

ISOJ 2019: Day 2, Morning Session

Saving local news in the U.S.: Can we have sustainable online journalism in local markets?

Chair: Jennifer Preston, vice president, journalism, **Knight Foundation**

- **Jim Brady**, CEO and founder, **Spirited Media**
 - **Ryan Nave**, editor-in-chief, **Mississippi Today**
 - **Tasneem Raja**, co-founder and executive editor, **The Tyler Loop**
 - **John Thornton**, venture capitalist, co-founder of **Texas Tribune and the American Journalism Project**
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Jennifer Preston: Good morning everyone and as Rebecca did in her opening remarks I'd like to begin with a "thank you" and ask all of you to join me in thanking Rosental for 20 years of bringing together journalists, technologists and scholars to address the problem of journalism.

So, after I joined Knight Foundation almost five years ago Alberto Ibarguen the CEO and president of Knight Foundation and former publisher of The Miami Herald asked me to travel around the country ask me to talk to publishers and editors and the entrepreneurs who were creating new models for journalism such as the Voice of San Diego and Evan Smith right here in Austin at the Texas Tribune.

So, Alberto thought that it was time that Knight Foundation went back to its roots. Knight Foundation was started by Jack and Jim Knight, two brothers who owned and operated 26 newspapers around the country, and this was right after the innovation report had been published at The New York Times which broke open a lot of doors that needed to be busted open to bring the transformation that we're all seeing now at the New York Times, and so many national news organizations and international news organizations that can scale.

However, that same success that we're seeing at the national and international level we are not seeing across the country in a consistent way. However, what we are seeing are very promising signs and you're going to hear today from a group of people who are really driving transformational change, who are bringing new ways of storytelling, but most importantly new ways to make journalism the business sustainable.

So, a few weeks ago Knight Foundation announced that we are going to be doubling our commitment to journalism with a focus on supporting local news, that amounts to almost 300 million dollars over the next five years, and so we're really thrilled we announced some very important initial investments to report for America, to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the press which that investment includes adding 10 million dollars more to their endowment that supports local legal assistance for journalists so that there will not be journalists who will be unable to produce outstanding accountability reporting and investigative reporting because they don't have a lawyer for anything ranging from pre-publication review or to challenge that that FOIA request.

So we're also made investments in ProPublica to support more local investigative reporting and we have investments coming that will address the very big problem that we continue to have in this country and that is the lack of diversity in our newsrooms, a lack of focus and commitment to build trust and to serve underserved communities.

But today what I'm really excited to share with you and then for the discussion just some real pioneers, people who are making a difference and so we're going to first hear from Jim Brady. Jim Brady needs no introduction to anyone in this room, Ryan Nave who is the editor in chief of Mississippi Today, Tasteem Raja who has a really exciting story to tell you from Tyler Texas, and John Thornton who is the co-founder with Elizabeth Green of Chalkbeat and what I think is the most exciting promising pathway for local news and that is the American journalism project. So, let me please introduce you turn this over to Jim Brady.

Jim Brady: Morning! And I think this is my 15th Rosentalapalooza. So, very proud to be one of the probably top ten in terms of attendees of this conference over 20 years. It's very hard to say no to as you all know. So, I'm here at an interesting time, we are in the midst of... this is what? This is what Spirit media is today which instead of owning three sites we know on one side and this is what it will be in about 72 hours, only zero local news sites.

So, with that context I think one of the reasons I thought the timing was interesting and why I wasn't sure I wanted to do it was like what's my opinion on where we are in local as a guy who is now trying to get out of the daily local publishing business?

And my answer is: damn right we can still make this work. I will tell you and I'll

explain a little bit about why we're selling and both the reasons why in some of the mistakes that led to the fact that we were in that position. So, a little bit of context, I should tell you by the way that we sold them to really good local brand, so it showed that we did a lot right. We build value in these three sites that we created and we're able to turn them over to very happy great stewards... I know I keep turning around looking up here when I can look there, but anyway.

This is where we start, Denver Colorado Public Radio. We sold the inclined to Whereby.us. a startup that you guys probably all know that I sites in many cities, Miami, Seattle, Portland, and we're going to sell Billy Penn, but I can't say to who yet. So, why am I still bullish on this after all this? Why is the guy getting out? I'll tell you why, part of the reason we got out was we weren't able to raise the money we needed to raise to get us to where we needed to be from a profitability standpoint.

