The Case for Open Journalism Now

A new framework for informing communities

By Melanie Sill, Journalism Executive in Residence
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With support from the Annenberg Innovation Lab

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Foreword

Note: The ideas presented in this document are intended to be engaged in an interactive environment. To experience the full scope of this presentation, including hyperlinks and opportunities for further discussion, visit *www.annenberginnovationlab.org/OpenJournalism.*

Foreword

"The Case for Open Journalism Now" is a hopeful yet pragmatic argument for journalism's future as a public good. It addresses a basic question of the digital age: with information flowing everywhere, how does journalism provide value? The answers lie in a new orienting idea for journalism that is transparent, responsive and enriched through vibrant two-way connections with a networked universe.

Happily, open journalism is more than a notion. It is a set of practices fast gaining traction and earning notice. Some advances focus on social media interaction, in-person convening and contributed content. Others are making news work itself more transparent and responsive. These experiments point the way to greater trust and accountability for news providers, who after all seek to hold others accountable.

Yet, to bring real change, we must reorder the fundamental processes of journalism toward the goal of serving communities—readers, viewers, listeners and customers. We must focus first on service and only then on platform or product.

Open practices can also increase journalism capacity. For instance, the collaborative and problem-solving mentality of open-source software has connected with the established knowledge-sharing of investigative reporting specialists, extending the reporting's reach. Collaboration is being embraced by small enterprises serving communities in valuable new ways and by large organizations that once ignored each other's work. News providers are taking tiny steps toward networking with non-journalism organizations that see information as part of their public mission.

These practices must move to the core of journalism thinking. We must seize this moment of opportunity and enrich the two-way connection that improves journalism for everyone. By focusing on the service that excellent journalism can provide, news providers and communities can build common cause for this work as a public good.

With help from the Annenberg Innovation Lab I've posted this paper as a discussion document accompanied by a compendium of 100 arguments, ideas and illustrations for open journalism. I hope you'll post a response, cross-post to your own blog or web site and share links or input. Thank you.

—Melanie Sill,
December 2011

The Case for Open Journalism Now
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I. The Open Opportunity

These would be wonderful times for journalism if they weren't so terrible. Or maybe it's the other way around.

We know the twin storylines: Digital technology's rolling revolution has created a richer, livelier and more crowded news and information marketplace, yet the Internet's economic reordering and global recession have diminished the reliability and accessibility of public affairs reporting in many communities.

It's because of both realities that an emerging approach I call open journalism holds so much promise for newspeople and the public. It's not an idea for saving news companies, though it can help them. It's an idea for making quality journalism a collective endeavor and transforming it from a product driven by factory processes to a service driven by audience needs.

Open journalism's core principles are transparency, responsiveness, participation, collaboration and connection. Open doesn't mean everything is shared with everyone; it's a framework based on serving citizens and customers that applies whether content is free or paid.

Once you start looking you can find burgeoning examples of open practices, mostly on the fringes or outside traditional media and among online-only news sites. Through social media and expanding network connections, some journalists are asking and answering questions publicly as they shape reporting. It's time for these ideas to move from the edges to the center of news work in ways that make journalism more effective and accurate.

I believe deeply that journalism does important jobs for people and that this work not only is still needed but also is increasingly valuable. I've led two daily newsrooms and worked among people who cared about the community impact of their work. In the state capital regions of North Carolina and California, I've seen good journalism inform and animate important aspects of public life.

Yet journalism has changed too slowly to keep up with the world around it. The Internet has transformed how people live, not just how we get information. Open journalism embraces these changes and draws on two-way communication in reshaping news work to deliver the value people need now.

Open journalism has a significant major media champion in Alan Rusbridger, editor of the U.K.-based Guardian, which announced a ramped-up digital push this year, "placing open journalism on the web at the heart of its strategy."

Rusbridger's staff has steadily expanded liveblogging, content networking and crowdsourcing to engage the Guardian's online audience in the processes as well as the outcomes of news work. In announcing a Guardian experiment with sharing lists of stories in the works, National News Editor Dan Roberts wrote that part of the aim was to encourage reader tips and guidance.

"As Bismarck is said to have remarked about the process of passing legislation, many still think the business of making news is a bit like the business of making sausages: best kept out of sight from the end consumer. But in a world where many readers have been left deeply cynical about journalism after this summer's phone-hacking revelations, it seems there are more people wanting to know where their news comes from and how it is made. Painful as it might be for journalists to acknowledge, they might even have some improvements to make on the recipe too."

Rusbridger told me he hopes to find still more and better ways to involve readers actively in the news process. His reasons are competitive, practical and absolutely journalistic.

"The sum of what we can do plus what others can do is going to be better than what we can do alone," he said during an October chat at his London office. "The 21st-century way of journalism is about exploring these things."

There are many arguments to make for open journalism and most of them have been made for years, using different terminology, in manifestos, blog posts, journal articles and doctoral dissertations.

The time is right for a paradigm shift because of several opportunities and imperatives:

- News providers face ongoing distrust yet also remain important to the public in monitoring other institutions, as a recent Pew Research Center tracking survey shows.[1] Those who pursue public affairs and accountability reporting can benefit by being transparent about the motives and methods of their journalism.

- Social media and other Internet-based networks, along with ongoing advances in consumer technology, are enabling far richer and more substantive information exchange among individuals and organizations.

- Technologists (along with their tools and skills) are infusing journalism with innovation and fresh thinking that represent opportunity for newspeople to work much more effectively in a networked information universe.

Beyond those reasons, I offer both a business case and a civic case.

From a business standpoint, open journalism offers several advantages: increased capacity and quality, cultural relevance and customer connection.

As author and social media consultant Charlene Li put it in Chapter 1 of her 2010 book "Open Leadership," companies are realizing that "customers, employees and partners... now feel empowered because of a culture of sharing that allows them to spread their thoughts far and wide.

"Thanks to technology," she wrote, "they are becoming engaged with each other and with those organizations that embrace relationships in a deeper, more meaningful way."[2]

Or, as Rusbridger said it, "If you're not going to do it, someone else will."

The civic case is basic. Communities need capacity for the functions journalism provides.

The argument for change isn't that journalism is dying. In fact, journalism is expanding— mostly online through a burst of new kinds of newsrooms and individual information providers and through deliberate efforts by foundations and universities to broaden the field of news and information.

In our communities, people are identifying and working on problems together and using communication not just to inform but also to act. Most people now carry the tools of eyewitness reporting in their pockets or purses, and news coverage draws on what they post especially in breaking news situations.

Nor do mainline news providers lack for audiences, as the Pew Research Center's annual State of the News Media report shows. News sites and big aggregators continue to rack up online audience gains, as do local newspaper and TV online sites, and new platforms are multiplying the streams of news that feed into a ceaseless, churning river of information. A series of recent reports, including a U.K. analysis by Nic Newman for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, show that mainstream news providers still make up the biggest tributaries to this river, even though news distribution continues to fragment.[3]

The case for open journalism is all of the above. It's based not on the idea that information is scarce but on the recognition that it is abundant, and sees journalism as service that taps that abundance in ways that empower citizens.

Journalism is certainly not dying, but some areas of coverage are ailing. Newsroom financing is shaky among most organizations, for-profit and nonprofit. Major holes have been punched in coverage of public policy, science, health, religion and many other issues, especially at the state and local level. A Federal Communications Commission report released in June highlighted concerns about the loss of professional reporters, citing the elimination of 13,400 newspaper journalist positions in four years.[4]

Even some who see this as the inevitable chaos of industrial transition admit that, at least for now, the supply and quality of accountability reporting available in many communities have been significantly diminished. The FCC's report, authored by Steven Waldman, took note of the parallel storylines: many new voices, much-weakened journalism capacity. In the meantime, it noted, community and niche sites offer considerable high-quality coverage but struggle to reach audiences. Elsewhere, commercial and advocacy information disguised as news proliferate.

The FCC report, drawing from prior work by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities, noted that local television stations had increased programming hours while reducing staff. Its authors worried about several incidents in which stations aired "pay-to-play" stories (provided by advertisers for money) or video press releases and presented them as news

content. Most regional and local newspapers, the authors noted, have eliminated significant beats while increasing work demands on remaining staff. The report cited losses in coverage noticed not just by journalists but by citizens in local communities.[5]

This passage in the report's executive summary crystallized what's at stake:

"While digital technology has empowered people in many ways, the concurrent decline in local reporting has, in other cases, shifted power away from citizens to government and other powerful institutions, which can more often set the news agenda."[6]

This should be a call to action on behalf of open journalism, which can build common cause among professional and amateur newspeople and others in the community who want to keep power with citizens.

But to do that we need a new orienting idea for journalism.

When I grew up in the news business, the guiding idea was ownership. If you were excelling, you owned the story. If you owned the story, people had to come to you to get it.

In 2011, no one owns a story. Everyone's a distributor and most people can be a contributor. Not everyone wants to create journalism but lots of people are able to do so in certain circumstances.

There's another idea, which I borrow from open-source software via Brian Boyer and his news applications team at the Chicago Tribune: It's "Show Your Work," which the team does <u>via its blog</u> and by posting its open-source code for others to review, improve and use.

"Show Your Work" captures what I call open-journalism thinking.

Open journalism offers a framework for building journalism capacity and support for journalism's aims. It focuses first on the needs of customers and citizens and looks at journalism as actions to meet those needs.

"If news organizations could just reinvent themselves as a service, as opposed to a content creator, it opens up all kinds of possibilities," said <u>Michele McLellan</u>, a former newspaper journalist who has worked extensively with a variety of foundation-led efforts to invigorate community journalism.

"I think people pay for service," McLellan said.

Open journalism is a guiding principle, not a formula. It can't be simply switched on. In fact, the reason some of these ideas have faltered is that open journalism needs systems, structures and definitions to carry out its aims.

Along with this paper I've put together recommendations for newspeople and, along with them, a compendium of 100 links to arguments, ideas and illustrations that flesh out the idea of open journalism.

One of my inspirations for writing was the wealth of good arguments that have been offered already. We know what needs doing. We just need to accelerate doing it.

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[1] "Views of the News Media: 1985-2011/Press Widely Criticized But Trusted More Than Other Information Sources," report from the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, Sept. 22, 2011.

[2] Charlene Li, Open Leadership: How Social Technology Can Transform the Way You Lead, (San Francisco, 2010, Jossey-Bass), Chapter 1, section "Moving the New Relationships Forward."

[3] Nic Newman, "Mainstream Media and the Distribution of News in the Age of Social Democracy," report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, September 2011.

[4] "The Information Needs of Communities: The changing media landscape in a broadband age," report from the Federal Communication Commission by Steven Waldman and the Working Group on the Information Needs of Communities, June 2011: 5.

[5] "The Information Needs of Communities," FCC report, 11-14.

[6] "The Information Needs of Communities," FCC report, 6.

