

How Do We Know Engaging Community Matters?

Outcome Harvest Pilot

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Journalism That Matters

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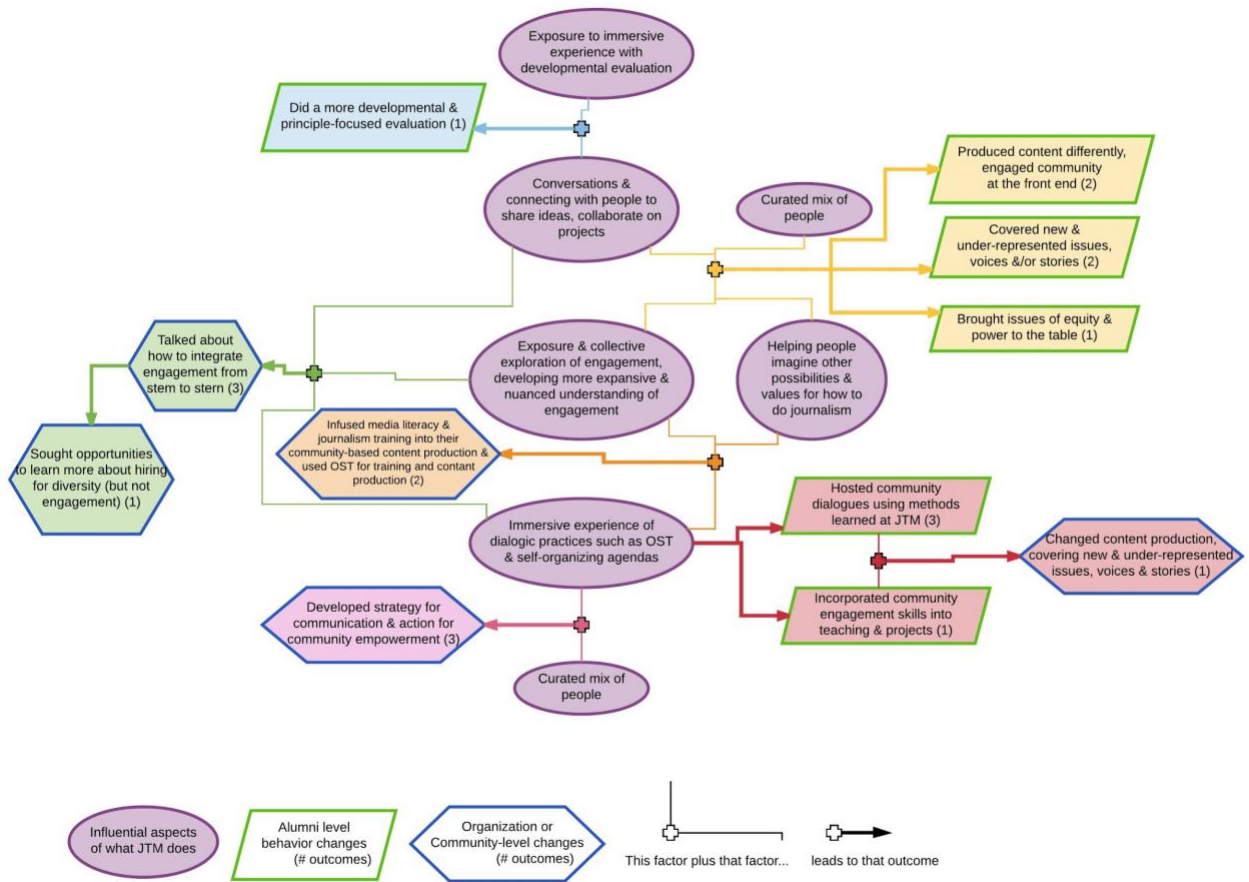
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The respondents

In total, 19 completed outcomes were submitted from six respondents, all alumni of one or more JTM gatherings. Five of the respondents attended their first gathering in 2015 or later, and one attended first in 2005. Five of the respondents attended two gatherings, and one attended only the most recent, in 2017. One respondent, who has attended ten gatherings between 2006 and 2017 submitted draft outcomes, but they were not complete enough to include.

The instrument can be found [here](#). For explanation of the Outcome Harvesting method go [here](#).

Analysis



Evaluation Question 1: What do the alumni consider is the importance of what JTM did that resulted in the changes?

- Curated mix of people
- Financial support to ensure a well-curated mix of people
- Conversations and connecting with people to share ideas, collaborate on projects
- Exposure and collective exploration of engagement that helps people develop a more expansive and nuanced understanding of engagement
- Helping people imagine other possibilities and values for how to do journalism
- Immersive experience of dialogic practices such as OST and self-organizing agendas
- Exposure to and immersive experience with developmental evaluation

“That’s one of its strengths - the deliberateness of inviting people that aren’t all of one ilk, but there is diverse coming together of different people and they have the space to come together without a pre-determined agenda or formal presentations.”

