



DIGITAL PROGRESS, ONE NEWSROOM AT A TIME

In Eldon, Missouri, Missouri School of Journalism junior Genevieve Smith helped transform The Advertiser's newsletters — tripling subscribers and adding a stronger community voice — during a one-week placement through RJI's Potter Digital Ambassadors program. The initiative, funded by Missouri alumnus Walter B. Potter Jr., MA '81, embeds students in local newsrooms to strengthen digital strategy, expand audience engagement, and explore new

revenue paths. Publisher Trevor Vernon, who oversees six papers in the region, said Smith's upgrades "moved us ahead light years." For news organizations stretched thin, the students offer cutting-edge skills — and fresh energy. "I used to push back," Vernon added. "Now I just say, 'Let's try it.'" The program underscores RJI's commitment to sustaining local news by investing in innovation — and the next generation. Photo: Nate Brown



A big leap for AI in journalism from small-town Missouri

RJI Fellows: New tools for smarter, stronger journalism

Tackling the climate crisis through collaboration

Note from the Director

Randy Picht
RJI Executive Director



WELCOME TO THE SUMMER 2025 EDITION OF RJI INSIGHT. There is no cicada invasion this year, but there are plenty of other challenges facing small community news organizations, and this issue will introduce you to a variety of ideas and ready-to-use resources to make life easier for you, your staff and your audience. And you never know — you just might find yourself inspired to do some innovating of your own.

Inside, you'll find a refreshing story about small-town AI innovation with a look at Rust Communications, a family-owned network of news outlets in Missouri that is making waves with an advanced content management system powered by PubGen AI (pp. 10–13).

For those looking for targeted solutions to specific challenges, look no further than the work of our 2024-2025 RJI Fellows (pp. 14–16), who built free and open-source resources like a toolkit for turning data into sound and a curriculum designed to bolster journalists' algorithmic literacy. And don't forget that the newest class of Fellows is only just getting started; stay tuned as they test and iterate on a whole new set of practical resources.

The Fellows aren't the only ones producing open-source solutions: Find out what this year's winners of the annual Student Innovation Competition came up with to address the problem of news avoidance and earn a \$10,000 prize (p. 4).

Of course, innovation is about much more than technology, and we're also tackling critical industry challenges through collaboration. The newly launched Climate News Task Force brings together 12 highly motivated news organizations to develop new ways to support climate journalism nationwide (p. 18).

And as the news desert crisis continues, take a moment to consider the important differences between "citizen journalism" and the rising trend of volunteer journalism (p. 8). Could the latter be a viable way to keep local news alive in small communities that have run out of options?

Speaking of keeping news alive, columnist Dorian Benkoil has a few ideas if you're in search of new revenue streams (pp. 22–23).

Whether the resources and strategies within these pages are a perfect fit for your needs or the spark that ignites your own ambitious project, there is something here for you and your news organization — something actionable, cost-effective and realistic.

With that in mind, enjoy this issue of RJI Insight, and if you have an idea you're interested in bringing to life through collaboration, send us an email:



rji@rjionline.org

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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

Kimberly Griffin, Ashlyn Lipori-Russie and Alicia Ramirez are the judges for the 2025 RJI Student Innovation Competition. The three chatted with Kat Duncan while Travis McMillen, far left, prepared to record their discussion on the merits of the top three teams.

Photo: Nate Brown



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RJI Executive Director
Randy Picht

Editor
Austin Fitzgerald

Designer
Lamar Henderson

Contributors

Dorian Benkoil, Nate Brown, Kat Duncan, Emily Lytle, Matt MacVey, Nick Mathews, Travis McMillen, Sriya Reddy, Joanie Straub

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Reynolds Journalism Institute
University of Missouri

Innovation in Focus

Four ways to break down large revenue goals into short-term experiments

RJI's Innovation in Focus explores new tech, tools and methods of storytelling for newsrooms worldwide. The team interviews experts, tests ideas and provides findings to help media organizations.



OVER ONE MONTH, more than 20 newsrooms participated in a two-week revenue and fundraising experiment designed to show that short-term tests can deliver valuable lessons, community impact, and increased revenue—without the need for extensive funding or lengthy preparation.

The experiments fell into four groups:

1. **Perks for donating:** Testing creative incentives to encourage donations or subscriptions.
2. **Creative ways to say thank you:** Exploring new methods to acknowledge donors and deepen relationships.
3. **Targeting specific audience segments:** Using segmented email campaigns to tailor donation appeals.
4. **Registry-style donation pages:** Offering donors the chance to contribute to specific causes or items.

What we learned across all cohorts

A surprising takeaway was how receptive audiences were to donation requests. Engagement was higher than expected, with few unsubscribes—even when multiple appeals were made in one month. Each newsroom adapted experiments to fit their unique goals, yielding valuable insights.

Perks for donating

Campaigns offering incentives like T-shirts, tote bags, coffee, or vintage magazines raised between \$1,500 and \$5,000. These perks not only boosted donations but also increased brand awareness.

For example, Minnesota Women's Press surveyed donors and found strong interest in tote bags and online discussions on social issues, plans they aim to implement.

At Sioux Falls Simplified, Megan Raposa tested Instagram donor

conversion by offering perks based on donation level. She raised \$3,000 from 44 donors, many opting for the \$60 tote bag level—equivalent to an annual subscription.

At LOOKOUT, a provocative T-shirt campaign responding to hateful reader mail raised nearly \$7,000 and supported local trans advocacy, showing how values-driven campaigns can galvanize community support.

Creative ways to say thank you

While perks are impactful, some newsrooms focused on strengthening donor relationships.

Eugene Weekly hosted an open house event to engage members personally.

The Chicago Reader held a special evening for top donors and “Best of Chicago” winners at a local business, fostering connection and prompting additional gifts—even without direct asks.

Tradeoffs sent thank-you notes and stickers, sparking appreciative responses and further engagement.

Targeting specific audience segments

Segmented email campaigns helped newsrooms identify where their fundraising messages landed best.

At Spotlight Delaware, Matt Sullivan discovered most donors personally knew or recognized him, inspiring a new strategy to target community influencers.

PublicSource noted a high email open rate with zero unsubscribes among over 4,000 recipients, encouraging repeat appeals.

At the Poynter Institute, Jamese Branch's segmented ask raised \$4,500, mostly from highly engaged subscribers. However, scaling the ask to the full audience revealed diverse donor personas, highlighting the need for tailored messaging rather than one-size-fits-all.

Hechinger Report tested converting one-time donors to recurring monthly supporters. While monthly conversions were low, some one-time donors upgraded to annual gifts. Future plans include A/B testing different language for better results.

Registry-style donation pages

This cohort tested pages where donors could fund specific items, from “a cup of coffee with a source” to “camera equipment” and “legal fund.”

While initial conversions were modest, click data offered clues. For example, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism found “help us make videos” and “coffee with a source” were popular click options, even if donations were slow.

Tradeoffs sent thank-you notes and some stickers to show appreciation and build a deeper relationship with donors. Kathryn Dugal at Tradeoffs said she received some messages from donors that they appreciated this new outreach



At Sioux Falls Simplified, Megan Raposa wanted to see how many Instagram users she could convert to donors. She ran a two-week experiment asking folks to make a one-time contribution in exchange for a choice of perks depending on their contribution: a cup of coffee at a local shop or a SFSimplified tote bag. She ultimately had 44 people donate for a total of \$3,000 profit, excluding the \$150-\$200 in expenses.

India Currents tried two distinct wish lists but lacked enough data to determine which items attracted donors most. Several newsrooms noted that success here requires more focused marketing to drive traffic.