This round fell a little short. The funding environment out there is pretty tough if you're a for profit which we were by the way in case you didn't know that. So, you're out there trying to raise money in a for profit environment from companies that are going through their own struggles at the moment and we just weren't able to get the capital we needed.

But part of the reason that we're in that position is we made some mistakes and one of them was we launched membership at least a year too late, maybe a year and a half too late. Membership is a huge boon for us, it brought our burn down 75% last year, but we still need a little bit more time which we didn't have the funding to get to hence us moving to selling, but we saw enough and what we learned over the last five years doing this that I want to share some of those things.

So yes I'm a believer. I'm still sure that we can make this work, but I want to start before I get to why and how I think we do it, have to start with a couple of caveats I think. Caveat 1: The days of 100-person local newsrooms are largely over, it doesn't mean that there aren't places where somebody is gonna be able to have you know a local billionaire will decide they want to have a really robust local newsroom, but I think for the most part the big large newsrooms are pretty much over. That doesn't mean in a lot of these cities you can't have 1010 person newsrooms or 520 person newsrooms or 52 person newsrooms.

I think as we niche off a little bit there might be sites that cover sports, some that cover entertainment, some that cover government, some that cover something else, and then there's break into niches which in some ways are more fungible from a

financial standpoint because you have very specific people who might buy advertising and be willing to give you money, but the big newsroom I think we have to acknowledge is largely over.

The days of competition driving action needs to end. One of my big takeaways from this was something we did from day one and I think we were absolutely right about is that we were almost never the tenth person standing at a press conference, or the fifth person standing at a press conference, or the third person standing at a press conference. We have such a dearth of local coverage around the U.S. right now that the idea that we were going to have seven news organizations in the same town each sending multiple people to cover the same press conference to me is insane because somewhere in there there are 15 stories that are not being told by anybody.

And so what we need to do is start working together and in Philadelphia Billy Penn one of our three sites was one of the 19 sites that was involved in this project called Broken Philly where we just covered poverty in Philadelphia and all 19 sites were worked together. We had meetings with 19 news organizations where almost no profanity was thrown at anybody else, imagine how hard this is.

We generally have not worked together very well, but we have to work together now because we have to look at coverage of an area something we're trying to cover collectively not just by ourselves because we're not going to have enough people to do that, but all that said the road ahead is still very treacherous. We don't know what's going to happen in the economy, we don't know what's going to happen with funding whether that's nonprofit funding whether it's foundation funding or for profit funding.

So, the road is treacherous, we don't have room for a lot of mistakes. I think we have to be very very... like to my point about not watching membership early enough, that alone may have been the mistake that put us in a position where selling was our best option.

And so we've got to be very precise about the decisions we make and commit to them and then commit to unmaking them if they're the bad decisions and I think we still move too slowly as an industry to do that. And then the last one is the newsroom cultural changes. After 25 years of work in a digital news I'm still frustrated by how often you run into people in the newsroom who don't want to change their habits and don't want to change your schedule and don't want to change the way they do things and obviously if that continues on I think the first

three things on the slide are sort of moot.

I think it'll be fatal for us if we don't embrace this a little bit more, and now obviously we were doing digital only start ups and we didn't have to worry so much about some of those kind of older legacy challenges that other people in the room have, but still the cultural changes have to happen. So, but it can be done, of all those caveats aside here's sort of my 10 bullet points which I'll give you a little bit context in each of them.

So for me, don't be in the community, be of it. I think one of the real struggles we've had for a long time is we write like we don't live in the places we're writing about. How often do you read a story in a newspaper and feel like the person who wrote it could have written it from anywhere on earth, right? If you live in Austin you should write like you know Austin and you have a familiarity with it and I think we don't do that yet. We do it, we did it at the sites we're in. I think there's a lot of startups that have embraced the idea that we have to be of this community not just in it, but I still think in the legacy side of things is still a little bit of a sense if we want to be kind of on the side reporting, but not really involved in it and I think that's a fatal mistake for some of the reasons I'm going to get into shortly here.

2. Focus on the consumer always and in all ways. And that doesn't mean... I mean, it means a lot of things, right? It means some of the obvious stuff. Use harken to gather questions that you can answer or you have your newsroom answer, as lots of tools you can use commenting tools to get people involved in what it is that you do, but it's not just that, it's also understanding that you actually have to deliver to where they are which is delivering to mobile devices. You know, we when we think about serving the consumer we sometimes think about providing information that's useful to them.

