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Journalism Partnerships

A New Era of Interest

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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About This Report

This report examines five case studies of existing journalism partnerships to understand how they came to be and how they are ultimately serving both the producers and the public.

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The report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Find related reports online at pewresearch.org/journalism.

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One recurring theme in the Pew Research Center’s journalism research over the last two years has been that of newsroom collaborations. In its examinations of [nonprofit news outlets](#), [newspaper innovations](#), [statehouse reporting](#) and [digital startups](#), The center has encountered news providers teaming up in new ways. Legacy media outlets are looking more than ever for ways to augment what they can produce with a depleted staff, and news startups are eager to place their work before a wider audience and figure out roads to sustainability.

Jim Brady, immediate past president of the Online News Association and a seasoned digital and newspaper executive, puts the case for collaboration succinctly. “This is a time when journalists need to huddle together for warmth.”

What these collaborations mean for the public—at least in theory—is broader and deeper news coverage, more easily accessed or discovered. What they mean for news organizations is—depending on one’s place at the table—a more diverse mix of content to offer, broader reach and more scalable reporting.

But content collaborations are not easy. The Pew Research Center’s conversations with various players in the news space speak to a range of structures and levels of success—and to a sense from many of interest but uncertainty as to what works and what proves most challenging. Thus we thought it would be helpful to closely examine a handful of existing arrangements, delving into the detail of how various sharing arrangements are structured, how they came into being and how they are ultimately serving both the producers and the public.

Detailed below are five such cases which offer a mix of sharing structures, of players and of levels of success.

Our examples include:

- A durable and simple partnering of a non-profit providing topic-specific coverage for a local paper and its website. (*Charlottesville Tomorrow and the Daily Progress*)
- How a well-managed non-profit with a strong investigative focus became the news department of its local PBS operation. (*I-News Network, Rocky Mountain PBS and KUSA-TV*)
- Why former rivals in a competitive state market now share front page stories. (*The Texas Front-Page Exchange*)
- A case with high collaboration potential stalled by financial and other challenges faced by both non-profit partners. (*The Lens (New Orleans) and WWNO Public Radio*)

- Two newspapers, several thousand miles apart, joining forces for a one-off investigative project in which each brought something significant to the table. (*The Toronto Star and El Nuevo Herald*)

These five cases certainly don't touch on every possibility, but they do speak to forces that bring two outlets together, key elements in making collaborations work and the challenges of sustaining them. A few of the major takeaways:

1. **Economics were and still are the driver for these partnerships.** Precipitous advertising losses at newspapers and the deep newsroom cuts that followed kicked the partnership movement into gear in 2008 and 2009. As the worst of the emergency passed, energy turned elsewhere. Less successful collaborations were phased out, and some first-wave non-profits failed. However, continued revenue losses and pinched resources are encouraging a second look at opportunities for partnering. Broadcasters (commercial and public), have also become attuned to the business case for adding good content originated elsewhere.
2. **Paradoxically, often little if any money changes hands.** In that way, the arrangement stays simple. Deals can be sealed with a handshake, and there are often no rigid expectations of how frequently stories are exchanged. If there are clear benefits for both sides, that may be all it takes. Put another way, with a small commitment of editing resources, legacy media pick up valuable coverage such as investigative projects or in-depth beat coverage that they cannot afford on their own.
3. **Things can easily go wrong.** While this report mostly profiles successes, many such efforts do not make it. Execution can be high maintenance, and a promising initiative may get shelved if foundation start-up funding stops or those committed to the collaboration change jobs. One Knight-funded grant series to pilot eight collaborations between news outlets and community contributors had only one active participant when the seed money ran out.
4. **Imaginative ad hoc partnering may be the next wave.** The wired, distributed nature of the web makes it easy to create collaborations around shared communities of interest—topic-by-topic or even story-by-story. That strategy makes sense, for instance, for coverage of “valley fever,” a debilitating fungal disease that is on the rise in California’s Central Valley and parts of Utah, Arizona and New Mexico (but unknown east of the Mississippi). Or the local environmental impact of fracking—a big issue in some states yet

not so immediate in others. The borders of local news no longer stop at the city or even the state line.

5. **Oddly, though digital disruption and competition is the change agent, digital partnering may be secondary.** Incompatible content management systems as well as differing paywall structures and audience metrics can make digital sharing more difficult than legacy forms like print or broadcast. For now at least, the default is to link to the site originating the content and let it harvest the audience and any accompanying advertising.
6. **Quality counts; quality plus engagement is even better.** Foundations and corporate underwriters gravitate to high-impact investigative work. But several of the savvy successes profiled here are careful to pick projects that will also spark discussion. They take the initiative to convene forums and events where that dialogue takes place. That's good for the traditional journalism mission of supporting deliberative democracy. It resonates with funders as well.

Many feel that as long as there are needs to fill on both sides, this new era of collaborative content will only grow.

“The volume of this shared work will increase,” Nancy Barnes, editor of the Houston Chronicle said. “As non-profits become more established and credible, they will become an increasing asset to traditional news organizations. Readers don't care where the content comes from so long as the quality is consistent, fair and accurate. Our job as editors is to make sure that's the case.”

Charlottesville Tomorrow and The Daily Progress

Virginia civic activist Brian Wheeler launched an unusual local non-profit in 2005. Christened [Charlottesville Tomorrow](#), it focused on planning and land use and attendant business and environmental issues. But Wheeler's group did not have a point of view to advocate. Instead he envisioned generating awareness and discussion in the community.