Why short-term experiments matter

Whether raising \$5,000 or a few one-time donations, every newsroom found value in breaking large revenue goals into manageable steps. These quick sprints sparked

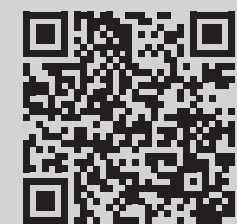
fresh ideas, improved messaging, and revealed new opportunities for audience engagement.

What's next?

Have an idea for a short-term revenue or fundraising experiment? This inaugural round of Mini Revenue Experiments proved the power of testing in small bursts—and we want your input.

Email Emily Lytle at lytle@rjionline.org to share your ideas.

CURIOUS TO HEAR MORE ABOUT THESE EXPERIMENTS? SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH A SHORT VIDEO WITH EMILY LYTLE, WHO LED THE COLLABORATION WITH 20+ NEWSROOMS ON THESE REVENUE EXPERIMENTS



bit.ly/minirevenueexperiments



RJI News in Brief



RJI Student Competition spurs real-world innovation to combat news avoidance

THE REYNOLDS Journalism Institute is helping shape the future of journalism by turning student ideas into real-world tools for newsrooms.

The 18th annual Student Innovation Competition challenged college students to build open-source solutions that help local and community news organizations re-engage audiences who feel overwhelmed by the news. Six finalist teams tested their tools with professional news partners and pitched their results to a panel of judges.

The \$10,000 grand prize went to Columbia University's Here Today, a text-messaging service that delivers three curated news stories daily — offering a low-friction, user-friendly way to stay informed.

Second place and \$2,500 went to Flipop from the University of Southern California, which developed an AI-powered news summarizer. Rarefiers, another Columbia team, took third and \$1,000 for a Chrome extension that visually declutters digital news.

California Polytechnic State University's News AInchor won the Fan Favorite Award for its AI-generated video news briefs.

"We asked teams to create tools that help rebuild trust and reduce news fatigue," said Randy Picht, RJI executive director. "They came back with ideas that are not just innovative — they're usable right now."

The competition reflects RJI's mission to support practical solutions that serve both journalists and the public — especially at the local level.

TO VIEW THE FULL LIST OF FINALISTS AND THEIR PRESENTATIONS, SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT RJI'S WEBSITE



bit.ly/studentcompetition2025

Browser extension verifies trustworthy news sites

THE TRUST.TXT SYSTEM has quietly helped a network of media publishers establish mutual trust by their association with other reliable publishers since 2018. The system fosters collaboration between news organizations and state press associations and can help search engines distinguish trustworthy news from misinformation or disinformation.

Until now, the system — which received early funding from RJI — has largely operated behind the scenes as an internal industry tool rather than a public-facing resource. Now, a new browser extension can detect the trust.txt files that indicate a news website is trustworthy and bestow the website with a publicly visible badge, much like the icons browsers use to indicate websites are secure.

Scott Yates, founder of Trust.txt and JournalList — the latter a network of about 3,000 participating publishers, already far more than the 110 sported in 2022 — said the value of the system and its badge comes from its crowdsourced approach to trust.

"This isn't like Google providing a badge that says Google approves of



this Google transaction," Yates said. "This is saying, 'someone else trusts me, and you can trust that it's true because of this badge.'"

The badge and browser extension were made possible by the work of Christian Paquin, a Microsoft engineer who had been working on an unrelated "origin of content framework" that similarly allowed people to list content they created or approved of. Upon learning of Trust.txt, he helped modify the system to not only verify that websites were part of a trusted network of news organizations but to extend that capability to associated social media pages, essentially creating an automated auditing system with an informative, public-facing utility.

TO LEARN MORE, FOLLOW THE QR CODE



bit.ly/trusttxt

Leah Becerra to oversee Knight-funded digital support service

LEAH BECERRA, formerly the senior digital editor at the Boston Globe, has joined RJI as the product director for the Knight Foundation-funded initiative that will help news organizations with their digital transformations.

In this role, Becerra will oversee the project, which will be designed to provide a range of digital help to newsrooms — from case studies and scorecards to consultants and companies that can be hired for hands-on, project-by-project work. It will also mark Becerra's return to her alma mater, the Missouri School of Journalism.

The Knight Foundation is providing \$2.5 million over three years to build the comprehensive service. In addition to RJI, the Local Media Consortium (LMC) will be working on the initiative and has already started matching some newsrooms with consultants to get some individual projects launched. As point person for the effort, Becerra will be coordinating the strategies to ensure all resources are available to newsrooms of all different sizes and types.

"The impact we're looking to have on the industry is on a specific area of journalism that I love, which is digital audience strategy," Becerra said. "I've been in so many different newsroom settings that I have a unique point of view in terms



Leah Becerra

of what small newsrooms, large newsrooms and digital startups are looking for."

At the Boston Globe, Becerra transformed the newspaper's push alert strategy as app editor before being promoted to senior digital editor, where she supervised a 24/7 digital news desk and launched a refreshed app for the publication last year.

In addition, she previously held the position of digital and audience engagement editor at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard, overseeing the foundation's digital strategy and assisting its Nieman Reports and Nieman Storyboard publications.

Keep an eye on rjionline.org to learn more as the project progresses.

Association of Gun Violence Reporters launches

JOURNALISTS COVERING gun violence now have a new support system: the Association of Gun Violence Reporters (AGVR), a membership organization providing training, tools and community. AGVR is currently recruiting new members.

AGVR emerged from the work of 2019-2020 RJI Fellow Jim MacMillan. It's the third journalism organization that can trace its roots back to RJI, along with LION Publishers, a network of local, independent news organizations formed in 2012, and Trusting News, an organization that helps newsrooms build stronger relationships with their communities.

McMillan used his time as a Fellow to host the Better Gun

Violence Reporting Summit and launch The Philadelphia Center for Gun Violence Reporting. The latter has incubated AGVR, which will now operate as a sister organization.

AGVR's stated goals include helping reporters and editors center survivor voices and lived experience in their reporting, build relationships with communities most affected by gun violence, use trauma-aware and public health-informed practices, and stay current on gun violence legislation, litigation and research.

MacMillan visited RJI last year for a panel about these very topics, during which he screened a documentary — "The Second Trauma" — about the ways news

coverage of gun violence can negatively impact victims and their families. He described the challenge of overcoming generational differences in newsrooms and cultural divides that can cleave journalists and their communities apart during traumatic events.

"There is a small number [of journalists], maybe 20 percent, who say, 'I've been looking for this for so long — how do I get involved?'" MacMillan said at the time. "Most of the people say, 'It's complicated, we're not sure.' Then there's a slice that says, 'Jim, we observe and report, people don't understand what we do.'"

AGVR is a key part of the effort to close that "understanding gap."

Could a four-day workweek help local newsrooms?

BURNOUT IS ONE OF the biggest threats facing journalism, and there is growing interest from newsroom leaders to address it via creative scheduling — specifically, the four-day workweek.

At a March RJI workshop, broadcast newsroom managers from across the country gathered to explore what that flexibility could look like in practice. The focus: transitioning to four-day, ten-hour shifts as a way to improve retention, reduce burnout, and build stronger teams.

For some, the idea seemed out of reach—until they heard from leaders already making it work.

"I was skeptical—very skeptical," said Kelly Hicks of Nexstar Media Group. "But this gave me language to help persuade a leader. I feel very

prepared to have this conversation."

