Media Seeds Developmental Evaluation Report
Stage 1 - Looking at the early work in a rural Appalachian media desert.

by Laura W. Black, based on collaboration with Michelle Ferrier, Peggy Holman,
and members of the Southeast Ohio Media Seeds planning team.

Project Summary

The Southeast Ohio Media Seeds Project is using a process called Developmental Evaluation, which involves active, ongoing collaboration between project leaders and evaluators. Our overarching goal is to help develop a programmatic model of community-based media innovation that could be shared with journalists and local leaders in similar communities. Through consistent reflection and learning, we have used developmental evaluation to capture what we are learning and use those insights to make adjustments in real time.

As a whole, the Media Seeds Project operates with engagement principles drawn from the work of Journalism That Matters into engagement work in building community: Nothing About Us Without Us, Speak Truth to Empower, and Listening is Our Superpower. These principles guide our project activity and are central to the evaluation of our success: helping communities to thrive with the design of new communication tools with and by communities. We divided this evaluation into two stages, based on the design of the Media Seeds project. This learning conversation discusses our learning from the first evaluation stage by focusing on the project's early work in a rural, Appalachian media desert. This includes what we did to understand the region, select communities for deeper engagement work, and build relationships within those communities. During this evaluation stage, we focused on the questions:

1. How did we enter a media desert in rural Appalachia?
2. How did we gain local support and begin to build collaborative partnerships?
3. How did these activities dovetail with the principles guiding our work?
4. What else has emerged that is not part of the principles?

In our work, we used a variety of methods, both online and face-to-face, to learn about the communities and build collaborative partnerships. We encountered challenges related to culture, geography, and technology that are central to understanding and working in rural environments. This report details what shifted in our work and what we learned from the process. Based on this work, we offer the following insights about entering rural media deserts, which we believe can be relevant to other projects engaging rural communities.

#1 **Consider your identity**: Reflect on who are you and what that means for your relationship to the community. What can you offer? What are your limits?

#2 **Listen deeply**: Use a variety of methods to learn about community assets and needs.

#3 **Make the invisible visible**: Discover the factors that affect the capacity for community members to connect to themselves and others.

#4 **Embrace serendipity**: Be willing to let go of plans to work with the unexpected.

#5 **Treat every community as unique**: Design specifically from what you learn about each community.

Introduction

The Southeast Ohio Media Seeds Project is using a process called Developmental Evaluation as an assessment tool. This approach uses active collaboration between project leaders and the project evaluator throughout the entire process. Based on the work of Michael Quinn Patton, developmental evaluation aims to capture learnings in real time rather than waiting until the project is completed. This approach does more than just capture lessons learned for future projects, it also allows project teams to make adjustments along the way based on what we are learning.

The overarching goal of the evaluation process is to capture our learning from the Southeast Ohio Media Seeds Project and to develop a programmatic model of community-based media innovation that could be shared with journalists and local leaders in similar communities. As a whole, the Media Seeds Project operates with engagement principles drawn from the work of Journalism That Matters into engagement work in building community infrastructure as described in the report *Journalism for Democracy and Communities: A New Framework.* Out of work with journalists and community engagement practitioners emerged the three principles: *Nothing About Us Without Us, Speak Truth to Empower,* and *Listening is Our Superpower.* These principles guide our project activity and are central to the evaluation of our success: Helping communities to thrive with the design of new communication tools with and by communities.

We divided this evaluation into two stages, which are based on the design of the Media Seeds project. This report describes our learning from the first evaluation stage by focusing on the project's early work in a rural, Appalachian media desert, including what we did to understand the region, select communities for deeper engagement work, and build relationships within those communities. A media desert is a community that is lacking fresh, daily, local news and information. Southeast Ohio represents various types of media deserts: those that lack a daily newspaper, those that have broadband access issues, or those communities where local other factors such as family name and politics play a role.

