

take care
make care



Dispatches from the Future of Local News

Care Collaboratory



*The shortest distance between two people
is a story. — Margaret Wheatly*

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Hello!

We're so glad you are reading these words. You're on the precipice of diving into some big, important ideas that are vital to humanity. In essence, this entire resource is about humanity: preserving it, uplifting it, privileging it over the pressures of efficiency, money and our own comfort.

We've created this zine in community with a few dozen caring, thoughtful people who do their best each day to consider how actions, words, and intentions combine to make other people feel, think, and act. Their insights, observations, tips, and provocations have strengthened all of us who participated in the Care Collaboratory. And we'd like to offer a taste of this experience to you through this co-created publication. To get the most out of this resource, we have a few suggestions:

- Make time for yourself. Pick this up when you're not between meetings, or about to switch tasks. Time is a form of care, and giving it to yourself will allow you to better explore how you can care for others.
- Get comfortable in your body. Take a moment before diving into the sections that call to you, and settle into your chair, bed, hammock, or whatever position you do your best reading.
- Absorb what you can, and close it when you're content and return another day. We've curated a variety of ideas and resources so that you can choose your own adventure.
- Lastly, give yourself some credit. You're doing what can be so hard right now: caring enough to explore something deeply. We're grateful you're here and invite you to take three deep inhales and exhales, and then follow wherever your energy takes you.



Welcome

Welcome to the Care Collaboratory

jesikah maria ross

In July of 2022, I received an email invitation to the Future of Local News (FLN) Camp in Atlanta, Georgia. I hadn't heard of the group or the event, but a quick look at the participants made my jaw drop: It was a who's who of folks who were dreaming up new ways to serve their communities through participatory, community-rooted media. Some had created local news start-ups, others worked at regional journalism support organizations, a few were funders or organizers pushing forward a racially equitable future for local news. There were media researchers, designers, and makers. Most worked in BIPOC-centered organizations. Their ethos and the aim of

the camp was so different from all the other journalism events I'd ever attended. I jumped at the chance to participate.

Actually, "jump" might be a misnomer. Trudge is probably more accurate. I had just left nearly a decade in a public radio newsroom pushing forward community-engaged journalism practices. It had been anything but easy. I felt like I'd been paddling hard upstream for years. I didn't even realize how exhausted I was. I needed a clear, still pool where I could rest, rejuvenate and feel buoyant again. FLN Camp turned out to be just that place.

The Camp ran for two and a half days using an "open space technology" method where participants create the agenda.

“We had a who’s who of folks dreaming up ways to serve our communities through participatory media

That gave everyone a chance to voice their needs and interests and organize their time around them. It also gave us a chance to explore the passions and concerns of peers.

Over the course of the event, the topic of care kept popping up. We talked a lot about what an “ethic of care” might look like in news organizations, and how it might be operationalized. We wondered how we’d even define care and what kind of organizational culture supported it.

What tactics and practices could we use to generate care?

The most amazing part of the Camp, I discovered, was that we were invited to identify key themes and propose working groups to continue exploring them. Instead of a report that gets circulated or just leaving with fresh ideas and inspiration, the FLN Camp had on-going peer learning and support baked in. I was smitten. I was also deeply intrigued by the concept of care in journalism.

As I dug into some research, I started to see care in journalism as a three-legged stool. One leg represented institutional care: how organizations create a culture of care with staff and volunteers. It’s hard to extend care when you aren’t feeling it in your own workplace.

The second leg was self care: how we attend to our own physical, emotional, spiritual, and creative needs. How we set limits, create routines, and engage in practices to sustain our souls help us thrive and attend to the needs of others.

In the late stages of the coronavirus pandemic, several journalism support organizations began offering workshops, tool kits, and conferences devoted to mitigating burn out. They took on bolstering organizational care and self care, two critical support pieces.

But no one seemed to be focusing on the third leg of the stool: care in the storytelling process. How do we enact care when examining who gets to select and tell stories, how and where they are told, how stories are heard and responded to? How do we center care as we strengthen the ability for all affected (sources, audiences, community members, reporters, publishers) to understand the context in which stories are generated, not to mention the impact the content has on how people live in community?

Equally important, how might integrating care practices into our storytelling processes fuel the kind of community change that many of us are working toward?

Change like a greater sense of belonging, increased trust (of each other and our organizations),





and broader civic involvement to collectively address pressing issues.

As I scanned the journalism landscape, I couldn't find any groups or initiatives exploring those questions. It felt like a gap that I could help fill.

That's how I came to apply to FLN in fall 2022 for support to create the Care Collaboratory: six virtual monthly gatherings from February to July 2023. The sessions were designed to:

- Explore practices and conditions that lead people to care for each other
- Get inspiration, examples, and resources that help evolve our work
- Help articulate the why and how of this work, and some definitions
- Build a community of practice with care at the center

To shape the effort, I conducted surveys to discover the kind of topics that most excited folks, who'd be game to lead an activity, and what would make the Collaboratory experience meaningful.

I roped in Jennifer Brandell (CEO of Hearken) as a thought partner and put out a call to fellow FLN members interested in participating.

We talked about what an “ethic of care” might look like in journalism

What Made the Collaboratory Unique

I'm an experience designer. I thrive on creating interactive events in which people connect more deeply to their own dreams and with each other. The Collaboratory gave me a chance to experiment with ways to craft that kind of experience and get meta with it by intentionally infusing care into every aspect of the effort, starting with who was in the room.

An interdisciplinary cohort

The pre-meetings surveys I conducted revealed that participants hungered to connect with people across the journalism field. So I reached out to journalism

66 What tactics and practices could we use to generate care?

scholars and support organizations, newsroom leaders, editors and reporters – from legacy media to university programs to grassroots publications. I also felt like we would benefit from interacting with practitioners in other disciplines, so I recruited artists, group process facilitators, and health care practitioners to join the cohort. At the project launch, we had 31 people from throughout North America working in five different fields in a wide range of roles and organizations.

Holistic design

Our monthly sessions were just 90 minutes and done over Zoom. My design challenge was to curate each session to engage the body, the mind, and the spirit. I did that by weaving together:

- Embodiment activities like breathing (conspiring!), mediation, and dancing to get grounded in our bodies.
- Storytelling exercises, many from playonpurpose.com and liberatingstructures.com, that personalized the topic of care and role modeled activities participants could integrate into their work.
- Peer-led presentations covering theories, frameworks, and approaches that center care in community storytelling, followed by conversations dedicated to exchanging ideas, tools, and resources.
- Breakout group discussions to grapple with emerging questions, big and small.
- Poetry to stoke people's imagination and rekindle their passions as they return to their lives, workplaces, and homeground.



