An Ethical Citizen-driven Community Journalism

A Project Submitted in Partial Completion of Master of Arts Program

Journalism and Mass Communication

David M. Fortier

Kent State University

Abstract

The project addresses journalism on the local level, where community newspapers and nearby metropolitan papers have reduced and consolidated staffs, resulting in reduced coverage of local government and businesses. This set of circumstances left citizens with limited recourse: (1) continue to exist in a news vacuum that leaves them vulnerable to the vagaries of unchecked government and business decisions and susceptible to an unreliable social media or (2) have citizens take on the responsibility for filling the void themselves. This project attempted to take on the latter by providing a website with resources for citizens who would like to raise the standard of journalism in their communities, be it a town, city or school. This proposal emphasized an ethical approach that sought to get participants to define what ethical, quality journalism is and gain an appreciation of how this journalism is conducted. The Bristol Edition (TBE), a companion website at www.bristoledition.org, provides resources for interested citizens to learn about journalism ethics, apply them to their current news providers, determine a new standard, and, if so motivated, produce their own journalism within the determined parameters. TBE website applies the ethical citizen-driven community journalism concept to Bristol, Connecticut, but it is accessible to anyone interested in conducting their own community journalism project.

An Ethical Citizen-driven Community Journalism

The press's efforts to remedy its financial woes have resulted in a retreat from the social responsibility model of the press, resulting in readers, especially those in smaller or mid-sized markets, receiving less news overall, but more importantly what news they do receive is less substantive. At the same time and in concert with the retreat from the social responsibility model, many of these community newspapers have been sold and combined or closed all together, creating an even greater or imbalanced news hole. In John (2007), the author found that a shift from the social responsibility theory of the press tended to leave its audience less informed about substantive issues. His study covers "a mid-sized Midwest community over time" (p. 2). At about the same time and continuing through this decade, corporate players, such as the Journal Register Co., began buying smaller community publications, consolidating printing operations and news staff, which negatively affected coverage while appearing to address the financial issues. Writing on his blog, Mutter (2008) reported JRC adopted a strategy that called for "aggregating neighboring newspapers into ever-larger clusters that would make it possible to sell advertising more efficiently while lowering the costs of producing the publications." The strategy resulted in short-term profits but long-term deficits in local coverage. Eventually, JRC's experience resulted in a series of bankruptcies, reorganizations, and sell-offs. At the time of its first bankruptcy, JRC owned "20 daily and 159 other newspapers, serving parts of Philadelphia, Michigan, Connecticut, the Cleveland area and New York," with about 3,500 employees (The Associated Press, 2009). Around 1998, JRC owned 24 dailies and 185 non-dailies in Connecticut, Philadelphia, Ohio, central New England, and Capital-Saratoga and Mid-Hudson, New York, regions ("History of Journal," n.d.).

The trend of this diminishment in coverage in these smaller and mid-sized markets is national and international. Sass (2017) wrote: "It may be a matter of some concern for readers that scores of local newspapers are trading hands in a wave of consolidation across the country, often leaving longtime family owners for bigger corporate bosses. And they may or may not share the same connection and commitment to the communities." While Sass focused on the United States, a recent study of local news providers across Canada concluded, "Newsrooms outside the big cities are closing, and with them goes the critical information citizens require for everyday life" (Lindgren, Corbett, & Hodson, 2017).

Larger publications do little to fill this void. Tippett interviewed the coordinator of the National Rural Assembly, who in speaking of Athens, Ga., with its population of 125,000, said, "If I'm reading The New York Times online, I'm intrigued by the flyover picture that gets told of, especially, rural communities. There's not a whole lot of embedded journalists, at the moment, who are, I think, spending the real time it's gonna take to tell the nuanced, complex story of historical trauma in rural communities...I'm struck by how that complexity is not there" (Giridharada & Kimball Coe, 2017). In a separate podcast, internationally renowned author Ian McEwan bemoaned the loss of local coverage: "...no experienced journalists are there to keep an eye on town halls and their politics and the whole pork barrel business that might overwhelm us" (Clayson, 2016).

Smarsh, in The New York Times, wrote: "The demise of local news was the backdrop of my early career, making me keenly aware of how a dearth of local reporting resources is inextricably woven into today's divisive political climate" (2018). She concluded: "Coastal media is often criticized for inadequate 'parachute journalism' into Middle America, but it shouldn't be New York's job to understand Nebraska. Nebraska understands Nebraska" (2018).

