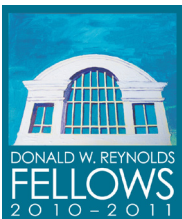


Community engagement:

A practical conversation for newsrooms



JOY MAYER
REYNOLDS JOURNALISM INSTITUTE
2010-2011 FELLOW

AUGUST 2011

An introduction from Joy Mayer, Reynolds Journalism Institute

There is a general understanding among journalists these days that flourishing in today's media landscape involves more interaction with and responsiveness to our communities. Community engagement is often cited in future-of-news conversations as a key to continued success. Nine out of 10 editors in a [Spring 2011 Reynolds Journalism Institute survey](#) said they were talking in their newsrooms about how to make the news more social and participatory. The survey reinforced, however, that editors aren't sure what exactly that means or how to go about it.

This discussion guide is an attempt to help get folks started.

As part of my [2010-2011 RJF Fellowship](#) ("Ditch the Lecture. Join the Conversation."), I spent several months interviewing journalists about their changing relationships with their communities. I focused on their attitudes and actions toward their intended news consumers. Along the way, I took notes about the questions these journalists seemed to be pondering, and of the tips and strategies they shared with me. I grouped those strategies into [three categories of engagement](#): outreach, conversation and collaboration.

You'll find many of their ideas on the following pages, and I'm indebted to everyone who shared their time and expertise with me.

A few lessons I heard time and again:

As a newsroom, know what your mission is. What do you value? What do you stand for? What does your community value in you? Do you re-evaluate those answers periodically? Are you adapting as community needs change, and as other information sources in your community change? Are you making long-term decisions, and daily decisions, based on the answers to these questions?

There's no one-size-fits-all solution to community engagement. Some of the strategies were suggested by national news outlets. Others came from community startups. Some are digital and some are analog (and many work either way). Find those that work for you and focus on those. Make sure, though, that you allow room for roles and strategies that you might not have considered in more straight-forward times. Consider a range of possibilities.

Approach each strategy or project with goals. Know what you hope to achieve. Have an agreed-upon, stated objective, followed by a plan to measure success. It's hard to value what you can't measure. Think broadly about measurement — it's not just about page views. Measurement can mean the number of in-person participants in an event, the time spent on site with collaborative projects, the number of inbound or outbound links from your site, the civility of comments (yes, that can be measured), or the origin of story ideas. There are suggestions throughout this document, and [click here for a link to a report](#) that came out of a workshop on measuring engagement.

I hope the suggestions you'll find here help you and your newsroom have meaningful conversations about how to better involve your community in your news processes and products. Together with your community, you can accomplish things that you couldn't on your own, building a relationship that can serve as a solid foundation for thriving journalism.

Joy Mayer
2010-2011 Donald W. Reynolds Fellow
Reynolds Journalism Institute
mayerj@missouri.edu
573-882-8182

How to use this discussion guide

This guide is intended to get you and your colleagues talking about specific strategies for shifting your newsroom's focus to be more squarely on the audience. Because not every approach is right for every newsroom, the guide is divided into 11 value statements. You might agree with all of them, and that's fine. But figuring out which ones you'd like to prioritize is key, so you can then allocate your resources to what you most want to accomplish.

Each value statement in this guide has a page of discussion notes, with questions to talk through on the top followed by specific strategies to try.

If your goal is to get a conversation going in your newsroom, let me tell you how I envision this guide helping. (The method has been road tested by my colleagues at the Columbia *Missourian*, and I'm grateful for their patience, support and feedback.)

1. Print out the large value statements and tape them up on the walls of a meeting room. Let folks take a few minutes to read over them.
2. Give each person cut up pieces of post-it notes and ask them to put one on the three statements they think your newsroom needs to focus on most.
3. Regroup the pieces of paper by priority, so you can visualize where the consensus is. Regroup according to the number of post-it notes, so the tally is clear.
4. Invite participants to talk more about statements they voted for that didn't get a lot of other votes. Ask each person if their top idea made the cut. Give folks a chance to explain what they value most and to talk the rest of the room into discussing what's important to them.
5. Then, as a facilitator, pull out the discussion guide pages for the three to five ideas you want to start with. (Save the other vote-getters for future conversations.) Project each on a screen so the room can see them, or hand out physical copies.
6. For each idea, spend a few minutes talking through the discussion questions. See if you're working from common definitions, and where there is tension that will need to be addressed.
7. Then look over the list of strategies. Cross off the ones that don't fit the mission of your newsroom or that you're already doing. Ignore for now the ones you're not quite ready for. My hope is that there are some left that will help you get started.

