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Partners of Necessity:

The Case for Collaboration in Local Investigative Reporting

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I was almost 40 years in a newsroom, 30 of those as editor, before I wrestled with a resource problem I could not solve.

In January 2008 Stephen Engelberg, managing editor for enterprise and investigative reporting, left *The Oregonian* to help Paul Steiger launch ProPublica. Tom Detzel, our investigative team leader, was on their recruitment list. Six months later, he was also New York bound.

The loss of the two investigative editors within so short a span would be a blow in any metro news organization. Preceded by the exodus of dozens of staff members in back-to-back buyouts (and with another looming), we lost much of the heft and the leadership that had been committed to our most complex investigative reporting.

Today, editors of every newspaper between 100,000 and 500,000 circulation have hit their own version of this wall. Some, in publicly traded companies that depend on Wall Street for affirmation, cut staff early, cut deep and only recently eased off, likely only temporarily as print revenue continues to decline. Others, like *The Oregonian*, blessed with private owners and ambitious-for-their-community publishers, held off longer, but still ended up at the same dismal place.

In the year since I left the newsroom, I have puzzled over how I could have preserved more of the revelatory watchdog reporting necessary for a thriving, engaged community and what today's brave editors can do differently to increase the investigative reporting capacity in their communities.

Citizens want and need the independent watch such reporting provides, not only of their government, its institutions and leaders but also of the powerful public and commercial forces that drive policy and the decisions that impact lives and pocketbooks. With government larger, more complex and more powerful than ever, the relationship between government and business interdependent and with citizen distrust of public and private institutions extraordinarily high, local and regional journalism do not produce enough accountability

reporting to fully engage and empower citizens, jeopardizing their ability to hold government, business and civic leaders accountable.

The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy articulated what happens when such watchfulness is lacking in its report in the fall of 2009: "A community without public accountability suffers from unresponsive government. Neglect is common, corruption all too plausible. Money is wasted as government officials are slow and awkward at doing what other governments do quickly and nimbly."[1]

When a Pulitzer Prize–winning investigation by the *Los Angeles Times* revealed that eight public officials in Bell, California, had illegally enriched themselves at citizens' expense — including the city manager who was paid $800,000 a year plus benefits — it inevitably raised the question why the abuses had gone undiscovered for six years. If Bell, a Southern California community of 36,000, had had regular coverage of its most basic government functions, would the abuses have been revealed sooner, saving its citizens as much as $5 million?

Steven Waldman, senior adviser to the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), who had been working on an assessment of the state of the American media for more than a year, offered his personal view of this "historic crossroads moment" at a Media Learning Seminar in February sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation: "Actually a lot of the media landscape is fantastic. It's vibrant. There are parts of the media landscape that are more vibrant than they've ever been," he said, referring to news on the community neighborhood level and other areas where the field has been enriched by new players rather than drained by digital disruption. "So the problems are not a broad problem with information. It's not a problem with news. I would say it's not even a problem with journalism. It's really a very specific problem. It's a problem with local, full-time, professional accountability journalism. That's the nut of where the problem is."[2]

The sprouting of more than 50 investigative news sites in the last four years has nurtured hope that they will fill the substantial gaps in accountability reporting. Today, however, most of these budding local online investigative sites, largely reliant on foundation funding, are one grant

cycle away from hitting their own version of the wall. Some are taking root, many others will not.

Anyone who thinks there's an easy rescue in sight for rebuilding local investigative reporting capacity is wrong. Newspapers, traditionally the source of most investigative coverage in communities, will not be able to restaff newsrooms robustly and, more likely, will face additional cuts; no new business model is within reach; many of the new online local sites are not sustainable in their current form and no evidence suggests government will step in to help fund journalism in the public interest. Given those circumstances, what can change this picture?

Growing evidence suggests that collaborations and partnerships between new and established news organizations, universities and foundations may be the overlooked key for investigative journalism to thrive at the local and state levels. These partnerships, variously and often loosely organized, can share responsibility for content creation, generate wider distribution of stories and spread the substantial cost of accountability journalism.

Today's editors — digital, print and broadcast — are transitional leaders charged with bridging the gap between 20th-century media and today's communications revolution. As such they must determine how their scarce resources can foster distinctive original investigative reporting and whether new tools and new approaches can tap into what New York University journalism professor Clay Shirky has identified as a vast "cognitive surplus" in communities. Can they partner with each other, with universities and with interested citizens and use their institutional capabilities and reputation to actually expand the capacity of accountability reporting in their communities? It is not a challenge for the faint of heart.

The rationale for collaboration

With the ongoing shrinkage of revenue, once strong regional newspapers have fewer than half the reporters and editors they once did. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* in 2000 had a staff of 535. Today it has 225. Likewise, *The Seattle Times* had 450; today it stands at 200. *The Oregonian*'s

news staff was 440; today it is 225. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* is today at about 300, down from 650.

Between 2006 and 2009, annual editorial spending at newspapers was cut by one-third, $1.6 billion. Television news staffs are down by half, and the number of all-news radio stations is about half what it was.[3]

Shirky believes that regional journalists are "trapped inside a burning building." His belief that cultural and practical changes in newsrooms could improve journalists' jobs and their work drives his passion for experimentation and collaboration.

Crisis makes groups rethink. "One happy byproduct of the collapse of the business model is that people are more humble and willing to try new things," the FCC's Waldman says. "The developing relationships are symbiotic."[4]

Yochai Benkler, co-director of Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, is a leading thinker on collaboration and information production. The origins of his research lie in the Internet, but the implications go well beyond. "It turns out that we are creative, social beings; we do what we think is fun, not only what is profitable; we do what we think is right and good, not only what we think advances our interests; and we are able to organize ourselves, even at very large scales, into coherent social enterprises," Benkler wrote in reference to Wikipedia on its 10th anniversary.[5]

Local and regional investigative reporting has yet to reap much of the benefit of these shifts toward collaboration and social production evident in many information endeavors.

Journalists remain deeply skeptical of collaboration with other professionals — much less nonprofessionals — in the field of investigative reporting in part because the old heroic model of the lone reporter still dominates newsrooms. But it is not only the lone reporter – by legend highly specialized, highly secretive, territorial and tenacious beyond description — who can produce effective investigative reporting. In many circumstances, small groups of variously talented people can bring specific skills to a project to enhance its conception and execution.

Beyond that, there's evidence that ad hoc but carefully constructed teams actually can increase investigative capacity.

Some investigative reporting partnerships already launched exist primarily for story creation, some primarily serve to expand distribution and others are formed for funding, to spread the financial burden. In the end, those that are motivated by all three needs are those most likely to be sustained.

