

## Coast to Coast Ep. 15

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:03:47] Welcome to Coast to Coast. My name is Lily Weinberg, and I'm here joined by my colleague, Ellen Wong, program director from Philadelphia.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:03:58] Hi, Ellen.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:04:00] Hey, how's it going?

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:04:01] It's going well, and I'm super excited because our colleague Lillian Coral, which our audience members know very well, had her baby on Friday.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:04:10] I know. It's so exciting.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:04:12] I know.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:04:12] We miss you Lillian.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:04:13] I know we do miss Lillian, but she is certainly busy and doing very important things with her, with our newborn. But excited to share the screen with you, Ellen, and to go deeper into Philadelphia and to see what's happening and all the cool things that are going on in Philadelphia. And so, as our audience knows, coast to coast is really talking about the future of cities and what that means and context of COVID and how it's such a dynamic time. And we've had topics are on public space or on technology mobility. And today, I'm really excited to hear more and to learn more about what engagement looks like during a pandemic, because that's complicated and there's different ways to engage, of course, safely during a pandemic. So can you tell us a little bit more about about what we're talking about today?

**Ellen Hwang** [00:05:09] Yeah. So I am also really excited to be here, so thanks for inviting me on today's show. We have a powerhouse of women from Philly today, and that gets me even more excited. We're going to be looking at the creative ways in which cities and particularly in Philadelphia, how we're engaging with our communities during this pandemic. What are we seeing? What are we learning? One of the questions we're going to be grappling with and so we're going to go deep into both the kind of our perspectives on what communication looks like, as well as some tactical things that hopefully our audience can take away with and perhaps implement in your own hometowns. And so with that, I'd like to welcome our guests, Sandy Clark, who is the Vice President of News and Civic Dialog for WHYY and Maitreyi Roy, the Executive Director of Bartram's Garden. Hello.

**Sandra Clark** [00:06:05] Hello.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:06:06] Hey guys, have fun and I'll see you guys later.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:06:10] Yeah, that's right. So we're going to spend about 15 minutes with me and dialog and then we'll invite Lily to come back in to post some questions from the audience. So for those who are tuning in today, please make sure to put your questions in a Q&A box or on Facebook, and if you're tuning in from Twitter, just make sure to include the hashtag Knight Live. All right. Let's get started. So just to begin, let's set the context for

the conversation for today. This question is for both of you but we'll start with Sandy. Sandy, could you tell us a little bit about your work? And what does community engagement mean to you and your organization?

**Sandra Clark** [00:06:49] Hi. Well, good afternoon, everyone, and I hope everyone is keeping well. You know, so community engagement to me is really is so foundational. Sometimes I get choked up talking about it, really. You know, this is about doing the work inside out, not outside in. It's about, you know, asking and understanding and seeing and listening to our communities who aren't always asked and seen and heard and understood. You know, and it's a, it's really about meeting for us as an organization, meeting a real need instead of a perceived need. Right. It's recognizing the work that people in communities already are doing, those in communities every day who are asking, understanding, seeing and doing, and so, and working together. You know, I think for journalism, you know, it really is about you know, it's about relevancy and connectivity. You know, we hear that trust building all the time. But the reality is, is that, you know, we have to be there and people should know what to expect from us.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:07:59] Yeah, that's great. Thanks so much for sharing that with us tonight. I do appreciate you also just mentioning the emotional aspect of your work. You know, we are in Philly together. It is our community and we're experiencing a pandemic together. So when you think about how are you connecting with folks, I do think there is just a lot of that emotional aspect that goes into what drives us in wanting to serve sort of each other. So Maitreyi, do you mind answering the same questions? Tell us a little bit about your work and what does community engagement mean to you and Bartram's Garden.

**Maitreyi Roy** [00:08:34] Thanks for having me. This is a great opportunity to share a little bit about Bartram's Garden, which is located in southwest Philadelphia along the title Lower titled School. The garden has over the years been seen much more as a private estate. So in the last few years, we've been working hard to make the garden open, accessible and to live up to its public space status, which it has had for years without necessarily our neighbors knowing about it. For us, the community engagement work over the last few years has been really focused on building relationships. The idea that a garden, a park, a civic space needs to mean something for its community and how could Bartram be a space that becomes the family room, the classroom space for the southwest community. So that's what we've been tackling at the garden and through a number of different sort of programmatic initiatives. At the heart of all of those programmatic initiatives is, how can this garden really stand up and take responsibility and have its role be that of a public green space where everybody is welcome, where our neighbors, who are largely an African-American community, have not felt welcome in the past and have felt like they were venturing into a private estate. How can we in these times when spaces such as the garden are needed just for people's well-being and a little bit of stress relief? How can this garden be that for the local community? So in these times, the relationship building and word of mouth in the southwest has been a really big part of what we've been focused on.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:10:41] Wonderful. Let's stay on that topic of relationship building as a core element to communication, which is just what I'm hearing from you, Maitreyi. So since the pandemic has occurred, you know, you both are thinking a lot about, you know, what that relationship building looks like. Right. You say also thinking about representation and making sure folks are saying engage, but you're both managing quite very different