RJI's workshop didn't just pitch a theory—it gave newsroom leaders practical tools and space to model what a reimagined schedule could look like. Participants worked with coaches, reviewed staffing data, and built mock four-day newsroom plans. Importantly, they also discussed how to communicate the new approach to their bosses.

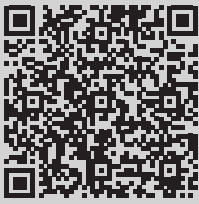
Mikel Lauber, news director at Gray Media's KOLN/KGIN in Nebraska, has implemented four-day weeks in three stations over 15 years. His advice: "The four-day week shouldn't just be a perk. Use it as an incentive. You'll be surprised what people are willing to take on in exchange for that extra day."

For many attendees, the workshop

turned an abstract idea into an actionable strategy. As one participant put it, "We spend so much time reacting. This gave us time to think, to imagine what healthier journalism could be."

RJI will continue to track and support these experiments as part of its mission to help newsrooms build a more sustainable — and human — future.

HEAR FROM MIKEL LAUBER ON THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION BENEFITS OF THE FOUR-DAY WEEK—AND HOW TO GET STARTED



bit.ly/rji4dayweek

Trio honored for support of visual journalism

THREE MEMBERS OF the staff and faculty at RJI and the Missouri School of Journalism have won top awards from the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) recognizing their efforts to support visual journalism.

Jackie Bell, co-director of RJI's College Photographer of the Year competition and a professor of photojournalism at the School of Journalism, won the Mentorship Award for her guidance of students and young visual journalists in 25 years at the school.

"With CPOY, the mentoring has kind of gone on steroids because I feel like a teacher to kids around the world," Bell said. "That's kind of strange, because I'm not their

teacher, but I feel like their entry into CPOY has helped educate them."

Marie D. De Jesús, director of RJI's Pictures of the Year (POY) competition and co-director of CPOY, earned the Distinguished Service Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the NPPA from staff members and volunteers.

De Jesús served as president of the NPPA from 2022-2024 and previously served as the organization's national secretary beginning in 2018.

"It was great to come in and re-energize the members and the leadership and give NPPA a shift in who we were as an association," said De Jesús.



Marie D. De Jesús

Kat Duncan, director of innovation at RJI, was honored with the Innovation Award, which celebrates those who help develop new technologies or strategies to support the field of visual journalism. Duncan oversees the RJI Fellowship program and other initiatives centered around creative solutions to industry challenges, including those facing visual journalism.

"I think visual departments often feel a little overlooked in innovation and experimentation, and helping them make the space to try new ideas is really exciting," Duncan said. "I've tried really hard to work with photo staff and freelancers to help them realize that they can also create new ways to tell stories."



Kat Duncan



RJI is hitting the road!

Catch RJI staff at these conferences — let's connect, collaborate and talk journalism innovation

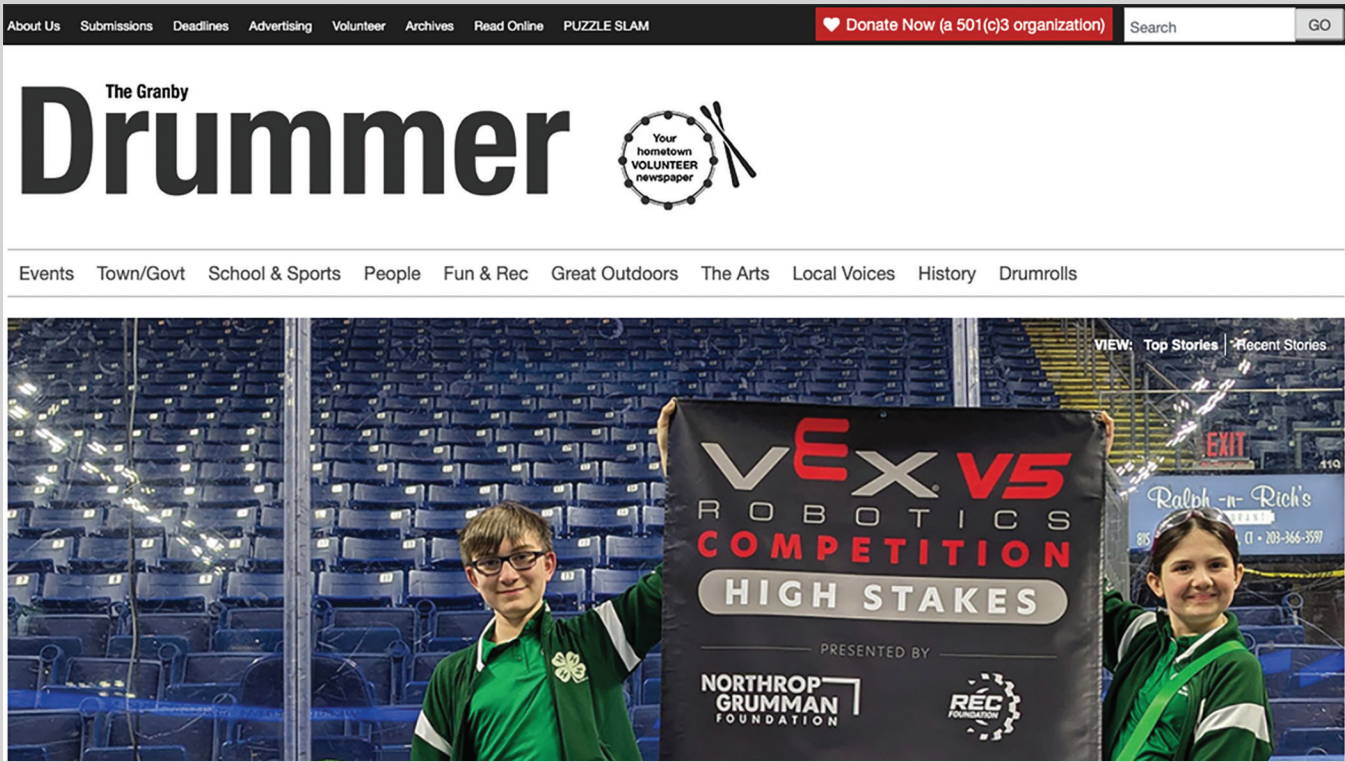
NABJ | Aug. 6-10
LION | Sept. 3-5
ONA | Sept. 10-13
Radically Rural | Oct. 7-9
IPI | Oct. 22-26

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RJI Research Focus

The rise of volunteer journalism



Homepage of the Granby Drummer, a volunteer, non-profit newspaper serving Granby, Connecticut

THE RURAL TOWN OF Almena, Kansas — home to fewer than 400 people — sits less than 10 miles from the Nebraska border, roughly halfway between Kansas City and Denver. Of the 19,000 incorporated places in the United States, nearly 18,000, including Almena, have populations under 25,000. And that doesn't even account for countless unincorporated communities that dot the rural landscape.

Almena is small. But so are thousands of other Almenas, scattered across the country and around the world.

In 1990, the weekly newspaper Almena Plaindealer folded when its owner, Helmi Moody, could not find a buyer. Four years later, a group of residents stepped in, launching

the Prairie Dog Press — a publication proudly bearing the phrase “community volunteer newspaper” on its masthead. Written and produced by volunteers from Almena, about Almena, and for Almena, it has endured — marking its 30th anniversary last year.

Similarly, in rural Connecticut, The Granby Drummer proclaims itself as an “all-volunteer, non-profit newspaper.” And in a rural community in Denmark, the HornePosten has printed quarterly since 1973 and terms the publication as “sogneblad,” which translates into “parish magazine,” or community magazine.