During this evaluation stage, we focused on the questions:

1. How did we enter a media desert in rural Appalachia?
2. How did we gain local support and begin to build collaborative partnerships?
3. How did these activities dovetail with the principles guiding our work?
4. What else has emerged that is not part of the principles?

This evaluation report captures our learning from these questions and is a result of our process of ongoing reflection. This evaluation complements Michelle Ferrier's Media Seeds Report, which provides a detailed account of the project activities during this evaluation period.

Developmental evaluation for this project involved both actively participating in the project work and also engaging in continual reflection about what we are learning along the way. Acting as the

evaluation lead for this project, Laura Black consulted with Michael Quinn Patton to deepen her understanding of the developmental evaluation process. As an evaluation team, Laura Black, Peggy Holman, and Michelle Ferrier engaged in regular conversation to develop evaluation questions and processes and reflect on what we were learning throughout the process. Laura also participated in project activities such as meetings with community partners. The evaluation drew from these experiences as well as materials created for the Media Seeds project such as the student reports and reflections on the local communities, digital ethnographies, and information compiled and shared with communities.

We also engaged the planning team in ongoing reflection as part of the work process. The planning team engaged in biweekly meetings, and we built in time for reflection in each meeting. Laura led reflections by posing questions about what we were learning about ourselves and the communities, what has shifted during the project and why, what surprises or challenges we had faced on the project so far, and how project activities related to JTM principles. Laura also interviewed two students involved in the project to hear their personal reflections on the project work and what they had learned. During all of these activities we kept detailed notes of the conversations, and audio or video recorded the meetings for future reference.

This balance of participating in project work and leading the team in ongoing reflections is essential in developmental evaluation work because it both informs the project work in real time and also helps capture learnings for future. Our hope is that these learnings can help others wishing to spark communication innovation in rural communities.

This report briefly summarizes what we did to accomplish two goals: deepening our understanding of the communities and connecting with local community leaders. Within this summary, we indicate points were our work shifted because the shifts are important in helping us tease out what we learned. Then we reflect on what we've learned by noting the connection to JTM principles and tentatively offering our reflections on five key insights we developed through our early work. We believe these insights have implications for other projects aiming to develop media and communication tools in rural communities.

How We Entered a Media Desert in Rural Appalachia

In order to begin the process of seeding media innovations in rural Appalachian media desserts, we made efforts to deepen our understanding of the locations. Any successful media innovation needs to be well suited for the locality, so we believe it is essential to develop a baseline understanding of the communities, the people, community assets, and the media landscape. The Media Seeds Project builds on prior work in the region by Dr. Michelle Ferrier, principal investigator for the Media Deserts Project, a project that seeks to map media desert conditions emerging in locales across the United States. Using Media Deserts Project data, as well as other topical datasets on opioid deaths and broadband access, we sought a variety of locales in SE Ohio for our design efforts. Our initial activities on the Media Seeds Project occurred between August 2017 and May 2018, during two academic courses taught by Michelle Ferrier.

Students engaged with community members throughout the first year of the project, first through monitoring activities on social media, where they conducted a network analysis of social influencers, content, and key activities that drive engagement online. Students also worked with community members in selected communities to design solutions based on the ethnographic work and community needs and partners. Students developed final reports of more than 20 counties in SE Ohio, that summarized health and news and information-related solutions based on communication audit and monitoring tools.

Students from Ohio University also met with Dr. Clay Carey, whose book *The News Untold*, details the media desert conditions in SE Ohio through the media analysis of regions very similar to our own home county. Students were able to gather insight from a local and an expert into local media conditions. In addition, students also met with Peggy Holman, an expert on appreciative inquiry and dialogic practices, to understand and learn a few practices for engaging with individuals and small groups as we worked with community members to design solutions.

