

Block Club Chicago

Immigration WhatsApp Channel

JAKE COX/FEBRUARY 2026



Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

Background

We originally planned a hyperlocal channel for Pilsen and Little Village, neighborhoods with large immigrant populations and strong WhatsApp usage.

When federal immigration enforcement escalated, we pivoted to meet the needs of our readers — delivering citywide immigration news with timely updates on a medium where they were already getting news.

Why WhatsApp?

46% of Hispanic Americans use WhatsApp as a primary social media platform, out-indexing the general population (Pew, 2021)

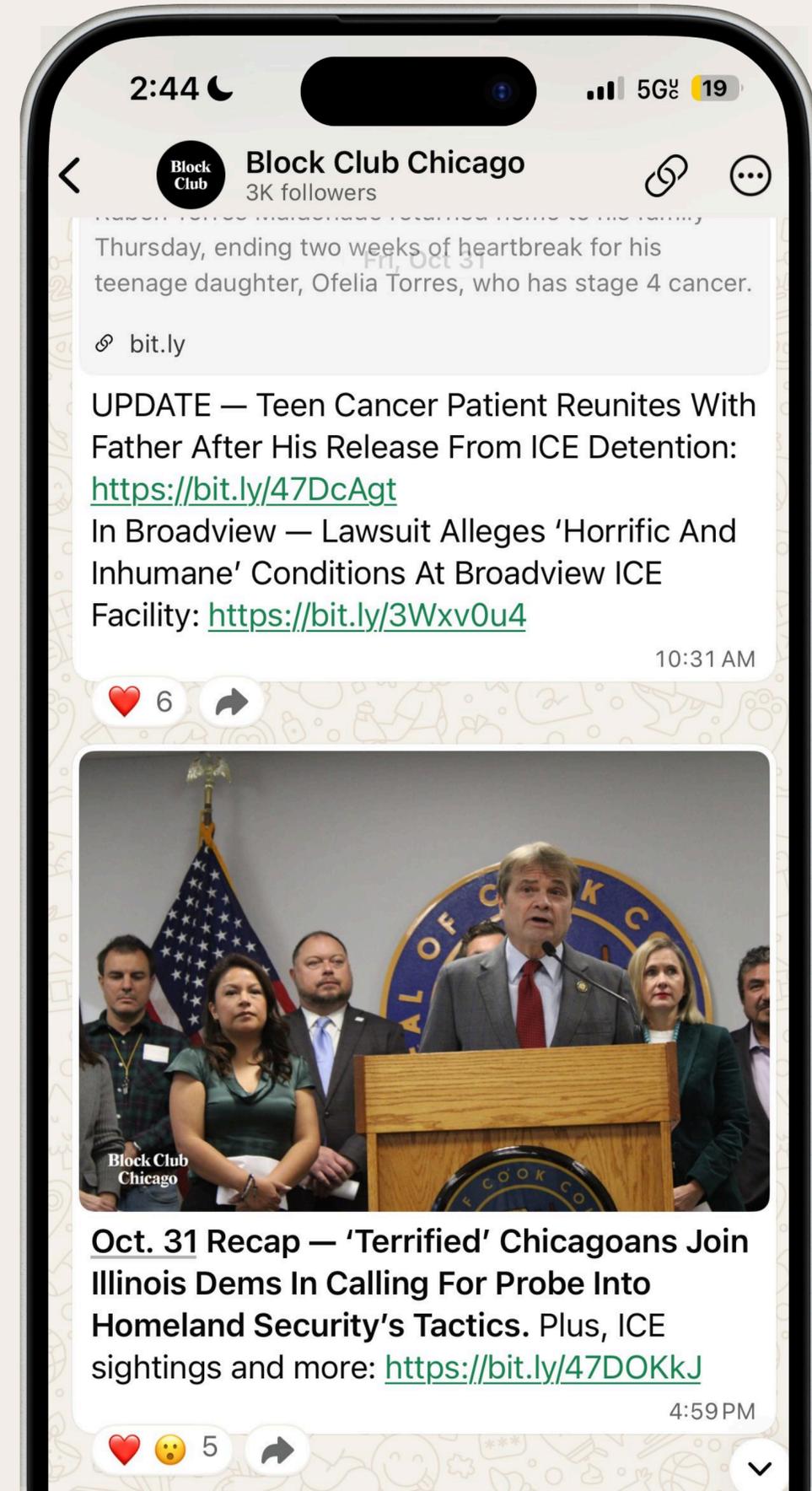
Mobile-first platform with a low barrier to entry

Mirrors how many residents already organize — through family threads, group chats and local broadcast channels

What We Built

A one-to-many broadcast channel: readers can react to posts with emojis but cannot send messages to the group.

