

THE NEW NEWSROOM



REPORTING FROM THE FUTURE
OF PUBLIC INTEREST JOURNALISM

THE ATKINSON
JOURNALISM FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD



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ABOUT CATHERINE WALLACE



CATHERINE WALLACE

2016-2017 ATKINSON FELLOW IN PUBLIC POLICY

Catherine Wallace has nearly 40 years of experience as a journalist. She was formerly the managing editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, the deputy national editor of the *Globe and Mail's* Toronto edition and a Southam Fellow at the University of Toronto. She's currently the assistant managing editor of news at the *Toronto Star*.

As the 2016-2017 Atkinson Fellow in Public Policy, Catherine explored the future of journalism at a time the number of journalists in Canada was in sharp decline. She went beyond examining new business models, instead focusing on what role the community can play in helping fill the gap in information and storytelling. From universities to museums to everyday citizens, Wallace reported on new kinds of collaborations that are helping make sense of data, inform the public and hold governments accountable.

The Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy awards a seasoned Canadian journalist with the opportunity to pursue a year long investigation into a current policy issue. This award is a collaboration of the Atkinson Foundation, the Honderich family and the *Toronto Star*.

READ THE FULL SERIES AT
<https://medium.com/the-new-newsroom>

INTRODUCTION

When veteran journalist Catherine Wallace pitched “the new newsroom” as her focus for the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy in 2016, we jumped at the chance to support her. Her take on the state of the news media industry demonstrated she had the best interests of all Canadians in mind.

Catherine set out to describe new ways of doing journalism and engaging different sectors in Canada, the U.S., and France. By the time her last story was filed, she had taken us to museums, university classrooms, research centres, and nonprofit organizations to imagine realistic alternatives to the status quo and to see promising experiments in action. We also saw the future of news in the transition to a digital economy from the perspective of a working journalist.

A year later, this perspective is even more important. We concluded that the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy series deserved a wider audience and decided to re-publish it in full — with updates — on an open, digital platform, and in print form.

Catherine took this opportunity to write an article on the new collaborations and other actions that are shaping the future today. Recently, the Government of Canada pledged \$50 million to support local news journalism and to examine new models for philanthropic engagement in journalism. This decision has paved the way for a much broader discussion with Canadians about the value of journalism in a democratic society and the role we play from subscriber to collaborator to shareholder.

As a foundation established with the proceeds from the sale of the *Toronto Star* in the last century, we often ask ourselves: what role would Joseph Atkinson want us to play? Mr. Atkinson was the editor and publisher who transformed the *Star* from a workers cooperative into a modern news company over 50 years. He oversaw an era of modernization and innovation in the media industry while staunchly defending core journalistic standards. It was, however, his unfailing commitment to the rights of workers that helped defined the *Star* as “the paper for the people”.

We imagine that the current state of the news business would keep Mr. Atkinson up at night. But the news would get him up in the morning, determined to keep people informed and engaged in the fight for the future of high quality public interest journalism.

So, that’s what we’re doing. We’re making sure complex social issues continue to get deep, nuanced coverage while new newsrooms are under construction. We’re keeping the light on workers and their rights – in the media and other industries affected by economic disruptions. We’re putting everything we’ve got into the fight against inequality, including inequality of voice and media representation.

If you’d like to learn more about this work, please connect with us via social media at @AtkinsonCF or our website at www.atkinsonfoundation.ca.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colette Murphy". The script is fluid and cursive.

Colette Murphy
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



CANADIAN JOURNALISM IS IN DECLINE. HERE'S WHAT WE CAN TAKE ACTION ON NOW

New kinds of collaborations are helping fill the gaps, but more needs to be done.

In the face of a collapsing news industry, New Jersey is putting \$5 million a year into civic information.

It's recognition by a state government of the vital role information plays in a democracy — of the essential need for citizens to be informed and engaged. But it's also a recognition of the shrinking part that traditional media is able to play, and of the range of solutions that will have to be considered.

The money approved by the state legislature this summer sets up New Jersey's Civic Information Consortium, a rare example of a comprehensive and collaborative approach to filling the information gap. The plan is that anyone can apply for funding — news outlet, academic, ordinary citizen — if they have a good and workable idea that addresses residents' civic information needs. Five state universities will provide the organization and infrastructure for the consortium.

It was one of the most inspirational projects I reported on as the 2016-2017 Atkinson Fellow in

Public Policy, as I researched where civic news and storytelling might come from as traditional media shrinks.

New Jersey isn't alone in realizing support is needed; Canada's 2018 federal budget in February announced a \$50-million fund over five years to help local journalism in underserved areas. But six months later, no guidelines have been released on how the federal money will be spent or what principles would be applied. Will it support business models? Community models? Experimentation? Whose needs will be addressed?

The Civic Information Consortium, by contrast, was the result of two years of groundwork by a variety of partners working at different levels. This included an advocacy group, Free Press, which talked not only to news outlets but to residents in public forums across the state about their needs as local journalism dwindles and the digital revolution risks becoming a sea of cacophony.

This work, as with many other efforts in the U.S. to make sense of the new information ecosystem, would not have been possible without the financial support of philanthropic foundations. I had listed the need for funding for research and experimentation as one of the big lessons of my fellowship, and now — a year after completing the Atkinson, and seven months after returning to work in the news industry — it stands out even more clearly because things are only getting worse. We are losing more journalists; we are producing fewer reported stories on key public institutions, as a new report by the Public Policy Forum outlines this fall.

The news industry is focused so intensely on finding sustainable models to pay for the kind of deep reporting and investigative work that can only be done by professional journalism that it has no resources to spare for experiments in civic information that fall outside that mandate.

But in Canada, so far, little help is coming from outside the industry either, and lack of funding is one large reason. It takes money to carry out research, consult with communities, experiment and share information. It takes money to co-ordinate.

As we search for the best solutions to ever-evolving information needs that matter in our daily lives and also impact democracy, a modest amount of money could go a long way. We could:

- Give each interested newsroom the money to employ a full-time outreach journalist, whose sole role would be to work with community partners — universities, museums, libraries, citizen groups, advocacy groups — on different kinds of civic information; and to find journalistically-acceptable ways of distributing the content.

The *Gazette*-Concordia University experiment discussed under the Atkinson Fellowship would be one such example, with journalism published on the newspaper

"As we search for the best solutions to ever-evolving information needs that matter in our daily lives and also impact democracy, a modest amount of money could go a long way."

website and academic research written with the public in mind published by the university.

Another example would be a discussion I held with the *Hamilton Spectator*: In a rapidly gentrifying city, can a newspaper balance its development and political reporting by gathering — or working with a community partner to gather — people's stories about their homes and neighbourhoods, to help narrow the divide between new and long-time residents?

- Train interested citizens to gather accurate information for their neighbours — taking notes at school board or town hall meetings, or accessing basic information from local councillors — and to understand distribution methods like newsletters or Facebook groups.

Think of the Observer Corps volunteers in the U.S. or the Winnipeg Foundation's free journalism training sessions under its Community News Commons.

- Carry out real-life studies of alternative ownership models for local news organizations: community ownership, benevolent corporation, non-profit status, shared professional and citizen journalism, and so on. The studies must go beyond theory and be based in several communities to examine what works in different circumstances.
- Fund experiments, such as those that could come out of such a study.
- Examine and hopefully set up a co-ordinated effort by Canada's journalism schools to provide practical support for small news outlets and citizen-based information or story-telling efforts. One example is the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

As Mike Rispoli, director of the News Voices program under the Free Press group, told me last year when speaking about the citizen forums held in New Jersey: "I don't think anyone has really said it quite like, 'We don't need the local media.' I think everyone realizes that strong, independent, verifiable journalism is something critical to the future of the community's success and its health. But there are so many different things that are going on right now that aren't traditional journalism in a lot of ways."

I'm grateful to the Atkinson Foundation for relaunching this series. While it's sobering to see how little has been done on the solutions side in the past year, and how much the challenges are growing, it's also inspiring to realize again how much wealth of knowledge and expertise we can draw on — including from respected institutions like foundations and universities — if we choose to make that possible. I ask the same question I did at the close of my first fellowship article: Who will step up?



JOURNALISTS ARE VANISHING. WHO WILL FILL THE VOID?

As the number of journalists declines, we look beyond new business models and ask how new kinds of collaborations can help make sense of data, inform the public and hold governments accountable.

I followed a lot of news for free this week. I feel bad every time this happens. I believe in paying for journalism. I believe in it strongly. But it's actually hard to avoid consuming it for free now. I used to utter a satisfied "aha!" if someone left behind an intact newspaper in a coffee shop. Now news and opinions are all around me, from all variety of sources, completely shareable in Twitter links, on Facebook feeds, in email alerts and newsletters.

My smartphone is a 24-hour news feed — a newspaper, magazine, computer, radio, TV and town square in a single mobile device.

A click at a time, I've joined millions of others in advancing a revolution.

"Media disruption" is the term often used to describe the situation that technology and our rapidly shifting habits and attitudes have produced in the news industry. But "revolution" has also been used, and it's a better description for a social change that is so wide, so deep, and so irreversible.

We've lost at least a third of Canada's journalists between 2010 and 2016, according to a Public Policy Forum finding, as newspapers in particular but also broadcasters and even new-world online companies cut back. PHOTOGRAPH RICHARD LAUTENS / FOR THE TORONTO STAR



There is no part of the news industry that has not been radically affected — from creation to production, through to distribution and revenue. But the audience — you, me, all the readers and viewers — has also been completely altered.

It may be a cliché to say the Internet gave everyone the ability to be a publisher, but it is repeated so often only because it is so true, and is such an extreme change. Just 20 years ago, the news industry was the gatekeeper of information and opinion, deciding what and who would be covered, and in what manner; choosing whose views would be aired. Readers and viewers were the recipients of those decisions. There was a clear and firm division between the creators and the audience.

Now the news may come from a traditional source, or it may be a citizen's video. It could be an original story, or it might be a mashup with added material. It could be something you've altered in a way by adding your comments as you share it on Facebook or Twitter.

It doesn't make us all journalists, but it changes everything about the news — no longer an industry, now an ecosystem.

As with all revolutions, there are exciting gains and troubling losses. On the plus side: a democratization of news and information. The power not only to express ourselves but to publish those opinions. Countless witnesses to big events, backed up by their smartphone audio and video. Diversity.

On the down side, we hear about the decline of media companies and loss of journalism jobs — another segment of the economy falling victim to digital change. But the news stories that focus on

A recent piece of citizen journalism that made a huge impact: Waseem Khan attempting to film an arrest by Toronto police on Jan. 24, 2017. They told him to stop recording and the force had to apologize for their actions and remarks.

the failing business model — plummeting print advertising, digital ads bringing in pennies rather than dollars, falling profits, rising debts, dwindling readers and viewers — mask the real loss.

The big loss is the decline and weakening of quality journalism itself, particularly at the community level, and it affects all of us, whether we think of ourselves as news consumers or not.

A report last week on the state of the news media in Canada, produced by the Public Policy Forum, says that “the news media’s march to the precipice appears to be picking up speed,” and poses the question: “Are we merely passing through a turbulent transition to a more open and diverse future, or witnessing something that could inflict lasting damage on democracy?”

It may seem that we are all swimming in information, and in a sense we have never had it so good. But there’s a difference between information and journalism. A lot of what we see on the Internet is raw — unverified, possibly incomplete or inaccurate, perhaps easily misinterpreted.

And there are increasing worries about the kind of deliberate misinformation and fake news we’ve seen in the United States during and since last year’s election campaign.

On the Internet, it’s as easy to publish lies as truth.

Journalists are traditionally the people who make sense of raw information: who dig further, ask questions, verify assertions, test explanations, balance viewpoints, explain complex issues. In this way, they connect us to each other, to our societies and to our governments. They also do more than any other social institution to hold governments and other powerful interests accountable; just their existence can discourage malfeasance through the fear of exposure.

Yet we’ve lost at least a third of Canada’s journalists over the last six years alone, according to a Public Policy Forum finding, as newspapers in particular but also broadcasters and even new-world online companies cut back.

Some newsrooms have been harder hit, going from perhaps 120 newsroom employees (editors, reporters, photographers, designers, librarians) six years ago to 50 or 60 today. Some smaller newsrooms have closed altogether. This paper, the *Toronto Star*, had around 400 journalists a decade ago and has about half of that today.

