



POY ASIA, an official program of the prestigious Pictures of the Year International (POY) competition held by the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism, has concluded its second year of competition.

“Show truth with a camera” — a 50-print exhibition designed to emulate POY’s founding 50-print exhibit in 1944 — opened July 13 and ran until Sept. 3 at Mindful Art Forum, a private gallery in Seoul.

Here, Lyndon Steele, director of POY and co-director of POY Asia, video conferences with this year’s competition judges in Seoul.

LEARN MORE ABOUT POY ASIA





RJI partners with Chalkbeat to track source diversity

Helping 'Rural Journalism' is not straightforward

RJI News in Brief



Note from the Director

Randy Picht

RJI Executive Director



WELCOME TO THE WINTER EDITION OF RJI INSIGHT.

I can't promise that every issue will feature a curious Panda peering over a speaker's shoulder but we couldn't resist featuring this one. Partly because award-winning photographer and filmmaker Ami Vitale's "master class" in October here at RJI was so heartfelt and wonderful but also because sometimes journalism seems to share the same status as the endangered, Giant Panda. Actually, pandas have taken a step forward and are now termed "vulnerable."

The news business should be so fortunate and that's what we're working toward as we collaborate on projects, award fellowships and launch initiatives. As always, there's a lot going on around here.

First up, it's a busy time of year for the institute's cornerstone program, RJI Fellowships. That's because we have one group of fellows finishing up (see pp. 16–17 about their presentation at the 2022 Online News Association annual conference) and we'll be accepting applications for the next group this month.



Our new projects keep rolling along, including designing a collaborative social media campaign (pp. 2–3), creating a pop-up, evergreen newsletter (pp. 14–15) and experimenting with an affordable texting service to help a newsroom reach underserved audiences.

We're also keeping our ears to the ground to explore ideas that tackle some of the most challenging issues our industry is facing. We highlight two such projects: the necessity of reaching across geographic, economic and other logistical boundaries to engage rural newsrooms in the very projects and conversations that could shape the future of community-centered journalism (pp. 8–11); and a new digital tool to help newsrooms audit their source lists to identify overrepresented and underrepresented voices (pp. 22–23)

And don't forget to read this issue's featured columnist, Sarah Alvarez, who discusses ways that news organizations are striving beyond superficial engagement (pp. 20–21) to revolutionize how the industry feeds and informs civic engagement.

I hope you take some useful insights from these pages, and if you want to join in our effort to create exciting new solutions for the news industry, get in touch! Collaboration is how we get things done, and I can't wait to hear your ideas.

Send us an email at



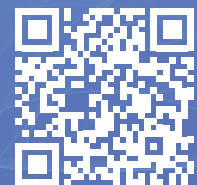
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The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) works with the news industry, professors, students and others to make sure journalism has a long and bright future. As a “think-and-do” tank that opened its doors in 2008, RJI uses its guaranteed funding to work exclusively to strengthen journalism in the service of democracy. It’s part of the Missouri School of Journalism.



ON THE COVER

Photographer and filmmaker Ami Vitale, a recipient of the 2022 Missouri School of Journalism Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism, presents her master class “Reframing the Narrative” on Oct. 19, 2022, in RJI’s Fred Smith Forum. Vitale touched on the importance of sensitivity and building relationships in creating impactful journalist work. She recounted some of her most famous and enduring shoots, including her efforts to document panda-breeding efforts in China.



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**Donald W. Reynolds
Journalism Institute**
University of Missouri

Innovation in Focus

Harnessing Instagram to support mental health

Innovation in Focus explores new tech, tools and methods of storytelling for newsrooms worldwide. We interview experts, test ideas and provide our findings on a different topic each month. In this edition, we hear from Shay Lawson, a 2022 RJI Student Innovation Fellow who partnered with The Center for Public Integrity last summer.

THE CENTER FOR Public Integrity (CPI) is a nonprofit publication that often collaborates with other organizations to expand impact. One collaboration that we worked on this summer at CPI was the Mental Health Parity Collaborative, for which we implemented a social media strategy designed to make it easier to convey complex data and ideas to audiences.

As CPI noted in its announcement of the collaborative, the Mental Health Parity Act was passed in 1996 — the first legislation to require that certain insurance providers cover mental health benefits the same, or on parity, with medical benefits. Yet even after the Mental Health Equity and Substance Abuse Parity Act passed in 2008, expanding the reach of


the 1996 legislation — along with the Affordable Care Act in 2010 — parity between mental health care and medical health care is far from achieved.

The Mental Health Parity Collaborative is a partnership between The Carter Center's Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism, The Center for Public Integrity, and news outlets



When Savannah Police Department officers are called to a scene of a crisis, those who respond arrive in an unmarked Ford Explorer, donning a simple blue polo and gray khaki pants.

It's part of an effort started in 2020 in the coastal city to respond to the growing mental health crisis — a way of de-escalating a tense situation without anyone getting hurt or the person being sent to jail, as was common in the past.



WHAT ATLANTA SCHOOLS ARE DOING TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS

Reporters interviewed both high school and universities in the Atlanta area and found out what resources their administrations have in place to support students struggling with mental health.

The Center for Public Integrity

Credit/ arvin.temkar@ajc.com



in Arizona, California, Georgia, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Texas and the District of Columbia.

The collaborative was built to raise awareness for mental health parity at a time when mental health issues are still shrouded by stigma and a lack of awareness that puts people at higher risk for suicide and crisis.

More than 40 reporters and editors in the collaborative produce data and solutions-driven stories that examine access to mental health care in their states and why mental health parity hasn't been achieved. Our charge was to help the various audiences more easily decipher the information in these stories. To do this, we implemented Instagram carousels — posts that contain more than one photo or video. Users swipe left through the post and are easily able to digest multiple pictures or videos within one post.

To implement this feature, we pulled out the most critical facts from every article, grouping each within categories optimized for social platforms. For example, all articles focused on state solutions were grouped into the same carousel to be posted on the same day.

With easily accessible and concise information at their fingertips, audiences on Instagram can be informed of useful resources, which in turn will help drive web traffic to the stories themselves.

Of course, one of the keys to a successful collaboration is helping everyone stay on the same page. Instagram posts that vary widely in style and content, for example, are far less accessible to audiences than posts that maintain uniform standards.

To ensure that uniformity, we recommend creating social media toolkit plans like the ones we shared with all our collaborators.