No matter how many you get through, or how many ideas you and your colleagues are ready to tackle, leave the discussion with practical tasks you can start on within a few days.

Please get in touch with me if you have suggestions for how this guide could be more useful, and I'd also be grateful to hear how your newsroom is progressing on the path to a more connected, collaborative relationship with your community. My contact information is below.

Joy Mayer
2010-2011 Donald W. Reynolds Fellow
Reynolds Journalism Institute
mayerj@missouri.edu
573-882-8182

Value statements

Click on a statement to skip right to that page.

Our core audience feels a connection with us.

We actively reach beyond our core audience.

We appear to be and actually are accessible, as a newsroom and as individual journalists.

Individual community members feel invited into our processes and products and encouraged to help shape our agenda.

We find ways to listen to and be in continual conversation with our community.

We continually alter what we cover, and how, based on what the audience responds to.

It is easy for community members to share their expertise and experiences, and we value their contributions.

We amplify community voices besides our own.

We invest in our community and are seen as a community resource.

Our content reaches the audience where, when and how it's most useful or meaningful.

There are a variety of ways users can act on, share and react to our news and information.

Our core audience feels a connection with us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we know as much as we can about who our core audience is?

Do we have data to back up newsroom assumptions about audience? What do we know about our most loyal users?

Research has shown that [users' perceived similarity with journalists can enhance credibility](#). Do we have a staff that reflects the diversity of the community?

How much of ourselves as individuals do we feel comfortable sharing? What about our lives and activities do we feel comfortable putting out there in a getting-to-know-you sense?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Post profile pages for editors that include more than just job duties and contact information (favorite spots around town, community involvement, sports allegiances, hobbies).

Share behind-the-scenes videos of newsroom processes and experiences.

Publish behind-the-story podcasts.

Post "staff picks" on the website (what we're reading, in other local media and elsewhere).

Share text Q&As or host live chats with staff members.

Consider ways to make a connection to the news organization part of peoples' social identities, such as:

- easy sharing/branding/buttons on social media
- branded rewards (like t-shirts) for frequent or long-time contributors, commenters and subscribers
- community social events, like [the ones put on by radio station WNYC](#)

Celebrate community milestones, in your coverage and using your social presence. Use Facebook to, as a brand, congratulate groups and individuals and share content with them.

Initiate or partner on projects that celebrate what's special about your community. Work with the historical society on an oral history project. Work with the library on an exhibit of archive photos. Host or sponsor watch parties for sports teams or discussion groups on community issues. Offer your wall space for local artists to showcase their work, and your meeting rooms for community gatherings.

Contribute to community events by sharing photo galleries (perhaps on Facebook, inviting users to tag themselves).

We actively reach beyond our core audience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

When we analyze our audience data, do we separate repeat visitors from new visitors?

Do we pay attention to traffic from search and how people find us (search keywords, site referrals, etc.)?

Is our site structured for stickiness, with plenty of appealing, relevant jumping-off points for visitors who find us accidentally?

Do we agree on where our best potential for growth is, online and in our community? Which users are we courting? To whom can we offer the most value?

Are we willing to invest in [identifying the people who most want and need an individual story](#) or piece of information, and then making sure they find it?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Post on the Facebook wall of a group, church, school, etc., whose fans are likely to be featured in or interested in a story or project. Then track if Facebook is a big source of traffic to the story.

Send emails to people mentioned or interviewed in stories, or even information-only pieces such as calendar listings, where appropriate. That makes it easy for interested people to share what you have to offer. Then track if direct referrals to that story are higher than usual.

Send emails to community leaders (PTA presidents, club organizers, business owners, neighborhood associations) whose networks would be interested in or benefit from a story or project. Train the individual journalists (rather than one designated staff member) how to do that in a non-spammy way.

When attending community meetings relevant to your content, hand out flyers with links or invitations to participate.

(See "***We should invest in our community and be seen as a community resource.***")

When news is of high interest to a geographic area, or coverage is ramping up in that area, distribute flyers door to door.

Use social media in a way that is optimized for easy sharing. Create Facebook events, for example, for events you're sponsoring or hosting. Create photo galleries on Facebook with high face counts, so the albums or individual photos can easily be reposted.

Find where online people are talking about what you're covering and join the conversation. Share context and links. Be a resource. Then track traffic from those sites.

