



RJI INSIGHT'S companion video series debuted on May 18 on YouTube and is another great way to learn more about the projects RJI is working on. In this photo, RJI Executive Director Randy Picht is talking with Mitra Kalita, founder of URL Media and the local news site in NYC called Epicenter-NYC (see page 22 for more details). The debut piece featured David Beckford, founder of Dynasty Media, who talked about the pilot project he launched in St. Louis about audience growth. (see page 24). Watch for more of these short videos in coming months. You can find them on YouTube by searching RJI Insight. Or just scan the QR code next to this paragraph.

VIEW THE DEBUT OF RJI INSIGHT



youtu.be/H-rX7HgWpck

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INSIGHT

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JOURNALISM INSTITUTE



Introducing the 2023–2024 RJI Fellows

Partnership with URL Media helps BIPOC outlets

Watchdog Writers Group sees continued success

Note from the Director

Randy Picht
RJI Executive Director



THANKS FOR PICKING UP the summer 2023 edition of RJI Insight.

You won't get far in this issue without realizing that collaboration is a big theme, which isn't surprising given that partnering with the industry to help small and community-centered news organizations reach their audiences is at the core of our mission. I hope that by sharing the work we're doing with partners all over the country, we can inspire you to act on an idea that, at this very moment, might only exist as a quiet spark of insight into a challenge facing journalism today.

RJI's role in bringing those kernels of ideas to fruition as projects with real, practical value to newsrooms is our "currency of impact," whether that impact is on BIPOC media advertising (p. 22), rural news organizations in Missouri that benefit from the student ambassadors we send to train staff on digital tools and practices (p. 9) or the news deserts that lack reliable coverage of important civic events (p. 8).

From our RJI Fellows' innovative projects that help journalists and reporters navigate complex challenges (p. 10) to immersive and educational events like the Women in Journalism Workshop (p. 8), everything we do centers around on-the-ground work with the journalists and newsrooms we serve.

And like the researchers and fellows who continue to build on the work they performed with RJI after moving on (p. 13), I'm optimistic that the work described herein — and the broader body of work you can learn about on RJIonline.org — encourages further iteration. The resources within these pages can grow and evolve with time as the context for their creation morphs with our ever-changing industry, much like software is "patched" over time.

That said, we also recognize that sometimes it's exposure to a perspective, not a toolkit, that creates inspiration. For one such memorable perspective, don't miss John Loeppky's column (p. 18) reminding us that audiences with disabilities aren't the only ones deserving of accessibility measures; disabled journalists need to be part of the conversation.

Speaking of perspectives, I want to hear yours. If you are interested in collaborating with RJI or learning more about our work, let's talk!

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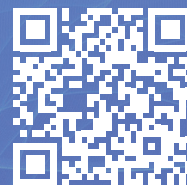
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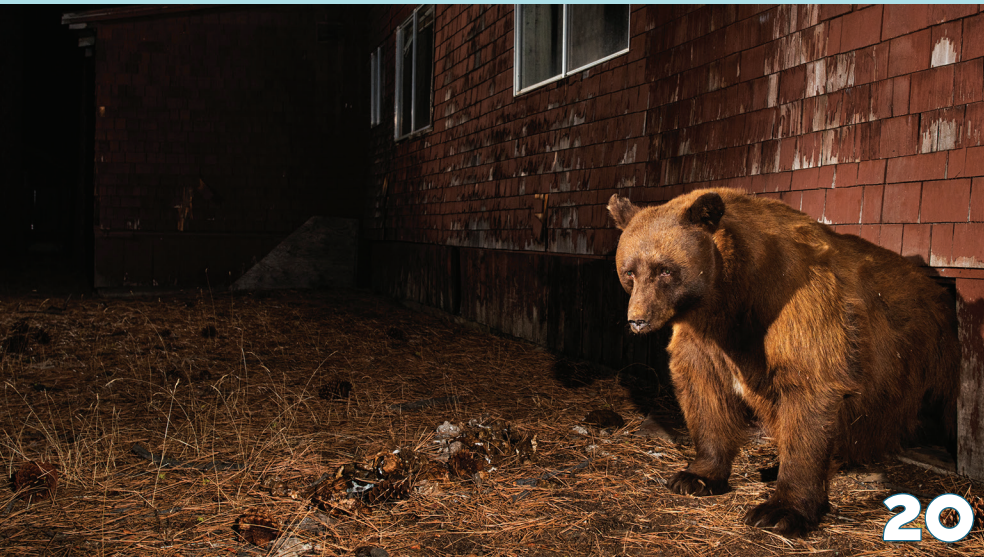
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ON THE COVER

Jan Risher, features editor at The Advocate in Baton Rouge, hula hoops to music in front of the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Women in Journalism Workshop on April 8, 2023. After the last session—Hostile Environment and First Aid Training—of the three-day workshop ended, attendees had the option to relax, hula hoop or get resume reviews.

Photo: Kat Duncan | RJJ



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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.



Donald W. Reynolds
Journalism Institute
University of Missouri

Innovation in Focus

Five AI options for transcribing audio

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, Emily Lytle, RJI's Innovation in Focus editor, examines five AI options journalists can use for transcribing audio.

FOR MANY, OTTER.AI has been a loyal friend for years. The popular transcription platform can save loads of time by transforming recorded interviews into transcripts that are editable, searchable and shareable.



But with the departure of the unrestricted free version, Otter has limitations that make it worthwhile to look at other emerging options.

While we could not test every AI transcription service out there, we chose five options that we found highly recommended and/or free alternatives with unique tools that could be helpful in day-to-day reporting.

RJI partnered with KBIA-FM, the Missouri School of Journalism's NPR member station, to run an audio interview through each of these services: Parrot AI, Otter AI, Google Pinpoint, Rev and Sonix.

Here are the results.

Saving time

This is often the top reason journalists seek a transcription service: If we can spend more time reporting and writing, and less time transcribing interviews, that's a win.

The quickest service to upload and transcribe a 25-minute interview was Sonix. In just under 3 minutes,

Sonix uploaded and transcribed the interview. Rev was not far behind at 4 minutes, 30 seconds.

But speed only means so much if the transcript requires a lot of editing to clean it up for accuracy.

For English interviews with mostly clear audio, most of these services transcribed with few errors. Google Pinpoint performed the worst, as it does not separate speakers and often breaks up paragraphs poorly, which makes copying and pasting quotes difficult.

Rev did a good job picking up colloquialisms and breaking up sentences with commas, such as in this sentence: "And so we figured, hey, give 'em something from back home, have someone speak Spanish



and have that environment that they had back home."

Sonix similarly required very little editing, and it even knew to capitalize the name of a community center. Sonix also made it easy to export the final transcript to formats like Microsoft Word or text.

Otter's transcription was decent, though it struggled with names and spelling of names. One big time-saver for Otter is the outline

tool along the side, which breaks down the major topics of your interview for quick navigation.

Parrot had some inconsistencies that might be annoying for AP style devotees – such as writing fifth grade and 6th grade these two different ways, or missing capitalization – but it was mostly accurate.

Like Otter, Rev and Sonix, Parrot will automatically scroll and follow



each word in the transcript as the audio plays. If you click on a word, the audio will pick up from that spot. However, unlike the others, this word-tracking doesn't work well when editing.

Transcribing non-English interviews

Otter and Parrot are both English only, a disappointing limitation when so many languages are spoken worldwide.

Sonix and Rev each transcribed a Spanish interview clearly, identifying different speakers and requiring minimal edits — though more edits were needed than with the English interview.

If you need to transcribe a variety of different languages, Sonix might be the choice for you because it allows

To help you pick the service that best fits your needs, here is the breakdown of what each service offers by feature.