These are just three examples of volunteer journalism worldwide. No central organization connects them, no industry association tracks them. We

do not know how many exist. Unlike commercial news outlets, which are typically part of regional or national associations, these news organizations remain largely uncharted.

While their journalism may be untracked and unpaid, it is by no means unimportant. This is precisely why a team of researchers — me included — sought to investigate this largely unknown group.

Two questions perhaps rise. What exactly is volunteer journalism? And: Should journalism — given its importance to communities, democracy and society — be left in the hands of volunteers?

It's important to highlight three critical elements that go beyond the simple absence of compensation to journalists. While the news

products varied — from weekly newsletters to monthly newspapers to quarterly magazines — the central thread was volunteerism.

First, volunteer journalism is defined by a sustained commitment to an organization, distinguishing it from other forms of uncompensated journalism, such as citizen journalism. Citizen journalists typically capture a moment or news event, often working independently and sharing content on social media or digital platforms.

Second, volunteer journalism is characterized by the creation, curation and circulation of news and information. Unlike other forms of content that are designed to persuade or influence, volunteer journalism focuses on sharing factual content with their communities. This aligns volunteer journalism more closely with the norms and objectives of traditional news organizations.

Third, volunteer journalism centers on serving the broader community rather than focusing on advocacy or specific topics or issues, prioritizing providing news and information that reflects the interests and needs of the entire community.

To be sure, serving their community was the driving force behind the volunteer journalists interviewed in the research project. As one participant put it, “I don't need to get paid for doing this. It's simply part of what I do for my community.”

Study participants were driven by a strong sense of duty to address their

community's need for news and information — a need often heightened by the closure of local newspapers, as seen in Almena, Kansas.

In another example, a volunteer in a rural New England community saw a similar void after the closure of a longtime local weekly

In 1990, the weekly newspaper Almena Plaindealer folded when its owner, Helmi Moody, could not find a buyer. Four years later, a group of residents stepped in, launching the Prairie Dog Press — a publication proudly bearing the phrase “community volunteer newspaper” on its masthead. Written and produced by volunteers from Almena, about Almena, and for Almena, it has endured — marking its 30th anniversary last year.

newspaper and started a new volunteer publication.

“People had been missing the paper for six months,” the study participant said. “We were saying, ‘There's enough interest here to support (us). We're going to do this.’”

Taking the lead, the volunteer gathered a group of about 15 residents — mostly friends and family — to produce the first edition of a four-page weekly newspaper. Over the past five years, the volunteer team has expanded to as many as 50 people, with roles

including news gathering, proof-reading and distribution.

Would we all love for every community to fund professional journalism? Of course.

Would we all also prefer every community to have professional fire departments? Absolutely. But the reality is, many do not. Around 65% of fire departments in the United States are volunteer run.

Many of the Almenas of the world lack the services that other communities take for granted. According to a recent study from Northwestern University, roughly 225 counties in the United States lack a local news organization.

In these communities, some may believe it is heartening — not dismissible — that volunteers step up to provide news and information when no one else will. These volunteer journalists' dedication can be seen as a powerful testament to the value of journalism.

Nick Mathews is an assistant professor of journalism who specializes in local news and the economics of journalism. His research examines the everyday impact of limited access to news and the economic, technological and societal forces reshaping the field.





A wall inside the Southeast Missourian's offices showcases the newspaper's values

A big leap for AI in journalism from small-town Missouri

SMALL, COMMUNITY-FOCUSED news organizations all over the country continue to deal with aging hardware, staffing constraints and economic realities that make experimentation difficult, and the rise of AI threatens to push them further behind the curve. At the same time, many of the country's largest news organizations have acknowledged the need to invest in AI but have proceeded cautiously, keeping much of their experimentation out of public view.

Public-facing AI innovation, then, has largely remained in the domain of Silicon Valley, as was the case during the advent of the internet —

an example many in the industry point to as a cautionary tale in which news organizations were unaccountably slow to embrace the next frontier of media.

But more than 2,000 miles away from Silicon Valley in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, a family-owned network of news outlets seems determined to prove that it isn't too late for local journalism to take charge of its digital destiny.

Rust Communications encompasses 15 newspapers across five states, though most are located in Missouri. Almost all of them, from the Town Courier in rural Blytheville, Arkansas, to the flagship Southeast Missourian

in Cape Girardeau, now use a content management system (CMS) that one might expect to find at a high-powered national media conglomerate.

In many respects, this CMS is all-in on artificial intelligence. AI tools can generate headline suggestions, produce accurate summaries and ensure that all elements of a given story are SEO-friendly. Others can analyze a journalist's notes and spot an important angle that even an experienced reporter missed in their write-up. Still others can generate illustrative images, determine which article would be best to feature on the homepage or scan an outlet's news

archives to learn the stylistic and grammatical rules it needs to follow.

Many news outlets have taken bits and pieces of these capabilities and attempted to gently massage them into their workflows. Rust Communications' CMS does them all, it does them well, and it's all powered by PubGen.AI, a system built by a sister company to its newspapers. In the first three months after Rust launched the CMS across its newspaper network, the publications saw an average 30-45% lift in online traffic. Digital-only subscriptions have grown in a range from 16-37%.



Jon K. Rust, president of Rust Communications

"The performance of this CMS is ridiculously high compared to what's out there in the industry," said Jon K. Rust, president of Rust Communications. "It's all created to use AI in the most positive way because it's tuned to journalism."

Readers would be forgiven for dismissing Rust's optimism as a marketing pitch — indeed, now that the CMS has been rolled out to the company's newsrooms, it is also being sold to news organizations —

but this reporter was given firsthand demonstrations of its capabilities, and "compared to what's out there," the difference is stark.

Image generation, for example, is not the comedy of errors that anyone who has tried to "engineer" an image prompt will be familiar with. The various forms of SEO and drafting assistance flow together seamlessly and swiftly, without the need to switch back and forth between a smorgasbord of tools from different sources. (For now, the only exception is a third-party tool for crafting page layouts, though that task, too, will eventually become integrated into the CMS.)

But perhaps most impressively of all, even the network's most grizzled veterans of news writing and editing are not put off by thematic suggestions from their robot helper, an editing tool staff affectionately call "Eddie" (Its public-facing version is a conversational chatbot that appears as a pop-up on the Southeast Missourian's website).

Rick Fahr, editor of the Southeast Missourian, is one such staffer. Aside from being a veteran in two senses — he has served as a columnist, editor and publisher over the course of three decades in the business, and he served on two tours of military duty overseas following 9/11 — he is also verifiably grizzled: Like a hard-nosed baseball player from the 1920's, he spits tobacco juice into an ever-present water bottle that sits by his computer as he puts together each day's edition. But when it comes to AI, he is ready to leave the dead-ball era.

"I have a reporter out there who used to be editor of the paper, so he's been doing this for 30 years

just like I have," Fahr said. "Even he finds Eddie useful, because he'll write a story and think he has a good handle on it, but it'll give him a suggestion and he'll say, 'You know, I didn't even think about that.' I didn't have any resistance from reporters thinking that this could replace them as a reporter. It's there to make sure they don't miss anything."

Fahr said the system does more than check for missing pieces of the story — it also alerts reporters when a story displays more nuanced biases or blind spots that result in the omission of an important perspective.



Rick Fahr, editor of the Southeast Missourian

Fahr emphasized that the CMS's utility as an assistant for reporters is more than just a parroting of the party line for an industry that doesn't want to spook its journalists. It has demonstrated real value for one of community journalism's most enduring challenges: making the most of the available talent in markets that typically see young professionals move on after a few years.

