants and artists drew heavily from our personal and professional connections to Northwest Arkansas and Central Arkansas. Diversifying our constellation kit themes as well as our use of conversation conveners will help us expand our reach.

While the distribution strategy was broad, we confirmed that deep engagement IS possible at this scale based on time spent on the website and the number of audio plays our kits generated. Compared to traditional media, we engaged at a much higher and longer rate (see next section for media comparison).

The key, we believe, is offering many threads and unpacking content in a multitude of ways for “slow burn” engagement on issues audiences can relate to, voices they can connect to, and images that inspire and motivate them. In fact, we learned fairly early on that each kit produces an abundance of content, far more than what we anticipated for our timeline and distribution capacity. We would rather add capacity than slow down the content creation, but we did prove that you don’t need a volume of voices to go broad and deep on distribution. The content generated by our prompts and creative collateral offered by our artists is richer and more flexible than we anticipated.

## Arkansas media ecosystem: A desert of opportunity for equity-based narratives

With our metrics for reach and engagement in hand, we recently began to outline the contours of the Arkansas mediascape. Our focus is on benchmark and keyword analysis of outlets responsible for statewide content distribution, specifically, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, *Talk Business and Politics*, *Arkansas Times*, *Arkansas Money and Politics* and *Arkansas Business*.

Together, the five Arkansas news outlets published 538 Facebook posts (around 18 posts per day) and averaged approximately 13 engagements per post (likes, comments, shares, etc.). While the Reimagine Arkansas approach cannot compete with the content production capacity of the primary media outlets in the state, our post engagement is 3x higher. Of the 30 pieces we published across social media in October, our average rate of engagement per post was around 40 compared to the 13 engagements per post of the traditional media cohort (less than 10 engagements on posts that met our keyword criteria). We may not be able to produce as much content, but we can ensure the content produced reaches and engages deeper with audiences.

Additionally, we scraped the Facebook accounts and websites of the 5 media entities for posts/articles published during the month of October to apply our keyword analysis (figure 1). The keyword list reflects the research and messaging recommendations of a variety of equity narrative advocates, including Opportunity Agenda, ASO Communications and Demos' Race-Class Narrative Project.

- Of the 923 articles sampled, [less than 7% met our keyword parameters.](#)
- Of the 538 Facebook posts, [less than 4% included a keyword in the caption.](#)

**Fig. 1 Initial keyword list**

unemployed	frontline worker	low wages	educational disparities	access to healthcare
wage worker	trapped	earn a wage	educational inequities	paid sick leave
essential workers	cycle of poverty	decent job	gaps in learning	point system
ALICE	living on the brink	fair wages	achievement gap	health risks
working poor	make ends meet	good wages	school as safety net	high premiums
poor people	pay bills	hard work	educational reform	high deductibles
disadvantaged	raise a family	work hard	school funding	unexpected emergency
communities of color	welfare	economic rules	low-income students	prescription costs
people of color/BIPOC	broken economy	rigged	free and reduced lunch	comorbidity
black and brown	economy is broken	favor the rich	educational equity	at risk
underserved	fair economy	economic barriers	digital divide	can't/struggling to get ahead
marginalized	economy for all	economic obstacles	rural broadband	huge corporations
uninsured	out of poverty	income gaps	school reform	health inequities
vulnerable	rebuild the economy	inequalities	health disparities	rent

We are excited about this initial research and hope to fine tune our systems and filters to yield reliable data and patterns and extend these filter searches to a larger portion of the digital landscape. Our hypothesis, however, is that the share of news content that contains equity-based frameworks and messaging will not increase considerably without strategic intervention. In fact, given the election season and the pandemic, a 7% share of website articles is probably high. With our engagement-focused approach, we could make a significant dent in this space through targeted and strategic amplification of existing and emerging voices.



\*Word cloud of 3 Reimagine Arkansas constellation kits

Specifically, since the keyword signals from traditional media are so few and far between, it is within our capacity to track and investigate what is being reported that aligns with the equity goals and framework of WRF/Reimagine. This could inform a strategy that places less reliance on us to produce original content and increases our focus on extending the reach of content/topics/points of interest produced by other creators.