In the fall, students gathered information about rural counties in SE Ohio by using digital media tools. Their deep, digital ethnographic work involved compiling information about the county, including demographic makeup, economy, education, housing, and civic sectors. Students mapped out the county's media landscape by investigating what media served the county and how residents used social media. An example of the digital ethnography for Meigs County can be seen on the Media Seeds platform. All of this student-generated content was compiled and hosted on a wikinetworks site that could be made available to serve as a resource to community members.

As part of the ethnographic work, students developed personas of different residents who lived in these geographic localities. These personas were based on compilations of different sources, including the social media accounts of local influencers. The personas helped students better understand the variety of different types of people who live in the community and their news and information needs.

The opioid epidemic has hit the Southeast Ohio region hard. Health resources are stretched to reach residents with addiction services. Communicating with residents about the ongoing issues and solutions has been challenging work for the existing media. But healthcare access is a challenge for the region, and students discovered this through their social media monitoring work, through their audits of social messaging and finally their recommendations for reaching local residents with health messages.

During the spring semester, students drew on information from the digital ethnographies to propose local, specific social media innovations that could address some kind of specific communication need. For example, Matt Morris developed a proposal for a "Civic Channel" app that would improve communication between local public officials and members of their community. His proposal offered a solution to a clearly recognized communication problem in this

rural media dessert, which was that citizens lacked access to timely information about decisions being made by local public officials and had no clear way to provide input on policy discussions. Matt's proposal offered to develop an interactive "public communications platform that promotes government transparency and encourages public participation." Student work on these proposals included an analysis of the problem being addressed as well as a business model for how to create and sustain the intervention. As part of the work for this class, students pitched their ideas to community leaders, such as [Matt's pitch for the Civic Channel](#).

What Shifted in this Stage? What Did We Learn?

During this first stage of the early work, the biggest shifts we saw were in the way students talked about the communities they were studying. As students learned more about their communities and developed the user personas for different types of local residents, they began to feel more connected to the places they were studying. Purva Indulkar, who was Michelle's graduate teaching assistant for the fall semester class, remembers that students reached a point midway through the term where they began defending their counties from what they saw as misinformed and stereotypical news coverage of the region. Students developed a sense of connection to the personas such as "country boys" and "local business owners" and became very enthusiastic about the counties they were studying.

Matt Morris describes experiencing a shift in his own project as he went from seeing it as just something he was doing for a class to becoming something he could actually do as a real project in his hometown. He describes staying up late thinking about his project every night, trying to work out implementation details so that he could make a real impact on his community. These shifts show that students involved in this early work grew attached to the places they were studying as they deepened their understanding of the assets, needs, and people there.

How we Began Building Collaborative Partnerships

The second set of activities focused on building collaborative partnerships with community members. These efforts moved us from gathering information about the communities identified to building the kind of relationships with local leaders that would be necessary for any intervention or creation of localized media tools. The groundwork for this was simultaneous with the students' early efforts to learn about the communities as Michelle networked with business leaders, local influencers, and leaders of nonprofit and civic organizations. Our collaborations ramped up considerably in spring and summer of 2018 as the Media Seeds project moved into seeding more specific, localized projects.

During the summer of 2018, we zeroed in closely on two counties and worked hard to develop collaborative partnerships in those communities. This involved meetings with potential partners, such as the business leaders in Pomeroy, Ohio, village council leaders of Chesterhill and neighboring towns, and organizations such as Rural Action that work across the region. Members

of the Media Seeds team also attended community partners' local meetings to make presentations about the project. Community partners became part of the Media Seeds planning team and were invited to participate in regular team meetings, which we held via the online platform zoom.

During this time, we also developed a short survey for community members, which allowed us to reach a wider population beyond community leaders. Paper surveys are a gold standard in terms of getting information in remote locations, and we used the Every Door Direct Mail service from the US Postal Service for this service, which allowed us to target particular zip codes and get surveys to every household in the communities. These surveys provided a glimpse into community members' perspectives about their town and their overall access to local news and information. We compiled results from these surveys and shared them with our community partners to help inform our collaborative work.