“JTM’s non-hierarchical, collaborative, transparent, inclusive, discussion-oriented way of learning aligned with my values and JTM exposed me to the possibility that I could create media that also aligned with those values. I don’t know that I would have gone into journalism if I hadn’t seen that it was possible to do media in that way.”

“JTM created an immersive experience that made community engagement even more concrete and understandable and of value. He made deeper connections to the value and necessity of engagement. It reinforced the idea of “not just parachuting in” and now he has a more expansive understanding of what community engagement means. He now understands the principles and what it looks like, and it reinforced his commitment and ideas of how it can happen.”

Evaluation Question 2: What have JTM alumni done differently in their journalism work and/or in communities, because of attending JTM gatherings?

Because of **JTM gatherings’ immersive experience of dialogic practices** such as OST and self-organizing agendas, alumni, working on their own or with colleagues in their organizations, began:

- **hosting community dialogues** using the methods learned at JTM. In one case, journalists were at the conversation table with other members of the community (outcomes 16, 17, 18; 3).

These changes are significant because facilitated community dialogue is not typically part of what media organizations do to build trust, nor is engagement before reporting. Typically, reporting happens first, and then engagement is to get reaction after the fact. In these cases, the **agenda was set by the participants in the room rather than the journalists, shifting power and exposing journalists to new ideas and people.**

- Also as a result of the immersive dialogic experience, other alumni who are journalism faculty began **incorporating community engagement skills into teaching and projects** (outcome 15; 1)

Engagement is not generally taught in schools of journalism. Faculty are often not comfortable teaching these practices because they themselves lack the background and experience. So it is significant that these faculty are experimenting with engagement in their own work, and **developing their own expertise so that they can pass on these practices more effectively.**

“Several faculty have incorporated community engagement skills into their teaching and projects. For example, a faculty member is using engaged journalism practices shared at the January workshop and at Elevate Engagement with students in her Reporting I class. Instead of immediately diving into writing stories, the instructor has them spend time visiting communities and talking with a variety of community members, letting story ideas and angles develop from those interactions, rather than imposing them ahead of time. She reports that the student-produced stories have been the most nuanced she’s ever received.”

Because of the **conversations and connecting** with people to share ideas and possibilities for collaboration that takes place at JTM gatherings, coupled with opportunity to see **developmental evaluation in action**, one alumnus allocated resources to hire a consultant (met at the JTM gathering) to **do a more developmental and principle focused** evaluation of a project than was originally planned (outcome 5; 1).

This change is significant because the new methodology **allows the principles and values of engagement to be brought to bear** in understanding the value of the work.

Because of the **exposure to and collective exploration of the breadth and depth of engagement** that **helps people imagine other possibilities and values** for how to do journalism that takes place at JTM gatherings, coupled with **opportunities to connect** and

share new ideas with a **carefully curated mix of people**, alumni working on their own or with a partner they met at JTM:

- began **producing content differently, engaging community at the front end** of content production rather than after the fact (outcomes 6 & 7; 2), and **covering new and under-represented** issues, voices &/or stories. (outcomes 6 & 12 ; 2)
- Joined the JTM board, bringing attention to **issues of equity and power to the table** (outcome 8; 1)

By engaging the public at the beginning rather than after the reporting is done, the project **redraws the geographic and racial boundaries of national conversations**, and cultivates media and journalists interested in **telling stories of under-represented audiences in sensitive and accurate ways**. By bringing power and equity to the table, efforts to create communications ecosystems **where people have a say in the decisions that impact their lives** are likely to be more effective.

“The conversations I had and people I met at the conference helped me realize that if what my project aims to do is to fill a void in coverage, that our capacity to fill that void is strengthened and fortified when we have the public engaged with the project from the beginning – I would never have thought of that. So I decided to add a component to engage a racially inclusive audience from the beginning of the project, instead of just doing outreach at the end of the project, once the content was already created, as is typically done.”

Evaluation Question 3: What changes have communities and institutions undergone a result of what JTM alumni have done differently because of attending JTM gatherings?

The **immersive experience of dialogic practices** provided by JTM gatherings led to **changes in content production** in one alumnus’s organization.

- Reporters in one public media organization began **covering new and under-represented issues, voices and stories**, using new and different sources than they had used before. This occurred after the alumnus learned about OST at a JTM gathering and began using it in engagement events that also involved the reporters in conversation with community members (outcome 19; 1).

Previously, these reporters would only rely on known sources that they had worked with before. Now the **voices** heard in the station’s reporting are **increasing and diversifying**, and the **perspectives** that are being shared in these reporters’ stories are **broader, nuanced and unexpected**.