Features	Parrot AI	Otter.ai	Google Pinpoint	Rev	Sonix
Non-English transcriptions			X	X	X
Free version	X	X	X		
Quickest transcription turnaround					X
App included		X		X	
Record and transcribe in real time	X*	X		X	
Integrate with Zoom	X	X		X	X
Shareable transcriptions	X	X	X	X	X
Track words while editing/playing audio		X		X	X
Time stamps on transcript		X	X	X	X
Custom dictionary		X		X	X
Export transcript to text file		X	X	X	X

* Note: Parrot's live recording function is only for meetings or screen recordings

you to pick from a list of more than 38 languages in a dropdown menu before transcribing. While Rev offers 30 different languages in beta, you must remember to change your default language in settings each time.

Google Pinpoint has the ability to transcribe 13 different languages, but again, the separation of paragraphs and speakers was poor



in the actual transcription. Google Cloud's text-to-speech tool, which offers more than 80 languages, might be a better option here.

On a tight budget

Parrot AI is completely free (for now) and would work well if you conduct a lot of interviews or meetings that need transcription.



While Otter offers a free version, this level has become more limited. Beyond the 30-minute conversation limit, it's especially frustrating that Otter only allows three imported audio files on the free level. If you don't record and transcribe in real time, you're out of luck.

Sonix and Rev both require subscriptions or pay-as-you-go plans.

Transcribing in the field

If you want an option to transcribe while in the field with a mobile app, your choices are Otter and Rev.

Both allow you to record and transcribe in real time or import a file, but here's what's different: In Otter, almost all of the helpful editing and navigation features — like the outline, highlighting, commenting and sharing — are still available in the app.

Rev's editing is more basic on the phone, but it offers free audio recording and call recording apps.

Features breakdown by service

To help you pick the service that best fits your needs, here is the breakdown of what each service offers by feature.

Emily Lytle is the *Innovation in Focus* Editor on RJI's *Innovation Team*. She produces the monthly web series *Innovation in Focus*.



RJI News in Brief

Student competition celebrates ingenuity

RJI RECENTLY AWARDED prizes of \$10,000, \$2,500 and \$1,000 to three collegiate teams who came up with the best practical, actionable plans to address a local need in their community through service journalism.

This edition of the annual RJI Student Innovation Competition awarded the top prize and \$10,000 to four students from the University of Missouri. The students worked with the Missouri Independent to produce content accessible to the Latino community in Columbia, Missouri, and surrounding areas, a community that sometimes lacks access to news and information due to language barriers.

The second and third prizes went to Team Tipbot of Stanford University and Team Diamondgigs of the University of Maryland, respectively. Tipbot created an interactive, news-gathering chatbot in an effort to modernize news tiplines, while Diamondgigs built



RJI Executive Director Randy Picht awards the top prize in this year's RJI Student Innovation Competition to Team De Veras, L-R, Erik Galicia, Cristal Sanchez, Lauren Hubbard and Sharon Quintana Ortiz

an online, hyperlocal job board for their local campus community in College Park, Maryland.

The projects were judged by an independent team of working journalists and entrepreneurs who cover diverse communities and civic life for publications in Los Angeles, New York City and Minnesota. Their decision potentially has further-reaching consequences

than a monetary award: last year's winner, Dana Cassidy, went on to an internship at the Washington Post that eventually became a full-time job at the newspaper.

"I think that each of these projects has a sustainable future ahead of them, and I really hope the students continue to work on them," said judge Andrea Pineda-Salgado, a community reporter at Epicenter NYC.



Every month, we're experimenting with new tools, technology, storytelling methods and more to support small and community-driven news organizations. Subscribe for templates, guides, tips and interviews with related experts!



bit.ly/3qel4bN

RiskMinr tool streamlines investigative research

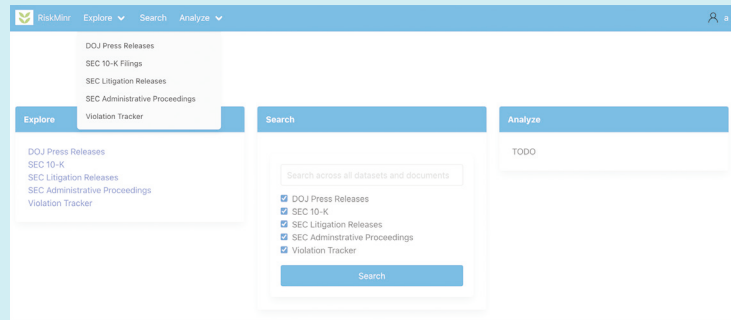
INVESTIGATE MIDWEST, a nonprofit investigative journalism organization covering the agriculture industry, has partnered with RJI to develop RiskMinr, a tool that collects data about large agribusiness companies from government regulatory bodies such as the SEC, the EPA and USDA, among others.

From risk assessments on topics like climate change to records of fines and violations, the data will feed into a searchable database journalists can use to streamline the otherwise painstaking task of tracking down separate sets of records from various agencies.

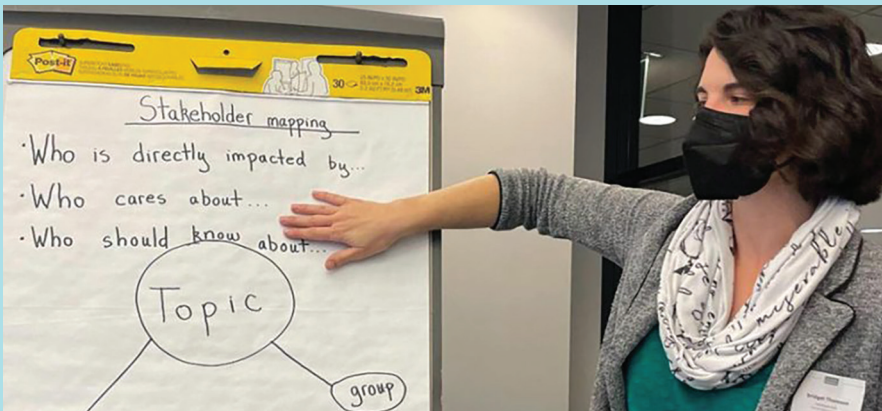
Brant Houston, president of the Investigate Midwest board, said that two types of searches will be available: an open-ended keyword search and a more structured search for specific types of documents. Once initial development is completed, the plan is to put the tool through its paces with hands-on testing by journalists at Investigate Midwest.

“I’m excited to get this into the hands of staff who can say, “Hey, this works, but can you add this?” Houston said. “I love that phase.”

Investigate Midwest is also a partner newsroom of the Mississippi River Basin Ag and Water Desk, which is based at the Missouri School of Journalism and distributes in-depth environmental reporting for free to news outlets all over the country.



Building successful newsroom collaborations



INN Director of Collaborations Bridget Thoreson leads a discussion on stakeholder mapping at a collaborative session in Chicago. Photo: INN

RJI AND THE Institute for Nonprofit News are teaming up to explore how news organizations can build meaningful, long-lasting and topical collaborations with other newsrooms. The partners are creating a guide for community-centered newsrooms looking to

join forces to address significant societal issues through in-depth, collaborative reporting.

Ongoing collaborations that involve multiple outlets sharing editorial resources to tackle a single topic remain relatively rare in the industry. Out of 171 journalism

partnerships in progress listed by the Center for Cooperative Media — for which data was available on collaboration type — only 14 are ongoing single-topic projects where participants either work together to create content or share resources at the organizational level.

More than 100 outlets responded to an initial survey of INN members, naming topics like the environment and energy, systemic inequities, criminal justice, housing and rural issues as the most ripe for inter-newsroom collaboration. A more in-depth exploration of ideas and feedback over the next few months will result in a practical resource that shows community news organizations how to harness the collective strengths of multiple newsrooms.

Community journalism that promotes civic engagement

RJI AND THE GREEN LINE, of Toronto, are working on a project to share the hyperlocal news outlet's unique engagement and action-oriented newsroom strategy with the news industry.

Anita Li, the founder and editor-in-chief of The Green Line, said the guide will walk journalists through the stages of the outlet's original "theory-of-change" models, especially what she calls the Attention Funnel and the Action Journey.