platforms from each other. So I think maybe we can look at it from those two different perspectives, one from the journalism side and thinking about the role of media and storytelling, and then Maitreyi, from your perspective around doing public spaces. How has your thinking around relationship building and community engagement changed during this time? Are there specific things that you've started to do that are different from what you were doing before? Are there things that perhaps you continue to be able to sustain because it just is the best way of connecting with community? I'd love to hear some examples or some things that you've tried to do or things that you've been able to continue to do through the pandemic.

**Sandra Clark** [00:11:50] You know, Maitreyi and I come, you know, obviously from different sectors. But everything she said, you could have put WHYY in there and it's exactly the same. Right. What do we mean as a public media station, an organization to our communities and, how do we connect and how do we serve serve needs? So it's just such a you know, I think this is a moment where, you know, the thought of, you know, what people are experienced in their homes and their lives and it's really kind of sharpened our focus in terms of service in a way that it's not like, it's not program first, but it's people first. Right. So when we think of ourselves in that kind of way, I think it, you know, and I would also add, you know, it's also a time when organizations in boardrooms and newsrooms are being held accountable for, you know, diversity, inclusion and if we ever get to the equity part. Right. That's usually kind of, it sort of trails off before you even get there. So there's just so much, you know, just kind of, there's so many things that are kind of bringing to surface, I think, where we, how we can best serve. One of them is that, you know, a lot of kind of our our sort of legacy thinking and behaviors has been kind of, you know, it has sort of been knocked out of the way in so many ways. They can be barriers to engaging with communities and really meeting needs. So one example of this is that obviously there were lots and lots of protests across the nation, also in Philadelphia, against police brutality and racial injustice. Pre- pandemic, we would not have been able to turn around a four part series on police reimagine, right? We would not have been able to engage the community so quickly. There was just an agility about being able to just say, you know what, here, let's talk about this topic, particularly defund the police. Right. It was a narrative that was already being carried, carried in so many different ways. So to be able to engage a community on TV right, on something that generally costs a lot of money, but in this world we're in now where we're used to the zoom visuals, we did on TV, across digital and then we had a community conversation after the broadcast. That's just something that we would not have been able to do before. I think it was a resonant conversation right in the moment, as opposed to, you know, all this kind of production barriers that come up that normally would have probably kept us from doing it so quickly.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:14:43] There's a few things that I want to point out that you said that really resonated with me as people first versus program first. Sometimes when you're planning things, you're like, how do, you know, what can we do to get people to do something with us? When you think about the people first, that's a much easier conversation and a much easier way to approach. I think that's perhaps fundamental to communication as what I'm hearing from you. I think the other thing that I'm hearing is the urgency that has shown up in the work that you're trying to do in community engagement. It's been accelerated and catalyzed because of the pandemic and the social unrest that's going on as well. You've been able to utilize that momentum to be able to bring the news and information and images and engagement to folks. Then the third thing was that, you know, because you're providing information to your community and you're engaging with folks is that you're actually in people's homes, and that's kind of, I never really thought

about that, that you're, it's a very personal experience. So I just appreciate those things that you shared. Maitreyi, can I turn it to you? How are you thinking about community engagement? Has it changed? How has it stayed the same? Please share.