So, it is also user experience, right? So, it's about serving consumers where they are, it's about serving them fairly by providing user experiences that are not abusive which they are borderline abusive in a lot of cases because again we're going to need these consumers to basically fund us down the road and so stop worrying about how much you can monetize a single visit and start figuring out how you can get people who just have lots of visits and monetize them a little bit less on every visit, build a long term relationship with them. So it's focusing them and always, it's not just involving them in the process.

3. Have a point of view and communicate it. This one is always controversial

because people think that means a political point of view. It does not mean a political point of view necessarily although it can. What it means is you just have a point of view for what your site is about. So, for Billy Penn in Philly it was really Philadelphia as a wild, crazy, flawed, wonderful city and we all want it to be better, how do we go about doing that?

We don't go into it with the idea that everybody is going to agree on exactly what that is, but we all agree that that's the goal. The goal is a better city and we all acknowledge the weirdness of this place at times, and I think you have to be clear about what you're about. It can't just be you come here to find out what happened yesterday. In my opinion, it's got to be more than that, it's got to be much more connected like there's a sense of place.

4. I think you've got to produce journalism of value, not of quantity. I think we got into this volume game which was... I don't know, that we all probably got into it to some extent, I never was in it as much as I think others had to be in it because you have to produce a lot of stuff here. If I make more journalism every day, the math works better. I think we've proven at this point based on what's happening with economics of journalism that's not the answer. Writing three really well reported stories a day about the community is gonna get you more audience and more loyalty down the road than rewriting 20 pieces other people in town wrote on a given day.

You've got to have your own voice, you've got to be able to find the whitespace and the coverage in your area and you've got to do those stories, but this is not a quantity game local journalism, maybe it's at a national level where you're trying to generate enough ad revenue that's the way to go, but it's not at a local level, you've got to have a sense of place.

5. Metrics. Don't do impressions or page views. I know that that's a hard argument to make for people who are fully based on the ad model and maybe you can't get out of that particular cycle of hell, but if you cannot do page views as your core metric that is a wonderful way to go through life I will tell you because we never made page views of the core metric because we were always based on making money on events and making money on membership. So, for us it was the loyalty of the reader that led to revenue not the quantity of the page views.

And to me a page view spike is like an ice cream sundae. It's a kind of thing that you should be able to see and go like that's a treat, but if your entire diet is page view spikes it's a really crappy diet, and as we all know from the chasing page

views it's a very unreliable diet. And so if you can focus on getting important stories in front of the right people and having them share that will lead to page views, but don't focus on page views as a primary thing.

6. Be different. We're in a city that has you know... Keep Austin Weird. Don't just be informative, be surprising, be essential, be fun. We stink at fun, you know in general and in journalism we stink at fun. So, sometimes just have fun like you know every year in Pittsburgh on Valentine's Day we did Pittsburgh themed Valentine's Day cards. One of them was just you are my sunshine because there is none, right? So, but this gives you a sense of place like you know the city you're in and you can be fun and yes you can also do good journalism, but you can also show that you're a human being who has lots of facets and you can be fun.

7. Don't cover national. You cannot win that own your own backyard if you're a local startup and you ever have national stuff on your site I would love to know why you think that's a good thing to do. Yes, if Donald Trump comes to your town and you want to report about a national figure coming to town that's fine, but like writing about national and international news on the site if you can avoid it I think is a bad way to go. If you came to any of our sites you got all local news all the time period.

8. Remain small, but try to act big. One of the compliments we got a lot for Billy Penn was when we would tell people as a newsroom before they'd say you only have 4 people, it feels like you've like 15, right? That's what I want because there's a lot of newsrooms I've been involved in where we had 15 and it felt like 4. So, use strong curation, link people to stuff that's interesting in your community whether you wrote it or not and just linked to it, don't rewrite it, be indispensable, have a good morning newsletter, have a strong social game.

9. Build loyalty and passion, and monetize that. If you do the first aid in this, you start to have an audience that feels connected to what you do and wants to help you survive, you have to be clear with them that you need them to help you survive. So, focus on loyalty and passion as a business model if you can do that because down the road it's a lot more sustainable than an unpredictable ad model.