Like Benkler, Shirky sees partnerships as a natural, necessary and evolutionary shift from one class of institutions, primarily newspapers, to an ecosystem of investigative efforts. This is where "we have to situate the need of our society for accountability," he argues. "The question then becomes, which institutions have the greatest capacity for sustaining investigative journalism?" Shirky doesn't think it's time to settle on specific models. "The next step needs to be vast and varied experimentation, not the transfer of allegiance from one institution to another."[6]

Shirky's collaborative model, applicable to investigative reporting, relies on a non- hierarchical network with a small number of contributors, tightly aligned on the mission of the project. The group will be defined by interest (there by choice), ability to contribute (skill set that will benefit the network), independence coupled with mutual reliance (must have trusting ties to each other for success) and benefit derived (for some it will be organizational, for others the personal satisfaction of contributing to worthwhile work).[7]

Benkler believes the editors of traditional news organizations who are willing to be creative and imaginative are best positioned to lead these new efforts. The beginning of these partnerships is really just telling a story everyone understands, he says. "You need me, I need you..." The traditional newspaper editors have the visibility and the clearest, direct need because of the market's impact on their newsrooms.[8]

Despite the battering daily newspapers have taken, they still carry enough institutional power and reach to move an audience to action on core civic concerns. But as local media markets

continue to shift and splinter, newspaper editors have only limited time to imprint their brand as *the* investigative source before the others in this new media world do so.

Leaders of local investigative reporting — whether from newspapers, public broadcasting, universities or new nonprofit journalism outlets — who can form effective and independent partnerships for the most complex journalistic work, be generous in promoting those partnerships and effective in sustaining them, will be the winners.

Where collaboration is working

"*All models are wrong, some models are useful."*
---George Box, Professor Emeritus of Statistics at the University of Wisconsin

ProPublica

In the middle of the busiest financial district in the world, on the puzzle of narrow intersecting streets and tall buildings that is lower Broadway in Manhattan, the elevators open at the 23rd floor of a modern office building. What could be space for another investment firm is instead one of the most ambitious newsrooms in the country. Welcome to ProPublica, the nonprofit investigative news site founded three years ago by Paul Steiger, former managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, and initially funded with a $30 million commitment from Herbert and Marion Sandler, who made their fortune in mortgage lending.

Stephen Engelberg, the managing editor, greets me. He is smiling broadly, a smile of accomplishment I know well. I congratulate him on the publication that morning of the first part of "Dollars for Docs," an investigative series on the pharmaceutical industry that Engelberg calls "our five-way play date."[9]

I've known Steve for more than 30 years. His first reporting job out of college was at *The Virginian-Pilot* in Norfolk, where I worked and was later editor. I recruited and hired him at *The Oregonian* in 2002 as a managing editor. He is fiercely competitive. "Five-way play date" is not a

phrase I have ever heard him utter. It is a reference to ProPublica's five partners on this "Dollars for Docs."

His editor's note that morning pitched the story as "part of a broader effort to expand the possibilities of collaborative journalism." ProPublica has partnered with *The Chicago Tribune*, the *Boston Globe*, *Consumer Reports*, National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcast Service's (PBS) *Nightly News Report*, all of whom had a hand in the stories and are going with their own versions that day. Engelberg's note also invites "every medical patient in the country to join this investigation."[10]

When ProPublica is talked about in regional newsrooms, it is with a mix of admiration and envy. "Give me $30 million and a single mission and I could do something too," is a typical reaction. And when it is written about, it is most often in the context of the largess of the Sandlers or, more recently, as the biggest and most successful of the new wave of independent investigative reporting news sites not weighted down with history and printing presses and delivery trucks or television cameras. It is in such a new and different category it is easy to overlook that it may be leading the way not because of its digital home, or its awards (including two Pulitzer Prizes), but because it is increasingly a model of how newsrooms should produce investigative reporting.

In the beginning, Steiger and Engelberg imagined ProPublica publishing its own original investigations and leveraging distribution of the best stories by partnering with another outlet, national or local, print or broadcast. ProPublica would benefit because the partners' self interest would ensure prominent play of the report.[11] ProPublica, like most of the rest of media, would be a retailer of investigative reporting. But experience has changed that model. Now it is also a beneficent wholesaler, giving away its data and methodology. It is not only partnering for publication or broadcast, it is creating databases and asking others to use and improve them. It no longer merely summarizes its reporting for a story, now it is increasing capacity by setting up conference calls with professional journalists and bloggers (as many as 100 people on one 90-minute call) that function as seminars on particular story methodologies. And it is not just

asking the public for comments on stories; instead, it is enlisting people who have expertise or interest to report, keep the story alive, and take it further. Parts of ProPublica's data base of payments to 17,000 doctors and its reporting have been used by more than 60 news outlets to produce their own local stories in the months since the project's release.[12]

"We have come to embrace this as part of what we do," Steiger said. Story generation now often is dependent on a web of linked partners, markedly different from the historical straight line story production model of reporter plus time equals story.

All of the lessons from ProPublica are adaptable on a local level and don't require $30 million. Leaders of local investigative projects can provide their digital tools to citizens or those interested in taking their reporting forward and use the feedback to refine the tools, they can enlist various local news outlets to do different aspects of complex projects, and they can teach, offering virtual or community college training in data base research and other skills.

The FCC's Waldman believes partnerships are the necessary next step in preserving local investigative reporting. "I agree that partnerships tend to have an idealistic ring to them, but the cold reality is that partnerships are essential to making sure that investigative and beat reporting actually get done. It's not a question of why we can't partner."[13]

It's not economical for commercial media to devote the requisite resources for labor intensive investigations or even beat reporting, which at the state level has been cut more than a third during a time period when state budgets have doubled. And many of the nonprofits, according to Waldman, "are doing good work but not many people are seeing it."

Rocky Mountain Investigative News Network (I-News)

That was exactly what Laura Frank assumed when she started Rocky Mountain Investigative News Network (I-News) after her employer The Rocky Mountain News was shuttered with 24-hours notice by the E.W. Scripps Company in February 2009.

Even before the presses shut down, Frank was already imagining how she might help sustain in-depth reporting in Colorado if she lost her job.[14]

Laura Frank is not easily ruffled or deterred. She looks the part of the attractive, super-organized suburban mom that she also is. She conceived the creation of I-News expansively as an in-depth news service for all of Colorado, yet executes her plan methodically with a strong sense of service. One senses she doesn't often stumble and can recover and adapt quickly. Her approach may give I-News the advantage it will need to be one of the local investigative sites that will survive.