**Maitreyi Roy** [00:15:55] One of the things at The garden that we've always taken for granted is this idea that this space allows people to gather, and, all of a sudden we weren't able to gather in the same way anymore. We had to pivot very quickly to figuring out how gatherings could happen without people actually being at the garden in groups. We also had to pivot to making sure that the casual visitor, which suddenly became a huge number during the pandemic, our numbers have just grown and produced in staggering ways. How do we ensure that the garden can be kept up so that it doesn't get worn down with the extra use and so on? How does the casual visitor become part of the garden sort of way of being? Given that everybody's looking for that little respect and peace and quiet and a chance to be outdoors. So we very quickly pivoted to three priorities at the garden. One was that we've always in the summer had about 50 student interns engage in a deep way at the garden. These are students from our immediate community. We didn't want to have those jobs go away. This was not necessarily pocket money for a lot of the students. So we were committed to making sure that the students would have a part virtual part socially distanced program, and our youth leaders, I give them so much credit based on a basically overnight. We imagined the engagement process, so much so that students were taking home kits to figure out the nutrition and education component and doing it virtually from home over Zoom lessons, meeting in groups of three to six at the garden and socially distanced programming. So all of that had to happen within a matter of a few weeks, and that was, I think, one of the biggest things that we were able to do to keep our students engaged at the garden. The other big priority that we decided was going to be very important was to continue the work of the Farm Sankofa Community Farm and the garden producers provides about 15000 20000 pounds of fresh, locally grown produce to our neighbors. Keeping that farm up and running has been really a big focus for us. So much so that because we couldn't bring in volunteers, as we usually do, we've had a rotation of staff come through to make sure that our production numbers don't decrease our way of communicating. Now that the producers sort of plentiful is actually through a very ultra local text group that we are using to tell people where the produce will be available and what times and so on. It only goes out to the neighborhood that we're focused in. It does not go out on Facebook. It does not go out in any other social media. We're using text groups to as many as 250, 300 families at once to communicate events and activities at the garden. The third thing we pivoted to is just sort of well-being, mental sort of recreational kinds of activities that would allow our neighbors to have a chance to. You know, keep their spirits up at a very difficult time, so we are doing a lot of virtual programming that is about mental health, you know, getting out on the trail, how to be on the trail safely. We provide hand sanitizers now across the entire length of the trail so that families that are coming out can feel safe. We are also providing a lot of sort of content that families can first engage with at home before they come out to the garden so that they can have the safe experience. We're doing a lot of this through word of mouth. We also have a street team that goes out and fliers, specific program elements that we feel we want to really engage locally with. One thing that the city did, which I really commend them on, is because our local pools and our rec centers were closed through the pandemic. They sort of revamped a program called Play Streets. So we were able to be one of the sites for play streets at Bertram's essentially play streets means that children from the immediate community have a safe place to come and play and also have access to meals. So during the summer when the school was, you know, schools weren't necessarily providing meals as regularly, we felt that that was a rule that the garden could play. So we

sort of pivoted and worked as a distribution site as well. So some of this has been very much hands on, very carefully thought out. You know, within corporate guidelines programming, a lot of it has been virtual. And what's been amazing is to see the community response to getting the texts and showing up at the farmer's market. That just gets put out like there's almost like a call and response kind of thing. That's been very interesting and heartwarming in all of this.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:22:03] That's wonderful. Thanks so much for sharing about the robust work that's happening apart from starting. And I think you know both. What you're what you're both sharing is that there is really no silver bullet to how you can engage community. There's a lot of ways in which both your organizations are wanting to stay connected with folks in an inner city. And so, you know, I may show you kind of brushed over it, but you know that even just using a platform like text messaging and pushing notifications, you know, it can be such a simple, simple little thing. But it's a very, very clear tool that you've been able to utilize something that you already had in place and now it's become crucial to getting information out. So I have my last question to you all. As you know, what opportunities do you see in the future of your communities post code? What's what are you doing now that's here that you think is here to stay? What are some things that you've discovered that, you know, this is incredible. And we want to make sure it's something that we institutionalize in the work that we do and community?