Part 2: Open Journalism in Action

On occasion, usually amid disaster or crisis, we get a glimpse of open journalism's possibilities. In those situations news organizations often put aside routines and assign more trust than normal to people outside their organizations who have information to share.

In Reno after a September air race crash, newspaper and television sites curated user social-media reports including spectator reports and Twitter updates from a local hospital. The Reno Gazette-Journal (rgj.com) used its Facebook and Twitter feeds as two-way news channels, as Carl Lavin reported later on his blog. It also published a spectator's photo on its front page (and paid the contributor). Said editor Beryl Love in a subsequent Twitter chat: "It underscores (the) need for *@rgj* to be the place open communications come together quickly AND are given context."

After Hurricane Irene, the tiny Watershed Post news site in the Catskills region of New York state turned into a live illustration of open journalism by becoming an information collective on flooding and relief efforts with input from journalists, local experts and residents . Citizen volunteers helped keep a live blog going for 12 days and contributed information for a shared spreadsheet of needs and responses.

A nearby newspaper site, The Daily Freeman in Kingston, contributed reporting and other support for the blog. Over nearly two weeks, in two hour shifts, the two-way channels fed news reporting and spread useful real-time material. The Watershed Post's work put the Catskills flooding on the national and state agendas.

This was a remarkable example that went beyond the "share your photos" approach that most other sites used for user participation on Irene. In fact, aside from much-improved mechanics, the interplay of professional news work and networked sourcing seemed barely advanced from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when the New Orleans Times-Picayune website nola.com became the community's information exchange. Many organizations linked only to their own material and perhaps to a weather site.

In watching several websites in the day before Irene made landfall, I found myself thinking about the what-ifs. What if news organizations updated their source-building for crises to be ready, amid emergencies, to tap the capacity of help agencies and government that also transmit information? What if their open invitation were "tell us what you know or what you want to know" instead of "submit your photos."

What if, instead of creating redundant resources, news providers drew some information from online volunteer efforts such as Crisis Commons, which draws people together to create shared resources amid crisis, and invested their energy in original reporting?

Jeff Jarvis, a writer, press critic and associate professor at the City University of New York, saw several key ways the Irene storm coverage could have improved by focusing news efforts amid a larger information flow. In a critique on his BuzzMachine blog, Jarvis looked back at nola.com during Katrina (when Jarvis was head of the online arm of Advance Publications, the Times-Picayune owner) and noted that today people can inform one another through social media and also get direct information from sources such as government and weather websites.

"So the question the journalists should ask is how they can add value to that," Jarvis wrote, "now that information can be exchanged so easily and instantly from officials to citizens, data sources to users, and witnesses to witnesses. It's an everyday question, not just one for emergencies."

How? Jarvis continued "they should aggregate and curate reports from witnesses and data from officials. They can visualize data. They provide background and service information. But mostly, shouldn't reporters report?"

Such shifts would require recognition of a key reality: News sites, consciously or not, are part of a network of information consumers tap in crisis. The focus on being a central source may cause newspeople to miss opportunities to do certain things uniquely well.

Common interests and a sense of "we're all in this together" come easier amid crisis. Yet examples of open journalism are beginning to proliferate among new media and around the edges of mainstream coverage.

The New York Times has steadily though quietly been opening windows into its thinking through blogs, user participation and social media. On Oct. 31, editorial page editor Andrew Rosenthal started the "Loyal Opposition" blog. The NYT programming team has a blog called Open. Columnist Nicholas Kristof, like a growing number of journalists, invites readers to follow him on various sites including Twitter, where as of late November he had more than 1.19 million followers. He doesn't just tweet links, he frequently responds to questions and comments from followers, retweets others and hands out compliments.

Since May the Atlantic Wire has been running "Open Wire," an experiment in opening up the newsroom's coverage conversation to online readers. The South Florida Sun-Sentinel editorial board began tweeting its morning meetings, as Nieman Journalism Lab reported in November.

At The Sacramento Bee, reporter Jon Ortiz uses his State Worker beat blog more effectively than any I've seen for constant two-way information exchange with his core readership – government employees and their bosses. Ortiz takes feedback and shares it, catches his readers up on important news from elsewhere, gets tips that have led to scoops, keeps up a steady stream of news and reports independently without pandering. (I was editor of the Bee from 2007 through May of this year)

Yet in most newsrooms these are individually driven activities rather than central functions of daily coverage. Much greater gain lies in moving the impulses of such interaction to the core. That's the idea of open journalism.

Among mainstream media companies in the United States, Journal Register Co. has taken the most public stance on open culture beginning with a blog by its CEO, John Paton, whose occasional posts highlight company strategy and his view of his industry's challenges in sometimes blunt terms.

The JRC advisory board includes Jarvis and Jay Rosen, associate professor at NYU, whose PressThink blog and other work have steadily articulated and spread open journalism thinking for 20 years. Another member is Emily Bell, director of Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital

Journalism, who helped launch several Guardian innovations as that company's digital media leader.

Steve Buttry, JRC's director of community engagement and social media, said community connection is a central goal as the company rebuilds its news operations with a now-familiar "digital first" mantra. They're pursuing that connection, he said, "certainly with a heavy use of social media, meetings, however many different ways you can think of." JRC also is building training (through Buttry) and structure for transparency and engagement.

Among JRC's small newspapers and their websites, at least a dozen are sharing their news budgets, or story lists. Connecticut group editor Matt DeRienzo has led JRC papers including the New Haven Register to add blogs reporting back to users on corrections. "Fact check" boxes appear at the bottom of each story on JRC sites such as the Torrington, Conn., Register Citizen.

The Torrington paper also opened its building as a community center with a "Newsroom Cafe" offering free computer use, classes and archive access. DeRienzo, who blogs at Newsroom Cafe and Connecticut Newsroom, also is seen and heard frequently. After the New Haven Register announced plans to have staff members moderate online comments, he debated the changes with commenters and scheduled an in-person community forum for further dialogue.

No large newsroom has been as public about the open journalism push as the U.K.-based Guardian, one of the world's leading English-language news sites and one of its most respected. In 2009, it put together one of journalism's most effective crowdsourcing efforts by inviting readers to help comb through 1 million newly released expense records for members of Parliament. Some 25,000 users did so. Its crowdsourcing efforts continue as a mix of expert and eyewitness—for instance, in covering the London riots during the summer.

Earlier this year Guardian reporters, along with social media editors, built a conversation with health care workers and ordinary Brits while covering proposed National Health Service reforms. The dialogue went on for weeks as coverage unfolded on an NHS blog on the Guardian site.

Laura Oliver, Guardian social media editor, described the interaction during a London journalism gathering in October. As reporters live-blogged the NHS developments, she said, readers jumped in to turn the blog into their own discussion space. Journalists then responded to readers, the tone of comments improved "and then that made the journalists want to participate more... all in a lovely circle."

The open push is happening in many spots around the Guardian, though they're not easy to find on the guardian.co.uk site. A crowdsourcing page features efforts by the Guardian and others. Readers share travel tips that are tagged and searchable. A travel writer announces his destinations and collects advice from readers via Twitter, then blogs the trip, in a feature called TwiTrips. Teachers share their lesson plans—48,000 had registered by the time of my visit with Rusbridger— on the Guardian's Teacher Network.

An active and engaged audience of 48,000 teachers makes a readership base of value to advertisers, notes editor Rusbridger. He says his colleagues in advertising support the Guardian's push to build engagement and trust among readers to provide both audience growth (the Guardian

claimed 50 million unique visitors in September) and loyal niche audiences.

Rusbridger has stuck his neck out on open journalism and not without dissent or criticism—internal and external – because he also has advocated free content over pay walls. A Spiegel Online article in September characterized the Guardian tack as "journalistic success, economic disaster" because of the heavy and ongoing losses suffered by the trust that owns the Guardian and its Sunday companion, the Observer.

Rusbridger is convinced that what he has called "mutualised" journalism is perhaps the only approach that makes sense for a world of distributed information. He is immersed in decisions about money and resources: how quickly to shift content from the print paper to digital only, for instance, and how to compete for audience and advertising.

Yet he thinks those issues require long-term vision versus a focus on short-term profit, or monetization, of the open journalism approach.

"If that's your starting point you get into blind alleys," he said, " so why don't you think about what's going to work journalistically?"

Recently the Guardian hired its first "open editor" for the United States: Amanda Michel, who helped shape an outreach strategy at ProPublica with several notable differences from a traditional investigative newsroom.

ProPublica.org invites people to sign up as part of a reporting network and to "steal our stories" using a Creative Commons licensing approach. The Creative Commons license was born out of the open-source software movement and provides a way for creators to keep some rights and share others. For instance, users of the Flickr photo-sharing site often make their photos available for republishing under Creative Commons licenses.

ProPublica does most of its major stories in partnership with print or broadcast media. Yet its outreach goes beyond social media links to resource sharing: many newsrooms, for instance, drew on the "Dollars for Docs" database developed by a multi-partner ProPublica collaboration to spin off stories of their own. (Read more on ProPublica in this sidebar)

Michel sees open journalism as an approach recognizing cultural shift as well as digital shift. If she brings a different mindset it's partly because she came to journalism not through a city desk beat but after working on political campaigns in which publishing meant eliciting action: donating, volunteering or joining.

For Michel that's the step journalism needs to recognize: that engagement means offering people ways to act, not just read. Social-media tools, she said, have accelerated progress among journalists and "made engaging people scalable and easy and flexible and fun."

"As the web becomes more and more a place where people are interacting and communicating and doing real business, it makes sense for journalism to make that transition too," she told me in a phone conversation. "Crowdsourcing seems inevitable. Journalists are going to have to become well-versed in all of these (techniques) because that's what it's going to take to make sense of

people's world."

Michel's first major journalism role at Huffington Post involved organizing the 2008 "OffTheBus" presidential campaign coverage, which signed up citizens as correspondents. She spent months recruiting participants, interviewing them, rejecting some work and setting quality standards along the way.

"A lot of the crowdsourcing was actually originally intended to give us competitive coverage while we were in the process of building up a team of writers," she said. Yet it also made news as some 12,000 participants shared what they were seeing and hearing from campaign direct mail, for instance, and candidate appearances, according to a recent HuffPo article announcing the relaunch of "OffTheBus" for 2012.

Among other efforts at ProPublica, Michel helped reporter Paul Kiel build a reader/citizen input channel for ongoing coverage of the mortgage meltdown's effects on homeowners and mortgage holders. A recent story by Kiel posted on the ProPublica site, for instance, was accompanied by two highlighted questions: "Did your bank seek to foreclose on you?" and "Are you in mortgage servicing?"

Users who clicked on the question found a simple form or email link that would then carry their input, confidentially, back to the reporter.

Michel's experience helps her see what most news organizations miss. Crowdsourcing, two-way engagement, tapping expertise, giving people ways to work on coverage all extend source-building. By "scaling the volume," Michel noted, professional journalists can extend the reach of their reporting.

"It's always presented as kind of a magical activity but I think it's also about efficiency and responsibility," Michel said.