Charlottesville has particular characteristics that made Wheeler's undertaking a fit. It is a university town, highly educated, also with a cadre of wealthy retirees. The surrounding county remains 95 percent rural.

"I didn't think we would be doing journalism," Wheeler recalls. Instead he wanted to take "a community that cares a lot about Charlottesville as a special place ... (and) inform them about some quality of life issues."

Four years later, Wheeler found himself in conversation with McGregor McCance, the editor of the local Charlottesville newspaper, [The Daily Progress](#). McCance was staring at a grim number. In just four years his reporting staff had fallen from 42 people to 18. Some worthwhile coverage would have to go or get reduced attention as beats were consolidated.

The two ended up with a handshake deal and a two-page memo of understanding. Charlottesville Tomorrow would provide a large portion of the paper's coverage of land-use and development issues. Money would not change hands (though Charlottesville Tomorrow does get in-kind help as the paper prints its voters' guides and other reports for free).

But the win-win opportunity was obvious. Charlottesville Tomorrow would get much wider exposure for its work. The Daily Progress would get thorough coverage of a subject important to readers that might otherwise have gone neglected.

Charlottesville Tomorrow and The Daily Progress



Charlottesville,
Virginia

The Players: A daily newspaper and niche nonprofit

The Deal: Niche outlet supplies majority of land development coverage to print paper; No money exchanged; Web content hosted on niche site

Duration: Since 2009

Challenges: Establishing an unbiased reputation

Keys to Success: Communication and flexibility

Success Measures: Funding and staff

Five years and 1,200-some stories later, the relationship is still flourishing. It has survived a change of ownership, as Media General sold the Progress and other newspapers to Warren Buffett's BH Media in the summer of 2012. McCance has moved on to the top public information job at the University of Virginia, but new editor Lee Wolverton has seen no reason to walk away from the deal or modify it.

Charlottesville Tomorrow produces high content volume," Wolverton said, "which allows our municipal reporters to expand their focus into more substantive stories. Charlottesville Tomorrow covers many bases and produces thorough, accurate copy."

"Communications between the two sides are strong," Wolverton added. And calls on who covers what are typically pretty simple. "We have a keen interest in enterprise and investigative journalism. Charlottesville Tomorrow is highly interested in policy."

Ed McMahon, a senior fellow at the Urban Land Institute, spoke several years ago at one of Charlottesville Tomorrow's community forums. Though he does not see their stories regularly, he applauds their activity. "In every city where you can get people on the same page, good things happen," he said. "Competing groups actually find there is a lot they agree on." So policy discussions move past contentious public hearings on specific projects "where no one will listen to anyone."

Like the original agreement, the mechanics of the partnership are uncomplicated. At the beginning of each week, Wheeler said, he and Progress editors confer "on who's covering what." The flexible terms allow Progress reporters to focus on other topics most of the time but collaborate or bring in-house stories they want to be staff-produced.

Charlottesville Tomorrow has grown to an annual budget of just over \$400,000. More than half of that comes from major gifts from individuals, the balance from grants, underwriting and smaller individual gifts.

Wheeler still writes many of the stories but has been able to add two additional reporters, a community engagement and marketing specialist, and some interns—in total then, four reporters plus interns. Charlottesville Tomorrow also repurposes its work in regular podcasts. That amounts to pretty lavishly funded supplemental beat coverage for a small town paper with daily and Sunday circulation just over 20,000.

Wheeler said that he aims for in-depth takeouts, and his budget allows for data analysis and elaborate infographics that would be beyond the reach of the Progress on its own.

At the same time, Wheeler concedes, “I’d be the first to admit we had things to learn.” Professional editing has sharpened the writing of the material, he said, and the paper’s editors are skilled at cutting to fit (at the same time linking back to the non-profit’s site for a longer version of some pieces).

Problems have been relatively minor, Wheeler said. When the collaboration began, Wheeler was a member of the county school board and ultimately became chairman. It was more than a little odd, he said, to see a story with his byline sitting next to an account of a school board meeting in which he was a newsmaker. After a time, he “ended up resigning to take that concern off the table.”

While metrics are not always a part of these partnerships,

Wheeler keeps a few. Besides the running story count, he said he determined that just over half the coverage of growth issues in the Progress over a year-and-a-half period came from his organization. And despite continued pressure on news space, the story count in the Progress on the topic has risen from a monthly average of 44.6 from 2005 to 2009 to 48.1 in the five years since the partnership began.

There are several lessons in the successful experiment: A non-profit and a for-profit journalism enterprise can have independent missions but can agree on a common goal. “Be nimble and experimental,” Wheeler said, “and try things like video and podcasts, going the extra mile.”