Members of the Media Seeds team also visited the communities to tour the area, take photos, and meet community members. This trip involved conducting journalistic interviews and photography to create content for the Media Seeds project. However, community members were also given digital copies of the content, including professional photographs, to use in their own advertising and outreach efforts. Community members were also invited to participate in future activities with the Media Seeds project.

What Shifted at this Stage? What Did we Learn?

There were several key points where things shifted for our project during this stage and we adjusted our work accordingly. These shifts were motivated by challenges related to technology, weather, and geography.

Initially we had planned to host a workshop similar to Journalism That Matters' "Create or Die" events to help members of different communities network, develop ideas, and build support both from our Media Seeds team and from one another. As we went through the process of building relationships in these communities, however, it became clear to us that this was not the best engagement strategy for our project. One of our concerns was that travel would be challenging given how geographically dispersed these communities are: traveling between Pomeroy and McConnellsville takes an hour and a half of driving on small, winding roads. Additionally, the region had heavy rain in the spring, which created serious difficulties for people throughout the region and resulted in substantial flooding in Pomeroy, which is located along the Ohio River.

Additionally, we recognized the importance of seasonality for rural communities. Spring and summer are busy times for farming communities as crops are being planted and tended regularly. In Chesterhill, for example, local residents were extremely busy during this season as they prepared for the opening of the seasonal produce auction, which is a major economic driver for local farmers and residents. Given the time of year, it became clear to us that many local business owners and other potential community partners would be unavailable. We realized that a regional

gathering, which asked people to leave their home community and travel to another location for a full day or more, would create economic difficulties for potential participants. In other words, only the most privileged would be able to afford the time and travel. Given these concerns, we shifted our work away from a regional gathering to focus more on locally-grounded, specific communication strategies based on the needs and assets of the particular communities.

Another shift happened when we recognized that our taken-for-granted reliance on technology would limit our ability to effectively work in a media desert. Many residents in these communities do not have high speed internet access, and even those who do experience frequent outages that can take days to resolve. The lack of cell service in some areas was eye opening, especially when Michelle was in one of the communities and unable to call in to one of our planning team zoom meetings because the cell signal kept dropping. She later learned that there is a parking lot at the local library where free wifi is available, but until she learned that insider knowledge, it was impossible for her to use mobile technology in the way she was used to. We also learned about localized efforts to make [broadband](#) internet available through the region, and we shifted our work somewhat to help support our community partners' efforts. It also forced us to embrace multimodal media tools that do not require cellular service or wifi. Finally, we shifted our use of technology when the online platform we were initially using for the project closed down and we needed to move all the content to a new space. This prompted us to explore different online platforms and move to using [zipit news](#).

How the Work Dovetails with Journalism That Matters Principles

The three JTM principles anchor the Media Seeds Project and can be seen throughout our early work. Yet, we have come to see that this preliminary work is also based on a principle that had not yet been articulated. We believe that our work can help develop an additional principle, based on deep reflection about one's own identity that is necessary for journalists and dialogue practitioners before we can enter communities.

When entering media desserts, it is ethically essential to do preliminary work that helps develop a deeper understanding of local communities. We recognize that as university faculty, students, and journalism professionals who are not members of these communities, it is important for us to have humility and carefully learn about the communities before stepping in. Our sensitivity to local community issues is driven by our commitment to the JTM engagement principles and is especially important in our specific Appalachian context. Appalachian culture is known for its combination of self reliance and support for members of their community, which are attributes that can support [community-based innovation](#) and development. However, this cultural commitment to the local community can also lead to suspicion of outsiders. The region of SE Ohio has a history of resource extraction (coal mining, deforestation, hydraulic fracturing, and the storage of nuclear power waste) that was led by outsiders. Given the boom and bust cycle of some of these industries, many Appalachian communities face [substantial and widespread poverty](#). Appalachian

communities are more diverse than stereotypes dictate, but racism is still a substantial and visible problem in the region.