Encouraging experimentation

There are so few spaces where people feel genuinely comfortable taking risks. But how can we evolve our work if we don't try new things? And if we don't have easy, supportive ways to get feedback?

I worked to make the Care Collaboratory a place that invited and celebrated experimentation.

We started by discussing how people wanted to give and get support.

What would help us

pilot new approaches?

How could we develop a

culture that

embraced

"thinking in first drafts," as

one group member put it,

or testing new ideas? The

community guidelines we

developed created a

foundation of openness to build on.

Next, I did something personally risky in each session. From leading a "community wiggle" to attempting new Zoom room tech feats to facilitating a complicated storytelling exercise. And I was totally transparent about it. Sometimes these experiments worked; other times they flopped. But role modeling vulnerability, and the warm landing I always received, helped reinforce a culture of experimentation.

Lastly, I worked with each presenter to identify a curiosity or something they wanted

to try out. Then we

workshopped how we could do that in the

Collaboratory. One person, for example, piloted her

book talk. A duo led the group in defining what

we mean by care. Yet another engaged the

group in creating their own templates for

operationalizing care. Each presenter also

had a chance to experiment and get

input to strengthen their work.



What Happened?

This publication aims to give you a snapshot of the ground we covered, and what it felt like.

Just as the Care Collaboratory was co-created by those involved, this document too is the work of many hearts and minds. I'm incredibly grateful to everyone who joined me on this journey and contributed to this effort. And to FLN for making it all possible.

I didn't have a clear vision of what success looked like when I launched the Care Collaboratory. That was another amazing gift of this experience: I didn't need to name my measurable objectives up front.

I did know what others wanted to get out of the experience, and reading their evaluations gives me a deep sense of our collective achievement.

A quote from one participant, in particular, made me swoon.

"jesikah's work to create, hold and move people through a collective space is a profound gift. Her facilitation, her gentle leadership, her thoughtfulness and her ability to be a powerful THOUGHT

“We started by discussing how people wanted to give and get support”

PARTNER is so transformational. I appreciated specifically how she remained endlessly focused on two oppositional things - holding space for casual connection AND making the time actionable and meaningful.

This is the best definition of success, on a personal level, that I can imagine.

But more broadly, success would look like you reaching for this publication whenever you need a little inspiration. And that you share it with your networks. Maybe most of all, success looks like care rippling out into our lives and storytelling work.



Big Care-y Questions

Jennifer Brandel & jesikah maria ross

The Care Collaboratory generated more than just great vibes, ideas, tips, insights, and 59 pages of typed notes. It bubbled up the power of 103 great questions! Some were personal. Some rhetorical. Others remain existential. In the spirit of journalist and author Krista Tippett, we invite you to “live into these questions” with us.

As Tippett describes in her *Living The Questions* series, she was inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke, “*who understood that when we are unable to live the answers to the questions in our midst, we are then called to hold, love, and live the questions. Our world is defined by raw, aching, open questions . . . that we must live now if we hope to live our way eventually into new answers together.*”

One of the big raw questions facing our industry now is around artificial intelligence (AI). If AI is coming for many of the jobs journalists and journalism used to do, one thing it *cannot* do is fundamentally enact care. We think it’s a wise investment to improve our care practices.

On the following pages, we share a collection of some of our favorite questions posed during the Care Collaboratory. Perhaps meditating on these, or free-writing your answers, or discussing with a friend or colleague, might lead you to living into new answers?

We care and dare to dream.

“What brought you joy as a kid? What do you love to do?”

Personal questions to warm up and connect to your individual experience and purpose:

- If you were a vending machine, what advice would you dispense?
- What brought you joy as a kid? What did you love to do?
- Why is care important to you? Why does it matter in your storytelling work?
- What does it feel like when you are cared for? Or when you care for others?
- What helps make you feel emotionally safe? How can you sense it in yourself? How can you notice it in others? Do you compare what is being said with body language?

Questions to reflect on the purpose and practices of journalism:

- How do your natural interests and biases influence how much care you take with sources and stories?
- What creative tactics have you used to listen better?
- What does it look like to acknowledge when listening has happened?
- How does your institutional context enable you to listen with care?
- How does your institutional context hinder or thwart your ability to listen with care?
- If care is not part of your institution's culture, how can you prioritize care work (while keeping your job)?
- A budget is a record of what your newsroom values. Where does care show up in the budget?
- If we want to ensure that we center care at our very foundation, how can we make policies that enshrine it?
- What are some examples of the harms and ripple effects of carelessness from the world of journalism?
- What reporters or kinds of media have you been impressed by in how they care?

Radical questions that may really bust open what's possible:

- What would it look like to be able to bring some WOO WOO (love, joy, exuberance) into the newsroom and not have to apologize?
- How, as a source, could you tell your full, true story if you have no connection with the person interviewing you?
- Across the landscape, a central feature in care is allowing people to feel seen and feel heard. So in journalism - is the product necessary? Or is the value in the process itself?
- What is another framework that news can use that is not about efficiency, which disincentivizes care work?
- What if journalism's responsibility is to distribute responsibility for care? (Learn more by reading Chapter 4 of *Meaningful Inefficiencies* by Eric Gordon and Gabriel Mugar)

“What does it feel like to be cared for? Or to care for others?”



Go Deeper: Centering Care

The Paper Towel Theory: How institutions can better serve through deep listening

Eric Gordon

Have you ever found yourself waving your hands underneath a paper towel dispenser in a public restroom? Do you try out new configurations of arm gyrations to trigger the sensor to roll out a piece of paper for your wet hands? If a simple swipe doesn't work, perhaps you try a zig zag, or a figure eight. You know the machine wants you to do something, but you're not exactly sure what. You cut it some slack, because it's just a machine, and not capable of deciphering your precise needs at the moment, so you try again and again, dancing like a circus monkey to make it deliver what you need. Still nothing.

Now you have a decision to make:

keep trying to adapt to the machine's system, or reject it all together and dry your hands on your pants.

"The ordered world is not the world order," the philosopher Martin Buber wrote in his 1923 masterpiece *I and Thou*. I love the book; it's about our relationship to each other, to the natural world, and the divine. The book has inspired generations of theologians and feminist thinkers concerned with care, including Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto. But this line, tucked away in an unassuming corner of a chapter's end, has stuck with me perhaps more than any other line.