In a nutshell, the stages of the Attention Funnel are:

- Comedy, op-ed and behind-the-scenes content
- Service journalism
- Original journalism
- In-depth journalism

The Action Journey's stages are:

- Explainer
- Long-form feature or series of short-form articles
- Events
- Solutions article



Riverside-based artist Mighloe performs at The Green Line's Winter Marketplace event for its January Action Journey.



Customers chat and purchase items from local vendors at The Green Line's Winter Marketplace event.

Crafted with the help of input from other community newsrooms, the guide will also share case studies of this model in action, including the resulting community impacts and audience engagement.

Ultimately, the guide will be designed not only to help newsrooms implement these models to engage more meaningfully with their communities, but to demonstrate how to iterate on the models to suit specific needs.

Here's an example of one recent action journey from January that focused on food insecurity in Toronto's downtown east-end neighborhood of Riverside:

In week one, The Green Line published an Instagram explainer breaking down how gentrification, an inflated cost of living and three years of COVID have worsened the impacts of food insecurity and precarity in Riverside. Week two saw a series of short-form articles reporting on existing local solutions to food insecurity in Riverside.

In week three, we disseminated a community survey at an event at Ralph Thornton Community Centre in Riverside.

And in week four, we published a solutions article that crowdsourced



The Green Line editor-in-chief Anita Li kicks off the Winter Marketplace event.

community-driven solutions to address food insecurity in Riverside.

The Green Line and RJI are taking a step-by-step approach to ensure our guide is as digestible as possible because it's important to us that you actually use it and find it valuable.

Student Innovation Fellows assist newsrooms nationwide



SIX STUDENTS at the Missouri School of Journalism have fanned out to local news organizations across the country to work on projects ranging from improving audience analytics and product testing to enhancing coverage of underrepresented communities. Meet the newest class of RJI Student Innovation Fellows:

Junior **Laine Cibulskis** is working virtually at Lake County News of Lake County, California. Cibulskis will use data-mining software and artificial intelligence to identify and collect data about local sites that have been most impacted by climate change and wildfires. In addition, she is helping the newspaper present information about the county's budget in a more reader-friendly and visually appealing manner.

Sophomore **Anna Colletto** is embedded with the product team

at the Texas Tribune, focusing on audience testing to help the all-digital outlet best serve its community. She hopes to ultimately work for a nonprofit newspaper or public radio station doing local, investigative political journalism.

Junior **Emily Hood** joins the Star Tribune in Minneapolis, working to optimize newsroom systems that help reporters more closely connect with the needs of communities they cover. Her work supplements the newspaper's efforts to raise news literacy among its audience.

Ellie Lin, a senior, is helping the Sacramento Bee cover historically underrepresented communities through multimedia storytelling. She is also putting her experience in graphics and visual design to good use by helping design user interfaces.

Senior **Katie Taranto** is tackling news product and audience

engagement tasks at the nonprofit Springfield Daily Citizen in Springfield, Missouri. An education and youth reporter at the School's digital-first community newspaper, the Columbia Missourian, she is excited about the opportunity to learn more about the industry firsthand.

Han Vu, a second-year graduate student, is working at the American Press Institute to learn more about the organization's audience through data analysis. Vu worked as a political journalist for 13 years before coming to the School to study data journalism, a field that she sees as an opportunity to harness digital resources like social media to collect information that can enrich stories or reveal stories that might otherwise fly under the radar.

Agenda Watch: An oasis in news deserts

AS THE INDUSTRY continues to grapple with the problem of news deserts, a growing number of decisions that affect local communities are made in the dark, casualties of a lack of coverage of public board meetings, zoning commissions and other mainstays of local reporting.

For more than a year, RJI and Big Local News at Stanford University have worked to make Agenda Watch a full-featured platform for journalists looking to fill these gaps, a platform that provides the ability to research past agendas and minutes as well as subscribe to alerts based on topics and keywords relevant to a reporter's beat.

The multifaceted platform can serve as an early-warning system when a local agency is preparing to debate affordable housing, environmental cleanup, noise ordinances, and myriad other issues. The goal is to help reporters more easily keep tabs on the issues that matter most to their communities.

Additionally, software shop DataMade has helped significantly expand the capacity to gather documents from local agencies by further extending an open-source web scraping library.

The job of gathering documents from public agencies is a massive undertaking, with civic coders, students, news organizations and others all playing a part in expanding the reach of the platform. Stay tuned: the new and improved Agenda Watch will launch soon.

Women in Journalism Workshop offers tools for success

COVERING NATURAL disasters doesn't always come naturally. That was a hard lesson for Marissa Lang to learn when she was sent to report on the 2016 Wine Country wildfires in California.

"Journalism jobs threw me into covering events that I hadn't received any training on how to do safely," she said. "I learned on the fly, but I wished I knew beforehand that there was training to help me prepare for such a situation."

Now, as one of the session leaders at the Missouri School of Journalism's Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute's (RJI) Women in Journalism Workshop, the Washington Post staff writer is helping equip other female journalists with the knowledge and tools to be prepared for similar situations.

It was just one of a number of sessions on the agenda at this year's workshop that took place April 7-9

and featured sessions led by female journalists at outlets including BBC Mundo, the American Press Institute and Reuters. Nearly 50 attendees — including working professionals and Mizzou faculty,



Some attendees at the Women in Journalism Workshop 2023 took a break from the workshop to work on their Hula-Hoop skills.

Photo: Kat Duncan

staff and students — spent the two days immersed in topics as varied as salary negotiation, identity-aware reporting practices and collaboration in the newsroom. There were puppies, too!

Ultimately, the workshop aims

to provide female journalists the opportunity to learn about evolving practices in the world of reporting while also preparing them for specific challenges they might face as women in journalism.

"The workshop is big on speaking up and advocating for yourself because women don't do that enough," said Kat Duncan, founder of the workshop and director of innovation at RJI. "I had one student who messaged me and said they negotiated \$10,000 more for their salary at their first job. It makes me feel great that RJI supports this, sees the value in it and provides this experience that helps journalists in their careers."

Audrey Brown is a rising senior at the Missouri School of Journalism, and the managing editor of the Women's Sports Exchange.



You can get a lot done in a week!

DURING EVERY WINTER break at the Missouri School of Journalism, a posse of digital-wise students are sent by RJI into community newsrooms across the state. There, they spend five full days gathering information and training staff in digital tools and practices. At the end of the week, the students leave behind written routines designed to sustain the initiatives they brought to the news organizations.

In January, 13 MU journalism students were paired with 12 community newspapers in Missouri through the program. This was the fifth set of ambassadors sent out across the state since 2018.



MU senior MaKayla Hart (left) served as a Potter Digital Ambassador at the Poplar Bluff Daily American Republic where she worked closely with staff members like Assistant Editor Samantha Tucker (right).
Photo: Donna Farley

“The School of Journalism has its Missouri Method which is to learn by doing, and this program is a perfect example of how effective that approach is,” said Randy Picht, executive director of RJI. “It’s an experience that will serve the ambassadors well in their careers while also benefitting community newspapers in the state.”

Mike Bushnell, publisher of Northeast News in Kansas City,



MU senior Sofi Zeman served as a Potter Digital Ambassador at The Northeast News in Kansas City. Photo: The Northeast News

couldn’t have been happier with his ambassador, MU senior Sofi Zeman.

“Sofi was awesome, and her final report and flow chart is something we’ll post and use daily moving forward,” Bushnell said. “It’s already paying off in terms of social media traffic and using search engine optimization terms to get a higher traffic count on our website.”

Hit the ground running

Once matched with a news outlet, the ambassadors have several weeks to prepare an in-depth community audit that explores the demographics of the community, media competition, social media presence and much more.

The students then develop a plan to address issues they’ve uncovered. Their research is shared with their assigned newsrooms upon arrival, setting a tone that the ambassadors are prepared and ready to work.