(See "***Our content reaches the audience where, when and how it's most useful or meaningful.***")

More reading:

[So long, "Wizard of Oz" journalism. Let's make margaritas!](#)

From Nieman Report: [Engaging Communities: Content and Conversation](#)

We appear to be and actually are accessible, as a newsroom and as individual journalists.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What commitment are we willing to make to [accessibility and responsiveness](#)? Should our newsroom respond to every phone call, email and social media post? If not, how do we decide which to address?

Is it easy for users to know who is responsible for every story or piece of information and how to get in touch with that person?

Do we not only make ourselves available but also issue invitations to connect?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Make finding individual journalists as easy as [yoururl.com/contact](#), with a staff directory by name and department. From there, and from each piece of content, link to staff profile pages that include contact information, newsroom responsibilities and other information.

(See ***“Our core audience feels a connection with us.”***)

Publicize [all the ways there are to get in touch with the newsroom](#). Consider all the ways users communicate in their everyday lives, and see if you can make it easy for them. Take tips or ideas via text message (and have them show up in a newsroom inbox). Prepare cards or flyers with contact information to give to sources or hand out at community events. Set up a booth at a community event just for listening. Make a list of all the ways users can get in touch with you — all of them, from online comments to letters to stopping journalists on the street. Figure out which ones you want to encourage, and turn that into a list for publication.

[Invite the community to your physical space](#), for anywhere from a few hours a month to all the time. Offer your space for use by community groups. Have a public area that invites hanging out or using services such as archive access. Make sure they're greeted by friendly staff.

Encourage staff to wear name tags or t-shirts at community events or even just running errands, to invite conversations and encourage the community to see the newsroom as a group of individuals, not a brand. Be accessible and approachable in other peoples' space, not just your own.

Consider coffee shop hours for journalists. Be findable in consistent, advertised ways.

Individual community members feel invited into our processes and products and encouraged to help shape our agenda.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we have an open news gathering and reporting process that invites collaboration? Do we want the community to know what we're working on before it's published? How do we weigh transparency with our competitive urges?

Do we want to move beyond being accessible into actually issuing authentic invitations to contribute?

Are we willing to devote staff resources to responding to the individuals who take us up on our invitation?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Publish news more iteratively and transparently, inviting users to share what they know as you report what you know — and what you don't know. If community input helps shape a project, celebrate that in the newsroom and be transparent about it in the content.

Use Cover It Live or other chat services during live events, meetings and breaking news, to share updates and ask for questions or information from the users.

Live tweet or live stream news meetings. Use a Twitter hashtag for news tips. Invite specific community members to come to the newsroom. What if every news meeting had a community member present?

Assign staff resources to bring community input into news meetings, and report back out to the community on those meetings.

Keep a list online of what the newsroom is working on, inviting tips, interview questions and follow-up ideas.

When contributions or ideas come from the community, acknowledge them. Give the individual, or the collective reader, a byline. Use metadata to track story ideas, so the newsroom has a sense of which ones were suggested by the community. That could be a key metric.

Look for collaborative news projects. Example: Open up the photo archives and invite the community to take photos of the same spots today. Example: Have a feature each week that is determined by the community, such as a profile of a teacher that is nominated, and perhaps reported, by a community member.

Dedicate staff resources to answering community questions. What if a reporter each day served a Q&A function? The community could submit questions, and vote on which ones should get answered.

We find ways to listen to and be in continual conversation with our community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we as a newsroom value the ideas and connections we gain from talking to and listening to our community? Is there value in the connections and discussions themselves, or only in the concrete results for our products?

Do we have a sense of how and where our community members talk to each other? Do we know what social media sites are most popular in our community, and do we have a presence there?

Do we take advantage of digital resources to monitor what our community is talking about? Are they talking about us? Or the topics and issues we cover?

Research has shown that the civility of comments goes up when site owners participate. [Do we take ownership over the comments on our own website?](#) Do we invest in moderating and participating in the conversations that take place there?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Convene conversations about community issues at specific times online using Twitter hashtags. Track if participation increases, and what topics work best. Or be in a physical place at a specific time and invite the community to come talk. Find groups sponsoring community conversations, such as the library, and partner with them, offering sponsorship, or contextual information about the topic of discussion.

Assign staff members to spend a portion of their time listening to the community, in person or online. When online, retweet or otherwise share comments, observations, tips or ideas that are consistent with the newsroom's social media voice.