It is unsurprising that members of rural Appalachian communities tend to be suspicious about government, the media, academics, and other outsiders. Unfortunately, practices of parachute journalism and traditional academic research have exacerbated community members' suspicion of outsiders who want to extract information without making any meaningful change in the communities themselves. Because of this cultural backdrop, it is essential that ethical approaches to community change be grounded in a deep understanding of the community, a collaborative approach to working with community members, and ongoing reflection about our role vis-a-vis the community.

Early work conducted by Michelle Ferrier and her students embraces the principle *Listening is Our Superpower* because it recognizes the importance of seeking information and knowledge about the communities. The thorough work done by students in these courses were rigorous attempts to learn by deeply (and in this case, digitally) listening to the communication and information from and about community members. But, the early work is inherently partial—a community cannot be fully understood from an outsider perspective and this is especially important to remember in media deserts, where information available online cannot fully represent the life of the community. This is why the next step, building collaborative partnerships, is essential.

Given that the information is gathered from a distance, it is limited in its ability to embrace the first two principles. The information gathering was rigorous and was done with the principle of *Nothing About Us Without Us* in mind. But, the principle is not fully met because for the most part students enrolled in these courses were not members of the communities they were studying, and most of their information gathering was done through digital media rather than engaging first hand with community members. Similarly, the early work was done with the principle of *Speak Truth to Empower* in mind because students did their best work to get the truth about the communities they studied. However, the early work was focused on gathering a good information base, not sharing the information with community members or empowering them to act. These two principles are better met through our efforts to build collaborative partnership.

In our efforts to build collaborative relationships with community members, we worked hard to embrace the JTM engagement principles. Student work was shared through the online platforms (first on the wiki then later shifting to zipit news). Through our early work we identified local leaders and other community members who were change-makers in their local communities. Michelle and other members of the planning team traveled to the communities to meet with these potential community partners in their locations. We also met regularly as a team using zoom and we shifted meeting times to evenings to make the meetings more doable for local community partners. When it became apparent that zoom meetings were still challenging for community partners, given the lack of consistent internet access or cellular service, we relied more on these on-location meetings as a way to organize with community partners. This meant that sometimes Michelle, as project lead, served as a conduit between the Media Seeds planning team and the

community partners by sharing information between the two groups in what could seem like duplicate meetings. But, given the constraints of our region, this strategy was more successful than trying to convene the planning team members and community partners at the same time. These efforts were grounded in our commitment to the principles of *Nothing About Us Without Us* and *Speak Truth to Empower* because we worked to build local capacity and maintain regular communication with our community partners despite the challenges of technology and geography.

What Else Has Emerged: Key Insights from this Project

Throughout the first year of doing this work, we centered our efforts on deepening our knowledge of the rural communities, building relationships with community members, and designing localized media tools for different communities. In this work we began to develop our understanding of key insights that we believe may travel well into other projects. These insights need to be deepened and further developed, but they are principles that we tacitly drew on in doing this work that we are coming to see as essential, especially in our rural Appalachian context.

#1 -- Consider your identity
To successfully enter a rural media desert, it is important to reflect on who you are and what relationship you have to the community. This means seriously considering what knowledge and experience you bring to the project, how others in the community are likely to see you, and how these things may limit the scope or pace of your work in the community.

In our project, we were keenly aware that there was an important difference between insiders and outsiders, and that this distinction was meaningful to community members. For Michelle, Laura, and other members of our team who were associated with Ohio University, simply living in Athens for several years did not mean we were insiders for any of the communities we entered. We may have been 'in' the community, but we were clearly not 'of' the community. Other aspects of our identities, such as race, class, nationality, and education, positioned us as outsiders. Another member of our team, Matt, grew up in McConnellsville, moved away for work and school, and then returned to his hometown to work as a journalist. Despite having deep family roots in the town, he found that people were suspicious of him in his work as a journalist. His identity involved a dual insider-outsider status because of his journalistic role and his experience away from the community.