“Some of our reporters now produce stories using new and different sources than they had used before, people that they met at events we hosted where members of the community and reporters sit together for dinner and conversations. Previously, these reporters would only rely on known sources that they had worked with before and knew they could rely on. Now the voices that we are hearing in our station’s reporting are increasing and diversifying, and the perspectives that are being shared in these reporters’ stories are broader, nuanced and unexpected.”

As a result of the **exposure to and collective exploration of the breadth and depth of engagement that helps people imagine other possibilities** and values for how to do journalism that takes place at JTM gatherings, coupled with **immersive experience of dialogic practices** and **engagement theory and practice**:

- The alumnus and colleagues at the community-based media organizations she founded infused **media literacy and journalism training into their community-based content production**, and **used OST** and other methods for facilitating dialogue as part of their training and content production. (outcomes 13 & 14; 2).

This integration of dialogic engagement, community-based training and content production **produces citizen journalism done at a professional level** that effectively and respectfully **engages communities around complex, sensitive and controversial issues**.

“We are equally committed to both producing high quality content and the [community] training. What makes the training significant is that good media is a mixture of media produced by media professionals and citizens. The combination produces citizen journalism done at a professional level.”

The **exposure to and collective exploration of engagement**, the **experience of dialogic practices**, and the opportunities **for conversation and connecting with people around new ideas** provided by JTM gatherings led to some **changes in hiring priorities**, but there is still a ways to go.

- Two alumni from one public media organization began **talking about how to integrate engagement into hiring priorities**. It helped one of these alumni to keep the conversation going about **how to integrate engagement not just in hiring, but “from stem to stern.”** However, so far, little real progress has been made toward the goal of “baking engagement into the newsroom.” Despite the excitement about hiring for engagement that was engendered at the JTM gathering, there **has not been follow through to create job descriptions that include engagement**. One new person was hired to bring new perspectives to the reporting team, but engagement is not part of this person’s job description (outcomes 1, 2 & 4; 3).
- In this same organization, the conversation about integrating engagement into hiring priorities extended to the HR director as well, whose **action was to seek opportunities to learn more about hiring for diversity (but not engagement)** (outcome 3; 1)

The significance of these outcomes is that even when there is vision at the top, leadership to follow through and **make the institutional changes necessary to fully integrate engagement into the normal operations of a media organization does not come fast or easy**. Because diversity is an organizational priority, built into the HR director’s performance expectation, **change toward inclusion and diversity is taking place before the infusion of community engagement organization-wide**.

JTM’s **curated mix of people** who together **experience immersion in dialogic practices, especially self-organizing agendas**, led to strategic **changes for a community-based advocacy organization**.

- After meeting at a gathering, two community activists **hired another alumnus to assist in developing an anti-gentrification strategy** (outcome 9; 1).
- As a result of this partnership, the community organization is now **re-strategizing to focus on communication and action**, not just grievances, in order to support a thriving community (outcomes 10 & 11; 2)

JTM's **diverse mix of participants brought together content, communications and activism expertise to empower communities to learn about cause-effect trends in urban planning and get ahead of decisions** that are hard to reverse once the City and developers have signed contracts.

“With my assistance, a community landtrust has been planning a civic engagement process to educate the residents, organizations and activists so that everyone is on the same page with enough and right information on issues of gentrification and about what action to take to organize themselves to secure the future of their own community...I am consult[ing] to help them create a strategy to preserve the cultural heritage of the community and its sustainable economic health.”

Evaluation Question 4. What principles, values, roles and/or activities are associated with the outcomes (and how do these inform the emerging Framework)?

Peggy Holman’s analysis looked at the patterns of activities in outcomes. She noted:

- **All but one respondent incorporated engagement into their work**
 - Revised approaches to content production, engaging community at the front end
 - Revised approach to strategy work (focus on communication and action, not just grievances)
 - Revised approaches to teaching to include community engagement
 - Community dialogue with journalists participating
- **All but one started new endeavors with engagement as central. The one made diversity - another theme of JTM’s work - central**
 - Trust project with engagement as central feature
 - Diversity hiring (no follow through as yet)
 - Engaging community at the front end redraws the geographic and racial boundaries of a national conversation
 - Strategy for community thriving
 - New series of community/journalist dialogues
 - Engagement incorporated into teaching
- **All facilitated community conversations**
 - Two used Open Space
 - Five noted the conversations were around sensitive and controversial issues
 - One hosted conferences
- **All noted collaboration with other partners/organizations**

Stephen Silha noted some similar patterns and possible principles:

- philosophical / theoretical shifts as a result of participation in JTM events
- importance of including unheard voices, including youth and people of color
- encouragement of innovation / experimentation
- community of practice has been established, even if fleeting
- less fear of tackling “gnarly problems”
- use of Open Space models a potential new power dynamic
- importance of transparency in our gatherings, and by extension, the news/storytelling process
- impetus to take action on long-simmering issues/challenges/possibilities
- more clear connection between journalism and community vision / self-concept
- our original hunch about including the “whole system of journalism,” including managers and money people, was correct
- importance of chance meetings with people you might not otherwise meet

Ashley Alvarado’s analysis distilled some “lessons” for JTM.