Open journalism requires rigor and management. It recognizes the value of expert, or professional, journalism, while assigning greater value to the work of people outside.

It also works.

In a recent interview about the Catskills flooding coverage, Julia Reischel, publisher of the Watershed Post, noted that the live blog staffed in part by volunteers provided reporting tips along with community connection. Journalists were able to verify or debunk rumors. They broke important news from one such tip—that sirens hadn't been working on a local dam during the Irene flooding—by learning how the information had come to the woman who posted it (through a "reverse-911" call from local authorities) and backtracking to confirm it.

The coverage boosted traffic and advertising sales and deepened trust and affection among community members for the still-young site and its proprietors. (Reischel, a former reporter herself, is married to site editor Lissa Harris)

A few weeks after Irene, the Watershed Post was named "New Business of the Year" by the

local chamber of commerce. Reischel said she and Harris got a standing ovation at the awards event.

"It's like getting a Pulitzer," Reischel said, saying her two goals for the site are to do the best journalism possible and "to have the community view us as a resource."

Part 3: The Tail that Wags the Dog

In 2009, Michael Skoler wrote an essay for Nieman Reports envisioning ways that new communication networks might finally force culture change in journalism.

Facebook, Twitter and other platforms, he wrote, could be "a route back to a connection with the audience," giving newspeople more and better ways to listen as well as to transmit information. Skoler, then a fellow at the University of Missouri's Reynolds Journalism Institute, argued that journalism needed profound culture change to rebuild the trust that's essential to relevance and business success.

Yet at that point, he wrote, most news organizations were using social media mainly to distribute and market content rather than "to establish relationships and listen to others."

"People aren't fooled by false interaction if they see that the news staff don't read the comments or citizen reports, respond and pursue the best ideas and knowledge of the audience to improve their own reporting," Skoler wrote. "Journalists can't make reporting more relevant to the public until we stop assuming that we know what people want and start listening to the audience."

Two years later, Skoler thinks most newspeople are still missing the opportunity social media offer—not as new places to put story links but as new places to learn things and to build the promise of journalism as partnership. Now vice president for interactive media at Public Radio International, he continues to work on ways to change the focus.

"How do you create a new relationship where fundamentally a media organization is feeding the needs of the audience rather than setting the agenda for the audience?" he asked in a recent telephone conversation.

The answer lies in breaking down outdated newsgathering processes and building new ones that reach outward—continuously rather than post-publication—as part of the fundamentals of journalism. New systems, not just good intentions, are required to turn the hope of more meaningful interaction into substantive dialogue.

Skoler has been influential in pioneering approaches including Public Insight Network, the most effective system developed so far for expanding community sourcing for ongoing news coverage.

Being open requires strategy and structure. For social media or other systems, tools and platforms to improve journalism's effectiveness, newspeople need to know what they're trying to do and pick the right ways to carry out those goals.

A former colleague, Senior Editor Scott Lebar at the Sacramento Bee, used to talk about this process in terms of "the tail that wags the dog." Ideas for doing something new with coverage often work best by beginning with a desired outcome—a new kind of reader service or coverage form—and building a process to get there. The process could then change behavior and produce other benefits.

Reporters move to a different role in journalism as service when they "anchor" stories in live time by curating social media feeds, vetting tips and facts and choosing which to include. I've seen beat bloggers stop thinking about what editors wanted to know and begin focusing more on what users want to know.

Skoler envisioned that kind of shift in position when he helped launch PIN at Minnesota Public Radio in 2003.

"Fundamentally I was trying to remove some of the arrogance that I think separated journalists from the audience," he said. "In my mind everybody was an expert" on something.

Public Insight works through a rigorous system managed by coordinators in individual newsrooms. These coordinators post questions to websites or via email as part of news coverage. Those who respond and sign up are added to databases to be tapped again via email and occasionally by telephone or text message.

Media partners such as the Miami Herald, Southern California Public Radio and American Public Media's Marketplace Business Report regularly draw on, and credit, sources found through Public Insight's database. The network has more than 130,000 sources, said PIN's Joellen Easton, and more than 40 media partners who pay seat license fees to use PIN's tools.

As the network has drawn people in as contributors to news coverage, PIN has won trust by guarding the privacy of those who sign up. This also becomes a limiter: The network so far has essentially been a closed system controlled by news organizations. PIN members haven't been able to hear from one another or track in any public way how their contributions affect coverage (unless they are individually interviewed).

While it's not perfect, Public Insight shows that a new system can create different process and results through a structural emphasis on tapping community experience and expertise. In the meantime, Easton said that PIN is working on changes that would give sources ways to track their participation and to facilitate more feedback to and from newsrooms.

Another major participation effort is the five-year-old CNN iReport, which invites and directs viewers to share news and feature videos and photos. The site and was recently revamped (as Mallary Jean Tenore reported on the Poynter site) to operate more as a social media network. iReport has drawn some criticism, mainly because it offers no pay to contributors, but also has established user-created content as part of the core of breaking news coverage. In announcing its revamp, the site said it had a million people in its user community.

Contemporary models are essential for remaking, not just adding to, news work. In traditional organizations, workers face tall challenges in how to build interaction into the heavily routinized work that produces print newspapers, magazines and TV and radio newscasts.

These realities can't be dismissed. Social media tools and other digital connectors can improve journalism by enabling source-building and extending news gathering, but only if the structure of news work is reshaped to make engagement part of the journalism rather than an add-on.

The challenge is related and similar to the rebuild going on in some places around shifting news processes to become more effective for new platforms—the "digital first" idea that's driving change in many news organizations.

"Digital first" alone won't capture journalism's opportunities for improving in more fundamental ways—building transparency, participation and responsiveness into the processes of gathering, synthesizing and transmitting news and information. Yet it can be the tail that wags the dog, creating a new framework that builds in open practices.

Joy Mayer, an editor at the Columbia Missourian and a University of Missouri associate professor, spent months interviewing journalists about their attitudes and actions toward news consumers during a Reynolds Journalism Institute project she dubbed "Ditch the Lecture. Join the Conversation." She turned her learning into practical guides. One drew on a group brainstorming session at RJI on identifying and measuring audience engagement strategies, the other laid out a process for newsrooms to use in developing goals and plans.

Rather than starting with tools or technology, her guidelines begin with conversations about organizational mission and values then continue to strategies that carry out those values.

Engagement, she says, needs to be central in the work of journalism, not an add-on.

"My dream in the newsroom is for every budgetline to include an audience component," she says. Key questions: "Is there an identifiable audience we should try to interact with? Is there a social medium we should use? What should we link to? Is there a blog that covers this stuff that we should seek out? How will it be received, who will want it and how (does it fit) into the overall conversation around the topic."

As Mayer notes, engagement and adding value go far beyond social media. There is no template or single strategy that works for any issue or story. While many people are active Web or mobile users, many are not. Some engagement, she says, involves community events or old-fashioned telephone response.

Mayer returned to her newsroom and began working with a participatory journalism class and in a new role at the Missourian. In October, she blogged a success story: To provide context and information for people on a city budget vote involving bus routes and prices, the Missourian staff turned "weeks' worth of transit budget reporting into a two-page handout, and we took it to the council meeting."

They printed 100 and ran out of them quickly.

While a small example, the flier underscores a key aspect of open journalism: creativity in addressing the aim of the journalism and finding the right approach rather than sticking with old forms.

Amid a breaking news story, the journalism for a newspaper site might be having a knowledgeable reporter doing a live chat to answer questions, gather and curate real-time information rather than writing or producing a "story" for later publication. Newsgathering might

send reporters to community gathering places, including Facebook groups or forums, to put out word about questions they're pursuing.

Mayer has been working tirelessly to share her learning and evangelize for an approach to engagement that begins with discussion. For instance, what are an organization's values? How does use of social media support those values? What's the right tactic?

"I definitely don't have any magic solutions that don't require effort," she told me in an email exchange about the guide. "But some of these strategies (like more fully taking advantage of what we can learn from analytics, using social media to listen not just broadcast, and identifying audiences to take specific content to) have so much potential that we can't afford NOT to invest in them."

As news providers shift to social media, there's a chance for a do-over. Vadim Lavrusik, journalist program manager for Facebook, has advised many news organizations and individuals about ways to use the platform to aid good journalism.

Many sites are using Facebook to handle user comments, which enforces more use of real names but also leaves organizations with the prospect of turning social media into another "we report, you respond" channel.

The news industry is focused mainly on the platform's power to expand distribution and market brands by posting links that carry users back to media websites. Yet this focus overlooks the deeper power of networks, which are changing how people live and not just how they communicate, for more accurate and better-informed coverage.

Lavrusik cautioned that journalists who use Facebook only to post links will discover "that's going to be a pain in the rear."

In an August phone interview, he said he saw more gain for those who use it "to make it more of a relationship, where you're able to sort of do beat work online and be able to touch a lot more people in a complementary way to do the beat work or the ground work, it's going to be so much more beneficial because you're going to be the go-to person when that person has a tip."

I think what's missing for many news organizations using social media is a coherent articulation of how these tools fit into the larger journalism mission and strategy. What's needed isn't bureaucracy, it's a conversation about the journalism that sees engagement as part of how you find and tell stories.

While working on this paper I came across one such vision, though it didn't include social media specifically, for the mindset of an open newsroom.

In the early 1990s under Oakland Tribune Publisher Robert Maynard, Editor Charles Jackson and Managing Editor Eric Newton were working on what they called the Open Newspaper approach to leading, hiring and operating with greater transparency.

Jackson and Newton, with help from Maynard's daughter Dori Maynard, produced a second

edition of "The Open Newspaper Workbook" in 2004 as a project of the <u>Maynard Institute for Journalism Education</u>. By then, newspapers were well into readership declines and well behind on the culture changes—capturing the rewards of America's ethnic diversity and the Internet's expanding reach—needed for relevance.

Here's what Newton[7] wrote in the prologue of the update:

> Open Newspapers draw people and practices from host communities. They have an institutional open mind, one that learns from the communities they serve and the people they employ.
> The Open Newspaper is as interactive as the Internet, as widely used as the telephone, as fresh as the television. But it has the perspective only a newspaper can bring.
> Open Newspapers are in philosophical tune with the idea of an Open Society.
> They can demand wide access to society because they allow wide access to themselves.
> Does this sound radical? Utopian?
> Here's radical: We are in the midst of a digital renaissance, in which the world's knowledge is being turned into electrical pulses like the human brain's – thousands of billions of on-and-off switches.
> Here's utopian: This transformation offers opportunities to remake large sections of our business, social and political lives.
> The Open Newspaper is the tame part.

"The Open Newspaper" remains a compelling document whose core ideas, especially for leadership and hiring, could improve most newsrooms today. (<u>See the Open Newspaper sidebar for a copy of the workbook</u>)

In addition to its specifics, it also stands out for offering comprehensive vision connecting mission to tactics. Being open was a means to better journalism and the workbook a guide for getting there.

