Experience Engagement
Community Platform Findings

Introduction
A group of journalists, community leaders, academics, and technologists met in Portland in October 2015 to discuss the intersection of Journalism and Community Engagement. Going into the meeting leadership had identified the desire to develop a digital platform that extended the outcome of the 3-day event. It was original described as an interactive Field Guide to allow participants to discover, use, and contribute resources about what works to connect media professionals and communities. Through the gathering, the tool evolved more into a platform to help support the evolving community of practice. To inform development of the platform we listened to the participants to hear what kind of needs the community had for such a tool. Employing a values analysis we identified “what matters most” to the different stakeholders in attendance as well as the functional and thematic elements that attendees identified as valuable and/or desired. The intent of this report is to share those findings to inform next steps of the project. The report concludes with questions and suggestions to guide next steps.

Methodology
In order to assess the values of stakeholders, identify desired functionalities of the platform, and identify themes that stakeholder are interested in discussing data was collected from the following sources:

- Participant observation;
- Notes from short interviews with conference attendees; and
- Relevant documents created by various stakeholders (e.g. original field guide explainer, harvester notes).

Qualitative and emergent coding processes were used to conduct a values analysis to surface a set of shared values and potential value tensions.

The values analysis was based on identifying what conference attendees identified as most important to their participation in an online community platform. This focused on identifying qualities they desired to inform how people interact in the collective spaces and with one another.

Analysis of functionalities was based on identifying what types of features attendees identified as desirable. Themes were defined as issues or content that conference attendees
want to continue discussing with others within the community.

Findings
The findings below are divided into three core areas: Values, Functionalities, and Themes.

Values
The values analysis identified shared values, or “what matters most” to attendees in regards to the tool. This list includes the top shared values, meaning those values which support was shown across different stakeholder groups. One core value tension arose that is also discussed and warrants further discussion/attention.

Through the values analysis a total of 12 values were identified. The following list includes top values that were expressed throughout the conference and that multiple stakeholder groups identified, indicating it was a shared value.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOP SHARED VALUES</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>QUOTES/EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Transparency, uninhibited access to information; free of value judgments</td>
<td>“We want to create an environment that...communicates the values of openness and listening.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Quality of interactions that emphasizes focused attention on what others have to say and their experience</td>
<td>“Listening is a big part of engagement...we want to put that at the heart of this space.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Desire to work with others to solve problems</td>
<td>“I want to be able to post and see who is interested in working with me and we go from there, working together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Learning</td>
<td>Desire to learn from others who share same goals and/or are in similar positions</td>
<td>“What are others doing that I can learn from?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Placing confidence in each other to act in the best interest of all</td>
<td>“I would love to talk to people I know I can trust and not be worried that someone will take what I have to say and distort it in the media. I want to talk to people who are thinking about things the same way I am.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Space*</td>
<td>Ability to share information with selected group of individuals</td>
<td>“I want to participate in a space that is safe for me to share my ideas with like-minded journalists who are doing good things for my community and want to hear about the good things we are doing in the community.”</td>
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*Value Tension - The Safe Space value may introduce an important value tension in this
The desire for civic leaders to create “safe” spaces may be contradictory to the reporting values of journalists such as openness, objectivity and transparency. It also could influence how inclusive this space becomes and creates questions regarding who is invited and what kind of vetting process occurs for new members. This particular value was mentioned by three civic leaders I spoke with as well echoed in the secret Facebook group that was created for the gathering. Security and privacy of information will undoubtedly be important for all, but for civic leaders it means something specific. It was expressed, as the desire to know that the information they shared will not be accessed by those who are not working in their best interest, or for information to be used in a manner that is detrimental to those in public positions. As one leader said, “I don’t want to deal with ‘gotcha’ journalism.” I strongly recommend further values exploration with this particular stakeholder group. It is possible they are not interested in participating without certain constraints in the system to limit who can engage, but further evaluation is necessary.