[Update: The job numbers above apply to the 2010-2016 period. Newspapers across Canada continue to decrease staff.]

Consider how many fewer stories are being produced, how much less we know of what’s going on, in city after city across the country.

It’s an odd product, journalism. Not everyone consumes it. Relatively few people pay for it. But it’s what economists call a public good — a commodity that benefits everyone. If careful news monitoring of city hall prevents corruption in the awarding of contracts, it benefits you, whether you read the story or not. If beat reporting makes your local school better, there’s a social benefit,

“Are we merely passing through a turbulent transition to a more open and diverse future, or witnessing something that could inflict lasting damage on democracy?”



even if you didn't see the stories. It provides the common starting point for a more informed discussion that anyone can join.

The amount of news doesn't shrink just because advertising revenue does. The world doesn't become less complex.

But is a business model the only answer? Or — thinking of the social changes that have come with the digital revolution — is a social model part of the solution?

This is the focus of this year's Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy, funded by the Atkinson Foundation. What elements of journalism can we find outside the news industry? Who in our communities can sift through data, explain complex issues, look beyond the surface of an event or document? Who can keep enough of an eye on neighbourhoods or councils to serve as an early warning signal of things not working as they should? Who can encourage discussion on key social issues?

Could universities, for example — with their wealth of expertise and a scholarly tradition of research and verification — play a role, shifting some of their efforts to focus on the broader public? Can citizens, as individuals and in interest groups, be effective and sustainable sources of information?

Can newsrooms and non-journalists collaborate in various ways to try to ensure we're paying attention to the key elements of civic society?

This is what I'll be reporting on over the next few months: what we mean now when we talk about journalism, and the roles we might play. As part of the fellowship project, I'll work with some newsrooms, universities, citizens and interest groups on partnership experiments, and I'll report on those discussions, too.

Would participants like these replace the need for professional journalists? No. Journalists practise a specific craft with specific qualities and standards. They are not only informers,

A video posted on Facebook by Willem Shepherd in December 2016 shows various vehicles losing control in slippery Old Montreal.

explainers, analysts and investigators; they are storytellers, narrators, creating that first rough draft of history in a way that defines our society.

Some will say that experiments involving non-journalists have been tried in the past, and failed. But everything is different now. The digital revolution is so radical and swift, this year is different from last; today is different from yesterday.

A spectrum of journalism — or journalism-type information — already exists, thanks to the shift in publishing power from an industry to an ecosystem, and it's evolving. At one end are the professional journalists working for a variety of news organizations, both traditional and new; at the other are citizens with smartphones who happen to be standing on the sidewalk when news breaks out.

The middle ground is less clear. It has the potential to be exciting, democratizing and more informative than the news industry ever could be. It also has the potential to be inaccurate, malicious and deliberately narrow. The new lexicon that spread from the U.S. election and its aftermath, including “fake news” and “alternative facts,” are a warning signal to all of us of the ease with which digital space can be filled by information we have no reason to trust: at best unverified, at worst unscrupulous.

It's true that not everyone cares about news. One in 8 Canadians apparently don't need it at all. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, based at the University of Oxford, compiled an international digital news survey for 2016 — its fifth annual survey but the first to include Canada — and it found that 12 per cent of the Canadians it reached while setting up an online polling sample said they had consumed no news at all in the previous month.

And who's paying for it? Not many people. Of the 2,011 Canadian news consumers who were surveyed, only 9 per cent said they had paid for online news in the previous year, either in a subscription or in one-time payments.

Still, news and information is “one of the pillars of a strong and healthy democracy,” in the words of the House of Commons Heritage Committee, which is holding hearings into the state of the media, especially as it affects local communities. When the U.S. Federal Communications Commission did something similar several years ago, it concluded that a growing loss of what it called local accountability reporting — the kind that monitors governments and other key institutions — is a major concern.

“This is likely to lead to more government waste, more local corruption, worse schools, a less-informed electorate, and other serious problems in communities,” said the report, “The Information Needs of Communities.”

It focused particularly on the loss of newspaper journalism, noting that over the years newspapers have been the main source in the information food chain. They've generally had more reporters than TV or radio, and employed more of them on steady beats, with day-in and day-out coverage of civic topics.

Ryerson University journalism associate professor April Lindgren also noted the “keystone role” newspapers play in a local news system when she spoke before the Heritage Committee in October.

“They’re providing that sort of base record of what’s happened in the community,” she told the members of Parliament. “They’re not major players in terms of circulation, but they are players in terms of influencing what’s happening and the vibrancy of the local news coverage in that area.”

Lindgren is working with University of British Columbia researcher Jon Corbett on a crowd-sourced map of changes in Canada’s local media — cutbacks in frequency, shutdowns, and startups. Most shutdowns — Lindgren counted 169 on the map between 2008 and 2016 — are of smaller community papers, those publishing fewer than five times a week.

The map illustrates how revenue losses translate directly into a loss of journalism. It’s a way of visualizing what Lindgren calls local news poverty — communities that don’t have access to basic critical information — and then trying to trace why some areas are well served in news and some do badly.

One of the more entertaining comments about the role of newspapers in a healthy city is still that of David Simon, creator of the television series *The Wire*, when he spoke to a U.S. Senate committee hearing in 2009 to lament the loss of beat reporting:

“That means that all of a sudden there’s nobody covering the cop shop, nobody covering the zoning board. The day I run into a Huffington Post reporter at a Baltimore zoning board hearing is the day that I will be confident that we’ve actually reached some sort of equilibrium (between old and new media).

“The next 10 or 15 years in this country is going to be a halcyon era for state and local political corruption,” he said. “It is going to be one of the great times to be a corrupt politician. I really envy them, I really do.”

Simon was pointing out not just the value of beat reporting, but the fact that new online news organizations like the *Huffington Post* are not filling the reporting gap that has grown as traditional newspapers decline. Early assumptions that new players would step into the breach as old players became smaller, or vanished, have not yet been realized.

This is especially true at the local level. Startup media organizations are more likely to be able to find the audience and revenue to keep operating by focusing on either niche or national topics. A deep niche product is more likely to be able to apply a subscription-only policy; a national focus is more likely to draw more viewers, useful in crowdfunding or in seeking advertising or sponsorship partners.

Meeting the needs of a broad local audience is part of the old business model that is proving economically unsustainable.

“No one in Canada has yet figured out a digital-only online business model that easily supports a large number of full-time, paid professional journalists,” Robyn Smith, editor-in-chief of British

“The amount of news doesn’t shrink just because advertising revenue does. The world doesn’t become less complex.”

Columbia-based online magazine *The Tyee*, told the Heritage Committee in September. “None of the local digital outlets have the size and scale that legacy media outlets once had. We worry that there’s a dangerous chasm that’s opened up as legacy media fails, and digital media isn’t catching up fast enough to bridge the gap and cover what’s lost.”

The Internet was an instrument of such upheaval that nothing can bring back the old news revenue model, or the society that enabled it, say the three authors of “Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present,” an essay published in 2012 through Columbia University’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism.

But their first core belief is, in their words: “Journalism matters.” And the three — C.W. Anderson, Emily Bell and Clay Shirky — are worried about some of the elements we’re at risk of losing along with the traditional model.

Continuity is one. That’s the ability to cover a story, a beat or a section of society “persistently and over the long term,” even if reporters come and go. Continuity is what enables the “watchdog” and “scarecrow” functions.

“Both a watchdog and a scarecrow stand guard. But the fact that only a watchdog actively barks and the scarecrow does not bark does not always matter,” they said. “Though the scarecrow ‘does nothing,’ its very existence, the very fact that the crows know it is out there, ‘watching,’ is often enough to constrain bad crow-like behaviour.”

Most discussion about the media is focusing on the watchdog function, they say — “the fact that fewer stories will be covered than before and that the watchdog will bark less. We think the real institutional function at risk in this case, however, is the scarecrow function.”

They also note the lack of staffing “slack” in new digital players, which live “permanently close to the bone.” Traditional organizations had the staff capacity to perform three distinct roles, all at the same time: report on news, manage beat coverage, and mount time-consuming special investigations.

“We simply want to point out that the removal of excess slack from the arsenal of news institutions is a genuinely new development, one whose full implications remain unclear.”

It’s an uncertain world, as the essay’s authors say, where what doesn’t work is clearer than what does. The importance of news isn’t going away. The importance of dedicated professionals isn’t going away. “What’s going away is a world where the news was made only by professionals, and consumed only by amateurs.”

No longer an industry; now an ecosystem.

That means that democratic accountability, too, now falls not only to professionals but to amateurs. There’s room for a whole host of players, from trained journalists to the committed blogger at every city hall meeting; from concerned parents to impassioned activists; from professional researchers to eyewitnesses.

Let’s see who steps up.



JOURNALISTS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES INVESTED IN PROVIDING TRUSTED CIVIC INFORMATION

Museums, universities and ordinary citizens are all potential sources to look to as newsrooms shrink.

The plain truth is this: without journalists, there is no news." True or false? For generations, "news" has been something delivered by "journalists" — people working for organizations whose role was to decide what should be reported and how. The "audience" received the information.

But the digital news space is a crazy and chaotic place. It's home not only to professionally produced and edited reporting but also to solid material from non-journalists, well-intended but misleading information, unprocessed data, unsubstantiated opinion, marketing spin and deliberately fake news.

The digital revolution makes us all reporters of a kind, chroniclers of small moments and big events, whether we're capturing a slice of city life on Instagram or live streaming a protest on our Facebook account.

Does that make us journalists? Are we producing news?

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. Some recent displays have been compared to journalistic projects. PHOTOGRAPH DAN HARPER / CANADIAN MUSEUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



Defining what we mean by these terms is more than a pedantic exercise. As the number of professional journalists declines in Canada, as some news outlets shut their doors and the flow of solid, fact-checked, explanatory information about our society and governments diminishes, we find ourselves relying more on the output of other organizations and individuals for whom reporting is not a main function but a sideline. And that leads to questions like: Who do they represent? What standards do they follow? How much can I trust them? Are they providing the information I need, or the information they want me to have?

The opening quote in this story is from Julia Cagé, a French economist, in her book *Saving the Media: Capitalism, Crowdfunding, and Democracy*. She believes the primary purpose of news companies is “the free, unbiased, high-quality information that is indispensable to democratic debate,” and like many other people she’s trying to find new models to replace the falling revenues that have affected the news media throughout the world.

Her aim is to protect professional journalism. There is much reporting that can be done only by trained, experienced journalists working for news organizations that give them the security, time and resources to cover a topic day in and day out, or probe deeply into an issue, without fear of the consequences.

But whatever the business models of the future look like, journalists will continue to work within an information ecosystem where non-journalists’ reports and images are prevalent — and needed. Where in the community will we find or create these other sources of reliable civic information?

Ivor Shapiro researches aspects of ethics and excellence in journalism. He has come up with a five-point definition of journalism that can lead down unexpected paths.

PHOTOGRAPH ANNE-MARIE JACKSON / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

In museums?

That isn't a joke. Consider a display on the anti-gay bullying of a teenager, part of a permanent exhibit at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. It outlines a real Supreme Court case, giving different perspectives on the issue and pausing occasionally to ask visitors their take on the questions before the court. At the end, visitors find out how their responses compare to those of others viewing the material — and to the court's decision in the case.

When Ryerson University journalism professor (and now associate dean of faculty and student affairs) Ivor Shapiro saw the exhibit, he came away thinking it could be seen as a form of alternative journalism.

Shapiro has given a lot of thought to how to define journalism in a way that fits today's world, where the boundaries between professionals and the audience have blurred. "A clear definition of journalism will help us open up our eyes to journalism that isn't provided by news organizations," he said in an interview in November.

His proposal focuses on "what constitutes journalistic activity, rather than who is a journalist," and he breaks it down into five elements.

Other academics have studied definitions over the years and come up with some common characteristics, he noted in "Why democracies need a functional definition of journalism now more than ever," published in *Journalism Studies* in 2014.

Gathering and disseminating news is one, of course, though "news" itself is difficult to define. ("News is something someone somewhere doesn't want printed. Everything else is advertising," is the famous quote from British newspaper magnate Lord Northcliffe in the early 20th century, still heard today.) Among other characteristics: independence. Accuracy and verification. Objectivity. Public service. Writing in a plain or narrative style.

