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**Journalism Instruction and  
Citizen-Centered Democracy  
2019**

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## Introduction

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As a research organization that explores innovations in citizen-centered democratic practice, the Kettering Foundation has a long-standing interest in the relationship between journalism and democracy. It has published research addressing civic/public journalism (e.g., Merrit, Rosen and Austin 1997; Friedland 2003) as well as journalism education (e.g., Kurpius 2003). More recently, the foundation has worked through a learning exchange with journalism educators on innovations in journalism curriculum to prepare students—the journalists of tomorrow—to practice journalism in ways that are more supportive of democracy.

As with all of Kettering's work, this project considers democracy from a particular viewpoint, focused on the work of citizens to address concerns and solve problems through collaborative efforts. This entails a conception of citizenship that goes beyond the legalistic definitions of legal residency and/or voting ability. Rather, it takes a view of citizenship as the willingness and capacity to engage with others in collective, collaborative action to improve the lot of everyone affected by a particular circumstance. As the foundation says on its website, "We strive to learn more about what can increase the capacity of communities to act on the problems they face."

A description of the learning exchange's work, as prepared for an August 2017 meeting, noted the following (emphasis added):

Journalists say they serve the needs of citizens in democracy. But their notions of what it means to serve those needs suggest that they have a narrow view of the work that citizens do in democratic public life. The narrowness of their view limits the ways that journalists go about their work and is reflected in the problem of mutual distrust between journalists and citizens. The [learning exchange] conversation continues Kettering's exploration of the role of journalism education in forming journalists' ideas about the role of citizens in democracy. **Participants are seeking new approaches to journalism education that might produce journalists who have a broad concept of citizens as participants in democratic public life and a deeper commitment to serving the work that citizens do in democracy.**

In describing the foundation's work, Kettering program officers sometimes employ the distinction between problems *in* democracy and problems *of* democracy. Problems *in* democracy are what the elements of a democratic society—elected officials, government bureaucracy, NGOs, voluntary civic associations and the like—address in the interests of social improvement. These include, for example, issues surrounding public health, safety and welfare, and equality of opportunity. Problems *of* democracy, on the other hand, are the characteristics or issues that prevent these elements from operating

effectively as they seek to address these problems. As the foundation puts it, “We probe underneath obvious problems to find the deeper causes, or ‘problems behind the problems,’ that prevent democracy from working as it should” (<https://www.kettering.org/core-insights/problems-behind-problems>). These include polarization, distrust of institutions, difficulty reaching agreement about what steps should be taken around contentious issues, and a general failure to recognize the work of ordinary citizens.

Classic theories of how journalism and democracy interact focus on how information fed out to the public has an impact on public opinion formation, which in turn affects governing institutions. Sociologist Herbert Gans described this approach as a process in which “news media help to assemble the audience whose opinions play various roles in the political process and are incorporated in the political climate” (2003, 83). Journalism professor James Curran elaborates on this, saying:

According to this consensus (view of journalism and democracy), the media should keep people informed about public affairs so that individuals are adequately briefed when they take part in the processes of self-government. The media should be fearless watchdogs, vigilantly examining the exercise of power and protecting the public from wrongdoing. The media should also provide a platform of open debate that facilitates the formation of public opinion. In addition, the media should be the voice of the people, representing to authority the citizenry’s views and expressing the agreed aims of society. In short, the primary democratic tasks of the media are to inform, scrutinize, debate, and represent (120).

As Curran notes, this classic formulation includes the spotlight and watchdog roles familiar to every journalism student, working journalist, and many members of the public as well. In the spotlight role, journalism helps ensure the flow of information such that citizens are well-enough informed to participate effectively in self-governance (also described by Meiklejohn, 1948). In the watchdog role, journalists highlight the activities of government institutions as a means to hold officials accountable. These are not mutually exclusive functions of course; accountability often is achieved by providing information to the public about officials’ errors, misjudgments, and misdeeds. Historical examples of this include the early 20th-century Progressive Era “muckrakers” movement and, later on, coverage of the Watergate scandal and the Pentagon Papers disclosure.

This approach sees the interaction of journalism and democracy through the lens of problems *in* democracy. Spotighting and watchdogging generally focus on policy formation and institutional function. The theory, plainly put, is that if citizens know enough about what governments are doing for (or to) them, then “they the people” can react accordingly at the ballot box and in other ways through mobilization of public

opinion. “The existence of a free press enshrines the democratic concept of the political accountability of power holders to ordinary citizens” (Gurevitch and Blumler 1990, 273).

At the present time, it is difficult to claim this system is operating effectively or well. According to Kettering, loss of confidence in institutions—including the media—is one problem of democracy; that clearly is the case now considering that a Gallup poll conducted in collaboration with the Knight Foundation in 2017 found that 43 percent of Americans have a negative view of the news media, with just 33 percent having a positive view and 23 percent neutral. Only 44 percent of Americans say they can think of a news source that reports the news in an unbiased manner (Knight Foundation 2016). Among the systemic factors contributing to this are the attenuation of news coverage at the local level (as local news operations have withered in recent years), an emphasis on partisanship and punditry at the national level, and a proclivity at all levels to coverage of controversy and scandal, as well as a horserace focus (winners and losers) of electoral politics and policy formation. These trends have accelerated to the point that, as press critic James Fallows argued a couple of decades ago, the news media no longer contribute to a functional democratic system but undermine it. “Far from making it easier to cope with public challenges,” he wrote, “the media often make it harder” (1996, 7). The Knight-Gallup study virtually echoed Fallows, reporting that “most Americans . . . believe the media continue to have a critical role in our democracy but are not very positive about how the media are fulfilling that role” (Knight Foundation 2018).

Could journalism as an institution of democratic society avoid this trap by having journalists and news organizations work with less focus on the problems *in* democracy and more attention to problems *of* democracy? Can journalism educators contribute to such a reset of journalism with curricular innovations that create student mind-sets and skill sets oriented to addressing the problems of democracy? This exchange among journalism educators seeks to answer the latter question by exploring what journalism students—the journalists of tomorrow—need to know and what they should be able to do in order to help create a form of journalism that mitigates the dysfunction in the contemporary system.

To help build these insights, more than 30 members of the learning exchange offered their thoughts about

- features of a journalistic system that could overcome the limitations of the traditional models for how journalism and democracy interact
- characteristics that tomorrow’s journalists should have in order to work effectively within such a system
- curriculum that would help create those characteristics in those students.

Their ideas were used to derive a set of nearly 50 learning objectives across four broad categories that could be used by journalism programs or individual educators to develop anything from a single lesson to a semester-long course to a complete program redesign. These curricular reforms could then articulate a new approach to journalism education oriented toward a journalism that helps communities and groups of citizens overcome the problems *of* democracy.

A journalism curriculum built around these learning objectives would correspond well with previous Kettering research about what democracy requires with respect to citizens, communities, and institutions. Specifically, Kettering cites among its core insights that citizens must be able to make sound decisions about their future while functioning as a community that works together to address common problems, in accord with institutions that have public legitimacy and contribute to strengthening society (<https://www.kettering.org/core-insights/core-insights>). The objectives for a journalism curriculum developed by participants in the journalism educators learning exchange, as outlined in this report, emphasize community capacity building on all of these levels.

**Building on past projects of the learning exchange.** This report builds on previous work done through the learning exchange, which has so far resulted in several pieces of published work. These include a series of case studies of curricular innovation (Becker, 2016; available on the Kettering Foundation website) and a collaboration with the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) to present five research studies at an AEJMC convention and in its flagship academic journal, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (Rosenberry 2017). The research presented in those venues demonstrated that students who are taught different things, in different ways, can gain an understanding of how alternative approaches to journalism can be effective. When that happens, the research indicated, students will begin to develop new mind-sets about practicing journalism with a stronger community-centered focus while still *in* school, which will serve them well when they are *out* of school. Changing mind-sets from the outset—while students are still learning to become journalists—offers the greatest potential for reforming journalism from the inside out.

A significant limitation of research done under the auspices of the learning exchange so far is that, as a series of case studies, the findings cannot be presumed to be universally applicable. Case studies are valuable in showing that an innovation has the promise and potential to work in at least some venues. However, the fact that the innovations that have been examined so far worked in certain settings offers no guarantee they would work elsewhere.