These plans can include:

- Color schemes
- Logos
- Sharelines
- Graphics
- Captions
- Timeline
- A chart detailing each social media effort, how partners can use them and expectations

The Mental Health Parity carousel slides launched in summer 2022 on CPI's Instagram account.

Shay Lawson is a 2022 RJI Student Innovation Fellow partnered with The Center for Public Integrity.



RJI News in Brief

(For more details, go to rjionline.org)

Granting agency in climate reporting



CRISTINA MISLÁN, Missouri School of Journalism associate professor, interviewed local environment and climate reporters and residents, asking them what they want the rest of the world to know about their community and what they see in their futures. She offers a few tips for rethinking disaster coverage and climate reporting to cultivate solidarity with vulnerable communities: Be open about the reporting process, place value on reciprocity and communal knowledge, and don't fall prey to false equivalency journalism practices.



POY Asia launches its first-ever photo exhibition in Seoul

In summer 2022, **POY ASIA** — an official program of RJI's prestigious Pictures of the Year International competition — launched its first-ever photo exhibition in Seoul, South Korea. The exhibition showcased award-winning work from 2022's POY Asia competition, demonstrating the worldwide impact of excellent photojournalism and the continued prominence of POY in celebrating the fusion of visual art and journalism. As the newest POY program, POY Asia was founded in 2020 and awards prizes across 10 categories.

Acknowledging the toll



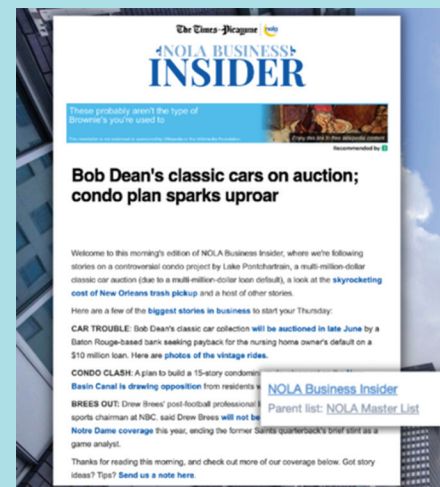
Most Americans say they do not know a Muslim

More than 80% of television media coverage of Islam and Muslims in the United States is negative. Such narrow media representations open the door to distorted public perceptions of Muslims, especially in the absence of any first-hand knowledge of this diverse community. RJI Fellow **TASMIHA KHAN** is developing a toolkit for writers to better cover Muslims and Islam in the media by confronting the unconscious biases that can influence how a story is covered.

Recognizing that the work journalists do is both impactful to the communities they cover but also has a personal impact on them allows journalists to prioritize their own psychological health. In order to continue doing the important work of journalism, news media producers have to protect themselves from burnout by practicing self-care, according to RJI Fellow **TARA PIXLEY**, who is putting together a Source of Safety that will provide resources to help journalists attend to their safety, risk management and mental health needs.

Six tactics to build a newsletter list from scratch

2022 RJI Student Innovation Fellow **SYDNEY LEWIS** helped New Orleans' NOLA.com launch a business newsletter that racked up 1,000 subscribers in the first day. Drawing from that experience, she has put together a list of tips to help news organizations grow their newsletter audiences quickly and achieve sustained growth over time. For more on Lewis' other efforts, flip to page 14.



A template for building an Airtable of great journalists you may want to hire

RJI COLUMNIST P. KIM BUI, director of audience innovation at the Arizona Republic, wants to talk about the talent pipeline — the infrastructure that gets people from early career to their next steps. The pipeline is something to keep a watchful eye on, but problems can arise when those who build the infrastructure just assume everything is going to keep flowing. Like literal pipes, there are places where things can get clogged. That’s why Bui built what she calls her “not-so-secret Airtable of great journalists I want to hire.”



It’s OK to use this ‘F’ word

Philanthropic support for journalism has soared as an appetite for public-interest journalism has grown. RJI Fellow **BETH FRANCESCO** is developing a guide that will provide strategy worksheets, templates, and ready-made campaign themes to encourage very small newsrooms to dip their toes into philanthropic revenue or dive right in. In particular, she is targeting newsrooms that don’t yet have a development lead or are exploring how to show the need for such a position.

Succession planning is key to journalism’s sustainability

Transitions and changes in journalism abound these days, including and especially at the leadership level. As someone working in the journalism support space and as a person who loves to nerd out about organizational culture, RJI Fellow **AMY KOVAC-ASHLEY** has been asking herself what a successful, smooth transition could look like in an organization when a leader or founder steps down, researching best practices, advice and tips to help others prepare for what they may face.





It's not easy to craft a push alert strategy

VIRGINIA ARRIGUCCI, former audience development manager for the Associated Press and 2019-2020 RJI Fellow, has crafted a guide for creating a push alert strategy to reach audiences in new and effective ways. Pulling together research from the fellowship and her work with a team at the AP, the guide also helps newsrooms monitor clicks and traffic during major news events to see what is resonating with audiences in real time.



Building a visual storytelling experience in Newspaper

Student Innovation Staffers **CHLOE OLIPHANT** and **BEATRICE BANKAUSKAITÉ** spent the summer turning stories from currently incarcerated people — part of the Prison Journalism Project's WILT Project — into a visual storytelling experience using Newspaper, a content management system. The end result: a long-term, evergreen multimedia project using content that began as separate, individual pieces. Along the way, Oliphant and Bankauskaité put together a step-by-step guide to help others harness the power of Newspaper for visual storytelling.

How listening sessions can connect you to the local community

With the help of 2022 RJI Student Innovation Fellow **JULIA WILSON**, La Voz Arizona hosted listening sessions to help the news organization more accurately represent the Spanish-speaking community in Maricopa County. A session centered around rising housing prices, for example, prompted the publication to provide information like where to find rental assistance, affordable and low-crime housing options and proximity to grocery stores going forward. What's more, these resources will also be provided as physical pamphlets for those without internet access.



Combining historical and current day journalism in an interactive experience



June 9 marked the 50th anniversary of the 1972 Black Hills Flood in South Dakota. To commemorate the anniversary, South Dakota Public Broadcasting (SDPB) built a landing page that includes audio stories of the survivors and a full-length documentary. Student Innovation Fellows **ANNIE JENNEMANN** and **REGAN MERTZ** worked with SDPB to build the interactive map experience that put the survivors' stories together for the anniversary landing page. Along the way, they shared their process to help others present history as journalism.