Literature Review

The literature shows that professional journalists have been grappling with the phenomena of citizen and participatory journalism for decades. It also shows that ethical values journalists have developed over the years to maintain their integrity, ones that dominated the editor as gatekeeper model of the press, are ones citizens now need to adopt as their own (Ethical Journalism Network, 2015). In addition, the literature shows many news media have been experimenting with various roles for citizens to fill, working in concert with their staff or organization. Also, the literature contains several reports promoting a constructionist educational model as an effective way of teaching people to learn new roles.

Professional Versus Lay Roles

One hurdle for professionals when it comes to new roles for citizens is the division which they see between professionals and lay people. In "The tension between professional control and open participation: Journalism and its boundaries," Lewis wrote, "While it is true that other media professionals are redefining their roles in a participatory media environment..., journalism, ..., has found digital media and digital culture to be particularly unsettling to its professional paradigm" (2012, p. 3). In Lewis's account, journalism "lacks the trappings of a classical profession: It has no monopoly on the training and certification of its workforce, nor has the means to prevent others from engaging in its work, and, while it has self-policing mechanisms of ethical codes, its power to enforce compliance is minimal" (p. 6). Despite the classical trappings of professionalism, Lewis concluded, society has benefitted from journalistic professionalism with its ethical standards (p. 13). Specifically, among these professional standards, he mentioned public service, objectivity, autonomy, and ethics (p. 14).

Lewis wrote that in today's environment "what sets apart the present media is the *ease* with which individuals may participate in the creation and distribution of media, on a scale and with a reach unimaginable in earlier times" (p. 16). This development, one of convergence, where "longstanding distinctions between media creation and media consumption [have become] increasingly fluid," has resulted "not merely in a technological phenomenon, but also a cultural one ..." (p. 17). Whether under the title of "participatory culture" or "digital culture," "end users feel enabled and encouraged to participate in the creation and circulation of media" (p. 17). This greater participation on such an expansive level achieves "normative aims of collective wisdom and well-being" (p. 19). Throughout, this participation bridges individual agency and the concerns of the group using digital means to solve group problems (p. 19).

Lewis stated that "there is emerging evidence--small but significant--that journalism's ideological commitment to control, rooted in an institutional instinct toward protecting legitimacy and boundaries, may be giving way to a hybrid logic of adaptability and openness: a willingness to see audiences on a more peer level, to appreciate their contributions, and to find normative purpose in transparency and participation" (p. 23). In effect, Lewis wrote, as journalism shifts from product to process, "journalist and audiences both recognize, and respect, what citizens can contribute when news becomes a mutually shared process, requiring forms of 'work' from both groups" (p. 24). Lewis concluded the resulting "ethic of participation" is a natural outgrowth of this professional-participatory tension and is accepted as normal where digital journalism is concerned (p. 24). In the end, Lewis anticipated that these circumstances might "lead to a revised logic for journalism: one that preserves certain ethical practices and boundaries that lend legitimacy, abandons jurisdictional claims that have lost their currency in the new environment, and embraces fresh values, ..." (p. 25).

In Campbell (2014), the author "argues that fully understanding and situating citizen journalism requires moving beyond the journalism-centered focus which dominates the literature towards a consideration of citizen journalism that incorporates theories and practices of citizenship alongside those of journalism" (p. 4). He acknowledged the divide between those who "argue that anyone can be a journalist" and "those who express concerns about the under-valuing of professional skills, training and values" of the journalist (p. 4). He distinguished between two theories: that of the informed citizen and the monitorial citizen, as they relate to citizens and journalism, concluding that these models fall short of capturing the complexities of journalism in the age of social media (p. 9). Citizenship, according to Campbell, eclipses a legal definition. He wrote: "Seen from a radical democracy perspective, citizens' media materialize as important sites where citizenship is forged" (p. 10).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014), wrote, "Where journalism's role once was to simply provide information as a tool of self-governance, it now becomes a role of providing citizens with the tools they need to extract knowledge for themselves from the undifferentiated flood of rumor, propaganda, gossip, fact, assertion, and allegation the communications systems now produces" (p. 290). They proposed inviting "the community into the process by which the news is produced" (p. 290). They recommend three areas where the process might begin: (1) transparency, as the "beginning of a new connection between the journalist and the citizen"; (2) partnering with citizens who can help "gather news in ways more sophisticated than we imagine," by "approaching them as a new group of sources, organizing their intelligence, and vetting and synthesizing that intelligence into a whole"; and (3) "listening when the public reacts to the news" (pp. 290-291). They concluded, "The more active citizens become in the news, in turn, the more responsibility they begin to bear for it" (p. 291). In a previous work, Kovach and

Rosenstiel (2010) suggested both an expanding role for journalists as well as citizens: "the new or next journalism means a new role of being something of a Socratic teacher, in which the presentation of the news is accompanied by material, perhaps, even tutorials, to help develop the skills needed to turn that material into knowledge" (p. 201).