Journalism needs more of both, vision and structure, to go deeper on two-way communication.

The digital renaissance has offered transformational change in many ways, yet news processes have made only incremental progress. In some ways it seems we're just building faster versions of old problems, especially the tendency of news organizations to be opaque and insular.

One small but telling example of this is the failure of many news organizations to link out to others from reports, which is part of web culture. As with other things, newspeople are improving on this, but general practice doesn't seem to have changed much. "Here's what we know" doesn't come routinely with "here's what others know" and "what do you know?"

<u>Dan Gillmor</u>, a former San Jose Mercury News business and technology columnist who has written frequently on these issues, coined one of the signature ideas of networked journalism: "My readers know more than I do."

Gillmor is founding director of the Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He also authored two books: "We the Media" in 2004 and "Mediactive" in 2010.

While written for different times and with different emphases, both books address and urge change on both sides of media: those who create content and those who contribute to it or consume it. An advocate of experiments, Gillmor says mainstream news has made progress but that it's "really limited."

"It just seems to me like there's still this weird resistance to giving up the oracle status that news organizations have," Gillmor told me in a phone conversation. "I don't understand it.

"I don't think it's the case that people just said we're going to ignore the audience completely," he added. "I think what rather has been the case is a lot of suspicion of it and a lack of resources or perceived lack of resources."

When I asked what he'd suggest, he rattled off a dozen ideas for what he sees as examples of easy ways to fill gaps (many of these ideas are found in "Mediactive.")"[8]

News providers should pair stories reporting what is known with headlined boxes listing "things we don't know" and enlisting readers in helping fill gaps, Gillmor said. By explaining what went into an investigation and why it was done, he said, news organizations could build respect for "the hard work that goes into journalism." More difficult but important, he said, would be additional steps: to discern and reveal the agendas of people trying to spin journalists, to identify a newsroom's "world view" and to engage viewers and readers actively through conversation and participation.

Gillmor said professional journalists at levels also should be creating connections between their coverage and the work of others—inside or outside journalism – who are gathering or publishing information and telling stories.

"They shouldn't just be doing it in a vacuum and saying you all come to our thing; they should be working with other people in the community where they are among the participants," he said.

Individual journalists are becoming more proactive in trying to connect, especially those whose work has shifted online or exists only on websites or blogs. Yet individual points of contact don't add up to institutional shift, to helping improve journalism by giving news organizations access to a much larger set of inputs, without change in the process of news work. I've heard this described in news training as "automatics," the habits that newspeople build into their thinking to produce reporting.

Open journalism makes networked conversation on coverage a key "automatic" in the newsgathering process. It adds inputs along the way – social media or web queries, awareness of and active linking to information flowing through other networks—to post-publication feedback.

Doing this simple thing, changing the inquiry process, doesn't happen without conscious effort. Public Insight Network, for instance, couldn't have succeeded without the rigor involved in

building it as a new journalism system.

Skoler recalls the work involved in building the network, including meetings in people's living rooms and exhaustive effort to sign up partners and set up the national framework. Now he's helping lead another citizen involvement effort called State Integrity Investigation, a collaboration among PRI, Global Integrity and the Center for Public Integrity.

"I really believe the future will be won or lost on whether or not we have real partnership relationships and trust," he said.

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[7] Corrected from original to indicate Eric Newton as the writer of the Open Newspaper Workbook's prologue.

[8] Dan Gillmor, Mediactive, 2010, Dan Gillmor. Chapter 8.

Part 4: "Show Your Work"

One of the most significant forces increasing journalism capacity and quality has a shorthand name—hacks and hackers.

The hacks are the journalists, the hackers are technologists (primarily software developers) who are bringing different skills, ideas and approaches to the work of gathering and presenting news, information and analysis.

Burt Herman, a former Associated Press reporter known for co-founding the news-technology startup Storify, also launched the group Hacks/Hackers in 2009 "as a reaction to seeing how media was changing (and) the fact that technology was so linked to how you gather information and distribute material for stories."

"It just seemed like the two groups were not talking to each other," he told me in a recent telephone conversation.

Hacks/Hackers began as a series of informal meetups and caught on as an organization, now with chapters in a couple dozen cities in the US and on five continents, that focuses on gatherings outside offices or companies for socializing or doing work together. It also helped crystallize an idea, that the best journalists and the best technologists can innovate and excel when they team up.

Around the same time Hacks/Hackers emerged, news work was beginning to catch up to the challenges and possibilities of a networked universe. News companies began hiring skilled programmers and giving them influence, first in prominent newsrooms such as the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, ProPublica and Associated Press and, gradually, in an increasing number of smaller commercial and nonprofit operations.

Programmer-journalists, hacker-journalists, data journalists—whatever you call them, these skilled workers are a new breed of newsroom specialist. Some work mainly on the reporting end of journalism (gathering or networking information, building tools for data work, helping organize and analyze databases) and some focus on web and mobile interfaces. Some are new to journalism altogether; others have moved over from reporting toward data.

They're a potent combination because they're bringing both open-source technology and some of its mindset to bear in propagating the most difficult and important work of journalism among newspeople and the public.

They're doing this through new networks (social media, data blogs) and via established structures such as Investigative Reporters and Editors, journalism's original skill-focused, knowledge-driven association. And through these sharing methods they're proving that open journalism approaches are far more effective than closed culture for improving quality and increasing capacity.

The familiar conversation about news company downsizing and the small scale of news startups—the "not enough" equation, which says new enterprises are not enough to replace lost jobs—misses the other side of capacity. Part of journalism capacity is numbers of people working to

inform others; the other part is what those people can do.

At Duke University, former Washington Post database editor and reporter Sarah Cohen, a Pulitzer Prize winner, heads a new operation called the Reporter's Lab. Officially named the Duke Project for the Advancement of Public Affairs Reporting, it represents an effort to address journalism capacity by reducing the cost of high-end work.

Cohen's aim, working with a small staff and in collaboration with IRE and others, is to bring technology innovation into the core of public affairs reporting. They're part of Duke's DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy and its research program in computational journalism.

In a recent journal article co-authored with James T. Hamilton and Fred Turner, Cohen wrote that computer scientists could "strengthen the hands of the remaining professional reporters and engage new players in the watchdog process."

They continued:

"Building on the experience of an earlier generation of computer-assisted reporting, journalists and computer scientists are developing new ways to reduce the cost and difficulty of in-depth public affairs reporting."[9]

The challenges, they noted, include culture—computer scientists and journalists learning each other's ways.

There's no doubt that open-source ideas clash with some aspects of news company culture. This is a culture that has lived on competition, words like "exclusive" and a notion that if a newspaper or TV station didn't report something it probably didn't matter.

Yet the aspiration and get-it-done culture associated with the hacker idea also connect with the ingenuity, determination and skill associated with journalism's best over many generations. That's why the "hacks" side of hacks and hackers matters—and why this brand of open journalism has such potential for improving craft and skill far beyond the hard-core work of data mining.

Boyer, the Chicago Tribune news applications editor, has been one of the most active and vocal open-source evangelists working in journalism. He also illustrates how changing a structure can produce results: He entered journalism through a Northwestern University program set up to recruit talented programmers into the field.

Boyer arrived at the Trib after interning at ProPublica and brought with him a short list of mandates. His team blogs, works with open source code and shares its code actively.

Their mantra of "show your work" has been picked up in the widening discussion about open-source methodology as a guide for a more transparent approach to journalism. Show your work can apply to telling users how we know what we know, to posting data for users to check and for others to mine for their own purposes and to other non-data aspects of journalism.

Bill Adee, vice president of digital stuff at the Trib (*real title), said the attitude is as infectious

as the technology is useful.

"To have somebody shift fields from a lucrative field that so many people are going into now and switching to our field, journalism, and to be so excited about it," Adee said, "is a great thing to have in the newsroom."

Yet Adee noted that Boyer's original and biggest mission (set by Tribune Editor Gerould Kern) was to increase the paper's investigative prowess. The apps team started by jumping into a nursing home investigation and helping reporters mine and analyze data, then turned the results into a more effective web presentation than would have been possible earlier.

Boyer now reports to the paper's investigative leadership and is helping, through his Trib work and outside involvements, build journalism tools and solutions that many others can use. He helped the Tribune win a Knight News Challenge grant for a project called PANDA, now under development with its own team, to build open-source software that will make data much easier to organize and use—even for journalists without advanced skills. An alpha version was released in November.

Boyer notes that peer-to-peer collaboration has long existed in journalism and is expanding now. Via Twitter, new and established blogs and a crisscrossing web of formal and informal partnerships, like-minded journalists are finding one another and making things happen (often without executive supervision).

"Getting free and open-source tools into the newsroom and into news organizations is happening more and more," Boyer said. With data journalism exploding and connecting with data work in other disciplines (science, government and social sciences), he said, "I think we're at the beginning of something completely new."

In the past, news organizations without the dollars to hire their own Brian Boyer would mostly have had to settle for admiring or envying such work or emulating it on a modest level. Individual journalists, students and those working in small startups or nonprofits would have had to choose whether to invest in such skills over other pressing demands.

Today, digital networks and both formal and informal structures offer outsiders the benefits of the hacks and hackers variety of open journalism practiced by the best in the business.

As Cohen and her Duke co-authors noted in their journal article, the programmer-journalists also connect to the iron core of computer-assisted and statistical- analysis journalism pioneered in the late 1960s. Over the next two decades computer-assisted reporting emerged as an important journalism specialty, developed as a discipline by a few key leaders and through IRE and the National Institute of Computer-Assisted Reporting (NICAR).

Mark Horvit, IRE executive director, thinks the organization was journalism's original open-source leader. Established by reporters who wanted to share tips and techniques, IRE became a locus of knowledge-sharing and skill-building.

Its conventions and publications have long attracted journalists working largely on their own in

individual newsrooms and seeking help and camaraderie. As a result IRE members built a culture of reciprocal help.

The organization and NICAR also established structure and leadership for such sharing. For instance, IRE's awards program stood out from others by extracting learning from prizewinning work. Cursed by many an award applicant, the contest entry form requires documentation of how stories were done. As a result, other journalists can order a back copy of a prize-winning story and get that documentation.

NICAR, meanwhile, runs an active listserv where at almost any hour one can find members asking for and getting help on database and technology challenges.

Beyond member benefits, IRE has been actively extending its reach through open-source approaches that offer learning and capacity to anyone who want them. A good example is a collaboration that produced a kind of "Easy button" for journalists working with Census data.

It started, Boyer recalls, with him and a couple of other programmers griping about the hassles of Census data and deciding "we shouldn't be repeating ourselves, we should be doing work" together to allow news organizations to focus on their local stories.

Horvit at IRE got involved and won funding for the project from the University of Missouri's Reynolds Journalism Institute. The collaborators got together for a couple of weekends of solid hacking and worked remotely afterward to produce the open Census tools, which went live over the summer.