(See ***"We amplify community voices besides our own."***)

Pay close attention to the comments on stories. Consider a tiered comment system that encourages the community to vote on comment usefulness and relevance. Assign staff resources to monitor and, when appropriate, participate in the comments. Consider having them introduce themselves when they're on duty, making it clear someone is listening. Considering holding individual journalists responsible for staying involved in the comments on their stories. Provide clear suggestions for appropriate participation.

Analyze how well you transform traffic into conversation by looking at a ratio of page views to comments.

Use Google alerts and Twitter searches to stay in touch with online mentions of your community or beat. Create Twitter lists of local Twitter users. Share them publically as a resource for community conversation and connection. Monitor online mentions of your brand. Aim to have more promoters than detractors. Help solve problems, or otherwise respond, whenever possible.

Decide on a newsroom social media philosophy, and train the staff in it. ([Here's an interesting one from *The Guardian*.](#)) Consider the "voice" you want the brand to have overall. Consider the purpose of the brand's social media accounts (driving traffic, building loyalty, generating conversation, seeking sources, etc.) and provide a guide for the staff. Consider the newsroom philosophy on the use of your individual journalists' accounts, and provide constructive guidance for how to best interact with the community.

[Use web analytics as a listening tool](#), paying attention to what your users are "telling" you they like and want. Practice reflective listening, reporting back to the community about what you're "hearing." Then show you were listening by changing your behavior and agenda based on what you heard.

(See ***"We continually alter what we cover, and how, based on what the audience responds to."***)

We continually alter what we cover, and how, based on what the audience responds to.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we pay enough attention to what resonates? Do we authentically want to know how individual community members respond to what we offer?

Do we get as much as we can from our analytics reports? Are we willing to commit resources to going deeper? After years of expensive focus groups, during which we asked people to tell us what we should cover, we have minute-by-minute data about what they actually consume. Are we valuing that information? Have we struck a balance between our own news judgment and the preferences of the community?

Do we assess our product based on what resonates with our users? How willing are we to cover topics and beats that get the most traffic? What are the downsides to doing so, and how do we handle them?

What content are we committed to covering, regardless of readership? Do we endeavor to make sure our most important content is audience-focused?

What are we willing to scale back on if it's not resonating?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Slice your analytics report in ways that make the most sense. If you want to focus on your core audience, for example, study your repeat traffic specifically. If you want to increase conversation, study how you write your prompts, and what questions get the most response. Study the ratio of comments to page views for a sense of how well you're converting attention into conversation.

(See ***"We find ways to listen to and be in continual conversation with our community."***)

If you value intense attention, focus on repeat visitors and time on site for specific content areas.

If you value driving traffic to the most important civic news, experiment with how that news is presented. Consider writing formats that encourage quick scanning, like bulleted lists and lots of subheds on meeting or speech stories. Try podcasts or videos. Try Q&As. Then track if more users spend more time with any format or style in particular. Repeat what works, and keep experimenting with the rest.

Track how your content spreads (can be done using unique bit.ly links) and make decisions based on what is shared most, and therefore valued enough to be passed along.

Share transparently with your users what you're finding about what content they spend time with and what they share. When you make decisions based at least partly on that information, share that as well.

If you know how your content is consumed and shared, make decisions about staff resources based on it. If a certain beat gets relatively little traffic, does it make up for it in time on site?

Consider A/B testing of website features (headlines, placement, etc.) to see what leads to more clicks, more time on site or more advertising conversions.

It is easy for community members to share their expertise and experiences, and we value their contributions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we brainstorm what we could accomplish *with* the community that we could not do on our own?

Do we offer a range of ways people can contribute what they know, with varying commitment levels, from voting on a poll to filling out a detailed survey?

Are we as a newsroom tapped into the expertise in our community? Do we invite community members to make us better informed and more contextual, and do we allow multiple ways for them to do so?

Do we have connections we can rely on, or do we find ourselves scrambling in crisis times or on deadline?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Publicize all the ways users can get in touch with the newsroom. For example, take news tips via text message. (See "***We appear to be and actually are accessible, as a newsroom and as individual journalists.***")

At the end of each piece, invite users to submit corrections. If they do, invite them to share their contact info for possible contact regarding future stories on that topic.