And then 10. which circles back to number 1, don't just be of the people, be with the people. We went through about 75 events last year across our 3 sites, we mingled with thousands of people a year that read our sites and that may also makes them feel more connected. So, one of the keys, really focus on being with them and not reporting from the side, and that's it for me.

Ryan Nave: All right! So, Mississippi Today was founded 3 years ago as a solution to the problem of our capital like a lot of statehouses around the country of becoming a news desert, but we knew as the New Kids On The Block we didn't want to be an alternative source of news. We wanted to figure out what role can we play in supporting legacy media and existing media, but also make people feel like they're getting something special for Mississippi Today that they can only get for Mississippi Today and also create spaces for others in the ecosystem, and what we decided to do was to focus on filling in coverage gaps.

So, we don't compete head to head with the daily newspaper or other competitors. Out of the gate we doubled the number of reporters who were covering the Mississippi capital full time. We have five reporters who are there full time on a given special day and on any special day in particular. All of our reporters may be in and out of the building flooding the zones. I mean we wanted to cover the hell out of legislative committees that weren't getting coverage anymore.

We wanted to cover agencies that weren't getting coverage anymore and not just the big sexy ones like the departments of health and education and corrections, we wanted to cover the Mississippi Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities in our state. We wanted to cover the Mississippi Transportation Commission which is making decisions about infrastructure funding and obscure agencies like the office of state, a road construction which it took us a while to figure out what exactly that was, but it's a very important agency that is involved in local infrastructure funding decisions.

And more than anything Mississippi Today wanted to be the place that really got to the question of why as we say in Mississippi are we always first and everything bad in last and everything good. We shouldn't have to brag about diversity, but I'm going to do it. We hire people who look like people who live in our state, and not just for applause lines at conferences, but we feel strongly about the fact that you cannot cover the state with the largest African-American population in the United States, with Mississippi's unique history of slavery, and Jim Crow, and racial terror with a newsroom full of white folks or a newsroom management structure full of just all white men.

And so, this is something that we're really proud about because once you drill down and do data analysis we will find stories about racial inequity in criminal justice and health care and education, but even on stuff like infrastructure and I swear like that's not all we do, but it's a lot of what we do because infrastructure

stories are also stories about racial equity.

There's stories about poverty, about power, who gets to make decisions for everybody in the state and who doesn't have the power to make those decisions, and we do it all over the state. I mean we're based in Jackson, but these are an example of some of the datelines that we filed just in the last year and a half. Jackson is covered, Jackson has a pretty reasonably robust media presence so we don't have to spend a lot of time in Jackson.

We can spend our time in Southwest Mississippi which hardly has any statewide coverage. Up in the Delta we have 2 Delta based reporters on our team. Northeast Mississippi and on the coast, North Central Mississippi and covering issues like our Choctaw community. So, we understand that a lot of news organizations no longer have the resources to put reporters on the road. We are fortunate in the sense that we can and so, we want our reporters out in the field as much as possible, in communities, talking to people about what's important there.

And so, when we talk to our readers and our members about what they think Mississippi Today adds in terms of value you'll see a little of... you know, some people see us as an alternative, but more than anything what we hear is that people feel like they get something from Mississippi Today that they don't get from other media. And so, what that says to me is that we're actually not being extractive we're actually adding value to our ecosystem and we are succeeding in creating spaces for everybody to succeed and grow and thrive.

And just to talk a little bit about the work that we have ahead, I mean we just got into the collaboration game in the past year and our approach to collaboration is to not be particularly precious about them. I mean, we will work with anybody who wants to work with us. And so, we're working with a local TV station to put together a series of investigations, thank you Knight Foundation. We're working with other journalism non-profits to do stories around certain issues in this case education funding.

And so, we contributed a number of stories to this collaboration. We also contributed a number of editorial cartoons to the collaboration. Everybody ran all the stories on their site, we ran stories on our site and is actually the first time that we had a story appear in the daily newspaper, it was a Saturday, but we'll take it how we can get it.

And then the kind of collaboration that I'm most interested in and most excited

about are these little collaborations that we do. I think a lot of times we think that collaborations have to be these big ass projects that take months and months of planning and produce you know 10,000 word series, but what we realize is like we never go to Natchez, right? We never had any reporting out of Natchez, what was going on in Natchez, and we just got on the phone with the local editor and asked what's an issue in Natchez that's important that you all need to do a story on and you just haven't had a chance to.