**Sandra Clark** [00:23:12] Well, I think this is one of the questions that was in the chat, you know, was about finding, you know, engaging with new communities and also serving the longstanding communities that we've had. You know, this is a moment where, frankly, our membership, which is, you know, largely white, there was some of that is changing, but also older. And because I think of the unrest there actually as a yearning to have more information, right. And as a yearning to engage more, which is great, because I think that that's sometimes can be a barrier to to new communities. We're also working with community partners. You know, we we have just created a news and information exchange which is working with folks who are ready are in communities who are creating content, who are, you know, engaging with their communities. And and it's really about breaking down, recognizing that there are people there who are doing this work every single day, you know? And so we've we ask them, don't come to us and try to retrofit what you do for WHYY. We want to meet you exactly where you are. We want to support what you do. And so we've we started with a number of partners and, you know, we put their work on the radio talking about gun violence and exactly the voice that they capture it. And I think that. That's gonna be, you know, very, very powerful, in addition to helping us build relationships that are, you know, sustainable in communities and not just swooping in and out. I do want to add that there is, you know, other parts of WHYY I mean, if you look across the whole organization, you know, everything's kind of kicked up and into a different room. Are we expanded our education offerings on TV? You know, there's, you know, programming for kids all the way to one to one up. Right. Because we know that people are home with their kids, you know, and there's a desire for different kinds of programming. We've, you know, have been having race conversations. You know, well before this moment, we'll continue to do so. And one thing that Zoom allows us to do is that, you know, we're planning a conversation now with some partners where we're going to have communities in different breakout rooms and then bring us all together so we can actually do a bunch of different neighborhoods in one engagement as opposed to, you know, trying to figure out physically where we all meet. Right. And I think that's going to be really interesting of kind of, you know, bringing together different parts of our city into one one conversation. And and I do. And I want to give a nod to our media labs and, you know,

Career Pathways program. And these are you know, you've been there, Alan. So so you've seen what these these kids can do. This could have been a time where, you know, it's just like we're not going to do the summer programs. We're not going to have students because we've we haven't figured this out yet. But instead, we created a careers pathway paid, you know, summer program. And so twenty two students, you know, worked with various media partners. And we need to know kind of how they're processing information, how they're creating in the way that connects with their audiences to in their communities. And so that was just so rich for us. I mean, I think just watching how they engage in conversations about being out of school, for example, right. And virtual learning, you know, sometimes we forget that the youth voices, you know, need to be heard as well and that they're creating content in their own way that is very, very connected. So I think across the whole organization, I mean, we found we have found ways to both address kind of some of the sort of legacy mindsets, frankly, and to break down the silos internally as well so that we can engage. And the other thing is that we've also engaged several community curators. And so these are people that we are working with in conversation with who are creating conversations in their own communities. And then we are listening and we are engaging and and watching what their needs are as well.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:27:29] Yeah, that's fantastic. And my tribe. What about you? What's here to stay post, COVID?

**Maitreyi Roy** [00:27:34] You know, one of the things I'm really energized by is the new urgency that we feel that I'm hoping we can hold on to that. There are amazing conversations going on in southwest Philadelphia about climate change right now, about access and sort of the lack of access and injustices and how do we tackle some of these issues. And I want to hold on to that. I want to hold on to the agility that I've seen among some of the leaders in the Southwest to jump in to solving problems and addressing need. I want to hold on to some of the kindness I see, some of the sort of generosity I see in an environment where it's easy to retreat to, you know, just being about yourself and being about, you know, just what relates to your own personal life. I see incredible generosity. I see incredible kindness. And I want to hold on to all of that. I want to really hold on to the urgency, though, to tackle big challenging issues. I think this is the time it's come it's here and it's going to redefine with public spaces are in communities.

**Ellen Hwang** [00:28:58] I think that's a beautiful note to leave Lily back in. And and I know, Lily, you have some Q&A from the audience.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:29:07] This is this is a fantastic conversation. I want to elevate a couple of questions and then we'll. Well, we'll close the show. But thanks, Ellen, for it for leading this. So so one one question is around elevates the digital divide. And so as we think about engaging communities virtually. How how are you? How are you dealing with our communities that don't have access to Internet? I know that that texting is a great example of that. And there are a bunch of questions about which platform you're using, but I'll I'll start with you of how you're thinking about engaging virtually folks that don't have access to Internet.

**Maitreyi Roy** [00:29:59] Two boat rooms. Our technology has not necessarily been what we've been, you know, leading texting service is an old fashioned service. It's like e texting. It's really simple. We over the last few years, as relationships have grown, we've asked people to sign on. And we've asked them if they'd like to know more about when the farmer's market is up or when they when our movie nights or things like that. We've

combined it with our street team. We hire locally o sometimes as many as 10 people to blast information across the neighborhood. It's all old fashioned, you know, sort of walk up and down the streets and let people know we go into local stores and things like that. So it's a combination of the two. And we've been asking people to sign up to things so that they can know when to show up. And so on. And it's a bit of a long haul. It's taken us a few years to kind of build up the communication channels.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:31:11] But this isn't high tech that we're talking about.

**Maitreyi Roy** [00:31:15] And we're a very low tech organization. In fact, it's one of our has been one of our challenges, which I think the agility has come in. I have not been about technology. They've been about hands on engagement in the garden. And so we've had to pivot really hard.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:31:36] Yeah. Sandy, do you have any thoughts on on on this question?