Charlottesville Tomorrow Content hosted on The Daily Progress

The screenshot shows the top of a news article on the Daily Progress website. The header includes the newspaper's name, a weather forecast for Charlottesville, VA (36° Overcast), and a navigation menu with links to Home, News, Opinion, Sports, Entertainment, Lifestyles, Obituaries, Weather, Magazines, Video, and Contests. The date is Tuesday, December 2, 2014. Below the navigation is a breadcrumb trail: Home > Edition > Mapping. The main headline is "Biz group asks City Council: Charge for on-street parking". Below the headline are social media sharing buttons for Facebook (Recommend), Twitter (Tweet), Google+ (+1), Pinterest (Pin It), and Email (Share). The article is posted on Tuesday, December 2, 2014 at 4:40 am, by Sean Tubbs (stubbs@cvillemorrow.org | 260-0763). The article text begins: "The Downtown Business Association of Charlottesville has asked the City Council to consider charging for on-street parking within the downtown core." A quote follows: "Our present on-street free parking system is not serving the needs of the public or the businesses downtown and has acted to restrict the availability of parking downtown for most people, but especially those that are customers of downtown business," said Bob Stroh, co-chairman of the group. A small text block at the bottom of the article reads: "The downtown association wants councilors to consider installing a system of kiosks that would read the license plates of vehicles parked on streets. He said that association members would be willing to help pay to install the system."

Source: The Daily Progress

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“Our critics would say that our bias is in giving these topics the detailed attention we do,” Wheeler added, “but we are sensitive to the difference between information and advocacy. We try not to take sides.”

Charlottesville Progress publisher Keely Byars said that any bias in coverage would be unacceptable and Charlottesville Tomorrow steers clear of that. Another check, she added, is that “our community is extremely well-read and intensely interested in local issues” and thus would flag any axe-grinding.

It is this last point that makes Charlottesville Tomorrow a comfortable fit for news coverage. But that charter also probably explains why there are so few such local partnerships. Non-profit groups much more often are born of an advocacy agenda—environmental, school reform or social welfare. That makes them better qualified for op-ed page essays rather than basic news coverage.

As time goes on, though, news organizations are growing more comfortable using outside contributions with a point of view so long as the facts check out. At the same time, local activists may want to consider Wheeler’s model and consider the heightened impact of putting agenda-setting ahead of proselytizing.

I-News Network, Rocky Mountain PBS and KUSA-TV

Laura Frank’s idea for a multimedia investigative network in Colorado was born in February 2009, the day the Rocky Mountain News closed. An experienced investigative reporter who led a small team at ‘the Rocky,’ she wanted to keep doing what she did best and also cushion the abrupt end of the paper’s contributions in Denver, a city with a rich investigative tradition.

Called the [I-News Network](#), Frank has built what began as a \$40,000 grant and a one-person operation that gave its content away for free into a team of 12 writers, editors, and producers, a budget of about \$700,000, and over 100 media partners including the market’s top-rated commercial station, Gannett-owned KUSA. And in January 2013, I-News transitioned from being a content partner with the [Rocky Mountain PBS](#) and its flagship Denver station KRMA to being its official news department. The demonstrated capacity, in turn, helped land a two-year \$1.4 million grant from Corporation for Public Broadcasting for an “[Inside Energy](#)” project that reaches out through Colorado and beyond state lines to include other public media in Wyoming and North Dakota. Currently four of the dozen I-News staff are devoted to that project—an executive editor, a data journalist, an engagement specialist and a reporter who can produce for print, radio and TV.

While there are still clear goals to reach, I-News looks to be a model of how to build a high-impact non-profit news operation—without the advantage of having a single big benefactor like Herb and Marion Sandler have been for the nonprofit investigative news outlet [ProPublica](#).

I-News Network, Rocky Mountain PBS and KUSA-TV



Denver, Pueblo, Grand Junction and seven other cities, Colorado

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- The Players:** A nonprofit multi-media news network, the local PBS operation, a major TV news station and more
 - The Deal:** I-News serves as the news department of the PBS station, and provides investigative content by contract and for free to the other news organizations
 - Duration:** I-News was founded in 2009; contract lengths vary
 - Challenges:** Maintaining income from paying contracts
 - Keys to Success:** Physical location inside the PBS newsroom, free-trial offering, a variety of partnerships
 - Success Measures:** New contracts, increase in staff, long-term investigative reports resulting in changed state laws
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The Early Days

Frank remembers the early days of I-News as very modest. She won a \$40,000 Scripps fellowship that allowed her to develop and test business models. As the venture moved out of the academy into the real world, Frank recalls a faintly comic launch at a state press association conference.

“I had myself set up at a little table with a sign that said ‘free content.’ My pitch to the editors was that we were going to open a state conversation on important topics ... and do you want to be on the inside or the outside of that conversation?” She also promised that the work would be good enough “that eventually you will want to pay for it.” The project was conceived as business-to-business rather than direct to news consumers, and in the end, the free trial approach paid off, though it was not without struggle.

After the free trials, I-News landed a few paying contracts with Colorado newspapers, but not nearly enough to sustain the news effort Frank hoped to build. A sudden budget cut wiped out a paying contract she had been developing with The Denver Post. But the early work and its widespread dissemination did attract a \$300,000 grant from the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) (its largest award in a challenge competition for community news sites) along with substantial support from other national and regional foundations.

Early on, Frank made a second valuable decision. She needed office space as she added reporters. Rocky Mountain PBS had extra room and agreed to house the venture for free.

That proximity made it easy to bring some of the team’s projects into news specials or discussion forums. It also made it easier to build trust with a station in need of additional reporting power.

The PBS Appeal

General Manager Harris Ravine and CEO Doug Price took over Rocky Mountain PBS in early 2009, and “inherited a situation where we were struggling,” Ravine said. Similar to the pressures faced by other public broadcasters, technology was shifting, membership was declining and federal support was waning too. The station and affiliates had no digital presence or local news staff to speak of.