John Temple, former editor and publisher of the Rocky Mountain News and now founding editor of Peer News, an online local news site in Honolulu, agreed to serve on the board of directors of I-News because of his confidence in Frank. "Laura has real credibility as an investigative reporter and as a teacher. She had a real reputation for integrity and being a hard worker and accomplishing different tasks as a journalist. She is a doer and that's really important because she had to go out and convince people to give her money."[15]

"Free content." That's the lure Frank offered on a sign in a makeshift display at the Colorado Press Association meeting in early in 2010. Her bait was a multi-media series on campus sexual assault she had coordinated with the Center for Public Integrity. She was offering it to Colorado news outlets and pitching her ideas for more free content coming their way. She promised considerable time invested in each story, a rarity in most newsrooms, and the skills and expert use of data she had developed over a 20-year career.[16]

That same weekend she got word that her proposal had won a $100,000 start-up grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation. With that in hand, she set out to visit every newsroom in Colorado, promising them eight multi-media projects over the coming year, figuring that's how much journalism $100,000 would buy if she worked relentlessly and used freelancers judiciously. The benefit to the news outlets of free regional in-depth content was clear. She was candid with the editors that if I-News proved its worth in the first year she expected they would financially commit to help keep it going.

She had already made some crucial decisions: I-News would be a subscription service rather than selling its stories one by one, so the time and paperwork required to pitch and bill stories

individually wouldn't dilute her efforts; she would not try to make I-News a destination site, instead relying on the successful distribution of her 20 Colorado partners, and she would tailor stories for each market's needs; she would build the trust of partners through the quality of journalism she provided and a commitment to expand investigative reporting capacity in Colorado by offering training in database research and other skills to journalists and other nonprofits that might have a need for their own data base tools and skills.

Frank started with partnership at the core of what she was doing and has stayed focused on that; she doesn't see herself as competing with legacy media but rather telling stories that aren't being told because of time demands or skills slippage. She has an entrepreneur's spirit and is nothing if not flexible, seeming to have a plan for every contingency.

I-News reports have shown how Colorado's medical marijuana laws inadvertently have helped feed the supply of illegal street sales of the drug. Most recently, I-News analyzed 10 years of airline safely reports in Colorado and found more concerns reported in the last year than in the previous five years combined.

The work produced by the site in its first months spurred the editor of *The Gazette* in Colorado Springs to put $10,000 in his 2011 budget for I-News. That promise, in turn, encouraged Frank to advance her timeline to moving to a pay model. Now she is making the newsroom rounds again and expects to build to an annual partner revenue stream of $200,000 over the next several years. Her partner subscriptions come in three flavors (and pricing levels): stories only, stories plus training for partner newsrooms, stories plus training plus commitment to work directly with a newsroom on its own project.

She also plans on future revenue from corporate sponsorships as well as a journalism boot camp for high school students I-News will begin offering this year and expanded training and sales of data services.

Still, she knows she only has so much runway to get I-News aloft before the foundation funding runs out. She's one year into a three-year funding cycle, with the largest support from the

Knight Foundation. She pays herself the same as the two full-time reporters she has hired — $50,000 — a fraction of what they made previously, and gets office space and administrative support from Rocky Mountain PBS, one of her partners.

Greg Moore, the editor of *The Denver Post*, was taken aback last month when he first realized that Frank was expecting financial support from the *Post* for I-News. But then she pointed out to him (and his investigative reporting editor confirmed) how much I-News reporters have worked with *Post* reporters on a complex data analysis of agricultural tax breaks and the eight I-News stories or collaborative stories done by I-News and *Post* reporters that had been published on his front page in the last year.[17] Now he has agreed to pay I-News $40,000 a year.

Most important to Moore is that his investigative team, formed last year with six reporters and one editor, sees great value in working with Frank and her crew. It adds expertise they don't have and Frank's willingness to work side-by-side provides advanced training for *Post* reporters.

That partnership approach is what made Jeff Thomas, *The Gazette* editor, willing to be the first editor to commit to financial support of I-News. He can discuss story possibilities with her that interest him and get help in defining them. He feels like he contributes something and I-News contributes something, increasing the value for both. He would not have been as interested in a less-engaged pay-for-freelance investigative reporting model, in which he purchased one story at a time with a more distant relationship. It is the nature of the partnership and the value from it that appeals to him.[18]

Oklahoma Watch

Another new nonprofit journalism outlet had its origins in October of 2008, when Ed Kelley, the editor of the Oklahoma City *Oklahoman* and Joe Worley, executive editor of the *Tulsa World*, met for lunch in Stillwater at "The Hideaway," neutral territory halfway between the two cities. Kelley sketched out the impact of a large layoff at the *Oklahoman*, and proposed the two papers, both locally owned, consider sharing some content. Two weeks later, Worley got word that he needed to cut his own newsroom by 15 percent. By the end of January about 55 journalists were

gone from the two newsrooms and the editors announced that they would share content, beginning immediately. Mid-level editors were left to work it out as they went along, warily at first but smoothly now, more than two years into it.

That cooperation between two rivals and the trust it generated laid the groundwork for Oklahoma Watch, a nonprofit, independent, investigative reporting team "producing journalism in the public interest" launched at the end of 2010. Partners in the venture are the two newspapers, the Oklahoma Press Association, a commercial TV station, a public radio station and the University of Oklahoma journalism department. The $450,000 in start-up funding came in equal parts from the Tulsa Community Foundation, Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation in Oklahoma City and the Knight Foundation in Miami. If it lasts, and goes beyond the initial in-depth explanatory series on women's incarceration rates in Oklahoma (the nation's highest), Oklahoma Watch will be the first of the current crop of investigative start-ups to launch with all the right players — media, local foundations and higher education — at the table. They are learning as they go, but their structure is promising.[19]

Tom Lindley is the editor. He thinks collaboration is the next wave of journalism. "I haven't seen anything like this since I've been in journalism." Lindley has a 35-year history as a reporter and editor. In 1999, he left Flint, Michigan, where he had been editor, to go to *The Oklahoman* as an investigative enterprise reporter. Eight years later he moved to the *Tulsa World*, where he was caught in one of the staff layoffs. He is seeing the value today in maintaining the trust of former employers.[20]

Joe Worley, executive editor of the *Tulsa World,* says Oklahoma Watch started quickly and without a lot of planning but with a solid base. "I don't want to say 'only in Oklahoma,' but the stars were in alignment." The local ownership helped because no national headquarters slowed down or complicated the process. Personal relationships were even more important. The editors of the two newspapers have known and respected each other for years. Tom Lindley had worked for both and was known, available and trusted. And the foundations were taking the lead on the financing.[21]

The stage was set. Oklahoma Watch launched quickly in December, with less than two months lead time, driven by its desire to be online when the Oklahoma legislature met in February. Their coverage spurred the legislature to pass a bill that will reduce the prison time served by low-risk, non-violent offenders in favor of other treatment.[22]

It is a challenge to "make sure everybody wins," according to Worley, and to have the stamina to keep pushing the story forward. For example, because of deadlines, the small paper members of the Oklahoma Press Association distributed some of the stories before they were published in the larger papers that did much of the work on them, a circumstance that would have previously been unthinkable. Twenty-six Oklahoma news outlets have used stories from Oklahoma Watch.