And so, they reporters made a few phone calls, reach out to their sources. Our reporters reached out to our sources and we put together a little story in a week. And then at the end of this we planned an event at a local brewery in Natchez where we talked about the story, we talked about people's frustrations with this infrastructure problem, and with our lawmakers in Jackson which we have intimate knowledge of, and we talked about it over beers.

And that's what we want to double down on this year because of our collaboration with the local TV station other TV stations are now coming out of the woodwork saying that they want to work with us, right? And we're having conversations about how to structure those differently so that they're not competitive with each other because TV is still fiercely competitive, we can be all kumbaya and blow up the competitive model if we want, but yeah we want to have conversations and be deliberate about structuring collaborations in ways so that all boats rise and so this is really where our focus is right now. Thanks.

Tasneem Raja: Good morning! So, I wasn't here yesterday and I want to tell you why, this is why. Last night in Tyler, Texas we put on a live storytelling show where we had 10 amazing storytellers so we've been working with for months, tell stories that in some way big or small related to Tyler and East Texas is greatest challenges and greatest opportunities. You look at this lineup here and that looks like Tyler. I don't know if I've ever seen a group of people on stage that look like Tyler. That was intentional, that was baked into our mission. I'm happy to say that we sold out this show, 300 people came to the Downtown Civic Theater in Tyler, Texas.

Thank you! Our audience look a lot more like Tyler than audiences I'm used to seeing, and I'm happy to say we made money on this deal through ticket revenue and through sponsorships so that was really exciting. Now I'm going to get into my real thing, and Mallery I might need your help doing that. I've got a lot to cover but I'm from Philadelphia so I can talk fast and when I got to East Texas I learned to slow it down just a little bit.

So, my name is Tasneem Raja, I'm the editor in chief and the co-founder of The Tyler Loop. So, The Tyler Loop launched in 2017, we are non-profit, we are members supported and this project is really different from anything I've done in my career. Before I got to Tyler I was in Washington D.C. as a senior editor at NPR's Code Switch. Before that I was a senior editor at Mother Jones magazine in San Francisco as a data editor and life brought me to Tyler, family brought me to Tyler, and I have to tell you I'm having the most fun I've ever had in my career doing this project. So, I want to talk about how The Tyler Loop is redefining what's possible in the capital of east Texas.

Tyler, Texas? What is that? We are a community of one hundred and twenty thousand, more like a quarter of a million during the day because Tyler is a jobs magnet. We are booming in healthcare and education. If anybody knows anything about East Texas they've heard of us as an oil and gas mecca, that's not really what's happening today. Tyler is a majority minority community, it is a quarter Black, quarter Latino, half white and our Latino population is growing incredibly quickly.

Really important to understand, we are not a cowboy country, we are more like a little bit of old south, a little bit of bayou culture, and then really just its own kind of piney woods pragmatism that I have come to really enjoy and feel at home in. So, one-on-one launched in 2017, I started my career in alt-weeklies at the Philadelphia Weekly and the Chicago Reader so, I've always brought kind of an all weekly vibe to what I'm doing.

We cover what I call "policy, potential, and possibilities" in the Tyler metro. We are non-profit, membership program, and our idea is to inform local ideas about what is possible because for a long time there's just been a single story about what's possible and we know from the conversations we have with a lot of people you don't get to hear enough from that there are actually a lot of stories to cover. We are a staff of one, hello!

And as I said I have a national and local journo background which really has been incredibly useful in kind of thinking about what's happening on the ground, and then like what's the big picture that I can import to East Texas in a way that nobody else is really gonna do. I think of what we do as "slow-baked, small-batch" journalism which means less is more.

So, I'm going to talk about five problems that I started to notice when I got on the

ground in Tyler and they're going to talk about five solutions that we've come up with to try and address those problems not just for our own journalism, but for our community. So, like I said outdated perceptions about what is possible in Tyler, idea that you know, if you're not old guard, old money, white, you can't have a voice, the idea that Tyler which currently is deeply segregated as I said we are deeply diverse with deeply segregated the idea that that's just how it's been, that's the way it's always gonna be and there's nothing you can do about it.

So, how did we try to address that problem? Through data-driven reporting on civic and demographic change. We have found that when you talk about difficult issues starting with data just sort of helps neutralize the issue as I'm sure many of you are familiar with that concept, and so we started doing stories it just got at some of these widespread misperceptions. So, for instance if Tyler's economy really tied to oil booms and busts so let's look at the data, we find that oil and gas is way down the list in terms of the economic drivers in our community.