With that in mind, a broader exploration of innovations in journalism curricula was conceived as the next project for the learning exchange. This next step would seek ideas related to the following questions:

- *What characteristics should journalism have in order to support a citizen-centered understanding of democracy more effectively?* While this question is not specifically oriented to journalism curriculum or education, it was included in the research to help learning exchange members consider end results in the process of preparing students to work in a journalistic system that supports citizen-centric democracy. Such preparation requires a vision of what such a system might entail.
- *What characteristics should journalism students have to contribute effectively to such a system?*
- *What should be included in a curriculum and other in-school experiences to help students become effective contributors in this regard?*
- *What sorts of existing journalistic innovations could be helpful in such instruction, and to what degree are they being incorporated into the classroom?* This question specifically mentioned several current experiments in journalistic approaches, including Hearken, the Coral Project, the Local News Lab, and Solutions Journalism, and invited respondents to discuss those or others of which they might be aware.

The purpose in posing these questions, and the way they build upon each other, was to refine the concept of how journalism practices should change to serve citizen-centered democracy better. The project's purpose is to identify learning objectives that could guide specific curricular innovations that would help to shape students who embody the characteristics such a journalistic system would require. Answers to the questions were formulated with input from more than 30 individuals who have been members of the journalism educators learning exchange at some point since it was established in 2014. Members provided written feedback to the questions via an online form, and their responses were evaluated with qualitative analytic methods to ascertain key themes.

**Results.** Journalism educators learning exchange members who responded to the queries held the view that journalism must be more closely attuned to community concerns if it intends to serve the needs of citizens in a democracy more effectively. The journalistic system they envisioned would accomplish this by having journalists collaborating more closely with citizens. Involving citizens in all phases of the journalistic process, notably story development and reporting, could reconceptualize the role journalism plays vis-à-vis citizens and communities, thereby creating more favorable conditions for citizens to collaboratively address those concerns.

For students to be effective practitioners in such a system, they should have not only training in traditional journalism principles and skills, but also a better understanding of civics, government, and citizenship combined with the ability and willingness to listen effectively as a means of engaging with citizens. Curiosity and critical-thinking ability are two keys to developing these additional characteristics. A curriculum preparing the students for this role would require instruction in these areas combined with substantial hands-on coursework in which students engaged with community members.

As for the experiments in journalism that are currently under way, respondents thought such innovations were most valuable when they created more engagement with communities. Several respondents suggested Solutions Journalism as an experiment that comes close to implementing the kind of reforms in practice and teaching of journalism envisioned in their responses to the first three questions.

**Citizenship, community, and media.** As Kettering notes, the focus of the foundation's work regarding media "is on the impact [the media] have on the ability of citizens to do public work, [hoping] to gain a better understanding of what successful democratic practice looks like from the perspective of citizens and from the perspective of journalists and other media professionals" (<https://www.kettering.org/core-insights/institutions>). As described at length in *The Ecology of Democracy* (Mathews 2014), democratic civic action entails the following:

- The intersection of citizen initiative with institutional presence offers a potential venue for citizen-initiated democratic practice to translate into systemic social impact.
- Social impact also comes from ever-expanding networks of citizen actors each starting in his or her own sphere but then overlapping, complementing, and reinforcing one another to build stronger civic capacity.
- This all happens through a process of deliberation, defined as weighing the positive *and negative* impacts of all feasible options and then making sound decisions based on community values, that is, the things the community deems most important and cherishes most highly.

The question then becomes: How can a community's values come to light through the work of journalists? Relatedly, how can the work of journalists, especially within communities (i.e., journalists working in local media), help to build these interconnections and citizen networks in order to promote deliberative action? Extended to journalism education, the issue becomes a matter of helping students who are interested in journalistic work develop a combination of mind-set and skill set to put this into practice.

The importance of these aspects can be more thoroughly understood in light of theory surrounding the work of journalists and the intersection of journalism with community values. As Friedland and McLeod put it, “Community integration . . . remains a relevant theoretical problem for democratic action” (1999, 202). Their definition of this integration focuses on the intersection of community action networks and local institutions to create the “capacity of communities for self-directed change” (204). Perhaps appropriately, the description of how community networks interact with local institutions is similar to the wetland/mainland metaphor used throughout *Ecology of Democracy* (Mathews 2014).

Media, especially community media, have a role to play by contributing to stronger community self-efficacy. This happens via local news coverage that builds greater interest, willingness, and ability of the community’s members to engage in collective problem solving. As Friedland and MacLeod put it, “Local media can be seen as fundamentally creating a particular conception of community and interpreting its boundaries and norms” (1999, 208). Local coverage of community initiatives provides what social scientists call bonding and bridging social capital (Hess 2015). Specifically, local media provide social construction of community boundaries through a process of highlighting social interaction, thereby contributing to local areas’ social capital (Hess 2013, 2015) and social cohesion (Emke 2001; Yamamoto 2011). In this way, they help to provide a “symbolic geography” (Graham 1997) that is crucial to the development of community.

This reflects the phenomena explored in some depth first by Park (1922), then Janowitz (1951, 1967), and later Stamm (1985) that came to be known as the community ties hypothesis. Janowitz (1967), for example, studied community newspapers in Chicago neighborhoods, concluding that they supported community identity by maintaining local consensus and emphasizing common values. Coverage of what Stamm (1985) calls “process”—social interactions among members of the community that highlight common endeavors—illustrates community bonds by reporting on how members of a community have things in common that distinguish them from those outside the community. This is almost identical to Cohen’s (1985) definition that members of a community have something in common that distinguishes them in a significant way from those outside the community. Geographic community identity also is related to distinctiveness, pride, continuity, and self-efficacy (Twigger-Ross and Uzell 1996). Local media can contribute to construction of all these attributes, especially self-efficacy, which may foster greater community capacity by strengthening social capital within the communities (Hess 2015).

A common thread running through these theories of community and media is that a certain degree of intimacy between local journalists and the communities they cover is closely correlated with community social capital and self-efficacy. This has been part of

the ethos of community journalism for decades, as explained by Lauterer (2006). “The [local news]paper and its people must be genuinely active stakeholders in the community,” he maintains (74), going on to say, “our stories cumulatively reflect the realization that positive growth occurs when our news judgment springs from a perspective that ‘we are all in this together’ ” (75). This is exactly the relationship described by learning exchange members when asked to envision a system in which journalism would be more supportive of citizen-centric democracy.

In sum, learning exchange members emphasized the need to consider journalism education as something broader than its traditional remit of content-creation skills and processes. They expressed the view that the student “mind-set”—listening, curiosity, and critical thinking/analytical ability—has equal place alongside building students’ skill sets of producing and creating content using appropriate tools. Detailed outcomes from responses to these queries and a synthesis of curricular innovation ideas and learning outcomes from them are elaborated upon in the remainder of this report.

## Journalism Innovations

Even before they were asked to consider journalism education or curriculum, members of the learning exchange were asked to reflect on what sort of characteristics a journalistic system that supported more citizen-centric democracy would need to include. Specifically, they were asked:

*What characteristics could a journalistic system operating more effectively in service of a citizen-centered understanding of democracy include?*

This was not meant to engage the group in designing some sort of journalistic utopia. Nor was it meant to rethink or redefine Kettering's general approach to media work as focused on the impact media have on the ability of citizens to do public work (<https://www.kettering.org/core-insights/institutions>). Rather, the purpose behind the query was to get learning exchange members to "begin with the end in mind" as personal-effectiveness guru Steven Covey once put it (1989). Innovation experts admonish that without a vision of the end result, successful innovation is not even possible. (A frequently cited example of this concept of vision as a motivator to innovation is President John F. Kennedy's charge to NASA to complete a successful manned mission to the moon [Phillips 2011].) Envisioning what would be required to improve journalistic support for citizen democracy was at the heart of asking learning exchange members to reflect on this question.

In their answers, **deeper engagement and collaboration with communities and those communities' concerns** was the theme that came across most consistently in describing the kind of journalism that could foster better citizen engagement. Some specific techniques or characteristics related to putting this into practice included

- listening to and involving the community in the story-development and reporting process
- reconceiving news outlets' roles in framing community issues as a means of improving public discussion, and taking on the role of moderating discussions or debates
- helping audiences understand how communities function best

A few other ideas more tangentially related to the idea of closer community-journalist collaboration were mentioned multiple times as well. They include improved coverage of community institutions, transparency replacing objectivity as a core journalistic principle, and better attention to diversity and pluralism.