California Watch

When it comes to partnerships, Robert (Rosey) Rosenthal has become a believer. Rosenthal is the Pulitzer Prize–winning director of 34-year-old Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), mother ship to California Watch, which he started two years ago.[23]

California Watch, which with CIR has a combined staff of 32 and a budget of $5.2 million, does original reporting which it distributes to several dozen California media outlets, creating a huge multi-platform audience for its projects. It is an expensive-to-operate story creation and distribution channel, difficult if not impossible to replicate in other states or regions. As a result of its early success it is already changing, and like ProPublica, it offers lessons beyond its good work.

California Watch has built in the idea of collaboration, looking toward being the primary state supplier of news and investigations on statewide issues and the California center for media cooperation. Now it is partnering on projects with individual media outlets in addition to reporting throughout the state. In early March it provided editing and direction for a Stanford University investigative reporting class story on a courses of interest list distributed to athletes for classes the athletes described as "easy." The story received wide play nationally and strong pushback from the university, which immediately discontinued the list.[24]

Rosenthal describes the California Watch model as a wheel with the stories — the journalism — being the axle and the various media outlets and forums, across platforms and languages and storytelling methodology, as the spokes of the wheel, carrying the story outward and propelling it forward.

What collaboration really means, according to Rosenthal, is that you have to be willing to trust the working partners you have and you have to lose the love of exclusivity.

Those are not characteristics he was known for as a reporter, a city editor or as editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* or managing editor of *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

He is candid about his own transformation: "What happened to me was getting my brains beat out and basically getting fired twice." Failure, he said, opened him up to collaboration.

He sees a different world now. "If we went back and started with the question of how to serve — we're no longer [investigative reporting legends] Barlett and Steele or a big investigative team, no longer [driven by] exclusivity and competition and those concepts we grew up with. If I were back in Philly and wanted to work with Bucks County paper and wanted to do a big story, I could see how to do it." He pauses, imagining what he would do differently in Philadelphia than he did when he was editor. "I imagine I could sell this if I were in Philly now."

In April, California Watch released its project "On Shaky Ground," the result of a 19-month investigative effort on seismic safety and what's not being done to protect schoolchildren in California schools. California Watch created a database of more than 10,000 schools in California and their inspection reports.[25]

The distribution of these stories is the broadest yet for California Watch. Stories were published in eight newspapers in the state, broadcast over public radio and nationally on PBS, distributed in California ethnic media outlets with the stories translated into Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese, local versions were posted on 125 Patch sites, 40,000 coloring books were distributed to schoolchildren and an iPhone app was released. It's a complete melding of

technology into story, Rosenthal says, and it is a perfect illustration of the challenge of paying for this complex journalism.

Rosenthal estimates the story cost more than a half-million dollars in staff time. The revenue California Watch derives from sales of the story and the underwriting of the production of the coloring book may total $35,000 to $40,000.[26]

"Clearly that is not a sustainable model," Rosenthal told an investigative reporting conference at the University of California at Berkeley the week the stories were released. Currently, less than five percent of his annual revenue comes from payment for the syndication of stories on which his distribution model is built. He knows he needs to get that percentage up to a minimum of 20 percent to show progress and a path toward financial sustainability to the foundations he relies on for continued support. He is counting on increased sales especially of video as the path to get there.

University partnerships

In-depth and investigative reporting partnerships are sprouting on university campuses like mushrooms after rain. Universities provide a fertile field for partnerships where many organizational approaches can thrive. Journalism schools, only five years ago viewed as out of synch with journalism professionals and behind the times, are leading the way today.[27]

Of about 50 new investigative journalism sites, 16 are university based, according to a survey by Charles Lewis, executive editor of Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University. These partnerships have the advantage of institutional support in the form of office space and other university services and, in most cases, of a ready and eager student population.[28]

Examples abound. Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern earlier this year formed the Watchdog Accountability Initiative, which is funded by the McCormick Foundation and the university. The initiative pairs three professionals with student interns and will deliver its work free to partner news organizations in the Chicago area. The William Penn Foundation

announced $2.5 million in grants to Temple University, which will provide a home base for a start-up venture that will hire new journalists and form partnerships among existing news providers to "leverage the ways in which news and information can affect policy change," according to the job posting for a chief executive officer.

These partnerships have various origins and structures. Some, such as the one at Medill, have been created by the universities to expand their teaching offerings and because they see opportunity where the commercial outlets have pulled back; some have been initiated by newly formed nonprofits that need a low-cost home and the prestige of the university's brand, but are not university-governed, such as the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Reporting; some have been initiated by foundations that want university partnerships for efficiency and to build a stronger base in the community but are not linked to specific journalism classes, as is the case with the William Penn Foundation and Temple University. The university partnerships rely on established commercial media for distribution, and, mostly, are not charging for their work.

Yet another variation on partnerships is being launched at the University of Illinois, where investigative reporting professor Brant Houston has received a grant from the McCormick Foundation to bring together journalism professors at Midwest universities and their students in collaborative public service and investigative reporting projects. Houston, who is the former executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, thinks the education consortium will start with about eight universities and will distribute its work through public broadcast stations and commercial media in the region.

Northeastern University

Northeastern University's Journalism Department proudly displays 19 story summaries and links to the full text on its website. What school wouldn't? Those are the 19 stories that have been published on the front page of *The Boston Globe* since Professor Walter (Robby) Robinson began teaching an investigative seminar at the university for hand-selected undergraduate and graduate students four years ago.[29] He came to his alma mater with the best of credentials. He had worked for *The Globe* for 34 years as a reporter and editor and had led its Spotlight

investigative team's reporting of the Catholic priest abuse scandal that will be cited for decades as a model of the imperatives of investigative reporting and the impact it can bring.

From the beginning, Robinson and School of Journalism director Stephen D. Burgard decided Robinson would go beyond teaching investigative skills and assigning "practice stories." "Students are either doing a rehearsal for journalism or they are doing real journalism," Burgard said. He believes real journalism is the fertile ground.

Robinson sees what he is doing today as a potential model. "Our modest start at Northeastern can be replicated by any adventurous journalism program. Journalism teachers need not limit themselves to wringing their hands at the plight of the news business. Nor should students need to wait for newsroom internships or graduation to do reporting that gets published in a metro newspaper — reporting that makes a difference. And savvy newspaper editors ought to welcome the help."[30]

Robinson's class, usually about a half-dozen seniors or graduate students, learns how to "scrub" local candidates' and public officials' records through the full range of public databases available. Robinson then has them do initial reporting from that material and from the ample cache of story ideas he has. He guides students through every step of the reporting, occasionally conducting the most important in-person interviews himself with students in attendance. He keeps *Globe* editors informed and understands they will edit even after he finishes.[31]

Marty Baron, editor of *The Boston Globe*, who benefits from the decades-long relationship with Walter Robinson at Northeastern, also sees what the university program gets: "We're the necessary piece." If Northeastern students were doing the same stories and published them on the university's website, they wouldn't have any impact, he says. True enough. Newspapers in almost every city, despite losing print circulation at a five-percent-per-year clip, still have a reach beyond other local news outlets and still have the voice of authority, if no longer the voice of God, in reporting matters of importance in their communities. Their brands and coverage matter.