Ethics as a Common Denominator

Increasingly, with the advent of social media, the literature shows that lay people are performing, as White said, "acts of journalism" (Ethical Journalism Network, 2015). He added, "although, you might say the door is open to far more people being engaged in journalism, that does not dilute the importance of standards and quality in the work that is being done" (2015). In addressing freedom of expression, White made clear distinctions between it and journalism:

> Free expression, it's great and it's liberating and it's an important part of democracy but
> it's not journalism. Journalism is quite distinct. Because journalism is not free expression
> in that sense: its press freedom; it's the freedom of journalists to express themselves but
> within a framework of values, and that framework of values are the ethics of journalism.
> It's about self-restraint. Journalists don't allow themselves free expression. They
> constrain their expression inside the ethical framework of the work that they do. (2015)

A remedy for White, then, becomes a matter of educating the layperson about journalistic ethics: "We need to work out how we can transfer the values of journalism into the whole online communications spectrum" (2015).

Toward this end, morals must be distinguished from ethics: morals deal with a person's actions, oftentimes influenced by religious and societal values; ethics "are an external system of codes of conduct that [journalism] professionals have developed in order to justify the special place which [they] see [they] have in a functioning society and democracy" (Ethical Journalism

Network, 2018). Patterson & Wilkins (2011) wrote: "Moral systems are not synonymous with ethics. *Ethics begins when elements within a moral system conflict.* Ethics is less about the conflict between right and wrong than it is about the conflict between equally compelling (or equally unattractive) alternatives and the choices that must be made between them" (p. 4).

Kidder (2003) defined ethics as "not a blind impartiality, doling out right and wrong according to some stone-cold canon of ancient and immutable law" (p. 50). He called ethics "a warm and supremely human activity that cares enough for others to want right to prevail" (p. 50). He wrote "ethical fitness is like character – which, we've been told, is what you are in the dark, when no one's looking" (p. 51). It is "private and personal. But it's also public and social" (p. 51).

Merrill (1997) addressed broad ethical considerations and a blanket definition of journalistic ethics: "A journalist must *care* about doing the right thing, must *want* to be ethical; such a sincere desire will lead the journalist to seek out moral wisdom as a guide to ethical decision making" (p. 28). It is this development, "ethically through various stages," that a person evidences "greater ethical maturity and sophistication" (p. 28). The framework for this journalistic maturity exists throughout the profession, from the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, to the ethical standards for specific publications, such as The New York Times with an entire catalogue of topics, Politico with a single page, and National Public Radio with a handbook. Many media organizations have created ethics courses for students, professionals, and lay people. Among these, Poynter's News University offers the course, "Ethics of Journalism," which can be completed online over time. The Ethical Journalism Network offers "The Ethical Journalist's Toolkit."

Ethics is not simply the concern of journalists. A growing number of institutions have made ethical decision-making tools available to the public via the internet. Harvard University's *The Guidebook* to its GoodWork Toolkit (2010), a publication of its GoodWork Project, features "a collection of intriguing narratives and dilemmas" that workers face in their attempt to "carry out work of high quality," none with a clear-cut solution but intended "as invitations, to ponder how work is accomplished, and how it might be carried out in a better way" (p. 5). Among these is an example of a young journalist grappling with an ethical issue of her own (p. 75). In addition, "The Good Project," a part of the GoodWork Project, features a digital tool, "Ethical Dilemmas and Value-Based Decisions," with a module, entitled "To Print or Not to Print" ("To Print," n.d.).

Projects Featuring Citizens Involved in Journalism Projects

The literature shows that projects featuring citizen and participatory journalism began as technology enabling such participation became available. With the increasing availability of technology as it related to the production of and dissemination of the news, early on the MIT Media Lab and its Electronic Publishing Group engaged in several projects under Bender, who espoused the following on his homepage under "Thoughts on the future of news (circa) 1996":

> The application of technology to the future of the news is not only about the efficiency of professional production and distribution of news. It is also about providing the news consumer with tools that facilitate creation, access and use of news in both individual and communal contexts. While the adoption of digital communication technology by the news industry will enhance consumer access to information it must also support news as a "community service." News as a service model is one in which the consumer of news is an active engaged participant. (n.d.)

Picard (2004) found, "Learners construct new knowledge most effectively when they are in the process of constructing something external which they can examine for themselves and discuss with others":

Learners feel differently about the knowledge when they experience themselves as active participants with control over (and personal involvement in) the learning process. And the way they feel about the knowledge profoundly influences what they will do with it and especially how they reflect on it, which in turn influences how it grows and connects. (p. 262.)