The ordered world is not the world order. Of course it's not. But if you think



back to your performance in front of that paper towel dispenser, or pause and take a look at the institutional structures we've built around us more generally, it would seem that that is precisely our delusion. We have created economic, political, and social systems that manifest their purpose and value through the creation and maintenance of order. That paper towel dispenser only cares about the order it's been programmed to manage, and we bend to its rigid worldview.

We have made government institutions with rigid bureaucracies, ostensibly in order to mitigate discretion and corruption, wherein the imposition of order (long, redundant forms and procedures) is the dominant form of interaction. We have news organizations that have structured the enterprise of creating information for the public good with little attention to the public's needs, extracting from the specific for the good of the general. We have surrounded ourselves with machine-like institutions theoretically designed to support the publics they serve, but as our technology gets better and better, we have been enculturated to serve them.

This tension is particularly important when we consider the decades of harm many of our institutions have perpetrated on communities. In cities throughout the

“This is listening that is relational, aware of differences in worldviews”

United States, government organizations have actively ignored communities of color, allowing economic, educational, and health disparities to grow. News organizations have actively ignored or objectified these same communities, ballooning misinformation and harmful stereotypes that continue to stigmatize and strip agency from people. The result is rapidly deteriorating trust in nearly every institution in American life, particularly government and news.

The systems that created this harm have not been overtly illiberal or antidemocratic. In fact, these same institutions often boast about their

“Deep listening is flexible: The listener must be able to adapt

community engagement efforts. The problem is that the interfaces created to connect the institution with the publics they serve (town meetings, audience comment threads or forums) have largely been created by the institution, within the logics of the institution. They reinforce the values and value of the institution, and too often fail to capture what really matters to people.

While institutions might listen by taking in feedback within a clearly articulated structure, this mode of listening is insufficient for them to be responsive. Quite simply, if people don't trust the institution in the first place, then they will not speak freely. If they don't have confidence in the institution, meaning if they do not believe that change is likely, or even possible, then they will not speak freely. For our institutions to truly be responsive, they need to listen deeply. This

is listening that is relational, aware of differences in worldviews, and flexible.

- Deep listening is relational. To listen is to acknowledge not just what the speaker is saying, but what they need. Listening does not always require a response. It communicates simply that the listener is present and that the speaker is heard. It is trust in the presence of the listener that motivates one to speak. Relationships strengthen when interactions are persistent, not just episodic, or just-in-time.
- Deep listening acknowledges differences in worldviews. Institutional rigidity forces audiences/constituents to bend to its way of knowing the world. For example, when a reporter is on a deadline and needs sources for a story about a local shooting, breaking

the story quickly dictates interactions with the impacted community. Efficiency eclipses care. But if the institution took the time to understand the values and needs of the community, through direct conversation, or even through transparent, machine-aided insights, the negative impact of this value misalignment would be mitigated.

- Deep listening is flexible. The listener must be capable of adapting. Before listening, there must be clear pathways for modification, and they need to be clearly communicated to the speaker. This is called open-ended listening, where change is possible, but wherein the outcome of listening is not necessarily known to the institution prior to the interaction. Instead of showing up with a survey

because you already know the right questions to ask, show up with questions about the right questions.

Next time you are dancing for your paper towel in a public restroom, remember that the dispenser is providing you with a service, but on its own terms. You are bending to meet its expectations. You exist within its system. Our institutions don't have to be this way. They can and should deeply listen to the needs of those they serve. Only then can we pivot from our drive to create good institutions to, instead, creating just institutions.

Build Trust in a Changing Industry

Bringing care, identity, and community into journalism practices

Sue Robinson

I stumbled onto the concept of an “ethic of care” while I was writing a book about how journalists are engaging in new ways to build trust in their news content. Over four years, I documented the new skills and roles resulting from this emergent journalism movement, from community building to conversation facilitation to collaboration to identity trainings – all work that centers community in newsmaking.

But I struggled with how to describe it as a new paradigm. One of my doctoral students named Elaine Almeida was centering an ethic of care in her work with

Latino men processing traumas through Instagram posts. Through her, it became clear to me what I was really documenting was how journalists were becoming caregivers.

Traditionally, reporters are taught to care only in the abstract – about democracy, audiences, government institutions, etc. They are taught a “Grand Virtue” kind of caring, with dominant values like objectivity and the American Dream. They are taught not to care about individuals or groups in their neutrality. Any evidence of this latter kind of “caring” results in discord within the profession,



66 Engaged journalists build trusting relationships and approach people with direct and explicit care

such as when Black reporters were told they cared too much about Black people to cover Black Lives Matter movements. The profession, operating under this paradigm, is failing.

The press's failure stems from many reasons but has at its core a breakdown in staying relevant with communities for whom the American Dream is not working out so great. As politicians have perpetuated the narrative that mainstream news publishers care only about

profits and "liberal agendas," half the population have turned toward conservative misinformation sites that peddle in fear and stoke resentment, playing up self-care for the individual rather than care for the whole.

But the intention behind the "engagement journalism" movement is meant to counter that, asking journalists to act as caregivers.

In the early 1980s, American ethicist and psychologist Carol Gilligan published the formal "ethic of care" theory to show how women empathize in their moral work. Then, public deliberation scholar Joan Tronto theorized that an ethic of care in democracy would include "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible," as she wrote in *Caring Democracy*.

I was particularly drawn to the blueprint that Tronto laid out for how to manifest an ethic of care in public communication spaces:

- Attentiveness (e.g. we must know the needs of others by attending to others),

- Responsibility (e.g. we must feel responsible for others' care),
- Competence (e.g. adopting an ethic of care requires action with appropriate resources and effort),
- Responsiveness (e.g. we must adjust our caregiving according to the needs at hand, for the person or entity specifically and not by simply imagining what needs we ourselves might have), and
- Solidarity (e.g. we must understand and accept collectively that care is essential to a working democracy and a thriving humanity).

