



Study Visit Toolkit

Peer learning as a catalyst for
stronger journalism





Introduction

Study visits have proven to be a dynamic tool for fostering innovation, problem-solving, and collaboration among independent newsrooms. Through the Journalism Value Project (JVP), members of Reference - The European Independent Media Circle have successfully piloted these visits, learning first-hand how peer exchanges can drive practical improvements.

A study visit typically involves one newsroom sending one or more staff members to another newsroom for a set period to exchange knowledge on editorial, non-editorial, or mixed topics. Within the Journalism Value Project (JVP), these visits took place across European borders, lasting a few days and focusing primarily on non-editorial aspects of newsroom operations.

While the toolkit is tailored to reflect the specific structure and learning goals of the JVP visits, it can easily be adapted for other contexts. In the JVP, participating Reference members were paired based on a survey that matched their areas of expertise and success with the needs and challenges of others, a process that proved valuable. Making at least a basic match of skills and needs before detailed planning begins is highly recommended and is outlined in this guide.

This toolkit is a document intended to guide newsrooms in planning, conducting, and benefitting from study visits. It draws on experiences to date and will be regularly updated with new insights.

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Clarify the purpose of your visit

Before you begin planning, define the type of visit:



Solution-oriented visits

- Aim to tackle a specific operational, non-editorial challenge to ensure a clear and valuable outcome from the time invested.
- Example: Improving your newsletter onboarding flow or streamlining your podcast production workflow.



Exploratory visits

- Focus on observing another newsroom's practices to stay open to learning and gain inspiration across a range of areas.
- Example: Learning about different models of community engagement without a specific problem to solve.



Tip: Be clear from the outset. If the visit is exploratory, ensure both sides understand that no tangible solution is expected, only learning and inspiration.



Identify the core challenge

In early planning meetings (online or in-person), identify the specific need or opportunity of the visiting newsroom. Ask:

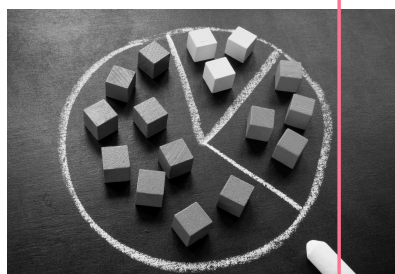


- What is a significant operational challenge we are facing?
- How could this problem be addressed practically?
- What internal strengths do we (the visitors) have that might aid the solution?

While the primary focus may be on supporting the visiting newsroom, host organisations should also reflect on what they hope to gain from the exchange and share these goals openly with their guests to foster mutual benefit.

Define clear, achievable goals

Start by breaking down broad challenges into specific, manageable objectives. This helps ensure your study visit is focused and productive. Instead of trying to solve everything at once, identify one or two concrete areas to work on.



- **Break down the challenge:**

Big Challenge: “Our newsletter retention rate is low.”
Smaller Goals: “Improve first-week welcome emails” and “Establish a re-engagement sequence for dormant subscribers.”

- **Be specific:**

Example: When The Bristol Cable visited Fumaça, they didn’t try to overhaul the entire editorial model. Instead, they focused on improving podcast workflows—one clearly defined aspect of their operations.

Avoid vague or overly ambitious outcomes. Instead, define goals that are specific, realistic, and actionable.



Plan the exchange collaboratively

Effective preparation is key. **Both visitor and host must:**



- Agree on the focus and desired outcomes.
- Select the right participants: people with the relevant expertise, decision-making authority, and good communication skills. It is a good starting point to let people meet with their counterpart from the other newsroom, i.e. the person responsible for the same areas.
- Discuss technical or organisational requirements: e.g., access to CMS, CRM, Slack channels.
- Create a shared agenda: it is advisable to include and alter between structured sessions (presentations, workshops) and informal discussions.



Checklist example

- ☒ *Morning session: Workshop on onboarding new members*
- ☒ *Afternoon session: Informal discussion with editorial team on community-building strategies*

Use the 'Study Visit Plan' worksheet to structure your planning - download it [here](#).



Set a realistic timeline

Based on the experiences of our 2024 cohort, our advice is:



- Visits should run across working hours over 2 to 4 days.
- Avoid cramming eight-hour work days. Allow for creative thinking and social connection.

Schedule example



Day 1: Arrival, social dinner

Day 2: Workshops in the morning; free afternoon for informal chats or sightseeing

Day 3: Practical working session; feedback wrap-up

Organise travel and accommodation

Each newsroom should be responsible for their own logistics:



- Both newsrooms should agree on dates in advance.
- Book travel and accommodation.

Tip: Book refundable fares where possible in case plans change.



Foster human connection

Study visits are not just about formal learning. Relationship-building is essential.



- Schedule social activities: dinners, coffee breaks, walks.
- Meet different team members, not only the ones working in a similar role.
- Embrace local culture (if possible).



Example

During the Átlátszó Erdély visit to Mensagem de Lisboa, informal meet-ups helped the teams understand community engagement beyond formal strategies.

Fun builds trust and makes it easier to share honest insights and helps to build long-term relationships.



Document and share learnings

Documentation is important both for the visiting newsroom and potentially for the broader community. During and after the visit it can be useful to:

During

- Take photographs (informal shots are fine).
- Keep brief daily notes: key ideas, lessons, action points.

After

Write a 1-2 page summary including:

- Challenge tackled
- Solution or roadmap developed
- Key lessons and surprises
- Reflections on the process

Share your summary report not only with your team, especially those who didn't take part in the visit, but also with the host newsroom. If appropriate, consider sharing your insights more widely through professional networks, newsletters, or informal channels with other newsrooms that could benefit. While it may feel uncomfortable to highlight areas for improvement, openly discussing both successes and challenges is essential for fostering trust, transparency, and solidarity within the independent media community.

Example summary



"We learned that separating member acquisition from editorial goals helped Fumaça double their active membership within a year. We plan to adopt a similar approach by Q4 2025."



Conclusion:

Our tips for great visits



- **Prepare thoroughly.** Agree objectives, people involved, and logistics early.
- **Be realistic.** Don't try to solve everything in one trip.
- **Create breathing space.** Avoid an agenda overloaded with back-to-back meetings.
- **Keep it mutually beneficial.** Hosts should gain value too (feedback, ideas, peer benchmarking.)
- **Celebrate the informal.** Friendships often prove more transformative than formal sessions.
- **Think about sustainability.** After the visit, consider follow-up collaborations.

Food for thought

A study visit is not a field trip, it is a powerful collaboration tool.



Successful visits require trust, openness, focus, and flexibility. Prepare well, keep your goals clear, and embrace the opportunity to learn from colleagues who understand the unique challenges and opportunities of independent journalism.

Ready to start? Download the [Study Visit Plan worksheet](#) and begin planning your exchange today!



THE Journalism Value Project

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