Boyer, Joe Germuska and Chris Groskopf of the Chicago Tribune joined forces with Jeremy Ashkenas and Aron Pilhofer of the New York Times, Paul Overberg of USA Today, Curt Merrill of CNN, Matt Waite of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Mike Tigas of the Spokesman-Review.

The big collaboration, launched early in the year, was going to take time. So in the meantime Overberg and USA Today did the work to make state-level data and some additional offerings available to IRE members at no cost.

"Their management said yes right away," Horvit said, still sounding surprised months later. "All that work they were doing on USA Today's dime became available to journalists around America."

Adee, who was Boyer's boss at the time, says the Tribune saw benefits in taking "the open-source model to that level as well.

"That's the culture that makes us all better," Adee said.

Open journalism approaches like this address cost and capacity issues shared by news organizations of all sizes and funding models. The IRE offerings were publicized, for instance, by ethnic media and community news organizations as well as through mainstream newsrooms. The code was posted on github, the web-based hosting service for open-source projects.

At the IRE site, data tools were put up along with training links and other resources. Anyone in any shop, small or large, or working individually could take advantage of work by the best in the field.

Horvit wants IRE to do more projects like the Census collaboration, and not just because they make partners feel good.

"IRE is probably the least 'kumbayah' organization in the world," Horvit said with a laugh. Partnerships and collaborations, he notes, are tricky and difficult, but in current times absolutely necessary.

Despite all this progress, mainstream journalism is still catching up to technology as an enabler of transformative versus incremental change for the work of news.

The hacker-journalists have won attention for their spirit and attitude as well as for their work. In several recent articles, various writers argued that open source culture offers a better model for journalism as service in a networked world than the closed systems used in the past.

In an Oct. 7 post to the Nieman Journalism Lab blog, Nikki Usher and Seth C. Lewis argued that newsrooms could gain much from open-source approaches and what they called hacker/maker culture, an idea that has been explored recently by other journalism thinkers. Usher (who earned her doctorate at USC Annenberg) is assistant professor at George Washington University's School of Media & Public affairs. Lewis holds the same title at the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism & Mass Communication.

As opposed to Silicon Valley's commerce-driven software culture, they wrote, "open source might be what people are hoping for when they think about remaking journalism—both in terms of innovating the business/system of news, and in terms of making it more transparent and participatory."

A similar belief inspired two major foundations, Knight and Mozilla, to join forces on the Knight-Mozilla News Technology Partnership (nicknamed Mojo) that sparked dozens of new ideas and projects this year aimed at improving news online for journalists and users.

Mojo links Mozilla's open-source approaches (peer-to-peer learning, open development and collaboration) with Knight's push to spur innovation in journalism, which several program officials summarize as making news and information "of the web rather than on the web."

Run as a contest and collaboration wrapped together, Mojo took off in the spring with online challenges and in-person meetups to spark ideas and proposals for improving news on the web in key areas. The process continued in several phases in which projects were developed further and the field of candidates was narrowed. In November, the partnership announced five "fellows" picked for paid jobs in 2012 in forward-looking newsrooms selected for the first round.

Among the ground rules: Projects had to be developed using open-source code so that they would benefit news producers and users broadly rather than contest participants individually.

In following Mojo I was struck by its potential for impact much greater than simply improving the technology of news. The civic passion and community sensibility of many proposals, as well as the project's focus on open development and collaboration, reinforced journalism's aims while giving them a fresh orientation. (More details in this sidebar)

Dan Sinker, an author and innovator picked to lead the Mojo project for Mozilla, mused in a series of Tumblr blog posts in November about the potential the project showed for journalism to become a more active technology participant in the open web.

He mentioned the Knight-funded DocumentCloud project, originally developed by programmers from the New York Times and ProPublica, which provided "super-useful and highly adopted javascript libraries" along with its more publicly visible benefit, tools for uploading, analyzing and publishing documents.

"It's a perfect example of how working in the open can have unintended, positive, consequences: The work to create a specific (and awesome) journalistic project spun out general-purpose code that's helped to build all sorts of things on the web," Sinker wrote.

In June, DocumentCloud moved to IRE with another Knight grant aimed at developing it as an open-source tool to draw readers into using and annotating documents themselves.

Ted Han, the lead developer on DocumentCloud, sees the potential of such work in linking journalism ideas to broader interests. He thinks connections are multiplying among the "online volunteer community... the open data community, people who are civically engaged and want to find out about something, and lastly journalists, as this kind of triangle of knowledge workers."

"People are trying to help people as part of a broader civic impulse," Han said. "Journalism doesn't seem like a huge leap."

Han sees both civic and commercial value in such connections.

"I'm interested in seeing more stuff come out of journalism that gets used in other places," he said. "That's the way that you grow outside your own space. Who are you going to be selling stuff to, who are you going to get money from?"

Mojo is one of the latest efforts by the Knight Foundation to ramp up innovation and experimentation in journalism. In 2007 the foundation committed $25 million over five years to its Knight News Challenge, (and spent a bit more) and Knight has invested millions more in project grants outside the contest.

Eric Newton, now senior adviser to Knight Foundation President and CEO Alberto Ibarguen, said the challenge grew out of a sense among foundation leaders—especially Ibarguen—that digital change was offering a moment of opportunity for innovation that journalism wasn't seizing.

"We wanted to follow the future of news and information wherever it was going, and see if we could even get ahead of it a little bit," Newton recalls.

The News Challenge began with broad guidelines and a contest format and changed every year, Newton said, aiming "to have a culture of continuous change," which he sees as essential for any organization to survive.

Recently Knight announced that it would <u>continue the news challenge</u> beyond the original 2012 end date and make it a faster process with three rounds each year instead of just one annual competition. A parallel program, the $24-million Knight <u>Community Information Challenge</u>, has funded even more experimentation among dozens of community-level players by matching money from place-based foundations for news and information.

From Newton's view, Knight's work recognizes a much more profound set of changes being wrought by digital communication in our culture and the flow of information: changes in who's providing journalism, how news and information are being delivered and consumed and how citizens are creating and using content.

"It's not the audience anymore, it's a community; you either engage with it or you don't," Newton said. "The whole one-way system is obsolete. Now it's a network digitally."

Part 5: Embracing a Networked Role for Journalism

One of journalism's biggest challenges amid media shift also offers some of its greatest opportunities: the movement of information across and through networks rather than through the media funnels that used to direct most news.

Acts of journalism are providing value in countless ways in this environment, yet the processes by which news is gathered and transmitted miss countless more opportunities for better-informed coverage.

In a networked universe journalism remains valuable by discovering, amplifying and connecting information—offering citizens the power that comes from knowledge. Newspeople can be vital as independent, active information agents for citizens, but to do so their actions must recognize a different place than the old gatekeeper role. Value might come from identifying, surfacing, vetting and organizing material as well as from original reporting.

At Pew's Project for Excellence in Journalism, Executive Director Tom Rosenstiel notes that despite ongoing surveys indicating distrust of mainstream media, people still seek fact-based reporting from known sources when news happens. Rosenstiel oversees, among other things, the annual State of the Media report.

He also has co-authored, with former Nieman curator and longtime journalism leader Bill Kovach, two books exploring journalism's obligations and changing imperatives in public life. The first book, "The Elements of Journalism," began building a framework of essential roles for journalism amid changes in media and culture. In the second, "Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload," the authors outlined key functions of journalism including traditional ("authenticator" and "investigator") and new ("sense maker" and "smart aggregator").[10]

From Rosenstiel's view, media trends demonstrate people's innate appreciation for fact-based reporting. When news occurs, he notes, people flood to mainstream news sites—including aggregators—for "essentially 19th-century wire copy."

Yet as a former newspaper reporter he thinks newspeople should focus on the value they're trying to provide and on being much more intentional and targeted in how they're providing it.

"What does a newsroom really do, what is its function in a community? It creates knowledge," Rosenstiel told me in a telephone conversation. "It's not in the business of writing stories and selling advertising against them. That's how we used to perform this function, but it's not the actual function.

"We are caught up in an ancient confusion between how we do things and what our function is."

Rather than a recipe, he said, people providing these functions must be creative and adaptive thinkers that recognize what's missing and what's needed in various situations.

"What adds value changes with where the story's at," he said.

Open journalism provides a useful construct for this challenge, considering the work of newspeople as part of networked information rather than its hub. As part of a shift away from "we own the story" to "we provide valuable service," news providers can focus their energies, make their resources count and extend journalism capacity in their communities.

If there's a shorthand for this idea, it might be Jeff Jarvis' BuzzMachine blog post from 2007 in which he wrote that the "new architecture of news" could be summarized as: "Cover what you do best and link to the rest." Earlier, in 2006, Jarvis had offered an idea he called "networked journalism" as an alternative to citizen journalism.

"'Networked journalism' takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism now: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives," he wrote. "It recognizes the complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product."

As the Internet has matured so have the networks that inform people, and news is just part of those networks. In our communities—towns, cities and communities of interest—people are exchanging information constantly. Groups form to address problems or invent things. When events happen, people turn to trusted sources including news providers but ranging far beyond them.

There's no doubt of the need for reliable, independent information. Yet journalism's opportunity in the networked world is in recognizing value in others' information even as newspeople apply scarce resources to work that supports their own value, as a paid service or as a civic benefit.

Many reporters are tapping networks for information and sources, but too many newspeople seem disconnected from other ways people informing one another. Too much news work focuses on origination and not enough on networking information. (Aggregation is only part of networking.)

Open journalism's capacity-building idea comes into play here. The question isn't how journalism competes with other information, it's how it adds value by making such information useful, accessible or understandable in various ways.

In California, for instance, a group of Stanford University students and alumni came together over shared frustration with the state's financial and political dysfunction. Armed with the idea that better information could activate citizens and shape solutions, they began gathering data on state government and eventually filed public records requests for all California government outlays, only to be denied by the administration of Gov. Jerry Brown.

Undeterred, or perhaps even energized, by the refusals, the group in summer 2011 launched a "transparency data portal" offering data and graphics ("visualizations") analyzing various aspects of government spending by the state and some localities. The nonprofit, called California Common Sense (CACS), has been working to expand by enlisting students at other colleges and universities. In November it was preparing to relaunch with new web and Facebook engagement tools for journalists and the public to use in building their own "data stories."

No journalists work for CACs. Yet what the group is doing—gathering data, offering it for public view, using it to engage people in civic life—echoes some of journalism's aims.

Joe Lonsdale, a Silicon Valley software executive and chairman of the group's board, sees CACs as a resource to go beyond what media reporting can provide both in terms of data and engagement.

"A lot of organizations don't have time to do the reporting they did earlier," he noted, and with the increasing sophistication of government data, lack resources to put together a site like the CACs portal.

Stanford senior Dakin Sloss, president of CACs, has led the group's fundraising, which he said topped $400,000 by this fall. He sees the portal as a way to hold government accountable and to make it easy for citizens to connect with elected and policy leaders—to take action. In November, he was making the rounds with legislators and other elected officials to convince them to respond to data findings and citizen concerns on the CACs Facebook application.