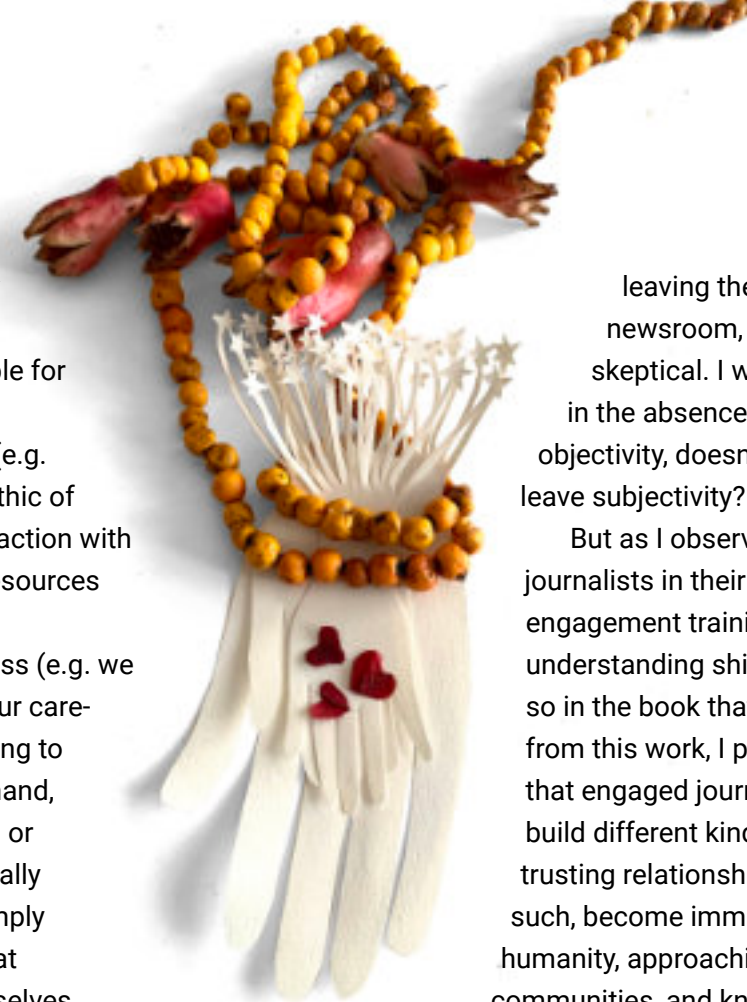
However, applying this framework to journalists requires more involvement in audiences' lives — in direct opposition to the mandate to stand a critical distance apart from communities. Because I still identify as a journalist 17 years after

leaving the newsroom, I remained skeptical. I wondered, in the absence of objectivity, doesn't that just leave subjectivity?

But as I observed these journalists in their engagement trainings, my understanding shifted. And so in the book that emerged from this work, I propose that engaged journalists build different kinds of trusting relationships and as such, become immersed in humanity, approaching people, communities, and knowledge

with direct and explicit care. This is the first major paradigm shift for the mainstream journalism industry in a century.

What would this look like in practice? Per Tronto's blueprint, it means thinking about attentiveness as listening and learning, responsibility as taking on the mission of community builder rather than only a storyteller. Activities would include checking quotes, sending questions ahead of time, following up with communities



after stories have run, allowing sources to interview the reporter, being present beyond the story, asking different kinds of questions, and understanding that different people need different kinds of care. It also means committing to engagement as a fundamental part of the job (competence) and being responsive to different constituents, appreciating that each story affects different populations according to the power dynamics of that context. It means reporting and producing in solidarity with communities to help cities understand the problems, connect stakeholders and research solutions.

But care theory has some limitations. For one thing, it assumes that all mainstream journalists care in the same ways, and my data show that journalists engage according to their identities as racial, aged, able-bodied, gendered, moneyed, educated beings with varying histories of caring.

This is where my main conceptualization for the book comes in: an identity-aware care. I call for a more radical embrace of personal and professional identities toward the ultimate goal of trust-building between journalists and communities. If reporters were encouraged to

activate their identities in their reporting, their relationships with communities would be more profound and their reporting more accurate and relevant.

Within this approach, journalists promote and reproduce qualities such as empathy, cross-difference dialogue or attentiveness, responsive reliability, identity introspection, a responsibility to marginalized peoples, and explicit compassion using, competently, a justice lens as individuals with contexts, politics, histories and identities in solidarity with their communities. A focus on these kinds of engagement strategies move the journalist from witness to proactive collaborator. They move from stenographer to listener, connector, and mediator.

But we have a long way to go as we are coming off a decade of political policies that turn people's focus into an understanding of the individual as a vessel of self-care. With *How Journalists Engage*, I provide a blueprint toward reclaiming that relevancy in a way that not only buoys democracy but also our souls as journalists and community members through a caring storytelling practice.

Define Your Terms, Design Your Results

Making care understandable, assessable, & actionable

Jihii Jolly &
Jillian Melero

How do we define 'Care'? How is that reflected in our institutions?

When you stop to think about it, care is all over the map. There's a massive spectrum of formal to informal providers performing acts of care all the time and in invisible ways in our homes, with our friends, with our family, and for ourselves. And then, of course, there are institutions and structures in society that provide care with very different incentives.

Working at a feminist economics organization for the last four years broadened my thinking about why appropriately defining and valuing care

is crucial for progress in any industry. I'm currently researching a book project about it. At the beginning of my writing I like to do a "landscape scan," or survey of how a concept shows up in different spaces, to broaden my thinking. In this case, I looked for institutions that in some way operationalize care or provide care as a service. Once I picked a few examples, I reviewed and noted how they break down their standards of care into different tiers and how they evaluate the level of service.

Below are five types of care that stood out to me that feel completely different from each other.

HOSPITALITY CARE refers to the hospitality industry's way of ranking hotel services. Different countries and bodies have different criteria for how hotels receive their star ratings. For example, the European Hotelstars Union is the body in Central Europe that defines standards of care in the industry. It does so on a five-star scale. A "one-star" hotel must provide a clean environment and clean showers, and that's about it. In contrast, a "five-star" hotel has requirements for how many hours the staff should be available to you, parking, and whether or not you will receive a personalized greeting when you arrive at the hotel. Hospitality care is fascinating to me because the criteria are assessable. And it's also revenue-driven. So what you pay for is the kind of care you'll get.



The **CARE ECONOMY** looks at care as a type of work that contributes to or can be factored into the global economy. Care work is defined broadly as work or relationships necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of all people, young and old, able-bodied, disabled, and frail. This is a broad definition, but it's a basic human need and necessity. As a sector of the economy, it includes those responsible for providing care and services that contribute to the nurturing and reproduction of current and future populations, ranging from child care to elder care, education, health care, and so on. If you'd like to nerd out about this stuff, look at "Measuring Care: Gender, Empowerment, and the Care Economy" by feminist economist Nancy Folbre in the *Journal of Human Development*. Folbre has done foundational research on the care economy. She breaks down categories and examples of care work to understand its impact on women and their participation in the economy. This ranges from unpaid care work, what you're going to be doing in the home, caring for your children, caring for your parents, caring for relatives who might be sick or disabled, and caring for yourself, from informal market work to actual paid employment.





