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Strengthening community news: Funding the teaching hospital model and educational community collaboratives

By ALLISON FRISCH and GINA GAYLE

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Strengthening community news: Funding the teaching hospital model and educational community collaboratives

By ALLISON FRISCH and GINA GAYLE

Editor's note: This article was the top paper submitted to the 2022 research paper competition sponsored by ISWNE and the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at Kansas State University. The selection was made by a panel of ISWNE members who are current or retired community newsroom veterans. Entries were judged on the basis of their value to small newsrooms.

Abstract

College and community news partnerships could increase civic engagement and create local pipelines of information for residents beyond corporate media. They could help sustain, strengthen and promote local civic literacy, engagement and, ultimately, democracy at a grassroots level through the support of local news outlets, specifically weekly newspapers/digital websites. Further, they might provide students with paid internships and the opportunity to cover myriad vital local sectors including civic, social, business, political and philanthropic issues. Such collaborations could benefit local newspapers in need of more resources. Using our ongoing research, colleges could make the case for philanthropic private and public funding to collaborate with local media to provide vital news and information to residents.

Keywords: Local newspapers, collaborations, teaching hospital, news deserts

Introduction

More than 1,800 communities in the United States that had local news outlets in 2004 had none at the start of 2020, and most of those losses were weekly newspapers in “economically struggling communities” (Abernathy, 2020). The rise of news deserts and ghost papers – regional papers, largely owned by hedge funds putting profits above journalism (Abernathy, 2018) – means citizens increasingly lack access to information vetted for accuracy and context necessary to make decisions regarding the democratic system (Westlund, et al., 2021). Additionally, more than 100 local newsrooms closed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hare, 2021).

In October 2021, the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism, led by Kathy Best, published a collaborative investigation, “Printing Hate,” which interrogated the racist past of newspapers (Philip Merrill College of Journalism, 2021). Faculty, staff and visiting professionals from the Los Angeles Times, St. Louis Post-Dispatch and Washington Post worked with students, recruited from the University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism and five Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). To supplement the writing, the students analyzed data, shot photos, recorded audio, created static and motion graphics, designed a website and built a news application that will allow people to explore historical lynching coverage by approximately 100 newspapers that still exist in some form today. The project was led by the Howard Center, a part of Merrill College. The mission of the multidisciplinary center is to teach the next generation of investigative journalists through hands-on projects. It is funded by a \$3 million grant from the Scripps Howard Foundation and honors Roy W. Howard, one of the newspaper world’s pioneers. “Printing Hate” also was made possible with a grant from the Park Foundation, which supports excellence in investigative and in-depth reporting (Philip Merrill College of Journalism, 2021).

Best is one of six participants in our study, which aims to understand the benefits and challenges to the teaching hospital model of journalism education and its potential as an

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answer to the proliferation of news deserts and ghost papers. We also visited Concordia University's Center for Investigative Journalism in January 2020 and observed its director Patti Sontag as she led a team of student journalists, news professionals and data scientists as they launched a major project examining Indigenous communities' water and health.

Review of Literature Collaborative Journalism

Since the mid-2000s rise of social media – and technology companies such as Google and Facebook – the algorithmic approach to delivering audience to advertisers in the early 2000s (Stites, 2011) and increasing political polarization in the U.S. (Waldman, 2020), a renewed commitment to focusing on local citizens, community journalism and public trust through non-profit online news has emerged (Konieczna & Robinson, 2013). Adjacent to the conversation about nonprofit, publicly funded collaborative journalism is the revival and evolution of the “teaching hospital” model in journalism to promote collaborations between student journalists and community news professionals. Jenkins (2020) defines collaboration as “initiatives or projects through which journalists from different news organisations work with one another and with other actors – such as technologists, data scientists, academics, and community members – to report, produce, and distribute news” (Jenkins, p.7). Collaborative journalism, once unheard of due to the competitive nature of journalism, is more widely accepted, locally, nationally and globally. The historic “teaching hospital” collaborative model (Carson & Farhall, 2018; Murray, 2021) comes in various forms such as centers for sustainability, investigative centers and centers for media entrepreneurship (Schmidt, & Lawrence, 2020).