**Functionalities**

Functionalities are descriptions of the type of features attendees described as they imagined using the technology to support their work. The following inclusive list includes features that were expressed more than once throughout the conference. The functionalities fall into three primary categories: Connecting, Information Exchange, and Usability/Aesthetics. They are not ranked in any particular order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNCTION/FEATURE</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking*</td>
<td>Ability to connect with others, share contact information and see who has common interests or access to necessary resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/collaborative space</td>
<td>Creating connection and collaboration between journalists, communities/ providing space for people to work on projects together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking by community*</td>
<td>Create a system to surface most relevant resources according to community. One approach to this is to create customization based on user type (e.g. “advanced” or “beginner” or “journalist” “citizen”). Another approach is to allow users to rank or “upvote” resources so that anyone coming to the site will see the resources identified as “most useful” at the top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMATION EXCHANGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information exchange</td>
<td>Support sharing of information and resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repository of resources/ability to post links to resources</td>
<td>Have a place where people can post useful links and share resources to support engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curation</td>
<td>Digital curation is the selection, preservation, maintenance, collection and archiving of digital assets. Digital curation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
establishes, maintains and adds value to repositories of digital data for present and future use.

Show starting point

Ability to share the starting point for a given project in terms of resources, support, etc. For example, indicating that there was external funding available, support from management, etc. The intention was that someone who is interested in doing a similar project can understand what they need to have in place to get started. (There could be possibility for updating to show real-time progress).

Building Blocks

Desire to show how projects progress over time, with a building block type of visualization that makes it easy to understand as a module or incremental steps. The “building blocks” are an opportunity to both highlight success stories (or failure and why) as well as show process to others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USABILITY/AESTHETICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search and filter function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization of resources</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: While desire was expressed for all of these functionalities, it may not be necessary to include all of them. Adopting a “lean” or “agile” process of building this community space can allow for new functions to be incorporated over time. When the larger team convenes, further discussion and evaluation of each component can help inform which ones, if not all, to move forward with from in the first iteration.

Themes (Taxonomy)

Themes include any type of content attendees discussed wanting to address, that can be content for the digital space.

Throughout the weekend a few clear themes emerged to inform what type of content is of interest to the community of users. The following is a list of commonly expressed themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>QUOTE/EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurements for Engagement*</td>
<td>“Showing the outcomes of this work helps me make the case to my editor... What are standard ways to evaluate these outcomes?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Works and What Doesn’t</td>
<td>“I’d like to see examples of what others are doing and when it works and when it doesn’t.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics of Engagement**</td>
<td>“What ethical implications do we need to consider when engaging with the community?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How To” Guide on Engagement</td>
<td>“What skills, practices, etc. do we need to keep in mind? (e.g., interview skills, cultural etiquette tips)”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>List of resources to support engagement efforts.</th>
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</table>

**Share stories**

Community and community leaders share stories of community engagement to inform journalist reporting. One particular way this is possible is by sharing how projects unfolded and providing insights into how to accomplish this work (see building blocks functionality above). The building blocks approach also provides an opportunity to highlight success stories.

The themes represented above primarily reflect what journalist identified as relevant topics of discussion. Sharing stories was the one exception. For non-journalists “sharing stories” was also about the desire to use this space to shed light on the projects they are working on in their communities for journalists to access. Said one civic leader, “I would love to have an opportunity to tell journalists about the work we’re doing in the community and help them get information so they can reflect back and report on that positive work.”

**Measuring and Evaluating Engagement**

*Measurements for engagement is an important topic area for attendees. It is clear that there is a need for journalists to justify community-based work, and finding evaluation methods and measures is necessary to do so. Many attendees discussed the desire to learn how others are able to make the case and gather support in the newsroom. It is clear that this issue is ripe for discussion and many attendees value the opportunity to talk to and learn from others about it.