“The idea is to hit the ground running as soon as they arrive,” said Jeanne Abbott, a professor in the School of Journalism who oversees the program.

The results have been a win-win for the ambassadors and the

community newspapers. Kevin Jones, chief operating officer of The St. Louis American, was impressed with the energy and expertise his paper’s Ambassador, MU senior Katie Quinn, shared with his staff.

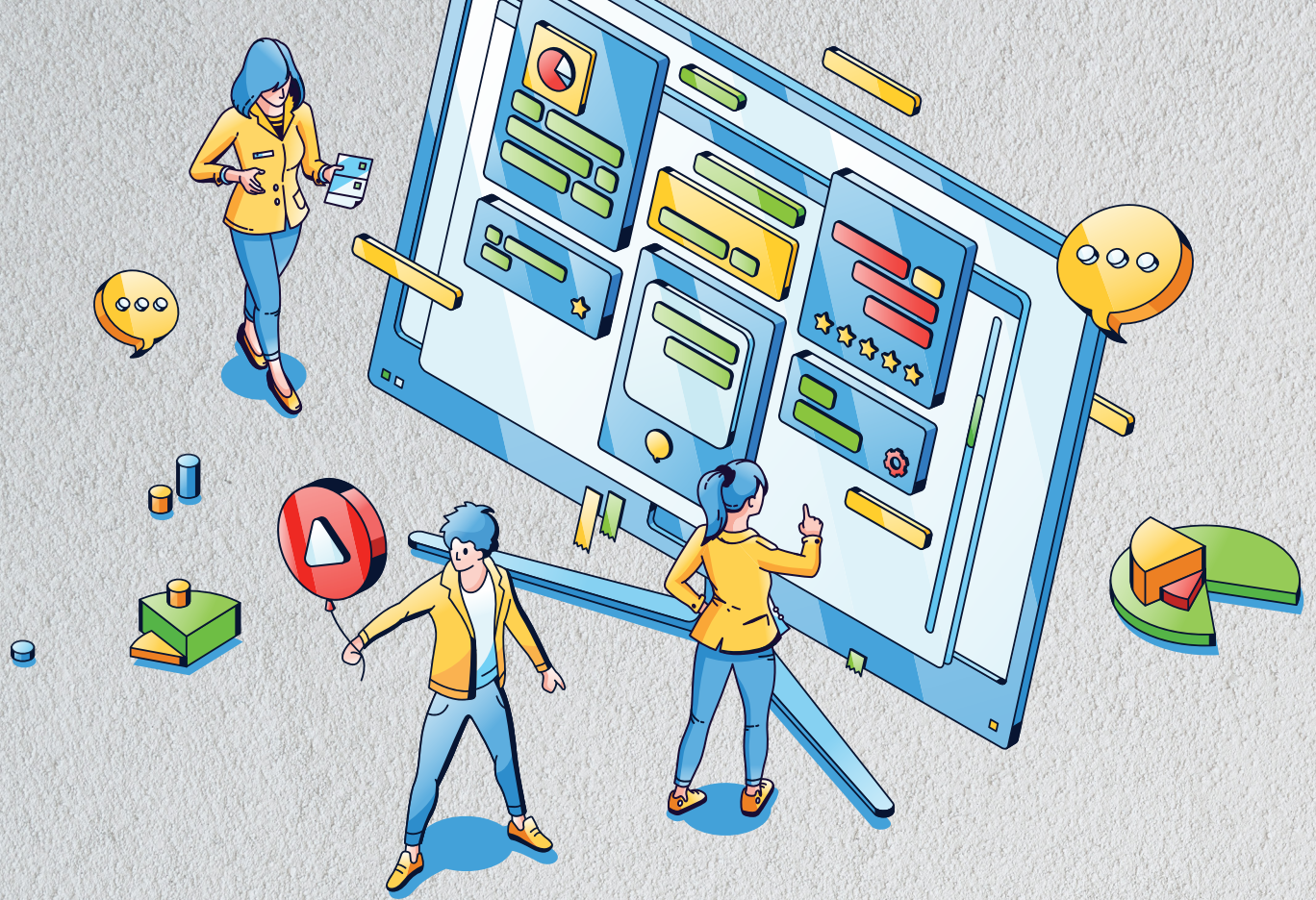
“She helped from start to finish, including teaching a lot of us ‘veterans’ new tech-related things,” he said. “Several folks here have been dilly dallying with Slack the last six months. She made sure everyone on the editorial team was signed up, and she taught each of them personally how to use it.”

Quinn, who plans to attend law school in the fall, said she enjoyed the opportunity to share her knowledge.

“I wasn’t just teaching but learning myself,” she said. “For me, I learned to be a better advocate for myself. It’s a wonderful program.”

Sara Diedrich is a Senior Editor / Public Safety Information Specialist with the University of Missouri News Bureau.





Introducing the 2023–2024 RJI Fellows

THE NEWEST CLASS of RJI Fellows is working to help newsrooms engage with and accurately represent their communities. Their innovative and practical projects range from teaching journalists how to work with amateur radio operators during natural disasters to improving the quality of reporting on Latino and Hispanic communities.

Their guides, toolkits and other digital resources will become available for free to journalists and newsrooms at the conclusion of the 8-month fellowships.

“Our fellows are designing easily usable, community-minded resources that will help journalists engage with and accurately represent the people they serve,”

said Randy Picht, executive director of RJI. “It will be great to see these projects piloted in newsrooms around the country.”

Fellows receive \$25,000 stipends and can complete the fellowship remotely, either as an individual or on behalf of an institution. There were no residential fellowships awarded this year — residential fellows collaborate with RJI on-site in Columbia, Missouri, and receive up to \$100,000 in stipends and project funding.

Past fellows have created a search engine optimization app, a leadership succession planning guide, a local development tracker toolkit and much more.

“I can’t wait to get started with our 2023 RJI Fellows,” said Kat Duncan, director of innovation at RJI. “This year’s fellow’s projects are all unique and very much needed in our news industry. I know journalists will be excited to follow along with their projects and utilize these resources when they’re launched.”

Meet the 2023–2024 RJI Fellows

MARIA ARCE, a veteran bilingual journalist and digital specialist, is building a guide for newsrooms to partner with ham radio operators, who can provide much-needed data about



weather and local conditions during natural disasters, when other forms of communication are often unusable.

Ham radio communication is regulated by the FCC, and operators can typically only communicate with each other — except during natural disasters, when they are allowed to report on their local communities.

Arce wants to make sure newsrooms are prepared to take advantage of this resource when disaster strikes; her plan is to create a network of partnerships between groups of radio operators all over the world and the newsrooms that can benefit from their services, a network that her guide will help other newsrooms replicate and expand upon. The guide will also feature a guide to the training and outreach required to work with ham radio operators.

“We think satellites can see everything, but that’s not true,” Arce said. “In the case of tornadoes, for example, you can report over the radio that this tornado just knocked down 10 power lines. That kind of information is something that the satellites can’t see.”

TAMOA CALZADILLA is the editor in chief of Factchequeado, which publishes fact checks in Spanish and English.



She is developing a resource with tools and best practices for reporting factually on Latino and Hispanic communities, enabling newsrooms to engage more meaningfully with these communities while reporting information that counters and prevents misinformation or disinformation.

Calzadilla said the resource will be helpful not only to the communities being covered, but to Spanish-speaking journalists themselves.

“We want to be more precise and accurate with coverage on Latino communities, and that’s not just about understanding the language,” Calzadilla said. “It’s about understanding the lives, the diversity.

The Latinos in Miami are not the same as those at the border, in the Midwest or those who came from countries with dictatorships — I came from Venezuela, for example.”

STACY FELDMAN, founder and publisher of the nonprofit Boulder Reporting



Lab, wants to help small community news organizations create pop-up newsrooms.