Publish a feed of what the newsroom is working on, inviting questions or information. (See "***Individual community members feel invited into our processes and products and encouraged to help shape our agenda.***")

Broaden the scope of your reporting by adding a collaborative layer to projects. When reporting on potholes, or Mother's Day, or high school track, create a crowdsourced element inviting contributions. That could be, respectively, a google map, a personal story or a database of athlete statistics. Build queries into the culture of the reporting. Use prompts from the staff as the first comment on a story. Or use Facebook Questions or sites like [All Our Ideas](#) to solicit responses. Many users will click on a poll response when they wouldn't respond in a comment.

Invite community groups or individuals to liveblog their meetings.

Reward contributors. Give them bylines (as individuals or as a collective, such as "readers"). Throw them parties. Invite them to lunch. Give them t-shirts.

Create a database of community members willing to be sources, with information about all the topics they know something about. Or participate in the [Public Insight Network](#), which shows how this is done.

Use tools like google forms to solicit information about users' personal experiences (on mortgages, or diabetes, or parenting) then have the answers feed into a spreadsheet for easier analysis, filtering and tracking. Don't be afraid to ask for detailed information. If it's a topic people are passionate about, they'll spend the time. Then keep in touch with these committed, interested users.

Use collaborative document tools to invite the community to flag interesting agenda items or elements they'd like to see reporting on.

Ask for quick, easy, specific experiences, too. Like one quote, or a photo of a specific object, or a one-word movie review. Or use a Twitter hashtag to solicit brief responses or facts. Example: [The Washington Post's #wherewereyou project](#) on a 9/11 anniversary. Curate the best answers for publishing on the site, or include a feed of all answers as part of a published report.

We amplify community voices besides our own.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we recognize publically that we're part of a diverse media landscape? Do we see all the other voices only as competition, or is there room for collaboration?

Do we value the idea of being a hub for community information — one that provides unique content but also steers users elsewhere?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Create, or participate in, a network of community bloggers. Link to, repost or contribute to their content.

In your analytics report, study outbound links for a sense of how well you're directing users to other voices or resources.

Create a directory for the community of information sources, whether that's a Twitter list, a blog directory, a Facebook group or a list of news media.

Retweet, repost and otherwise share and validate community content that's consistent with your brand and mission.

Offer training for the community on blogging, social media and other media creation tools, with a goal of strengthening the overall community (and perhaps charging for it).

(See "***We invest in our community and are seen as a community resource.***")

Solicit contributions from the community in a variety of ways, then feature those contributions prominently. Consider a spot on your home page, or in print, for curated user comments, letters to the editor, columns, photos, etc.

(See "***It is easy for community members to share their expertise and experiences, and we value their contributions.***")

If it's consistent with your mission or brand, consider reserving space for community groups, nonprofits, schools or others to share their own content without much editing.

We invest in our community and are seen as a community resource.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How do we contribute to civic life, as an institution and as individuals? Where do we as a newsroom draw the line of journalists' personal involvement in the community?

How broadly do we think about meeting community information needs and contributing to community knowledge? Are we willing to invest in databases and directories that might not contribute to today's news report but that fulfill a long-term information need?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Create guides and suggestions for how to follow the news, such as Twitter lists of credible sources or [discussion questions for teachers](#).

In your analytics reports, study outbound links for a sense of how well you're directing users to other voices or resources.

Offer training for the community on things like citizenship, the First Amendment, FOIA, web analytics and media creation tools, with a goal of strengthening the overall community (and perhaps charging for it).

(See "***We amplify community voices besides our own.***")

Consider offering separate classes (and perhaps charging for them) for public officials or small business owners on things like social media and writing press releases. Track participation in the classes.

Offer up your physical space and technology resources for community members to hold events or training of their own. Consider tracking how many community members enter your physical space.

Find a way to connect people in your community who have needs with people who can help, especially in times of breaking news or crisis. Examples: people who need help or are willing to help with shoveling driveways, or with offering rides to the polls.

Consider creating comprehensive, searchable repositories of information for things like local restaurants (geotagged, optimized for mobile and linked to reviews), volunteer opportunities (with fields like "time commitment" and "skills needed") and business services (from plumbers to piano teachers).

Attend community meetings of people who would be interested in your content, and present them with needed contextual information. Hand out flyers with links or invitations to participate.

(See "***We actively reach beyond our core audience.***")

Encourage your staff members to volunteer in the community, for their own sense of community connection. If they feel comfortable, consider sharing their experiences with users.

Sponsor or host political debates and community conversations. Consider partnering with a local library, university or civic group.

Our content reaches the audience where, when and how it's most useful or meaningful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Do we think and talk often enough about how our community seeks information?