Lonsdale thinks the student involvement is "one of the coolest things about this" and sees CACs as a longer-term effort to empower citizens.

"The thing so far is focused on the front end, data transparency," he said. "The next step is to focus on the back end, engagement. I think both are necessary to bring about change."

Across the continent in Burlington, Vt., Michael Wood-Lewis and his wife Valerie set out in 2000 to build an online neighbors forum to help them get to know people in the community where they live, called Three Sisters. In 2006 they turned the idea into Front Porch Forum, which has grown into a network of neighborhood online forums reaching an estimated 30,000 households in several Vermont towns.

It's a business built on service: acting as a connector that helps neighbors get to know one another and deepens civic connection, Michael Wood-Lewis said. Forums are closed (participants have to live in a neighborhood to belong and must give their real names and addresses) and kept small enough to provide a sense of safety.

Many local elected officials belong to their own forums and communicate with constituents who are also their neighbors. Much of the interaction, I found during a couple of weeks of observing, is about neighborly help—borrowing tools, selling used items and planning get-togethers.

"There's a fascinating cumulative effect that builds up," Wood-Lewis said. His summary: Instead of identifying one another by the cars they drive, neighbors start learning everyone's names.

After about six months, he said, "the sense of ownership of the community emerges—'Now I'm part of it, and now I feel that, whatever, the youth center or the park or the potholes or the crime problem are my issue.'"

Wood-Lewis doesn't see himself as a competitor for news companies, though he sells online

advertising and hosts plenty of civic discussion. (Businesses can post anything in their own neighborhood forums, but pay for sponsorships that reach across neighborhoods). He said Front Porch Forum generates local news leads and neighborhood conversation that builds interest in issues, and thus helps expand the audience for local journalism.

"What we're doing is one or two things very well," he said. "We're helping neighbors connect. And we're helping public officials connect with their constituents."

Whatever the models, these are just two of hundreds or thousands of ways people are creating or using communication networks to meet civic needs. Their community positions are different from those held by news organizations, even nonprofit startups, yet many of them offer substantive information and connection to audiences that aren't necessarily coming to news sites.

There's no template for how news providers tap such information networks but a core idea works; these are sources, channels or communities where people are working on things together. They're both context and substance for the jobs of journalism.

In Pittsburgh, a $50,000 grant helped the Post-Gazette newspaper launch a site called Pipeline, an experiment with five partners on covering the politics, science and economic effects of the natural gas extraction method called hydraulic fracturing ("hydrofracking") in the Marcellus Shale region. Hosted within the newspaper's website, Pipeline links Post-Gazette coverage with an environment-focused radio show called Allegheny Front, a broad-based data and information site called FracTracker, an independent video journalist, a local freelancer focused on community issues and a local blog called Burgh Diaspora.

The site includes news, links and information such as public meeting notices and connects to a Facebook page for public discussion. It highlights work from partners and posts coverage from the P-G as well as aggregated headlines from elsewhere. The Post-Gazette does the heavy lifting for the partnership and managed the grant, giving $2,000 to $4,000 to each of the partners. Reporter Erich Schwartzel, who joined the P-G in 2009, leads the newspaper's efforts.

Pipeline is more of networking mechanism than a reporting collaboration, since the partners generally work independently, but Schwartzel says the relationships it has created are beginning to bear fruit.

"I think it's created an informal circle of collaborators who can bounce ideas off each other," he said. "I also think it's informed the newsroom's reporting."

Mary Leonard, Post-Gazette deputy managing editor, says the project wouldn't have happened without the grant support from J-Lab, a Washington, D.C., "journalism catalyst" nonprofit that has supported experimentation and learning in a variety of key ways for more than a decade.

Yet now that Pipeline has gained traction and acclaim (it won an Online News Association award in September), Leonard says it's helped change some viewpoints in the P-G newsroom. She and Schwartzel are looking toward 2012 presidential coverage framed around Marcellus Shale issues, possibly by seeking another grant for part of the work.

Samantha Malone of FracTracker says the Pipeline partnership has added credibility for the Post-Gazette within her organization, the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. FracTracker is itself a collaboration of the school and other partners and Malone is a communications specialist and doctoral student working with it.

The newspaper partnership has broadened the audience that sees FracTracker, she noted, and the chance to "work with media in a way that you weren't always in a rush" has improved the overall relationship with the Post-Gazette.

Other newsrooms are starting to look into communities, not just across media, in considering how their work adds value or links to others. Matt DeRienzo, Connecticut group editor for the Journal Register Co., told me in October he was excited about a project taking shape there "to take a really broad look at our communities and see what's missing" in terms of information needs.

From there the question will be, he said, "how can we help curate, aggregate, piece together, sponsor, start a new network or things that are meeting needs better than anything has in the past.

"The only way to do that is through a really open engagement process," DeRienzo said.

So far newspeople have mainly taken up networking within journalism, yet even those efforts often run into predictable challenges: competitive worries, lack of resources or an absence of trust.

Michael R. Fancher, former executive editor of the Seattle Times, has been examining and writing about relationships among new and established media with a focus on the Seattle area. In an Aspen Institute paper this year titled "Re-Imagining Journalism: Local News For a Networked World" Fancher wrote that the Internet had given journalism "a chance to recreate itself the way it should have been, if the technology had allowed" and continued:

"In an interactive world, journalism must be a trusting partnership between journalists and the public. Building that partnership will require enlightened leadership within news organizations and deep public engagement with the news media."[10]

In a conversation in September, Fancher told me that the network idea runs into both pragmatic and cultural challenges. People in established news organizations and some startups feel overwhelmed trying to manage both news work and change, he said.

"I think one of the toughest parts of this is that people who are steeped in the traditions of journalism feel such an obligation to protect journalism that it's really, really hard for them to come at this from at it from the standpoint of openness and engagement," he said, and give up "that sense of control."

Fancher, now teaching at the University of Nevada at Reno, envisions what he calls a "journalism commons" bringing many other players together on ways to meet certain community needs. Largely unanswered, he said, are questions of what people outside media want and need.

"It's hard enough to get the journalists in this conversation in meaningful ways, but bringing the public in seems to be almost an afterthought," he said.

C.W. Anderson, assistant professor of media culture at the College of Staten Island, spent several years studying Philadelphia media organizations, from the city's major newspapers to a variety of startups. His resulting doctoral thesis turned into a book called "Networking the News," due out from Temple University Press in 2012.

Anderson found many obstacles that kept the network idea from being realized in Philadelphia. Among them were entrenched newspaper culture tied to print production routines and also to a sense that serious journalism was largely centered on reporting (versus other functions of the digital era such as organizing, linking, vetting or amplifying information).

Also, Anderson wrote, the failure of the networked news idea in Philadelphia went beyond logistics and management to a deeply embedded idea of journalistic authority and "the 'thickness' of journalism's vision of itself [and] its own self-conception of its democratic purpose."

"While executive-led newsroom innovation tactics can shift the nature of journalistic work in more collaborative directions, the underpinnings of journalistic behavior partly lie in a particular vision and self-conception about the validity of empirical knowledge creation—centered around reporting—and a particular idea of what the public is and how journalism relates to that public," he concluded. "These attitudes about the meaning of reporting and the idea of the political public have, by and large, accomplished many remarkable things over the past few decades. To the degree these visions are now shifting under our feet, journalism—and democracy—find themselves riding a choppy current, hurtling towards unknown shores." [12]

Partnerships among journalism institutions, even when they succeed, provide only part of the answer. For newspeople to provide the greatest value they need to understand networks better as capacity-builders and context for acts of journalism that provide value and service.

Many books, articles, blog posts, speeches and scholarly works have examined the effects of digital networks. Clay Shirky's books on the Internet's effects on society, including the 2008 "Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations," discuss media and journalism in the much broader context of digital life. Another oft-cited book, Harvard law professor Yochai Benkler's "The Wealth of Networks," describes the emergence and maturation of Internet-based peer and expert networks in overcoming both the limitations and controls of 20th-century commercial mass media to enable what Benkler calls "a networked public sphere."[13]

Such works describe how the Internet continues to change information flow and citizen participation, an ongoing evolution that has accelerated with the expansion of social media. In my view these changes don't form a convincing argument that journalism isn't needed in the digital age. They point to the need for acts of journalism, and those who provide them, to work in conscious and intentional relationship to that new public sphere.

Excellent journalism, after all, has never been simply about information. It's information provided to enable knowledge, published or broadcast as a public exchange by people accountable for its accuracy. Networks can enhance quality by linking the work of newspeople and many others to support journalism's public service functions: accountability, timeliness and accessibility.

As Gillmor notes, it's the service that needs saving versus the form the service takes. The

modern age offers countess opportunities and experiments. Some will fail, some will win out, but all exist now in the context of networks.

"We're talking about an ecosystem which includes for-profit, not-for-profit, volunteer, and all sorts of other stuff," he said. "It's completely obvious that we have not seen remotely what's possible.

"It could be spectacular."

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[9] Sarah Cohen, James T. Hamilton and Fred Turner, "Computational Journalism: How computer scientists can empower journalists, democracy's watchdogs, in the production of news in the public interest," Communications of the ACM, Vo. 54, No. 10, 66-71.

[10] Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), Chapter 9.

[11] Michael R. Fancher, "Re-Imagining Journalism: Local News for a Networked World," The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, 2011. Executive summary p. ix.

[12] C.W. Anderson, Networking the News (Temple University Press, forthcoming)

[13] Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of Networks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) Chapter 7.

Part 6: Open Journalism Now

In the past four years a variety of forces, mostly outside the mainstream of news, have created a support system for open journalism. Social media and online sharing have made interaction among news providers, contributors and consumers even easier.

The convergence of forces provide a moment of opportunity. Perhaps, as the web matures, newspeople and others can make a conceptual leap that puts journalism fully in service to citizens and consumers and returns respect and value to the work and those who do it.

That leap is trust, which open journalism can promote through transparency, standards and accountability. Trust is the basis for the tactics of building capacity, for instance, by establishing new alliances and networks.

Trust is what's gone missing in many parts of our culture. It comes not from saying trust us, but instead from recognizing the interests of customers and contributors and serving them actively. It comes from showing our work, being responsive and keeping our eyes on what's needed and where our expertise and resources can provide value.

Here are some ways we've seen progress:

- News organizations have begun to collaborate or cooperate with one another to extend capacity and reach. A recent paper by former Oregonian editor Sandy Rowe, "Partners of Necessity," detailed the motives, rewards and challenges of such partnerships in local investigative reporting.[14] The nonprofit Investigative News Network now has some 60 members from across the country. Experiments in collaboration or partnership are multiplying among new and traditional newsrooms and through a modest but growing number of local blog networks. (I helped launch one, Sacramento Connect, at the Sacramento Bee)

- Knowledge-sharing has greatly expanded through prominent journalism websites and blogs (Poynter, Nieman Journalism Lab, StreetFight, 10,000 Words, PBS MediaShift Idea Lab, OJR and others) that track media along with technology, science and other disciplines, extending the range of thinking. Just as powerful, perhaps, is the impact of informal networking through social media and blogs linking peers with tips, advice and help.