I-News Network’s 12 Staff Members

An executive editor, a data journalist, an engagement specialist and a reporter who can produce for print, radio and TV. The unit also employs:

- 3 data journalists
- 3 reporters
- 3 executive editors
- 1 engagement specialist
- 1 managing editor

Through I-News, the stations got an early jump on a national movement to reposition local PBS stations, ultimately made official in the November 2013 commissioned report “[Public Media Models of the Future](#).” Its top recommendation was to tap the “great potential” of creating a strong local news presence.

Ravine said that he and Price explored several possible collaborators but settled on Frank. Her brand of investigation aims for depth and makes heavy use of data-mining. But she also favors a style of presentation that encourages community conversation and action rather than just sparking outrage or prescribing a fix. Ravine and Price found that congenial.

“Over a couple-of-year period,” Ravine said, “we came to define our mission as being the media part of the non-profit community.” The I-News approach to projects was ideal—“put facts on the table, build understanding as well as awareness and let the community come to a decision rather than advocate a solution ... Laura’s vision of public service journalism matches ours.”

While there is no contractual definition of what the unit delivers, Frank said that she aims for one or two major projects a year, a monthly in-depth report and a steady run of daily posts and feeds to radio partners.

Ravine said that the journalism is on track but that it is still early to declare victory. “We need to enhance the monetization” he said, “and the jury is still out on how well we can do that.” Most likely, say Frank and Ravine, that will include developing some paying partnerships but also leveraging successful projects to increased underwriter, foundation and member/viewer support.

“To date, we have no NPR outlets paying for our content,” Ravine explained. “We do, however, have shared reporter relationships with several and are in the process of developing similar relationship with others.” This model, Ravine adds, “allows us to both extend our coverage areas with a lower investment and increase our distribution. This in turn is generating underwriting interest which supplements the foundation support that has largely fueled our venture to date.”

From Frank’s point of view, the merger had another clear-cut financial benefit—tapping into an existing member base of 60,000 viewers instead of trying to build that leg of a revenue mix on her own.

With the shared mission of public service journalism, exclusivity was not a part of the deal, allowing Frank to continue to develop new partnerships which she says now number more than 100, including nearly all of the state’s daily newspapers and public radio stations as well as small ethnic outlets. The majority still get the work for free.

KUSA—an Outlet for Daily Content

The collaboration with KUSA (Channel 9), built around daily investigative reports for the general public, provides a little less than 10% of the unit’s budget, Frank said, and will run well into six figures over a period of years.

In return, I-News times releases of its major reports to coincide with the three-times-a-year ratings sweep periods and gives KUSA first crack at adapting and expanding the reports. The unit also provides KUSA at least one piece a month. “They’re good at taking what we would think of as a story and building it into a continuing series,” Frank said. And exposure during the ratings period splash, she added, helps attract attention to the longer print versions of those pieces.

It is also regarded as a success from the TV station’s viewpoint. “We have found that they are so easy to work with,” said Nicole Vap, executive producer of the station’s investigative unit. As an example, she said, one of her reporters had developed a particular interest in hit-and-run accidents and wanted to spotlight the problem through the year.

“Bert Hubbard, their data person, was able to provide great information—how often and where they happen, how many people are hurt,” Vap said. And the database stays updated and can be used as a reference point when a new accident pops up in the news. Changes in state law have resulted, with the electronic “alert” signs for missing children and seniors now used as well to locate vehicles that flee the scene of an accident.

“I view us as giving their work a megaphone (to a large general audience),” Vap said. “Their shows (on PBS) are more watched by the decision-makers. So it is a win-win.” KUSA now has a multi-year contract with the I-team.

At a time when many markets provide a ratings-friendly version of investigative reporting that is little more than resolving consumer complaints, Frank said, “that’s not what we are doing ... The response has been quite something. If we are inspiring people to take action, we are doing our job.”

Frank cites a multi-year project titled “[Losing Ground](#)” as an example of the unit’s best work. Based on a deep dive into census data, it found a huge increase in child poverty, concentrated almost totally in the state’s black, Latino and native populations. Prospering and growing, Colorado has a particularly weak record of extending benefits of the boom to lower income populations.

Versions of I-News work appeared as a multi-part newspaper series—above the fold in a large majority of the state’s papers including the [Gazette](#) of Colorado Springs, [The Coloradoan](#) in Fort Collins and [The Daily Camera](#) in Boulder. It also was reconfigured as a half-hour PBS documentary and an e-book. For a 2014 sequel, the team did a similarly sweeping project called “[Untreated](#),” on lack of appropriate care for the mentally ill.

I-News has capacity to produce and narrate its own segments, but is also comfortable handing off to reporters or presenters at partner affiliates. Sometimes that is still needed, Frank says. “The Rocky had 200 people and a \$20 million a year news budget; we have 12 people and about \$700,000.”

Projects like “Losing Ground,” “[Untreated](#),” and “[Inside Energy](#)” are notable. How Frank, along with her PBS and commercial partners developed I-News from the germ of an idea into a working unit with statewide impact may be even more significant to the challenge of keeping strong journalism flowing in the era of business model transformation.