Helping 'Rural Journalism' is not a straightforward project

SO, YOU WANT TO TALK about a “rural divide?” Think about the many new and exciting digital products and services available to news organizations these days — the kinds of things you hear about at industry conferences and workshops — and then ask yourself how they help the rural news organization with an audience that lacks dependable Internet service? Don’t get us started on how many bars you might have on your mobile phone or trying to cover news across a giant geographic area.

These problems are coming into focus across the country as startup newsrooms spring up at a quickening pace (226 in the past five years, according to the Project Oasis Research Report), spurring a deeper look at what it’s going to take to address the decline of news coverage in rural communities.

Certainly, the battle to revive rural community news lacks neither urgency nor commitment on the part

of the industry. As Penny Abernathy stated in her most recent report on the state of local news, “More than half of the communities that have lost newspapers [since 2005] are in



Duc Luu

suburban or rural areas, where the population is shrinking, rather than growing.” But the first hurdle to supporting a rural news organization

is communicating across geographic, technological and even economic lines, a challenge that, if underestimated, can easily replicate existing disparities and limit an effort’s potential before it has even begun.

“There is a huge disconnect between the innovators, the funders in this space and the rural news ecosystem,” said Duc Luu, director of sustainability initiatives at the Knight Foundation. “These are small news outlets out in rural America trying to report the news with smaller staffs and budgets, and they don’t have a lot of time to keep up with the latest membership handbook that we’re putting out.”

Luu has observed that while industry summits often feature panels and brainstorming sessions focused on supporting rural news, there is a clear representation issue.

“I’m sitting in this room with maybe two dozen people at a conference, and I look around, and I basically



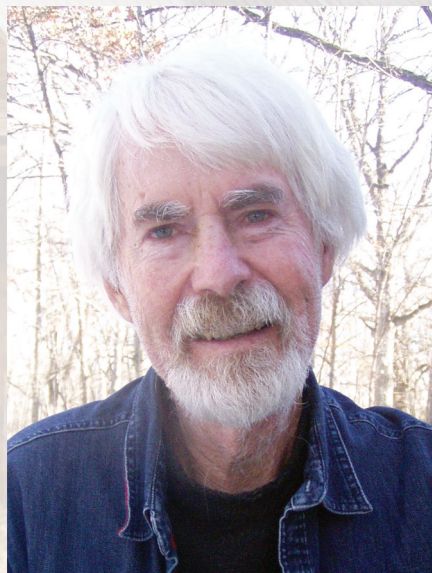
know everyone there,” Luu said. “So I know the answer when I ask them, ‘does anyone here work for a rural newsroom? Does anyone here work with a rural newsroom?’ The answer is no, and then it basically comes down to, ‘well, has anyone ever traveled through a rural town?’”

It’s a phenomenon Abernathy also noted in her report:

“At a summit on rural journalism, Tom Silvestri, former publisher of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, wryly observed that sometimes there seem to be ‘more people trying to save local journalism than actually employed in local journalism,’” she wrote.

Consequently, state press associations have become important channels of communication between these “funders and innovators” and the news organizations that can benefit from various forms of intervention. The Reynolds Journalism Institute’s strong relationship with the Missouri Press Association has led

to initiatives like the Rural Missouri Newspaper Scholarship, which offers scholarship money to Missouri School of Journalism students in exchange for committing to work at a



Tim King | Photo: Jan King

rural newspaper upon graduating.

But that approach only goes so far on its own. Many state press associations don’t recognize digital-only

publications, potentially leaving some news organizations out of the loop. Other publications are run and staffed by people like Tim King, a farmer and journalism entrepreneur in central Minnesota who simply doesn’t have the time to attend industry conferences and other networking events.

“The farm is full time, so the journalism work is a side project,” said King, who co-founded and published the bilingual community newspaper *La Voz Libre* until it changed ownership in 2014. “There’s not a lot of time to look for funding.”

Despite the multitasking — which also includes writing for the *Minnesota Reformer*, *The Land* (where his writing has appeared for nearly four decades) and running a nonprofit, *Dreams United*, that supports arts and culture in his home town of Long Prairie, Minnesota — King’s community journalism projects have won statewide recog-



dition. He wants to do more, but his options for tracking down local support are limited.

“I would love to train young Hispanic journalists, maybe even high school students, to report on the blossoming small business community driven by Hispanic immigrants in Long Prairie,” he said. “The rejuvenation of a dying city with 3,000 residents has been absolutely remarkable, but no one is writing about it. I talked to potential funders, and they said, ‘well, that’s interesting, but it’s not something we do.’”

It’s an idea that aligns with King’s passion for amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities through journalism, but without the time to make the rounds in the industry’s networking circuit, he is at a loss.

King is far from unique in this respect, even among full-time journalists, according to Jody Lawrence-Turner, executive director of the Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism, which launched in 2021.

“For rural newspapers that are often one, two, three-person operations, they don’t have the time or the money to go to conferences, and they’re not getting the information about what’s available to them,” Lawrence-Turner said. “There



Jody Lawrence-Turner

is not a one-size-fits-all answer for helping rural publications, so for me, it’s a matter of reaching out and helping them connect the dots.”

She started a project in October that echoes King’s plan to train young journalists: Future Journalists of America, which embeds high school students in newsrooms to learn about journalism and news literacy during the first year and how to sustain a digital publication during the second year.

But to help fill the gap in communication that prevents efforts like King’s from taking root, Lawrence-Turner wants to create a resource list that breaks down available tools and sources of support in terms of what they offer, their affordability and how they might suit newsrooms of various sizes. It’s part of what she sees as a need for regional resource centers that focus on helping rural news organizations identify and take advantage of opportunities for support — an approach that emphasizes meeting rural journalists where they are.

“Without an advocate who is looking out for them and connecting them to the right thing, they’re



gonna be left in the dust,” she said. “They need that last-mile, feet-on-the-ground person to help them get to the next level.”

She hopes that personal touch, though challenging logistically, will mean fewer newsrooms fall through the cracks of the ever-more-prominent nationwide effort to preserve rural news and revitalize news deserts. And on the same token, her approach would consider the varying needs of different rural audiences, factors like the reliability of internet service and other elements that are sometimes left out of broad-scale efforts to save rural journalism.

Indeed, this philosophy mirrors what people in rural communities want from their news, said Nora Hertel, who founded solutions journalism newsletter Project Optimist with support from RJI and the Tiny News Collective.