**Ethics of Engagement**

**Attendees also indicated need and interest in addressing the ethical implications of community engagement. It is clear that there is some tension between some of the standard norms of journalism and what it means to engage with the community as a journalist. Questions arose throughout the conference concerning the ethics of engagement and it was clear this is a topic of discussion many are interested in continuing.***

Some questions raised by attendees are:

*“How do we set expectations for those you interview as well as those for whom content is produced?”*

Attendees wanted to know, what if any obligation do we have to the communities we engage with? What about to our readers? What if those end up in conflict? Addressing these types of questions as a community is important to attendees.

*“How do we balance engagement with objectivity?”*

Objectivity as a value of journalism seemed as though it was in conflict with the community engagement approach to journalism for some attendees. Yet, they were not sure the two are mutually exclusive. Again, thinking as a community and including in the dialogue young journalists, journalism educators, and veterans was discussed as valuable. Somewhat related to this is the question of whether community engagement violates the code of ethics of journalists?
“Is there a way to engage but not become too entangled with the community?”

Another topic emerged regarding the education and training required for community engagement. Educators were especially interested in thinking out loud about how best to prepare students and want to work together to answer questions on how to provide students with proper training for community engagement.

Next Steps and Recommendations

- Conduct further values interviews with non-journalists to get more input from under-represented group with goal of gaining clarity on intentions of this group in participating.
- Convene group of volunteers based on resource survey and share results.
  - Develop process to prioritize functionalities and begin to identify platforms that support selected features.
- Resource gap analysis suggests need to get material resource support – continue to develop strategy to increase access to this resource.

Addendum

Non-Journalist Interview Insights – DRAFT 1/6/2015

In December 2015, five non-journalist attendees were interviewed to gather further understanding of their interest, needs, and values in regards to the Experience Engagement online platform. Interviewees were asked a set of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview process.

Multiple goals informed the interviews:

a) Learning about the desire and interest non-journalist showed for participating in an online space for the Experience Engagement community;

b) Providing insight into the behaviors and practices of non-journalists in the community (online and offline) since the conference;

c) Addressing the value tension that was surfaced in the first phase of the project regarding privacy and creating a “safe place” for interactions between journalists and non-journalists;

d) Identifying any concerns or barriers that may limit non-journalists’ participation in the online platform; and

e) Identifying non-journalists values and the types of features that support these
Findings are presented below and organized according to each goal and with recommendations where applicable.

A. **General interest and desire of non-journalists to participate in**

In general, interviewees indicated some level of interest in participating in an online community to continue addressing the topics that surfaced from the Experience Engagement conference. Not all interviewees were as enthusiastic about their own participation, but agreed that it would be exciting to see the community flourish and develop further. However, every interviewee said they are enjoying observing the community post-conference and are interested in watching it evolve and grow. (Barriers to participation are further discussed in section D below.)

**RECOMMENDATION:** Continue to involve and engage non-journalists in the development of the community. If the goal is to indeed expand beyond usefulness for just journalists, leadership will need to communicate how the tool can be beneficial to non-journalists as well. This can be done through ongoing discussions, regular invitations to the non-journalist community to participate and inform community rules of practice etc. More detailed recommendations are provided in sections C,D, and E below.

B. **Behaviors and Practices of Non-Journalists in online community settings**

Interviewees expressed different levels of engagement with the current Facebook page, varying from lurking to posting and responding to other posts. Most said they occasionally checked the Facebook group page and read posts but only one said she actively contributed to conversation by posting on things she was doing for her work that she believed may be of interests to others in the group. Topic relevancy is a major barrier to participation on the Facebook page for interviewees. Three of the interviewees indicated that they did not think the topics posted on the current Facebook page were relevant to them and thus did not comment, share, or post. When probed further interviewees indicated the conversations seemed to be specific to journalists and felt they could not contribute or did not gain from engaging further.