FOSTER CARE refers to the temporary placement of children and youth with families outside their own homes due to child abuse or neglect. The goal is to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment. To become a foster care parent, you typically go through an agency, and they would assess if you can meet a child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs. This safety-driven form of care is defined completely differently than the previous examples.



SELF-CARE sounds like an easy one. But it's actually quite complicated. We also all have our own definitions of it. According to the World Health Organization, self-care is the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability, with or without the support of a health worker. It's individually driven care and our capacity to do that, which includes everything from physical to mental health.



DUTY OF CARE is a fiduciary duty that directors or officers of a corporation have to make decisions that are in the corporation's best interest. This is legally driven care. You can be assessed on your ability to provide a certain level of care or whether you are currently providing it. Duty of care, in this case, is the duty by which a corporate director or officer is required to perform their functions in good faith in a manner that they reasonably believe to be in the corporation's best interest. Again, the assessment for that is completely different. Who is assessing you is also different.



This mini landscape scan can help us all think broadly about how care can be defined and what the criteria for it can be in different contexts. As you start to think about your definition of care in storytelling, I want to leave you with this question: How might we define care in our work in a way that allows it to be actionable, enforceable, and easily understood or otherwise teachable?

Keeping the House Warm: What Trust-Builders Know about Care

Alexa Miller

One way to understand care is to understand the concept of entropy.

That probably seems grim or overly cerebral. Stay with me.

Entropy means the system is no longer thriving. It's falling apart. The underlying scientific principle is that entropy occurs when a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work becomes unavailable.

In other words, order dissolves as heat gets lost. But what is that heat in the first place?

The way I see it, care is that *thermal*

energy – warmth. Just as Hestia, the goddess of the hearth whose arrival converts a chilly house into a *hygge* home, is signified by the warm hues of an enkindling fireplace, care is like the sunlight that nourishes a seed to sprout. It is loving human attention – the kind that gives the benefit of the doubt and validates lived experience while maintaining an expansive, life-giving perspective on the system as a whole.

That very same *thermal energy* is missing in, for example (a common one in healthcare), the doctor who decides to categorize a patient as “crazy” rather than

66 Societal entropy is preventable though systems that live the values of care

grapple with the complexity of symptoms that challenge his base of preconceived knowledge. Entropy alert!

Harmful interactions such as these demonstrate the particularly wounding nature of trauma wielded by those in positions of care-based power – parents, educators, physicians, church leaders, journalists – so insidious that it breaks trust, causing division. Such positions are sacred to our social fabric and quickly become damaging when held with objectifying or transactional approaches that see others not as human but as a threat, an opportunity, or as food. As journalism innovator Jennifer Brandel remarked recently, “misrepresentation may be the leading cause of suffering in the world.”

Care, on the other hand, is accurate representation, which is facilitated by humility and systems thinking: seeing others as interdependent with you personally while recognizing their contact with aspects of the world beyond your view. It is a curious attention that takes the opportunity to learn rather than to default, in uncertainty. Such care-driven attention builds trust that enables, rather than discounts, the lives of others. Hestia’s hearth is a fitting image because to receive that “thermal energy” of care feels wonderfully warm. It reflects the precise experience of feeling at ease in one’s own home: belonging.

Who feels at ease, and who does not? Who gets care, and who does not? Who holds the burden of providing care, and who gets to be care-free? Whose care labors are recognized, and whose efforts remain unseen? Whose needs for care and their costs are accounted for, and whose are not?

Such dynamics of care directly reflect to whom a system awards power and privilege.

Where is care happening within our societies? Industries like education, healthcare, journalism, and childcare make up the living energy upholding

what thriving we have. And they are hollowing out.

The crises of childcare that inhibit working parents (especially mothers), in concert with the rapidly decreasing time allocations for clinical medicine, and the newsrooms prioritizing fast-made clickbait over investigative journalism demonstrate the devaluing of care-full work and suggest a link with the entropy of a chillingly frayed and polarized America.

The dwindling of these industries is akin to a furnace losing its power source. And then what happens to the house?

Don’t take that like entropy is unavoidable, and chaos is always lurking. That’s fear talking.

Societal entropy is preventable. If you don’t trust my perspective as a teacher steeped in patient care, trust it as someone who has lived in homes both icy and warm.

The way to outplay entropy is simple: systems that live the values of care. Three in particular:

- Health: care values health as our primary resource. Care trusts that well-being comes in concert with – and not at the expense of – the

well-being of others. Care protects the sanctity of human life, operating in reverence to its value as part of efficiency.

- Accuracy: care values narrative – honest narrative. Not the propaganda



“Whose care labors are recognized? Whose efforts remain unseen?”

of a power-serving story, but an evolving and ever-updating knowledge base representing and co-created by the expanding whole. Care prioritizes clear-eyed accuracy over being right, recognizes it's a collaborative job, and trusts in its processes with curiosity.

- Improvement: care aspires toward improvement, with a primary recognition that our existing knowledge bank is flawed. Learning at the edge of the unknown feels risky — especially in rushed situations, or when one's sense of identity, expertise, or comfort feels threatened — this takes courage. Care assumes that risk because it plays a long game: weaving a strong social fabric.

Living the values of care draws from radical listening and steady logic, which in purest forms are simply expressions of love. Care-driven leadership emboldens systems to thrive. It is the most highly reliable insurance plan for preventing entropy.

What is the temperature of your system-home? Is the thermostat rising or falling? Where can care be restored?

As my health humanities colleague Gretchen Case teaches, “Care is not simple to explain, nor is it something anyone can live without.” Who has given you care? Beam them some love. How do the contributions and values of their care factor into your bottom lines? How can you bring that to the people you serve?



This this at home: Generating care

How to Create an Emotionally Safe Space

What is emotional safety? How do we achieve it? How do we create it for others?

Megan Finnerty

I am passionate about creating emotional safety in my community-centered journalism work. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments describes emotional safety as when someone "feels safe to express emotions, security, and confidence to take risks and feel challenged and excited to try something new."

That looks different for everyone, depending on the medium, the audience, or the outcome we seek to create. Here's a look at some questions I ask myself to operationalize emotional safety and how I answer them. I hope these prompts and responses help you to bring care into your storytelling work with

communities, communities, whether in-person, virtual, one-time, or ongoing.