Project Optimist is taking an interesting approach to the problem of covering rural communities. Hertel has decided not to focus on one

community but to cover “Greater Minnesota,” which covers virtually the entire state outside of cities and most suburbs. This requires her to focus on issues that will resonate with most rural communities in the state while still respecting what makes each



Nora Hertel

community different. It’s a delicate line to walk, but her model could be replicated in other states if successful.

“Each place I go, I have to under-

stand where they’re coming from and think about how that fits into the regional landscape,” Hertel said.

Sometimes, however, the best solution is more individualized work. That idea drives RJI’s Potter Ambassadors Program, which sends journalism students to rural Missouri newsrooms to train staff on technology and resources that can make their digital efforts more efficient and successful. Rather than approaching the newsrooms with a fixed set of resources and training, the student ambassadors travel to the newsrooms to take stock of individual needs and challenges.

For King, contemplating an industry that prioritizes meeting rural news organizations where they are reminds him why he got into the news business in the first place.

“I like farming, but it’s kind of isolating,” he said. “I think maybe I enjoy doing journalism because it keeps me connected with a group of people a little larger than my immediate family.”

RJI partners with Chalkbeat to help newsrooms track source diversity

RJI, IN PARTNERSHIP with Chalkbeat, a non-profit news organization focusing on education, launched a free tool in the fall of 2022 to help newsrooms track and improve the diversity of their sources over time.

Caroline Bauman, community engagement manager at Chalkbeat, said the project began as an internal effort at her organization, which covers education news in major cities across the country. Ultimately, Bauman and Kat Duncan, RJI's director of innovation, saw an opportunity to help small and medium-sized newsrooms on a larger scale.

"We evolved from that idea when we realized we could build something that other newsrooms could use," Bauman said. "One of

the reasons it's easy for newsrooms to drop this work over time is because there hasn't been a sense of community across the industry over this issue. We want to create a shared sense of support."

So far, that approach is resonating. More than 100 newsrooms have signed up to use the system, which sends automated surveys to sources via email. Newsrooms can view aggregate data compiled from these surveys to inform their broader diversity, equity and inclusion work — a process known as source auditing. It's replicable and adaptable by design — Bauman already envisions numerous ways to expand upon the tool's current functions and sees the potential to use data from the surveys to create newsroom-specific

source databases.

But just as the tool is bringing newsrooms together to address inequities in the industry's representation of the communities it serves, Bauman said the tool itself should be seen as only one piece of a larger collaborative effort to address diversity issues in a number of contexts.

"In newsrooms, there is no solving an issue in isolation," she said. "No solving source auditing work without talking about internal culture or internal structures and systems or equitable language. This process has taught me a lot about how powerful thoughtful collaboration can be."

That collaborative ethic was also integral to the source auditing tool's creation. RJI partnered with



Chalkbeat to provide funding and help build the tool, and Duncan, who led RJI's part in the project, also connected Bauman with Missouri School of Journalism students. These students received hands-on educational opportunities interviewing journalists and helping with research analyses, which helped inform the project.

"I am always looking for partnerships to build free and practical innovative resources that will help tackle a current need or challenge in journalism," Duncan said. "I jumped at the chance to work with Chalkbeat because I could see that they didn't just care about how this tool would benefit them, but wanted to work with us to build something that could benefit all newsrooms invested in this important work.

I think this project is a testament to what we can achieve when we collaborate to create resources that are open to and for all journalists, not just one newsroom or company."

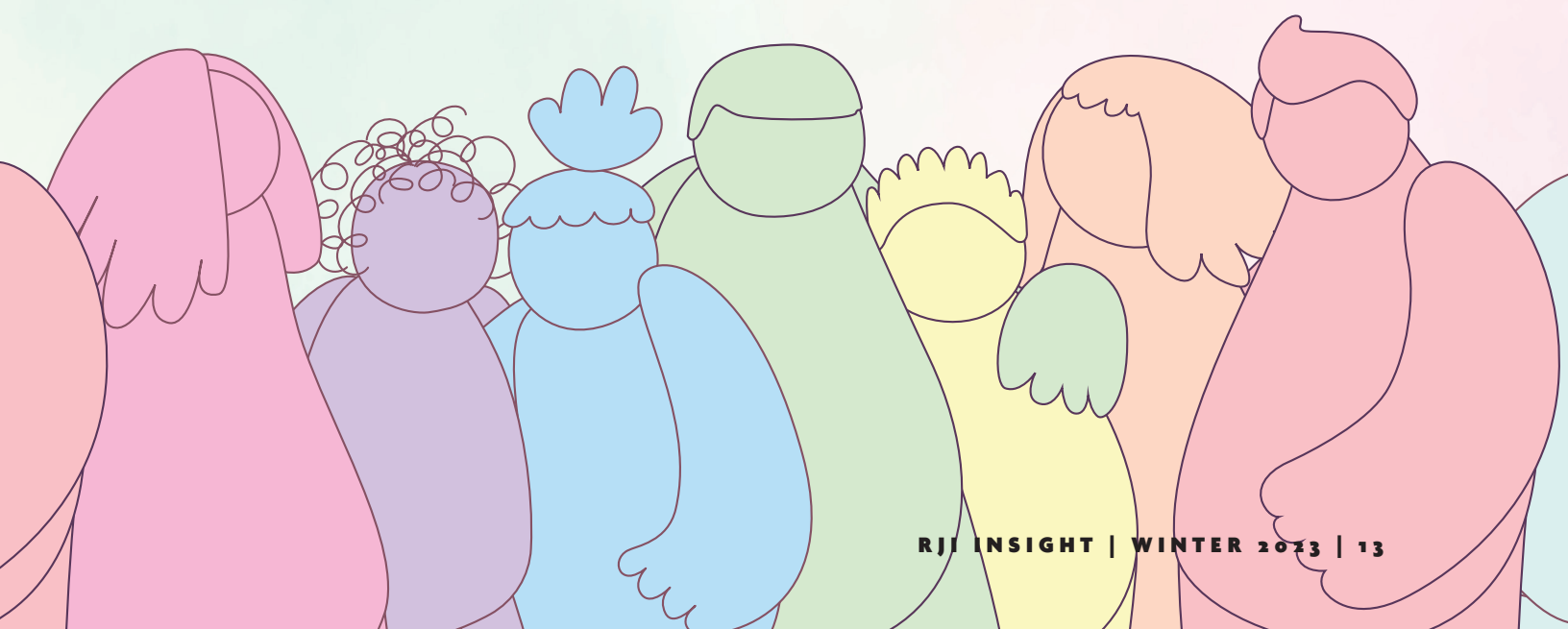
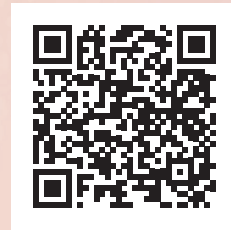
For Bauman, the success of the RJI partnership has dovetailed nicely with the source auditing tool's power to foster collaboration with communities and forge connections between news organizations.