In addition, Picard found that participants in print and radio journalism, "facilitated by easy-to-use tools, led to an active debate over the content of their stories and, more importantly, the processes that they engage in as media producers" and that the "collaborative editing process seems to help them develop a critical stance towards traditional media. ... they begin to understand the biases and critical thought processes that are the norm for professional journalists" (p. 262).

Turpeinen (2000) pursued community publishing in light of social learning. He characterized community as having three attributes: purpose, identity, and communication (p. 19). He included common goals and projects. He conceded each community is different: "They have personality like individuals, they have differing needs and motivations. Community members learn from one another's experiences, set common strategies, develop a shared vocabulary, and have common norms and means" (p. 19). Community communication can be understood "as the evolving script, which creates and sustains the individual within the group" (p. 19). Ultimately, Turpeinen concluded that the group he worked with, which happened to be

senior citizens, benefitted socially from their participation in the group as well as producing

journalism.

Driscoll (2008), in his work with community journalism, found himself allied with MIT

and several students working on doctoral programs, including Turpeinen. Driscoll wrote: "The

rise of citizen journalism has been spawned by the invention of the Worldwide Web while being

abetted by the mainstream media's drift toward a fixation with the bottom line and away from its

responsibilities as a servant of the public" (p. 13). In posing the question, "Why does MIT (and

the Media Lab) spend so much time working with communities?" he responded: "The two most

obvious answers are (1) altruism and (2) the need to test technology in real-world settings.... A

third aspect, which especially pertains to the Media Lab, has to do with the sometimes-

controversial educational philosophy called 'constructionism.'" (p. 70). He quoted from a

chapter by Edith S. Ackermann, "The cycle of self-directed learning is...an iterative process by

which learners invent for themselves the very tools and mediations that best support the

exploration of intriguing ideas" (pp. 71-72). Driscoll included three projects he was personally

involved with that developed around constructionism: The Melrose (MA) Mirror Silverstringers,

The Junior Journal, and The Rye Reflection Surfers. The Mirror and Rye Reflections involved

senior citizens who produced their own web-based publications. The Junior Journal involved

high school students from around the globe. The latter had a six-year run (p. 85). Of the senior-

led publications, Rye Reflections is no longer accessible online with no end of publication date,

and The Melrose Mirror ceased publication in December 2017. Driscoll concluded:

"Philosophically the ideal situation would be to have community-journalism groups that

maintain their independence with assistance from the media organizations in such a way that

both benefit" (p. 85). The media needs to experiment "in the citizen-journalism realm, not to add

to circulation or add to the bottom line. With the public good as the only goal, the question that needs to be resolved is how everyone can best co-exist" (p. 85). He posed the following question: "How about a recipe that includes one part independent community-journalism group, one part media news operation and one part liaison person bridging the two with some form of compensation as a binding agent? Stir, but don't mix. Of course an alternative recipe could call for all to maintain their own independence, co-existing as competitors, friendly or otherwise" (p. 85). He included scholastic publications as potentially fulfilling this role, citing programs begun under the aegis of The New York Times, but cautioned that they "tend to suffer from the top-down syndrome" (p. 85).

The ISeeChange website touts on its stories page: "Weather and climate change reporting from the ground up. You've posted and we've listened! Read in depth reports on the changes people are observing in their local environments and how these observations relate to trends or patterns scientists are seeing" ("I See Change," n.d.). Koski described ISeeChange as "a news project that involves ordinary people at every stage in the climate reporting process" (n.d.). She continued, "It's a departure from citizen journalism, which leaves reporting in the hands of well-intentioned amateurs, and user-generated content, which casts journalists as curators over material of widely varying quality and reliability. This approach treats audiences as collaborators in a professionally managed reporting process, deepening audience involvement and even improving the quality of stories reporters produce" (Koski, n.d.).

Curious City, "an ongoing news experiment at WBEZ, online at wbez.org and on the radio dial around Chicago at 91.5 FM," has for its mission "to include the public in editorial decision-making, make journalism more transparent and strengthen multimedia coverage about Chicago, the surrounding region and its people (past or present)" ("Curious City," n.d.). Jennifer

Brandel is the journalist behind the program, which she calls "public-powered journalism" (Koski, n.d.). "Curious City started as an experiment—to test whether audiences had good story ideas, and what would happen if journalists gave them some editorial control" (Koski, n.d.). City Bureau, also of Chicago, publishes the following on its home page: "Journalism, civic engagement and public tools for the public good--follow us as we create a media lab built on people-power in Chicago" (City Bureau, n.d.). Its mission describes the program as "a nonprofit civic journalism lab based in Woodlawn on the South Side of Chicago. We bring journalists and community members together in a collaborative spirit to produce equitable media coverage, encourage civic participation and hold powerful forces to account" ("Our Mission," n.d.). City Bureau offers citizen reporting programs for early career journalists as well as veteran reporters, a public newsroom drawing members of the media and citizens each week to learn more about the reporting process, and documentary training for community members.