Tightly curated immigration news: stories are selected by editors for alerts and digests, rather than automatically pushing every story.



Tools & Workflow

Any account can create a broadcast channel. For basic setup, any staffer can create the channel and add other staffers as admins to post updates.

At Block Club, we used a newsroom smartphone to set up the channel so it isn't tied to an individual's phone number and allows readers to text the newsroom via SMS or WhatsApp.

Newsletter staff curates and writes updates based on available content, then passes them to editors for review before publishing.

Channel promoted on the website, in newsletters, and on social media to attract subscribers; a news release accompanied the launch to reach more readers.

Strategy

Posting frequency

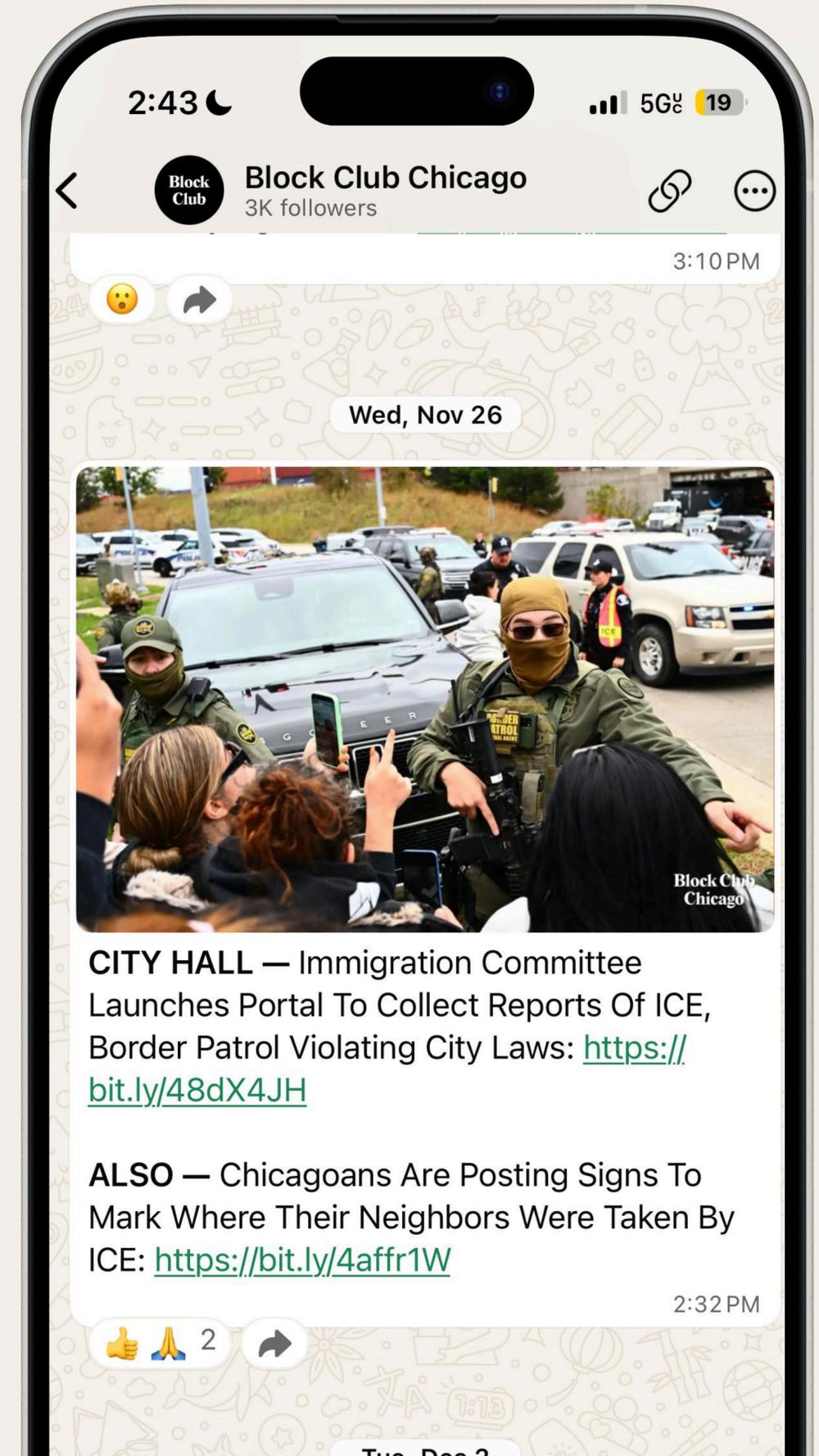
We currently post 1-2 times a week depending on content, however during escalation in federal immigration enforcement we posted daily.