"There's a world where we would do far inferior work in the long run trying to make this work on our own, repeating a lot of mistakes we could have learned from," Bauman said. "To be able to do this work properly and take our time because of our partnership with RJI — it's really reinforced to us the idea of good partnerships."

WANT TO EXPLORE A PARTNERSHIP WITH RJI?

Contact Kat Duncan at
duncank@rjionline.org

To learn more about the
free source auditing tool,
follow the QR code below





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HURRICANE CENTER

Introduction to the season



Building a pop-up evergreen newsletter

THIS PAST SUMMER, RJI Student Innovation Fellow and Missouri School of Journalism junior Sydney Lewis worked with The Times-Picayune (NOLA.com) in New Orleans to explore a new product idea: an evergreen pop-up newsletter. Focused on hurricane preparation, the newsletter ran for six weeks and made use of content from 10 years' worth of relevant stories from the paper's digital archives, in addition to some new content that filled in the gaps.

With an eye toward innovation and efficiency, Lewis led the planning and production of the newsletter — a process that took only three weeks from idea

to completion — as part of an internship with the newsroom that was designed to develop news products and content strategies.

She built the hurricane prep newsletter using Campaign Monitor, a design and automation tool that the Times-Picayune had previously used only to send emails, not to design and build them. The tool allowed for increased flexibility in formatting and design while staying in line with the paper's branding standards, and it was so easy to use that Lewis, who had never built a newsletter in the tool, had no issues picking it up and using it to create a refined product for the largest paper in New Orleans.

The result was a topical and timely product that delivered important service journalism to the Gulf Coast community, which has been hit by nearly 30 major hurricanes since 2000 and was wracked last year by Hurricane Ida.

"We launched the newsletter in June, and peak hurricane season doesn't start until late August or September," Lewis said. "The goal was to give people time to prepare for the season."

Fortunately, the area's hurricane season turned out to be less severe than expected, though even the quietest of hurricane seasons are rarely a breeze in New Orleans, and the area was not exempt from

economic impacts stemming from Florida's deadly Hurricane Ian. But the newsletter served as an important model for filling a need that isn't likely to go away any time soon.

Part of that importance lay in the product's quick turnaround. Because all the content was evergreen, Lewis only needed to add one or two paragraphs to introduce each edition of the newsletter while occasionally updating outdated references in the stories themselves — one article from 2013, for instance, suggested that parents bring along a portable DVD player to entertain their children during an evacuation.

The pop-up newsletter concept can be easily adapted to suit the needs of any news organization. Types of evergreen content will vary between organizations, and staffing differences might change the ratio of new and repurposed content.

The core of the process, however — which uses Campaign Monitor and existing evergreen content to build a topical newsletter quickly and easily — has utility for newsrooms all over the country.

And while the project offered service journalism to the people of New Orleans and demonstrated another way for the industry to engage with the communities it serves, the project also meant a lot to Lewis, whose first professional newsroom internship netted her real work products thanks to the product-focused nature of



Sydney Lewis

RJI Student Innovation Fellowships.

"I was working with the Times-Picayune's digital team, but I got to basically own this project myself," Lewis said. "It was amazing to be able to jump in and have that creative freedom, and now I've come out of my first internship with a pretty robust product portfolio."

STUDENT JOURNALISTS ARE THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM, so student newsrooms should be setting industry trends, not just following them. That's the philosophy that led Sydney Lewis to create the College Media Innovation Coalition, a collaborative space for college journalists to build sustainable innovation structures in their newsrooms.

Scan the QR code to read more



Save the date! March 10, 2023

"The future of journalism and defamation law"

Join us at the **Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute** on the University of Missouri campus for the **Missouri Law Review Symposium**, "What if New York Times v. Sullivan is next? The future of journalism and defamation law."

Experts in **both law and journalism** will discuss potential changes to the Supreme Court's jurisprudence, defamation law and journalism.

Follow RJI on Twitter and Facebook for more information.



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From ONA to you

Insights from RJI fellows on promoting diversity and equity in and out of newsrooms

ON THE SECOND DAY of the Online News Association’s annual conference in September, four past RJI fellows took the stage to bring their insights about inclusivity, equity and accessibility directly to an industry audience.

RJI Director of Innovation Kat Duncan moderated the panel, which ranged from tips about how to encourage fruitful internal conversations about accessibility and diversity at news organizations to solutions for increased transparency with employees and sources. As 2021-22 fellows, the panelists were able to offer insights from their completed projects.



Emma Carew Grovum

Emma Carew Grovum, whose fellowship project involved creating a guide for promoting and retaining journalists of color, discussed the importance of an open dialogue between reporters and newsroom managers — especially when it comes to assigning stories based on factors like race and community affiliation.

“People are not a monolith,” Carew Grovum said, who recently joined The Marshall Project as its first-ever director of careers and culture. “Some are quite honored to cover their own communities. Others have a lot of trauma from being told they can’t cover their communities. It’s



Yukari Kane

important to ask people, are you comfortable covering this story?”

Yukari Kane added an appeal to make sure that stories are assigned for the right reasons and based on an open dialogue with the reporter.

“Please make sure it’s more than just tokenism, that the story is being incorporated into coverage in a significant way,” said Kane, who as founder and co-executive director of the Prison Journalism Project developed a framework for collaborating with incarcerated people on coverage of American prisons and life in the system.

Kane also pointed to an additional method of ensuring that reporting accurately reflects the communities it covers.

“The AP has peer monitors of news coverage, which I think is a great idea,” she said. “People in senior DEI positions can be difficult to replace when they leave, and having someone who isn’t senior keeping an eye on coverage is a great way to get useful feedback.”