Project Defined

The problem this project addressed is how to get Nebraskans to understand Nebraskans, or to get people on the local level to understand their news needs and effectively resolve the gap in coverage. The project had several components. The first was to draw up a plan for a series of workshops. The fundamental idea was to provide participants with an experience that would allow them to realize that the work of journalists is not cut and dried but involves choices because journalism is guided by codes of ethics. Ideally, the project would provide them to have an opportunity at being local journalists. It was important not to prescribe a course of action but rather to provide participants with an opportunity to see how their own thinking about journalism might evolve. The sessions were developed from the reading on ethics, exercises mentioned in this reading, as well as experiments that involved inquiry and hands-on experience, especially

from the early MIT Media Lab. The original series included five weekly one-hour sessions, with an hour or two of exercises between sessions. The five weeks included a session each on the following: an introduction with an overview and information gathering from participants, a review of personal news habits, an introduction to journalism ethics, opportunities to research and propose subjects for possible stories, a writing workshop, and a wrap-up session. The workshops ended up stretching out to 10 weeks, between cancellations from winter storms and having to add components. The final project ended up with seven sessions. These sessions, "A 7-part ethical CDCJ workshop series" can be found under the "Ethic in action" tab on the "Citizen-driven community journalism" navigation button on the website.

A second step was to find volunteers willing to devote the time and energy to such an involved project. This was accomplished through personal invitations as well as invitations delivered via the website, www.bristoledition.org, and community Facebook pages. Nine people requested additional information, and seven accepted. Of these, five were male and two, female; one was in his 60s, another in his 50s, one in her 30s, four in their 20s. Four were in education. The remaining three were, respectively, working in insurance, in marketing, and in job training services. Two had run for city council: one previously who was in a second term but had not run for a third term, another had run unsuccessfully for a first term. Another had recently been elected to the board of education. There was one retiree and one minority. The only journalism experience was limited to one person who took a college course.

Once the workshop series was completed, the information was gathered, evaluated, and redesigned specifically for use under the "Citizen-driven community journalism" tab on the navigation bar of www.bristoledition.org.

However, the workshop series was only one of the components of the project. The next step was to figure out how to restructure these workshops, taking into consideration the literature review and other sources that would more accurately capture the scope of the project. The result was the development of tabs for "The concept," "Ethics as a foundation," "Ethics in action" (including the 7-part workshop series, "Ethical partnering," "The Ethical organization," and "Resources and tools." In addition, suggestions from the group resulted in the development of one podcast and several stories, but most of the focus was on the "Citizen-driven community journalism" component. Development of the website is intended to grow organically from this component.

Regarding the latter, two of the original group members have committed to continue working on the website. An additional two, Greenleaf and Cimadamore, have committed to writing columns. A sports reporter has been invited to join but has to figure out his time commitment. I intend to continue working on the website as well as the "Citizen-driven community journalism" model. According to statistics provided by the website's software, The Bristol Edition has 500 subscribers receiving email updates whenever it posts.

The website, then, is a work in progress and will continue to function after the completion of this project.

Methodology

Several assumptions were made regarding this project.

First, there was the assumption that there would be a handful of people from the community willing to participate is a project that involved a considerable time element. The project found that there were people willing to commit time and energy to a project that aimed to improve the quality of coverage of their community.

Second, there was the assumption that ethics would be the hinge upon which the project swung, providing opportunity for engagement, allowing for choice, and reinforcing personal agency. The concept that citizens drive community journalism, rather than, say, business interests, is one that demands an awareness that citizens have to recognize each of these components.

To get to this point, I reviewed my notes, the readings, and the concepts from the Ethic of Journalism course. In addition, I read copiously from the literature about citizen and community journalism, especially criticisms of citizen journalism, where journalists had the most problems, and finally what news media were doing to engage readers.

