



CASE

MENSAGEM
DE LISBOA

“**Lisboa Without Borders:**
Reaching a City’s
Marginalized
Communities

STUDY

IN SHORT

Mensagem de Lisboa launched and developed three editions of Lisboa Without Borders, an English-language newsletter focused on Lisbon’s foreign communities. The project took feedback from community members into consideration to deliver content that migrants in Lisbon previously lacked.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Mensagem de Lisboa was founded four years ago in Lisbon. Its coverage focuses on civic and social endeavors. The outlet describes itself as “community centered” — Mensagem de Lisboa staff keep their eyes on the streets to deliver in-depth local coverage to their audience.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Mensagem de Lisboa sought to engage Lisbon’s foreign communities through a bilingual newsletter, offering accessible, relevant local information that fosters connection, belonging, and civic participation among migrants.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

Using interviews, surveys, and informal meetups, Mensagem identified community needs and designed newsletters that felt conversational and welcoming, covering integration stories, events, and local insights.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Mensagem de Lisboa recognized that Lisbon's growing migrant population lacked tailored local media coverage. Many foreign residents desired stories about civic life, history, and culture — but few accessible sources existed. By launching an English-language newsletter, the outlet aimed to bridge this information gap, foster inclusion, and create a platform that welcomed readers from all backgrounds. The project was also a step toward rethinking journalism's role in connecting communities that live side by side yet rarely interact. Through Lisboa Without Borders, the newsroom made inclusion a journalistic priority.

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

During the project's preparation phase, team members conducted interviews, a survey, and informal meetups with community members from diverse backgrounds to better understand what needs were not being met. These insights provided the basis of the newsletter's early editions.

When crafting newsletters, the organization prioritized making it feel like a discussion with a neighbor. The newsletter covered themes like integration tips and coverage of local events.

DID MENSAGEM'S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

The project laid the foundations for a long-term bilingual strategy at Mensagem de Lisboa, helping the organization understand how to serve an audience traditionally excluded from local media. The outlet emphasized that the project was small in scope, and more newsletters are needed in the future to transform engagement with their audience.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID MENSAGEM ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

A significant challenge the group faced was engaging Lisbon's growing foreign population, who often lived in a parallel world, disconnected from both local Portuguese society and other immigrant communities. Despite speaking the newsletter's language, many migrants remain socially and culturally distant from issues affecting the city. They also show limited interest in stories beyond their immediate experience. To bridge this gap, direct feedback from audience members was crucial.

HOW WAS MENSAGEM'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

Audience feedback was positive, with readers praising the newsletter's accessibility and local focus. Migrants appreciated seeing their experiences reflected in journalism that respected their perspectives and backgrounds. The project revealed a clear appetite for immigrant-centered storytelling in Lisbon. However, Mensagem acknowledged that sustained engagement requires continued investment and consistent publication. The experiment proved the concept's potential, even as the outlet continues to seek resources to make such coverage a regular part of its newsroom output.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID MENSAGEM GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

Experiences of migration vary widely based on race, class, and origin. Mensagem de Lisboa learned that a one-size-fits-all approach to immigrant-focused media does not work. When covering stories that intersect with different migration narratives — like shared struggles around bureaucracy or housing — it is important not to flatten distinct experiences.

Mensagem de Lisboa also learned that surveys provide crucial feedback for projects like this. While the scope of their survey was small, they received thorough answers that guided their approach.

WHAT DOES MENSAGEM PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

While Lisboa Without Borders proved there is a clear need and audience for immigrant-centered, English-language journalism in Lisbon, continuing the project beyond the grant period is not currently feasible without additional funding. As a small, independent newsroom, its capacity is limited, and it cannot sustainably produce this newsletter at the quality and frequency it requires without dedicated resources.

That said, the insights and connections gained through this project will continue to shape Mensagem's broader editorial vision. If another grant opportunity or funding source becomes available, it will expand the project, potentially scaling it into a fully bilingual platform and deepening community collaboration. The groundwork has been laid and the audience is there.

What the outlet now needs is a path to sustainability that values this kind of journalism as essential to a more inclusive and cohesive Lisbon. Until then, the project remains a blueprint — and a reminder — of what's possible when underrepresented voices are prioritized in the local media landscape.

Beyond expanding the current project, Mensagem de Lisboa reflected that there is a need to host more events in general, in order to cultivate a stronger sense of community.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD MENSAGEM GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANISATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

Building inclusive, cross-community dialogue requires more than language — it requires intentional framing, context and diverse representation in storytelling, and continued effort to challenge social silos that exist even within migrant populations. Newsletters are more than newsletters — they are a glimpse into a community. To this end, a fitting tone is essential.



Community Voices in Conversation



Local Encounters, Shared Stories