That discussion of turnover in DEI positions also brought to mind the ebb

and flow of motivation when it comes to maintaining a focus on representation and equitable reporting. For Sisi Wei, founder of the DEI Coalition for Anti-Racist, Equitable, and Just Newsrooms, a key part of keeping motivation high is ensuring that communication with reporters is supportive, not intimidating.

“When we talk about equity and inclusion, we sometimes create the impression that it involves climbing a giant mountain one step at a time for the rest of mankind’s future,” said Wei, who is also editor-in-chief of nonprofit newsroom The Markup. “Getting away from that metaphor will help you really connect to people and encourage them to keep doing this work.”

Wei’s fellowship was spent creating a guide to turning private conversations into public resources, a process that depends on transparency with sources at every step to build a sense of community and trust.

“There is a lot to be said for sharing more or all of a piece with people before publishing,” she added. “What are we scared of? Getting feedback?”



Sisi Wei

Hannah Wise, the central region audience editor for McClatchy, noted that such transparency should also apply to internal conversations at newsrooms themselves. During Wise’s fellowship, she created a toolkit guiding newsrooms through the process of evaluating the accessibility of their products to the disability



Hannah Wise

community, as well as evaluating their coverage of that community. Wise reflected that perspective in her comments on transparency.

“In a past position, I was able to take part in monthly town halls that celebrated staff but also gave people a point of access to ask tough questions,” Wise said. “That gave higher-ups a chance to answer questions honestly, to be real with everyone. Transparency is always the best policy.”

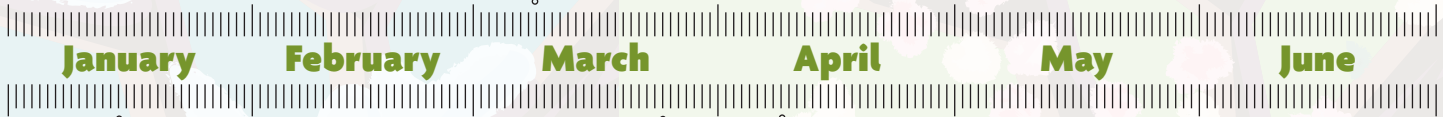
Use the QR code to learn more about RJI Fellowships and the work of current and past fellows



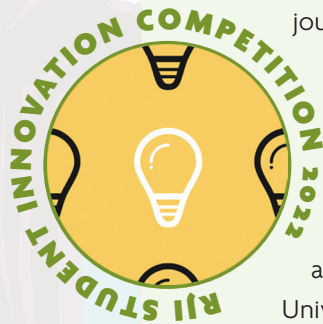
More highlights from 2022



Judges reviewed 30,000 images and named international pool of winners in 34 categories.



Eight MU journalism students were paired with eight community weekly or daily newspapers in Missouri to upgrade tools and strategies that would maximize their multi-media and social media presence.



Dana Cassidy, a senior at the University of Florida, won first place and \$10,000 for her news literacy toolkit project.



The Women in Journalism Workshop is an annual workshop that focuses on challenges and issues specific to women in the journalism industry today.

PARTNERSHIP WITH MMCA



RJI extends its partnership with the Multicultural Correspondents Association to grow and strengthen the “Inclusive Media and Economies” project.

AG & WATER DESK PARTNERSHIP



The Mississippi

River Basin Ag & Water Desk conducts RJI-funded research about attitudes toward climate change in the heartland.

RJI sponsors “Best New Product” category at the Local Independent Online News local journalism awards, which was presented at the News Sustainability Summit in Austin, Texas.



July

August

September

October

November

December

WATCHDOG WRITERS GROUP



RJI's Watchdog Writers Group adds two new journalist-authors, Sarah Smarsh and Alisa Roth, to its list of fellows, who each receive \$50,000.



Replace the news with something better

Each issue features a column from a guest contributor on a topical industry challenge. In this issue, we hear from Sarah Alvarez, founder and editor-in-chief of Outlier Magazine. A longer version is available at rjionline.org.

THAT IT IS TIME to replace local “news” with more useful and inclusive visions of how reporters and newsrooms can serve their communities is beyond argument to me. Our most basic news functions, something like creating an accurate record of what is happening in and around the places we live, and work is completely fundamental. It is also completely inadequate in a world with the pace and scale of preventable crises like climate change and mass shootings.

If we want to be more valuable and integral to our communities, we need to change. Newsrooms with newer models and a sharper focus on creating impact are proving that when we deprioritize catering to the already powerful or chasing superficial engagement, we can change our industry and our communities.

But some people, without this conditioning, are using news and information tools to stretch far past incremental change. Cierra Hinton

and the team she works with at Scalawag is one of newsrooms working to stretch far beyond incremental changes. Scalawag is using their work as a tool for Black liberation in an attempt to help repair the South. “What I do is conditional to my reality,” Hinton said, “but what I dream is not.”

It is a shockingly pure act of faith to believe that our professional tools — observation, verification, storytelling and information distribution

“ Voting is a tool for liberation, organizing is a tool for liberation. Mutual Aid and wealth redistribution are tools for liberation, and media is, too. ”

— could be up to such a difficult and necessary task. But Hinton has convinced me.

Hinton said the “pie in the sky” idea of what Scalawag is building is “a more than just South where media is a liberatory tool.”

“Voting is a tool for liberation, organizing is a tool for liberation,” she said. “Mutual Aid and wealth redistribution are tools for liberation, and media is, too. And, like other liberatory tools, anybody can do media, anybody can do journalism, anybody can tell stories.”

Hinton is devoting significant resources towards training more people in the south to tell their own stories. Capital B is centering and catering to an audience ignored for too long. City Bureau is expanding their documenters network across the country so regular citizens can be trained and paid to help us all rebuild civic infrastructure by making local government more

transparent and accountable. Outlier is responding to information and accountability needs first instead of letting reporter and editor preferences drive coverage.

All of these news organizations and many more are trying to rebuild civic information infrastructure at the same time they are delivering news and information. This is imperative if we are actually going to shore up an American democracy in decline. The voter turnout numbers in Detroit and across the country should feel like a stinging rebuke that even healthier midterm election numbers this past November shouldn't assuage. The problem is not voting, it's participation and representation more generally.

Lynelle Herndon, one of the two coordinators of Outlier's Documenters program works every day to get more people civically involved.

“Even if you don't have a Documenters program you can still share your tools,” she said. Newsrooms, she continued, “need to create opportunities that let people know they are valued and create ways to participate.”