Having an outsider view of a community can be very useful because outsiders may see things and ask questions that uncover assumptions and allow for new ways of thinking. However, in the rural Appalachian context, many community members are suspicious of outsiders. So, it was essential that we recognize the context-specific limitations we were likely to experience based on our identities.

#2 -- Listen deeply

In addition to engaging in self reflection, it is essential to learn about the assets and needs of the community. This deep listening builds on the principle "*Listening is Our Superpower*" to emphasize the importance of learning as much as possible about the community before entering. We call this listening deeply because it requires doing more than gathering basic demographic information to really get to know the heart and soul of the place. Listening deeply can help you become a more competent communicator in the community.

Our project involved deep listening in several ways. Students did digital ethnography work as a kind of deep listening and learn about the communities, which also prompted perspective taking and a feeling of attachment to the community. Later, team members visited the communities and began to develop relationships with local residents. We tried to practice this deep listening in face-to-face meetings so we could engage dialogically with potential community partners. Practicing this kind of listening helped us challenge our pre-existing assumptions about people and places that could have prevented us from developing good working relationships with community members.

#3 -- Make the invisible visible
Discover the factors that affect the capacity for community members to connect to themselves and others (e.g., geography, history, technology, temporality, politics, demographics, culture). Many rural communities are invisible to people outside of the community as rural America is stereotyped in particular ways. But even within the communities themselves, events and assets are often unknown because local news and information is not consistently and easily available. To seed rural media deserts with high quality news and information, it is important to understand what factors obscure information and what impacts community members' ability to connect to one another.

In our project we found that developing user personas was helpful because it uncovered different types of people in the communities who might seek out news and information. These personas helped us think about what kind of content would be most useful for these different types of community members, and also helped us develop specific tools and strategies for those groups. Additionally, we recognized the challenges related to technology and infrastructure in rural communities in Southeast Ohio that prevent community members from having easy access to news and information. Identifying these issues and developing a deeper understanding of them can allow us to develop tools and strategies to make the community visible to itself and to outsiders in ways that are responsive to the local conditions.

#4 -- Embrace serendipity
When doing this work in rural locations, it is useful to expect the unexpected. Of course having a plan is important, but given how much travel and technology are central to working in rural locations, planners should be willing to let go of best laid plans to work with the unexpected. Being flexible and responding to changing weather, internet connectivity problems, travel difficulties, or changing schedules is essential. It is not useful to treat these unanticipated events as challenges that prevent project work. Instead, we learned to take a mindset where we were open to learning from people and places we encountered.

In our project, there were several times where meetings were cancelled or plans otherwise shifted. But, our team went on with visiting the communities and doing face-to-face networking with people there. This helped us meet people of all ages, like the young girl who won a bike at a local hardware store, participate in families' local events, like a science demonstration for families at a local library, and see some of the localized community points of pride. These were things we had not specifically planned, but enriched our understanding of the communities and helped us build relationships with people in the communities.

#5 -- Treat every community as unique
Finally, it is important to design tools that are consistent with and build from from what you learn during the deep listening. From an outsider perspective, rural communities might look the same. But the specific assets and needs vary widely, and successful designs are based around those specific assets and needs. In our project, one community had specific needs related to improving communication between government officials and community members. Another community's needs centered on the local business community. The size of the communities also became a criteria in determining priorities. A village of 500 residents has very different needs than a community of 5,000. Existing media entities also played a role in how residents viewed their news consumption and needs. Collaborating with local partners helps to keep the designs well grounded in the assets and needs of that community, but it is also important for designers to be mindful of how the innovations address the unique, specific characteristics of each locality.