There is no clear path forward to funding collaboratives, and this applies to college-community collaboratives. When colleges receive philanthropic funding support, they are then left to continuously scramble to keep the funding steadily flowing, a full-time advancement job that uses often-scarce resources. Additionally, nonprofit philanthropic support alone won't bridge the gap to funding local news, say those who work in college and community collaboratives. Abernathy's 2020 report notes the only way to ensure all communities, regardless of socioeconomic demographics, have access to vital information is to “allocate more public funding toward local news. This means building out the journalistic model already established by NPR and PBS, which embodies editorial independence, and finding new ways to support legacy and start-up news organizations with taxpayer money” (Abernathy, p. 91). We believe this type of funding might be more systematically applied to college and community collaboratives, helping to solve issues of declining college enrollment, especially in journalism majors (Knight Foundation, 2014), and the urgent news desert crisis and its imminent threat to civics discourse and democracy. If strategically applied, the funding mechanisms could become more seamless – and less of a patchwork of constantly depleting resources.

The collaborative function of an evolved journalism framework and of college-community partnerships is a continued

source of study, as well. Hellmueller, et al. (2017) note that globalization and technology have given rise to new journalism ecosystems “as in the case with global news startups, which all point to a space in which journalism is performed as Reese's (2016) ‘networked public sphere’” (Hellmueller, p. 46). Jenkins and Graves (2019) defined journalism collaborations as cooperation among newsrooms, tech and data professionals, colleges and the community to “report, produce and distribute news” (p.7). The study, which focused primarily on European news, found a number of promising opportunities, including sharing resources and knowledge, the ability to report on topics they might not have otherwise and the ability to network with people affected by those issues. They also found challenges to the collaborative model. Participants “expressed uncertainty about the sustainability of their efforts” and challenges regarding the creation of shared processes among collaboration participants, particularly in integrating newsrooms with disparate missions, goals, ownership and funding models and teaching “local journalists how to incorporate data into their reporting, adapt their communication and management structures to reflect the needs of participants, and find ways to chart and measure the implications of their work.” Yet, there remained optimism around the “potential of collaboration for making the most of limited resource and showing the willingness of journalists and other community-level actors to embrace experimental approaches fostering journalism that makes a difference in peoples' lives” (p. 6).

Funding challenges

The financial sustainability of quality local news is vital to a well-functioning democracy and the health of community discourse. For more than a decade, journalists have negotiated news work with swiftly evolving digital technology. Newspaper editors and business managers focus on the economics of a declining print product and increasingly rely on digital websites and mobile applications to deliver news (Lee, 2016). Journalists must think about engaging the audience because they are faced with the very real dilemma of economics – something historically disregarded so as not to influence their work (Karlsson, 2011). Newspaper companies' economics are upended by the loss of advertising revenue redirected to social media companies – the very entities they seek to ally with to recoup lost revenue by growing audience (Lewis and Molyneux, 2018, Diehl, et al., 2019).

In the early 2000s, journalists and news managers were hopeful social media engagement between journalists and publics would not only reinvigorate journalism economics, but strengthen democracy as well (Lewis and Molyneux, 2018). The optimism surrounding the potential to expand audience is warranted. Pew (2021) found that nearly half of Americans get their news from social media, at least some of the time, a number which is down slightly from 2020. The potential opportunity to grow audience and revenue is tempered with the inherent risk (Duffy and Knight, 2019) of social media and its velocity – and journalists and editors are situated squarely at this intersection. Audience growth and engagement necessary for financial sus-

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tainability depends on increasing website traffic (Lee & Tandoc, 2017) and involves reporters and editors monitoring website and app audience analytics using web metrics software “to inform their traditional gatekeeping functions...giving the audience what it wants” (p. 571). Advertising as a local news revenue stream continues to diminish, first due to search and social tech company disruption and currently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ragnhild, et al. (2020) find the pandemic affected news sites in opposing ways – first by causing an uptick in website traffic from a public hungry for news about the public health crisis but also by crushing local businesses who were forced to close and unable to advertise as they had pre-COVID. Researchers argue the “existential crisis” faced by news organizations requires “immediate and collective action” in the form of “communal news work” (Ragnhild, et al., p. 673). A variety of funding sources is often the way collaboratives, particularly those at colleges, survive, according to our research. Nonprofit support alone won’t bridge the gap to funding local news, say those who work in college and community collaboratives.