The origins of the idea came in the aftermath of 2021’s disastrous Marshall Fire. Boulder Reporting Lab collaborated with the Center for Environmental Journalism at the University of Colorado Boulder, setting up a pop-up newsroom with seven graduate students who reported on stories that might have never been told otherwise: the stories of the homes that survived the fire and remained livable, leaving their owners to find a path forward amid the devastation around them.

The expertise available within communities inspired Feldman to increase the accessibility of pop-up newsrooms by crafting a how-to guide that shows other community newsrooms ways to expand their coverage without taxing their limited resources.

“Pop-up newsrooms can allow smaller newsrooms to leverage the skills, expertise and drive of their community to be part of the news production process,” Feldman said. “The idea is for them to be nimble and temporary, to address something pressing — basically a four-month-long micro newsroom.”

KATE MAXWELL is the publisher, cofounder and managing editor of local news service



The Mendocino Voice, and she is creating a virtual “go bag” of resources local newsrooms can use to inform their coverage of natural disasters.

The idea came about as a result of Maxwell’s experiences with rural news outlets, which sometimes lack the resources to get information and real-time coverage to their communities efficiently — often the same communities increasingly impacted by wildfires and other environmental disasters.

“The goal is to create a guide that will help small, community-focused newsrooms and independent journalists prepare in advance of a natural disaster and produce effective reporting in the midst of a disaster,” Maxwell said. “The guide will also provide case studies of coverage once the disaster has passed for communities recovering.”

JENNIFER MIZGATA, founding director of the Women’s Leadership Accelerator and a consultant



and coach specializing in digital innovation, leadership development and improving work culture, seeks to

help newsroom leadership promote the welfare of their employees with an online training program.

Covering policies, practices and programs aimed at fostering a healthy work culture, Mizgata said the training can help balance the priorities of newsrooms to ensure internal policies and wellness programs are not forgotten in the race for a scoop.

“As organizations start to grow, it’s really important that they invest in their people culture,” Mizgata said. “If people are getting ground up in the gears and not being taken care of, they will burn out.”

She plans to incorporate the voices and experiences of at least six different news leaders, grounding the training in practicality and firsthand knowledge.

ARJUNA SORIANO,

sustainability lab director for Media in Color, wants to harness the passion and knowledge of local community members to produce high school and community league sports coverage — content that is highly valued by local communities but is rarely covered by larger regional and city newspapers.

Soriano’s solution is to engage people like parents or coaches to report scores, upload photos or videos and write short stories about the games. Using an automated SMS messaging system, these community members would be sent links where they could upload the materials, which will be published



via a partnership between Media in Color and the San Fernando Valley Sun. The project will result in a guide showing news organizations how to replicate the model.

“For a larger outlet, covering sports down to the high school level is time and resource intensive,” Soriano said. “The other outlets that would cover it are very local, but their resources are limited. But communities are very engaged in these sports, and local businesses do like to support their local teams, so there is definitely an audience there. We’re trying to bridge that gap between the audience and outlets that don’t have a lot of resources.”

CELIA WU, as managing

director of Global Press News Services, is building an open-source Google Chrome extension for the organization’s style guide, which helps journalists write stories with dignity and precision.



In addition to the extension and further developing the style guide, the project will also include a how-to manual for organizations to create their own extensions, enhancing the accessibility and adoption of resources — like style guides — that establish best practices in the industry.

“A key component of rebuilding trust in journalism is allowing people to recognize themselves in stories,” Wu said. “The Global Press Style Guide exists to ensure journalists are equipped to use dignified and precise words and

phrases for the benefit of audiences. This project will allow people everywhere to use the Global Press Style Guide to write stories with the power to transform global narratives and build trust with audiences.”

ARIEL ZYCH is the director of audience at public radio and nonprofit media outlet Science Friday,



where she is building a sensitivity toolkit that guides newsrooms in finding and employing editors with expertise in preventing the marginalization of specific communities and identities.

“It can be hard or impossible to fully staff all the identities we treat with our journalism,” Zych said, emphasizing that smaller organizations with limited staff and resources can still work to accurately represent the communities they serve with the help of sensitivity professionals. “...And this is not only an editing role. It can be from conception to publication to audience engagement — sensitivity plays a role in every part of a story.”

Zych highlighted that radio sources like Science Friday tend to be ranked high in trustworthiness among the public compared to most other media at a time when trust in media remains at a historic low. This dynamic, she said, makes radio an ideal platform for initiatives like this sensitivity toolkit, which could help other news organizations build a stronger connection to the various cultures and identities present in their communities.

Finishing strong: Our 2022-2023 fellows show off their projects

RJI'S 2022-2023 FELLOWS

presented their projects in April as their fellowships came to an end, showing off a range of tools that newsrooms can implement to address issues like coverage of diverse communities, search engine optimization and reporting on traumatic situations safely.

Taking the form of guides, toolkits and apps, the projects — backed by research and the rich, varied expertise of the fellows — are designed to be “plug and play,” especially for small and independent news outlets for which budget and staffing issues can sometimes inhibit innovation and problem-solving. All are available for free.

“These resources were designed by people who intimately understand the challenges facing the industry, whether they are technological or policy related,” said Randy Picht, executive director of RJI. “They are not aspirational or theoretical solutions: these are real tools that are made to be used, which is what the RJI Fellowship program is all about.”

One such resource is a succession planning guide that helps newsrooms not only survive but flourish after important figures like founders or influential public faces leave the organization. The guide goes beyond the transition process itself and includes tips for executive and leadership team development to help improve the depth and preparedness of newsroom leadership.

On the technological end of the spectrum, another project



RJI Fellows present their projects via a webinar hosted by Kat Duncan (center, top row), RJI Innovation Director. From l to r, bottom row: Amy Kovacs-Ashley, Tara Pixley; center: Tasmiha Khan, Mary Heisey, Kelsey Tolchin-Kupferer; top: Nissa Rhee, Duncan, Ryan Restivo.

resulted in the creation of a new app: YESEO, which walks users through best practices for search engine optimization. SEO continues to be vital for newsrooms to reach digital audiences, and YESEO offers AI-assisted guidance in getting it right — an especially useful tool for organizations that lack the budget or resources to devote additional time to evolving their optimization practices.

These are just a few of the projects from the year’s eight fellows, and while their fellowships have drawn to a close, their creations have been designed with accessibility and sustainability in mind, helping to promote what the fellows hope will be long-term use of the resources by news media well after the end of the fellowships.

And for the fellows themselves, the experience was a resounding success in allowing creative and experienced experts to create a

public good — the kind of work that got them into journalism and related work to begin with.

“I wanted to use what I’ve learned over the years to serve people, and RJI’s purpose of building free, accessible and practical innovation really fit where I wanted to go,” said YESEO’s creator, Ryan Restivo, the director of product and emerging technology at Newsday. “I really appreciate RJI’s support in this fellowship so that I could make this for folks.”

MORE ABOUT THE 2022-2023 FELLOWS AND LINKS TO THE RESOURCES THEY CREATED CAN BE FOUND AT [RJIONLINE.ORG](https://rjionline.org)





Christopher Leonard (left), executive director of the Watchdog Writers Group, attends an event at RJI with WWG Fellows Shoshana Walter (center) and Mya Frazier (right) to discuss their investigative reporting projects. Photo: Nate Brown | RJI

Watchdog Writers Group sees continued success in fourth year

THE WATCHDOG Writers Group is now in its fourth year as a non-profit journalism program that supports authors as they research and write books based on in-depth investigative reporting. Based at RJI and prioritizing the reporting of oft-neglected issues that serve the public interest, WWG offers fellowships with stipends of \$50,000 per year to the writers and pairs each of them with a graduate student reporting assistant from the Missouri School of Journalism.

The newest class of authors will be selected later this summer, but the year is already seeing some memorable developments.

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation has awarded the program a three-year grant worth \$70,000 per year, which will enable WWG to support an additional author and student.