How do we create emotional safety? This work requires a commitment to creating a space where expectations are set and met for a specific group of people, at a certain time, in a limited context. Creating emotional safety is a commitment to specificity and place-making through asking questions and making choices designed to meet your invitees' emotional, social and sometimes spiritual needs.

Why does this matter? What happens when people don't feel emotionally safe? At minimum, the people you're trying to reach will not want to stay in the space you've created. And if they stay, they may



66 Creating emotional safety is a commitment to specificity and place-making through asking questions and making choices

not want to come back. Beyond that, people may feel taken advantage of, shocked, unprepared, and worse. And what many of these feelings share as the root cause is this: people will feel like something was asked of them that they could not provide, or did not want to provide. The experience may create feelings about some emotional and spiritual work related to "living up" to these expectations.

How do I create an emotionally safe space? What does that look like?

Creating an emotionally safe space is part of a set of behaviors that make places welcoming, comfortable, and suitable for what people are working to accomplish at a given time.

1. Set Goals: Know what you're working to accomplish. Be specific and detailed. Be narrow. Be clear on what you are NOT doing. For example, we are hosting a live storytelling event featuring everyday community members as curated by the local newsroom. The newsroom is doing this to create empathy and support democracy by encouraging people to gather and see each other as neighbors worth caring about. Community members attend because they want to be entertained and feel a sense of community. Community members tell stories because they have something to share, and they think it will be fun, challenging, and essential in their lives in some way. We are not reading essays. We are not doing open mic. We are not performing poetry. We are not featuring slide shows, music, etc.

2. Set Expectations: Know when, where, and whom you're working with.

People's expectations vary by time of day, venue, nature of event, etc. You expect





cursing at a late-night rock concert but not a morning religious service. You expect things to start on time virtually, but within 10 minutes in person. People's expectations begin with the venue. You expect comfort at a big civic theater, but might anticipate something edgy at a black box.

People's expectations vary depending on the organizers. If civic groups are involved, you might expect professionalism. With students or experimental groups, you might expect more risk. People's expectations vary if something has age ranges, dress codes, and other signifiers. If children are involved, you might expect something interactive and emotionally safe. If something is black tie, you might expect something with a lot of ceremony and little vulnerability.

3. Manage emotional safety for one group of participants at a time.

Emotional safety for performers or officiants differs from emotional safety for audience members or staff. But usually, you'll have different groups in the room. Plan for everyone by picking and work-shopping ideas for one group at a time.

Ask yourself what your values are vis à vis this group. For my work with community-based storytellers, some key values are:

66 The values we have for our storytellers are different than the ones we have for audiences

- They must be able to return to their jobs, their communities and their families without harming or compromising their relationships.
- They must feel good about the experience, that it makes sense for them personally, professionally, and spiritually.
- They must know what they are getting into by participating so we don't accidentally do harm to them by letting them share their stories.
- They may not do harm to others by sharing their stories.

What values will be important in your place-making? The values we have for our storytellers are different values than the ones we have for audience members:

- The audience must know what to expect and feel we're giving them this.
- The audience must not feel like the storyteller wants something from them other than attention.
- The audience must be open to receiving stories. We need to help them prepare to do this.

The stories must be universal and able to be received by diverse audiences of everyday people.

4. Ask yourself what language you need to write down to outline these values.

Do you need a script? An onboarding document? A guide? A series of FAQs and primers? You might need a LOT of language, or just a few lines.

Some of the language we scripted early on to help inform our storytellers includes:

- "We can only produce stories that support our storytellers' three primary roles: who you are in your family, at your job, and in your community."

- "We will work with you to make sure you don't share anything that would jeopardize your relationships or role in those spaces in your life. It's not that we think you'd intentionally want to light a match and run. It's that some things in life need a lot of context to understand, and we've only got eight minutes."

5. Ask yourself what behaviors support these values.

Do you need training? Rehearsals? Do you need onboarding sessions? Do you need to send pre-event emails and prep notes? Do you need people to agree to things in writing? Verbally? One-on-one or in a group?

That is a start! I know it's a lot, but making emotionally safe spaces is a TON of work! And let's not even get started on renting the right chairs and figuring out the parking! These are some ideas to get you thinking about what emotional safety is, how to create an emotionally safe space, and what that space might look like for different groups of people. Don't worry if it seems overwhelming at first! It takes a lot of thought, a lot of planning, and a lot of work to make these things happen.



Want to bring more care into your media project? Here's a tool for you!

Liz Miller

Participatory media projects have taught me how making time to *reflect* at different stages of a project is an important form of care. By creating an *ongoing space* to check in, we can help ensure that the purpose of a project is in sync with the purpose of the participating individuals. Some reflexive processes are *planned*, like a weekly check-in, a rough-cut screening of a film in progress, or an end of a project debrief. Others are *informal* and happen over a meal, or a shared ride that becomes a spontaneous debriefing session.

Reflections are important at the end of a project, when we want to make meaning of what we have done or share the experience with others. But too often, when we try to recount the story behind a collaborative process, we tell a one-dimensional, or at least a linear, story. We forget to include the complexities, the conflicts, the break throughs. We forget to include the informal moments or even the failures that offer a more complete

picture of a process. This was my experience. In the past when I wrote or spoke about collaborative projects, I tended to focus on a groups' accomplishments and less on the messiness and unforeseen discoveries behind the scenes.

Several years ago, when I finished production on [The Shore Line](#), a multi-year collaborative documentary, I wanted to find a meaningful way to reflect on and narrate the collaborative process. I reached out to my colleague Dorit Naaman, who was also ready to reflect on her long-term collaborative project, [Jerusalem, We are Here](#). I proposed that we reflect *together*. We quickly realized that we needed some prompts and a structure to do this work. We discussed key turning points, and asked each other questions about how we made decisions, addressed

conflicts, and consulted with partners. Our questions and conversations kept evolving and over time we realized that we had all the ingredients for an online tool kit, what would become [Mapping Participatory Media](#).

As Dorit and I were developing our reflection tool we began sharing it at conferences, leading workshops, and we even developed a graduate course to teach with the tool called "Ethics, Care and Participatory Cultures." We realized that we also needed a planning component for our tool kit. Planning is another form of care, what I think of as *anticipatory care*. By discussing and anticipating possible scenarios around authorship or outcomes, before a project begins - a group can start to align individual and collective purposes.