Newsrooms are accustomed to separating themselves from civic infrastructure. It will be more unfamiliar than it is difficult for us to change the culture of news into one that helps to rebuild the civic information systems our communities want and need. It's the only way out for our industry and our collective futures.

Sarah Alvarez is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of Outlier Media, a local newsroom and information service serving Detroiters.



From the One Newsroom: Creating an affordable text system for your community-centered news org

At RJI, we periodically work with the Missouri School of Journalism's One Newsroom — a collaborative, multiplatform space where five professional newsrooms (NBC affiliate KOMU, NPR-member station KBIA, community newspaper Columbia Missourian, online Missouri Business Alert, and monthly VOX Magazine) work together to deliver high-impact news to their community — to develop innovations that have real, practical benefits for newsrooms.

AS PART OF an ongoing effort to broaden the impact of their coverage, many newsrooms are trying text messaging communication to more directly speak with audience members who can benefit from receiving the news. But platforms like GroundSource or Subtext, which provide an established way for newsrooms to send SMS alerts and outreach, can come with prohibitive costs for smaller outlets.

The Philadelphia Inquirer is among the outlets that have developed text programs for elections. Enlace Latino NC, a Spanish-language news organization in North Carolina, uses WhatsApp to reach Spanish-speakers. Outlier Media used primarily automated texts to help low-income residents in Detroit find data and records about landlords and property maintenance.

A more affordable text service like Twilio that offers a per-message rate allows outlets with smaller distribution lists to launch similar efforts while keeping costs low. A texting number, which can be a local area code, costs \$1 a month through Twilio. The exact cost of sending or receiving a text varies slightly based on the recipient's phone carrier, but is generally a little more than a cent. Sending 400

messages and receiving 50 messages costs about \$5.50 a month.

These were attractive factors for one daily community newspaper, the Columbia Missourian, as we helped them develop a text outreach system for increasing coverage of housing and homelessness.

Our experiment with Twilio

The Missourian's staff engaged with community members — including city officials, organization leaders and people experiencing homelessness — to solicit their opinions about how to make this text service useful.

Through these conversations, the newsroom learned that our community felt it would be important to deliver alerts over both SMS and a WiFi text program. We also developed a list of topics in

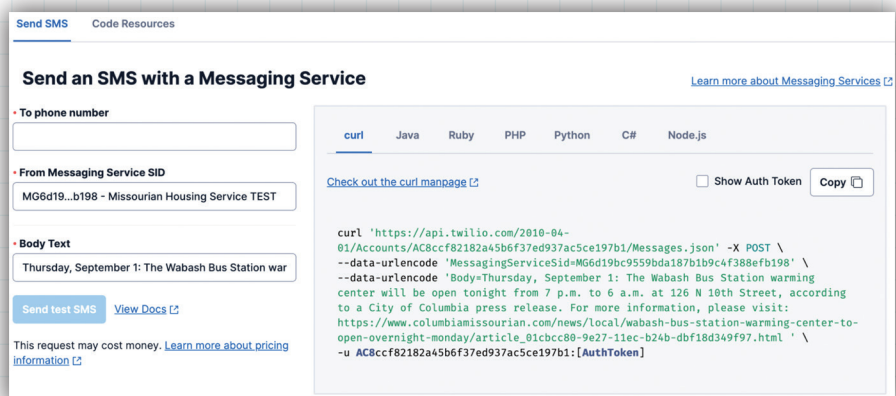
the Missourian's news coverage to distribute information about, with the assumption that it would change and grow over time beyond this particular project.

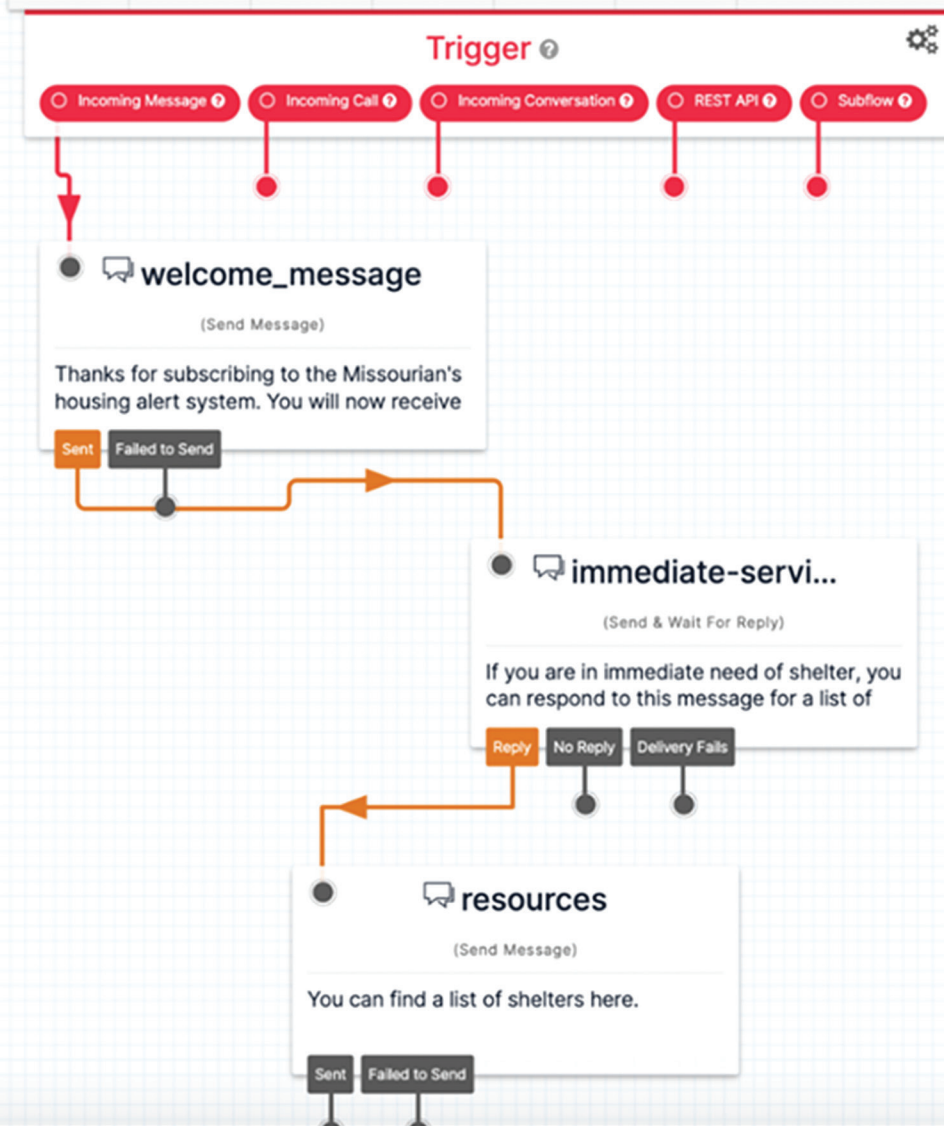
Their messages could be received via both SMS and WhatsApp and allowed those who signed up to contact newsroom staff through the same system.