**Sandra Clark** [00:31:40] Yeah, it's something, you know, I've been thinking a lot about, too. So we use ground source, as in Texas through our community contributors editor and that's been very effective, actually. And, you know, I think sometimes we forget that digital is also word of mouth. So, you know, you can put the information out there. It's still, you know, mean something if you're you're sharing it with your communities. And then we continue to work with our partners. And these are like faith leaders and others. Right. And we're very, very much connected in their communities, in their various ways. But I think that's a really good question in terms of, you know, how do we how do we get to people who, you know, aren't going to get on a Zoom call? I will say that we've had so much more engagement. I feel a different maybe crowd of people, you know, who are coming to our conversations, you know, to get 200 people into a room at WHYY isn't that uncommon, but, you know, that's a good event for us. And these conversations we're seeing two, three hundred people. And so I think that there's something about just having kind of you know, we have our time is different. Right. And it's you're not planning schedules in exactly the same kind of way so people can come on their own terms.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:32:56] And that is that is really an interesting point. You know, that the broader piece of the potential of that outreach is very exciting as I got engaged. I'm gonna have one more question on. And Sandy, you did answer, isn't it, on the Q&A? But I wanted to dig a little bit deeper about this point that you made around the opportunity to be more nimble during this time. And I think that that this might try. You also kind of alluded to this technique. Can you tell us a bit more about why? Why do you think that you've been able to be more nimble during this time?

**Sandra Clark** [00:33:38] Well, I think when Maitreyi said in terms and it's there's an urgency, right. And there's something about, you know, all the layers between, you know, our communities and us. I mean, it's just it sort of feels like that, you know, all the reasons that we can get to a room and have these exhausting meetings about, you know, why we can't do certain things because it doesn't fit here, doesn't fit there. We're not worried about that anymore. And I think there's something very liberating and freeing about that. And just being at not you know, we don't have to have a lot of conversations about how we line up the shot and do all these kinds of things that actually have been barriers. And so I think just understanding the need, you know, understanding our relevance and what we should mean to our communities and to me, to our communities.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:34:26] Absolutely. Maitreyi, you have any thoughts on that?

**Maitreyi Roy** [00:34:29] I think sincerely says I feel like for us to be relevant, we had to pivot quickly. It was an I think, you know, done was better than perfect. So we moved into doing some things. We failed at some things. We sort of pivoted quickly. I think getting the staff and my board and my staff or the talent pool is amazing. Getting everybody working together. There has been really incredibly rewarding and out of that engagement to really creative solutions for very simple things that we might have thought were barriers before. I think Sandy says, you know, it just stripped away all of these layers and you sort of cut through the noise and got to the heart of it. I think when we said to ourselves that we were going to keep these three priorities for the garden, it meant some other stuff to take the back burner. And that was OK. We made the decision collectively when we decided that this was going to be our focus. And I think that keeping everybody on the same page has been another really important aspect of this during this time. We have a ton of conversations, maybe even more than before, about what's happening with how things are impacting everybody. So I think just keeping those lines of communication open all the time be fantastic.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:36:06] Well well, thank you. We are. We are at time. But I know it is. It is an incredibly challenging time, you know, and our world right now. And but you, too, have have left me feeling very optimistic and many ways. And, Ellen thank you for for leading this very important conversation. And Sandy and Maitreyi. You are fabulous and so insightful. And when I think about, you know, the simple things as as people first, people first, you know, really simplifying it. It matters. And it's what matters. And our communities. Ellen, do you want to say any final words?

**Ellen Hwang** [00:36:54] No, I just thought, you know, how much I love you both. And. And we're you know, we're just so thankful as a community to be able to have leaders like you really thinking very deeply about these things. And also taking taking that chance at trying things out. Whether they fully work out the way in which we we think about them or we dream them off. And sometimes think we do fail. And I think and I think we need to take those chances, especially during these unprecedented times. So thank you so much for your time. And thanks for having me.

**Lilly Weinberg** [00:37:26] Of course. Thanks and for folks who are still hanging on. We did put a bunch of resources and a chat box that you can look at. And we'll also be linking to our Web site the resources for both panelists. And next week, we'll do a deep dive with Meg Daly, the executive director of the underlying. And really look at what has resiliency and innovation looked like during these unprecedented time. So with that. Thank you. And see you all next week, Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. Eastern. Take care. Thank you. Bye bye.