Shapiro condenses the academic thinking into these elements:

"The digital revolution makes us all reporters of a kind, chroniclers of small moments and big events, whether we're capturing a slice of city life on Instagram or live streaming a protest on our Facebook account."

1. SUBJECT MATTER: Journalistic activity focuses on current or recent events, "although exemplary models of journalism include attempts to contextualize, analyze, and interpret events rather than merely conveying the latest emerging facts." Journalism, he says, "is not history."

2. AUDIENCE: It is aimed at a broader public. "The word journalism is not used for insider-to-insider communication within organizations and closed communities; rather, journalism seeks, by definition, to broaden the boundaries within which information is known and understood."

3. ACCURACY: "Journalism always involves some attempt at ensuring that factual statements are accurate." Shapiro does note that the achievement of accuracy is a matter of evaluation.



4. INDEPENDENCE: There is no direct benefit to publishing the material — no financial or other gain from a particular piece of reporting. (Earning revenues and an audience from publication is not considered a direct benefit.)

5. ORIGINAL CREATION: Journalism is “not merely copying, republishing, or referencing existing works.”

“By this definition, journalism is surprising,” Shapiro said — and could include a museum exhibit. “A lot of curation is actually journalism.”

Jodi Giesbrecht, manager of research and curation at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, where Shapiro saw the exhibit on bullying, sees the parallels.

“We’re keenly aware that we’re not necessarily a news source,” she said, but the museum includes a number of timely exhibits, and uses digital technology that enables constant updating if necessary. For example, new material was quickly added to an exhibit on Indian residential schools after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report in June 2015.

The museum reviews its research, as a Crown corporation it’s independent, and some of its material is original — including its oral-history collection. And it is aimed at a broad audience it wants to engage in timely issues.

“Our mandate is to inspire reflection and dialogue on human rights,” Giesbrecht said in an interview. “That’s really the purpose of why we address different issues and tell different stories, to prompt that awareness, reflection and dialogue.”

PHOTOGRAPH RAWPIXEL

“What are those burning issues of the day, what are people talking about and how can we enhance that conversation or provide a bit of education function to the public?”

Aside from its obvious support of human rights, Giesbrecht said, the museum aims to present a range of views. The presentation on bullying was part of an exhibit looking at a series of court cases, from assisted dying to abortion. “And sometimes we’ll get the question of, ‘What is the museum’s position on some of those issues?’ And through the exhibits we don’t take a position or tell visitors what they should think.

“We often see ourselves as a platform for debate, for presenting different perspectives, competing perspectives at times, but we generally try to avoid advocating one way or another.”

So: only museum curation, or also a form of journalism?

Can university profs be journalists?

Research carried out in universities — like museums, a community institution — meet many of the criteria of journalistic activity proposed by Shapiro.

It doesn’t always focus on current or recent events, but it can.

Accuracy and verification are a bedrock of scholarly research, often through the process of “peer review” — scrutiny by others in the same field.

The work produced in universities is often independent. Some research is sponsored by industry or government, but researchers must make conflicts and sources of financing known.

And while research often builds on the work of others, it generally includes original thinking or new proofs.

What universities have not been known for is writing for the public. Their more natural audience is other academics, sometimes in very narrow slices of a specialty, and the resulting jargon and scholarly norms can make research almost indecipherable to a general readership — in fact, to anyone outside that particular field.

But there is an increasing emphasis on reaching a wider audience. Anyone applying for research money now to the body that oversees a large chunk of scholarly grants in Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), must include a plan to share the research beyond academia.

The idea is “to demonstrate the value and contribution of social sciences and humanities research to society,” SSHRC media relations adviser Julia Gualtieri explained in an email.

“This could be the general public, policy makers or practitioners in the field such as teachers or social workers. It depends on the particular focus of the research project. However, the audience is always intended to be a non-academic one.”

SSHRC asks grant recipients to consider different ways of reaching people, including social media, blogs, videos, and op-eds. It provides them with some training — for example, in writing opinion pieces for media outlets — and sponsors a Storytellers competition.

“We believe it is crucial for the next generation of researchers to hone their skills as communicators,” Gualtieri said.

What about your neighbour?

How journalistic are some of the contributions to the news ecosystem from citizens, as individuals or in interest groups?



This can be a real hit-and-miss source of information. One citizen may be a true expert on an issue, who writes clearly and fact-checks everything before posting it. Another may happily pass on information without knowing whether it's reliable or not. How would we know?

Despite a continuing decline of faith in the media — only 45 per cent of Canadians in late 2016 said they trust the media as an institution, with 58 per cent saying they trust traditional media, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer — and despite the focus south of the border on “fake news,” professional news outlets generally follow standards of accountability. Depending on the organization, readers and viewers can request corrections, they can appeal to a public editor, they can take the organization to a press council, they can even take it to court. The understanding behind these measures is that the news outlets will be accurate and fair, and will be open to challenge if they are not.

Museums and universities aren't news outlets but they too have regulations to uphold, and reputations and revenues to protect.

No such understanding exists with non-professionals. Many will hold themselves to high standards, but not everyone will; and some deliberately will not.

BuzzFeed media editor Craig Silverman has written extensively about the fake-news phenomenon and created a checklist to help people judge the reliability of what they're reading. Among the common-sense tips: Is the author identified by name? Does the online site have an “About” page or say clearly who's behind it? Is the headline backed up in the story? Have you found any other stories with the same information or claim? When you search for information about the site on Google, what do you find?

BuzzFeed media editor Craig Silverman. PHOTOGRAPH BILL JACKSON / METROLAND

Given the ease with which someone can disseminate misinformation or unproven rumour, knowingly or not, can we increase the possibilities of creating reliable sites run by citizens?

To go back to Shapiro's five elements of journalistic activity, citizens would likely be focused on current or recent events, and their information would be aimed at a public audience, though clear presentation would not be a given.

THE LARGER DIFFICULTIES MAY BE IN:

- Conveying accurate and verified information: knowing where to go for information and how to check it.
- Ensuring independence: establishing that no business or personal benefit arises from the information that's reported and shared.
- Offering original work: even more of a difficulty now that the Internet makes it so easy to reproduce and share words and images; it's easy to blur the concept of originality and adaptation.

This checklist shows why, even after we all had the ability to publish our own words online, past efforts in "citizen journalism" usually focused on people in a community providing stories to the local news organization, which would pass the work through its own editors for verification, balance and writing standards.

But newsrooms no longer have the staff to devote to time-consuming edits of outside work.

And training non-journalists and managing partnerships is beyond the resources of many news organizations without outside funding, says Jan Schaffer, who has been involved in discussions of many experimental projects over the years as executive director of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism.

She has found that projects involving citizens often simmer out. One big issue, she said in an email exchange, is that citizens don't really want to do journalism. "Frankly, it's too hard."

The most promising efforts, she has found, are by journalists who have left news organizations and started investigative news sites; or by "civic catalysts" who run hyperlocal sites in their communities. "And increasingly mainstream and public media are partnering with these startups to amplify each other's journalism," she said.

What kind of partnerships might give each side something it needs? Interested citizens need some training and ongoing mentorship. Short-staffed newsrooms need to help inform their community without having to be directly responsible for the quality of information produced by others. Universities and other institutions need to reach the world outside their specialties. We all need more and better information about the places where we live and the people we live among.



HERE'S HOW COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND NEWSROOMS COULD HELP INFORM THE PUBLIC

While these initiatives won't replace the journalism we're losing, drawing on academic expertise is one way to provide context and analysis.

Collaboration (the definition): the action of working with others to produce something.
Collaboration (the complicated reality): working with people who may be in other fields, with different interests, speaking different jargons, compiling data in different ways, producing something for different audiences.

Collaboration (the payoff): a mingling of expertise, methods and ideas that can lead to more resources, more innovation, more diverse insights, more successes.

A powerful notion — and a tough thing to pull off. There are great divides to cross when different kinds of partners try to work together.

News organizations and universities have long had partnerships of sorts. Journalists rely on academics for news from their fields, expert insights and social analysis; academics need journalists

PHOTOGRAPH AHMAD FAHMI

to bring their research to a broader audience. But the work often takes place amid, and almost despite, a mutual distrust.

Consider how different their worlds are: Peer-reviewed journals (dotted i's, crossed t's, foot-notes) are the antithesis of the daily deadline newsroom (frantic phone calls, "could not be reached for comment," next-day follow-ups). Each side has a stereotype of the other — the ivory tower snob versus the grubby headline hunter, the snail-paced researcher versus the slapdash reporter, the data-obsessed scholar versus the adjective-obsessed storyteller.

But while methods differ, researchers and journalists can be seen as two sides of the same coin — each working to establish and publish truths and facts. When they work together, the resulting journalism benefits from academic rigour, and the academic work benefits from journalism's timeliness and popular focus.

In recent years, some researchers and universities have been stepping further into the journalism world, both to work more deeply with news organizations and to create forms of journalism themselves — to join the public conversation. And that's exciting at a time when the digital revolution is creating a news ecosystem that anyone can contribute to, for better and for worse.

Two aspects of this are particularly interesting under this year's Atkinson Fellowship for Public Policy, which is examining alternate sources of civic or community information to help fill a growing gap as the news industry in Canada shrinks.

First, as the amount of professional journalism decreases (an estimated one-third of Canada's journalists have lost their jobs since 2010), we need other reliable and community-minded institutions to help keep us informed.

Second, academics' contributions — what they focus on and the methods they use — could broaden the way we think about civic or community information. One of the most valued characteristics of professional journalism is its ability to hold governments and other powerful interests accountable. This is key in upholding democracy, and it's a difficult role for anyone else to play. But other kinds of information also knit communities together and spur our curiosity.

Will this replace the journalism we're losing? No. Certainly not in quantity, and generally not in the kind of stories that are created. But with training, support and a shift in priorities, this could add something different to the evolving information ecosystem — something smarter and more diverse.

"Could add" is a deliberate wording choice. While the different academic tradition is a strength, it's also something that has kept scholars from contributing more in the past.

"News organizations and universities have long had partnerships of sorts. Journalists rely on academics for news from their fields, expert insights and social analysis; academics need journalists to bring their research to a broader audience. But the work often takes place amid, and almost despite, a mutual distrust."



Ann Rauhala, associate chair of Ryerson University's school of journalism and a former journalist, has lived on both sides of the fence. She has also taught workshops to anyone at Ryerson interested in learning how to work with the news media, both as interview subjects and as opinion columnists.

"Academics generally are people who have spent their lives pursuing some idea that animates them, and they want the world to appreciate it," Rauhala says. "But the way scholars think, in my opinion, is really quite different from how journalists think."

Journalists, she says, "are looking for something no one else has ever said or done." They want the newsiest of the news.

But academics start with what others have done before them and add to it. "Scholars build

their work, they build their hypotheses, based on other people's hypotheses. So right from the get-go, the set of assumptions is quite different."

The university world is also very different in what it values and rewards, Rauhala notes. "Except for people who have gone to grad school, many, many of us don't really understand what scholarly life is like or what the expectations are." Traditionally, when considering hires or promotions, universities have valued a research article read by a couple of hundred people in an academic journal over a piece appearing in a large-circulation newspaper that might be read by tens of thousands.

"The difficulty is that many of the universities, I get that impression, are still stuck with this idea that your value as a scholar and a prof is primarily on the number of journal articles you have published and the number of times other people have cited your work," Rauhala says. "As though that is the only measure of your efficacy as a public intellectual."

"It would be really nice if the universities actually genuinely rewarded people and recognized people for playing a public role, a true public role."

CHANGING PRIORITIES

At the University of Ottawa, Michael Kempa is trying to move in that direction. A criminologist, Kempa found he was spending more and more time responding to reporters' questions as policing and security issues dominated the news.

He was happy to do it — but as a professor he's expected to spend 40 per cent of his time teaching, 40 per cent on research and 20 per cent on administration. The interview requests

Ann Rauhala, associate chair of Ryerson University's school of journalism.

PHOTOGRAPH ATHERINE FARQUHARSON / FOR THE TORONTO STAR



were starting to take up as much as a day a week. Where did the media work fit in and how valuable was it to the university?