Baron would love to have Robinson teaching an investigative class in the newsroom where he once worked and still has a desk. "And why couldn't we offer a class for the public on researching public records, a citizen journalism academy," Baron asks hypothetically.

Baron is acting on the conclusion that even metro dailies cannot supply all — or even most — of the investigative and accountability journalism needs of the community. "We can't be the only ones doing that," he says. "You can't be the eyes and ears for everybody and everything." He can see a time when a wider group of people is contributing, with *Globe* encouragement. He sees how a working or retired journalist could contract with a newspaper to teach an extension class at a community college on investigative techniques and data mining. "We need an RFP [request for proposal] for investigative reporting," he says of news businesses.[32]

Despite his determination, the barriers are real, Baron says. "It takes just as much time as if doing it ourselves." Also, he notes, newsroom culture can work against change: "In all newsrooms, there's always a reason not to do something." Having a former highly regarded employee leading the university project makes the Northeastern and *Globe* partnership unique, all involved acknowledge, and would be difficult, but not impossible, to replicate. Given the number of experienced investigative reporters available in most markets, it is possible to envision a metro newspaper sponsoring an investigative reporter instructor at the university to kick-start this variation of collaboration. Virtually all of two dozen journalism deans surveyed would welcome such a plan.

Boston University

In a neighboring zip code to Northeastern, Boston University's New England Center for Investigative Reporting (NECIR) is headed into its third year as what it calls the first "university based, multimedia investigative reporting collaborative focused on local and regional issues." Like other such new sites, it struggles to find its footing. The Knight Foundation awarded NECIR $700,000 over three years, beginning in January 2009, and charged it with finding a university-based sustainable model for nonprofit investigative journalism. NECIR relies on the journalism done by its two professionals and that of freelancers; it uses students only as interns,

who do research and whose bylined articles have appeared in news outlets across New England.

At a March 2011 NECIR board meeting, the talk was of the need to raise money for this year's budget, the need for an overall marketing plan, the need for a development plan and the results of a consultant's report that recommended both a change in direction to a more national subject-oriented reporting scope, and a change in name. That proposal was discussed, then tabled for another time.

Tom Fiedler, dean of the College of Communications at BU, launched the program with Joe Bergantino and Maggie Mulvihill, two veteran investigative reporters, as co-directors. As conceived, NECIR would use staff and student interns to provide simultaneous investigative stories in multi-media forms to news outlets throughout the Northeast. Fielder said they soon realized they lacked the capability to deliver finished stories in different forms for newspapers, television, radio and online. Now, he said, they pitch a story to what they think is the most appropriate media, usually print, and deliver it there. Broadcast outlets most often get the reporting and produce their own finished stories.[33]

NECIR also functions as a training institute. It offered two sessions of a two-week high school investigative workshop last summer and will do so again this year for a tuition fee of $2,000. Also this summer NECIR is offering two two-week long programs for foreign journalists and bloggers at $2,000. It is exploring the possibility of using its research capabilities commercially, for example, to vet companies for clients, including institutional investors.

Selling stories individually is time consuming and money losing, Fiedler concedes. The site was paying about $3,000 to freelancers to produce an investigative story, a fee it is now cutting dramatically. Most often it is paid several hundred dollars per story from the newspapers and broadcast outlets that use it. Bergantino hopes to raise about $50,000 this year from story sales.

The lessons from experiences of Northeastern and Boston University seem to emphasize the high level of trust and credibility needed with potential collaborators, and the importance of having a focused mission relentlessly pursued.

University of Wisconsin

Collaborative reporting between professionals and students comes with its own set of challenges, as Marty Kaiser, editor of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, learned. Under Kaiser's leadership, the paper has been known for its robust public policy accountability reporting and for explanatory stories, work that has won three Pulitzer Prizes in the past four years.[34]

The newspaper and the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Reporting, directed by Andy Hall, working with students from the University of Wisconsin, stumbled when a report examining out-of-state trips required a correction and a follow-up story to clarify a previous story.[35]

"We were sailing along," said Kaiser, who blames himself, saying he was enthusiastic about the teamwork and didn't raise questions to the extent he should have along the way. "For these to work there has to be one person completely, totally in charge. We've talked about it internally here. The first time you do something brand new like this the person at the top has to be all over it." *The Journal Sentinel* hasn't partnered with Hall's group since then but he expects they will.

Hall also has examined his organization's practices. He sees the credibility risk of errors as even greater for organizations like his than for commercial media since he is entirely dependent on the distribution partnerships for reputation and survival.

The Wisconsin Center has now adopted the rigorous fact-checking methodology of the Center for Public Integrity, in which every fact in a story is numbered and a separate file created for all sourcing material including interview notes.[36]

Columbia University School of Journalism

In addition to questions of the skill level and reliability of student journalists' work, questions of control and ethics arise from partnerships with universities.

Nicholas Lemann, the dean of the Columbia University School of Journalism, is very familiar with all that is developing in the partnership world. But he is reluctant to join the ranks of those journalism schools that eagerly leap at these opportunities.

"Journalism schools are feeling their oats," he explains. "Lots of us are asked to be in subsidiary role — that's not very appealing. We've got legends on this faculty. Lots of really good work emanates from this school (and others)."

He understands the appeal of partnerships, he says, but questions the value of an education system that would take students' money, send them on the subway to *The New York Times* or any other news outlet to work, and then essentially have the students come back to Columbia for their cap and gown. Also, Lemann questions the appropriateness of a university such as Columbia providing faculty and students to work at the behest of a for-profit business such as *The New York Times*.

His biggest issue with it, though, swirls around questions of trust and respect. Most newspaper editors would ask journalism school deans to be more flexible about sending students to them, he said. "For us, we would say, 'Trust us more to be true content providers as opposed to free labor.' We would like to have an editorially substantive role. It's hard to get to that point."[37]

Four years ago Lemann hired Sheila Coronel, an award-winning investigative reporter from the Philippines to establish and lead the Toni Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism, which consolidated investigative reporting teaching at Columbia. Coronel accepts as many as 15 students each year who spend a year in investigative reporting classes, learning techniques and tools and producing an original investigative project that is their master's thesis. Virtually all are hired after graduation, most often now at national news organizations like Bloomberg News and by the new nonprofit news outlets.

Coronel says she and her colleagues frequently discuss the possibilities of partnerships, but each time come to the conclusion they don't want their students to be free labor. All partnerships are tough, she said. Students have to learn, different from fully professional

partners. “We say, ‘We will work with our students, and we will say when they are ready for investigative reporting.’”

The public as partners

With social media, the field for local investigative reporting can be plowed and seeded not in straight rows, one plant at a time, but in expanding circular patterns where each connection pushes the circle outward and makes possible multiple additional connections and actions, building a networked community of interest and engagement at every step of the process. New enterprises exploring this field are led by some of the most creative thinkers in the business.