Do we try to think like users? Do we know what kinds of technology are most popular in our community, and on which devices users are accessing our content? Do we know what social media sites are most popular in our community, and do we have a presence there?

Do we assess whether we're being as effective as we can in sharing content on the most appropriate platforms, for consuming on multiple devices?

Are we willing to think of content distribution as more than publishing stories in or on our own products?

What resources are we willing to commit to proactively sharing content with specific segments of our audience? Whose job should it be to identify target audiences and take the content to them? The individual reporters? An outreach editor? A social media editor?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Make it a priority to find users who might not otherwise find you.

(See "***We actively reach beyond our core audience.***")

During plays, film screenings and festivals, put together a page of related content, then buy ads for the event programs with QR codes linking to that content.

Link your restaurant or city guide to your Foursquare or Gowalla account, so users can find location-specific content when they check in.

Create tours using Gowalla to put together a sightseeing trip, or a walk through places involved in a news event. Offer an incentive for users who complete the tour, perhaps partnering with a local business to offer a prize or coupon.

Find out where online users look for information about your community. Tourism sites? Question-and-answer sites like Quora? Put together an easy landing page for community information, and share the link on sites where interested users are likely to find them. Track traffic from those sites.

Share videos on YouTube, photos on Flickr, community trivia on social game sites, and sports links on fan sites. Track traffic from those sites.

Consider the shelf life of your content. Pull packages from the archives to feature when they're relevant. Consider looking at traffic to old content as a regular metric.

There are a variety of ways users can act on, share and react to our news and information.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How willing are we to have our content published elsewhere, with credit to us, if it extends the content's usefulness and reach?

Do we consider fostering discussion to be part of our mission? If so, are we willing to dedicate resources specifically to that?

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Think about some of the content most likely to be shared, such as obituaries, birth announcements, youth sports features, and business profiles or reviews. Then encourage the sharing. Print copies for businesses to post on their wall. Send links encouraging users to share on Facebook walls and listserves, then track that traffic.

(See "***We actively reach beyond our core audience.***")

Turn announcements of life, death, marriages and anniversaries into opportunities for celebration or paying tribute.

Consider making widgets, such as a gas price tracker or reporting tool for community problems (such as [See Click Fix](#)) and inviting online users to share them on their own sites.

[Make the news social and interactive](#), with quizzes, caption contests, photo contests, scavenger hunts and trivia games.

Make even the more serious news interactive, using games to enhance understanding or encourage community problem-solving.

Use a site such as [xtranormal](#) to encourage the community to virtually introduce themselves, or to act out or role play situations.

Share discussion points for the news. These could prompt online comments, but they could also be used in the same way discussion guides work for book clubs, as a conversation starter. Perhaps this could take the form of "here's what you could talk about at dinner tonight" daily report.

Encourage online sharing by offering embed code, like YouTube does. If a user clicked, they'd be able to easily share a piece of the content on their site, along with proper credit (formatted by you). You could then track where the content goes and how it is consumed.

Encourage physical sharing. Ask sources or groups if they'd like to share content in their newsletters or link to it on their websites.

Suggest (and participate in) ways to share content and have conversations online. Start (or participate in) Twitter chats using #hashtags for specific events or topics. Create (or participate in) topic- or event-specific Flickr tags.

(See "***We find ways to listen to and be in continual conversation with our community.***")

Track participation.

THANKS ...

This discussion guide is the final product of my Reynolds Journalism Institute fellowship year. It's based on dozens of interviews with working journalists, and with folks in other fields who had relevant expertise. I had a lot of help, and I relied on the guidance of some generous advisers for periodic reality checks.

Thanks to the [participants of the Engagement Metric event](#) at RJI in May 2011 for keeping our conversations about lofty ideas grounded in what would work in actual newsrooms.

Thanks to my own daily reality checks, the faculty editors at the [Columbia Missourian](#), for pushing back when I suggest crazy ideas, for giving me a place to experiment and for serving as the guinea pigs for this discussion guide.

Thanks to Michele McLellan, James Janega, Steve Buttry and Anna Tarkov for really specific, helpful feedback on this report.

Thanks to the journalists who shared their expertise with me this year. They're too numerous to list, but a few gave me insights that served as the foundation for much of my work. I want to especially recognize Meg Pickard of *The Guardian*, James Janega of the *Chicago Tribune*, Ashley Alvarado of *California Watch*, Grant Barrett of *Voice of San Diego*, and Dave Marner of the *Gasconade County Republican*.



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