Existing Infrastructure

Advertised the channel in our newsletters, with a story on the site and through social ads.

Digests

We've found posting 1-3 stories with strong art has been our best format for the channel.



Limitations

Very basic analytics

WhatsApp only shows reach and follower metrics for the last 30 days, with no granular data available.

Subscribers are anonymous

Our setup doesn't show where they joined, what stories they click or where they are in the audience funnel.

Limited customization

WhatsApp broadcast channels offer minimal options for formatting, layout or branding.

Reach

3,215 subscribers

As of February 2

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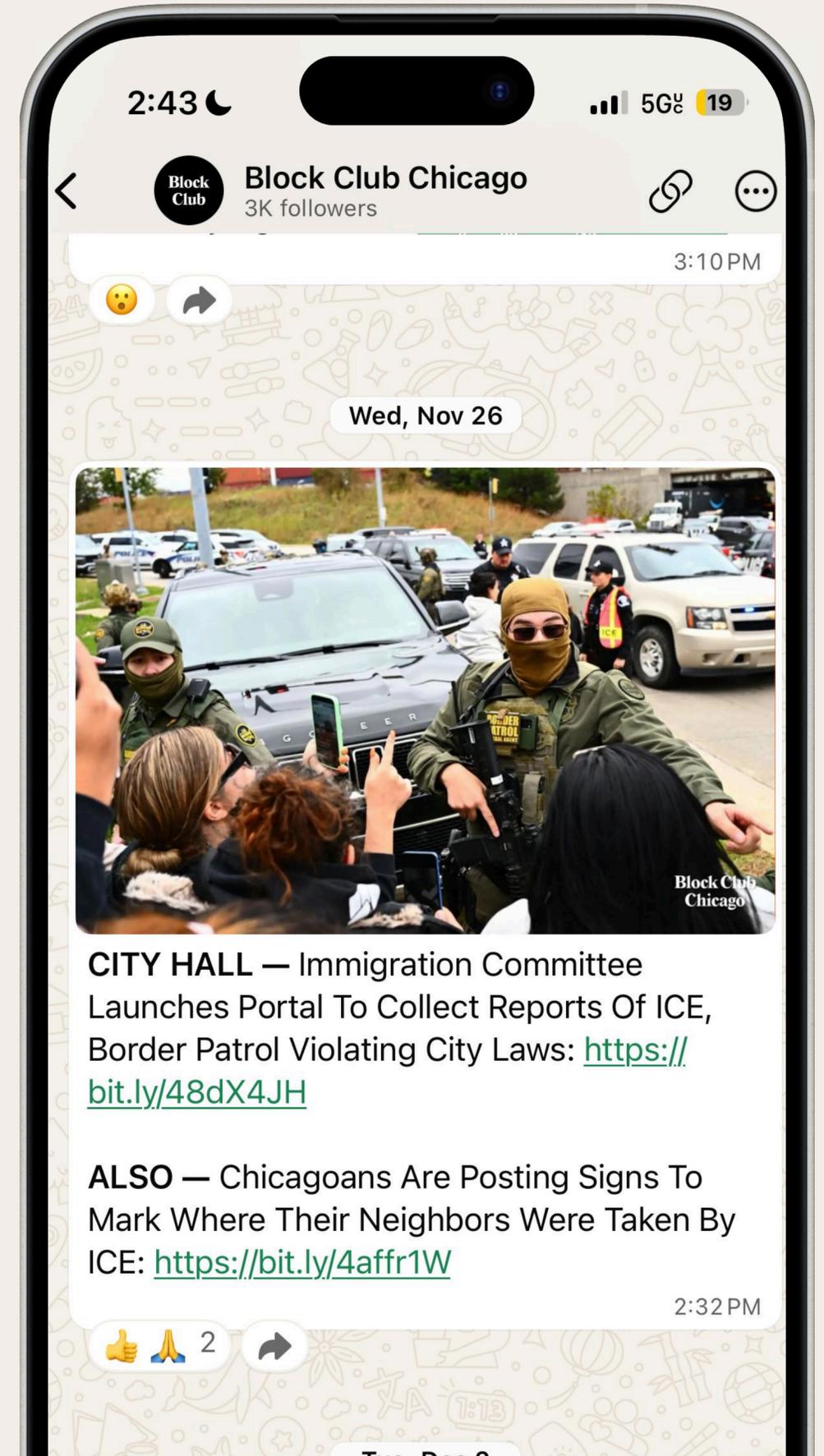
Victor Hilitski for Block Club Chicago

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Contact

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