The brisk evolution of technology over the past two decades and the failing newspaper business model incentivized managers to attempt to implement several innovative changes in swift succession. They found that journalists don’t support innovation that “distracts from core journalistic functions, can lead to burnout and fatigue, and risk stagnation or innovation paralysis” (p. 9). The newsroom environment is rife with innovation-oriented to-do lists, innovative digital tools and products that distract from building a workable strategy to structure the innovative process. Further, it’s imperative that newsroom innovation be research-based and collaborative with metrics for success that apply to myriad changing newsroom environments and “innovations in audience engagement and development are more important than technological innovations” (p. 21). This creates an ecosystem in which newsroom managers may be reticent to collaborate with student journalism programs due to the perception that this is a trial collaborative innovation and will require more time and resources than they have.

One model college-community collaboratives may look to for guidance is The Vermont Digger, where founder and Editor-at-Large Anne Galloway, a journalist by training, focused on making money from the nonprofit news organization’s inception and has been rewarded with double-digit percentage growth in every major line of revenue, from membership – from \$10,000 in 2010 to nearly \$330,000 in 2017 – to corporate sponsorship at roughly \$400,000 in 2017 (Shorenstein Center, 2018). Galloway doggedly worked to sell her vision to the community and her persistence paid off. Dairy co-op Cabot Creamery made a commitment to support the fledgling non-profit news organization with a small but meaningful \$7,000 initial investment and the Digger was on the map. (Shorenstein Center, 2018). Sjøvaag & Krumsvik (2018) found that, as in the U.S., in Norway, news organizations are comprised of a mix of public and private media, making sustainability dependent on “commercial viability” (p. 1,201) A focus on earnings and cost-control in media is coined as “media as business” (p. 1,212) by researchers, who assert distribution, not storytelling, will be the focus of media

organizations when evaluating new platforms for news, where new players in the market might surpass legacy institutions as the platform for citizen debate. Colleges may be ideal for this type of exploration, given students and researchers’ ability to imagine and construct new avenues for distributing, and potentially funding, news. In Fall 2021, Ithaca College professor Allison Frisch’s Journalism Innovation course worked with an Ithaca College alum, Jared Weiner, on a startup app called Forth. In the course of that work, students split into two groups, those working on content and delivery and those working on marketing and distribution. This might prove to be the ideal setting for innovation at a time when news managers are finding that focus on revenue usurps the ability to combat innovation fatigue.

College and community journalism collaborations

The collaborative model (Carson & Farhall, 2018; Murray, 2021), comes in various forms such as centers for sustainability, investigative centers and centers for media entrepreneurship, to name a few (Green-Barber & McKinley, 2020). We interviewed directors and leaders working in these centers from New York to Georgia to Arizona. We found that focusing on sustainability means more than financial sustainability – it refers to the sustainability of quality journalism in communities where resources are scarce. Collaborative service and solutions journalism allow journalists to reimagine community journalism in a post-truth ecosystem nationally and internationally (Lukina & Demaske, 2019). Community journalism is an antidote to political polarization and threats to the democratic systems undermined by swiftly evolving technology, including social media (Starr, 2009; Snyder & Stromberg, 2010; Shaker, 2014; Pickard, 2020; & Abernathy, 2020; Thorson, et al., 2020).

Four media organizations at Temple University, in partnership with nonprofit media resource Resolve Philadelphia, published two multimedia reports on students and the coronavirus. The collaborative of 14 student journalists, six faculty members and three Resolve staffers spent a year reporting. Challenges included university siloes, legal issues and the pandemic itself. And yet, the collaboration shows the “value in finding a way for professional and student journalists to work together...and forge a model to introduce students to collaborative journalism” (*Can student journalists and local media collaborations work together?*, Resolve Philadelphia, 2021). Among the challenges collaborations face is a focused approach to integrating goals, missions, structures, funding, use of data, communications, management and finding “ways to chart and measure the implications of their work” (Jenkins, p. 6). Lough and McIntyre (2021) apply challenges with integration across college campuses in which student media is set apart from other schools and departments such as data and computer science and business schools, which are often siloed. In January 2020, we visited Concordia University’s Center for Investigative Journalism, led by former *New York Times* journalist Patti Sontag. A conference attended by college and regional media collaborators kicked off a report on Indigenous communities’ water and health ultimately published

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in February 2021 (*Concordia's Institute for Investigative Journalism Coordinates a Major Project Looking at Indigenous Communities' Water and Health*, 2021). Stakeholders across university departments (notable among them, the data science department, which broke down for journalists how it scrubbed and coded data vital to the investigation) worked together to shape the bones of the investigative reporting with urgency, a sense of purpose and dedication.