“Their interviewing skills might not be where we would like for them to be,” he said. “This thing is really good at generating interview questions. And every now and then, when we’re between reporters at, say, our little newspaper in Marble Hill, Missouri, the publisher can use this tool to fill in some of the gaps.”

That striking combination of small-town news and sophisticated technology reflects a rare combination of flavors: The family ownership, once almost ubiquitous, that has declined in the industry as local news deserts have expanded, paired with the deep pockets more typical of a mass media company.

But for Jon Rust, there is no juxtaposition — only a consistent dedication to the Cape Girardeau community and other small Midwestern towns. And lest it be said that he doesn’t walk the walk, he still lives in an apartment above the flagship newspaper’s offices.

“We really want local media to survive and to succeed because that will help communities thrive,” Rust said. “Local media has always played a role in helping to create community identity and reflect it. We’re missing that in a lot of places in this country right now.”

The community and family-focused ethic also imbues the company with built-in longevity. Gary Rust, who founded the company in 1967, died in January, exactly three years and one day after the death of his son and Rust Communications co-president Rex Rust. That another son of the family patriarch still runs the company is only a hint of the depth in the family’s ranks.

In fact, it’s the third generation that has led the AI charge. Sho Rust, Gary’s grandson, left a successful career in Los Angeles as design lead for Boston Consulting Group’s Digital Ventures — in addition to learning to deploy generative AI for eight years and, previously, working on computer effects and promotional campaigns for the blockbuster Marvel film, “The Avengers” — and returned to Cape Girardeau to found PubGen.

His return to his roots has informed his view on what AI can do in a community-centered setting.



Sho Rust

“I realized the legacy of a newspaper isn’t just my grandfather or the newspaper itself, it’s all the stories that are in there, too,” Sho Rust said. “It’s almost like a museum of the stories and history of this community. I very much wanted to be a part of that.”

That sentiment became quite literal in the context of PubGen. While the AI has been fed specific rules and information to guide its operation, much of the context it

draws from has been gathered from integrating the archives into the AI, sometimes to the surprise of Fahr and his reporters.

“I had a new reporter here use Eddie to help with a story about the upcoming Christmas parade, and when they turned the story in, there was historical information about the grand marshals of the parade,” Fahr said. “I thought it was really interesting, and it wasn’t information that we would have had in a normal parade preview. Come to find out it was all true, and we wouldn’t have known about it if Eddie didn’t have all that archival material at its fingertips. I can tell such a difference in the depth of contextual information that we just didn’t have before.”

The Rusts see another, more indirect benefit, given that human editors are necessary to ensure any errors introduced by the AI don’t make it into the final article. They believe the importance placed on these editors in the drafting process will make content better in an age when a 24-hour news cycle, industry-wide staffing shortages and an over-reliance on automated editing have produced an evident laxity in proofreading standards in the name of speedy production.

“The quality of content just becomes so much more important in the age of AI,” said Sho Rust, noting that the influence of the archives on PubGen has added further impetus for Rust newsrooms to ensure they publish content with a consistent level of polish. “A lot of our newsrooms are going through a kind of cleaning process.”

Of course, “content” is a word with many meanings in the digital world; for the Southeast

Missourian, it includes a conversational AI chatbot that takes the form of a pop-up window both on the newspaper’s homepage and on article pages. As aforementioned, it is essentially the public-facing version of Eddie, but instead of advising reporters, it helps audiences with questions about articles or community issues.

Jon Rust has already seen the chatbot make a difference — he

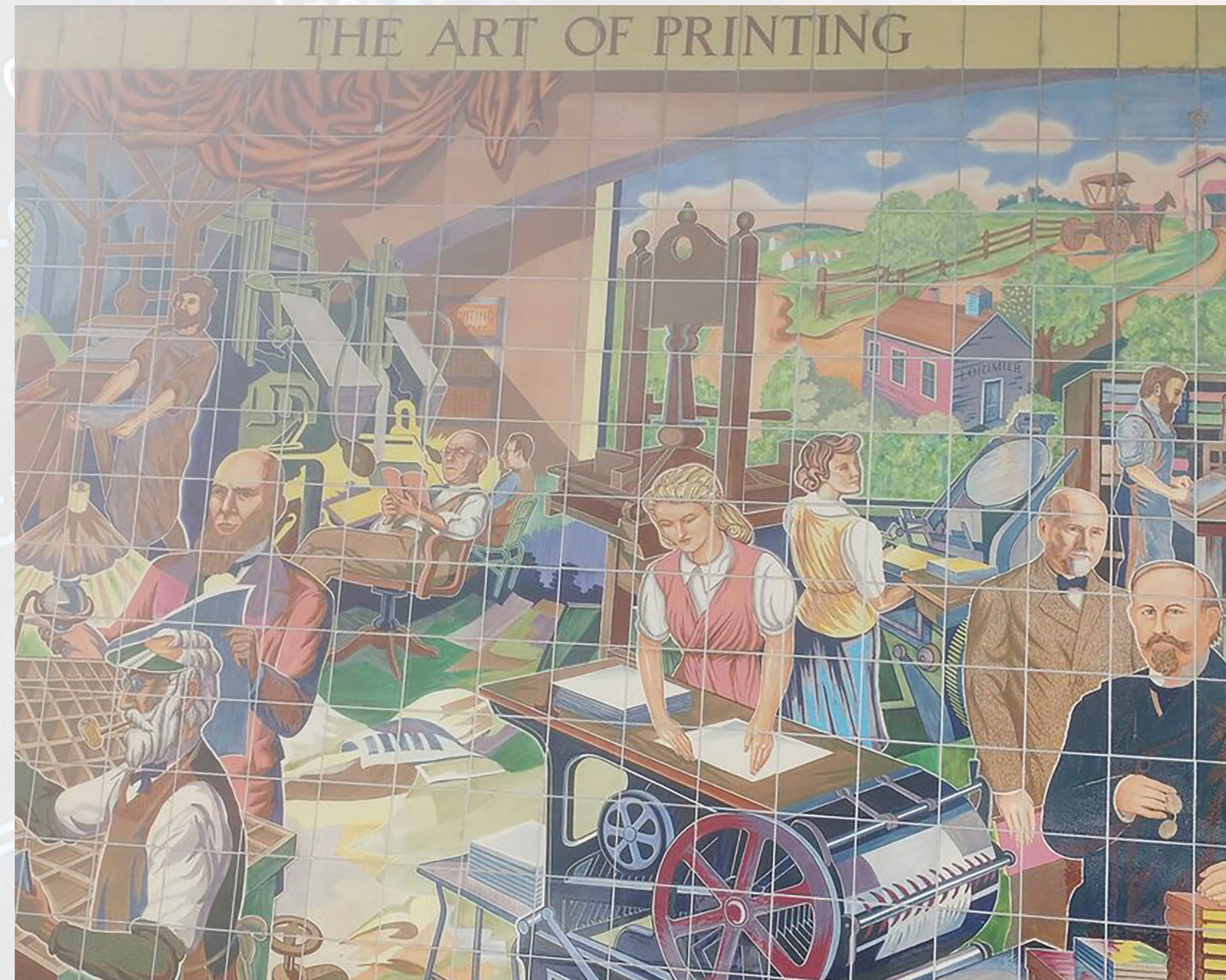
recalls a local chamber of commerce meeting about a proposed hike in water rates, during which community members said they didn’t have enough information to make a decision. He pointed them to the chatbot, which listed recent stories — and analysis — about the issue.

Another popular prompt is “local implications,” which summarizes why a given story should matter to a local resident.