Tyler is getting younger, this was blue people's minds. I've had 2 business owners tell me that they included this story in their business plans when they were looking for investment in businesses that were aimed at younger market saying you don't know this, but the data shows that Tyler is getting younger faster than almost any city in Tyler, this was like the talk of the town when we published it.

And as I said we are a majority minority city and again this was just like some people sense that this was happening, but nobody had ever really put it in numbers like this before, and this story just spread like wildfire. So, another problem: "you can't talk about that here." The idea that there were topics, there were problems, there were conversations that you couldn't have in Tyler because if you did you'd get a brick thrown through your window, you would lose your job, I mean a lot of people talk about Tyler is in a bubble, and they talk about you know, Tyler is kind of stuck in the 1950s in terms of social mores and progress, well it just depends on who you talk to, and so we said OK we keep hearing you can't talk about that here, what happens if we do talk about it.

The solutions: first person storytelling, remove myself from the equation. I'm a transplant, there's a very very small Asian population in Tyler so, I just felt like let me try to amplify other people's voices and help people just hear from their neighbors directly instead of me getting in the way.

Unflinching inclusion. So, when we do stories that reflect what's going on in marginalized communities we don't like to do that in a way that feels apologetic,

we just go and do it.

De-fang the story. This is something a reader said to me. He said "your stories just have this way of de-fanging like biting you know national narrative" they just have a way of removing the poison, but they keep what's important and that just felt so good to me. So, for instance Out of The Loop the storytelling show that I talked about last night where we had stories about identity, inclusion, difference, and the audience was there for, you felt it in the room.

First person storytelling, we did a series of profiles with undocumented East Texans where I just sat down, I turned on recorder, I said go, just tell me your story, and we ran these as like 3,000 word as told to us on our site. The time on page for these stories was like 3.5 minutes, that was really cool to see, people were reading.

And talking about issues like climate change, but doing it in a language that's going to make sense for the community that we're covering. Again de-fang the issue, and finally unflinching inclusion, we actually have the largest public high school still named for Robert E. Lee.

So we still have the largest public high school in America that is named for Robert E. Lee, and this is a huge fight in our community. So we said you know what... Let's just do it, let's just cover this, and we know this is a very very heated issue, but we're going to do it in unflinching manner, and we have gotten so many amazing messages from people in our community saying you changed my mind on this issue and that felt really good to me.

And we got a grant from the Solutions Journalism Network to do this story that taught a lot of people about a community that is a lot bigger in our region than anybody realized the Tyler Transgender Support Group has 300 members. There are 30 to 50 people who show up to their monthly meetings. This was like just changing our perceptions again of what is possible in our community and what is already happening in our community.

Another problem, as I said deeply entrenched segregation. I mean, I have lived in Chicago, Washington D.C., Oakland California, I have never seen surgical segregation of the kind that I see it is precise and Tyler. So, the idea is you don't go North Front Street, you go East to 5th Street, how do we get out of this? Proactive relationships, border crossing events, and make inclusion a habit.

This is a sheet of paper that resulted from my going to a community program called getting ahead. Getting ahead is a national program that somebody brought to Tyler, works with under-resourced individuals to help build life skills, and I just I just said hey can I can talk to your group, and can I do this like audience survey thing that I do, and then I just got everybody's number and I said you know... of all the stuff we talked about tell me what things you're interested in helping me with.

So, people said things like you talked about how can we get more diversity at community meetings, how can we get more affordable housing, I want to help with your journalism. So, get up, go to communities, and be proactive about your relationship building. We went on a taco tour of Tyler, our Taquerias are some of our fastest growing restaurants in our community, but they are mostly concentrated in one part of the city. So, we said we're just going to go on a taco tour of Tyler who's coming, and I thought like 12 people were going to email me and say I'll go on this weird thing you're doing, but I've got 100 emails and they got it, they understood that this wasn't just about carne asada, this was about crossing borders in our community.

Their emails the language that they use reflected that, and that was so exciting to me. And when you do stories with people who don't look like the majority population in Tyler don't just do stories about what's not working, don't just do stories about when something goes wrong, do stories about people who are leading successful businesses, who are just living life, having careers. This story radically changed the makeup of my email database. You just do a story about the amazing Michael McLendon who's this winemaker, he was actually one of our storytellers last night and suddenly my Facebook following, my email following looks different, it's simple, right?