- Experimentation and entrepreneurship have flourished in some parts of journalism, especially among community startups and through the multi-year Knight News Challenge and other projects funded by national and regional foundations. These programs spotlight ideas and innovation along with recognition that trying things comes with risk and failures, which aren't all bad. The Knight Foundation site itself offers a wealth of information and a section "What We're Learning" replete with lessons for those willing to spend time mining them.

- University journalism programs, also supported in part by grant programs, have become news producers and home to some of journalism's thought leaders. A growing number

are working with new and established news organizations not just on student-produced journalism but on high-impact projects aimed at helping build new models. A new report by several authors for the New America Foundation details successes and opportunities among university programs and urges far more ambitious change. The report, "Shaping 21st Century Journalism," calls for more financial support from commercial media partnerships and government scholarships, as well from as academic institutions, to expand the role journalism programs play in meeting community needs.[15]

- Quality journalism is beginning to be seen as a community resource deserving of local philanthropic support: The Knight Community Information Challenge, for instance, has used a matching-funding approach to encourage "place-based" foundations to invest in news and information. Like many Knight programs, this one generates valuable learning. For instance, a report by FSG for Knight identified ways to measure engagement successes among programs sponsored by these foundations. Those methods could be applied to any news engagement effort.

- Web culture has become an active force in news thinking, in some highly visible ways such as the work of skilled open-source software developers working in news organizations and in more pervasive yet subtle ways reflecting overall societal trends.

Social-media, web and mobile journalism, in particular, have incubated a kind of alt-j culture where people share tips, advice and links constantly across blogs and social media networks and connect to solve problems or learn skills.

This part of journalism culture is influenced not just by media traditions but also by ideas from the online volunteer movement, technology, science, design and the arts. It leans more to learning than training. It comes together through groups such as Hacks/Hackers, the Online News Association and conferences such as South by Southwest. It does not consider the terms "nerd" or "data geek" insults.

Robert Hernandez, an assistant professor at USC Annenberg and an originator of the weekly *#wjchat* Twitter chat for web journalism, is a walking illustration.

Hernandez (*@webjournalist*) shares frequently and publicly about gear and craft, along with other ideas and inspiration drawn from many disciplines. He's an ONA national board member and helped start the Los Angeles chapter of Hacks/Hackers.

"My vision for journalism: It is inclusive, it is community focused, it's about working together," he told me. "And that very much complements and mirrors the culture of the web."

To appreciate the depth of these changes as well as the lingering challenge it helps to look back a decade to a prominent study of newsroom culture, or at least newspaper newsroom culture, done as part of a large-scale readership project at Northwestern University's Readership Institute (part of its Media Management Center).

This might be the "ghost of Christmas past" part of this paper, a review of the blind spots that developed as journalistic independence grew into isolation and pride turned into arrogance.

For the study, researchers interviewed employees at 100 participating papers. The cultural diagnosis was part of broader "Impact Study" designed to help newspapers turn around readership declines by understanding customers and their own organizations, recalled Mary Nesbitt, now associate dean at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, who worked on helping translate research results for participating news organizations.

Yet it was the culture study that probably indicated how the rest of it would go.

While there were modest variations among departments and between papers, the overall culture of these news organizations was summed up this way: defensive, perfectionistic and oppositional. Other industries where researchers had found similar culture were the military and hospitals.

"Newspapers have a defensive culture that makes them slow to react to changes in the environment, focused on personal agendas rather than customer needs, and reluctant to work across departmental silos," read a summary on the Readership Institute website.

My point isn't to bash newspapers or media companies. I was managing editor at The News & Observer of Raleigh, one of the 100 papers studied, and recall being (of course) defensive about the analysis. My colleagues and I, however, recognized ourselves in this mirror.

The news culture that grew up in the second half of the 20th Century around some good attributes—competitiveness, shared mission, a focus on getting things right—ultimately put news organizations in a terrible position to deal with rapid change in the competitive landscape and massive economic disruption.

"Even though the data showed that better results with customers, for instance, better readership results, improved customer satisfaction, that there was a link with the constructive culture, that wasn't convincing enough to foster any kind of concerted cultural change," Nesbitt told me in a recent phone interview.

Just over a decade later, a new conversation about journalism has emerged online in which traditional players not only aren't dominant but in which newspaper editors and television broadcasters aren't highly visible and, except for the New York Times and a few other familiar names, are rarely mentioned.

Several people I spoke with even avoided the word journalism in favor of "news and information." Michele McLellan, who has worked closely with several significant foundation programs focused on community coverage, said "journalism" is a word that "comes with a lot of baggage." I heard a similar view from several others.

The aversion to "capital-J" journalism seems to focus on the failings of mainstream news organizations in the last part of the 20th century and beginning of this one—flaws of arrogance, insularity and change resistance, real problems that now look supersized in the rear view mirror of hindsight.

Open journalism reclaims what is overlooked by this backlash: the essential and important

service that good journalism and especially quality public affairs journalism provide every day. However flawed or short-sighted the news industry has been, journalism has served society well and remains a vital idea in our democracy.

I never encountered a reader who didn't want journalism. I found many who wanted it to improve.

In the context of a communication revolution, the solution to journalism's limitations isn't abandoning the idea of journalism. Progress has and will come by tapping the capacity of a networked society to do the jobs of journalism in fundamentally better ways.

For newspeople, whether they work in small nonprofit shops or big organizations, that means investing trust as well as asking for trust.

The biggest gaps are familiar. In the new journalism conversation, like the old one, it's hard to find the interests of underserved people. In fact, it's hard to find the demand side of journalism at all aside from web and mobile traffic measurements on page views and unique visitors.

Yet the answers are there in the brains and hearts of our journalists and our communities, in the networks where people exchange information and in the gaps and opportunities afforded by this Internet revolution that still seems entirely miraculous.

Open journalism begins with a focus on the world outside the traditional walls of news coverage, the world that citizens and journalists are trying to comprehend. Those working to extend its principles hope to make journalism a public good that's fresh and vital because it provides service that people need now.

That idea is worth a try.

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[14] Sandy Rowe, "Partners of Necessity: A Case for Collaboration in Local Investigative Reporting" (Joan R. Shorenstein on the Press and Public Policy Discussion Paper Series, June 2011)

[15] C.W. Anderson, Tom Glaisyer, Jason Smith and Marika Rothfeld, "Shaping 21st Century Journalism: Leveraging a 'Teaching Hospital' Model in Journalism Education" (New America Foundation: October 2011)

Action Steps for Newspeople

1. Build transparency into every step

2. Build a culture of responsiveness

3. Make participation a public exchange with benefits for all

4. Learn from collaboration success and expand peer-to-peer partnership

5. Embrace journalism's role in a networked information universe

1. Build transparency into every step

- **Start with the basics and a web conceit, About Us:** News providers assume far too much knowledge on fundamentals: who we are, what we do and how we operate. Large organizations can learn from startup newsrooms and non-journalism web sites. Here are a few: the New Jersey Spotlight, Charlottesville Tomorrow and ProPublica, all of which identify mission, staff, funding and activities. "About" pages also would work in print.

   "About" pages should include succinct summaries of editorial mission and business structure/funding, as VTDigger and Voice of San Diego do. They should point users to staff contacts and bio pages that amplify the expertise and experience of the people providing journalism and offer connections among newspeople and their readers and customers. (Here are staff pages, though they're all buried a bit on their organization web sites, from California Watch, Honolulu Civil Beat and Southern California Public Radio)

   Additionally, "About" pages can establish ethical baselines. For instance, how does funding affect coverage? The California HealthCare Foundation's Center for Health Reporting explains here. For-profit companies that maintain separation between advertising buys and editorial decisions can gain credibility by stating so explicitly and publicly (and living by the words). By publishing such basic principles, journalism providers also offer a measuring stick for others to use in judging them and comparing them to competitors.

- **What we know, how we know it and what we don't know:** Moves to share story lists, as organizations including the Guardian are doing, illustrate a larger idea of news organizations beginning to be more public about what they're covering and how people can contribute. Beat blogs, social media posts and other new tools are ways of doing legwork and widening sourcing beyond the "usual suspects" syndrome that has long plagued

newsrooms. This kind of transparency, like the "who we are and what we do" mechanisms, make it more likely for reporters to connect with relevant sources and to hear things they didn't know. Media blogger and author <u>Dan Gillmor</u> suggests including a "what we don't know" box on stories in the newspaper and inviting people to contact reporters.

Journalism also gains credibility by showing its work (as many of us did with our high school math equations). By sharing data sources as well as conclusions (as The News & Observer of Raleigh did <u>here</u>), by posting original documents for users to scrutinize, by explaining methodology, by sending a message that newspeople are seeking accuracy and are open to outside communication, journalism improves. In real-time situations, as Andy Carvin at NPR has famously done with <u>curation of social media feeds</u> during the Arab spring and since, journalists can actively ask questions and seek help from users on confirmation, contradiction and additional facts.

Such transparency could include sharing the back story of how journalism is done— how photographers or reporters create great craftwork, what it took to obtain certain information. This tears down walls and promises the same benefit as speaking publicly in explaining how journalism works. Social media channels can enable journalist-community dialogue, for instance, about the technical aspects of a striking photograph or the circumstances surrounding a difficult story.

- **How we make decisions:** I gave dozens of community speeches as a newspaper editor before it sank in on me that most readers, even appreciative customers, didn't understand how or why we made the choices we made on coverage. Lacking explanations, they supplied their own: political bias, self-interest and so forth. I added a <u>weekly column</u>, amped up my responses to email and blogged. Yet this communication, like most such efforts, happened outside the main frame of news we delivered each day.

There's benefit to using a variety of tools to articulate what news organizations aim to do and to bring back feedback that helps journalists see what they're missing. One example: Newspapers could publish a daily box explaining front page choices, coupled with renewed invitations to visit or take part in the discussion in person or via the web. Websites could add visible information identifying who's running the home page at different times and providing contact links. Broadcasters could add brief announcements on news mission and how to report errors. Such steps could extend journalism as a discipline that communicates steadily about its reasoning and that welcomes incoming ideas and feedback.

<u>Matt DeRienzo</u>, Connecticut group editor for the <u>Journal Register Co.</u>, said his starting point on pushing for greater transparency is his mother, who believes that news leaders "get together on a regular basis in a secret conference room with George Soros to get our marching orders" as part of the "left-wing media."

DeRienzo suggests newsrooms start by establishing an effective approach to correcting errors. At some of his papers that includes a <u>"fact check" box</u> (for reporting errors) at the bottom of every story and, for the New Haven Register, Torrington and Middleton sites,

corrections blogs that report back on how the paper handles accuracy complaints.