From this activity, I determined that ethics would be key because it relied on persons forming themselves through values and principles allied with ethics. The questions became ones that focused on individuals beginning to understand journalism and its ethical standards and then, working with similarly informed individuals, exercising this knowledge, to address how to improve local news coverage. The questions ranged from the practical to the more theoretical, for instance, here are a few: Would individuals starting from this scheme be able to do journalism? What would this journalism look like if it began from an ethical perspective rather than from a more traditional journalism training perspective? Would these people be about to appreciate how journalism worked? Would they end up adopting more favorable opinion of good journalism? How would their conversation affect how their community was covered? This conceptual outlook ran throughout the project, from the choice of title for the tab, "Citizen-driven community journalism," to the presentation of subjects on the pull-down menu under this tab, to the choice of workshops under the "Ethics in action" selection. Ultimately, the website that is being developed, it is a work in progress, in keeping with this concept, will revolve around

the decisions of the group of people who came together to answer for themselves questions such as these: 1) Is coverage of our community addressing important issues well? 2) If not, should existing news media be approached to address this? 3) Should citizens consider producing their own journalism? 4) If yes, what will that journalism look like? 5) How will it be reported? 6) How will every stage of the production incorporate an ethical code? 7) How will this be communicated to readers? 8) How will readers be educated about this framework? 9) How will readers be invited to join the conversation, both as partners in deciding what should be covered, how it will be covered, and how they can assist in the reporting? and 10) How will the organization encourage checks and balances to ensure the ethical framework perpetuates itself?

This type of thinking informed workshop sessions, for instance, under "Ethics in action," conversations often circled through and revisited either the Ethical Journalist Network's five core values: accuracy, independence, impartially, accountability, and humanity, of the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists featuring these categories: seek the truth and report it, act independently, minimize harm, be accountable. A typical pedagogical approach featuring the latter might proceed this way. A conversation would begin with the participants' understanding of a topic, such as, what do you consider to be news worthy? Or where do you find your news? From there, the conversation might turn to ethical concerns, such as, if the news media is charged with seeking the truth and reporting, how are things going locally? Are the important issues being covered? Are they being covered well? And from there, the conversation might bring in other ethical issues, from minimizing harm, acting independently, and being accountable. The focus on ethics needed to be front and center, and it needed to be revisited again and again as a framework for all decision making.

This constant reference to ethics needed to inform how the limited resources of the group would be used to improve the quality of coverage of their community. It would also be used to train new recruits, to inform conversations with the public, and to evaluate its performance. As the website grows, the understanding is that it would reflect in its reporting, policies, and practices this grounding in ethics. In most ways, the decisions from the pilot group resolved with surprising yet sound decisions, adhering to best journalism practices. For instance, participants determined that talking heads coverage, or he said-she said reporting, fell far short of actually informing citizens well, often encouraging misconceptions and division.

Limitations of Project

This project involved a group of seven volunteers from Bristol, Connecticut. Consequently, it did not provide a one-answer-fits-all scenario, but a process for people in different locations to determine what works best for them. In addition, the project did not deal with financial issues nor did it deal with legal issues beyond introducing basic concepts. It did, however, provide resources for interested parties to pursue each of these issues on their own. It did not delve deeply into social media and its various incarnations. Only basic information about technology requirements and websites was provided. Rather, the focus was on the development of an "ethical fitness" model, as defined by Kidder (2003): "First, it's what you let others know you to be—the way you communicate to others an openness to ethical concern, a willingness to engage tough moral issues, an invitation to challenge your actions by your values. Second, ethical fitness doesn't exist in a personal vacuum…. Third, ethical fitness benefits mightily from an organizational culture" (pp. 54-55). This resource will be for those interested in the problem of local news coverage, and the resource will guide them through the first steps leading them to evaluate local coverage and produce their own journalism. This resource, in other words, is a

jumping off point, with the understanding that anyone motivated to participate will learn along

the way. The primary concern of this project, then, was to provide regular citizens with the

ethically-centered, critical thinking skills associated with journalism, so that they can appreciate

quality journalism when they see it, evaluate the journalism in their community, and take action

to improve coverage, through reporting and commentary or by challenging the status quo.

Conclusion

The project accomplished what it set out to: creating a medium for citizens of a

community to drive the quality of news coverage of their community. By following the steps

provided under the "Citizen-driven community journalism" tab on The Bristol Edition website at

www.bristoledition.org, a group of citizens can evaluate the news coverage of their community

and determine whether to open a discussion of this coverage with an existing news medium or

strike out on their own and produce their own online journalism. The result is not prescriptive, in

other words, what one community decides is not the solution but a solution that suits this

community and the volunteers who step forward to accept the challenge that their community

faces regarding news coverage. Each community determines its own path, underscoring the idea

that citizens drive the decision by exerting their own agency rather than passively accepting

whatever coverage comes their way. The guiding principle is ethics. The shape of news in a

community will differ from one to another depending on the choices of participants, but what

does not change is that these choices are based on an ethical standard, each decision circulated

constantly and consistently through this ethical paradigm, whether it is determining how as a

group these individuals will function as an organization to determining the worthiest stories and

how to report them from day to day and week to week. As this dynamic takes hold, the rest of the

website, where the "Citizen-driven community journalism tab" resides, grows organically,

bringing the process full circle by providing examples of a group's choices resulting from its ethical stance. The website, then, continues to take on a life of its own beyond the scope of this project.