**General thoughts on engagement and collaboration.** A number of specific responses from learning exchange members spoke of the need to put a commitment to communities, individual community members, and the society they form at the center of journalistic work. Journalists must “be open to and interested in the lived experiences and opinions of the individuals who do (or might) consume its product,” one respondent suggested. “Journalists make a difference to communities in places where community journalists authentically identify and are authentically identified with the community,” another said. A similar thought about authenticity came from a respondent who said journalism needs a “commitment to reporting from within community, to building the trust necessary to report authentically with all citizens.” Elaborating on the same idea, another wrote that “this requires that journalists spend time within their communities, and that they understand the granular, down-in-the-weeds nature of local problems, conflicts, and possibilities. Journalists need to truly understand—even identify with—how these issues affect people’s everyday lives.” Overall, this requires “a deep understanding of the communities that are covered and a high level of engagement with those communities.”

One of the ideas from that quote, engagement, was a popular description for how such a reorientation could be articulated. “Journalists should view civic engagement as the measure of success, either in addition to or instead of political impact,” a respondent wrote. He added that the traditional model for how journalism addresses democracy treats engagement as an afterthought, or by-product, of political/institutional coverage. Another respondent suggested a shift in news values to favor engagement as a “best practice,” while yet another said to “emphasize proactive engagement with the audience.”

Some suggested taking this proactive engagement to a level not often seen in current journalism practice. One said there is a need for a “journalistic system that would encourage—rather than deter—reporters to volunteer and otherwise be involved in the communities they cover.” Another noted that “journalism works best in partnership with other forms of civic communications.”

**Community listening.** Accomplishing any of this starts with paying attention to community members. “Journalism needs to really connect with communities by listening to the issues and stories that matter to citizens across communities” a respondent wrote, which allows journalists to “better reflect the concerns of the communities they serve.” “Listening,” in fact, was a repeated theme in the responses.

“Listening to the needs and aspirations of the people guides every aspect of our work—the stories we choose to investigate, who we talk with, the questions we ask, the forms stories take, how they are distributed, and how they are used,” according to one respondent. More succinctly, another said journalists must do a “better job of listening to citizens to understand their concerns.”

Listening is especially important with regard to development of coverage ideas. “Elicit/learn and share knowledge from the public . . . encourage public participation throughout the reporting process,” a respondent wrote, adding that, “public involvement before story topics are set” is also important.

**Issue framing and discussion leadership.** “Frame issues for deliberation rather than advocacy” one respondent suggested, while another said there is a need for “greater emphasis on moderating public responses in any sort of mediated public forum.” Similarly, another wrote that newsrooms must be “more focused on showing individuals (all individuals) in a community that they have the capacity to influence public discussion.”

Exchange respondents saw these as vital steps toward getting community members to consider alternative viewpoints, which is a key part of the deliberation process. “Refocus [news organizations’] roles as . . . a means to improve the public discussion,” was the prescription offered by one exchange member. “We need far more sophisticated types of public fora than we see today, and we need to cultivate sites where people might be willing, even eager, to read ideas contrary to their own,” another said. Such an approach “would create forums for dialogue and for people to talk with others of different political persuasions and demographic backgrounds to reach new understandings,” a third respondent said.

Having journalists involved with and directing public discussions is a key technique for achieving this result. “Monitor reader responses in order to encourage discussion and civil debate, and eliminate trolls that scare people off from participating,” one respondent said. Another suggested that “moderated deliberation . . . should involve selecting the most thoughtful and constructive comments on stories relating to public policy and writing an analytical summary, but also running a selection of comments that is broader than those cited in the summary.”

Exchange members saw this as an important step along the path to community mobilization. The following is one lengthy, but thoughtful, description of how journalists might approach this process:

Journalists [need] to see their stories not as the end of their responsibilities, but as the beginning of a conversation between reporters and citizens. In practice, efforts to embrace this sort of journalism include newsrooms hosting community events to gather information from citizens before the publication of a story, and then to discuss the printed story in order to make citizens aware of what steps they might take in light of the newly published information. . . . [T]here is a fine line between teaching citizens the tools for effective mobilization and dictating the causes for which they should mobilize. Pursuing the former would allow the industry to maintain

its supposed neutrality while making journalism much more democratically useful.

**Elaboration on how communities function/coverage of community**

**institutions.** Support for citizen involvement with communities also would benefit by news organizations doing a better job of helping citizens understand what it takes to have a highly functional community. Journalism should get away from “assuming that people care or that they understand how society is structured or that they know what it means to be a citizen,” one respondent said. “Help people understand their world in the context of larger forces affecting them,” another added. Two others suggested journalists should “commit to collaborate with others to cultivate a system of civic communication that equips the public with the structures it needs to see itself and its world” and “provide information that readers find essential in orienting themselves to their community’s structures and processes.” This includes creating a more complete understanding of community institutions: “What matters is that people are shown institutions that work, told how they work, and reminded of their role in keeping things going. Journalism does an awful job of telling people about institutions that do work. . . . Understanding institutions will help citizen-consumer-reader-users recognize their role in community and the need to do their jobs as citizens.”

**Transparency and diversity.** Two other characteristics of a journalistic system that learning exchange members said were important aspects of supporting citizen-based democracy more effectively were transparency in the system and greater attention to (and respect for) pluralism and diversity in all aspects of journalistic work. Exchange members who commented on these topics saw them as closely connected to community engagement and attention to audience concerns. “Now is the time to make [transparency] fundamental. Journalism in service of democracy can no longer hide behind the specter of objectivity,” a respondent wrote. Such a newsroom, the same person continued, would have to be “willing to let the audience know where it comes from so it can approach them at their level.” Similarly, another respondent noted, “I’m coming around to the idea that journalists and news outlets should take sides, especially when their leadership is needed.”

With regard to diversity, a few respondents wrote about the need for “a high degree of pluralist behavior and thought” and the need “to be more inclusive in terms of coverage.” This is congruent with some of the outcomes of an earlier phase of the exchange’s work, notably two classroom case studies (Borron et al. 2017; Robinson 2017). Both of these studies examined ways of getting students to approach journalism with a new mind-set. The courses explored in these case studies both were rooted in service learning projects with community agencies that serve underrepresented groups (food pantries in one case and a variety of agencies serving the underprivileged in the other). The courses differed dramatically from traditional journalism reporting/writing

classes, presenting a class experience that was designed to get students thinking about community needs and developing solutions to those needs. The courses also had students reflect on what it takes to be a community problem solver, which is very much in line with Kettering's understanding of democracy.

**Summary.** As noted, the learning exchange members were asked to reflect on key characteristics of a journalistic system operating more effectively in service of democracy because of the value of envisioning how such a system would work. In the final analysis, journalists or the journalistic system can't take responsibility for reform of the democratic system. All they/it can do is foster the climate under which articulations of citizen-centric democracy, such as active citizen networks geared toward community problem-solving, may emerge. A journalistic system oriented around improved attention to community concerns, better integration and engagement with the community, with a willingness to listen to the community and lead more effective community discussion could accomplish this, in the process of building up social capital (Hess 2013, 2015) and social cohesion (Emke 2001; Yamamoto 2011).

Of all the ideas that learning exchange members offered in reaction to the question of how journalism could more effectively support citizen-centric democracy, perhaps the most succinct yet complete one was as follows:

Journalism in the service of improving democracy must shift its focus from trying to solve problems on behalf of citizens to trying to empower citizens with the information and tools they need to engage with these problems on their own.

## Student Characteristics

If a journalistic system oriented around improved attention to community concerns, better integration with the community, and a willingness to listen to the community is the key to empowering citizens to act more effectively on behalf of themselves and their communities, then what should prospective journalists know to function within such a system? This lies at the heart of the journalism educators learning exchange and was addressed by asking exchange participants to offer thoughts on the following question:

*What characteristics should journalism students have to effectively contribute to such a system?*

The answer that appeared in many responses can be summarized as “skills-plus” as a learning outcome. Developing an understanding of journalistic skills (e.g., writing, reporting, technical production) and journalistic values (e.g., truth-seeking, curiosity, and ethics) are necessary, but not sufficient, to the task of working in a journalistic system as described in the response to the first question. Learning exchange members said instilling recognition that journalists are not just collectors/disseminators of information but have a larger role to play in supporting a more citizen-centered democracy means that knowledge of skills in journalistic storytelling and production must be accompanied by:

- understanding of civics, government, and citizenship
- ability and willingness to listen
- curiosity and critical thinking
- ability to consider multiple/diverse perspectives
- willingness to experiment
- understanding of business issues and entrepreneurship

In short, they would need to know the things that traditional journalism education has always sought as a learning outcome for its students—excellent abilities in reporting, writing, and production—layered over with a particular orientation directing how these abilities would be brought to bear on covering a community. This is a more elaborate form of the mind-set-with-skill-set orientation to student development that came out of some of the learning exchange’s earliest discussions.