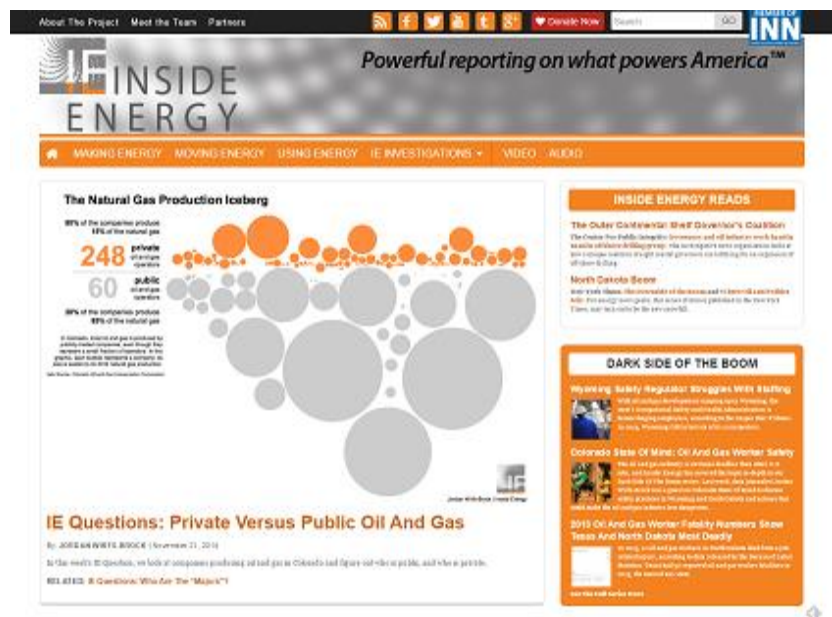
Are there particular keys to success, worth emulating?

Frank cites three: (1)

significant start-up funding, in her case a three-year grant from the Knight foundation

and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation insuring they would be around; (2) hiring top investigative reporters, since ambitious goals could not be met relying on freelancers; and (3) aiming for impact and engagement.

I-News Project “Inside Energy”



Source: insideenergy.org

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The Texas Front-Page Exchange

Three of the five case studies in this group feature the contributions of non-profit start-ups. But established news businesses also are fully capable of constructing news collaborations that work on their own.

A specific news event marked the beginning of a new era of cooperation among the five largest newspaper organizations in Texas, once a bastion of swaggering competition. The Center's [2009 State of the Media report](#) described the circumstances as follows:

In August 2008, a big regional story created an unusual moment for Texas's two largest papers, the Dallas Morning News and the Houston Chronicle. A church bus carrying Vietnamese Christian children from Houston to a religious retreat in Missouri crashed north of

Dallas, killing 15. In flush times, staff from each paper would have leapt into action, fanning out to create a complete and multiday package of coverage.

Instead, editors at the two papers with different owners agreed informally to share content. Houston would emphasize stories of the families and church. Dallas would focus on the crash and subsequent investigation. Supplemented by Associated Press photos, each paper had comprehensive coverage for several days without having to send a reporter across the state.

Bob Mong, longtime editor of the [Dallas Morning News](#), recalls that it was only a few months later that he and other editors of Texas dailies hit on an idea for sharing stories, bolstering state coverage that was endangered when big newsroom cuts became necessary.

Eight Ohio dailies had already started a news collective, motivated in part by dissatisfaction with the high cost and some coverage gaps in their Associated Press service. Mong and his counterparts

The Texas Front-Page Exchange



**Dallas, Houston,
Austin, Fort Worth,
San Antonio,**
Texas

The Players: Five daily newspapers in Texas

The Deal: Print-only, free exchange of stories ranging from sports to state house

Duration: Since 2009

Challenges: Differing paywall settings has kept digital out of the deal

Keys to Success: Flexibility, tweaks over time, openness to outside bylines, win-win structure

Success Measures: Staff efficiency; a wider mixture of print content, with less reliance on wires

at the [Houston Chronicle](#), [Austin American Statesman](#), [Fort Worth Star Telegram](#) and [San Antonio Express News](#) decided to adapt the model in early 2009.

They call it the front-page exchange, and the mechanism is simple. Late morning or early afternoon after daily planning meetings, each paper moves the others its tentative story list for the next day's front page. If an editor sees something good, he or she can follow the story's development through the day and slot it into the following day's paper.

No money changes hands, and no records are kept of who contributes most. From the viewpoint of the participating editors, that doesn't matter—the exchange simply provides worthwhile added content.

“Several times a week,” Mong says, “we see something that has not been on the AP wire. It is very functional, very helpful, and very useful.” As a recent example, Mong said, he liked a strong story from the Houston Chronicle on parents who had accidentally backed a car over a child. He put it in the next day's edition, gaining “a 12-hour jump” on the alternative of waiting for a truncated wire service pickup.

The arrangement is old-fashioned in that it applies only to print. Digital versions are handled with a short summary and a link to the original.

The same basic arrangement has been in place for five years now. There have been a few hiccups, but the papers not only kept it going but also expanded with other sharing arrangements. Now, the Austin bureau chiefs and editors of the five papers as well as the Associated Press hold regular planning conference calls. It also makes sense for papers to feed college sports coverage from their home town universities to the others who would need a writer to travel some distance to get a comparable story.

What stood in the way of this sort of cooperation for decades was industry prosperity, big newsroom budgets and a tradition whose definition of quality began with running only the work of your own staff along with wire stories.

Texas Tribune Content on the Austin American Statesman



Source: Austin American Statesman

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But particularly after papers scaled back any statewide circulation ambitions as hard times set in, there came to be very little competition for audience among the five.