And one WWG author — Shoshana Walter, an award-winning reporter for Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting who began her fellowship in 2021 — is “graduating” from her fellowship this year upon the completion of her book, “Untreated,” which chronicles issues with America’s addiction treatment system and potential solutions. Her achievement comes on the heels of Pamela Colloff’s

completion last year of the forthcoming “A Deal with the Devil,” an account of the system that enabled a jailhouse informant to lie for decades while reaping benefits. Colloff, a senior reporter at ProPublica and a writer-at-large for the New York Times magazine, was the very first WWG author.

“I’m excited to see WWG still picking up steam in our fourth year,” said Christopher Leonard, executive director of WWG. “These landmark moments demonstrate the value that we provide, which not only helps the authors who complete their books but increases the amount of quality, in-depth journalism available to

the public, which is something that benefits us all.”

The book, which Walter turned in to publisher Simon & Schuster in March, is her first in a award-winning reporting career spanning more than 15 years. The fellowship enabled her to take leave from *Reveal*, where she reports on labor, public health and criminal justice, to complete the project while also raising a newborn child. She emphasized that the multifaceted support of the fellowship, which also includes networking opportunities and workshops, was key.

“The program was essential not only because it provided financial support for my writing, but because it gave me a community of people going through the same agony I was in independently reporting and writing a book,” Walter said. “It’s great to have people to talk through things with.”

Like all WWG fellows, Walter also had the benefit of a student reporting assistant from the Missouri School of Journalism. Kelly Dereuck, a graduate student researching the use of public records to report on private equity, helped her complete the vast amounts of legwork required to write a book tackling the large-scale nature of America’s addiction treatment system.

“Kelly helped me make a big dent in my reporting as I was nearing the finish line,” Walter said. “She has just been so instrumental and helpful to me.”

For students like Dereuck, the experience also doubles as an apprenticeship on the best practices and ethics of investigative reporting.

Book geekery

In early May, the fellows and students gathered for their biannual in-person meetup at RJI on the School of Journalism’s campus in Columbia, Missouri. Each author took the opportunity to discuss their book in front of a group of professionals with varied expertise and experiences.

“It is hardcore book geekery,” Leonard said. “It’s so awesome because everyone is working alone on these projects. This is a chance to get us all in the same room and work through challenges together.”

Having finished her manuscript, Walter was able to walk the group through the entirety of the book’s structure for the benefit of the other fellows. She knew very well the benefit of this workshopping process; she said last fall’s meeting, which occurred as she was rounding the final stretch

toward completion, helped her map out the end of “Untreated.”

“We all have our different interests and reporting expertise, but we have this shared experience,” Walter added. “Just having everyone’s feedback, support and perspective is so helpful. People bring up questions that might not have occurred to me, and Chris Leonard is a fantastic mentor.”

The feedback, the support and the advice are the lammarks of the program.

“This is deep investigative journalism that is under-financed by the private marketplace, stories that deserve to be told by writers like Shoshana and Pamela who might not have the luxury of the time or funds they need to take a year or two and get them done. We’re catching the stories that fall through the cracks,” Leonard said.

Other attendees include WWG Fellow Alisa Roth (center) and Missouri School of Journalism graduate student Kelly Dereuck (right), who assisted Leonard and Walker with their book projects. Photo: Nate Brown | RJI





Members of the social media panel discuss a wide variety of topics during the 2023 Missouri Law Review Symposium, co-hosted by RJI, on March 10, 2023. L-R are panelists Frank LoMonte, Jasmine McNealy, James Daire, and moderator Lyrissa Lidsky. Photo: Nate Brown

What happens when a chatbot creates defamatory content?

IN A WORLD where machine learning software can write headlines and even compose passable news stories, the notion of “defamation by algorithm” is no longer the realm of science fiction. According to a panel of experts in journalism, law and social media who gathered in March at the University of Missouri’s Reynolds Journalism Institute, this uncharted territory needs to be charted — and quickly.

Moderated by constitutional law expert Lyrissa Lidsky and part of a larger, all-day symposium covering issues where law, journalism and social media converge, the panel’s discussion came at a time when

Dominion Voting Systems and Fox News were engaged in a high-profile defamation lawsuit; at the same time, the U.S. Supreme Court considered whether to weaken Section 230, a legal shield that protects social media companies from assuming liability for user posts.

The panel’s focus zeroed in more narrowly on the question of whether ChatGPT, a language model that continues to make headlines for its ability to convincingly reproduce all kinds of written items, can produce defamatory speech. Frank LoMonte, Counsel for CNN and a longtime press freedom advocate, tried to boil things down early on.

“Think of it in the same way as commissioning a piece from a freelance writer,” LoMonte said. “If a freelance writer was widely known to produce inaccurate stories, and I commissioned a story from them, then I am liable.”

New legal frontiers

But others argued that machine learning and algorithms are too multifaceted to pin down with the freelancer metaphor. James Daire, associate director of legal for online review site Yelp, noted that the company fended off a libel lawsuit in 2016 that would have held Yelp

accountable for its aggregation of user-generated ratings.

It wasn't the first lawsuit of its kind. In 2013, TripAdvisor defeated a similar claim that its algorithmically generated list of America's "dirtiest" hotels — based on user ratings of cleanliness — constituted defamation.

Despite these outcomes, Daire is concerned that the country's courts don't have a nuanced understanding of the processes by which computers generate everything from top ten lists to readable — but sometimes error-ridden — news articles.

"I don't think a lot of the courts have a good handle on what an algorithm is," Daire said. "It's really just a shortcut if you think about it. There isn't really anything inherently 'speech-y' about the algorithm itself."

One way that lawmakers have begun attempting to close that knowledge gap is by pushing for "algorithm audits" that would force businesses to analyze their algorithms for issues like racial or socioeconomic bias and report on the results. Jasmine McNealy, an associate professor at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications, said these audits could be a mixed blessing.

"If you're doing what you're supposed to do, seeing biases and figuring out how you could mitigate some of them, then that report could start to be used as evidence of, 'are you entertaining doubts about your system, and are you fixing them?'" McNealy said. "In the Dominion case, we're looking at emails. An algorithmic audit could

say the same thing. 'This is only giving us 60% of what we want, and we want it to get better. This isn't where we want it to be, but we're going to keep using it.' Could that possibly be used as evidence of liability? I think so."

For now, however, the question of liability is still emerging. LoMonte pointed out that so far, the Supreme Court is proceeding cautiously in establishing long-term precedents for technology that continues to change rapidly, putting the onus on news organizations and social media companies to avoid the pitfalls of tools that might be as risky as they are promising.

"The more that ChatGPT's faults are known, the more organizations publish from it at their own peril," LoMonte said.

More than AI

In addition to the machine learning and social media panel, two additional panels covered the topic of evolutions in defamation law from the perspectives of the journalism industry and law, respectively.

Moderated by LoMonte, the journalism-focused panel pondered the implications of any rollbacks of the so-called Sullivan standard, which requires public officials to prove that a defamatory statement was made with "actual malice."

In the nearly 60 years since the standard was established in landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *NY Times v. Sullivan*, it has been extended to a broader range

of people known as public figures, a distinction that is increasingly vague in an era when viral digital media and social media influencers can attract followings overnight that rival those of Hollywood celebrities.

"Oftentimes working in journalism, you have cease and desist letters coming from powerful people," said Eriq Gardner, founding partner and national correspondent at Puck. "Usually, reporters go ahead and publish anyway, but I think [if Sullivan were rolled back] there would be some reflection on whether that is wise."

Setting the record straight

The panel also took the opportunity to correct some misconceptions about journalists, such as the notion that anonymous sources are used frequently or irresponsibly by mainstream news outlets.

"The journalist who does the story knows who the person is, and in most cases, there is someone else who also knows their identity," said Rod Hicks, director of ethics and diversity at the Society of Professional Journalists. "Everywhere I've worked, anonymous sources are an absolute last resort."