**Skills-plus.** The starting point for identifying characteristics that students should have was the traditional fundamentals of journalism. “Strong reporting skills and the ability to produce content for multiple platforms—those more traditional skills do not go away,” one respondent wrote. “Students should be able to report quickly, thoroughly, and accurately, on deadline,” another added. “Good, basic reporting skills, including natural

curiosity, the courage to exercise it, and a strong allegiance to fact,” also are needed, a third said. “Avid readers,” “strong writers,” and “excellent language and editing skills” also were mentioned. But as important as these are, respondents noted, they just are not enough. “Technical instruction and skills-based curriculums . . . will only take them so far when it comes to achieving the goals you ask about,” one respondent said.

**Civic sophistication.** Not surprisingly, the number one “plus” characteristic that learning exchange members said students need to function effectively in a journalistic system that would support citizen-centered democracy was sensitivity to that form of democratic practice. Exchange members said, students “need to have a working understanding of how government, communities, and democracy operate”; should “see their work as fundamentally a service to their communities and to democracy”; and should “think of themselves as public servants who are facilitating democracy and a sense of community.” These characteristics would, in turn, develop a “commitment to the ideals of public service and to strengthening the institutions and practices of democratic living through journalistic practices.”

**Curious and critical thinkers in search of diverse perspectives.** Developing such an appreciation of and commitment to democratic principles would be enabled by students having deep curiosity and strong critical-thinking ability grounded in the liberal arts. Students “need to develop the critical thinking skills it takes to really ‘see’ what is going on amidst the spin and acronyms,” one exchange member said. “Technical instruction should be combined with a broader liberal education . . . with the critical thinking skills to challenge those underlying structures when they work to the detriment of broader goals regarding inclusiveness and community building,” another elaborated.

Closely related to this set of characteristics is a respect for diverse perspectives and a willingness to take them into consideration in order to make students sensitive to all areas, aspects, and members of their communities. Only then, exchange members offered, can students engage in the kind of community connectedness that is so significant to journalistic support for democratic practice as described in responses to the initial question. Students need “a cultural understanding and negotiation that enables a more authentic representation of voices and issues” and “need to be encouraged to learn about people who are quite different from themselves and who have needs that are likely to be different from their own.” Through this, they may become “aware of subgroups in their communities that might have different experiences, perspectives, and values,” thereby enabling them to have “productive engagement of multiple and diverse perspectives on any given wicked problem.”

**Good listeners.** Translating these orientations into effective journalism that truly engages with the community comes back to a fundamental practice: listening. Students

should be “skilled and curious listeners, who draw story ideas and material from real conversation and dialogue with their readers,” one exchange member said. Students “foremost must be great listeners, passionate about building relationships with citizens and helping them solve problems,” another added, while a third said students should “listen for and discover wicked problems that concern their fellow residents.”

In order to accomplish this, students must “look at journalism as an ongoing conversation rather than a lecture, and that, in doing so, they prepare themselves to think very carefully about who it is they’re attempting to converse with” and “need to be in the community [and] interact with the most powerless people of a community.” Developing good interviewing skills, building the ability to do crowdsourcing, and using online networking “to better cover communities and to achieve more engagement from citizens” are specific ideas for building these capacities in students.

In summary, students should “leave the program with a working understanding and comprehensive experience in audience engagement. . . . Students trained to more explicitly consider their intended audience will be better prepared to effectively contribute to a journalistic system that more explicitly attempts to empower those audiences.”

**Experimental and entrepreneurial.** For students to develop a mind-set that cultivates all of these abilities on top of their traditional journalistic skill set requires encouragement to be open to new approaches and experiment with them in practice. “Cultivate in students a boldness to experiment and even make mistakes when an audience is watching,” one exchange member suggested. Two similar suggestions: “Experiment with new ways to build cross-cutting experiments in news exposure” and “apply [journalistic] fundamentals in real-world settings that are built around experimentation.”

Going along with this were suggestions that students need a better understanding of business matters and entrepreneurship than journalism education has traditionally provided. “Basic understanding of entrepreneurship” and “entrepreneurial and business skills that will allow them to contribute to the sustainability of the places they work” were cited as characteristics students need to develop.

**Summary.** The clear message from the journalism educators learning exchange members’ responses to the question of what students need to know to be effective participants in an emerging journalistic system (as outlined in responses to the first question posed to them) is that journalism education must be focused on development of a particular mind-set that can be applied to questions of journalistic activity that puts citizens at the center of the process. This, in turn, requires a more nuanced understanding of what “citizenship” and “democracy” mean, beyond the legalistic or textbook

definitions. Students need to know that in order to use their skills of writing and producing journalistic stories most effectively, they must be engaged with their community and listening closely to it. Further, they must be curious and discerning in analyzing what they gather through this engaged listening and must be willing to experiment with new approaches to creating coverage. But what should educators be doing in and out of the classroom to develop these characteristics in students?

## Curricular Innovations

The Kettering Foundation encourages the development of innovative ideas and practices related to solving problems of democracy. In that spirit, one objective of the journalism educators learning exchange is to develop innovative ideas and practices that other educators can use in and out of the classroom to help students learn to “do journalism” in ways that are more supportive of citizen-centric democracy. The purpose of the first two questions learning exchange members addressed—“What would such a system look like?” and “What would students need to know to work effectively within it?”—really were just prerequisites to the key question for the group:

*What should curriculum and other in-school experiences that help students learn to be effective contributors (to such a journalistic system) include?*

The dominant trend in replies here, mentioned by more than half of the respondents, was that students should get hands-on, off-campus experience (what one respondent called “immersive” experience) covering communities *in* those communities. Some respondents said this ideally would entail creating content for public consumption rather than something only a professor would see. Related curricular topics that were repeatedly mentioned included:

- augmenting skills curriculum with understanding of civics and democracy
- teaching techniques of community engagement and facilitating deliberative discussion
- providing stronger media literacy/liberal arts perspectives in the curriculum

**“Real-world” instruction.** One respondent wrote that in addition to basic writing, research, and technology education, the journalism curriculum should include “as much real-world reporting experience as possible. Real-world outcomes transcend any canned in-class assignments.” Another suggested that “students should be accustomed to covering local news in the community surrounding the university and [learn] how interesting and encouraging it is, for themselves and the community, to participate in a process of publication.” A similar suggestion: educators should “constantly push our students to produce media for communities, either a campus community or a neighborhood/town/city. Curricular and extracurricular media production is of great value, especially when it shows students how their work can impact public discourse.” This is an application of what has come to be known as a “teaching hospital” model, further described by one respondent as “one in which students produce high-quality content for public consumption under the guidance of experienced professionals.”

Building on the idea of developing skills in listening and engagement, one respondent said journalism classes should “experiment with serving and listening to a community of their choice throughout the program.” In similar fashion, another person said journalism classes should be “highly experiential—requiring evidence of a far reach for contacting sources and having sources contribute to stories.”

**Engagement and deliberation.** As some of the responses about a curriculum that includes listening and engagement imply, suggestions for curricular innovation not surprisingly went beyond discussions of journalistic skills to include some of the “soft skills” or mind-set-oriented characteristics mentioned in discussion of the question about student characteristics. Explicitly teaching students about community engagement and facilitation of deliberative discussion addresses this need, learning exchange members said. Several respondents said techniques of conducting deliberative discussion should be included in classroom lessons.

The journalism curriculum must “prioritize journalism as process-oriented rather than results-oriented . . . to lead students to understand the important role citizens play in democracy and the way in which journalism can be used to empower them” and should “consider the audience’s perspective in an effort to understand how best to deliver the information they need to participate.” By doing this, journalism instruction could “point to the goals journalists should have in this new system—to be more inclusive and to provide citizens with the tools and information they need to feel politically empowered—while acknowledging that the means for accomplishing those goals remain elusive.”

**Civics, media literacy, and liberal arts.** Augmenting skills instruction with lessons in civics, democracy, and media literacy from a liberal arts perspective was another theme in suggestions for curricular innovation. There were two specific suggestions in this regard: “balance skills training with liberal arts classes that tease out understandings of social responsibility” and “teach sufficient entry level social science to know when experiments (in improving democracy) are working and when they are not, and why.”