Michael Skoler is vice president for interactive media for Public Radio International. With his partners, Skoler is developing a 50-state corruption index that will be completely open-sourced, fueled by social media and intended to give journalists and citizens a powerful tool to track and shut down potential corruption paths in their state’s public processes.

Skoler has worked in print, radio, television and digital media and he founded the Public Insight Network model, which has a data base of more than 100,000 people who have volunteered to share their expertise and experience with reporters. He has an MBA and spent several years as a McKinsey consultant. Now he has trained his sights on building tools for good government through the expansion of investigative reporting.

His staff is building a database and contacting organizations known to be interested in clean government and individuals blogging about it. They are enlisting them in this effort and mapping each organization’s social media presence with the purpose of creating and expanding an engaged network several degrees beyond their original contacts in each state.

Skoler’s partners in this work are the Center for Public Integrity (CPI), the 21-year-old granddaddy of investigative reporting sites, founded by Charles Lewis, and Global Integrity, the international nonprofit that analyzes and distributes government accountability and corruption trends worldwide, also founded by Lewis.

They will hire a contract reporter in each state to mine information available on openness of government and other checks on corruption that will make up the index and then load that data into their template. The information in these building blocks will be open-sourced so people can take data from them, use it, annotate and improve it. This work of building the network and gathering, loading and improving the data is expected to take until February 2012. A report card for each state, essentially an index of factors that create honest government, will then be released with its supporting data.

For six months after the release of the report cards, the organizations leading this effort will pursue a public information campaign and provide training on using this "corruption road map," as Skoler calls it, and how to nudge toward solutions for open government in each state. Skoler hopes this work opens investigative reporting opportunities for journalists as well as action paths for advocacy groups and interested individuals.[38]

Emily Bell, a professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, points out that journalists have always depended on a network of interested individuals. Traditionally, journalists' network "was a closed network [you and your contacts in the community]. Now it is open," Bell said. The open network breaks competitive silos, understands that more expertise may move the story in unexpected ways and drives the development of reporting tools and shares them. Bell is the former director of digital content for The Guardian, the British news outlet that led the melding of citizen and journalistic contributions to investigative reporting and that has established one of the most widely read news sites in the world.[39]

Giving citizens tools may involve releasing an important database and asking for help in scouring it or teaching data-mining skills or demonstrating how to set up a basic wiki to gather and consolidate information from individuals interested in a particular issue. According to Bell, part of the education function of news outlets requires including a wider network in the reporting, which in turn builds trust, stimulates civic engagement and the public convening required for action.

Harvard's Benkler says that "social production" of journalism will grow because we already know and have seen it. "It's the completely plausible thing to do." It's human nature, he says. When people in a university or an office building know people down the hall who are contributing their expertise to journalism, they are more likely to do the same. "The only question is how to organize it." Consider the Huffington Post, he said, which early on had to beg to get contributors. Now journalists jockey to be accepted and brag if they get a weekly column.

Partnering with and relying on community members is a tacit, but important, acknowledgement that "we know we won't get it right" without them. It effectively opens the drawbridge on the moat around investigative reporting and suggests different leadership attitudes, says Ken Doctor, author of *Newsonomics*, whose work and weekly columns focus on the changing business models of journalism.[40]

The journalists' perspective on partnering and how it helps them suggests we not are peering through the right end of the telescope, Doctor says. "It's what the community gains that's important, and those are different goals" that lead one to fundamentally different actions that require a more external focus. It means finding those readers and making community building a key focus of the editor's job.

Obstacles and lessons along the way

No doubt, establishing any type of partnership for collaborative investigative and accountability reporting encounters barriers aplenty.

The nature of accountability and investigative reporting — the degree of difficulty, the time and the specialization required — reinforce the belief that this is the work of a few rare birds. Additionally, editors' experience with the demands of verification and their understanding of damage wrought by the intrusion of compromising interests steer them away from trusting work from outside their newsrooms, especially investigative reporting, the high wire act of journalism. Control and protection are baked into investigative journalism. And in competitive

regional markets, there's no history of collaboration to fall back on. Journalists are instinctively territorial, guard dogs as well as watch dogs.

Editors in traditional newsrooms, although upended by the digital revolution, are the most reluctant to change practices in this arena. Given their heavy stake in the health of community discourse and action and their unique and still dominant distribution systems, local and regional editors should be orchestrators of geography-specific investigative reporting collaborations. First, though, they must see this as the opportunity it is rather than another threat to their tenuous professional hegemony.

Despite the obstacles, partnerships and collaborations create real possibilities, and the journalistic practices they foster beneficially challenge established norms and conventions. Collaborations, in many forms, constitute the best, most practical approach for sustaining, and potentially expanding, regional accountability and investigative journalism.

- Partnerships can create value. Approached effectively, they increase the supply of stories, expand the capabilities within the community to hold powerful institutions and individuals accountable, improve the quality of stories and engage more people in the work of democracy.

- Collaborative work benefits from a built-in community magnification effect. Because multiple players approach, display and promote the work differently, and engage the community using different tools, the journalism will reach and make a connection with more people. Because the purpose of investigative reporting is to reveal that which is hidden and trigger action and reform, the connections that citizens make on the substance of the issue and their ability to discern a path for action are the only important measures of success. Collaborations that involve work across multiple organizations offer citizens a range of opportunities to find meaning in the journalism for their lives and values.

- Collaborations help dismantle the fortress-like walls of media companies. Journalists have long fed an "us" and "them" mentality within their inaccessible buildings and their somewhat cloistered professional lives. Asking others — including the public — for help promotes a different, more open character.

No road map exists for successfully launching local and regional investigative reporting partnerships and anyone expecting one or two clearly defined paths to choose from will be disappointed. But holding back while others go forward is a losing strategy. Helpful lessons are emerging from the developing landscape.

Lessons on motivations

There is no clear market motivation, no direct financial gain from collaboration. Participants have to be self-motivated and see from collaboration a qualitative benefit that flows to their organization or interest, whether in the form of additional content, enhanced reputation, expanded skills or having a stake in important work. Investigative reporting partnerships are not hand-holding exercises; generalized "doing good" reasons do not breed success or hold together disparate partners.

Some motivating influences are obvious. New nonprofit news outlets need established media for reputation, talent and distribution. Traditional print media want a more fertile investigative reporting field and must have lower costs. They want to be viewed as essential to accountability reporting to a wider audience, not as a solo player sitting on the outside of new alliances inevitably forming. Universities have a stake in the media vigor of the community and their journalism schools need integrated learning, professional experiences, and any advantage they can get for their students. Community nonprofits or local family foundations that in one form or another need to foot much of the bill for complex local reporting in the public interest want better communities. Probing verifiable independent journalism is one of the more effective tools for achieving that.