Other editors share Mong's view that the cooperation, while not central to editorial strategy, is a distinct plus. Nancy Barnes came to the Chronicle in October 2013 after years at the Star Tribune of Minneapolis and began as a skeptic. "I was surprised—giving away all that content for free? But in fact these are all very distinct markets. The exchange helps us avoid redundant effort. It seems a very innovative solution."

Jim Witt, executive editor of the Star-Telegram in Fort Worth, like Mong, was one of the founders. "It has worked great," he said. "We have a lot fewer reporters than we once did and don't do much statewide anymore. We used to have a six-person Austin bureau, but now we just send someone during session (bi-annual in Texas) and rely on the Statesman the rest of the time." That may result in slightly less coverage and less focus on Fort Worth angles, but Witt accepts the tradeoff as realistic given the need [to downsize news operations](#).

The pool of potential collaborators has grown deeper with the emergence of The Texas Tribune. The Tribune is not a party to the exchange, but is a well-funded, well-staffed non-profit based in Austin delivering a separate source of deep state government coverage, heavy data analysis and investigations. "We probably use their stuff more than any of the other papers," Witt said. "It's free, and several of our former reporters whose work we respect are on their staff."

Outside the boundaries of the front page exchange, the [Morning News](#) and [Star-Telegram](#), 50 miles apart, have tried a number of two-way collaborations. Both Mong and Witt see some irony in that. In the late 1990s, the Morning News essentially invaded the Star-Telegram's turf, launching new editions in the populous suburban area between the two. The Star-Telegram, under Disney ownership at the time, got the entertainment giant to spring for a massive staff expansion that left Fort Worth the best-staffed metro in the country (measured by staff/circulation ratio).

That newspaper war is long over. "We have a great relationship with them now," said Mong. An experiment with pooling coverage of baseball, basketball and hockey franchises did not ultimately succeed. It was complicated by an incompatibility of paywall strategies, and the two editors decided that, while the exchanges work for high school and college sports, they needed their own stamp on professional sports coverage. (The Cowboys had been excluded from the deal for that reason). But it was worth a try, both editors agree.

The Morning News now prints the Star-Telegram, and Mong said that he was able to juggle production schedules to get his former rival an hour later deadline for high school sports. Witt said that he is happy to share coverage of events west of Fort Worth if the Morning News is interested.

Like a number of the editors in these case studies, Mong has grown to be a believer and explorer of multiple collaboration options. He has done work with public radio and broadcast and has recently changed commercial TV affiliations as his partner station passed from ownership by sister company, Belo, to Gannett.

Several of the broadcast exchanges involve sports. Morning News reporters appear as on-air commentators and a prep sports writer does a radio simulcast Friday nights. In addition, a KERA public radio host does a monthly Q&A feature on a commentary section while the paper's cinema critic does a weekly program for KERA. Mong has also added two arts critics and a physician-turned-medical-reporter by arranging joint appointments with area universities and splitting costs with them.

Quite simply, Mong says, partnering is a way to get more done at less cost, extending the brand and reaching a wider audience at the same time.

The Lens (New Orleans) and WWNO Public Radio

Any non-profit news startup (or for-profit, for that matter), faces a first-order challenge of sticking its head up and getting noticed. Put another way, the startup needs to find a spot in what is variously called the local news landscape or news ecosystem.

Markets don't come any more newsy, treacherous and competitive than New Orleans, where a mid-sized investigative unit called [The Lens](#) with a \$700,000 annual budget has been steadily working to define its presence and raise its profile since its founding in 2009.

The founding built off of Karen Gadbois' successful work as an independent blogger on the mispending of Katrina recovery funds and the neglect of historical preservation in rebuilding efforts. Her blog posts on the issue caught the attention of TV investigative reporter Lee Zurik, and the pair produced more than 50 stories over two years which led to federal indictments and won top national prizes. That work in turn sparked the creation of The Lens. "It was as if somebody in bunny slippers had hit a home run the first time at bat," editor Steve Beatty said.

In casual moments, Beatty will describe his approach to partnering as "promiscuous." He has gotten together with multiple collaborators on various platforms—making Lens content available, for instance, to both the established [Times-Picayune](#) and its NOLA website, while also doing business with [The Baton Rouge Advocate](#), which now publishes a daily New Orleans edition. The [Louisiana Weekly](#), targeted to minority populations, is another prime outlet.

The Lens also collaborated with ProPublica this fall on a big project titled "[Losing Ground](#)" (but in a different sense from the Colorado I-News project of the same name). With maps and aerial photos (from ProPublica) and on-the-scene reporting by The Lens, the project gave a vivid picture of the startling erosion of coastal Louisiana over decades.

The Lens (New Orleans) and WWNO Public Radio



New Orleans,
Louisiana

The Players: A non-profit news startup and a local news radio station

The Deal: Content provision with both partners using grant funding

Duration: Founded 2009; radio partnership initiated in 2012

Challenges: Lack of resources after foundation grants slowed; difficulty translating news content to radio

Keys to (initial) Success: A series of impressive journalistic accomplishments

Success Measures: Loss of staff, inability to maintain partnerships due to lack of funding

“Losing Ground”: A Project by ProPublica and The Lens

PROPUBLICA THE LENS+ Losing Ground DONATE TO PROPUBLICA DONATE TO THE LENS

PAST / PRESENT AN ENGINEERED COAST AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

1922 2024 LEVEES CANALS DELTAS SEVERE MODERATE

Louisiana is drowning, quickly.