Helping students make a more direct connection between journalism and democracy was another theme that emerged with suggestions that “journalism [should be] taught as a tool for democracy” and students should learn “the essential role of journalism in a democracy.” Students need “an education that challenges their fundamental notions of how social systems work” and should develop a “commitment to civic engagement and to improving the communities from which they will report.” Finally, “journalism programs could benefit by expanding into different disciplines and fields, all with the primary intent of empowering students to act in the public interest.”

**Entrepreneurship ideas missing.** One unexplained anomaly that emerged—or, more accurately, did not emerge—from answers to the question about curriculum was any discussion or suggestions about media business or entrepreneurship. Numerous responses to the question about student characteristics spoke of a “need for journalists to learn business and entrepreneurial skills” and for students to learn “basics about the business side of journalism . . . basic marketing/entrepreneurial skills.” But no suggestions about this as a curricular item were advanced by the group.

**Summary.** Suggestions about curricular reform from the journalism educators learning exchange members were consistent with their suggestion of “skills-plus” as the characteristic students would need to take away from journalism education to function effectively in a journalistic system that was more supportive of citizen-centric democracy. Journalistic skills related to community-engaged coverage would be developed best with hands-on work in those communities. As one response summarized it, “[A] full spectrum of student development in journalism/communication skills, content expertise, and effective community/issue engagement [requires] multiple immersive experiences.” But this skills development must be augmented by a curriculum directed at helping students understand and appreciate the purpose of journalism in a democracy, coupled with general development of media literacy, critical thinking, and analytic abilities through liberal arts study. This was described by one person as “critical thinking components as well as experiential elements.”

## Journalistic Experimentation Centered on Engagement

The final topic learning exchange members addressed in the survey that served as the basis for this report concerned journalistic experimentation already under way in the field. In some respects, these experiments are providing another sort of answer to the first question that was posed in the learning exchange about how a journalistic system more supportive of citizen-centric democracy might operate. Some (though not all) of these approaches make citizens or democracy integral to their mission. But even those that don't are oriented around related concepts such as community listening and engagement.

The connections between the perspectives of the members of the journalism educators learning exchange and innovations in the field of journalism can be summed up in a single word: *engagement*. The word does mean different things in different contexts. Legacy news organizations mostly use it to describe audience interaction with online content, primarily clicks, shares, and comments. In other contexts—especially relating to innovative, emerging digital presentations—the term refers to a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between the news organization and those who consume its content. (A Kettering learning exchange that parallels the one for educators is exploring the work of some of those innovators [Ellis 2017].)

**Engagement and collaboration.** “Engagement happens when members of the public are responsive to newsrooms, and newsrooms are in turn responsive to members of the public,” according to Jennifer Brandel, founder of Curious City and its successor, Hearken. She further describes it as a feedback loop or, in her clever turn of phrase, an “engagement ring.” “If there’s no pathway for input from your audience to shape the content decisions your newsroom is making,” she adds, “then it’s not audience engagement” (Brandel 2016).

In a strategy report for the American Press Institute, researcher Mónica Guzmán similarly equated engagement with collaboration between journalists and their audiences. “Collaboration is not about what your audience can do for you, but what you can do with your audience,” she wrote. Engagement is “making sure your work matters to your audience” (Guzmán 2016). In another prescription using similar language to describe a journalism sustainability project for the Geraldine Dodge Foundation, Josh Stearns wrote of the need “to be more intentional about finding spaces and places across journalism to build *with*, rather than *for* our communities” (Stearns 2015). Stearns defined the difference as follows: working *with* implies collaboration, coordination, and collective action, as opposed to working on behalf of someone when working *for* them. American Press Institute executive director (and longtime journalism researcher) Tom Rosenstiel similarly proposes building “local networks of collaborative intelligence that enable new ways to reach citizens in a more meaningful way” (Rosenstiel 2015). Connecting

engagement more directly to democratic practice, the Public Square program of the Democracy Fund describes engaged journalism as a community of practice made up of journalists and others “who care about the role of news and information in civic life, and see the value of opening up the newsroom to broaden the conversation around issues that matter” (Das 2017, 10).

**Engagement and journalism education.** One of the leading centers for examining engagement and its association with democratic practice is the Agora Center of the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. Describing the Agora Center’s work, Ben DeJarnette said engaged journalism “is rooted in a belief that journalism strengthens democracy when it engages communities in meaningful, thoughtful and sustainable ways” (DeJarnette 2016). Oregon and the Agora Center also have facilitated exploration of the concept at two events, Experience Engagement in 2015 and Elevate Engagement in 2017. Both were held at the University of Oregon in partnership with the nonprofit organization Journalism That Matters.

The 2015 event’s central themes were authentic connections, valuing people, and mutual exchanges that could help identify what’s best for individuals and the community. “This type of engagement moves beyond journalism towards a civic communications ecosystem that provides robust information, feedback, inclusive dialogue, strategy and action for serving community goals,” Journalism That Matters co-founder and director Peggy Holman wrote in a blog post summarizing the event (Holman 2015). Four strategies developed by the attendees to foster such an outcome were:

- strengthening the communications capacity within communities, including structures for people to tell their own stories
- strengthening the engagement capacity within journalism to be more participatory
- fostering a symbiotic relationship between communities and journalism, developing a community of practice
- nurturing a third way: a communications ecosystem that cultivates a thriving civic sphere of engagement

The follow-up Elevate Engagement workshop in 2017 focused on strategies for creating a community of practice around these and other approaches to enable journalism based on community engagement. “We strive to be meaning makers, story weavers and boundary pushers,” is how engagement strategist Joy Mayer described it in a post-event manifesto. “As engaged journalists, engagement practitioners, and community members, we can be catalysts in the path toward healthier communities,” she added (Mayer 2017). Among the several dozen themes listed in a post-conference compilation were ideas such as “journalists need to stop standing outside, they need to become part of communities”

and “deep radical engagement implies engagement before the journalism. We must listen and engage and develop stories from there” (Susskind 2017). These themes track closely with suggestions from the journalism educators, who for their part proposed reforms for journalism and education using nearly identical language.

With these events, the University of Oregon is staking out a place for itself as a thought leader for developing innovations in journalism practice around the concepts of engagement and collaboration that are related to the suggestions and proposals of the members of the journalism educators learning exchange. But other journalism schools are working in the same space with some of the same purposes, and two previous projects of the journalism educators learning exchange documented some of these efforts.

One of these projects presented a series of brief case studies examining work being done at 10 schools: University of Kentucky, University of Nevada - Reno, University of Southern California, Rutgers University, the New School (New York City), Marquette University, University of Wisconsin - Madison, University of Minnesota Duluth, Columbia College (Chicago), and Howard University (Washington, DC). But author Lee Becker acknowledged this was just a small slice of the work, noting that “other individuals and universities besides the [ones] profiled here are doing creative things to create a more citizen-centered journalism curriculum” (Becker 2016, 37).

Among them are the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, which works with more than 170 partners throughout New Jersey, including hyperlocal digital publishers, public media, newspapers, television outlets, radio stations, and multimedia news organizations to build a more collaborative local news ecosystem in the state. Its flagship project is the New Jersey News Commons, a statewide network of news providers. The center also conducts research and training about innovation and improvement of local news delivery (<https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/about-us/>).

The Civic Media Project at Harvard University notes: “As the definition of civic life is in flux, there is urgency in defining and questioning the mediated practices that compose it. Civic media are the mediated practices of designing, building, implementing or using digital tools to intervene in or participate in civic life.” To that end, the Civic Media Project presents peer-reviewed case studies that demonstrate the use of civic media for achieving a common good. Its focus is more on technology than journalism, with the site “meant to be a place for conversation and debate about what counts as civic, what makes a citizen, what practices are novel, and what are the political, social, and cultural implications of the integration of technology into civic lives.” But given that digital technology and journalism are inseparable these days, it offers insights into community engagement by “reflect[ing] the practices associated with the intentional effort of one or many individuals to benefit or disrupt a community or institution outside

of one's intimate and professional spheres" (<http://civicmediaproject.org/works/civic-media-project/index>).

The City University of New York (CUNY) master's program in social journalism bills itself as being "all about finding new ways to serve communities. . . . The social journalism program has a special emphasis on learning how to listen, build relationships, and produce tangible impact" (<https://www.journalism.cuny.edu/courses/community-engagement/>). It includes a mandatory course titled Community Engagement, which is described as "a course in listening to a community: understanding and empathizing with its needs and learning how to help it share its own knowledge. . . . As the course progresses, students will begin to identify and interact with the communities they plan to serve in the practicum" (<https://www.journalism.cuny.edu/courses/community-engagement/>).