Strategic partnerships with organizations such as Arkansas Soul and, more recently, the Rural Community Alliance will hopefully prove this to be a crucial pivot. By adding creative collateral and targeted

ad/distribution strategies to content produced by and for diverse audiences whose perspectives are not well reflected in traditional media, Reimagine can broaden and deepen the engagement with equity-advancing messages.

Another strategy we are pursuing is a “layered” approach to existing content. For example, the recent *Arkansas Nonprofit News Network-Propublica* piece on evictions in Arkansas met our keyword criteria and had a modest distribution reach. Given the challenges we were experiencing with securing participants for a conversation around housing insecurity and inequitable eviction rates, we used this article as a springboard for discussion about housing with our artist network in a recorded conversation that we will include in our next constellation kit. This approach allows us to layer more ideas and voices on top of existing work, stretch the conversation longer and deeper, and also amplify the original piece and the writers and outlets that produced it.

While it may not be in the realm of possibility for Reimagine Arkansas alone to secure a significant share of attention from audiences in the state compared to the 5 we are tracking, we

are well suited to organize a narrative collective of aligned media projects/initiatives/organizations who do. This collective could share and leverage resources, collaborate more strategically on specific narrative campaigns, and organize artists, writers and cultural influencers for greater impact.

### **Early challenges**

One barrier that we faced early on, and that impacted the overall reach of the first kit, was that our content was often labeled within the special ad and “social issue” categories of Facebook. This required us to move through the disclaimer process with Facebook before we could amplify our content, which took around 3 weeks. This shouldn’t pose an issue moving forward, but it does put some constraints around targeting that we didn’t consider.

As mentioned above, another challenge was the additional bandwidth needed for social media distribution. We underestimated how many ways these kits can be unpacked and distributed and that the “layering approach” necessary for deep engagement required additional treatments and time. By adding additional staffing capacity to our distribution efforts, we believe our reach and engagement could have been much larger.

Organizing conversations is still a challenge based on the people we hope to engage in this work. Our initial facilitator strategy relied on engaging frontline advocates to “buy into” the Reimagine concept and host conversations with underheard voices in their network. Given the newness of the project and the exponential burdens put on advocates’ time and capacity during the pandemic, this strategy did not bear out. Advocates were quick to join a call and support the initiative, but it appeared to be yet another heavy lift to their schedule and responsibilities to coordinate a recorded call. Assuming the role of conveners and facilitators ourselves, there was an access and trust factor that we couldn’t quite overcome, especially when we pursued the topic of housing and evictions.

Additionally, the Local Voices Network model of a recorded Zoom call creates a lot of participation barriers right now—reliable internet connection, 75 minutes of scheduled, uninterrupted time, and trust with the other people on the call. Moving forward, it is imperative that we make voice sharing accessible to the communities we are trying to reach and to that end, we are experimenting with [Speakpipe](#) (a web-based app that lets you record directly from any mobile device) and [Discord](#), a video and audio communication channel designed for mobile networks. Local Voices Network can transcribe any MP3 file that we produce, but we may want to pursue more affordable transcription services if we find we are relying more and more on mobile-based platforms.

One hypothesis that was 100% invalidated was the expectation of a traditional media pick-up of our work. We had hoped for an earned media buy-in and organic amplification of the project, but this failed to materialize.

## **Next steps**

Agile listening. To listen and amplify underheard voices in ways that shift power and access, we need to invest in facilitators and conveners in communities across the state. We also need to expand our use of accessible technology, beyond our own Zoom calls, to make sure there are very few barriers to participation. We hope to continue to explore innovative ways to capture online voices via emerging platforms such as SpeakPipe and Discord. As pandemic constraints allow, we are also excited to move into in-person, facilitated conversations as well as recording booths (Momentary exhibit) in public spaces.

Beyond graphic design engagement. Our creative focus on graphic design allowed us to pilot artist engagement with a small subset of creatives in the state and produce affordable inspirations designed to travel in the digital landscape. Moving forward, however, our engagement with audiences will benefit tremendously with a variety of experiences that go beyond graphic inspiration and include both online and offline creations. Our upcoming partnership with the Momentary in Bentonville is a prime example of linking the act of listening with a public experience of radical imagination and we hope this engagement will serve as a model for future creative partnerships.

