# **Bring these questions to your 2023 election retrospective**

Trusted relationships are at the heart of an inclusive democracy and a resilient news organization.

Retrospective conversations offer an opportunity to move beyond assessing what did and didn’t work on Election Day itself. You can also discuss how you serve your community with relevant coverage before and after an election — how those relationships are formed, and how they continue long after results are final. Consider bringing questions from the list below to this year’s retrospective to aid your planning for 2024. Focus on what’s most resonant for your organization and what you see as worth raising.

**Mission, vision and goals**

Journalists should feel their work matters. Consider starting with:

* What are we most proud of in our election-related journalism and engagement this year?
* How did we or could we celebrate or acknowledge these successes internally?
* How might we acknowledge this important work publicly?
* What or who was missing in our coverage?
* Why do we think these gaps mattered?
* What external challenges prevented or inhibited us from doing this work?
* What internal challenges prevented or inhibited us from doing this work?

Newsrooms have finite resources and news leaders must make decisions about what reporting and initiatives they focus on. Consider:

* How did our coverage differ from other news organizations in our area?
* Was the scope of our election coverage clear to our community?
* Was the scope of our election coverage clear to our team? When did challenges arise for what we decided to cover and what we decided not to?
* What does our team wish we would have covered more thoroughly in 2023?
* What do we think different parts of the community would say was over- or under- covered?
* How might we gather this information?
* How might our community’s perceptions align with what we actually did? Have we done a content or [source audit](https://americanpressinstitute.org/publications/articles/build-newsroom-habits-with-source-tracking/) on the lead-up to the election?
* How might or should our community's priorities [inform our decision-making](https://americanpressinstitute.org/publications/articles/community-listening-to-shape-election-coverage/) in 2024? How might we set up workflow or workspace efficiencies to solicit such input and respond to it?

Targets and goals can help you learn and grow. Consider:

* What, if anything, did we set out to learn in our coverage this year?
* What did we learn?
* Did we go into it with a hypothesis or a target — some measurable goal to see if we met our expectations?
* What might our “[mission statement for election coverage](https://medium.com/trusting-news/define-and-share-your-mission-for-covering-the-election-b16f926fe426)” be in 2024?
* How will we know if we have arrived at the vision for that mission? What will we observe?
* What data points might we begin tracking early in 2024 to track progress toward that goal?

**Earning trust and audience for election coverage**

Honest assessments reveal strengths and weaknesses in terms of growing and serving audiences. Consider:

* Who in our community do we think we served well with our election coverage this year?
* How do our analytics match up with what we think?
* Who might not have been well served by our coverage?
* Do we know how our communities view our past election coverage?
* Do all our communities believe their perspectives are represented in our election coverage?
* What external factors influenced these outcomes?
* What internal factors influenced these outcomes?

News organizations can build trust through authentic, in-person engagement. Consider:

* What kind of in-person engagement did we do related to this year’s election?
* What was attendance like and who made up the audience or participants there?
* Where did we go for these engagement efforts?
* Were these events opportunities for us to share information with our community, hear from them or both?
* What do we know about how participants liked or disliked this engagement?
* What efforts did we make to remain engaged with these participants or the community after the event ended?
* How did we promote this opportunity ahead of time? What relationships did we lean on (or not have) to make outreach for this event work?
* What did we learn during this engagement, its build-up or follow-up that informed our reporting or our distribution for that reporting?
* How did we tell the community about what we did in response to what we learned?

News organizations can also create on-ramps to election coverage digitally. Consider:

* What do we know about election-related searches online in our community? When did they spike in the past year, and how did our coverage align or not align with these moments?
* When did our voter guides or other information about candidates publish, and how did that align with searches for candidates?
* When did our information about how to vote or voting logistics publish, and how did that align with relevant searches?
* What might many people be looking for or be interested in related to elections before these moments?
* What do we know about how people engaged with our various distribution channels around election-related news? What can those insights tell us about where we should be investing our efforts?
* What do we think will be similar or different about social media channels in 2024, and how should that impact our work?
* Are there questions about our coverage and audience we can’t answer with our current analytics tools? If so, how might we address them?
* Did our election coverage across platforms (e.g. newsletters, social media channels, video) find their intended audience? How might we evolve our distribution strategies based on what we learned?

**Maintaining relationships and keeping audience after election day**

Election Day and election results offer a regular opportunity to attract audiences — and find ways to keep them. Consider:

* When traffic surged around our election results, how did we both inform those audiences and offer ways to go deeper with us?
* Did we have goals about [converting audiences to a newsletter](https://americanpressinstitute.org/publications/articles/newsletter-strategies-for-retention-trust-and-revenue/), free account or some other way to continue engaging our work?
* How did we promote these opportunities to go deeper, and what did we learn?
* How did we work across departments to build on this moment, and when did planning for it begin?
* What frames, initiatives or projects did we use to transition people from thinking about election results to other related coverage? What opportunities might we have had?
* How might we build follow-up in-person engagement with our communities?
* How does our engagement *after* the election relate or build upon the engagement *before* the election?

**Supporting fellow journalists along the way**

There are numerous hazards to reporting on elections in today’s political and societal environment. News leaders can mitigate risk and harm. Consider:

* How often and in what ways did we check in on the well-being of our reporters?
* What patterns did we see in terms of online harassment and abuse? Who felt this most?
* How did leadership respond to harassment as well as attacks on our staff’s mission, processes, ethics or integrity? Did leadership make it clear what staff should do in different scenarios?
* What resources did we offer this year to protect journalists’ security and well-being online and while reporting? What worked and didn’t work well about them?
* Did our policies to protect our team member’s health and mental health help our reporters? What situations did we not anticipate and what can we learn from them?
* How are we supporting our [journalists’ mental health](https://americanpressinstitute.org/publications/articles/support-the-mental-health-of-journalists/) *before* an intense political reporting season — as opposed to responding during a crisis?

*These questions are sourced from across* [*API team members*](https://americanpressinstitute.org/about/who-we-are/)*, including:*

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* *From our Product Strategy team: Elite Truong and Liz Worthington*

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*To learn more about API’s work and how we may support you in 2024,* [*visit our website*](https://americanpressinstitute.org/)*,* [*sign up for our Need to Know newsletter*](http://bit.ly/getNTK) *or* [*bring training to your newsroom*](https://americanpressinstitute.org/how-we-can-help/training-support/)*.*