A review of the concept of social journalism written by Julia Haslanger (for the Kettering Foundation) as part of her own graduate study at CUNY noted that "some newsrooms are embracing a new mind-set, where they value the news judgment of their readers, not just their editors. They include community members in the story conception and creation process, with much success. . . . More journalists are shifting their thinking from 'informing' the readers to actually serving, listening to and interacting with their community." Haslanger also reported that "the social journalists I talked to said they believe their work does help communities understand and govern themselves, and that social journalists play the same or a larger role in promoting democratic society than traditional journalists" (<http://towknight.org/research/social-journalism-who-what-when-how/part-5-where-the-industry-is-headed-and-its-implication-for-democracy/>).

**Engagement focused innovations.** In addition to research and development of ideas for civic engagement at these colleges and universities, other organizations are developing innovative tools aimed at building the capacity and prospects for journalists to engage communities more vigorously.

Hearken, GroundSource, and Coral Project are all systems that use online interaction to enhance engagement. GroundSource, for example, says it "helps you listen to the stories of your community by having a conversation with them" on assorted platforms including mobile-generated text and video, web interfaces, voice messaging, and other means (<https://www.groundsource.co/>). Coral offers tools that collect, manage, and display user-generated contributions and provides a space for online discussion. The organization also says it can improve online communities, whichever tools are used to organize them (<https://coralproject.net/about.html>). Hearken's approach is to connect news organizations with audiences at the story-development stage via a cloud-based platform it calls an engagement management system. "An informed citizenry is the

bedrock of democracy and the purpose of journalism. So why not let the citizenry weigh in directly on what information they need? . . . By listening to the public from story inception to completion, newsrooms can understand how to truly serve the needs of their audiences” (<https://www.wearehearken.com/>).

Advocates of community engagement say that the most productive starting point is simply listening, which is a perspective that also emerged from learning exchange member’s responses to the question posed about student characteristics. Tools such as Coral, Hearken, and GroundSource are meant to facilitate listening, but a commitment to doing it must precede their use.

“Listening is such an important way to start the process of building an audience, because it’s a disarming act. Your agenda isn’t to record an interview to publish; your goal is to observe and engage,” according to Jesse Hardiman, who conducted a community project called Listening Post in New Orleans. As part of this, Hardiman writes, “I went to midnight basketball games, sat on porches, visited libraries, community markets, churches, neighborhood meetings, and even doughnut shops to listen and gather data” (Hardiman 2015). He set up listening posts where people could record comments in a digital audio device in response to posted “prompt” questions. Later, he added GroundSource to include interacting via text messages. Hardiman concludes his description of the project:

More media outlets need to be in the business of community engagement. By that I mean, visit neighborhoods and listen first, see what comes back at you. Don’t assume anything about how best to reach people. Then explore how to develop a two-way conversation with citizens, offline first, and later online. Use those developed networks to get people information about housing, health care, education, jobs, security, government, and more.

(He later used his experiences to create an online website with a toolkit and playbook for implementing this that he called the Listening Post Collective [<https://www.listeningpostcollective.org>].)

Some observers see in today’s engaged journalism a reflection of a practice from a generation ago with a similar spirit: civic (aka public) journalism. Jan Schaffer, a leading proponent of civic and public journalism as leader of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, says, “Simply put: civic journalism worked. Readers and viewers got it. We learned that if you deliberately build in simple ways for people to participate—in community problems or elections—many will engage” (Schaffer 2015).

Democracy Fund Senior Fellow Geneva Overholser similarly says that today’s engaged journalism “shares some DNA with civic journalism” (Overholser 2017, 4). Some emerging entrepreneurial approaches, she maintains “rely on civic journalism’s

core principle of enriching public life” (5), and many of them “place engagement with their readers and viewers as a first principle of success” (8). Most significantly, though, she says that “engaged journalism today has to be about more than what the newsroom can do for the community. It must concern what newsrooms and communities can do together” (10).

**Incorporation of experiments into the journalism curriculum.** Asking the learning exchange members about their understanding of these experiments, and the degree to which students were learning about them, was another way to assess their thoughts about curricular innovation. Specifically, the exchange members were asked to address:

*What sorts of existing journalistic innovations could be helpful in instruction (congruent with the ideas addressed in questions 2 and 3), and to what degree are these innovations being incorporated into the classroom?*

(As a prompt, the question specifically mentioned Hearken, the Coral Project, the Local News Lab, Solutions Journalism, and the Engaging News Project, but respondents also were invited to discuss others they might know about that were not on that list.)

The general theme among responses was “experimentation is good.” The degree to which specific experiments are incorporated into classroom work was uneven, with some respondents saying they use these ideas extensively but many saying they don’t at all or “not as much as I’d like.” A few respondents, even in praising the goal of experimentation, questioned its effectiveness without proper metrics or assessment of what the experiments have achieved. The one specific idea that resonated most strongly—mentioned by about a third of the respondents—was Solutions Journalism. Hearken and the Coral Project each received a couple of mentions as well.

**Value to experimentation.** Innovations such as Solutions Journalism and Hearken’s audience-involvement model are “critical experiments on the right path to re-imagining journalism,” one respondent wrote. Similarly, another noted that “any and all such projects are very important to re-thinking journalism. There is no one way to do journalism or civic engagement. Such projects help keep the field innovating.” Yet another said, “I believe that their intentions are noble and they push us to think and test at a higher level about journalists’ roles in society and community at a practical level and critically examine journalism functions.”

The heart of this value lies in news approaches that emphasize audience and community engagement, Exchange participants said. “These experiments are focused in some way on making journalism more audience-focused, and each stems from the philosophy that the audience deserves more credit and attention than journalism

traditionally provided,” one respondent noted. Similarly, another respondent said, “These projects and others . . . are leading the way toward a new ‘engaged journalism’ approach to constructing the news,” while a third observed that such experimentation “is creating the necessary discursive space for this particular arena. . . . All of the ones mentioned take a citizen-first approach, which is key.”

Some respondents, though, qualified their assessments because these are experiments whose potential merits are still unclear. This thought was expressed with comments such as “These are all important experiments that are contributing to our understanding of journalists’ relationship with the communities and interests they cover. The issue, it seems to me, isn’t the quality of the experiments but the overall impact.” Similarly, another respondent wrote, “Any system that keeps journalists tuned in [or] in touch with readers/citizens can only help the journalistic process. It’s difficult to gauge to what degree [these ideas] do that.”

Overall, though, the sense of the group, as stated by one member, was that “the value of all of these projects is that they encourage more dialogue between media producers and media consumers, both during and after the reporting process.” Also, “I think many of them are wonderful experiments in practicing the ideals that Kettering champions. Few are perfect, but they are being implemented in creative ways and we should be doing even more to learn from them.”

**Classroom (non) applications.** But even as the learning exchange members seemed generally supportive of experiments focused on greater journalistic engagement with communities, not many had yet found ways to incorporate the approaches into their classrooms. Only a few of the more than 30 respondents appeared to be adopters of these experiments for instructional purposes. One of them observed, “These ideas and practices are core to our curriculum. We read, discuss, and practice all of these things.” Another one noted, “We discuss these and other projects with regularity, shaping new ideas and drawing from the lessons they have to offer.”

But a more typical response was that these ideas reach the classroom “not as often as I’d like. I just haven’t had the time to learn about all these groups and what they’re up to.” A couple of respondents said they are planning to incorporate the ideas, one in an intro journalism class and another in a special topics offering. “I think I could make better use of these if more information on them were available,” another person said. But overall not many of the learning exchange respondents are incorporating these field innovations into the classroom.

**Solutions Journalism making inroads.** Of the experiments specifically mentioned in the question, the one that had the most familiarity and adoption was Solutions Journalism. This approach to news coverage has been popularized by the

Solutions Journalism Network, a nonprofit organization based in New York City that describes its work as “seek[ing] to rebalance the news, so that every day people are exposed to stories that help them understand problems and challenges, and stories that show potential ways to respond” (<https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/who-we-are/mission>). Its website in May 2018 hosted a database of nearly 3,500 stories produced by 610 news organizations around the world that it says exemplify the approach. The group offers training in this approach to journalism, including in-person sessions, online webinars and self-directed courses, and downloadable written guides. It even has a set of resources specifically for journalism educators, called SolutionsU. “I have long been a fan of the work Solutions Journalism does, and I have incorporated that organization’s research into my teaching in journalism practicum classes,” one learning exchange respondent wrote.