How to Use The Mapping Participatory Media Tool

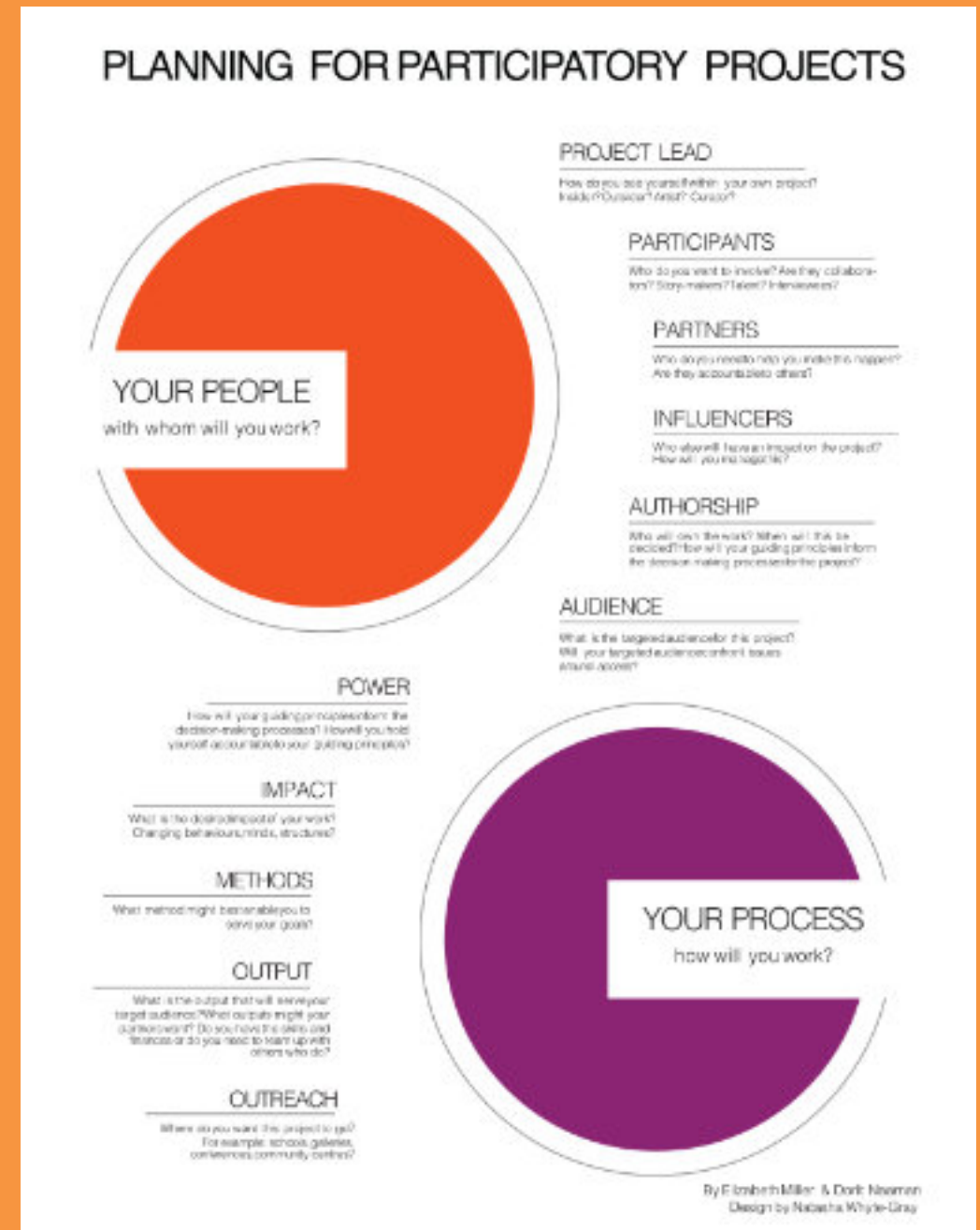
This online tool is intended to help you plan or reflect on collaborative media projects and research teams. Many participatory projects are the result of intuitive, difficult to describe, or “messy” processes, that evolve outside the realm of careful planning.

The tool in its simplest form is a set of 50 questions that are organized in two main sections: [Process](#) and [People](#). It is best done over a couple of days, but can also be done in a few focused hours. The questions are connected to thematic areas such as authorship, audience or impact. We offer stories and resources from a range of practitioners and groups to supplement the guiding questions.

The tool works well in a group, and we encourage people to begin by making a list of **five key events** from a project — a turning point, a moment of conflict, or a breakthrough. The next step is to map the moments on a timeline and discuss if these events were planned or unplanned. Were they considered accomplishments or setbacks? And what categories or areas in the toolkit do they connect to, like decision making, outreach, or power?

For the Care Collaboratory, the group offered some great insights about how the toolkit connects to practices of care. Many spoke about the need to design and create spaces of care, and discussed how this is possible even within institutions that might not be considered caring places. We also talked about how care emerges spontaneously when we create spaces of trust and inclusion.

Our hope is that by using this tool you can gain clarity and be more transparent with involved partners, team members, advisors, funders, and participants about your goals and hopes for the project. This tool is geared towards participatory media work, but can be used for other projects, processes, or research.





Bringing Our Experiences to the Table: Insights from the Care Collaboratory

We asked members of the Care Collaboratory to share how they bring care into their journalism, community engagement, and storytelling work: *What specific things do you do to generate moments of care in the storytelling process?*

Corinne Kappeler

In making a documentary film, I often share my questions in advance or do a pre-interview. We all think and process information in different ways: some people are quick on their feet, others need time to reflect. So a “surprise” is not necessarily productive. That said, sometimes it’s appropriate to unsettle with an unexpected or challenging question, especially when interviewing someone in a position of entrenched power. In that case, care is expressed in another form — in the formulation of questions that help expose

power abuses or injustice. — *Liz Miller, documentary mediamaker and professor*

Body language that indicates deep listening — eye contact, head nodding, leaning in. Most importantly, not interrupting while the storyteller is speaking. Respect silence. Ask questions that are responsive and/or clarifying to the information being shared. Above all, be a participant in the process. — *sue mark, cultural researcher, artist and community organizer*

When photographing community members who are not public figures, a photo editor at Chalkbeat established a practice of taking the time to explain the photographic process to the person being photographed, providing a space for their questions, and making the purpose clear. Working in communities of color, it was important that they set up the photography process thoughtfully. — *Emiliana Sandoval, Managing Editor, Chalkbeat*