TO LEARN MORE, ACCESS THE FULL RECORDING OF THE SYMPOSIUM HERE:



bit.ly/43BGfmC

“If you’re an editor, search the word disabled on your own website. You might be shocked with how few results come back.”

How we start building access for disabled journalists

AS A DISABLED freelance journalist, my identity is never all that far from the surface. For example, my Twitter bio begins with the words, “crippled and creative.” Most of my professional bios online end with the sentence, “John’s goal in life is to have an entertaining obituary to read.” To put it bluntly, you get what you pay for: A fairly loud (yet anxious) multiply-disabled writer who didn’t go to journalism school and is still recovering from the workaholic tendencies that enveloped most of his twenties.

What does this have to do with this column? For one, I’m a Canadian whose clients are mostly American; I’m a former athlete and artist, two identities that I think the wider journalism industry can learn a heck of a lot from; and lastly, I’m a person who has done everything he can do to not have a staff job post-student media. I’m interested

in how we can innovate, how we can support each other and how we can create access.

The root of the problem

Like it or not, our industry has an incredible bias against disabled reporters, and depending on who you ask, we constitute close to a fifth of all reporters. A recent British report puts the number of UK disabled journalists at between 14-16%. If anecdotal evidence is anything to go by, because we don’t have reliable data, that number is as high in North America, where research suggests 26% of Americans are disabled.

We are often confined not to our adaptive devices, but to a little proverbial corner with the words “trauma op-eds” scrawled on the wall behind us.

We have to be given control over our own stories before we can

begin to make a dent in stories we can tell about others. And this lack of progress creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. I get frustrated when I see disabled journalists who haven’t been given any room to grow. They write about their lived experience, never getting to do broader reporting — let alone the kind of work we need more of in the world — because they’re being slapped with the same label as so many other marginalized journalists: they’re being told that they can’t be activists and journalists.

But we have to be activists in order to get into these spaces and jobs. I well and truly lucked into this work at the beginning. I happened to sit down next to my campus paper’s editor-in-chief on my first day of university. I happened to be given the space to publish some truly cringy stuff that you can still find on the internet. I happened to



be supported in figuring out what my very disability-forward writing, interviewing and editing style was. One of the goals of this column is to provide opportunities for skill building so that you can provide, or find your way into, a safe space as well. It's not easy work, it's messy, but it can be a space for joy.

Good journalism about and/or by disabled people, no matter the beat, has to be rooted in solutions journalism. It doesn't have to be a super obvious call to action, and it doesn't have to be the daily news version of ramming down the door. Small increments can create huge change.

So, what can you do?

Lest I sound like someone on a very unsteady soapbox, not least because I'm an ambulatory wheelchair user with less balance than most, here's some actionable

advice — whether you're a disabled journalist or not:

Familiarize yourself with the National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ) guidelines. They will give you a sense of how the language around disability is changing. Also, look at your house style guide. Is it outdated when it comes to disability? If so, ask yourself what role you can have in updating it.

Make a point of finding stories by disabled journalists in your area. Ask around; we're often hiding in plain sight. If you're a disabled journalist and you think you have a fairly good grasp of who is out there, focus on another country or a beat/niche you rarely engage with.

If you're an editor, search the word disabled on your own website. You might be shocked with how few results come back.

Examine your remote working

policy. Many disabled people rely on the flexibility they provide, especially if they don't have the institutional backing to ask for formal accommodations.

Lastly, share how you think you can increase access to disabled staff and freelancers in your own journalistic sphere.

I'm biased, but I truly believe there is a disability angle to any story that crosses a news desk. We need to learn to see those angles with more regularity and assign people to them who have put in the work to know how to report on these stories equitably.

John Loeppky is an RJI columnist who explores issues that focus on journalism innovation through the lens of disability and freelancing.



POY80

PICTURES OF THE YEAR

PICTURES OF THE YEAR International's 80th competition saw judges review more than 35,000 images and photo stories submitted from all over the world.

A renowned RJI program, POY made history this year as San Francisco Chronicle photographer Gabrielle Lurie won Local Photographer of the Year for the third consecutive year — the first ever to do so.

The award for International Photographer of the Year went to Danish documentary photographer Mads Nissen, whose portfolio represented stories from Ukraine, Afghanistan and the war on cocaine in Colombia.

The war in Ukraine played a prominent part in POY this year, with several categories geared specifically toward its coverage. The categories covered the news of the war but also focused on images of

daily life that demonstrated resilience during the conflict.

And in yet another new addition, the first-ever prize for Team Picture Story of the Year went to the Associated Press, whose submission to the premier category featured the work of 11 photojournalists covering the war in Ukraine.

About POY

POY is the oldest, most prestigious photojournalism program and competition in the world. Created in 1944 at the Missouri School of Journalism, it has since evolved into an international competition with more than 40,000 entries annually.

**FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF THE WINNERS
AND A GALLERY OF THEIR WORK,
FOLLOW THE QR CODE**



poy.org/80/

Niclas Hammerström

Expressen newspaper
War in Ukraine: Daily Life, First Place

Nike, 50, proudly shows off her wedding dress to Kristina and Alexei at the military base. Nike married a few months ago to Alexander, 47, who is also a soldier. They live together on base in Piskey, Ukraine.



Louie Palu

National Geographic Magazine
World Understanding Award Winner

“Distant Early Warning”

A U.S. Marine, training in through-the-ice recovery in Norway, attempts to pull himself and his backpack from the frigid waters while wearing skis on Jan. 24, 2020. Beginning in 2017, the U.S. began training forces in cold weather conditions in reaction to Russia's growing militarization in the Arctic and actions in Ukraine.

Corey Arnold

National Geographic Magazine
Science & Natural History, First Place

A large black bear often sleeps underneath an abandoned house in a residential neighborhood in South Lake Tahoe, California. Local Bear Expert Toogee Seilch, a volunteer for Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, helps track and evict bears that have denned down under houses and on people's property.

This bear was captured via a camera trap as he exited the crawlspace shortly after dark. He/she sat at the entrance for 20-30 minutes, getting scared by the flashes, then backing back into the crawlspace before leaving.



Gabrielle Lurie

San Francisco Chronicle
Local Photographer of the Year

Junchang Tan washes his daughter Winnie Tan's, 8, hair in their SRO (single room occupancy) in Chinatown in San Francisco on Monday, April 11, 2022. Winnie's parents don't let her shower in the shared showers of their building, so he washes her hair for her regularly. She loves the time they spend together and the head rubs.



Partnership with URL Media helps BIPOC outlets show impact to advertisers

A JOINT RESEARCH project between RJI and URL Media seeks to better understand how media from Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) engage with their audiences and measure the value of that engagement.

By investigating and developing new metrics to quantify the depth of engagement BIPOC media outlets have with their communities, this partnership is looking past traditional media-buying metrics that are rooted in scale. That means, perhaps, disrupting traditional pricing models more favorable to national media and organizations driven by less diverse stakeholders — models that depend on quantifying page views, unique visitors or CPMs (cost per thousand impressions an ad receives).

It's an approach URL Media calls "currency of impact."

"Impact investing means advertisers are not only pouring their dollars into scale and reach, but into outlets that significantly resource and represent the diverse voices of their respective communities," said Melanie Figueiredo, URL Media Vice President for Ad Sales and Sponsorships. "The feedback we receive from our users — the gratitude — is unparalleled in the mainstream media marketplace. We organically produce a loyal media consumer who is also empowered



Melanie Figueiredo



Saadia Khan

by the media they are consuming."

URL Media, a network of 18 high-performing Black and Brown media outlets across the U.S., launched two years ago in the wake of 2020's protests over racialized violence and police brutality. It boasts a diversified revenue model consisting of advertising, philanthropy and inclusive talent development services and seeks to achieve scale without sacrificing the trust and intimacy of local, community media.