The George W. Bush Presidential Center (2021) noted the promise of college and community collaborative news efforts, highlighting Colorado College's Journalism Institute class called "The Future and Sustainability of Local News" focusing on how journalism students can work to solve the news industry's problems. The center lauded University of Denver research mapping project for helping foster student and community journalism collaboratives regionally. A vital question around these collaborations is how to fund robust community journalism in an age of declining retail and classifieds advertising revenue. Nonprofit, membership and subscription funding – or a combination of these and other funding streams – are central to industry sustainability. This binds the public good of journalism with the expense of providing quality journalism because community affluence is a factor in funding success, particularly when it comes to "cobbling together for-profit and nonprofit funding from a variety of sources" (Abernathy, p. 93).

Based on this literature and background, the following research questions were posed:

RQ 1: How do college/local news collaborations raise and sustain funding?

RQ 2: What are the unique challenges to the "teaching hospital" model of journalism education?

RQ 3: What are the potential benefits to the community from college/local news collaborations?

Method

A total of six interviews with the individuals responsible for oversight of college community collaborative journalism efforts provided insight into our research questions and the future possibilities associated with a collaborative solution that provides opportunities for student journalists and a much-needed public service for the community. Our method relied on the findings of Guest, et al., regarding number of interviews (6 to 12) required to reach saturation of themes and researcher flexibility based on rigor and "typically 6–7 interviews will capture the majority of themes in a homogenous sample: 6 interviews to reach 80% saturation" (Guest, Greg et al., 2020). Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze transcripts of in-depth interviews reflecting sources' perceptions of collaborative solutions for journalism that particularly addressed funding and other resource issues. This "inductive process of searching for concepts, ideas, themes, and categories...help[s] the researcher to organize and interpret data" (Benaquisto, 2008, p. 86).

Additionally, in January 2020, one of our researchers visited Concordia University in Montreal to observe Patti Sontag leading a conference of collaborative professional and student journalists collaborating on investigative work. Sontag leads

Concordia's Institute for Investigative Journalism. While we are unable to report directly on the content of the conference under an agreement with Concordia, we observed the way the collaborative process can work – and result in award-winning investigative journalism.

Interview subjects agreed to allow us to use their names and the names of their organizations:

Kathy Best is director of the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at the University of Maryland

Adrienne Fairwell is general manager of Arizona PBS

Jere Hester is director of Editorial Projects & Partnerships at CUNY Newmark

Erica Beshears-Perel is director of the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at the University of North Carolina's Hussman School of Journalism and Media

Mallory Tenore is associate director of the University of Texas at Austin's Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at Moody College of Communication

Stefanie Murray is the director of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University

Results

Several themes emerged in analysis, including a patchwork funding method that could be improved; the need for business acumen; a passion for investigative, solutions and service journalism; and the day-to-day challenges of those leading the charge to provide collaborative journalism services in various settings using various methods of outreach and funding.

Directors and managers shared their experiences running centers anchored at colleges across the country. Themes explored included resources, outreach and the teaching hospital model as it applies to student journalists.

Funding:

I think having supportive, more locally faced, foundations can also signal to bigger players that the work is valued locally. – Erica Beshears-Perel

Past industry experience is a valuable tool in terms of networking and fundraising. Beyond networking comes the ability to ensure funders that program administrators can handle the business side of the operation and that the college has the resources to support the vision. Working with foundations such as Knight or MacArthur means understanding metrics and accountability – and demonstrating you have the resources and wherewithal to attract more funding, particularly from a variety of smaller donors. "It's about not just having a good idea . . . but also having some track record" that the administrative structure is in place for "relationship building" (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2022).

An emerging theme in our interviews is how challenging it is to ensure funders, large and small, that the work you are doing is unique in place and approach, as well as complementary to a larger focus on investing in journalism for the sake of a

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well-functioning democracy. When seeking funding, it's vital, our sources said, to prove you are business savvy and have the pulse of the community, with a strategic goal for outreach, education and journalism. Journalism philanthropy is focused on local news and democracy, and many colleges have centers for reporting. The successful centers identify the projects that will attract funding without being redundant "and that it's complementary. It's really important and really tough (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2022).