In just 80 years, some 2,000 square miles of its coastal landscape have turned to open water, wiping places off maps, bringing the Gulf of Mexico to the back door of New Orleans and posing a lethal threat to an energy and shipping corridor vital to the nation's economy.

And it's going to get worse, even quicker.

Scientists now say one of the greatest environmental and economic disasters in the nation's history is rushing toward a catastrophic conclusion over the next 50 years, so far unabated and largely unnoticed.

At the current rates that the sea is rising and land is sinking, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists say by 2100 the Gulf of Mexico could rise as much as 4.3 feet across this landscape, which has an average elevation of about 3 feet. If that happens, everything outside the protective levees — most of Southeast Louisiana — would be underwater.

[Explore Delacroix, La.](#)

The effects would be felt far beyond bayou country. The region best known for its self-proclaimed motto "laissez les bons temps rouler" — let the good times roll — is one of the nation's economic linchpins.

1922

Over 7,000 years, the deltas of the Mississippi River created all of southern Louisiana, including vast coastal wetlands covering 6,000 square miles — the Amazon of North America. In the 1930s, coastal Louisiana was about 25% bigger than it is now. About 1,883 square miles are gone, according to the USGS.

30 km
20 mi

Source: USGS via Louisiana State University

Source: ProPublica

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Despite journalistic successes, The Lens nonetheless began experiencing financial challenges in late 2013 as initial foundation grants lapsed and new ones were slow in coming. Those struggles have, at least for now, stalled one of its most promising partnerships.

Beatty had determined that he wanted one lead partner to stabilize and grow, while maintaining other relationships that gave the work wide exposure. With encouragement from a Knight Foundation grant, he pursued a partnership with the city's public radio station, [WWNO](#), itself beginning a big shift to an all-news/talk format while phasing out music programming.

Beatty and his counterpart at the station, news director Eve Troeh, agree that both sides have benefitted journalistically. But, the resources are not there to ramp up to a full merger on the model of the Colorado I-News network or the St. Louis Beacon's absorption into St. Louis Public Radio. And without a sense of further ways to grow the partnership, the energy to keep it going waned.

A Good Deal Gone Dry

The partnership ramped up with a Knight grant of \$20,000 to hire a part-time producer to help Lens staff adapt written stories to radio. "We've learned that doing radio is more than just rewriting your print pieces," Beatty explained. His writers did get better but did not necessarily evolve into outstanding radio presenters. One solution has been to leave the more complicated narration and production to professionals while using Lens writers for so called "two-ways"—anchor chats about their stories.

For WWNO, the collaboration, if not perfect radio production, provided a lot of strong content at a time when the station urgently needed it. News director Eve Troeh, formerly a national Marketplace beat reporter for NPR, came aboard in April 2013 tasked with building a news department from scratch. It was not until fall of 2014 that she was able to hire a second reporter.

The Lens, she said, has contributed a steady stream of reports in the adapted-to-radio format along with "lots of information we could use to flesh out and report general news." A WWNO series on standardized testing "built on Lens reporting as a starting point." And the partners produced a segment on the continuing aftermath of the B.P. oil spill and gulf pollution that aired nationally on NPR's Weekend Edition.

Some bumps remained, Troeh said, in fusing print and radio news cultures. But the arrangement stalled out essentially for financial reasons. Both entities were relying on national foundation grants, drawn by the well-publicized cutbacks at The Times Picayune as it switched to an online-first strategy and stopped publishing a print edition several days of the week. And several of those grants were expiring.

That left the two competing for some of the same sources of funding. And Troeh was in the awkward spot of being asked to spend more to build the partnership while the operation she was tasked with developing was barely getting its own legs. In the summer of 2014, the two concluded that due in large part to finances, the momentum for a deeper collaboration or a merger wasn't there—though both she and Beatty consider this more a hiatus than a split.

The Lens was forced to lay off one of its reporters early in 2014 and had to discontinue, for now, a commitment to covering every meeting every month of charter school boards with a network of freelancers. In fall of 2014, managing editor Steve Myers accepted a visiting professional position at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, dropping down to a part-time projects editor at The Lens. Co-founder and staff writer Karen Gadbois has temporarily suspended her blog to help Beatty focus on business issues.

Even with the reductions, The Lens remains formidable journalistically.

The ProPublica collaboration, published this September, is a marker of that. The national investigative site brought a capacity for mapping and aerial photos to present the story of more than a century of erosion in a format that was mainly visual rather than traditional text. The Lens contributed star reporter Bob Marshall, who had a hand in two Pulitzers as a wildlife writer and sports columnist at The Times-Picayune, before leaving at the time of the digital switch. By his own account, Marshall had been tracking the disappearance of coastal lands for four decades. The Lens has also been able to coordinate a series of local forum events to extend the reach of the project.

But the biggest yet in a series of editorial successes unfortunately doesn't equate to financial stability. Beatty said that his current annual budget mix is \$500,000 in national foundation support, \$175,000 from local foundations and \$60,000 from individual donors. He hopes to build the individual donor base, attract \$100,000 in new underwriting and sponsorships and sell content to partners. "We've reached a point in our development in which we can no longer afford to give it away to everyone," he said.

The Lens has defined a clear mission: "to engage and empower the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by providing the information and analysis necessary to advocate for more accountable and just governance."