Hearken, which emphasizes audience engagement in the story-idea development and selection process (<https://www.wearehearken.com/>), is another experiment that some learning exchange members have used in the classroom. “I had one class that experimented with the Curious City model [forerunner of Hearken]; they were so taken with it. I would love to incorporate more of this work into my own research,” one respondent said. “Hearken, in addition to its software, has some of the top talent in terms of taking an audience-centered approach, and the advice they offer to journalists that work with them is invaluable,” another noted.

**Summary.** In classic journalism-and-democracy theory, political information shared through the news media informs, educates, and mobilizes citizen action. The inadequacy of this system, and a sense that we have reached a point where journalism does not sufficiently support democracy because this theory does not translate to effective practice, is one of the animating forces behind the journalism educators learning exchange’s efforts to find innovative ways of teaching the next generation of journalists.

But even as the learning exchange participants (and other educators such as those at the Agora Center) are crafting ideas to address this problem, experiments are under way in the field as well. These new approaches seek to construct news coverage in ways that really do connect and mobilize citizens through a focus on engagement. These experiments are not a panacea. Yet they may, in some respects, provide another type of answer to the initial question posted to the learning exchange in this project, concerning what attributes are required in a journalistic system more supportive of citizen-centered democracy. In that respect, they are worthy of examination by the exchange members and other educators for ideas that could be brought into the classroom and as examples of journalistic innovation for student journalists to emulate.

## Learning Objectives as a Basis for Curricular Innovation

A focal point of Kettering's work is the concept of shared learning, which includes a responsibility among learning exchange members to share ideas with the goal of fostering more widespread curricular innovation throughout journalism education. In fact, the most high-profile work of the group thus far was directed toward that end. This was its 2016-2017 partnership with AEJMC to publish research describing curricular innovations, notably innovative classes at several institutions.

Some of the learning exchange's past discussions have touched on other means to the same end, including ideas such as textbooks, syllabi exchanges, webinars, and online toolkits or learning modules (e.g., the self-directed classes of the Poynter Institute's NewsU). Development of individual class lessons or modules that could be part of general courses in journalism or other subjects are other ideas that have been suggested. But what should such instruction cover or include? Where should design of curriculum directed toward innovating journalism education begin?

Educators who have been involved with curriculum development, which is to say pretty much anyone who has worked as a classroom teacher at any level, are familiar with the concept of learning objectives that guide curriculum development and assessment. This is especially true for anyone who works in a program accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). Evidence of a robust plan for assessment of learning is one of ACEJMC's nine accreditation standards. Even educators in institutions without ACEJMC accreditation are no strangers to the assessment process and learning outcomes that are a central feature of it. Assessment of all programs across an institution is a key factor in general accreditation reviews conducted by organizations such as the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. And any institutional or department-level assessment program starts with a detailed set of learning objectives for the courses in that program.

To be clear, this is not an argument for making changes to accreditation or assessment standards. Nonetheless, thinking in terms of learning objectives and outcomes is a useful way to frame any project involving curricular reform. Learning objectives are an important part of program assessment because they are seen as a way to evaluate whether students actually *are* learning what their instructors believe they *should be* learning. For the same reason, curricular reform at almost any level, from redesign of a single course to restructuring of an entire major program, should begin with the identification of learning outcomes.

The collective thoughts of the journalism educators learning exchange members, as elaborated in the first few sections of this report, offer a starting point for doing

exactly that with regard to curricular innovation for journalism education. To that end, this section of the report outlines learning objectives or outcomes suggested by the work of the learning exchange so far.

**Learning outcomes.** According to the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Georgia, student learning outcomes are “clear, concise, measurable statements that describe what a student should know” (<https://wwwctl.uga.edu/pages/developing-student-learning-outcomes>). The Georgia center goes on to say that well-defined objectives can clarify student expectations and help faculty members design effective curricula. The Center for Teaching Excellence at Cornell University (<https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/designing-your-course/setting-learning-outcomes>) similarly suggests that learning outcomes are useful for designing teaching strategies and learning activities that will help students develop both knowledge and skills. According to the Cornell center, outcomes may be focused on important things that students should *know* (cognitive outcomes), should be *able to do* (skills outcomes), or should *value* (affective outcomes) from their education. Responses from learning exchange members to the questions posed about student characteristics and related curriculum addressed all three of these categories.

The Cornell and Georgia centers, and other organizations that offer ideas about learning objectives, emphasize that outcomes should be observable and measurable. Guidelines for construction of student learning outcomes recommend that the outcomes (1) address something meaningful and useful (2) in measurable ways that (3) explicitly describe what students can accomplish or do as a demonstration they have met the objective. A common and effective way to do this is to craft an objective with an action verb specifying the observable accomplishment. For example, rather than a learning outcome specifying students will “understand” a concept, an outcome that says they will be able to “identify,” “describe,” or “explain” it is preferred. Constructing the objective that way is stronger because evaluating whether a student has described or explained something adequately is a more concrete and feasible task for an instructor than somehow figuring out whether the student has “understood” the lesson.

Cornell offers the following checklist for evaluating the efficacy of learning outcomes:

- Is the learning outcome measurable?
- Does the learning outcome target a discrete aspect of expected performance?
- Is the learning outcome student-centered?
- Does the learning outcome utilize an effective action verb that targets the desired level of performance?

- Do learning outcomes measure a range of educational outcomes?
- Does the learning outcome match instructional activities and assessments?
- Does the learning outcome specify appropriate conditions for performance?
- Is the learning outcome written in terms of observable, behavioral outcomes?  
(<https://www.cte.cornell.edu/documents/Learning%20Outcome%20Review%20Checklist.pdf>)

One set of characteristics that is frequently relied upon in formulating learning objectives is Bloom's Taxonomy, a hierarchical progression of students' engagement with course material from simple to complex practices. The six elements in the hierarchy are **knowledge** of new material, **comprehension or understanding** of new material, **application** of new knowledge or skills, **analysis** of material, **evaluation** of concepts and alternatives, and **synthesis or creation** of new ideas or knowledge. Bloom's is an especially useful tool here because the survey of learning exchange members said critical thinking skills were a linchpin of curricular innovation in preparing students for journalism with a more citizen-centric focus. The more sophisticated layers of the taxonomy—especially analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of knowledge—are components of critical thinking.

As an aid in using the taxonomy to craft learning objectives, educators have developed a set of active, accomplishment-oriented verbs for each level. For example, at the most fundamental level, describing outcomes as things students should be able to *define, label, or recall* can be used to assess student knowledge. At the most sophisticated level of creating new knowledge, outcomes should use verbs such as *compose, design, and construct* to describe the sought-after outcomes. (An extensive, helpful list of suggested wording for all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/TWO%20SLOS.pdf>).

**Four focal points.** These techniques for constructing learning outcomes were used to craft outcomes for innovative journalism curriculum, taking into account ideas from learning exchange members about what would make for a more effective curriculum. As described previously, qualitative analysis of project responses grouped the ideas for innovating journalism education into the four areas shown in the following table:

<b>Student characteristics</b> (mind-set & skill set)	<b>Curricular characteristics</b>
Solid grounding and ability in traditional journalism values (e.g., ethics) and skills in writing, reporting, and content production	Journalistic skill set learned and practiced in hands-on settings, covering communities <i>in</i> those communities
Understanding of civics, government, and citizenship	Augmented skills curriculum with understanding of civics and democracy
Ability and willingness to listen (including reaching out/engaging with audiences, crowdsourcing, interviewing)	Techniques of community engagement and facilitating deliberative discussion
Curiosity, critical thinking, consideration of multiple/diverse perspectives, willingness to experiment	Strengthened media literacy/liberal arts perspectives in the curriculum

These distillations then were used as guideposts for developing student learning objectives related to new approaches to journalism education. Procedurally, the items were crafted according to recommended strategies for creating learning objectives, such as organizing the results along a spectrum of complexity drawn from Bloom. These learning objectives, in turn, can provide guidance in developing curricular innovations that could help journalism students develop a broader concept of citizens as participants in democratic public life and a deeper commitment to serving the work that citizens do in democracy.

The learning objectives are organized into four sections, corresponding to the four parts of the table; within each grouping, they are arranged in ascending order of Bloom's hierarchy, from knowledge (most basic) to synthesis/creation (most sophisticated). These qualities are listed parenthetically with each objective.

