

Video Volunteers upsills community journalists to help them tell local stories that appeal to wide audiences

Video Volunteers (VV) is a media and human rights non-profit organization. Since 2006, it has been empowering marginalized communities across 190+ districts in India to report on local issues.

OPPORTUNITY

Video Volunteers works with over 200 Community Correspondents across India. The company wanted to help these Correspondents better understand the technical possibilities of digital video and create content that would appeal to mainstream audiences. VV would then publish this content on its YouTube channel, giving local reporters access to a wider audience and driving growth for the Video Volunteers brand.

APPROACH

Video Volunteers invested in digital video capabilities and YouTube training for its 200+ Community Correspondents, helping them develop their skills for telling local stories with video. It published the videos on the Video Volunteers YouTube channel so that diverse and marginalized voices from across India could be more widely heard.

Providing mentorship and training: Video Volunteers delivered different types of training sessions for Community Correspondents, which were based around YouTube best practices. This included in-person sessions (two to four times a year) and phone-based mentoring, and covered everything from how to create eye-catching thumbnails and titles, to using YouTube's Community tools.

Creating training micro-modules: In addition to the live sessions, VV created a wealth of reference materials. For example, it created several new training manuals and micro-module infographics on important topics such as fact checking, searchability, and channel management.

Designing a YouTube video template: Video Volunteers designed an easily replicable video template for Community Correspondents to use when creating content. Prior to this, Correspondents would mail a DVD of raw footage to the VV main office, which editors would then craft into a publishable format. But the new template (called 'Advanced Mojo') meant that Community Correspondents could follow a simple story structure when creating their videos, which was optimized for YouTube audiences. This meant Correspondents had more control over the story they told, plus it reduced the workload for staff in the main office.

Expanding skills: In addition to the scaled approach, Video Volunteers helped the most active Correspondents expand their skills further so they were able to produce better reports with multiple episodes, not just one-off videos. For example:

- **"Fixing India"** is a series about issues that affect different localities, and how they can be fixed. Each video is on a single topic.
- **"India Loud & Clear"** highlights community voices and topics that fall outside the realm of breaking news, in a way that isn't sensationalized. This has been developed using content from stories that multiple correspondents have previously covered, with the aim

of keeping previous stories alive and bringing attention back to them.

- **"India Unheard"** portrays stories from India's disenfranchised communities.

Publishing content: Video Volunteers published the new, local content on its main YouTube channel. Previously, these local videos had only been published on social media platforms targeting the different states where the content was created. Now, VV publishes about 3K local videos on its YouTube channel each year.

Looking to the future: Video Volunteers continues to develop training for Community Correspondents. It identified two promising areas for the future:

- *First*, to train existing Community Correspondents in YouTube creator presentation skills. VV selected 40 Correspondents and are helping them hone their own YouTube personality/brand so they can launch individual channels.
- *Second*, Video Volunteers wants to give young people in every village the opportunity to create and publish content on hyperlocal channels. The team is developing a scalable training model to help local reporters establish their own YouTube channels to tell local stories. This includes information around channel and story focus/purpose (e.g., gender, fighting corruption, etc.), format, branding and show plans, and funding models (e.g., locally based NGOs could commission content).

RESULTS

Video Volunteers created new training and resource materials for Community Correspondents and helped them publish local content that appeals to a wide audience.

- **Trained 200+ Community Correspondents** across 10 states.
- **Designed an optimized YouTube video template** for Community Correspondents to use when creating stories.
- **Published 3K+ local videos** on the Video Volunteers YouTube channel.

LEARNINGS

Audiences connect with strong, authentic presenters: Video Volunteers found that audiences responded well to presenters who let their personality shine through, spoke authentically in their own voice, and reported on topics that they could speak to with authority.

Learning is a two-way street: While part of the Video Volunteers mission is to train Community Correspondents to become better digital video reporters, the team realizes that learning goes both ways. They recommend setting up platforms and processes so ideas and learnings around topics, best practices, etc. can be easily shared. Ultimately, this helps everyone create more engaging and authentic content that audiences want to watch.

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Our vision is that every village in India should have a journalist who is loyal first and foremost to the community, and who is from that village.

**Jessica Mayberry,
Founding Director of Video Volunteers**

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Rita Devi doing a story on National Family Benefit Scheme



Bharati Kumari recording a call to action for her story on Gender Equality



Chetan Salve doing a story on the people displaced by the Sardar Sarovar dam



Tahir Mushtaq doing a story on the people whose properties are going to be broken down for the creation of the dam on the Chenab River