Wanting to figure out how to be more effective and also more proactive with the news industry, Kempa spent eight months in 2012 in an innovative journalism program, the Munk fellowship at University of Toronto. In addition to learning how to produce material himself (he later wrote an investigative feature for *The Walrus* magazine about civilian oversight of the RCMP that was a finalist for a 2015 Canadian Magazine Award) he returned to U of Ottawa with a strong sense that journalism can be combined with academic research work.

He began offering columns and ideas to news outlets “rather than just responding to journalists” and sometimes used the journalism as a way to advance his research thinking.

Now he wants to teach some of the same skills to other academics at the university. He ran an experimental lab this year with master’s students in criminology to test the idea, and hopes to expand it to faculty. He believes every academic researcher’s data has the seeds of one news feature; and that with support and feedback in a class, the researcher can produce it for popular consumption.

[Update: Professor Michael Kempa’s experimental lab with graduate students will now be held every other year, and he now serves as Chair of the Criminology program at the University of Ottawa.]

The idea is for the academics to think about their field in a more journalistic way. What part of it is often in the news? What can they add to that public debate? Then they’re taught how to write an opinion column and a short feature.

What motivates them to learn this? What Kempa has found, like Rauhala, is a “desire to have people exposed to the stuff that they find so interesting in their areas of research.”

Michael Kempa, a criminologist at University of Ottawa, speaks to a group of people at Ryerson University. PHOTOGRAPH RICK MADONIK / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

He cites his own field: “Criminological social science is all about power and human benefit versus suffering — inherently interesting themes. But unfortunately, the way we write a lot of it up for an academic audience is of no interest to anybody.”

Some academics might stick with the training when the course is over and produce more media pieces; others might just want to do the one that they’ve had in mind for years, he says. “I think the younger generation of academics is much more interested in consistently engaging the media over time but they don’t have the skills or really any idea of where to get started.”

But as researchers learn more about the media, Kempa hopes they will start thinking about it right from the start of their research projects — setting that focus for themselves, or perhaps collaborating with a journalist at the beginning, designing the research with both academic and mainstream articles in mind and leaning on each other’s expertise.

“Very often the social sciences stop at exactly the moment that investigative journalism begins,” he says. “And what I mean by that is, the academics look at the structure and the ideas that enable all kinds of bad things to happen, and then the investigative journalists pick up and say, ‘Who are the people who pulled the strings who did the bad things?’

“Together we kind of cover the whole picture.”



TURNING EXPERTS INTO JOURNALISTS, WITH A 'BIG COGNITIVE SHIFT'

The Munk fellowship in global journalism at the University of Toronto teaches experts to reach beyond their field.

You hear people saying, 'You can't teach news judgment, it comes after years and years and years,'" says Robert Steiner. "And I disagree. Some people will get it more than others, but you actually can teach news judgment."

What Steiner is doing, as director of the Munk fellowship in global journalism at the University of Toronto, is teaching it not to students but to specialists — people who already have a career or profession or background in a particular area.

They might be a public-health doctor, or a China expert, or a criminology professor. When they wrap up their training eight months later, some will pursue reporting full-time, adding depth to the news industry with their expertise. But others will incorporate their new skills into their old careers, taking the craft of journalism down roads that Steiner hadn't foreseen when the program launched in the fall of 2012.

Steiner figures most people can find a story or two in their field, something important and interesting that isn't known to a broad audience. Then they run out of ideas.

PHOTOGRAPH MIKAEL KRISTENSON



“And that’s when the discipline of journalism really starts to become important,” he says. “Because one of the disciplines we’re teaching is how to find new ideas.

“What we’re doing is we’re saying, ‘Use your knowledge of your field to find stories that are surprising to you, and to be able to do what reporters do which is to find, always, week after week, year after year, find new stories.’ And that’s the discipline.”

The fellows spend some time learning the basics of entrepreneurial journalism (story structure, video, audio, photography, podcasting, data, ethics, legal issues), but the emphasis is on learning through constant practice to look at their specialty like a beat reporter.

And it stays with the fellows, even those who return to their original careers.

“It changes the way they do their other work. And often it’s because they now have an instinct because we’ve yelled it at them, politely you know, they can hear us saying to them, ‘Why would I care? Convince me that this is important.’ And ‘Why now, what’s new?’ and ‘Do you really know what you’re saying, do you really have anything to back this up?’”

Steiner slots Munk graduates into four categories: Some have gone on to join news organizations, even when journalism jobs are so scarce. “We now have alumni working on staff at the Wall Street Journal, the Walrus, TVO, VICE and the FT (Financial Times).” Others become full-time freelancers or stringers.

A third category of graduates return to their profession but do a lot of journalism as well. One former fellow, Dr. Seema Yasmin, is a public-health specialist who now splits her time and salary between the University of Texas at Dallas and the *Dallas Morning News*. She was part of the

Richard Matern says the journalism skills he developed during an 8-month fellowship in global journalism at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto enhanced his role as director of research and communications at the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank. PHOTOGRAPH ANNE-MARIE JACKSON / FOR THE TORONTO STAR



newspaper team that was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in breaking news for coverage of the 2016 ambush of police in downtown Dallas.

The fourth category of graduates is the one that came as the biggest surprise to Steiner — the unexpected path. They “are not ostensibly journalists at all but are using these skills to do their jobs in a very different way,” he says, “to create a smarter public conversation around the work they’re doing.”

Richard Matern is an example. The head of research and communications for the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, Matern believes the social-policy sector has to find better ways to get its information out to the public, to communicate the issues behind hunger and other struggles. Daily Bread’s annual survey of food-bank clients, and the monthly reports it gets from food banks around the city, are full of untold stories.

Matern went into the 2013-14 Munk fellowship already understanding the power of data. What he learned was the journalistic instinct: If something stands out in the monthly data from food banks around the city, make a few calls, ask a few questions, see what surfaces. It’s the art of the “lede,” the top of a story, the information that is both important and interesting to the public.

He’s not writing the stories himself. But like a journalist, he’s conducting his research with a wider public audience in mind.

Late last year he took note of global trends like Syrian refugees and rising food prices. When he planned Daily Bread’s annual survey he added questions on those topics to find out how they’re affecting Toronto.

Robert Steiner, Director, Fellowships in Global Journalism, Professor of Global Practice, Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto. PHOTOGRAPH ANNE-MARIE JACKSON / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Then, when he sent out the 60 or so volunteers who gather the survey information, he coached them to be mini-journalists.

"Now when volunteers are going out, we're saying with the one-on-one interviews, get some context, get some information," he says. "This isn't just ticking off a box when you're speaking with a person, you know, try to get their story and see what's happening.

"So in a way you have 60, 70 mini-journalists going out and looking in-depth into a situation, and I guess what I'm realizing is how priceless that is and how important that is. I thought, this is a very unique in-depth opportunity to explore what is the state of poverty on the ground in Toronto.

"There are thousands of stories here. You just have more eyes, you're looking at things in a different way."



THREE WAYS EXPERTS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE NEW NEWS ECOSYSTEM

From self-publishing to fact-checking, academics are finding creative ways to apply their expertise.

As traditional newsrooms shrink, researchers and universities have become an increasingly important element in the news ecosystem.

Here are three examples I discovered during my year as an Atkinson Fellow that show the range of potential approaches — each one applying academic research and rigour to an issue of public interest, either in partnership with, or as an alternative to, traditional professional journalism.

THE CONVERSATION: ACADEMICS TACKLE EXPLANATORY JOURNALISM

The Conversation is a new twist in the information landscape. It's a web-based model of what is being called "academic journalism," which is really just a way of distinguishing it from news journalism, says Alfred Hermida, director of the journalism school at the University of British Columbia.

Scott White is the editor of *The Conversation Canada*, which offers edited stories from the world of academia to newspapers and other outlets.

PHOTOGRAPH RICHARD LAUTENS / FOR THE TORONTO STAR



Hermida is a co-founder, with colleague Mary Lynn Young, of the Canadian edition of this growing global project that started in Australia in 2011 and then spread to the U.S., the U.K., France and Africa. It's funded largely by universities and powered by academics, but aimed at as broad a public audience as possible. Canada's edition started in the summer of 2017.

"Essentially what we're talking about is explanatory journalism," written by academics working with a team of editors, Hermida says. "So journalism that provides greater context and explanation for things that are happening in the news."

Of course this already happens in traditional journalism, he says – but there's less of it as the news industry declines. "We're not trying to replace the newsroom but rather we're complementing and enhancing the journalism in Canada through this different approach."

It's an interesting model: The academics pitch articles based on their specialties, ranging from politics and science to culture and religion. Each article is edited by a journalist working for The Conversation. And each is accompanied by a disclosure statement from the academic to identify any funding or affiliations.

"There are really smart academics in Canada doing remarkable work, who can help us understand our world, not just locally, regionally, nationally but internationally," says Hermida. And they increasingly want their research to be more broadly known and understood. "They want to participate in the public discourse."

The stories are published on theconversation.com site for each country but are also available free for republication — by anyone, anywhere, online or print, including traditional media outlets — under a Creative Commons licence.

Harley Dickinson of the University of Saskatchewan was part of several projects with the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, seeing a common purpose between the newsroom and university. PHOTOGRAPH LIAM RICHARDS / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

If it's all free, what's the business model?

The Conversation Canada is set up as a non-profit organization, funded mostly by university membership fees but also with foundation money and federal research grants. The site started with a three-year runway, and is working towards a 10-year financial model to ensure sustainability.

A year after launching, The Conversation Canada has 26 universities as paying members and has published more than 1,000 stories. A French-language edition, La Conversation Canada, is expected to launch by the end of 2018.

LES SURLIGNEURS: IN FRANCE, LEGAL EXPERTS TAKE ON POLITICAL FACT-CHECKING

Last year's presidential campaign in France featured an array of remarks and policy statements that raised not only eyebrows but legal questions: Are some proposals unconstitutional? Outside a president's jurisdiction? Unfeasible for a country that's a member of the European Union?

Enter Les Surligneurs — a group of university lecturers and legal researchers who took it upon themselves to track what the candidates were saying, and then publicly commented on legal questions that arose. At a time when so much attention is focused on false and misleading news, Les Surligneurs (it translates as “the highlighters”) are doing their bit to hold politicians accountable and raise the level of public debate on their website lessurligneurs.eu.

“To make promises that can't be kept and are dangerous doesn't help anyone, and doesn't serve democracy,” Vincent Couronne said last year. Couronne is the instigator of the project and a lecturer in law at Versailles Instituts Publiques, a research lab at the Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines.

About 20 researchers joined the effort. Each question was vetted by the site's editors, who decided whether it should be written up — if the issue needed to be clarified so voters could better understand whether a politician could deliver on a promise. They were helped by students at a political science school, Sciences Po Saint-Germain-en-Laye, who tracked what candidates said and sent daily updates on anything legally questionable.

It's important to use academic expertise to help journalists, and through them to help voters, Couronne said. Libération newspaper printed some of the analyses the group published.

Examples of questions answered by the law checkers during the 2017 campaign include:

- Marine Le Pen said she wanted to write secularism into the labour code. Les Surligneurs said the constitution enforces neutrality on the state, but guarantees private citizens the right to express their religion, including in their workplace. Any limitation must be justified and proportional.
- Emmanuel Macron called colonization a “crime against humanity.” This phrase should not be used as a generality, said Les Surligneurs, as it carries legal weight in the criminal code and also in the International Criminal Court.

- François Fillon proposed detaining refugee claimants until their claims were decided, so their deportation would be assured if they weren't accepted. This runs counter to the current law and to several European Union directives, said Les Surligneurs, finding the proposal "legally unfeasible."
- Jean-Luc Mélenchon said he would make school meals free. That isn't within the power of the presidential office, said Les Surligneurs; jurisdiction lies with regional authorities. Nor can he insist on vegetarian menus, as he suggested.

This year, Les Surligneurs continues its legal fact-checking and will launch a radio show. It is now collaborating with *Le Monde*, serving as expert legal sources for the newspaper's journalists, and the group plans to legal-check candidates in the European Parliament election campaign.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN AND SASKATOON STARPHOENIX MARRIED ANALYSIS WITH STORYTELLING

In an era when collaboration is a buzzword, academic Harley Dickinson and reporter Gerry Klein were pioneers.