Its mission to make Philadelphia a more "vital, just and caring community" is the motivation behind the history of funding journalism at the William Penn Foundation, which has almost

$2 billion in assets. Feather Houstoun, the president of the foundation, sees support of journalism as core to the mission of the foundation. “How can we convince people that there’s good reason for public officials to have integrity unless there’s news coverage when they don’t?” she asks.

Houstoun has witnessed an enormous change in newspaper editors’ attitudes over the past three years. Cooperative behaviors as simple as vetting and publishing content from other sources, to which editors’ reaction used to be “over my dead body, now they are doing before 8 a.m.” she said. “Show them death and they accept pain. Everyone has gotten a lot more flexible.” She and other foundation officials expect and, increasingly, demand growing collaboration in projects they fund.[41]

Lessons on organization

Even with no best apparent organizational model, the paths taken in Oklahoma and Colorado both have promise as statewide investigative reporting news services. A statewide approach is probably effective because of the number and range of partners possible for distribution that will increase impact and the potentially larger funder base.

In Colorado, the site was started by a lone investigative reporter with a clear vision who smartly sought out the best advice and adjusted as she went along. Organizationally, she did not try to compete but rather to fill gaps. She relied on major media partners from the beginning and removed the initial barrier to entry by offering free content. But she was transparent in the cost-versus-benefit piece of the equation coming after year one. She kept her expenses very low and launched with a feasibility plan in hand. At this stage of development, she spends 90 percent of her time working to execute that plan and on business development, an unusual but necessary shift for journalists trying to start new ventures.

In Oklahoma, the established content sharing by the *Tulsa World* and *The Oklahoman* was instrumental in creating a culture for a full-blown investigative partnership. Getting all the right players, including funders, at the table for initial conversations also was a key to success. Even though their single-issue focus at launch was limiting, they set out their larger purpose of

investigative and in-depth reporting; they had a reasonable estimate of the resources needed to launch an investigative site serving all of Oklahoma; they are increasing the work contributed by the partner organizations and they built in the independence required for success. They hired an editor they all trusted who has defined success broadly across platforms. He is building tools, such as video summaries, to take on the road to citizens' groups and civic organizations in Oklahoma to keep the work alive and citizens engaged.

The collaborative efforts that are doing well also understand that different participants bring different skills and benefits to the work. Professional journalists know what questions to ask and which levers to pull to get information. Because of the authority their organizations bring, their calls are returned, meetings and people are accessible to them. Citizen involvement deepens understanding of the underlying community issues and the information needed for citizens to be moved to take action and to have the means to do so. Citizens have experiences and often skills vital to journalism.

Even among only the most professional partnerships in journalism, there's no established organizational or procedural norm. Richard Tofel, general manager of ProPublica, says it best. "We've had 80 partners so far and that means about 85 ways of doing business." To work collaboratively one must understand there are lots of different ways of doing things, not one best way, he says. You have to be flexible and adapt to their way to doing business. Even the required rigor of verification varies widely among journalism outlets. Magazines and some other outlets may have departments for fact-checking. Other organizations have written protocols for editors. Others rely on less established practices and still others expect that ProPublica will do 100 percent of the fact-checking.

There is no way to standardize approaches if you really believe in collaboration, Tofel says. "You're going to need to be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to work with people where you find them."[42]

Lessons on funding

Increasingly, collaboration among journalistic entities is key to unlocking the magic door of foundation funding. Look at the grant announcements and you will find "in collaboration with" or "developing a sustainable collaborative model" echoing through them as if the words were stored in a computer "copy and save" key tapped for each journalism grant.

In foundation-funded nonprofits, an entrepreneurial bent to produce earned income is seen as another requirement for foundation funding and path to sustainability. That's a tough transition for many traditional journalists leading the first wave of nonprofit investigative reporting news sites and one reason some will not survive.

Early evidence and logic indicate the chance of recovering a major part of the expenses of the new nonprofit model through sales of content is not good. Twenty to thirty percent earned income would be a 10-fold increase even for an investigative news organization like California Watch. For the foreseeable future, the largest portion of revenue for nonprofits will continue to be institutional, community and family foundations and high net worth individuals.

Community foundations have their own cultures to contend with if they want to commit journalism. Their attitudes and behavior in their communities range from wildly activist to quiescent, according to William Penn's Houstoun, who quotes an illustrative truism of her work: "When you've seen one foundation, you've seen one foundation." They don't all embrace tough-minded, independent journalism. Offending their friends is not in their DNA, yet journalists know it as a regular byproduct of their work and essential to their skepticism and integrity.

Sue Hale, a former newspaper editor, now media consultant who works with the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, an Oklahoma-based foundation that in 2011 gave more than $1 million to fledgling investigative reporting outlets, has seen first hand the divide between foundation and journalism purposes. "Community foundations are all social-issue oriented, and that is scary because they want to advocate. They want to make a difference — that's great — but they don't really understand that they have to be hands off [the journalism]."

It's a learning process for them and it must take place, she says. Both Hale and Houstoun say it is a necessary and ongoing conversation at the local level, at national gatherings such as the Council on Foundations meetings and at annual gatherings of Knight Foundation–funded community foundations, which are being pushed hard to see journalism as part of their mission.[43] Waldman of the FCC argues for a sea change in the approach and amount of funding in the journalism sector from community foundations.

For example, if the community foundations targeted five percent of their grants to fund journalism efforts, that would total approximately $230 million a year. If new media–related companies such as Google, which should have incentive to support journalism, donated a similar amount from their nascent philanthropic efforts, the combined $450 to $500 million would replace about a third of what has been lost in print journalism annually, enough to make a dent in this area.

Tofel describes himself as optimistic for nonprofit investigative reporting sites' survival. "The real question," he says, "is do people see the need, do people see the importance of this, and they do. There has been enormous progress in getting a societal understanding that there has been a market failure in producing some kinds of journalism in this country, particularly high value journalism crucial to democratic governance." That in turn means that accountability journalism is a "public good" and needs to be funded as a public good. He and others cite citizen and philanthropic funding, through membership and donations, of cultural institutions such as art museums, ballet, theater and symphonies. High-value journalism is not substantially different in its worth to the community, he says.

For stronger investigative reporting partnerships to emerge, organizers cannot wait or hope for the single wealthy philanthropist to step forward. For stable financial footing and sustainability, costs must be distributed more widely. Funding will come from the large national foundations, such as Knight and Ford, from community foundations, family foundations and wealthy individuals, sales and other earned income, from individual donors and from the resources (in

the form of staff, office space and direct donations) of universities and the existing news organizations coming together to create these new collaborative enterprises.

Lessons on culture and values

As the landscape changes, some established journalistic canon is giving way to new.

Old value: Investigative reporting, the most difficult and expensive work of journalism, must be jealously guarded and the methodology not shared with other news outlets.