That’s fitting for a company, and a family, that has built its news brand on the power of “local implications.” Just as fitting is the way Sho Rust, once again a local resident himself, sees the future of AI, the future of Rust Communications and the future of close-knit community life in much the same light.

“I’m not going to let the torch die on my watch,” he said.

A mural on the exterior of the Southeast Missourian’s 100-year-old office building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The mural depicts the history of printing in Cape Girardeau.



New tools for smarter, stronger journalism

FROM DATA SONIFICATION to helping journalists understand algorithms in the age of AI, the 2024-2025 RJI Fellows built and tested free, open-source projects to assist news organizations in reaching and engaging audiences successfully and ethically.

“These are free resources that newsrooms can put to use without having to buy a bunch of subscriptions and software,” said Randy Picht, executive director of RJI. “That’s a big deal for news organizations that are already short on time and money.”

The projects not only addressed challenges the Fellows were facing as journalists and news managers but included resources and informative articles to help other newsrooms adapt the projects to solve similar issues.

Turn news consumption into a two-way interaction

Zoli Csernatony and Dana Amihere built DigInThere, a tool that gives newsrooms an automated and verifiable way to reward their audiences for meaningful reading and interaction through short, customizable quizzes on news content.

“We know we live in a society of skimmers — you swipe left, you swipe right, you swipe up because you get tired of things,” Amihere said. “This is trying to be an answer to how we get readers to stick with our content; not only to stick with it through the end but to actually take in what it meant.”



Zoli Csernatony

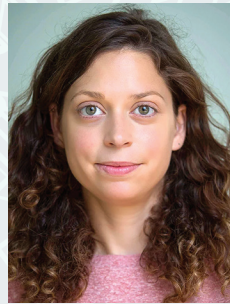


Dana Amihere

Build a visual strategy without hiring a whole team

Michelle Kanaar and Alyssa Schukar created the Visual Journalism Toolkit for local newsrooms. The toolkit includes databases, sample contracts, ethical guidelines and stock resources, which information to include for assignments, and examples of opportunities for using visuals to promote newsroom engagement and fundraising.

“Studies show that images impact emotions faster and more powerfully than words, in that stories with visuals garner 94% more total views,” Kanaar said. “Unfortunately, many local news organizations lack dedicated visual staff.”



Michelle Kanaar



Alyssa Schukar

Help freelancers build a sustainable business

Katherine Reynolds Lewis built a freelancing quick-start guide that lays out the essentials for turning freelance work into a sustainable career, including pricing, pitching and financial planning. In this guide you learn the key insights, challenges and decision points in building a freelance business model.

“The goal of this guide is to shorten the timeframe from launching a freelance business to reaching sustainability, so that freelancing becomes a more viable path for journalists,” Lewis said. “As of 2021, according to Pew Research Center, 34% of journalists were freelance, and we suspect that number has only grown since then.”



Katherine Reynolds Lewis

Make your article page work as hard as your homepage

Alex Partida built the Article-as-Homepage toolkit for independent local news publishers to help them rethink the article page to better serve today’s readers and drive engagement. The system of design helps you present reporting in rich, multimedia formats, provide audiences with the utility once held in homepages, and include pathways to collect first party data and encourage conversions to deeper forms of support.

“With only about 17% of our traffic [at Partida’s employer, The Salt Lake Tribune] coming from our homepage, we quickly realized that optimizing the article page is going to be incredibly important for audience engagement and the business as a whole,” Partida said.



Alex Partida

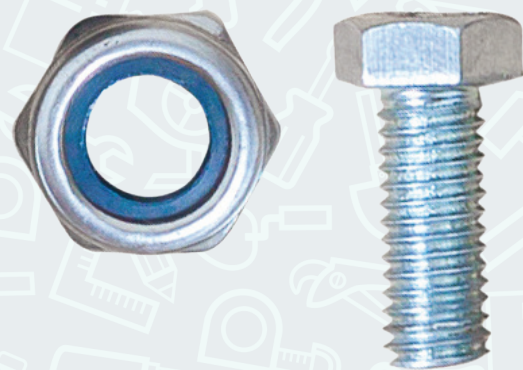
Train your team in algorithmic literacy

Andy Lee Roth built Algorithmic Literacy for Journalists, which offers a curriculum and resources to help develop journalists’ ability to understand the functions, consequences, and ethics of algorithms in a digital age. A core focus of the project was to help independent journalists and newsrooms whose digital content has been subject to shadowbanning, demonetization, and other forms of online speech filtering that restrict them from reaching a wider audience.

“Algorithms are the essential building blocks for a host of AI systems that are revolutionizing news,” Roth said. “Every news worker, regardless of their specialty, needs some degree of algorithmic literacy for the ability to understand and critically evaluate algorithmic systems.”



Andy Lee Roth





Use sound to make data hit home

Aura (Auralee) Walmer built the Data Sonification Toolkit for applying data sonification — the process of turning data into sound and music — to journalism. It contains step-by-step guidance for creating data sonification projects and a wide array of resources to do so.

“This method presents a perfect opportunity to make data journalism more accessible and emotionally impactful,” Walmer said, stressing that sonification doesn’t have to be as technically complex as it might sound. “If you’re interviewing folks and you have that recorded content, that’s something wonderful that you can include in your sonification. It doesn’t have to be this purely tool-based output.”



Aura (Auralee) Walmer

Fix the gaps in your organization before they break you

Kate Myers created Excellence.is, a self-assessment tool that helps newsroom leaders improve strategic operations by identifying needs and gaps in their current structure and process.

“I wanted to help leaders shore up their organization by really helping them prevent the worst failures and address the biggest operational pain points,” Myers said. “I know from unfortunate, painful experience that when operations fail, everything else tends to fall apart as well.”

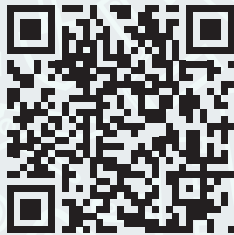


Kate Myers

Get started

Want a guided walkthrough? Contact RJI Impact Producer Matt MacVey at macvey@rjionline.org.

Want to see these tools in action? Scan the QR code to watch the Fellows’ webinar presentations.



bit.ly/2024-2025-fellows-presentations



Meet the 2025-2026 RJI Fellows

AS THE PROJECTS from last year’s Fellows establish themselves in the community news ecosystem, a new cohort of innovators have come aboard, developing solutions ranging from developing a platform to make journalism funding opportunities more accessible to a suite of tools for utilization by newsrooms with nontraditional models of structure, employment, policies and more.

The Fellows

SARAH BLESENER and **JENNIFER JACKLIN-STRATTON** will create an open-source toolkit designed to equip independent journalists and local newsrooms with tools and frameworks for ethical reporting on trauma’s aftermath.



TARA FRANCIS CHAN will build tools that support newsrooms with nontraditional structures, processes, and policies as well as amplify their best practices to the journalism industry at large.



CARA KUHLMAN, founder of Future Tides — which covers how people work, play and live on the Pacific Northwest’s waterways — will build a digital guidebook to help newsrooms engage in walking tours as a medium for local journalism.



NICOLE LEWIS and **LAM VO** will build a resource to help local journalists boost civic engagement by developing and implementing a strategy that better equips journalists to make decisions about who they most need to reach and how.



REBECCA RITZEL will develop a slate of online resources, including a state-by-state arts grant list, ethical guidance and a template for soliciting philanthropic arts funding. As a residential fellow — the first since the 2020-2021 fellowship cohort — she will work at RJI for a full year.