Over the years, they acted as matchmakers, instigating partnerships that have married the University of Saskatchewan's research and analysis strengths with the storytelling power of the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*. And together, along with many others, they worked on Taking the Pulse, a major survey of Saskatchewan residents' attitudes on a range of social issues. The project was published in 2001, with a second edition carried out in 2012.

Dickinson, who dove back into social research last year after 10 years in administration, says he sees a broad trend toward such synergies: "My experience at the university is that almost every initiative now is a partnership, a collaboration. You just need to find who the interested parties are."

As vice-dean of social sciences at the University of Saskatchewan, he was instrumental in conceptualizing and setting up the university's Social Sciences Research Labs, which he calls the community's "doorway into the university." Anyone with an idea or a research question can bring it to the labs and be matched up with an interested professor. And he was part of several projects with the *StarPhoenix*.

It made sense for the two institutions — the university and the newspaper — to work together, says *StarPhoenix* editor Heather Persson. "We have a common purpose in educating the community and enlightening them, and being a place of discourse."

"We're not trying to replace the newsroom but rather we're complementing and enhancing the journalism in Canada through this different approach."

Klein, now retired from the paper, began reaching out to professors in the 1980s to share their expertise in polling and other research. But it's the bigger, more formal research and storytelling collaborations that took this partnership to another level.

For Taking the Pulse, the newspaper and university came up with survey topics together. The university was responsible for the methodology, polling and analysis of the results, and then the newsroom went out to find the people who would make the statistics come alive – “a really interesting collaboration with academics doing their sort of aggregated statistical analysis and the reporters breathing life into that,” Dickinson says.

When the second edition of Taking the Pulse was carried out in 2012, CBC Saskatchewan became a partner and the *Regina Leader-Post* also joined in the reporting. The issues ranged from how safe people feel in their neighbourhoods, to attitudes on new immigrants and on assisted dying, to fears about Alzheimer's.

Peter Stoicheff, then arts and science dean and now president of the university, said at a public forum tied to the release: “I don't think anywhere in the country has seen such a collaboration between so many news outlets and a university.”



NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN THE TRADITIONAL LIFEBLOOD OF SOCIETY. WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY DISAPPEAR?

Eighty-six percent of Canadians think they could survive without local news, but here's what they stand to lose.

If your local newspaper went out of business, would you still get the news you need? Most of us — 86 per cent of Canadians — believe we would.

That's an astonishing number. It's a deeply worrying one.

Perhaps we feel we're swimming in news because it comes from all directions and sources, even when we aren't looking for it: from friends, strangers and news outlets, passing on links and likes. In the constant influx, we're less likely to notice who is providing it, and that local reporting may be an ever-smaller stream in a flow of repackaged stories.

When we find a story through social media or an online search, more than half the time we aren't aware of its origin — who reported and wrote it. We just know we got to it through Facebook or Google, according to a survey by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, which issues an annual report on digital news.

This unawareness of where news comes from may explain Canadians' complacent belief that they would continue to be well-informed if their local paper folded, says Bruce Anderson of Abacus Data, which produced the poll with these findings in early June.

PHOTOGRAPH JACKIE HONG / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

The state of the news industry, battered by the digital revolution, is a big story this year. Two in-depth reports, one by the Public Policy Forum and the other from the House of Commons heritage committee, detailed the effects of falling advertising revenues and subsequent job losses.

Both reports suggest some form of government financial aid to help the news media adapt to yet-unknown new business models. The call has been taken up by an industry association, News Media Canada, which in June asked the federal government to provide \$350 million a year to support coverage of civic news during the transition. The main goal, says council chair Bob Cox, who is also publisher of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, is to preserve newsroom jobs as companies cut costs.

The reports and appeals don't address a second challenge of the digital revolution: that while news organizations struggle with business models, communities and institutions are learning to produce and distribute information without going through the traditional media gatekeepers.

A new ecosystem is evolving, and it's changing the way we think about news: what it is, who creates it, who gets to tell the story. This has been the focus of the 2016-'17 Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy.

But it's very difficult to imagine a strong information ecosystem — to imagine a well-informed society — that doesn't have strong professional journalism at its core.

Newspapers have long been the main supplier in any community's news system. They do the most sustained reporting on the widest range of topics, from daily coverage of government and social beats like health and justice to occasional investigations that uncover dangerous or corrupt practices.

What happens when these sources of information dry up? What might happen if a paper like, say, the *Winnipeg Free Press* shut down? What would the people of Winnipeg know about their city and what their governments were up to?

No one should worry about losing the *Free Press* any time soon, though it is facing the same challenges as all newspapers. It has local owners committed to its survival to the extent that they've taken no dividends since 2015; any profits have been reinvested. Its employees are also committed, agreeing to an eight-per-cent pay cut if revenues fall below a certain level in the next two years (in return for a company promise of no layoffs).

But its newsroom has gone from 100 employees in the summer of 2010 to 67 this July. Many Canadian newsrooms have been cut more drastically.

At the *Free Press*, ingenuity is filling some of the gaps. When the company decided to outsource the layout and editing of its print pages to Toronto-based Pagemasters North America, for example — most Canadian papers have outsourced this work — some copy editors became writers. Other employees took on hybrid jobs: Someone may edit for the first four hours of a shift

"When we find a story through social media or an online search, more than half the time we aren't aware of its origin — who reported and wrote it."

and then switch to writing; a page designer may post stories to the web and help tweak layouts when necessary.

When the newsroom became too small to support more than one full-time editorial writer/editor, the *Free Press* came up with an “adjunct editorial board” that still fully discusses issues important to the community. Six writers in different departments participate in a weekly ideas meeting, take turns writing editorials and each day give feedback on the paper’s editorial stand.

The *Free Press* has two reporters at the provincial legislature and one in Ottawa, an increasingly rare position among local papers. It also publishes stories on amateur as well as professional sports, book reviews written locally and a Saturday section of in-depth stories.

Civic journalism, says publisher Cox, is journalism that informs communities about themselves.

“Local sports coverage informs the community about itself, and local theatre coverage informs the community about itself,” he says. “Even though they’re not public institutions, they’re certainly coverage of the things that are core to a community and to a healthy community.”

So what would the people of Winnipeg have been missing on Thursday, July 13 — a day chosen at random — if the *Free Press* weren’t around?

Several women who saw a *Free Press* story online about a man who grabbed a female jogger wouldn’t have come forward with their own experiences that might involve the same assailant.

Winnipeggers would have missed a story about the impact of a government cut in outpatient physiotherapy services.

They wouldn’t have learned how a forest-fire centre based in Winnipeg organizes relief crews from around the world.

The burial of a Ghanaian woman who died trying to cross the border into Canada in late May would have gone unreported; so would the loss of trees in a local wetland, cut down by a developer.

In all, the *Winnipeg Free Press* produced 40 local stories written by staff and freelancers on July 13:

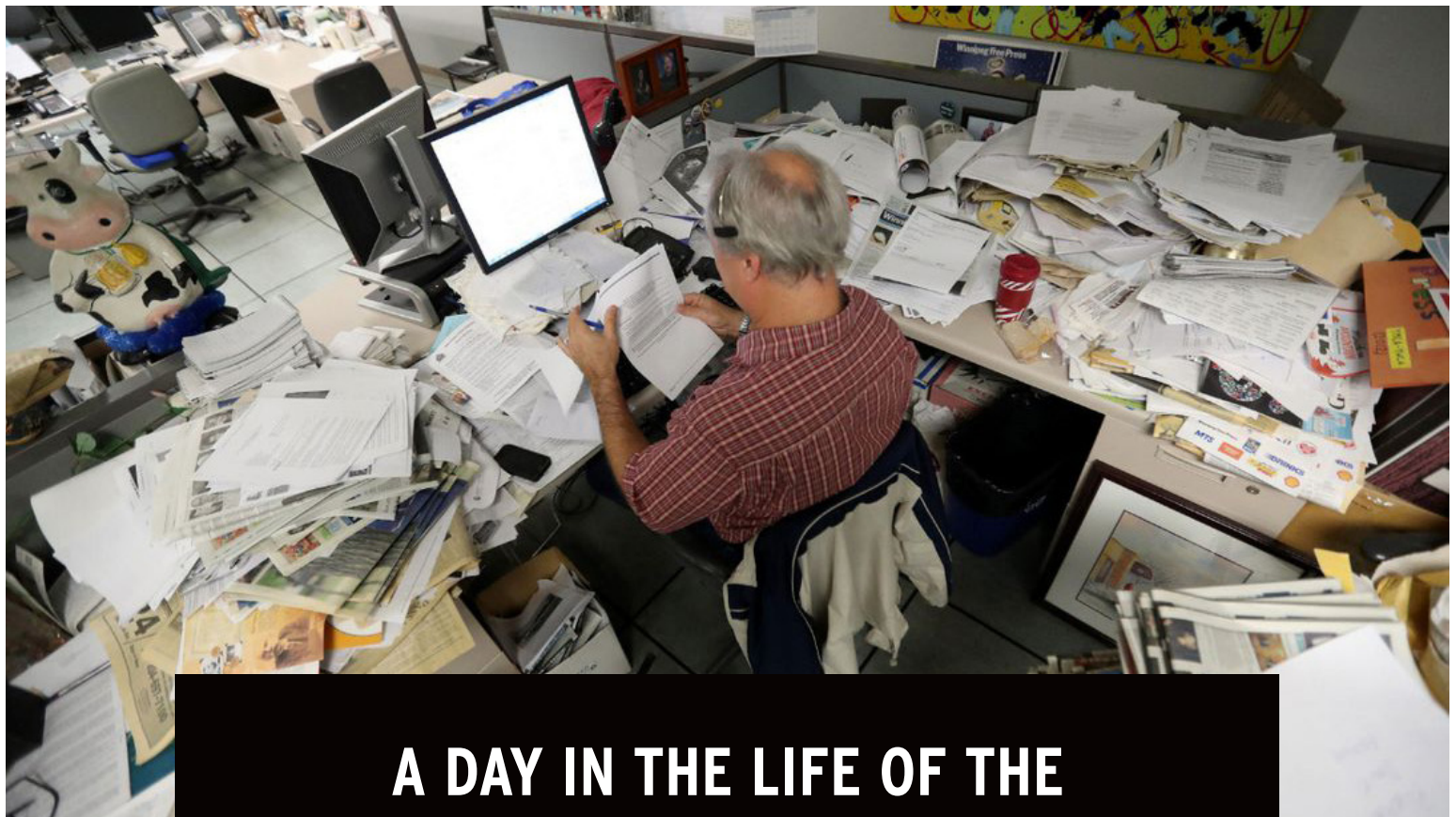
- Local and government news: 16 stories and 4 briefs
- Local business: 3 stories
- Local sports: 7 stories (1 freelance) and 1 brief
- Local arts: 2 stories
- Weekly auto section: 4 local stories (1 staff, 3 freelance)

“It’s very difficult to imagine a strong information ecosystem — to imagine a well-informed society — that doesn’t have strong professional journalism at its core.”

- Columns: 3 local freelance columns on health, personal finance and lifestyles
- Opinion: 1 staff editorial, 3 local opinion pieces
- 24 staff photos

This was one day. Over 365 days, year in and year out, this is journalism that documents the community: in big events and small, policy and human-interest articles, stories that make us fear and stories that connect us.

How informed would the city be without it?



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

As its staff has shrunk by a third, and reporters and editor juggle multiple roles, here's how the team manages to cover the city every day.

On Thursday, July 13, 2017, the *Winnipeg Free Press* newsroom had 62 people scheduled to work, including five summer interns. (Ten regular staffers were on vacation.) The efforts of only a couple of dozen of them would have been obvious to people reading *Free Press* stories produced that day. The complex choreography that allows a news organization to cover daily news while also juggling features and investigations happens largely behind the scenes.

For instance, literary editor Ben MacPhee-Sigurdson was working nine days ahead on the Saturday book section of July 22. He sorts through 40 to 50 books a week, deciding which to send to his three dozen freelance reviewers for the eight reviews he needs. And the arts department was finishing its exhaustive coverage plan for the upcoming Winnipeg Fringe Festival, featuring 188 shows over 12 days.