Okay! Problem. I'm going to skip ahead just a little bit since I need to do that. Oh OK. I'm sorry Rosental, I can't do anything, the people are asking.

Widespread community distance or disrupt stuff or distance from local media. So the audience doing reporting, I have a database, of course I know about amazing projects like Harkin, they are informing my work here, but before I go and use a new tool let's just start testing out, me e-mailing people saying ask me questions. I've got this database of 120 questions that the community has given me and going to the getting ahead program is what changed the nature of my database to where now I have a lot of more questions about childcare, utility assistance, rent assistance.

When I get the questions I answer them and I do it F.A.Q style, and this has been just so popular and I think it opens up collaboration possibilities with other local outlets in town. And then finally no one was telling the deeper story, this was a big problem. Slow, small-batch journalism, use the newsletter to become the destination for local news context. So, how is it working? We have over 100 monthly members, we've only launched a membership program a few months ago. We publish 100 stories in two years, I have six thousand combined followers between all of my platforms to recurring event series, reader feedback is like heart-eye emoji all over the place.

I love what people say, I love the language that they use when they talk about what we're doing. Problem going forward sustainability. How to solve this problem? OK, will Tyler's season philanthropist (we have a deep deep philanthropic tradition and Tyler) support the operations of a new kind of local journalism? So, how do I start getting out that? I invite them to my storytelling show, right? Like journalism isn't always the language, I use I often use words like storytelling or like we care about Tyler and language like that.

Kind of boost of national funding turbo charge our revenue building capacity, that's a big unanswered question. Can events grow memberships and sponsorships and lighten my editorial load, so can I flip it on its head to where I start with events and the conversation instead of... well, I just build events and I build moderated conversations into my reporting life cycle and maybe at the beginning of my reporting life cycle. How long can I remain a quasi-volunteer? That is what I am. I am a deeply paid quasi-volunteer and Rosental is saying thank you and I did it. Thank you.

John Thornton: Well, as my mentor in political fundraising used to say... how the hell are you going to follow that? I will say: my friend I've been doing this for a long time and nobody has ever asked me to talk more, ever. So, congratulations and the only good news about following his name is I invited her. One of the oldest lines in Hollywood is never follow kids or animals, so now we're gonna add never ever follow a theme Roger get on stage.

It's an amazing story and it's it's what gets us up in the morning right now, is that there are more and more and more stories like that, not exactly like that, but it is because we need to think about our local news institutions as fundamentally civic rather than commercial that we began the American journalism project. And I can't think of a more sort of emblematic enterprise than the one you're undertaking entirely, so we're eager to learn more. I'm going to try to go fast. I'm going to try to

stay on time for three reasons.

1. I learned a lot yesterday, and one of the most hopeful things I learned was just how deep and urgent the audio visual crisis at the American Journalism Project is which is another way of saying our slides suck, they're terrible. And so, I don't know when you guys have the time to make these beautiful decks, but we don't have one and so I'm going to try not to subject you to them, I say hopeful though because we've raised 42 million dollars in a little of about nine months with a really crappy deck.

And so, that must mean that we're at a moment and we do think we're in a moment where again our society is coming to realize the importance of local news and that our local news institutions need to be thought of as fundamentally civic rather than commercial. Secondly time is say on time is to stay in the good graces of this guy, Rosenthal. I met with Rosenthal on September 15th of 2008 which was the day Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, and I said we're gonna do this nonprofit thing we think we may call the Texas Tribune, and he said: I'm in.

Didn't know me from Adam, there was no Evan Smith at that moment, there was nothing. I don't know what Portuguese is for "I'm in," but it's the way this guy has lived his life and you've been our champion, and our conscience, and our spirit animal, and I just... I can't thank you enough.

And so, in the 30s, I'm gonna try to go quickly is why you've seen this before some version of it, and so I'm going to try to focus on amplifying a couple pieces of the story that I don't think we told as well, and then on giving you a brief update which as Neil Trello said it will not include the announcement of our first 5 grants. So, we really believe in a public service medium that is sustained by, governed by, and looks like the public it serves. We believe that standing up that at the local level is going to require a movement in journalism philanthropy.

And that last part looks like the country it serves to us is a moral imperative, but it's also a business imperative because we really believe that in order to sustain this movement in journalism philanthropy the thing has got to look like the public it serves otherwise that movement will never be sustained.