Strategic partnerships. There are a handful of existing and emerging individuals/ initiatives across the state who are collecting, creating and curating stories that advance inclusive, equity narratives. We want to track and support the content-production efforts they are involved in by amplifying or building upon that content with our processes e.g. Arkansas Nonprofit News Network, Rural Community Alliance Podcast, Arkansas Soul, Visionairi, District 3 Podcast, NWA Prison Story Project, Ozark Story Project, etc.

We are especially excited about our partnership with Arkansas Soul and collaborating with a cohort of diverse writers similar to our artist cohort. There are many stories within the constellation kits that beckon further exploration, investigation and writing and we want to connect themes that we are exploring with the voices of writers who have important perspectives to share on these topics. In return, we can provide many of the design elements through our artist engagement that will strengthen distribution and engagement of Arkansas Soul pieces.

### Essential Listening Lab.

While we intend to keep the kits at the core of our work, we know we need to increase the accessibility of the content with audio narration (podcasts), translations, etc. This offers an opportunity to bring in additional partners, influencers and activists to help create online and offline “products” designed to ease and enhance the experience of listening. We are also anxious to explore the concept of an Essential Listening Lab, a “social experiment” where dedicated listeners can tune into our constellation kit series, participate in discussions and reactions to written and artistic pieces, and engage in conversations inspired by voices shared.

Another tier of our “Essential Listening Lab” experiment is to cultivate a core group of individuals who have firsthand experiences with the challenges and aspirations we want to amplify.

Whether we are talking about housing, childcare, education, etc., ALICE experiences the intersection of these systems every day and is forced to navigate and survive under the pressures they exert. Similar to Robin Hood's Blue Ridge Labs, we envision recruiting and compensating a cohort of ALICE to periodically participate in conversations and discussions to share their lived experiences and provide feedback on certain issues. This cohort could also be valuable to many ALICE-serving nonprofits and agencies as a feedback loop to program design and strategy. Participation in this cohort could also expand to other opportunities, including leadership and organizing support, personal narrative design and public speaking and media engagements.

#### Arkansas Narrative Collective.

As we begin to connect informally and formally with other narrative change agents through strategic partnerships, cross promotion and amplification, we want to create a dedicated space for what we are calling the Arkansas Narrative Collective. Organized by Reimagine, the Collective will consist of an annual gathering of advocates, organizers, cultural activists, and storytellers organized around building an equity narrative movement in Arkansas. We envision workshops, keynotes, and campaign-building strategy sessions beginning as early as 2021.

#### **For Future Consideration**

As with all narrative and communication efforts, we need to be clear on our target audiences and design and test content to engage them in productive ways. Reimagine's "mirror and window" framework was useful for the kinds of accessible COVID themes we explored in our constellation kits. It also allowed us to maximize our advertising budget based on broad audience profiles. But that strategy is not sufficient for targeted campaign objectives nor our own calls to action based on the engagement we hope to secure from organizational partners, artists, writers, ALICE contributors and, most importantly, a growing network of dedicated listeners.

For Reimagine to succeed as a trusted listening channel for underheard voices, we need to invest in more sophisticated audience research to grow our own work and that of our aligned partners. As part of our digital distribution strategy, we can start to build out custom segmented audiences based on demographics (education-level, income-level, etc.) interests (media preferences) and behaviors (likely to engage with liberal, conservative, moderate political content) that align with the psychographic-based audience schema put forth by the Gates cohort and target them using a paid advertising strategy. Once we have these custom profiles built and mapped out, we can begin to test audience receptivity to issues, message frames and visuals for future campaigns and initiatives.

Reimagine would not be the only one to benefit from custom-built, psychographic profiles. There are numerous equity-focused organizations in Arkansas capable of creating exceptional content with the power to shift stereotypes and perceptions. However, it is very difficult to compete for attention in the digital space without targeted advertising. If we could leverage resources to provide technical support and advertising dollars to assist in their respective distribution efforts,



we could help amplify their content with similar audiences that WRF and Reimagine are targeting and create a truly surround sound experience.

Collaboration and coordination on audience engagement is critical and underscores the value of a loose network such as the proposed Arkansas Narrative Collective. Through this collective, we could leverage technical support and resources through activities such as micro-grants and capacity building workshops designed to assist targeted campaigns and initiatives. It would also connect narrative change agents working on similar issues across the state—and perhaps the funders that support them—with the communication tools they need to shift the narrative towards equity in Arkansas.