Winnipeg Free Press legislature reporter Larry Kusch. He spent months in 2017 writing about changes and cuts to Manitoba health care. PHOTOGRAPH TREVOR HAGAN / FOR THE TORONTO STAR



And so on and so on, in every department, through every level of planning, reporting, editing and production.

The first shift on July 13 started at 6 a.m. The final story was posted online at 12:10 a.m. July 14. Here are some highlights behind the day.

6 A.M. — EARLY ARRIVALS

Carl DeGurse starts the first assignment shift, scanning other media sites, checking overnight emails, answering the phone and co-ordinating the nine general-assignment reporters available on this day. Photographer Wayne Glowacki and videographer Mike Deal are covering Jimmy Carter's visit to a Habitat for Humanity build in Winnipeg. Security for former U.S. presidents being what it is, they had to apply for accreditation weeks ago, and they have to be on site by 6 a.m. — The press pen

Carter and his wife Rosalynn — longtime volunteers with Habitat for Humanity, the organization in which low-income families help build their own homes — arrive and Glowacki is taking photos from what organizers "call the press pen," he says later. "Like a pig pen? — this little picket-fenced area." He's hemmed in but gets a photo he likes and transmits it for a quick website post, using Wi-Fi to connect his camera to his phone. He had prepared a few captions the previous night, using the official Carter agenda as a guide, so he could work faster today.

Videographer Mike Deal, seen in the newsroom;
he got exclusive footage of Jimmy Carter collapsing.
PHOTOGRAPH TREVOR HAGAN / FOR THE TORONTO STAR



9:03 — FIRST OF MANY

Melissa Martin's first story is posted on the *Free Press* website. She'll be writing and tweeting about the Carters throughout their visit.

9:15 — THE LEGISLATURE REPORTER

Larry Kusch has spent months writing about the Manitoba government's health reforms, including a front-page story in this morning's paper about cuts to outpatient physiotherapy services. He lets the assignment editor know he'll be following more angles on this, including trying to get "what my editors call 'a real person,'" in this case an outpatient. He'll also check tips on a couple of other issues.

9:45ISH — CARTER COLLAPSES

Jimmy Carter has been working on a Habitat house with hammer and saw in the hot sun for an hour. Martin is in her car recharging her phone. Photographers have moved to a nearby tent for a 10:45 press conference. Glowacki hangs back for a few minutes, and that's when the 92-year-old Carter wobbles and drops to his knees. His security people close in.

Ignoring a Habitat person who says "You shouldn't be taking pictures of that," Glowacki gets the best photos he can through the crowd, "and then I got my phone and I messaged to Melissa and to Mike to come back here."

***Free Press* editor-in-chief Paul Samyn. When an off-site technical snafu takes down the paper's website at a key moment, he has to push to get the problem fixed.**

PHOTOGRAPH TREVOR HAGAN / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Deal had been setting up his video equipment in the tent. “I grabbed my camera off my tripod,” forgetting it was wired to a soundboard, he says later. “I forgot and I pulled it and everyone’s like, what’s going on? I just ignored everyone and ran off.” He’s shooting as he goes, and realizes he has captured Carter in the distance. He gets 16 seconds of Carter’s head bobbing among the phalanx of security.

10 — THE MORNING MEETING

Yesterday’s physio cuts story is the top performer on the website, and as senior editors discuss the day’s plans, one of them suggests an additional angle for Kusch to pursue: How will this affect people getting knee and hip replacements, a growth field for baby boomers? The rest of the lineup is straightforward. Coverage of the Carter visit was long planned, so little is said about it — until photo editor Mike Aporius gets an email about Carter’s collapse. He runs out of the meeting to find out more.

10:19, 10:42, 11:01, 11:29 — ONLINE UPDATES

Martin has looked at the photographers’ stills and video footage and is emailing updates to her original web story. She’s still tweeting.

11:45 — HOME PAGE DOWN

There’s a whoosh as editor-in-chief Paul Samyn stalks out the newsroom door to the technology department, cursing. The website’s home page isn’t loading. The problem lasts about 15 minutes but the timing is bad: There’s usually a readership peak around noon, and today the *Free Press* also has the Carter collapse. It turns out the U.S. company behind the publishing platform was doing technical work — something out of the newspaper’s hands, Samyn says later. “I told them, ‘One of your former U.S. presidents has collapsed in our city. We need it up and operational and we need it now.’”

11:45 — THE RAW CLIP

Deal has an exclusive in his video clip of Carter being helped by security, though it was shot at a distance, and Canadian and U.S. news outlets are calling to see if it’s available. He comes in from the Habitat site to produce a raw clip for possible use elsewhere, and then a version for the *Free Press* that highlights Carter’s head in the crowd, frame by frame. He couldn’t have done that video treatment on his phone on-site, he says.

Samyn is being cautious with allowing outside use of the clip. “In today’s world,” he says, “no one’s going to hear it was the *Winnipeg Free Press* that did it” if they see it on another site.

NOON — TWO-HEADED REPORTER

Mike McIntyre is covering the Winnipeg Goldeyes baseball game tonight but he shows up at the ballpark press box at noon. He has a feature to write, and he wants a quiet location. McIntyre is

both a sportswriter and a projects reporter on the justice beat. After years of covering the courthouse he wanted a change but didn't want to waste the good sources he had built up. Now he covers games and tournaments, and fits his justice work around them — usually.

More than once, the roles have overlapped. A source gave him information about the murder of a bus driver one night when he was covering a Winnipeg Jets NHL game. He toggled back and forth on his laptop: hockey story, murder story, hockey story ... "There would be a whistle and then I'd write a few paragraphs of the murder story, and then I'd write a few paragraphs for my working copy on the Jets game."

Today, looking out over the empty green baseball diamond, he's writing about Crown attorneys and post-traumatic stress disorder.

12:15 P.M. — THE EDITORIAL

Perspectives editor Brad Oswald usually has several editorials in the works. Today he'll run one about a change in Canadian Press style to capitalize the words Indigenous and Aboriginal. Oswald has discussed the piece with editor Samyn and now, as he always does, he emails it to the editorial writers scattered in different departments for their comments. There is little feedback today, probably because "the CP style change is one most folks think was overdue," he says.

12:20 — FINAL QUESTIONS

Alexandra Paul was assigned the coming weekend's big feature back in February: writing about the 200th anniversary of the Selkirk Treaty, which brought peace to the region and created the settlement that became Winnipeg. While still working news shifts, she's been sorting through treaty accounts and interpretations and trying to track down descendants. Her research material fills a grocery box beside her desk.

She began talking to associate editor Scott Gibbons about the reporting and writing at the beginning of June. Now, just hours before the Saturday feature pages go to press as a preprinted section, she and Gibbons are dealing with final questions, like the different spellings that various sources have of some Indigenous names.

2 — TOO MUCH FOR ONE PLATE

Legislature reporter Kusch has gathered many of the followup details he wants on the physio cuts, some from a good source at the hospital. He has also checked out another story that proved untrue, and wrote up a quick assessment of several cabinet ministers to help a columnist.

Now he hears of another health cut and that CBC and CTV are chasing it. He has too much on the go, so he phones city editor Shane Minkin, who assigns a news reporter to the story.

2 — STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Randy Turner sits down to write a short feature he researched yesterday. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre was mentioned in a Tuesday story about B.C. wildfires; it's based

in Winnipeg but no one knows much about it. Turner was asked to check it out, see if there was more to say. There is.

When he went to the centre's office, "it was just a bunch of guys sitting at their desks, so it didn't look visually exciting," he says later. "But when they started to explain how it worked, I thought, 'This is pretty cool.'" He did the interviews, lined up a photographer and transcribed his tapes. The writing now will take a couple of hours. The story will fill most of a page in Friday's paper.

"Not everything has to be breaking news," Turner says. "There's lots of room, or should be, for stories that explain things about the news."

4 — 2 MINUTES 44 SECONDS

Before Carter collapsed (it turns out to have been dehydration, and he recovered well), Deal had shot 32 clips of him talking to volunteers and working on a house. Deal edits this into a video that comes in at two minutes, 44 seconds. Not knowing how accessible Carter would be, he had been to the Habitat site several times earlier in the week to shoot B-roll. None of it is used today.

5:53 — MULTI-TASKING

Kusch has most of the interviews he needs and files his story. He didn't get a current physio patient. "Yet I was able to recreate what a patient might have told me from what I gleaned from the folks I did get," he says. "On so many days, reporters have a lot on the go. If you work on one story at a time, there are many days where you might not file anything."

10:30 — 3 STORIES LATER ...

Mike McIntyre had filed his 2,000-word PTSD feature just in time to watch the Goldeyes take batting practice at 4 p.m. He interviewed a new player and wrote a 700-word profile before game time at 7. Now he files 350 words on the game itself — his last story of a long day.

In the newsroom, print and digital editors are still at work.



WINNIPEG MEDIA

Winnipeg Free Press

Newsroom employees summer 2017: 67

Newsroom employees summer 2010: 100

Circulation: 100,000 weekdays, 130,000 Saturdays (Alliance for Audited Media data)

Digital-only full-access subscriptions: 6,000

Digital pay-per-article subscriptions: 6,000

Cost per article: 27 cents

Print and digital reach: 68% of Winnipeg adults each week (Vividata)

Print edition reach: 59% of Winnipeg adults each week

Annual operations budget: \$70 million

Annual newsroom operations budget: \$7 million



FOUR INNOVATIVE WAYS COMMUNITIES ARE BUILDING BRIDGES INTO NEWSROOMS

Historically, the idea of people outside the newsroom influencing what happened inside was inconceivable — but that's changing.

When I was managing editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, our digital editor came to me one day — it would have been late 2010 or 2011 — and said: “You know, people want to be part of the news process now. Commenting on stories online isn’t enough. They want to be part of making the decisions.”

I had been working in newsrooms then for about 32 years, often at the centre of the daily chaos that is news, and I couldn’t imagine how “civilians” could be a realistic part of the mix. News is unpredictable by definition. In a newsroom, you begin every day with a plan of action and it falls apart when the first reporter walks through the door. Floods inundate cities, scandals surface, events are added or cancelled, information is leaked.

That mysterious thing called news judgment is applied over and over, sometimes in thoughtful meetings, often by one person making a split-second decision on breaking news.

PHOTOGRAPH MANUEL PENA

The idea of people outside the process having a say was inconceivable. “How would this work?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” said the digital editor. “But we have to think about it. This is important.”

We didn’t find a solution that day, nor that year. Truth be told, it wasn’t one of our priorities — though it should have been, given the social changes arising from the digital revolution. We were preoccupied with the business fallout: the new technologies, declining revenues, staff cutbacks, constant restructuring of what we could cover.

Today, after a year outside the news industry as the Atkinson Fellow in Public Policy, I believe we missed a great opportunity — but I think it’s not too late.

As much as the digital world disrupts the news industry, it also simplifies partnerships and collaborations. Community institutions and groups don’t have to be part of the newsroom to be part of the storytelling.

Experiments and programs run by journalism schools, community groups, foundations and others, here and in the United States, are exploring different models to both support the supply of reliable news and information, and increase its diversity. Here are some examples.

NEWSROOM + UNIVERSITY

[Update: The Gazette-Concordia experiment was launched in Oct. 2017 with the co-ordinated publication of a feature article in the newspaper, and related insights by professors on the university site; but it ended there. However, Concordia hopes to use the model and the lessons learned in a future collaboration.]

Every Canadian city thinks it’s going through roadwork hell. Montreal knows it.

The city is halfway through rebuilding a major interchange; a new bridge is under construction alongside a crumbling one; work to replace water mains that can be a century old continues on streets both large and small; and now the mayor has ramped up a plan to get even more done over the next 10 years — just to get it, finally, done.

Day to day, the construction affects everyone: drivers, cyclists, public-transit riders, pedestrians, parents with strollers, people in wheelchairs, businesses. On a larger scale, the work is shaping the city of the future. If there is a civic topic Montrealers need to understand, this is it.

So, when the *Montreal Gazette* and Concordia University agreed to discuss an experiment this year as part of the Atkinson Fellowship, roadwork was the chosen subject. A pilot project will be published in mid-October, with articles written by the *Gazette* and by Concordia professors.

The idea is to give residents more information — information that’s reliable and diverse — than the news media can supply on their own, especially as newsrooms get smaller.