- Networking has become a signature element of JTM events, which is included in the OH so far but not spelled out explicitly.
- The Engagement Corps aspect provides a basis of understanding, vocabulary, and resources to move forward. The respondents who discussed adopting OST are good examples of this.
- Accelerate & Thrive is the one area that I’m not seeing represented in the outcomes.

Evaluation Question 5. Is Outcome Harvesting a useful method to learn about multiple-level outcomes of engagement work and should JTM pursue a full outcome harvest from additional respondents over a broader span of time?

In this pilot nearly all of the respondents submitted outcomes related to their participation in 2015 Experience Engagement and 2017 Elevate Engagement. Therefore, it can be seen as a useful evaluation of the last two years of JTM’s work. However a major limitation in this regard is that only five people of the more than 100 who attended were included in the pilot. Also, because of the small size of the pilot, we don’t know whether the fact that we didn’t hear much about some JTM practices that seem important (such as supporting diverse, curated participation through financial assistance) is due to those practices actually *not* being important, or we didn’t ask enough people.

Extrapolating to earlier years might be risky; even though JTM’s methods and principles have been consistent, the context and people have changed over the years. Assuming that the outcomes for earlier years would be similar might be an unwarranted leap. The fact that one respondent from much earlier (2006) lends some credence to this leap, gathering more outcomes from earlier years would add both richness to the realm of outcomes that you might discover as well as additional evidence that the outcomes presented here are reflective of a larger picture.

Thus, a larger Outcome Harvest could focus on earlier years and/or more participants from EE2015 and EE2017, depending on what you want to learn.

That this pilot covered a fairly narrow window of time also does not allow you to take full advantage of the Outcome Harvesting method. OH is especially powerful as a method for observing change and impact in complex systems over time. A longer term harvest would give the opportunity to track ripple effects of new developments. For example, Michelle Garcia's projects were just at the incubation stage - what happens when they get off the ground? We're probably all wondering what will happen at Capitol Public Radio - will leadership "bake engagement into its hiring practices" or not?

To take advantage of OH's power in observing change over time, you could continue to harvest outcomes that tell the story of wider and wider ripples from EE2015 and EE2017, or you could intentionally sample JTM alumni from over the years asking them to share changes that they have observed at multiple levels (their own behavior, changes in their organizations and projects, community changes).

(If you do the latter, keep in mind that for older outcomes, it is difficult to reliably remember them let alone their ripple effects, and adding the substantiation step, which we did not do in the pilot, might be worthwhile).

Interpretation (conclusion)

JTM alumni have incorporated the learning, insights, experience and connections gained through gatherings into their work in a variety of ways, including:

- Working within their organizations and communities to develop strategies for engagement, including having conversations about integrating engagement into hiring priorities
- Allocating resources to fund new engagement projects and evaluations of engagement
- Hiring consultants (and serving as consultants) to create strategy for community thriving,
- Changing the way they and their colleagues "cover" communities (Engaging community at front end and covering new and under-represented issues, voices &/or stories) and teach journalism (learning about engagement so they can teach about it)
- Incorporating community engagement skills into university teaching and projects.
- Training community residents in media literacy and creation
- Using OST and other engagement and dialogic practices for hosting meaningful dialogues in communities, in their newsrooms and in their media training programs
- Restrategizing to focus on community-based communication and action, not just grievances
- Joining board of engagement-oriented organizations.

These actions have wide significance in newsrooms, workplaces, universities and communities.

Media organizations are using the principles and values of engagement to understand the impacts of their work and how to make that work more valuable to communities. They are

beginning – though slowly – to make the institutional changes necessary to fully integrate engagement into hiring and other aspects of normal operations.

In universities, faculty are experimenting with engagement in their own work, and developing their own expertise so that they can pass on these practices more effectively.

In communities, conversation agendas are being set by the participants in the room rather than the journalists, shifting power and exposing journalists to new ideas and people. Communications professionals are lending their expertise to support community advocates to understand the power and economic dynamics that impact their future and to develop and communicate effective strategy.

The boundaries between newsrooms and communities are becoming permeable as media producers engage the public at the beginning rather than after the reporting is done. When this takes place, the parameters and focus of local and national conversations shift, as does the power to determine what is “news.” Reporters have access to and are seeking out a wider range of people, making an effort to tell stories of under-represented audiences in more sensitive, accurate, nuanced and unexpected ways. Moreover, people who’ve historically been left out of media representation and participation, are gaining the tools and access to create and share their own media and to initiate relationships with media institutions on their own terms.