One alternative to leaning exclusively on large philanthropic organizations is to take a community-based approach. Community may mean a local news media outlet catering to a small- to mid-sized audience – from a few blocks to a county or region – and can also mean a statewide focus on legislatures, where much of the elections and health rights laws are being crafted. A place-based state-focused strategy could serve two purposes: to provide sustained funding from more than one local/regional/state source and to show large funders that other funders believe in your mission. "They're more place-based, versus, everyone going towards the national foundations. And I think having supportive more locally faced foundations can also signal to bigger players that the work is valued locally. Colorado is one that's had some really a lot of ecosystem work done. North Carolina also has a lot of ecosystem work and ground-work that's been laid. I think that is something that can be replicated" (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2022).

Major donors to community news collaborations provide support in a variety of ways. They remain in close contact with center directors to provide insight and direction. They do not wish to be exclusive funders and so encourage advancement efforts for the sake of sustainability. "The Knight Foundation is one of our biggest funders, so we work very closely with them. They have really pushed us to be more self-sustaining and to also seek funding elsewhere so that's sort of been part of our work with them is to look for other revenue streams so that we're not having all our eggs in one basket, so to speak" (M. Tenore, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2022).

The notion that securing a major donor is a one-and-done enterprise is unrealistic, collaborators say. Major donors vet applicants for flexible and unique proposals in terms of journalism projects and they look for applicants who are already skilled at creating a patchwork of funding through local sources. A project-based approach can also be successful and that was true regarding pandemic reporting, according to Tenore. Beyond reaching out to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for help in rallying partners and stakeholders, the Knight Center for Journalism also looked at ways to support journalists in the field, asking themselves, "What is the need right now for journalists, how can we sort of act quickly and try to get funding to support that need for journalists?" ... it's somewhat hodgepodge" (M. Tenore, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2020).

While some centers offer resources for working journalists and existing news outlets, others work with students under a "teaching hospital" model, where students learn and work, con-

tributing to the profession while gaining skills in the discipline.

Teaching Hospital Model

"(The teaching hospital model) comes fraught with challenges. The anthem is volume and hours in the day and. It makes...media literacy and (news) judgment all the more vital." – Jere Hester

Focusing on early-career journalists' needs is another motivator for those providing outreach, education and support to the industry. Some who are leading centers also worked in community journalism and/or with students on nonprofit independent school newspapers. This gives those directors an inherent motivation to provide solutions for a new generation of journalists. Beshears-Perel has a network of former students and draws from their industry experience "... what's gone poorly. And I think that very much informs what I want to do at the center related to making jobs that are making journalism jobs better, or making careers in journalism better, especially for some local journalism, which are basically nonexistent" (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2020). For those passionate about journalism, it's often described as a calling. Each day brings new issues, investigations and stories. Working with students can be a satisfying space for former reporters and editors. Early-career student journalists bring a new perspective to community reporting. Ultimately, that perspective may yield new paths to journalism sustainability. "I'm seeing very clear lines between what I've done what I'm doing and where it's going, even if, when I was a kid, all I ever wanted to do is work for the Daily News" (J. Hester, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2022).

Statehouse coverage is top of mind for current and former journalists. The power state legislatures hold in shaping policy means the watchdog function of journalism is especially vital at the state level. Best (personal interview, Feb. 9, 2022) pointed to the University of Illinois Springfield's master's program and public affairs reporting model that places student interns in a statehouse bureau, providing critical state legislature coverage and collaborating with the Illinois Press Association (in some states, the Associated Press may fulfill this function). News professionals in the academic world bring a unique work-based focus to running collaborative centers. Journalists in the field are trained to handle many duties simultaneously in an ever-changing landscape. This skill translates to the collaborative media center role and "the impact and just the reach that we have is remarkable. It's one of those things that really keeps me motivated to keep doing this is when we hear from these journalists who you know wouldn't otherwise have access to this sort of training. It's a good reminder of why we do the work that we do, and why it's so important" (M. Tenore, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2022).

Additionally, public media is at the forefront of the collaborative-effort (NPR, 2020) relationships with nonprofit media on stories of public interest and import. The opportunity for students to work in tandem with public media finds success in established programs and partnerships. Arizona PBS General

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Manager Adrienne Fairwell oversees all of the news stations and activities on the local and national levels. She is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the station and the budget, revenue, content and technology. She reports to the dean of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications because Arizona PBS is “intentionally and strategically designed beside the school of journalism and it’s a really good match for us” (A. Fairwell, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2022).