Here’s how the model works:

“As much as the digital world disrupts the news industry, it also simplifies partnerships and collaborations. Community institutions and groups don’t have to be part of the newsroom to be part of the storytelling.”



THE NEWSPAPER: Over the last few years the *Gazette* has covered roadwork from weekly road-closing warnings to investigative reporting on contracts and collusion. But like newspapers around the country, it has significantly fewer reporters than it did; it offered buyouts to staff every year for the last three, and laid off some employees late last year. It's interested in seeing if a collaboration can give its readers access to more stories on this issue.

THE UNIVERSITY: Professional journalism gives us information through a news lens: what's happening at this moment, what's not working, what's the big talking point. Academic researchers study a topic all year, every year, and have different perspectives. At Concordia, roadwork comes up in research by professors in engineering, urban planning, political science, business and even fine arts. The university's communications team, which includes several former journalists, is acting as editor on the roadwork project, helping professors focus their research for public consumption. Some Concordia researchers are also in line to get training in writing for the public from The Conversation Canada, an academic journalism site that offers this service to member universities.

CO-ORDINATION: The *Gazette* and Concordia brought a reporter and a few professors together to discuss specific angles for the October pilot project. As the experiment continues, regular discussions about the reporting and research each partner has underway on roadwork will highlight the best places for collaboration. Not all *Gazette* reporting on the issue will have a Concordia counterpoint; not all Concordia research will develop into a story for the public.

PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION: The *Gazette* and Concordia are each responsible for their own material, to be published on their own websites. They'll link to and share each other's articles online and on social media. This model differs from past practices in industry-university collaborations when the newspaper would interview professors about their research, write the articles, and publish them; or would edit professors' opinion pieces to newspaper style.

NEXT STEPS: Citizen-interest groups have their own expertise on roadwork issues, including on cycling and public transit, and individual residents have unparalleled on-the-ground experience. The next stages of this experiment would find ways to involve them. The interest groups would be responsible for producing and publishing their own material on their own sites. Individuals' involvement could occur in different ways: from posing questions to Concordia's experts, to contributing to crowdsourced maps. A separate website, shared by all the partners, has the best potential for interaction with and contributions from residents, but funding would be needed to create and moderate it.

A model to copy? The model could be used in different ways: in big cities and small towns, on simpler or more complex topics, involving one or several news outlets and schools, varieties of public or citizen groups, and different levels of individual participation. A newspaper or a university could have several such partnerships underway at the same time, each one extending its reach into different audiences.

"The universities are all about content, and the media are about content as well, so there's a natural fit at that level," says Philippe Beauregard, Concordia's chief communications officer.

"What we like about (this model) most is that it is this triumvirate of news, academics and citizens. What's been really exciting is to see how we can draw on the strengths of each of these groups."

For *Gazette* editor Lucinda Chodan, the project is a way to explore different ways of providing valuable information. "I think that as the newspaper and mainstream media landscape changes, it kind of behooves us all to experiment with how we can be of service to the community."

"The people who are involved in the project are young and old, they're rich and poor, they're from all different areas of the city."

FUNDING EXPERIMENTS

[Update: New Jersey's governor signed a bill on Aug. 27, 2018 securing \$5 million a year for the Civic Information Consortium.]

"What we constantly hear from people is not only that they want better local media but they just want to find out what's going on where they live," says Mike Rispoli, director of News Voices, a journalism advocacy group in New Jersey supported by several local foundations.

"I don't think anyone has really said it quite like, 'We don't need the local media.' I think everyone recognizes that strong, independent, verifiable journalism is something critical to the

future of the community's success and its health. But there are so many different things that are going on right now that aren't traditional journalism in a lot of ways."

New Jersey newspapers have been hit hard by the digital revolution; news deserts — towns with no news outlet — are spreading. News Voices held public forums around the state to ask residents what they need, and the discussions helped lead to a bill tabled in New Jersey's state-house in June that would set up a "Civic Information Consortium" to fund information experiments.

Proposals could come from anyone — existing media outlets, hyperlocal digital startups, universities, community groups, individuals — as long as the end result would provide civic information to New Jersey's residents.

"It could be expanding the use of civic technology, or open-data platforms, or media literacy programs," says Rispoli. "We also heard really good ideas for people to create investigative reporting endowments where universities give out money to individual freelance investigative reporters in Newark. The possibilities are really endless."

A proposal could focus on generating revenue, he notes. "But I think the most important thing is that the emphasis on how this money is spent is whether or not the project is of the public interest. It will reward journalism that is of the public interest rather than trying to just generate more clicks, more click-based type stories."

Four state universities would partner with grant recipients: Montclair State, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan and Rutgers. The universities already work on media projects through their journalism schools or in other projects, and they're used to handling public money.

The legislation asks for \$20 million a year for five years. The Civic Information Consortium would be set up as a public charity so it can also raise money itself, meaning it wouldn't necessarily have to rely on the state after five years. The initial funding would come from the sale of state-owned public broadcast licences.

The bill didn't pass immediately, and now must wait until after state elections in November. But reaction from legislators has been positive, Rispoli says.

"I think that there's a general understanding from a lot of lawmakers that while their relationship with the media may not always be good, they recognize that it's critically important for their constituents to get basic information about where they live, and that a free and vibrant press is critical to a vibrant democracy. They see the problem, and there hasn't been a ton of solutions offered up."

SUPPORT NETWORK

Suppose you held an election and no one reported on the issues?

Voting Block is a deceptively simple project leading up to New Jersey's November vote for a new governor: Invite a variety of news outlets each to focus on one neighbourhood. Gather groups of neighbours over pizza or potluck to talk about their concerns. Report on what they say. Share the stories.

Then take it a step further: Create a guide so anyone can host their own potluck discussion and send in their notes to be shared.

While it isn't unheard of for newsrooms to collaborate with each other, historically they've been averse to dividing a story up with competitors. But who can cover everything on their own these days? And how can small hyperlocal outlets — sometimes the only media in an area — have any impact?

The Center for Cooperative Media, which created Voting Block, believes there is more to be gained from collaborating than from working in isolation.

"Twenty-five news organizations will be involved for sure" in the election project, says Stefanie Murray, director of the centre. "Plus, if we can get another 25 blocks around the state to host their own discussions, that's 50 different conversations about politics that we might be catalyzing."

The centre was founded in 2012 at Montclair State University's School of Communication and Media as a hub of information, communication, resources and funding for hyperlocal news websites. It has since expanded to work with all kinds of news and information producers across the state, including daily newspapers, public media, bloggers and citizen groups.

"We're a highly dense state — there are 565 municipalities in this little state" Murray says. "And they all have their own education, their own fire departments, their own police departments, everything. ... All these little cities all need their own watchdogs."

"That's why New Jersey is such a great place to incubate ideas for local news, because there's a big appetite here, there's a population here, there are many wealthy communities that can support news experimentation."

The centre's first initiative was the New Jersey News Commons, where members can share content, collaborate on projects, participate in training and get coaching.

"Maybe they have questions about their website or video or podcasting, and our associate director Joe (Amditis) is really good with that so he'll help them with that," Murray says. "Sometimes they'll call and they'll have a really tough ethical question: Should I publish this story? And I'm good at that so I'll talk them through those issues."

It also works with people who are not journalists. For example, the New Jersey group The Citizens Campaign, which trains people in civic participation, and the League of Women Voters, whose Observer Corps volunteers take notes at government meetings and share them publicly.

The Center for Cooperative Media is funded by Montclair State University, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Knight Foundation and the Democracy Fund.

CITIZEN JOURNALISM

[Update: The Community News Commons shut down in December 2017 after five and a half years of operation. During that period, it published 3,000 stories and thousands of photos provided by a range of citizens.]

It was an interest in photography that drew the man to the training sessions on the fundamentals of journalism. The Community News Commons was offering them for free at the Winnipeg Public Library, two evenings a week for six weeks. It was only after a few sessions that Noah Erenberg, who runs the News Commons for the Winnipeg Foundation, realized the man was living in a nearby shelter.



When he went on to contribute an occasional photo to the CNC website over the next year, it was a rare opportunity for a homeless person to share his view of the city, and for other residents to see it.

His perspective was “a world away” from any that Erenberg saw among newsroom employees in his own years in mainstream journalism. And that’s the purpose of the Community News Commons, a place where people can report on or tell stories about their neighbourhoods. It pulls in voices and views that otherwise would not be widely heard.

“People are not coming to us for the news of the day,” Erenberg says. “They’re coming to us to see interesting stories, for a review of a concert; it could be an event coming up, it could be a really interesting human interest story.

“The people who are involved in the project are young and old, they’re rich and poor, they’re from all different areas of the city.”

The News Commons was created in 2012 by the Winnipeg Foundation with a three-year matching grant of \$202,000 from the U.S. Knight Foundation — the only Canadian recipient under a program for informed and engaged communities. It seemed a good fit for the foundation’s role, says LuAnn Lovlin, director of communications, who is responsible for the project.

“Our motivation was not because of what was happening in the mainstream media community,” she says. “But that certainly built awareness in our thinking about giving voice to the community.”

The foundation has continued the project since the Knight funding ran out, covering Erenberg’s salary and small costs like website maintenance.

The note on this Winnipeg statue of Gandhi reads “If you’re cold, please take these.” Originally posted to the citizen journalism project of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Community News Commons, this simple photo garnered a response from thousands of people all over the world. PHOTOGRAPH GREG PETZOLD

Erenberg acts as journalism coach and editor to all the contributors: doing fact checks, urging them to get quotes from other people and talking them through a rewrite if necessary. Everything goes through him; he's the only person who presses the "publish" button.

The free workshops are repeated twice a year, drawing 25 to 30 people each time to learn the principles of journalism and tools like audio and video in 12 evening sessions.

You don't have to take the course to contribute to the News Commons. You do have to register and follow the policy guidelines on ethics, attribution, independence (no advertorial content, no paid content) and the right to distribute the material. A core group of maybe 20 people contribute frequently. More than 1,000 are registered to be allowed to submit their work or to comment.

Now, five years in, the foundation is considering whether changes are needed to stay relevant. Erenberg wonders if the site should become more focused on the news of the day, and help supplement the world of professional journalism.

"I think there is this untapped bridge or road that we could actually build between citizens doing their thing and traditional journalists," he says. People are writing online anyway, "and this in some ways tries to take that energy and put it through somewhat of a professional journalism filter, try to put it onto a site that is reputable."



'CREATING COMMUNITY LITERACY FOR NEWSROOMS AND NEWS LITERACY FOR COMMUNITIES': THE WAY FORWARD

We have a wealth of information at our fingertips. But as journalism transforms as a result of cutbacks, how do we make sure we get the information we need?

Sue laboni lives in a small town outside Toronto she describes as rich in activities, community groups and retirees, but a “captive audience” for its weekly paper. “There is a huge potential here for persuasive, factually based information,” she writes. “Surely our community can do something collectively to address this media challenge.”

Journalism instructor Teresa Goff knows her students are just learning their trade, but perhaps their classwork at Oshawa’s Durham College can help inform the public. “Could we collaborate to analyze data or provide hyperlocal information” to a newsroom?

Daniel Wigdor is an associate professor in computer science at the University of Toronto, researching user interface and information visualization. “Our lab has a cadre of immensely talented professors, graduate students and post-docs who are always keen to take on new and interesting challenges. What can we do to help?”

PHOTOGRAPH RAWPIXEL



These were three responses to the first article I wrote under the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy, which described the rapid decline in the news industry's fortunes. They hint at the breadth of possible solutions to the growing void in civic news and information. They show an eagerness by individuals to help.

But the readers' questions also point to a challenge that became increasingly clear during the fellowship year: We have no infrastructure, no network or resources, to guide these efforts as we begin relying less on the traditional news industry alone and more on society for our information.

Cutbacks in the industry are a major factor in the shift in where we get our news, but not the only one. It's part of the larger fallout of the digital revolution that opened the gates for anyone to publish online and share on social media.

Eyewitness accounts, passed on with smartphone photos and videos, give us an instant glimpse of history in the making, though we always have to check how accurate and independent the reports are. Groups whose concerns weren't covered by the mainstream media now have a platform, though they will still have difficulty being heard in the digital cacophony.

We have a wealth of information, of voices and diversity, at our fingertips.

But are we getting the information we need?