Interviewees had some misgivings about whether the *Experience Engagement* community was a right fit for them given the emphasis on journalism. Related to the topic relevancy issue, the interviewees suggested they did not feel there were many others in the EE community that shared their same goals, interests, and/or occupational roles. As we know, journalists were a large portion of the conference attendees. Two of the five interviewees said they have continued to build on conversations and relationships that emerged from the *Experience Engagement* conference. One interviewee said she never felt like this was really her community to start with but attended out of curiosity; she has not maintained any contacts since the conference.
RECOMMENDATION: If the goal is to invite non-journalists to participate in the EE community, create easy paths to connect the non-journalists to one another and increase visibility so they know there are others like them in the community. This can be supported through networking functionalities.

Every interviewee mentioned the need for an offline component to the community in addition to the online component. Face-to-face interactions are highly valued by interviewees and several mentioned preference for participating in communities that move beyond online only engagement. The potential social networking function of the EE platform is seen by interviewees as something that fosters relationships online that can then be moved to offline interactions as well.

RECOMMENDATION: Continue to explore the relationship between what occurs online and how leadership can support offline activities as well. Ongoing yearly conferences or monthly meetups may be ways to keep the community interacting offline. What is important is to build from is knowing there is a desire to move beyond online only interactions in terms of actions and activities that are supported through the platform.

C. Value Tensions – Creating a “Safe Space” for Journalist and Non-Journalist interactions

In regards to the value tension regarding a “safe space,” all of the non-journalists felt that it was important to establish rules of engagement for the online community and then they could elect to opt-in or opt-out accordingly. Two interviewees felt that participation in the group meant they understood some information could go public and that individuals should decide for themselves whether it made sense to participate. Two other interviewees felt that some discussion within the community should take place and there could be an opportunity to say “This is still private” with the understanding that community members would respect such instructions. The final interviewee was much less open to interaction with journalists which is discussed in the next comment.

Building and maintaining trust is very important to non-journalists interviewed. One interviewee expressed serious concern with the relationship between non-journalists and community members and indicated her interactions and participation in the EE community may be limited as a result. The other four interviewees discussed various means to address the potential tensions such as having a “vouching system” in place so that anyone that enters the community desire for a “safe space” for non-journalists to engage with journalists was mentioned by a few of the interviewees. however, most suggested that if norms and rules of engagement are made clear then they would self-select and opt-in or opt-out accordingly. In general, interviewees felt the platform should include different mechanisms to support trust building (further discussed in section E below).
Keeping the online community private or narrow is preferred by most interviewees, mostly to maintain focus and to keep the group on topic. Several interviewees commented that once a group goes public it can quickly become unwieldy and often loses topic focus. When that occurs, the interviewees said they often stop participating because it is no longer productive or relevant discussion and can feel more like spam. However, it is important to note that three interviewees explicitly said they did not want to be exclusive necessarily but wanted measures in place to make sure community members are similarly-minded and motivated.

RECOMMENDATION: Currently the plan is to allow members to invite others into the Facebook group, which may be one mechanism to translate into the EE platform. One interviewee mentioned a “voucher” system in which new members are introduced into the group by an existing member who “vouches” for them and provides a brief background post to explain their inclusion in the group. Systems like this support trust-building and accountability and can be considered good options.

RECOMMENDATION: Should non-journalists be targeted as users for this platform, creating and seeding conversations that are pertinent to non-journalists from the beginning will be valuable. Seeing representation of their interests is a clear path to increased engagement. In advance of launching the tool connect with some non-journalists to identify topics of interest and potential seed discussions to include from the earliest stages of the community.

D. Barriers to Participation in Online Communities

Topic relevancy is a major concern for interviewees and is a barrier to participation. Most interviewees said if the topics don’t address their concerns they are unlikely to participate in the community. Currently topic relevancy is an issue with the EE Facebook page for some of the non-journalist interviewees and has limited their engagement.