Philosophically speaking, journalism's future depends upon citizen engagement, and by this is meant not simply attracting new readers but developing in citizens an appreciation of journalism, how it functions, and its purpose. With this in mind, the project provides citizens with new possibilities beyond strictly media literacy instruction. The project shows citizens need opportunities to understand their expanding the role beyond that of a consumer. Through the project, citizens engaged in the practice of journalism seeing journalism through new eyes, raising their expectations about the type and quality of journalism they anticipate and how they must assume partial responsibility for journalism's success. The ethical component of the project is critical because it forces participants into the heart of editorial decision making. Ethics is the hinge upon which the project swings. The project confirms that, for individuals who experience this ethical thinking, exercising ethical fitness per se, the complexities of such decisions draw the individuals in. They get it. They can begin to appreciate what good journalism entails and how difficult it is to accomplish. At the same time, individuals working with each other on a group project such as this cannot help encouraging each other in this endeavor and practice. There is a pull, an attraction, to this type of work that affords those engaged in it to approach each other on equal footing. Participants found that an additional benefit of this ethical approach is that it addresses other obstacles to journalism, such as, accusations of bias, fake news, and imbalance. A focus on ethics allowed participants to depersonalize decision making, focusing on whether the decision at hand meets the ethical standard or what needs to be done to ensure it does, not who is right and who is wrong. Beginning with the five core values of promoted by the Ethical

Journalism Network —accuracy, independence, impartiality, accountability, and humanity—or those of the Society of Professional Journalists—seek and report the truth, minimize harm, act independently, be accountable—all other elements of journalism fall into place, whether a legal issue or one of reporting.

The ethical component also demands continuous education, for those in the group, and by extension, for all those who may become part of the group. In other words, anyone and everyone. Participants concluded that inviting others into the project and educating them about ethics will be an ongoing process. It is not enough for those who step up to do their own journalism to shrink away from the broader obligation to embrace the public. The project anticipates that citizens who experience this ethical approach will reach out to the community by inviting them to workshops and sessions, providing regular opportunity for an exchange of thoughts and ideas about areas that are ripe for reporting, as well as further opportunities to share examples of ethical decision making. What ensues is a conversation where participants are constantly informing and re-informing each other about what is most important in the community. The conversation promotes transparency and trust, an appreciation that journalism is not static but dynamic, that when mistakes occur an explanation and correction will be forthcoming, and that when it comes to this ethical approach there is always more rather than less to be done. Again, the "Citizen-drive community journalism" webpages anticipate this natural progression, providing a point of origin for the community to begin to consider the substance of its news coverage, fostering a healthy exchange of ideas among citizens who attempt to define its news needs, promoting self-reflection among both the group and the community it serves, and encouraging the public to challenge how well these practices fulfill on the promise that citizens are capable of driving their own community journalism. In the end, the point of the project is just

that, that each community demand a level of journalism that meets their standard, and if

necessary, that citizens are capable of and willing to produce the news coverage to meet this

standard.

References

About Politico. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from https://www.politico.com/about-us

Bender, W. (n.d.). Thoughts on the future of the news (circa 1996). Retrieved from Walter

      Bender's homepage website: http://web.media.mit.edu/~walter/

Campbell, V. (2014). Theorizing citizenship in citizen journalism. *Digital Journalism*, *3*(5), 704-

      719. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.937150

City bureau. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from https://medium.com/city-bureau

Clayson, J. (Producer). (2016, September 21). Ian McEwan's Shakespearian 'nutshell'. *On Point*.

      Podcast retrieved from http://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2018/01/01/ian-mcwean-

      rebroadcast

Curious city. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from https://www.wbez.org/shows/curious-

      city/7b79e16d-f3a9-4156-9b27-4d2cc6ce351e

Driscoll, J. (2008). *Couch potatoes sprout: The rise of online community journalism*. Xlibris

      Corporation.