Our SMS messages provided information ranging from when cold-weather-only warming shelters were open to information about bus routes, weather warnings and community events like job fairs.

How to develop your design

For the Missourian, a pay-as-you-go structure was beneficial because of a smaller audience — it has a print circulation of about 5,000. Thus, Twilio's options to send





over both SMS and WhatsApp, automation capabilities and rates make it ideal: each message costs a fraction of a cent.

No coding is required, though it is a possible approach if you wish to code in specialty features.

Creating a simple, automated series of introductory messages is straightforward. When the initial programmed message is successfully sent, another message follows with the option to receive an immediate list of local shelters and their policies (like hours, sleeping arrangements, whether coming and going is allowed.)

If the subscriber doesn't respond to the second message, nothing else happens. If they do reply — it doesn't matter what they say in the response — they receive a third message with a link to shelter resources. This type of chatbot flow is simple, with only two possible paths the conversation can go, but more information and variables can be added in Twilio at any time.

A flow chart shows the pattern of initial automated messages that a new subscriber to The Missourian's housing-related SMS outreach would receive.

As interactive systems that will require regular changes and adjust-

ments to find what works best for your community, flexibility and feedback are key to implementation, and the value of community input cannot be overstated. Getting feedback on ideas for topics and implementing a text system will help make SMS systems as useful as possible to those you're serving.

Eli Hoff is an Innovation Student Staffer for 2022–2023. He is working on monthly projects and collaborations



Catch up with the 2022-2023 RJI Fellows

FROM A TOOLKIT for visual journalists on trauma-informed and identity-informed safety practices to a project aimed at helping radio newsrooms jumpstart youth media programs, the 2022-2023 cohort of RJI Fellows year's fellows is tackling a wide swathe of issues in the industry related to diversity, technology, youth development and grassroots engagement.

Throughout their 8-month fellowships, these talented professionals are creating resources to help newsrooms serve both their communities and their own journalists.

"The RJI Fellowship Program has a proven track record of creating real tools that newsrooms can use," said Randy Picht, executive director of RJI. "It's exciting to see them making strides to help move the industry forward."

Learn more about the fellows and their projects:

AMY L. KOVAC-ASHLEY

is creating a succession planning guide for small, independent local nonprofit and for-profit news organizations to help them grow into mature, thriving businesses that serve their communities and transition gracefully past their founding, startup stage.



BETH FRANCESCO is building a fundraising resource to help small local news organizations diversify their revenue streams and decrease their reliance on traditional ad sales, designed for those newer to philanthropy.



MARY HEISEY and **KELSEY KUPFERER** are creating a comprehensive guide that supports radio newsrooms in creating or expanding youth media programs to train and invest in the next generation of journalists as well as engage future listeners, leaders and supporters of radio.



TASMIHA KHAN'S project addresses media coverage of Muslims and Islam, including correct terms and templates for journalists who are writing or referring to Muslims in their work. These templates also include sample language for Ramadan and Eid, along with other terms and guides.



TARA PIXLEY is building an online toolkit that offers trauma and identity-informed safety checklists, tips, gear advice and other necessary security training elements for all visual journalists, including freelancers and students, with an emphasis on equity and ethics.



NISSA RHEE'S guide will use grassroots organizing techniques to equip and engage underserved audiences.



Tips include who to hire, what kind of work field canvassers should do and where and how to integrate their work into existing audience growth strategies. It will be available in both English and Spanish.

RYAN RESTIVO is creating a practical tool that lowers the barriers for newsrooms to learn best practices for search engine optimization (SEO). This tool will utilize slash commands in Slack that — once installed — can be used by anyone in a newsroom's workspace to gather actionable SEO information and insights that they can use for future work.



Read their work



Where are they now

Former RJI Fellow Matt Thompson pursues context in a digital world

WHEN MATT THOMPSON started his RJI Fellowship in 2008, he was just coming off his first editing role as a deputy editor at the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Now, as editor of The New York Times' haven for long-form journalism, the Headway Initiative, Thompson has found that his time as an RJI Fellow continues to inform his work in important ways.

As part of his fellowship, which occurred during a time of rapid changes in digital news and tech innovation, he analyzed roughly 1,000 pages of reporting on growth and development in Columbia, Missouri. The effort was part of his larger goal of re-thinking digital news as a "living archive" that, rather than deleting or forgetting old stories, leveraged them to contextualize new information.

Below, Thompson explores how his work has evolved since his fellowship.

What lessons have you taken from your RJI Fellowship into your current work?

When you look at each individual story, reporting is not at all linear. It almost feels like a fractured narrative. But as you read a record of stories advancing through time, you really start to get a sense of how events are unfolding along a broader timeline than the news typically allows us to witness. It really gives a sense of the arc of an argument about questions we're still wrestling



with today. How do you balance the needs of environmental protection with housing, for example? As I'm assigning and editing stories on similar themes, I am put in mind of that work all the time.

Headway seems like an evolution of the "living archive" concept, with long and vigorously researched stories and deep attention to background. Why pursue long-form journalism in an era when much is made of readers' short attention spans?

I think there is some great power in deeply touching, focused encounters people can have with storytelling and with one another through journalism. Public, civic, community engagement is perhaps the highest end of what journalism can do and should aspire to. If we're not equipping people with the information that allows them to

hold together with others in their community, then people won't have much use for our work.

Where will your work with Headway go from here?

If your reading of what is happening within both democracy and media does not include a frittering away of the deeper social ties that have bound communities together, then I think it has to inherently be a superficial reading. We're asking, 'how do we take these big stories that we're doing and plant intimate conversations in communities all over the place about the implications of larger global forces on our neighborhoods, our cities, our local ecosystems?' In some ways, I'm still working on my fellowship project, diving deeply into long, unfolding local narratives and understanding where they might be heading.