RECOMMENDATION: To address topic relevancy issues with non-journalists consider holding a conversation with several in a group setting to identify what issues they are currently facing and consider those topics for seeding initial discussions online. Also, continue to monitor engagement from non-journalists in the Facebook group to see what topics emerge. Once the platform launches regularly follow-up with this sub-section of the community to identify whether they are engaged/still interested.

Finding a balance in sending notifications is important as interviewees said they need some reminders but do not want to be overloaded. Interviewees said striking the balance with online communities can be difficult but that too much information can feel like spamming and they tend to stop paying attention. At the same time regular reminders or updates are seen as valuable.

RECOMMENDATION: Choose a platform that has selection options for reminders so that individuals can decide whether they want daily or weekly updates from the group. Also,
make sure any emails from leadership are timely, relevant, and not superfluous.

E. Non-Journalists’ Values in Design and Preferences for Platform Functionality

The primary values of trust, collaboration and listening are well-supported by non-journalists and closely mirror the values of importance surfaced in the first phase of the project. Interviewees mentioned the three values as important to the types of interactions they hope to see reflected in the EE online community and platform. One difference was the value of “openness” was not as well supported, as non-journalists saw this as potentially in conflict with the value of trust-building.

The functionalities of information exchange, collaboration, and networking were identified by interviewees as important, aligning with the findings from the previous phase. The networking component was seen as particularly valuable with non-journalists as the interviewees are interested in connecting with others who are in similar positions as their own. One interviewee said it would be valuable to have a link to other social networking sites for members such as LinkedIn profiles so one can easily get a sense of who is in the group. Collaboration was mentioned by two interviewees as a valuable function to support as they hope to continue building

RECOMMENDATION: There is ample support to move forward with the functions we have discussed so far such as a social networking component, a space for individuals to actually collaborate online. Having required logins, links to other social networking sites such as LinkedIn, and using a voucher system to invite new members can be implemented to support the value of trust.

RECOMMENDATION: Community rules of engagement should be discussed openly and decided upon with some level of group buy-in, as it is clear non-journalists have some concerns that would be best be addressed by the community. As the platform is developed an open invite to those interested in participating in that discussion can be sent and holding the conversation in an online forum and/or posting notes from the discussion for transparency is highly recommended.

All interviewees saw this community as an opportunity to be able to have access to media and indicated interest in using the platform as a means of sharing their own work to gain media coverage. For non-journalists, the idea that they could have access to journalists who cared about the community engagement work they do was exciting and was seen by interviewees as a value-add of the EE community and platform. While there was still some hesitation regarding the trust relationship between journalists and community leaders, in general there was strong support for creating connections between the two.

RECOMMENDATION: Fostering the relationship between journalists and non-journalists will take concentrated effort but the EE platform can be a space that bridges the divide and shows tremendous opportunity. Careful management of the space, through community-established rules and moderation will likely be necessary, but if done well this
The following is a list of specific features mentioned by interviewees that would be useful to them:

- Chat features to support collaborative work
- Profiles to identify members’ expertise and background for networking and collaborating
- An algorithm that would suggest other members or topic/discussions that may be relevant based on what a member is following or participating in already
- Place to share stories and provide links to relevant resources
- Way to identify what a successful or failed project started out as and track its trajectory
- A way for a non-journalist to quickly identify journalists who may be interested in reporting on specific projects or work in the community

Acknowledgements

Data collection, analysis and findings provided in this report were provided by Dr. Sheetal Agarwal, Principal Communication and Community Engagement Strategist at Kwilt Strategy.

Meeting Hosts of Experience Engagement

- Journalism That Matters is a nonprofit that convenes conversations to foster collaboration, innovation, and action so that a diverse news and information ecosystem supports communities to thrive. We believe journalism matters most when it is of, by, and for the people.
- Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication (SOJC) is the gathering place for innovation in communication and civic engagement. In this moment of profound transformation, the Agora Journalism Center is re-imagining and redefining communication for the social good. We believe that the future of journalism and the future of democracy are intertwined.

Thanks to our Major Sponsors

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