The teaching hospital model at Arizona PBS serves students with aptitudes for journalism and those who are drawn to the tech side of news production, including the cameras, boards and tower climbers. “And the teaching hospital model allows us to do that, because we have a breeding ground of talented, talented smart students” (A. Fairwell, personal communication, Feb. 18, 2022). Staff and students work together to produce news and documentaries and create digital and social content that reaches a wide, loyal audience.

Challenges to the Teaching Hospital Model

Students evolve personally and professionally in the four or more years they attend college. For journalism students, the gap between the vision they bring to school and how that evolves can be wide. It’s a changeable time in students’ lives and to base a collaboration on the changing sensibilities, values and desires of developing students can be tricky. “Others who came in thinking that they were going to cover arts in The New Yorker are like ‘Oh my god, something has lit up in me and I want to be a community journalist, I want to be an investigative journalist.’ ... but it’s not going to be the same with everybody, and there are issues with keeping it going” (J. Hester, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2022).

There may be potential in the teaching hospital model but the reliance on free student labor can also be exploitative and create an ethics challenge. Further, to base a program on students means to work around their unique personal circumstances, including the traditional school year, evolving goals and other personal issues. The model can’t rely on “underpaying the staff” and there are gaps when coverage isn’t happening, such as summer break or holidays. Further, if you are trying to run a professional or semi-professional newsrooms using student labor, the field news organizations may be depending on coverage that fluctuates based on students’ schedules and interest “and I think that’s something that people don’t really understand” (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2022).

For those working in nonprofit college/community centers, the days are long, and tasks are never-ending. Further, without the support of the administration, faculty and staff, the undertaking is impossible. “You need an administration that’s behind it, and faculty and staff who are akin to the one-person band – and how do you do that without burning out it’s tough. A lot of people who are teaching journalism or are adjuncts and I’ve seen a lot of them go far, far beyond the call of duty” (J. Hester, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2022).

Serving Community and Industry

“... It’s a little easier said than done. Because anyone who’s taking work from somebody who’s not on their staff, whether it’s a freelancer or a student freelancer, it’s an incredible leap of faith.”
– Jere Hester

Having college institutional support is a lifeline for some who run centers for collaboration and support of local journalism. However, that support is ideally supplemented with local and regional support, as well as larger foundation funding, when possible. Fundraising to support projects and programs is central to the mission of leading a college/community collaborative journalism center, those leaders say. Further, the job of leading a center means working as a team and performing varied roles.

One significant component of academically based journalism outreach is looking ahead. When it comes to solutions for public mistrust and resource scarcity, those leading collaborative media in colleges offer ideas for future sustainability and widening the circle of collaboration. “Is there a role that (larger statewide journalism organizations) could play in helping to raise money and distribute money? There may be some entity or entities that can use their scale to have a conversation with Knight or with Solutions Journalism or with some of the big journalism funders and then could funnel that money to community journalism startups or existing newsrooms that are struggling and on the brink of going out of business” (K. Best, personal communication, Feb. 9, 2022).

Community outreach means connecting with local media outlets and citizens where they live. It’s not about “delivering audience to advertisers,” but, rather, “delivering vital news to citizens” and “building relationships in the community” in new ways (J. Hester, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2022). For local news outlets, the change has been particularly challenging. Editors face resource challenges and adding student journalism to the mix requires significant resources to vet and edit the work. Editors don’t often have the time to teach student journalists, so a strong leader at the college center – particularly one with journalism industry experience – helps the collaborative effort to succeed. Where once local newsrooms were reluctant to work with students, the economic conditions in the early 2000s saw more willingness. Yet, it’s still a highly collaborative endeavor that could yield a variable quality of results and it means trust on the part of the professional reporters and editors working with student journalists “because anyone who’s taking work from somebody who is not on their staff, whether it’s a freelancer or a student freelancer, it’s an incredible leap of faith” (J. Hester, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2022).

Collaborative college centers may focus on investigative journalism, providing resources for local, regional, state, national – and even international – journalists and news outlets, and research. The missions vary but the commitment, even amid the pandemic, changing media landscapes, scarce resources and public skepticism, remains steadfast. For Stefanie Murray, director of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, it’s about “do(ing) anything and everything we can to be a hub of journalists and media and the state, we try to bring

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funding, we do training, professional development ... There are all sorts of different things that we do to support journalism – and the state. And then nationally and internationally, we study collaborative journalism” (S. Murray, personal communication, Feb. 11, 2022).