New value: Give it away. Get widest possible impact of work and widest possible distribution of the investigative reporting. Especially look for ways to share your skills/research/methodology. Show others how to do it. Build a model, get it running, give it away.

Old value: Secrecy is critical. Do not tell anyone, sometimes even your own colleagues, the exact nature of what you are working on. Decades ago, with two or three highly competitive newspapers in most metro cities, sometimes housed in the same building or city hall offices, this made sense. And the practice was reinforced by the self-importance it suggested ("I'm working on something so important I can't tell you.") and the voracious egos it fed. It also helped to build the fortress that newsrooms became, inaccessible except to the chosen. Several years ago, sitting on the sidelines for a news budget meeting in my newsroom, I listened as an editor referenced, in intentionally vague-beyond-understanding terms, a piece of an investigative story we would break in the next day's newspaper. We were hours away from publication, the only people in the room were our own editors, but somehow the story was supposed to be a secret. I understood the instinct but was astounded by the lack of trust it suggested.

New value: Drop the zeal for secrecy. Ask for help.

Old value: "Exclusive" is the coin of the investigative realm.

New value: Creative collaboration is the new competitive edge. Drop the zeal for exclusivity. "Exclusive" in and of itself does not add value. Readers/viewers will value your work by *what it does for them,* the way it is presented, who is involved, the credibility they judge it to have.

"Exclusivity" fights against what you really need: you need media outlets and citizens to use it, report from it, keep it alive, enrich it and help create a climate for action.

Old value: Go it alone. Investigative efforts are best accomplished by lone rangers. Asking for comments was considered radical, an editor's whim; asking for help was unthinkable.

New value: Ask for help.

At ProPublica, virtually every story is published with this plea for reporting prominently displayed that goes well beyond the old comment contact information tucked away at the end: "*Inform our investigations: Do you have information or expertise relevant to this story? Help us and journalists around the country by sharing your stories and experiences."*

Reaching for greatness

It is dangerous for someone whose energies are now detached from the relentless demands of daily newspaper production, from website creation and 24-7 news feeds, from profits and staff to draw conclusions about what could or should happen in America's newsrooms. That is what leads me to cast my thoughts in a framework of what I might have done differently given the advantage of time and distance I have had this year.

On investigative reporting, I saw only what was within my newsroom. That was my domain, the extent of the leadership influence I had in accountability reporting arena, I thought. My questions were on the order of could I sacrifice some long-loved and productive beats to add more investigative ones, could we do even more to train reporters and editors in investigative techniques, could we redefine even more beats around public accountability questions that would relentlessly examine the use of power and influence in public policy decision making rather than tracking events and official actions?

It did not occur to me that I should assume a responsibility broader than my own newsroom for the engagement of the community around questions of public policy integrity and public policy leadership.

How might that have looked different? Given a mulligan, here's what I would do:

- Initiate conversations to test the appetite for collaboration for creation and/or distribution of accountability reporting with other newspaper editors in the state, the dean of the university journalism school, the president of local public broadcasting and the leaders of several commercial television stations.

- Include the leaders of the local research-based civic organization dedicated to public affairs and the research-leaning college of urban and public affairs at the university just up the street from the newspaper. I'd be aware of their possible agendas but learn more about what research capabilities they had that might be helpful to journalists on an ongoing basis and by partnering with them on how we could help citizens expand skills.

- Pursue the possibility of someone on our staff or retired from it teaching data-mining skills to citizens, perhaps at the local community college.

- Drive more accountability reporting into the public space through social media and learn from a staffer whose job it would be to lead us in engaging with citizen experts.

- Seek ideas and the means to partner one story at a time and on each I would look for lessons that might help us create a working template.

In a do-over I would work to change established newsroom culture by building alliances for in-depth and investigative reporting with universities, rivals, citizens and, potentially, philanthropists. I would make this work a major part of my own or a managing editor's job description. I would focus the work much more on the outcomes of our journalism, which is after all what citizens care about. We would measure success through a clear-eyed assessment of the stories done, the distribution they received, the range of tools and platforms used for that,

the engagement of citizens with the work and the impact or actions generated by the work. If we did not create value along those criteria, then we would know we were not fulfilling our mission.

Traditional editors who want to lead this in communities — whether their origins are print, broadcast or university — will need to re-calibrate and not be bound up in a definition of their role as the only ones who can do investigative reporting well. Re-framing investigative reporting along collaborative lines requires abstract thinking about how working together can build the capabilities of participants. It requires a group of committed people at the core and an orchestrator with an authentic and collaborative personal leadership style who understands what it is like to volunteer and get others to contribute.

Traditional editors inevitably will move toward investigative reporting collaborations and partnerships. The question is whether they will continue to have a limited vision of their role and be pulled in at the fringes or will they lead.

With new entrants to the marketplace and new tools in the hands of entrepreneurs, activists and interested citizens, there is every reason for today's editors to lead, creating collaborations that maximize impact and effectiveness.

At an April seminar on financial sustainability of nonprofit investigative sites, the anxiety about their future was high, the advice was free-flowing and the mutual support evident. The day-long conference was co-sponsored by California Watch and Investigative News Network (INN), a consortium of more than 50 nonprofit investigative news outlets created last year to coordinate among its members and provide support on distribution, back office necessities, technology and financial stability.

The meeting was filled with discussion among the two dozen participants of their need for foundation funding, their need for community partners, their need for fundraising acumen on their boards, the power of social media and the benefits of partnerships with universities, public broadcasting and others. I was struck by the absence of any suggestion that these new

investigative reporting entities may need the dominant state or regional newspaper as a necessary ingredient for longevity. It was as if they already discounted the essentiality of the largest, most traditional local news provider and the former primary producer of local accountability and investigative reporting.

Kevin Davis, CEO and executive director of the year-old INN, acknowledges that some members opened their doors as a reaction against the local newspaper, notably and successfully the *Voice of San Diego*, which is building out as a destination site for news that matters in the San Diego region.

Davis, however, sees far more opportunity to work cooperatively with traditional regional media outlets rather than trying to offer a clear alternative. Interestingly, the new regional investigative news sites have tended to partner with big media partners such as ProPublica rather than with local and regional media.

Many in this first generation of nonprofit investigative news sites are showing their nostalgia, Davis said, aware of the irony. "Some are trying to recreate what they had before."[44]

Nostalgia in journalism is crippling. The new leaders emerging, many digitally native and under 30, are not burdened by nostalgia but rather see what it is and wrestle with what it means to have a social contract between journalism and an audience that might never buy a newspaper.

The realization that investigative reporting leaders must establish the value of their work with citizens who may never buy a newspaper should help today's editors cast forward and further propels the argument for change.

A conversation with Engelberg reminds me there's another advantage of developing partnerships and aiming high: Partnerships allow editors to define ambitions upward instead of downward as they have for the last half-dozen years. "You have to have some opportunity for people to take it to the limit. You have to shoot for greatness. It doesn't just happen. It's calculated."

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