Ethical journalism. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from

      https://www.nytimes.com/editorial-standards/ethical-journalism.html#

Ethical Journalism Network. (2015, February 17). *What is journalism and who is a journalist?*

      [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orI0uEj2Z7M

Ethical Journalism Network. (2015, February 18). *The difference between free expression and*

      journalism [Video file]. Retrieved from

      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=499FWnBDveU

Ethical Journalism Network. (2018, May 3). *Ethics as business model* [Video file]. Retrieved

      from https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/lisbon-world-press-freedom-day-2018

The ethical journalist's toolkit. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from Ethical Journalism

      Network website: (https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/courses).

      SchoolJournalism.org offers "Journalism Ethics Training"

      (https://www.schooljournalism.org/journalism-ethics-training/

Ethics Handbook. (n.d.). Retrieved from NPR website: http://ethics.npr.org/

Ethics of journalism. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from Poynter.News University

      website: http://www.newsu.org/courses/ethics-journalism

Fischman, W., & Barendsen, L. (2010). *The guidebook* [PDF]. Retrieved from

      http://thegoodproject.org/pdf/GoodWork-Toolkit-guide.pdf

Giridharadas, A., & Kimball Coe, W. (2017, November 30). The call to community in a changed

      world (Interview by K. Tippett) [Transcript]. Retrieved December 5, 2017, from On

      Being with Krista Tippett website: https://onbeing.org/programs/anand-giridharadas-

      whitney-kimball-coe-the-call-to-community-in-a-changed-world-nov2017/

History of Journal Register Company. (n.d.). In *Reference for business*. Retrieved October 17,

      2018, from https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/73/Journal-Register-

      Company.html

I see change stories. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from https://stories.iseechange.org/

John, J. A. (2007, August). *Fifty years of community news: The erosion of social responsibility?*

      Paper presented at to the Community Journalism Interest Group of the Association for

      Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC.

Kidder, R. M. (2003). *How good people make tough choices: Resolving the dilemmas of ethical

      living* (Rev. & Updated ed.). New York, NY: Harper.

Koski, O. (n.d.). How participatory journalism turns news consumers into collaborators.

Retrieved September 9, 2018, from http://niemanreports.org/articles/how-participatory-

journalism-turns-news-consumers-into-collaborators/

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2010). *Blur: How to know what's true in the age of information

overload* (With new afterword ed.). New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know

and the public should expect* (Rev. & Updated 3rd ed.). New York, NY: Three Rivers

Press.

Lewis, S.C. (2012). The tension between professional control and open participation: Journalism

and its boundaries. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-36. Retrieved from

https://concservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/123290/iCS%20The%Tension%be

tween%20Professional%20Control%20a?sequence=1

Lindgren, A., Corbett, J., & Hodson, J. (2017, January 23). Canada's local news "poverty".

Retrieved from Policy Options website: http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/january-

2017/canadas-local-news-poverty/

Merrill, J. C. (1997). *Journalism ethics: Philosophical foundations for news media*. New York,

NY: St. Martin's Press.

Mutter, A. D. (2008, April 13). What went wrong at JRC? [Blog post]. Retrieved from

Reflections of a newsosaur website: http://www.nwsosaur.blogspot.com/search?q-

what+went+wrong+at+jcr

NPR ethics handbook. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from http://ethics.npr.org/

Our mission. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from https://www.citybureau.org/our-mission/

Patterson, P., & Wilkins, L. (2011). *Media ethics: Issues & cases* (7th. ed.). New York, NY:

    McGraw-Hill.

Picard, R., Papert, S., Bender, W., Blumberg, B., Breazeal, C., Cavallo, D., . . . Strohecker, C.

    (2004). Affective learning -- a manifesto. *BT technology journal*, *22*(4), 253-269.

Sass, E. (2017, July 27). Consolidation hits local papers across the country. *MediaPost*.

    Retrieved from http://www.mediapost.com

Smarsh, S. (2018, August 16). Our blind spots often hide the truth about America. Retrieved

    December 2, 2018, from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/opinion/trump-country-

    liberals-working-class.html

SPJ code of ethics. (n.d.). Retrieved September 9, 2018, from Society of Professional Journalists

    website: https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Standards and ethics. (n.d.). Retrieved from The New York Times website:

    https://www.nytco.com/who-we-are/culture/standards-and-ethics/

To print or not to print. (n.d.). Retrieved from

    http://thegoodproject.org/modules/dilemmasdecisions/#/print/intro

Turpeinen, M. S. (2000). *Enabling, modeling and interconnecting active community publishers*

    (Doctoral dissertation).

WNYC Studios (Producer). (2016, November 11). Wrong number. *On the Media*. Podcast

    retrieved from http://onthemedia.org