Media Consortium “Brain Trust” meeting

December 21, 2016

Dear all,

Thanks to the 17+ people who joined our first call. You can find a complete recording of the call attached to this email.

I will be sending a doodle today for our next call.

I also want to welcome you to invite others to join us. However, I insist on an affirmative action quota. If you invite a white person, also invite a person of color. If you invite a man, also invite a woman.

Instead of a transcript of our last call, I thought it would be more helpful to provide a summary of the discussion.—Jo Ellen

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The question governing our Dec 2016 call was, “What are the most important issues we should talk about if we want to transform the news ecosystem?” The answers mainly focused on trust—how do we create more public trust in journalism?

Fake News. We began with the topic of fake news as a significant threat to democracy. We had a discussion about why the public is attracted to fake news, which surfaced some concerns about the news ecosystem in general:

* On us: the news we produce is not relevant to most people, and is especially not relevant to local concerns in “flyover” country— journalism is too often about communtiies and not for them.
* On us: we are too opinion-based and don’t do enough to distinguish between news and opinion
* On the public: do we need more media literacy? Is the problem that people can’t distinguish between true and false stories? Relatedly, we wondered whether fake news is more appealing to white people than people of color, or more appealing to republicans than democrats

Engagement. If one of the problems is that journalists don’t do enough to make news relevant for the public, how do we fix that? We turned to the question of how to better engage the public and surfaced these ideas:

* Build bridges between local and national so that national news is more relevant to communities
* Transform our relationships to communities so that community members see themselves as journalists and/or see themselves in the journalism we produce;
* Engage in journalism around solutions, rather than snarky gotcha journalism that puts people off.
* Radicalize transparency

Values-Based Journalism. With transparency, the conversation turned to vision and values. A number of discussants talked about making our values more transparent.

* We are in a values war with white supremacists—we need our journalism to define a vision as well, to be based in a set of values
* But others suggested we also need to find common ground with the Trump voters. So this vision set can’t be perceived as being “left” or “partisan.” In a way, it has to be more radical than that.
* Some cautioned—if we embrace values, will we move further away from journalism? Will we lose legitimacy? How do we present as worthy of trust based on values, but not based on partisanship?
* One of our main values must be around democracy. We have to return to a narrative of journalism as being essential to the values of democracy and democratic practice.

There are a large number of questions from this conversation that we will want to follow up on at our conference. I am particularly seeking individuals who would like to lead a working group on the following issues:

1. What would it look like to create journalism for communities rather than about them? How do we transform our relationship to communities so that members see themselves as critical contributors and participants in the stories we produce?

2. How do we build bridges between local and national news (with the aim of making national news more relevant to local communities)?

3. What do we need to do to promte more solutions journalism?

4. How do we define our values? What are values that all journalists share? Is there an additional set of values that progressive journalists share –and should be transparent about?

If you would like to lead one of these groups on the Thursday/Friday of our conference, please let me know: joellen@themediaconsortium.org