To that end, URL Media interviewed seven of their partner media organizations: Documented, Epicenter-NYC, Haitian Times, Immigrantly, Native News, PushBlack and WURD-FM. All PushBlack and WURD-FM. All rely on "traditional" metrics from

programs such as Google Analytics, Chartbeat, Parse.ly, Nielsen and others, but they all also cited news and information being distributed beyond websites and platforms as a way to reach their communities.

Ultimately, the insights gleaned from these conversations, alongside further research and development throughout the year, will enable the creation of adoptable resources including guides, a white paper and webinars. The project will provide a model and metrics to calculate a given outlet's social and economic footprint in the communities it serves through — for example — service journalism, giving media organizations a practical and useful tool to engage audiences on their own terms.

“We know that emotional connections to companies fuel consumer habits.”

— Michelle Figueiredo, URL Media

The uphill scale game

Already, some common issues among these news outlets have come to the surface, including a shared sense of frustration at needing to prove themselves over and over, despite the trusted relationships at the core of their journalism. Also mentioned was having to accept smaller contracts just to get a foot in the door and over-delivering in the hope of bigger renewals.

On the flip side, the fragility of these audiences keeps everyone on their toes. Nothing is taken for granted, and oftentimes, the push to renew or retain a client starts right away. There is drive, hustle, a constant keeping and tallying of receipts.

That’s not to romanticize any of it. Saadia Khan, the founder of a podcast called Immigrantly, has had ad deals from brands as large as the National Hockey League and Bank of Montreal. She has a loyal audience and recently launched a second podcast, Invisible Hate. But many advertisers have a threshold of 50,000 downloads before they will consider sponsorship of a podcast. She doesn’t have that. Yet.

“We were below the minimum threshold,” Khan said, lamenting

one advertiser she could not land. “But that to me is shortsighted. Our demographic is very young, a lot of second-gen kids. They don’t have a strong affiliation with a particular product or a brand. They don’t go back five generations. The conversion rate is higher with our audience. But advertisers don’t see that.”

Indeed, scale does not necessarily account for much when looking into the deep relationship with communities that partner organizations of URL Media share. And the premise of the network is that advertisers do not have to choose between the two. In pitches with clients, Figueiredo touts the trust between BIPOC media and communities and how the power of collaboration has grown URL Media’s collective audience to more than 11 million users.

“When brands direct funds to programmatic buys over direct sponsorships, those same brands miss out on building an emotional connection with audiences,” Figueiredo said. “We know that emotional connections to companies fuel consumer habits. We know that representation in ads and brand marketing affect spending.”

A deeper relationship with clients

The Haitian Times described a back-and-forth, almost iterative approach to advertising. Audience Engagement Director Cherrell Angervil said the outlet, for example, might tell a client that their messaging won’t resonate or that they need to ensure photography is diverse.

“They see our impact in the community and they want to renew their contract with us,” Angervil said. “Advertisers are more patient with us. One month we might come in below and the next is skyrocket high. They are understanding.”

Similarly, WURD-FM president Sara Lomax noted that when she first started running the radio station in 2010, it was her deep relationships with key corporate leaders in Philadelphia that got her in the door.

“This impact conversation cannot be devoid of personal relationships,” she said, adding that a person of color in the C-suite can be transformative on spending with BIPOC media. “Relationships may get you a shot, but then you have to show and prove.”

Digital screens grow audience, build new revenue streams

IF YOUR AUDIENCE won't come to you, maybe it's time to think about going to your audience. That's one of the guiding principles for a new pilot project from RJI, Dynasty Media and Minnesota Digital.

The project, which builds on a successful experiment at the Minneapolis Spokesman-Recorder last year, involves using digital screens strategically located throughout St. Louis that will offer news and information along with advertising messages.

"Our goal is to give Black media a bigger voice and some type of competitive advantage in the larger mass communication landscape," said David Beckford, Creative Director, and Founder of Dynasty Media.

As the audience for printed products continues to slowly decline, black-owned newspaper publishers have struggled to transition their readers to digital products, Beckford said. Trying a different strategy just makes sense, he added.

That different approach worked well for The Spokesman-Recorder, which used 10 screens throughout the city to display news, event information and advertising. The project generated more than \$65,000 in advertising and sponsorship revenue in the first six months.

St. Louis will have at least a dozen screens in restaurants, office buildings and coffee shops. Harris Stowe University, the well-known Annie Malone Children's Home and two NAACP offices have also requested to join the network.

The monthly combined in-person audience is projected to exceed 100,000 visitors in various building



Paul Bird, co-founder, Minnesota Digital and Tracey Williams-Dillard, CEO and Publisher of The Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder at the Spokesman-Recorder office in S. Minneapolis.

lobbies, offices, and other locations where screens will be operating up to 16 hours daily, Beckford said.

That's not all: Instead of limiting the content to one publisher, as was the case with the Spokesman-Recorder's successful effort, Dynasty Media is also creating a coalition of area publishers who can supply unique content and benefit from the revenue generated.

Installation of the screens began earlier this year and the network was expected to go live in June.

Dynasty Media Agency connects the all-important digital revenue dots between BIPOC Publishers and the audiences they serve with various cutting-edge opportunities including media buys over 10 to 25 publishing platforms that feature direct lead generation on a national scale.

Learn more: youtu.be/vTO1dgHIZ70
Visit: dynastymediaagency.com

Minnesota Digital, a technology-forward company, based in Minneapolis, that is the nation's leader in creating ad-supported indoor digital newsboard networks.

Walter Pritchard is a communications specialist and accomplished writer with



more than 35 years of experience in journalism, public relations, advertising, nonprofit and sports marketing, and public elementary education as a teacher.

RANDY PICHT, RJI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INTERVIEWS DAVID BECKFORD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER OF DYNASTY MEDIA



[YOUTUBE/H-RX7HGWPCK](https://youtu.be/H-RX7HGWPCK)

Where are they now

Christopher Guess is harnessing machine learning to improve fact checks

CHRISTOPHER GUESS used his 2017-18 RJI Fellowship to improve Push, a mobile app designed to allow local newsrooms to present their work online with a level of polish and usability traditionally confined to larger news outlets.

Now, as the lead technologist at the Duke Reporters' Lab, his focus is on identifying and correcting false information in news media. Still, his emphasis on helping smaller news organizations keep up with technological innovation in the industry continues to be front and center.

Read on as Guess discusses how projects like the lab's Tech & Check Cooperative give newsrooms the tools they need to succeed in an age of widespread digital misinformation.

How did your time at RJI inform your current work at the Duke Reporters' Lab?

The Push app gave me a deep insight into how small newsrooms function — especially what they can and can't do. That's important because most fact-checking organizations in the world actually qualify as small organizations. They're not the New York Times or Glenn Kessler at the Washington Post; it's more four people in an office in Warsaw running a small-time fact-checking network and trying to do their best. If we want to use fact checks that are made worldwide by these organizations, we need to figure out how to basically do a lot of the work for them.



Is the Reporters' Lab using machine-learning models in the fight against misinformation?

Yes! We have had some quite interesting successes with things like listening to a politician's speech and being able to automatically extract the fact-checkable claims to see if they have already been fact checked. That can be used to automatically refute false statements as quickly as possible — it can happen in less than a second.

I'm also working on some theories that using the underlying representations that large language models are built on, we may be able to group and identify emerging disinformation campaigns, even if we don't know who is running them.

Convincing some people that fact checks are reliable and accurate can be a challenge.

We have absolutely thought about that. If you search something on Google and see a fact check come up, that is a direct result of the standard that I and the team at Duke helped create in collaboration with Google and other fact-checking and tech organizations. That can increase the visibility of fact checks, and there has been work showing that the sooner a correction or fact check is shown after someone is exposed to a piece of misinformation, the less likely it is for the misinformation to set in.

READ MORE ABOUT THE FREE RESOURCES PROVIDED BY THE DUKE REPORTERS' LAB HERE



reporterslab.org/tech-and-check