When the news industry and its supporters seek government funding to give it time to find a new business model, it's because of the role news plays in maintaining a strong society — protecting democracy, in the phrase often used. If we don't know what our governments are doing, we don't control them. If we don't know that hospitals have long waiting lists, we can't find a solution. If we

Port Hope, in southern Ontario, had its own paper from 1852 until 2009. Since then, coverage of local news and events has plummeted. Pictured, Port Hope Town Hall. PHOTOGRAPH PETER REDMAN PHOTO

don't know a development is planned, we can't fight to protect the green space instead. Without information, we can't have knowledgeable conversations with each other. We don't have a voice. Our communities then belong to the powerful.

Both major reports in Canada this year on the state of the news industry, by the Public Policy Forum and the House of Commons heritage committee, have made cases for government funding. So has News Media Canada, an association of print and digital newspapers. Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly made no promises when she unveiled a new cultural policy in late September.

[Update: The federal government announced \$5 million of support for local journalism over five years in its 2018 budget.]

Some critics believe the market should take care of itself; that if existing mainstream news outlets fold, startups made for the digital world would have a better chance of surfacing and surviving. Others worry the startups are also struggling to find the kind of sustainable revenue needed to pay for journalism's role as a watchdog.

Neither scenario guarantees us even as much journalism as we have today, never mind what we had 20 or 30 years ago. We need alternatives. And if we can find ways for different sources to collaborate with each other and with the news industry, we can shape an information ecosystem that supports society, that works together to cover important issues, rather than operating in silos.

Some alternative models have been emerging. The Conversation, an academic journalism website aimed at a public audience, launched a Canadian edition this summer that provides articles on politics, science, health care and other key topics. Museum exhibitions can be a kind of journalism when they inform us about issues in the news, as Ryerson University's Ivor Shapiro has said. The Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto is training people who are experts in their fields to apply the principles of journalism to their work, from food-bank research to public health.

These efforts are valuable, but not enough. The greatest need is at the local level — in big cities as well as small towns.

When the Abacus Data polling company asked 1,518 Canadians about news in their community, 32 per cent said they don't have a daily newspaper. Increasingly, more of us are without a community paper, too.

April Lindgren, an associate professor at Ryerson University's journalism school, has been tracking newspaper shutdowns and launches in Canada through the Local News Research Project. Numbers updated in September show that since 2008, 170 newspapers have shut down: 138 community papers that published fewer than five days a week, 22 free dailies, and 9 paid

"We have no infrastructure, no network or resources, to guide these efforts as we begin relying less on the traditional news industry alone and more on society for our information."



dailies (the remaining paper is undetermined). Forty of the papers were closed because they merged with others.

In the same period, 35 new publications were launched; 17 replaced those that disappeared through mergers.

[Update: The numbers on newspaper launches and shutdowns in this piece have changed — since 2008, 224 newspapers have shut down, including 188 community papers that published fewer than five days a week, 23 free dailies, and 13 paid dailies. Forty-one of the papers were closed because they merged with others. In the same period, 40 new publications were launched; 16 replaced those that disappeared through mergers.]

Research by John Miller, a former Ryerson journalism professor, shows the loss of local coverage that can come in a merger.

Miller examined the case of Port Hope, a town in southern Ontario, which had its own paper from 1852 until 2009 when the *Port Hope Evening Guide* was merged with a neighbouring daily and weekly to form *Northumberland Today*. Miller compared one week of the *Evening Guide* in 2008 with one week of the *Northumberland Today* in 2017. The number of stories about Port Hope fell from 46 to 16. Opinion pieces, including letters, about Port Hope went from 24 to 2. Stories about the region fell from 78 to 47, though that's what the merged paper was created to cover.

At the moment, we have no infrastructure to help anyone other than professional newsrooms cover municipalities. An experiment under the Atkinson Fellowship involving the *Montreal Gazette* and Concordia University, to collaborate on giving the public more information about the massive

The Winnipeg Free Press newsroom had about 100 employees in the summer of 2010. In 2017, that figure was down by a third, to 67. PHOTOGRAPH TREVOR HAGAN / FOR THE TORONTO STAR

amount of roadwork underway in the city, might develop into one model; its development has been possible because the *Gazette* and Concordia already have experts in their fields and resources to produce and distribute their stories.

A second experiment discussed under the fellowship focused on using ordinary residents to supplement news coverage in Hamilton. This experiment took much longer to shape, and has reached only a theoretical pilot-project stage. The local paper, the *Spectator*, is open to thinking differently but its newsroom is stretched as thin as most — too thin to co-ordinate and edit an ongoing project involving untrained residents. The pilot stage would gauge community interest and whether any individuals or groups might want to run the project.

Many models are needed, because communities' geographies, demographics and needs differ so widely. Is a college or university nearby? How active is the public library? Is it a commuter town, or are residents more apt to invest their time? How open is the local council with information? What most needs to be monitored?

The Local News Lab, a U.S. project launched in 2014 to examine how small news outlets might become more sustainable and work more closely with their communities, found after its first 18 months of research that one of the great needs is for experiments to be carried out so they can serve as examples to others.

Otherwise, how do you excite an understaffed and underfunded newsroom about possibilities they've never seen or don't understand? How do you talk to people with no journalism training about what they can contribute unless you can show them a model?

"The goal was not to save journalism, but to build a more diverse and vibrant public square that could strengthen New Jersey communities and foster more informed and engaged citizens," Josh Stearns and Molly de Aguiar wrote in a Local News Lab report in 2016.

"We talk about this as creating community literacy for newsrooms and news literacy for communities."

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The Local News Lab is now a national project under the Democracy Fund, but it started in New Jersey, a state with no private TV broadcasters where the impact of newspaper cutbacks is felt strongly. The News Lab is just one of several efforts by advocates and academics, largely funded by foundations, to develop support networks.

The Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University is another: offering training, guidance and collaboration to anyone from news outlets to citizen groups.

So is News Voices: It has held public forums around the state, leading to a "Civic Information Consortium" bill that, if passed, would provide funding for information projects.

In New Jersey, the responsibility for an informed society is passing from the largely private news industry to public hands — not excluding the industry but pulling it into the larger ecosystem.

This discussion is beginning in Canada as some models emerge. An open question is how far it will advance without funding or ownership. In the United States, foundations are the source of most of the money behind these efforts, both at the local level — such as the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation’s backing of many New Jersey efforts — and the national level, where the Knight Foundation is a longtime supporter of journalism and eBay founder Pierre Omidyar’s Democracy Fund is a newer arrival.

Canadian foundations operate under federal regulations that limit their funding of political activity or advocacy, as the Public Policy Forum pointed out in its report earlier this year. Those activities are generally interpreted as including journalism.

Would community information or journalism also fall within the definition? And if it didn’t — or if the government changes the regulations, which it has been urged to do — how much money is available anyway? The Canadian foundation world is very different from the American one.

U.S. journalism schools are playing a substantial role in not just documenting the problems of the news industry but mapping out new directions — though, again, their projects often rely on foundation funding.

Canadians have been mixed in their attitudes on government funding for the news industry. The Public Policy Forum report noted this, as did Abacus Data’s June poll: It asked whether “the federal government has a responsibility to do something to make sure there are strong local media serving communities across Canada.” A small majority, 56 per cent, said no; 44 per cent said yes. Younger respondents were more likely to support the idea. Would these numbers shift if the goal were media-community collaboration?

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of all of this is something I heard from both industry and community-engagement people this year: The news industry’s situation is worsening, no fresh business model is in sight, but there aren’t a lot of ideas on the table.

In New Jersey, one reason News Voices director Mike Rispoli is hopeful the Civic Information Consortium bill will pass is because legislators “see the problem, and there hasn’t been a ton of solutions offered up.”

Bob Cox, president of News Media Canada, in a June interview on his association’s request for government funding, commented: “I do say to all critics of this proposal, what would you propose?”

“The thing is, this is a public policy debate and so what would you propose? I think the government needs to hear that too. We’re a fairly large organized group and of course we were able to come up with a proposal more easily than some, but we shouldn’t be the only people the government hears from.”

The issue is just too important.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a very large thank-you to the Atkinson Foundation, the Honderich family and the *Toronto Star* for having made this year of research possible. The funding allowed me to stand outside the news industry and consider civic information on its own terms, not just as a component of daily journalism. This is an area that has received little attention in Canada, where the news business is understandably focused on its own future, but it's so essential to having engaged communities.

I was very grateful during the fellowship for the excellent guidance, questions and editing I got from the *Star's* J.P. Fozo, Janet Hurley and Glen Colbourn.

A year after the fellowship ended, I'm very lucky that the Atkinson Foundation's executive director Colette Murphy and director of social impact Pat Thompson continue to support the research, the cause, and me personally with thought-provoking conversations, shared information, and of course the republishing of this series. Thanks also to Sadiya Ansari for additional research and editing to make sure the series held up.

I had hoped to launch two experiments during the fellowship year; and while that turned out to be overly ambitious, I was able to draw up two interesting models thanks to the generosity of four individuals who spent more time than they could easily give to discuss the possibilities. I am very grateful to Philippe Beauregard, chief communications officer at Concordia University, who continues to be creative and enthusiastic about the role of universities in helping to fill the news and information gap; Lucinda Chodan, editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, for her immediate support and for bringing the newspaper into experiment planning; Paul Berton, editor of the *Hamilton Spectator*, for willingly talking about a newspaper-citizen experiment and for introducing me to his beautiful city; and Jim Poling, then the managing editor of the *Spectator*, who saw the possibilities and began filling in the blanks to bring life to a theoretical model.

Abhay Adhikari's Digital Identities workshop, held with the support of Google News, showed me how the Hamilton experiment could become a reality by starting small and smart.

I spoke to Ivor Shapiro, journalism professor at Ryerson University, early in the fellowship research and I ended up using his definition of journalism as a measure throughout the year.

I spoke to Michelle Ferrier, of the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism and of the group Journalism That Matters, late in the fellowship research, and wished I had found her much earlier. The JTM mantra "Nothing about us without us," focusing on the need to include communities when covering them, didn't end up in the final articles but has stayed with me.

Finally, many books and reports fed and helped frame my thinking. Among them:

- The 2014 report *Post-Industrial Journalism*, by C.W. Anderson, Clay Shirkey and Emily Bell (published by the Tow Center for Digital Journalism) (<http://towcenter.org/research/post-industrial-journalism-adapting-to-the-present-2/>) was invaluable in how it broke down the news industry and pinpointed what we're losing with its decline.

- Lessons Learned from the Local News Lab, a 2016 report, (<http://localnewslab.org/2016/02/19/new-report-lessons-learned-from-the-local-news-lab/>) spelled out relatively simple, collaborative ways of supporting local news organizations and startups, and the important role of U.S. foundations in funding them.
- The Shattered Mirror, 2017, by the Public Policy Forum, examined news, trust and democracy in Canada in the digital age. The PPF issued three follow-up reports in summer and fall 2018. All can be found at <https://www.ppforum.ca/project/local-news-democracy/>.
- The state of civic information in Canada, and the difficulty of finding solutions, is very clear in hearings by and submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage into the media and local communities, as well as the 2017 report issued by the committee. (<http://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/CHPC/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=8800976>)
- *Tell Everyone*, a 2014 book by University of British Columbia journalism professor Alfred Hermida, explores why people share content and why it matters.
- *The Elements of Journalism* (I used the 2014 3rd edition), by U.S. journalism veterans Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, is about the role of the news media, but also an honest look at its weaknesses as well as its strengths.
- *What Are Journalists For?* is a 1999 book by New York University professor Jay Rosen about the public journalism movement of the time that is just as relevant today.
- *No News is Bad News*, 2016, by journalist Ian Gill, spells out Canada's media collapse and looks at some early indications of what might come next.
- *Saving the Media: Capitalism, Crowdfunding and Democracy*, 2016, is a different take on the problems facing the news industry by French economist Julia Cagé; she also offers one possible model as a solution.
- Is No Local News Bad News? was a highly relevant conference at Ryerson University, held in June 2017, showcasing research from Canada, the U.S., and beyond (<http://localnews.journalism.ryerson.ca>).

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A collaborative project of the Atkinson Foundation, the Honderich Family and the *Toronto Star*, the Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy provides financial support for a Canadian journalist to investigate a public policy issue, with a goal toward promoting social and economic justice.

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