Just as this report was going to press, Beatty said that he has made progress on several fronts. The Advocate is now paying for Lens stories and the Hechinger Institute, an education nonprofit based in New York, is paying to use its charter school coverage. Beatty also said that he expects a large national foundation grant to underwrite operations. So the prospects for sustainability have brightened in recent months, but The Lens, like many a maturing non-profit, still faces a big challenge to find a stream of money to match its journalistic opportunity. Partnerships will be integral to that effort, but right now the details remain to be determined.

The Toronto Star and El Nuevo Herald Investigation

What common interest in an investigative project could Miami's [El Nuevo Herald](#) and the [Toronto Star](#), separated by thousands of miles and a national border, possibly have? The particulars of the story they did together provide the answer – and may also serve as a model of sorts for ad hoc collaborations.

The Star, working outward from a single court case in late 2012, had a lead that numbers of convicted Canadian sex offenders were making regular sex tourism trips to Cuba for encounters with child prostitutes. The route was well-known in the pedophile community but otherwise secret.

Records research took the investigation part of the way there, establishing that Canadian border security officials had no access to a registry of sex offenders, thus allowing the sex tourists to come and go repeatedly without challenge.

Filling in on-the-scene details would be much harder for Star reporters, who were not fluent in Spanish and had no experience making their way around the unfamiliar streets of Havana. Extensive Cuban government restrictions on reporting posed a further challenge.

Enter the Miami-based El Nuevo Herald with decades of experience mining news from Cuba and a senior reporter who could find his way to the most sensitive of information.

At the Star's initiative, a partnership formed. The resulting story was both shocking and actionable. The Star and El Nuevo Herald reporters observed a troubling scene in a run-down area of Havana where men in Maple Leafs and Blue Jays gear were roaming and looking for action in bars and brothels.

The [project](#), published in March 2013, led to reforms in both Canada and Cuba. Canada has passed much stronger laws making the records of child predators available to border authorities and

The Toronto Star and El Nuevo Herald



The Players: Two large newspapers in Toronto and Miami

The Deal: El Nuevo Herald lent its Spanish language skills and experience in reporting information about Cuba. No money involved

Duration: A one-time collaboration for coverage of a specific issue

Challenges: Coordination across national borders

Keys to Success: El Nuevo Herald's connection to the area, including its language; mutual interest in the story; openness to joint work

Success Measures: Led to legal reforms in both Canada and Cuba regarding child abuse

shutting down at least some of the most frequent tourists. Embarrassed Cuban authorities acted to clean up the neighborhood, scattering, if not fully dismantling the trade. The joint investigation won a top prize from Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada, a Canadian group that is part of a global network focused on curbing sexual abuse of children.

Brokering the deal might sound as easy as picking up the phone – but that’s not exactly how it happened.

Rob Cribb, chief of the Star’s high-profile investigative unit, and Manny Garcia, then editor of El Nuevo Herald, went way back. Both had long been active in [Investigative Reporters and Editors](#), Inc. (IRE), an organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting, having spent time together on the IRE board.

So trust and a shared zeal for investigations were already established. Garcia recalls that he began by sending ace Cuba reporter Juan Tamayo to “hang out for a week in Toronto,” getting to know Cribb’s operation and how the investigative project was shaping up. Later Cribb, Tamayo and a photographer spent a week in Havana for the on-the-ground portion of the reporting.

The two parties covered their own expenses, and there was no pressure to monitor or equalize costs as the project developed. While the findings were arguably of bigger benefit to the Star, Garcia disagrees. “For us, anything important we can find out and print about what’s happening in Cuba is a top story. It’s like the Star covering the NHL.”

Story by Toronto Star and El Nuevo Herald Staff

Canadians are major customers in Cuba’s child sex market

Canada is lax when it comes to stopping its sex offenders from going to Cuba and preying on underage prostitutes.


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 + save to my star



Most tourists are drawn to Cuba by the sand, the sunshine, and the culture. But a few tourists - including some Canadians - are drawn by something far darker.

By: Robert Cribb Jennifer Quinn, Julian Sher Toronto Star, and Juan Tamayo El Nuevo Herald, Published on Sat Mar 16 2013

Source: The Toronto Star

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The help with language and maneuvering around reporting restrictions, Cribb says, resulted in a revelatory rounded piece that “was a thousand times better than the standard ‘Toronto man arrested ...’ treatment.”

The special circumstances of the project may make it unlikely that the partners will craft an encore. But typical of collaborators profiled in these case studies, both Cribb and Garcia are avid on the benefits of partnering and jump at opportunities to do so.

Garcia (who has since moved on to edit the Naples Daily News) says that during the same time frame El Nuevo Herald teamed with the local CBS affiliate in Miami for a joint investigation of corruption in the small city of Sweetwater, Fla. Ultimately a number of officials were indicted. He recalls an afternoon sitting at a Starbucks with his TV counterpart, exchanging print and TV script drafts in two languages.

In a general way, Garcia says, this sort of partnering has allowed El Nuevo Herald, a comparatively small paper with a news staff of 54, “to play above our fighting weight.”

The Star, a bigger venture that competes both locally and nationally with the Toronto Globe and Mail, has crafted partnerships with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Radio-Canada on other projects and collaborated on an investigation with the Washington-based Center for Public Integrity.

“The natural instinct (for an investigative reporter) is not to share your documents with anyone else,” Cribb says, “but I have come around 180 degrees on that. There is no downside except ego. And who really cares in the end whether it’s a shared byline.”

But he also concedes “not every one (of the collaborations) we have tried has worked. You are not always calling your pal in Miami.”