SUSAN STELLIN will create the Toolkit for Reporting on Substance Use, Harm Reduction, Addiction, Treatment and Recovery to strengthen reporting on these topics as coverage shifts from a drug war framing to a more health-centered approach grounded in research and evidence.



MONICA WILLIAMS will build a searchable, one-stop platform to help U.S. newsrooms and journalists find money for reporting and journalism projects, from reporting and conference funding opportunities to foundation grants for newsrooms and journalists.



CLAUDIA YAUJAR-AMARO will create a modular, customizable immigration journalism platform that provides journalists with ready-made materials for immediate use.



Tackling the climate crisis through collaboration

RJI leads national newsroom task force

AS THE CLIMATE CRISIS intensifies, so does the demand for accurate, accessible, and engaging climate journalism. Yet the capacity to meet that demand remains uneven and under-resourced — especially among small and regional newsrooms that often sit on the frontlines of environmental reporting.

Recognizing both the need and the opportunity, the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) at the Missouri School of Journalism has launched the Climate News Task Force (CNTF), a pioneering collaboration designed to help newsrooms work smarter — together.

Launched in February 2025, CNTF brings together 12 mission-driven news organizations from across the country, including Grist, Drilled, Floodlight, High Country News, and Planet Detroit. The goal? To create tools, strategies, and shared systems that enhance the reach, sustainability, and impact of climate journalism nationwide.

“We’re excited to explore innovative possibilities that help newsrooms amplify each other’s work and operate more efficiently,” said Kat Duncan, RJI’s Director of Innovation and the lead architect behind CNTF. “We’re focused

on building solutions that small, independent newsrooms can actually use — and that make their reporting more accessible to broader audiences.”

Tools, tactics and teamwork

CNTF’s mission goes beyond simple content sharing. The task force is working toward the development of practical, open-source tools — potentially including a centralized content distribution platform — that streamline collaboration and reduce the burden on newsrooms with limited technical capacity.

Sriya Reddy, project manager for RJI’s Innovation Team, is overseeing the task force’s monthly working sessions, which surface both shared challenges and collective ideas. “We’re evaluating what’s already out there, what’s working, and where we can fill the gaps,” Reddy said. “We want to make sure every participating newsroom has a voice in shaping these solutions.”

Support for the initiative comes from a trio of philanthropic partners: the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Meliore Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation.

The project also benefits from strategic guidance by Emily Holden, founder of Floodlight, who focuses on content strategy and editorial collaboration, and Meaghan Parker, executive director of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing (CASW), who is leading fundraising and advocacy efforts to scale climate journalism through philanthropy.

“The climate crisis is the biggest story on the planet, but climate journalists can’t keep up with audience demand for credible, impactful coverage,” Holden said. “This work is about supporting journalists with the tools, partnerships, and resources they need to tell these stories at scale.”

Building on trusted partnerships

CNTF is the latest example of RJI’s long-term commitment to environmental journalism. Several task force members — including the Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk, which is housed at the Missouri School of Journalism — have collaborated with RJI before through initiatives like the Innovation in Focus series.

These relationships provide a strong foundation for trust and

“The climate crisis is the biggest story on the planet, but climate journalists can’t keep up with audience demand for credible, impactful coverage.”

— Emily Holden, Founder, Floodlight

experimentation, two key ingredients for any successful collaboration.

“This task force is an outgrowth of RJI’s mission to support community-centered journalism and help local outlets navigate a changing media landscape,” Duncan said. “It’s a direct response to the needs we’ve heard again and again from newsrooms doing vital climate work — often without the resources they deserve.”

Addressing a growing gap in coverage

The urgency of this work is underscored by sobering industry statistics. In 2023, climate coverage represented less than 1% of all major U.S. network news content. Meanwhile, only 8% of journalists surveyed said they regularly cover energy or environmental issues — compared to 28% who cover politics.

This disparity is particularly troubling given that the climate crisis intersects with virtually every beat: public health, infrastructure, agriculture, housing, equity and economics.

“To increase civic engagement and shape better policy, we must increase the volume and visibility of climate journalism,” Parker said. “But there’s a real funding gap.

Through CNTF, we’re helping identify how philanthropy can support editorially independent climate reporting at scale.”

A model for scalable collaboration

Though not currently accepting new members, the task force plans to share learnings and tools publicly. A key objective of CNTF is to develop consensus-driven recommendations that can inform and inspire similar collaborations in other areas of coverage — from health to democracy to rural affairs.

The task force represents a new model for journalism — one rooted in shared purpose, collective infrastructure, and scalable innovation.

“We’re not just talking about climate reporting,” Duncan added. “We’re rethinking how journalism can work — together — in a time of shrinking resources and rising stakes.”

To learn more, request a tool demo, or express interest in future collaborations, contact the task force at cntf@newscollaborative.org.

Climate News Task Force Members

The CNTF brings together 12 independent and mission-driven newsrooms with a strong track record of environmental and climate coverage:

- Canary Media
- Drilled
- Floodlight
- Grist
- High Country News
- Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk
- Mountain West News Bureau
- Planet Detroit
- Sentient
- Wisconsin Watch
- Mother Jones / Reveal
- The Xylom

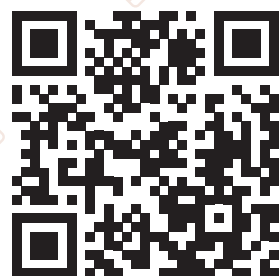
POY82

honors global photojournalism excellence

THE 82ND ANNUAL Pictures of the Year International (POY82) competition has recognized outstanding achievements in visual journalism from 2024. The competition, judged in February 2025 at the Reynolds Journalism Institute in Columbia, Missouri, celebrated the best in photojournalism across 37 categories such as news, sports, portraiture, and environmental storytelling.

“Across the different categories, the photography showed not only technical excellence but also bravery,” said Marie D. De Jesús, director of POY. “I was particularly happy to see a commitment to local stories tackling the issues that affect people in smaller neglected communities, showing dedication to bearing witness and building empathy.”

To explore the full list of winners and their work, scan the QR code.



bit.ly/poy82-winners

Olympic Action, First Place

Jerome Brouillet
Agence France-Press
“Surfing”

Brazil’s Gabriel Medina reacts after catching a large wave in the 5th heat of the men’s surfing round 3, during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, in Teahupo’o, on the French Polynesian Island of Tahiti, on July 29, 2024.



Daily Life, First Place

Matias Delacroix
Associated Press

“Fussing over a Quinceañera”
Friends and family fuss over a quinceañera in preparation for her photo session at Colon square in the Zona Colonial neighborhood of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on May 15, 2024.



Environmental Vision Award, First Place

Kiliii Yuyan, *Independent*

“Guardians of Life: Indigenous Wisdom, Indigenous Science and Restoring the Planet”

A dog team carrying hunters and narwhal mattak crosses over a crack in the sea ice on Inglefield Fjord, near Qaanaaq, Greenland, on May 24, 2023.



Sports Action, Gold

Emily Curiel

The Kansas City Star

“Patrick Mahomes’ helmet breaks”

The helmet of Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) breaks while being hit by Miami Dolphins safety DeShon Elliott (21) on a run in the third quarter Saturday, Jan. 13, 2024, at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium.

Science & Natural History — Picture Story, First Place

Ami Vitale, *National Geographic*

“Kenya’s Black Rhino Revival”

The skull of the last black rhino who once roamed here sits as the sun sets at Loisaba Conservancy in Laikipia, Kenya.





The influence of money

MONEY IS MONEY, RIGHT? When you're running a media business, not exactly.

The way a news organization earns revenue can deeply affect its operations and how it manages its business, from editorial decisions, to content presentation, to when bills can get paid.