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Conclusions and Next Steps

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This developmental evaluation process has provided us with key insights that can shape our work going forward and have implications for other projects with similar aims. Some of our most important learnings are the five key insights noted in the section above:

> #1 **Consider your identity**: Reflect on who are you and what that means for your relationship to the community. What can you offer? What are your limits?
> #2   **Listen deeply**: Use a variety of methods to learn about community assets and needs.
> #3   **Make the invisible visible**: Discover the factors that affect the capacity for community members to connect to themselves and others.
> #4   **Embrace serendipity**: Be willing to let go of plans to work with the unexpected.
> #5   **Treat every community as unique**: Design specifically from what you learn about each community.

In November 2018, we convened a group of project stakeholders to discuss this project, sharpen these insights and develop next steps. The learning conversation consisted of representatives from Journalism that Matters, the Democracy Fund, and the Jefferson Center as well as members of the Media Seeds team. We discussed the report and each of the five key insights, and ended with a reflection on next steps.

One of the conclusions that arose from this conversation was that the findings from this evaluation **expand and reorient foundational journalistic practices.** That is, the project builds on foundational journalistic practices, but require journalists to reorient themselves to local voices and needs in order to adjust those practices in meaningful ways. As noted in our learning conversation, this project reinforces the belief that "unlearning" is important for journalists, and the Media Seeds Project is articulating new practices to add to the journalistic canon. Honoring the voices and stories of communities we are in requires trust that can only come with deep engagement. But this engagement need not be at odds with the aims and goals of journalism.

For example, journalists have interviewing skills, which involve knowledge of how to listen. Similarly, journalists know how to conduct thorough research during investigative reporting. The Media Seeds project builds on and reorients these skills to expand listening to encompass a wide variety of voices, rather than approaching stories as if they have just two sides. Similarly, our project encourages journalists to listen from afar using digital tools, when possible, to build a deeper understanding of each unique community. The Media Seeds project insights also encourage a new approach to older models of "shoe leather reporting" that takes journalists into the communities for longer-terms, sustained engagement. This means moving away from a journalistic model of parachuting into communities to get a story and/or inform a community. Reconsidering investigation and listening as exploration and relationship-building can help reframe journalistic practices in ways that help address community needs and build on what grows locally. But to do so would mean that journalists need to adjust their posture or orientation toward being in service to the community.

The group also concluded that **serendipity** is a meaningful construct for doing localized, community-based work. During the learning conversation many people noted that serendipity is exciting because it promotes openness to new ideas and unexpected events. However, structures should be in place to both prepare for and support serendipitous work. Embracing serendipity should not mean going in without a plan, it means anticipating that plans will change and being open to learning from these deviations. To fully embrace serendipity, though, requires that journalists have support from organizational leaders. If there is not "buy in from the top," as one group member said, then journalists are more challenged to embrace serendipity in their community work.

Finally, the learning conversation group emphasized the **value of developmental evaluation** as an approach to this kind of work. They commented that ongoing reflection is a critical strategy for moving forward productively and that more project leaders should engage in the processes of "learning while doing." While people might consider reflection to be an educational technique, the developmental evaluation process we have used in this project has promoted on-the-job learning, accountability, and coaching in ways that are transferable to other community-based projects.

Next Steps

One step we will take as an evaluation team is to share the results of the developmental evaluation with others who could find value in it. This includes sharing with journalists, community leaders, and practitioners who are involved in seeding localized democratic innovations. To that end we will summarize the learnings captured in this report to create blog posts or shorter stories the can be easily shared in the appropriate networks.

Additionally, as the Media Seeds project moves into its implementation phase, we will continue to use developmental evaluation for ongoing reflection and learning. The implementation phase builds on what we have learned through this earlier work, but it also marks a significant shift in the work. There are multiple localized experiments going on within the larger Media Seeds Project. Success in the implementation will require continuing to nurture the relationships the Media Seeds team built in this early phase, but it will also require new actions that help move the experiments to sustainable, locally-based communication and information strategies. To do this well, we will need to continue to engage in reflective conversation about what we are doing, what we are learning, what is shifting along the way, and what those shifts mean for the implementation of the experiments.