The proximate objective is to raise 50 million dollars for a first fund to stand up or help 25 or 35 what we're calling civic news organizations. We've raised as I said 42 million dollars to date that the grant agreement that we signed with Jennifer and Alberto said it's a 100 million dollar project. So we've got a long way to go. I'm not

going to dwell on the problem. We've heard a lot of that, I will say there's one new take on it that I heard this week that I thought was really interesting which is even if you take this sort of squishy or leftier inclinations that I have about the importance of local news out and you think of it just on a good government and accountability put a good government and accountability lens on it.

Think about this, two thirds of the taxes in the United States are levied and spent within 70 square miles which is Washington D.C. The number of reporters covering that activity over the last decade has stayed relatively constant, arguably it's gone up. The other third of taxes though are levied in spent any other three and a half billion square miles in the United States. And a number of reporters covering that motion has gone down by a half two thirds in some places as much as 90%. Do you think there is more fiscal responsibility going on in those places?

Do you think that decisions with regard to resource allocation are being made more with regard to racial, gender, social equity? Doesn't seem very likely. So, what we talked about is a billion dollar problem and it's oversimplified, but never let that get in the way of a good story. We think that two billion dollars roughly has come out of what we call newsgathering spend, but below the federal level over the last decade. Our friends at Facebook and Google and other places say well, you can do more with less and so you don't need the whole 2 billion and so we rented a supercomputer and crunched a bunch of numbers and said fine we'll cut it in half.

So, we're saying it's a billion dollar a year problem. What we're trying to do is catalyze the rejection of a billion dollars a year back into local newsgathering. And this is an important distinction about what we're trying to do and it's something that is not easy to communicate, but we're not funding, we're not propose, we haven't done anything yet. We're not proposing to fund newsrooms.

Let me say that again, we are not going to fund newsrooms because we believe that when journalism philanthropy funds newsrooms, journalism philanthropy pretty much guarantees that it's going to continue to fund newsrooms. And so, what we're attempting to do at least is to fund integrated media organizations that have diverse revenue streams or to help what are essentially newsrooms shaking their tin cup today become integrated media organizations with diverse revenue streams.

These are the three solutions that often get proposed, not a lot of news there. This is I think really kind of the most exciting in some ways data we have today which is that this is where the growth is nonprofit news organizations at the local level particularly this is where you get an infinite percentage of the growth in the local

news ecosystem that there is today.

Started on a small base, but by the time we're done, by the time where we're trying to get the money away starting in December over a period of two and a half or three years, by the time we're done a number of these organizations is going to be easily twice that which means we're going to serve a very small portion of those sort of like Stanford undergraduate admissions percentage low.

And as I said it's a small base but 10 years ago when we started the Tribune we sort of got patted on the head, and all the brilliant people in the news media said it's kind of cute, but this is just a particularly bad recession, we're going to fix this maybe non-profit news will represent a bridge to some greater thing kind of a french fry.

Ten years later I'm here to tell you it ain't the french fry. Nonprofit news is gonna have to solve a big part of our local news problem and if you think it's trivial consider this.... memberships aggregate budget in 2018 was about four hundred million dollars. Digital newspaper subscriptions that we heard a lot of talk about yesterday if you take out the New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal in aggregate that's about how big that market is.

And so, the nonprofit news ecosystem this year may be bigger than digital subscriptions and newspapers so it's not trivial. What we're talking about is an infrastructure that looks a little bit like public radio, that a billion dollars in size, potentially a thousand or so outlets which is what public radio approximately has.

This is how public radio was funded. What we're saying is take government funding which in the fullness of time maybe there should be a public policy shift that would address part of what we're talking about, but in the meantime it's gotta be philanthropy. And so, think of a target funding, a target revenue mix and I would say more like 20 to 40% or 20 to even 45% in each of three buckets from the audience from commercial sponsorship, from philanthropy.

The point of the right hand side of that chart is just to say it's not as heavy a lift as necessarily or as you might think. So, I'm going to end there and just give you the briefest update on us on the American journalism project. We will with any luck have our sort of criteria and processes for grant making communicated to our community in June probably June 30th, I'm guessing.

And make grants are first maybe 3 or 4 in December. So, that's sort of the cadence

that we're on. I appreciate your attention. I appreciate all of you and everything you're doing is more than I can tell you.