Without reliable leadership and business acumen, reporting will continue to be a significant challenge. What good work could be done if the executives were business-minded and supported journalism for the public good? The tension between journalism and commerce must be ethically addressed. Without strong business acumen supporting strong local news, journalists will continue to work hampered by the lack of resources. These collaborative centers are working at the intersection of journalism and funding – for the public good – “Using the language of performance-driven change, ecosystem building and collaboration – change management. Raising up the best ideas about how journalism has a path forward through executive coaching, training and audience development best practices. We’re working to grow a more sustainable and equitable future for local news organizations, communities and journalists. Doing that through the intersection of research, education and outreach, and kind of building a community of practice. And then, more specifically, we want to redefine sustainability to mean more than just money” (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2022).

Journalism centers based at colleges use research, experience and collaboration to educate and support the industry and position it for the future. That includes delivering journalism to communities that exist in a local-information vacuum and it includes situating the next generation of news executives at the center of the mission. At the heart of the mission is a new generation of journalists, who may be facing different challenges than previous generations faced. But challenging conditions are not new to journalism. While the roadblocks may shapeshift, the mission remains: “Every day I leave the journalism school more and more optimistic...they’re there for a reason and the reasons are largely the same as how previous generations got into journalism” (J. Hester, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2022).

Discussion

We attempted with our qualitative research to better understand the college and community news collaborative relationship in terms of funding, the teaching hospital method and unique challenges and potential benefits. As part of our ongoing research into varied solutions for the support of local journalism (such as local news startups and increased philanthropy, as well as college/community partnerships), we believe the vantage point of the college/local news relationship is instructive and inspiring. The directors we worked with on this project were candid about workload, funding, the teaching hospital method and what they see as a path to the future of journalism. It largely involves business acumen, and the ability to network to forge and sustain relationships with the community and financial supporters.

What we find particularly gratifying is the depth and breadth of the work being done in collaboration. Though this is

not traditionally a journalistic orientation – with competition being a feature of journalism training – there are myriad examples of fruitful collaborations that allow journalists some autonomy while still making room for the sharing of resources under specified agreements. This is not without tension due to issues such as quality control, “especially when there is not a dedicated project manager or editor” (msuproductions, 2017). Yet, the examples of successful collaborative projects among news outlets, nonprofits and community investigative centers offers one possible direction forward to a stronger journalism ecosystem that could ultimately counter social media mis- and disinformation and public mistrust, leading to an unhealthy reliance on nationally focused “newsertainment” (Whatever Happened to the News? | Center for Media Literacy | *Empowerment through Education CML MediaLit Kit*, 2022).

Central to our conversations was the very real challenge of obtaining and sustaining funding. Ultimately, our interviews led us to the understanding that the notion of one major, angel donor is not realistic, or even ideal. The Vermont Digger began with a \$7,000 donation from a well-known Vermont business and that donation was successfully parlayed into support from larger donors (Shorenstein, 2018). Collaborative centers could potentially work with state funding sources and larger local and regional nonprofits to obtain and sustain a “hodgepodge” (E. Beshears-Perel, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2022) of funding that supports sustainability through a diversity of sources.

Beyond funding, people and time are resources to be managed, both ethically (through fair wages for both student workers and college staff and faculty) and wisely (through collaborative efforts that maximize time and minimize the duplication of efforts). A focus on the business side of the effort at the inception of a collaborative project or program can lay a strong foundation to sustain the journalism work (Shorenstein, 2018).

Recommendations

The conversation regarding the shoring up of local news should be ongoing and rigorous. In our continued research, including contributions to a book chapter this spring, we plan to look deeply into issues of funding and funders, student journalist experiences, the experiences of local news editors and reporters and ways we can bring all parties together through providing case studies for myriad unique circumstances. We recommend researchers continue to attack the issue of declining resources, news deserts and ghost papers and that future work be focused on ways to counter the ownership of local news by hedge funds with no interest or experience in local news.

Challenges and further research

Our interview subjects were generous and insightful. Challenges to quantitative study using in-depth interviews include obtaining more information than can be utilized in one study. The focus for this study was intentionally constrained to funding, teaching hospital model and industry collaboration. Our subjects run teaching and outreach centers. There are more conversations to be had around each model individually, as well

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as conversations with funders, student journalists and news industry professionals.

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