Let's look first at advertising and subscriptions, which provide the largest shares of revenue for publishers, as shown by recent surveys.

Advertising

For a publisher, advertising can seem like "free" money. Put in an ad spot. Serve automated ads. Get cash.

But automated advertising is usually a volume game. Publishers have to create and template content to get the highest engagement. That might mean cutting articles into multiple pages to try to get more views or placing lots of ads. The user experience can suffer.

Another issue is that publishers have to wait for payment — usually a month or more after the ads appear.

That's true even for ads sold directly to sponsors. Publishers can try to negotiate to shave a few days off the pay cycle, often by working with a larger affiliated group of media organizations, such as the Local Media Consortium, RJI's partner in the Digital on Demand Services project. One more solution is to ask sponsors for some payment up front, especially for specially created sponsored sections or events.

In the current climate, I feel obligated to also note that ad revenue fluctuates according to

economic conditions. This year's uncertainties have caused advertisers to lower their planned spending. So, in sum, advertising can force a media company to do things that require more and more views, cause more interruption, require waiting for payment, and increase susceptibility to the economy's ups and downs.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions tend to be less susceptible to economic swings. Also, since publishers collect the fees up front, they have the cash in hand to pay for operations. Another advantage for subscription-based orgs can be that they usually don't have to generate as many views or listens as ad-supported media. So, no need to cut articles in half or stuff a video full of ads.

Attracting paid subscribers, though, can be tough. Subscription products have to consistently provide whatever types of content gets people to subscribe in order to get them to renew, increasing the average "lifetime value," a very important metric. That means the journalism has to stay on target, often go deeper than any competition and provide stories and assets that subscribers really want.

Affiliate marketing

Some media organizations make revenue by earning a percentage on purchases that their readers and viewers make after clicking to buy from their pages, but trustworthy publishers who go this route have to transparently manage the ethics. Most legitimate journalistic organizations disclose that they receive a percentage of sales and work to keep the review

process editorially independent.

Publishers, meanwhile, are at the mercy of their so-called "affiliate marketing" partners. Amazon has repeatedly changed the percentages they pay publishers, and the e-commerce platform offers very different amounts for different product categories.

Platforms

Many publishers today earn significant chunks of revenue from partnerships with aggregators such as Apple News or Smart News, which pay based upon how much a publisher's content is accessed by their subscribers.

The upside is that publishers can get tremendous reach. But some publishers skip the opportunity, finding that platforms like Apple News cut into their ability to sell subscriptions on their own and obscure the source of the content.

Publishers who do opt in bear the cost of preparing and maintaining feeds to match the platforms' technical requirements. They also have to accept little control over how the presentation and exposure of their content, how many ads appear, what they can link out to, data security and fees.

Publishers also have been doing deals with AI platforms looking to access content to train their language models. Such deals may not affect daily editorial operations but can influence the ability over time to attract people to a media property, especially for archived or evergreen content.

Voluntary contributions

Asking people in a community to charitably support a news

organization can work, especially for original coverage of local news or of special interest topics such as climate and the environment. Seldom do such contributions provide a majority of revenue. Foundation grants can help, too, but can come with a lot of overhead.

Side businesses

Side businesses — cafes, web or marketing consulting services, digital media training, even selling branded products — account for 15% of news orgs' revenues, according to a Reuters Institute study released in January. Those businesses can be a way to help support an operation. They're also entirely different businesses, and so require different kinds of overhead, management, and work processes. That can be a distraction, and so staying focused on managing the media business is crucial.

There are other types of revenues — selling data, gating access to paid feeds such as via APIs, licensing, and more — all of which have their own considerations. There is no one right or wrong way for a news organization to earn revenue. It is important for leaders to have some understanding of how the type of revenue can affect their operations.

Dorian Benkoil heads

Teeming Media, a thought leadership communication consultancy focused on media technology, as well as The Verticals Collective group of media company founders and operators. He teaches media business at Columbia University and CUNY/Baruch.



RJI Program Spotlight

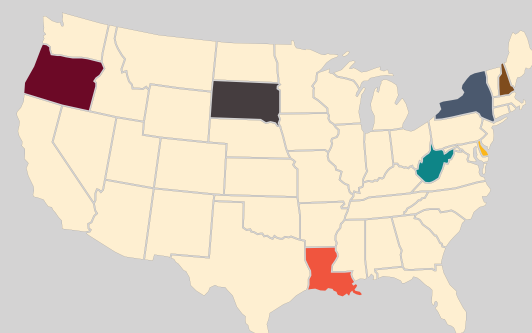
RJI Student Innovation Fellows spend summer at community news organizations across the country

FOR MANY NEWSROOMS, experimenting with innovative approaches to solving problems is less about creativity than about time and staffing — difficulties that can worsen existing disparities between large news organizations and their smaller, community-focused brethren. In response, RJI is sending seven journalism students to work at community newsrooms all over the country this summer.

Genevieve Smith, The Keene Sentinel, Keene, New Hampshire



Kalya Laire (left), Epicenter NYC, New York City



Sophie Rentschler, The Source, Bend, Oregon



Makayla Voris (left), Sioux Falls Simplified, Sioux Falls, South Dakota



Cristal Sanchez (center), Spotlight Delaware, Delaware



Sophia Anderson, WWNO and WRKF, New Orleans

Kathambari Ramkumar, Mountain State Spotlight, West Virginia



Where are they now

Something for everyone? Try everything for someone, says Victor Hernandez

VICTOR HERNANDEZ is the chief content officer for WBUR, Boston's largest NPR-member station. He is a broadcast news veteran, having held leadership roles at NBC affiliates in California and CNN's global headquarters in Atlanta, as well as at digital tech startup Banjo.

A decade ago, when the Apple Watch and Google Glass were grabbing headlines, Hernandez spent his time as an RJI Fellow examining how newsrooms could adjust to the ways audiences consumed news on wearable technology. His career has since shifted — from the west coast to the east coast, and from commercial startups to public media — but his core focus on the audience experience remains.

Can you draw a line between your 2015–2016 RJI Fellowship and your current work?

Everything we do is still largely thinking about an end user who is interacting with news and information on their smartphone. The idea that legacy platforms and broadcast news needs to evolve and change; that remains true.

After your time in the commercial sphere, has it been an adjustment reaching audiences through public media?

At WBUR, it's not the total of how many we're reaching but the



effect that we have on their lives and how they respond to that.

For us, that has really allowed a sea change in how we think about our role. We don't refer to ourselves as a radio station. We're a multi-faceted news organization that is available on a bunch of devices and screens and experiences. So it's great if we can reach as many people as possible and have something for everyone, but we've tried to flip that on its head and say, how can we be everything for someone?

What are some practical impacts of that approach?

We did a newcomer's guide to Boston, which was informed by listening to the community: What was available and what was missing? For example, helping new arrivals get started on registering their kids for school. Massachusetts has some funky laws and ordinances for school boards, depending on where you live.

And we created guides that talked about how you register to vote if you're coming from another state.

The other really popular series work we do is finding these hidden gems, like a great café a mile from you that you didn't know about. We end up talking to these so-called neighborhood mayors — the people who will take you on a guided tour and point stuff out. We had some great content over the holidays on a fiercely competitive battle here in the region, which is where you get the best hot cocoa.

People write us back and say, hey, my family and I are going to test all these places this weekend, and since it comes from WBUR, we know it's going to be good fun.

FOLLOW THE QR CODE TO CHECK OUT WBUR'S NEIGHBORHOOD FIELD GUIDE TO BOSTON



bit.ly/4jO2Ggd