"Being open, sharing your story list" and other steps will make newsrooms "less likely to make a mistake or miss the context in the first place," he said.

2) Build a culture of responsiveness; make engagement part of the journalism as well as the marketing

- **Answer questions, report back:** Online comments offer a cautionary tale as an example of ways news organizations reinforce institutional, one-way culture by putting out invitations (send photos, tell us what you think) without responding or following up. Online polls should be followed by reports back; user content should be evaluated, thanks should be offered, questions should be answered and open dialogue should be moderated. Reader questions posted in comments sections should be answered and, if they add to coverage, credited. Staffers should monitor comments for tips and insight as to what questions users have.

  Small news organizations and community startups offer some good lessons on these challenges. For instance, many online-only community sites actively manage user comments. The Block by Block gathering of independent community sites surveyed members and found that comments were "the #1 tool for reader engagement." In a Twitter chat on the topic, Tracy Record of the West Seattle Blog summed it up this way: "Comments are content." Other lessons on engagement are captured in a book called "Rules of the Road: Navigating the New Ethics of Local Journalism," written by Scott Rosenberg with funding from the Washington-based journalism nonprofit J-Lab and rich with the experiences of editors and publishers working on the front lines of online community news.

  "The irony is there are a whole lot more hyperlocal sites who have smaller staffs and are investing a lot more time moderating comments than mainstream news organizations are," said J-Lab's executive director, Jan Schaffer.

- **Make engagement part of the journalism, not just the marketing:** Journalists who answer questions at public events, in cross-media appearances, via social media or in reader exchanges are providing service and substance. Rather than just tweeting links and one-way posts ("Here's our story, discuss amongst yourselves"), newspeople can appear as their professional selves in many parts of the community by going to physical and digital spaces where others gather. We can post comments or links (if they're truly useful) on other blogs or host live chats with local experts (and knowledgeable journalists) as guests. Newsrooms can convene events, as the public affairs nonprofit Texas Tribune has done, or use their websites, broadcast programming or print pages to host community discussions.

  If the job of journalism is to inform, explain or host discussion, then any methods that carry that out in ways that reward users and readers count. As news organizations ask for financial support (through donations, underwriting or subscriptions), it's more likely to

come from people who perceive real value from newsrooms and who want to support their overall mission—not a certain product or format.

3) Make participatory efforts a public exchange with benefits to all, not just news organizations

To realize the promise of two-way connection, newspeople and those who contribute or ask for information through these channels benefit from greater structure and common purpose. "Send us your photos" means it's about the news organization. "Share what you know" conveys a different idea of improving the knowledge pool. News sites can host a public exchange for shared benefit if such efforts make a shift away from the "UGC" (user-generated content) ghetto to a system recognizing contributions and benefits for all players.

In May, public radio station <u>WNYC</u> and the New York Times teamed up with "citizen sciences and data collection project" called <u>eBird</u> for a "<u>Bird Week</u>" outreach effort. Readers/ viewers/ listeners could take part in various ways: for instance, by using SMS texting to share their favorite bird-sighting spots. The input was then <u>mapped</u> as part of coverage that included links on other ways to participate. On the NYT CityRoom blog, the Bird Week features also linked to and highlighted the Audubon Society and several other organizations running their own user interaction efforts. The journalism was part of networked enthusiasm.

The key concept is recognizing that news coverage is about subject matter, issues and people's passions—not about the publication. "Send us your photos" is an invitation to participate in a publication. "Report your bird sightings" is a solicitation to share in the joy of life.

Smart steps can scale participation to be more effective, as press critic Jay Rosen pointed out in this <u>recent speech and blog post</u>. Tools allowing people to fill out forms, weigh in on surveys or email tips are more likely to be used and thus more likely to provide quality input.

Rosen, an associate professor at New York University and author of the widely read PressThink blog, voiced one of the resonant ideas of open journalism in a 2006 post titled "<u>The People Formerly Known As the Audience</u>." It was written as a memo from the view of a newly engaged public "to inform media people of our existence, and of a shift in power that goes with the platform shift you've all heard about."

Along with his criticism of traditional journalism culture Rosen often offers specific ideas for improvement. In a recent speech and blog post, for instance, he <u>issued a C-grade</u> for what's happened so far along with a series of suggestions for what might happen next.

Among them: "right-sizing" the contributions asked of citizens and non-journalists to news work; giving newspeople an "advanced tool kit" for tapping expertise among users and getting more beat bloggers and niche journalists committed to using the tools we do have to draw on people's experience and knowledge.

"Pro journalism has never been optimized for high participation. But participatory media hasn't been optimized for quality journalism, either," Rosen wrote. "That right there is the work we need

to do."

News providers also could take the next step and make sharing live up to the term. Instead of one-way (you send us your stuff) news sites could set up and contribute to content exchanges for users to share material, which could be licensed using the free Creative Commons agreements employed by a growing number of content creators. (These licenses allow content creators to retain some right while assign some rights to others.)

Imagine all the ways people could tell stories about community events or major news under a Creative Commons approach that lets other users remix and share material for noncommercial use. Such an approach could provide structure for related decisions; for instance, when users should be compensated.

4) Draw on initial successes to make collaboration a force for extending journalistic capacity; move from top-down to peer-to-peer connection

Collaboration is a word often given to cross-promotion and other kinds of partnership. The promise of such alliances is not just finding ways to keep doing the same things but to team up for reciprocal benefit and better outcomes. Investigative collaboration, for instance, has expanded through distribution agreements and other partnerships, a change explored in depth in "Partners of Necessity," a paper by former Oregonian editor and Pulitzer Prizes board chair Sandy Rowe.

"Leaders of local investigative reporting—whether from newspapers, public broadcasting, universities or new nonprofit journalism outlets—who can form effective and independent partnerships for the most complex journalistic work, be generous in promoting those partnerships and effective in sustaining them, will be the winners," she wrote in the paper, published in mid-2011 by Harvard's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

Institutional support for collaboration is increasing; for instance, through the nonprofit Investigative News Network, which has 60 partners joining forces on financial sustainability and other common interests. In California, meanwhile, dozens of newspapers and radio outlets have gained help on ambitious health-issue reporting through collaborations with the nonprofit Center for Health Reporting. The investigative nonprofit California Watch has drawn together a half-dozen partners to report on the state's efforts to build a high-speed rail system.

The list of such joint efforts is growing rapidly everywhere, and so is the learning. Yet many such efforts stumble on competitive or cultural concerns and can benefit from clarity of purpose and transparency on goals and measures.

Michele McLellan, who has worked closely with the Knight Foundation's Community Information Challenge and organizes the Block by Block gathering of community online publishers, thinks we're at the point that organizations need more specifically defined agreements—memos of understanding—to spell out the goals and expectations among partners.

Too often, say McLellan and others, news organizations form blog networks or enlist community sites without creating wins on both sides. This too is evolving, with some organizations

paying others for coverage, but there's much more that can be done.

"Big organizations still have trouble letting go of the fact that they're not alone anymore," McLellan said. "I think it would be great if there were more models" of partnerships that helped all sides.

Mark Glaser, executive editor of the PBS MediaShift Idea Lab web site, is working on a new "Collaboration Central" minisite to act as a hub for learning and knowledge-sharing. Among the goals: developing practical tools and guidelines and answering questions about both the business case and journalistic value of collaborations.

Many so-called collaborations are really distribution partnerships or content-sharing agreements that are helping expand audience reach or content capacity among news organizations. They often stumble on familiar cultural barriers and competitive concerns.

News leaders might take some lessons from the successful collaborations around data journalism being forged at the peer level among programmers and investigative journalists. Management-level agreements are one thing, but there's room to allow much more peer-to-peer connection across news organizations and even beyond them, with the right oversight.

By empowering collaboration at many levels, within organizations and among them, news leaders tap capacity of smart and capable employees to solve problems and innovate. As the hacker-journalist movement shows, such empowerment can be contagious.

5) Embrace journalism's changing role in a networked information universe

- **Link, highlight and amplify:** As a Chicago Community Trust study released this year showed, news organizations and especially mainstream sites often fail the basic web test of linking to resources and organizations out of their core coverage. The study, based on research into links among more than 400 Chicago news and information sites, found that more than 40 percent of sites didn't link out and that eight in 10 received very few links in. Legacy media sites ranked low in "out links," as McLellan noted in a Knight Foundation blog post summarizing the results.

  Linking is just part of a larger function for journalism in pointing to, and crediting, substantive material and good work by others. Blogrolls, or lists of related blogs, are part of this, and so are the algorithm-driven links to related contents on other sites. But a more important shift puts newspeople in the role of helping evaluate, organize and highlight material that they don't originate. Everyone loves a shout-out, so why not note important data, interesting opinions and delightful photos by other content providers? Through the network effect, news providers also can get links back to their work—lists and directories, for instance, might be shared via social media by those who are included.

- **Wear your journalist hat but get out of your own news sphere:** The University of Missouri's Joy Mayer produced a community engagement guide suggesting ways for newspeople to "reach the audience where, when and how it's most useful of meaningful"

and offering fresh ideas for digital tactics. Newsrooms could put together landing pages for community information and share the link on sites where interested users might find them (the ask-and-answer site Quora, tourism sites or others), she writes.

Newspeople constantly ask users to come to their sites or coverage, but good journalism relies on reaching actively into the networks where people exchange information. Some journalists do this through social media and online groups. It's important to emphasize that you're there to do the jobs of journalism—learning, bringing information to light, explaining and most of all getting stories right. But just as they do when they go to neighborhood potlucks or the mall, journalists can participate as community members who perform a kind of service to others and depend on others as well to provide knowledge and information.

One example stands out from Southern California Public Radio's use of the Public Insight Network of community sourcing. A query about prison life, posted on the KPCC website and through its PIN network, helped reporters learn about an online forum where prison families exchanged information. Through these connections, SCPR's journalists broke stories on allegations of inmate mistreatment after a riot at the Chino State Prison. The source that came forward through Public Insight was recognized with a Sunshine Award from the Society of Professional Journalists. (For more on Public Insight at SCPR, read the related sidebar)

From the author

About this project

This paper and web presentation are based on Melanie Sill's work as journalism department Executive in Residence at the USC Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism from June through December 2011. They draw from extensive reading, conversations and observations prior to and during the residency.

Note: The ideas presented in this document are intended to be engaged in an interactive environment. To experience the full scope of this presentation, including hyperlinks and further discussion, visit *www.annenberginnovationlab.org/OpenJournalism*.

About the author

Before joining USC Annenberg Sill was senior vice president and top editor at *The Sacramento Bee* in California and *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C. In these and prior leadership roles she watched over digital innovation in newsgathering and storytelling and specialized in enterprise and investigative editing, freedom of information and open government issues and in efforts to connect journalism with community needs. As projects editor she directed the N&O's 1995 enterprise series on industrial pork production, "Boss Hog," which was recognized the following year with the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. Raised in Hawaii, Sill earned her journalism degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard in 1993-94.

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