**Learning objectives for basic journalistic skills (developed with hands-on learning)**

- Identify core principles of journalism such as independence, accuracy, verification, and obligation to the truth (knowledge).
- Identify key characteristics of news writing/news narrative, e.g., writing with clarity, conciseness, and precision (knowledge).
- Identify types of news coverage relevant to civic capacity and community building (knowledge).
- Identify core First Amendment values (knowledge).

- Describe common legal and ethical considerations relevant to journalism (comprehension/understanding).
- Construct journalistic narratives with clarity, conciseness, precision, and accuracy (application).
- Select and use relevant and verified sources for community coverage in a campus community, surrounding municipal communities, or both (application).
- Distinguish accurate from inaccurate coverage, ethical from unethical coverage, and fair from biased coverage (analysis).
- Analyze ethical implications in approaching news coverage (analysis).
- Select appropriate sources and facts to include in coverage (evaluation).
- Select appropriate tools and platforms for presentation of coverage (evaluation).
- Compose/construct community news coverage based on reporting and research done in the community (synthesis/creation).
- Collaborate with classmates and community members in creating community-based stories (synthesis/creation).
- Create journalistic narratives in emerging media modes, including social media and/or online digital media (text, audio, video, and integrated multimedia) as appropriate to the story at hand (synthesis/creation).

**Learning objectives for building understanding of civic life and democracy**

- Describe theories and concepts of community (knowledge).
- Identify and define concepts related to an active and informed citizen-centered democracy (knowledge).
- Explain the role that journalism plays in supporting democracy (comprehension/understanding).
- Determine what practices are relevant to civic engagement, participation in civic life, and citizen-centered democracy (comprehension/understanding).
- Apply knowledge of journalism to active and ethical participation in civic life (application).
- Identify and analyze the informational needs and motivations of key stakeholders in democratic society (application).
- Describe how traditional theories of the ways that journalism and democracy interact differ from theories of citizen-centered democracy (analysis).

- Seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences (evaluation).
- Evaluate and test alternative approaches to supporting a citizen-centered democracy (analysis).
- Establish partnerships with communities and civic bodies (synthesis/creation).
- Facilitate constructive dialogue with peers, faculty, and community members (synthesis/creation).
- Integrate community experience into educational activities through service opportunities (synthesis/creation).

### **Learning objectives for listening and engagement**

- Identify and define concepts of naming and framing, deliberation, and civic engagement (knowledge).
- Provide examples of citizen-centered democracy, civic engagement, deliberative discussion, and deliberative democracy (comprehension/understanding).
- Describe/discuss processes of building community engagement and of facilitating deliberative discussion in service of deliberative democracy (comprehension/understanding).
- Practice techniques of issue naming/framing around community issues (application).
- Practice techniques of deliberative consideration of courses of action around community issues (application).
- Employ listening skills to strengthen personal and professional relationships (application).
- Conduct community listening sessions when doing research for news coverage (application).
- Contrast personal knowledge/prior knowledge/conventional wisdom with ideas gathered through community listening (analysis).
- Select strategies and techniques for community reporting that emphasize listening to and engaging with community members (evaluation).
- Adapt ideas and messages based on outside perspectives (synthesis/creation).
- Synthesize story ideas from conversations with community members (synthesis/creation).

- Create structures for facilitation of deliberative discussion within the campus or greater community (synthesis/creation).

**Learning objectives for critical thinking employing multiple, diverse perspectives**

- Identify multiple perspectives existing around a public issue (knowledge).
- Describe the importance of approaching an issue from multiple perspectives (comprehension/understanding).
- Describe how to identify and communicate with diverse audiences (comprehension/understanding).
- Explain what it means to be a media-literate student, journalist, and citizen (comprehension/understanding).
- Employ diverse sources and perspectives in creating news coverage (application).
- Consider and accommodate opposing points of view (analysis).
- Explore differences among community members to discover common ground (analysis).
- Evaluate the benefits of employing diverse perspectives (evaluation).
- Collaborate with diverse classmates/sources/audience members/professional colleagues in all aspects of journalistic work (synthesis/creation).
- Collaborate across and within community structures to achieve a civic goal (synthesis/creation).

No lesson or course will be able to meet all of the learning objectives in these lists, of course; they are not meant as formulas or prescriptive approaches. Rather, they are meant as a “toolkit” that journalism educators who are creating curriculum may draw upon. A lesson, course module, or entire semester course might incorporate anywhere from a handful of these objectives up to a larger number of them. How many and which ones will be based on the nature of the activity and the instructor’s judgment of their appropriateness. But having them for inspiration in designing the curriculum and also (if desired) a means of assessing whether the students learned what the instructor set out to teach them could prove valuable as a catalyst for journalism education innovations.

**Congruence of learning objectives and Kettering approaches.** These learning objectives have significant connections with Kettering’s principles about the type of citizen interaction at the heart of a more robust democratic system. Students who learn from a curriculum built around these objectives will be better prepared to work as journalists in support of a democratic system based in those principles, especially

engaging in deliberative discussion to reach agreement on steps that help address shared problems.

For example, the learning outcomes proposed for basic journalistic skills include “identify types of news coverage relevant to civic capacity and community building”; “compose and construct community news coverage based on reporting and research done in the community”; and “collaborate with classmates and community members in creating community-based stories.” Students learning journalism basics with these objectives would have a different approach from the standard process/conflict frames inherent in so much contemporary news coverage and at the center of the current instruction students receive in preparing to create such coverage.

Learning objectives that would help students gain a better understanding of civics and democracy include “identify and define concepts of citizen-centered democracy and civic capacity”; “describe how traditional theories of the ways that journalism and democracy interact differ from theories of citizen-centered democracy”; “facilitate constructive dialogue with peers, faculty, and community members”; and “evaluate and test alternative approaches to supporting a citizen-centered democracy.” It is important for students to learn both the basics of governing institutions and the distinctions between conceptions of democracy that focus on voting and institutional action and alternative conceptions that incorporate direct citizen involvement in creating democratic action. Making such delineations is a prerequisite for students to approach journalism from a mind-set featuring citizen-centric democracy.

In the more general area of developing critical thinking skills and respect for multiple perspectives, the learning objectives include “identify multiple perspectives existing around a public issue”; “describe the importance of approaching an issue from multiple perspectives”; “consider and accommodate opposing points of view”; and “explore differences among community members to discover common ground.” In their responses about student characteristics that inspired the development of this set of learning outcomes, members of the learning exchange said critical thinking and the ability to consider multiple perspectives were intrinsically valuable as skills all well-educated individuals should possess. But the respondents also said these skills are necessary for approaching journalism in ways that incorporate concerns from all parts of the community into coverage.

The learning objectives noted here, and many of the others as well, underscore something that Kettering research has found to be critical to the ability of citizens to address difficult problems. This is the role of public deliberation, which happens when all parties weigh the positive and negative impacts of all feasible options as a means to decide how to address an issue (Mathews 2014). This set of learning objectives, designed

around making students more adept at listening and engagement, corresponds to Kettering concepts concerning deliberation. The following are key learning objectives in this area:

- Identify and define concepts of naming and framing, deliberation, and civic engagement.
- Provide examples of citizen-centered democracy, civic engagement, deliberative discussion, and deliberative democracy.
- Describe/discuss processes of building community engagement and of facilitating deliberative discussion in service of deliberative democracy.
- Practice techniques of naming/framing and deliberation.

The articulation of the learning objectives embodies many of the same principles and concepts as citizen or public deliberation, which Kettering research has found lies at the heart of citizen-directed democratic action.

**Next steps.** The concept of a learning exchange is that the Kettering Foundation seeks to learn from the groups with which it partners (in this case, journalism educators) while offering expertise the foundation has developed in previous work to help the partner group develop new ideas for being more innovative in service to improving democratic practice. This project has employed a crowdsourcing process of soliciting ideas from members of the journalism educators learning exchange and distilling those ideas into learning objectives aligned with ideas from prior Kettering work, such as the importance of deliberation in fostering citizen-centered democracy.

The logical next step will be for journalism educators, both those formally affiliated with the learning exchange and other interested parties, to use the learning objectives presented in this report to guide development of lessons, courses, and other means by which the next generation of journalists learn their craft. Curricula developed with these learning objectives could help students become journalists who are better prepared to approach their work in ways that promote and facilitate the community deliberation that lies at the heart of improved democratic practice.

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## About the Kettering Foundation

The Kettering Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan research organization rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Everything Kettering researches relates to one central question: what does it take for democracy to work as it should? Chartered as an operating corporation, Kettering does not make grants. The foundation's small staff and extensive network of associates collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, researchers, scholars, and citizens, all of whom share their experiences with us.

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