Every month, staff member Natalya Dreszer goes to farmers markets, festivals, club meetings, and organizations and interviews Santa Cruz County residents. She asks questions like: what local issues keep you up at night? What do you want our newsroom to push local leaders on? When appropriate, we bring Spanish and Mixtec interpreters. Once a month, she synthesizes what she's heard from residents and gives a report at a staff meeting. Our editorial staff then creates budget lines based on the feedback. Natalya also writes brief stories recapping what we've heard from residents to share their views publicly and elevate their priorities and concerns. — *Kara Meyberg Guzman, CEO, Santa Cruz Local*

My late colleague, Patty Brandmaier, brought care into the leadership of a team I served on. In a time of high conflict, Patty asked "Could everyone please each say what they need for us all to feel whole?" It was a tiny moment that changed the conversation. It not only honored the wholeness and humanity of each person, it actually elicited key information to seeing the root of the problem. — *Alexa Miller, visual artist and Founder, Arts Practica*

In journalism, care shows up in how we choose stories, who chooses them, how we work with others, who and how we center people, and the key outcomes. The dream is starting from a place where community liberation is the aim. It starts there and then flows into how journalism can be an act of care to help our communities. — *Megan Lucero, Founder of Bureau Local and The People's Newsroom*



Creating new spaces is an important way to bring care into the world. It shows that we are analyzing our spaces, identifying disparities, and taking action to shift power and make an environment that allows the people we care about to express themselves. When we directly name disparities in our communities, we will see that it's impossible for everyone to show up in the same ways. We shouldn't

expect everyone to have the same education level or expect everyone to speak the same language. Creating new spaces that center the needs of people who historically have been muted and excluded from conversation and action is a beautiful way to confront systems of oppression and demonstrate the act of care. — *Sierra Sangetti-Daniels, Network Coordinator, Future of Local News Network*

Making Room for Self-Care in Care Work

What lessons from burnout taught me about my work in care

AX Mina

Like many mediamakers, I've gone through periods of burnout at work that prompted me to reconsider how I extend care to myself and to others. What follows is an **assortment** of methods and perspectives that helped me, and I hope that they can support your own self and community care practices.

On Balance: Just a year before the pandemic, I went on an "Eat Pray Love" journey after a period of burnout. What I learned as I traveled the Yucatán Peninsula is that, in all the work I'd been doing, I had neglected my body and my spirit. When I returned, I adopted the idea that work is composed of head, heart, and hands — something I'd learned from a mentor. We use our head to engage in

strategic and intellectual work. We use our hands to get work done. And we use our hearts to practice care and compassion. I learned to ensure I was balancing these different aspects of myself. It's hard to extend care to others when one is imbalanced.

On Compassion Fatigue: Compassion fatigue is a myth. What I learned from my yoga teacher is that the fatigue we experience is more about empathy and giving of ourselves. Heart work, in that anatomical sense means we're both giving and receiving. Compassion means looking holistically at the care we extend, both to the people around us and to ourselves. The hard work of this heart work is to practice as much self-compassion as compassion for others.



On Self-Reflexivity: When entering a space, it's vital that we (use our heads to) understand the power dynamics we bring into a space. How do issues like race, class, gender, and language play into how we relate to others and how others perceive us? As journalists, we're often trained on objectivity, but one concept I've appreciated from anthropology is the idea of self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is an invitation to sit with and understand how our presence shapes and influences a situation and our ability to understand the dynamics of a story.

On Trauma-Informed Language: Often, care looks like being sensitive to the traumas that people around us might carry. Using [invitational language](#) makes space for people to say no or to respond in a way that feels more comfortable for them by giving them multiple options. Some examples include "Is this a conversation we can have today?" or, "Would you be open to talking about this topic right now?" or, "When would be a good time to ask a few questions about your experience?" Trauma-informed language might slow things down, but that can be a very good thing. In that regard, we are slowing down to put in the work, using our hands, to extend that invitation.

On Boundaries: If we maintain tight boundaries without opening the heart, we become cold and unapproachable. If we open the heart without good boundaries, we find ourselves depleted and withdrawn. In my leadership coaching work, I always ask my clients: what fills your cup and what empties it? This is a simple exercise for checking in with the nervous system and knowing when we might be overextending ourselves, or when we might have more to give to others in a situation.

On Practicing Care in Advance: Sometimes the hardest work is balancing practices like invitational language and care work with, say, a tight, high-pressure deadline. As in many things in life, being prepared is essential. Having conversations ahead of time with team members about how they handle stress and what kind of support they might need during stressful periods at work is a vital part of extending care in a variety of situations. Thinking about when and how to have these conversations can help us as we involve others in sharing stories and experiences we hope to bring into our journalism.

Coda

What We Will Carry Forward

The first season of the Care Collaboratory brought together 31 collaborative storytellers including educators, artists, filmmakers, journalists, and more. Throughout six months of group discussions, our fellow collaborators were able to build relationships and explore and exchange ideas on how care can be prioritized in our lives, in our work, and in our institutions. During our final gathering, we asked folks to share what they gained through our time together and how they plan to carry lessons and inspirations forward. Here are 10 quotes that help tell the story of what people are taking away and their experience of our journey together. — jesikah maria ross and Jillian Melero

I've gained so much from the practical experience that everyone shared. This place is open to challenges and not just successes. I'm often in conversations about how great new practices were rather than how difficult they were. So I've really appreciated this space. I will certainly bring some of the lessons I've learned from this group into my teaching and practice. — *Eric Gordon, Director, Engagement Lab at Emerson College*



I have loved exploring the network of care collaborators and learning from its interdisciplinary crossovers. It was good for me to hear the different perspectives that one can approach care, especially when thinking about institutional disruption. In particular, I appreciated the positivity for the space and the productive idea generation that happened both with the lightning talks and the breakout rooms. — *Sue Robinson, Professor of Journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

I've gained a community that brings inspiration, hope, support and joy for the future of journalism. A rare organizing of media people by values rather than organizational structure. This feels like a movement. — *Megan Lucero Founder of Bureau Local & The People's Newsroom*





I've gained connections and exposure to leaders in this corner of our industry. A big operational takeaway is for us to think about our mission and vision, and I wonder if we can make another layer or metric that prioritizes care for our community. We need to make sure that at our very foundation we're centered around care. How can I make that policy and enshrine it? **— Kara Meyberg Guzman, CEO/Co-founder, Santa Cruz Local**

I truly appreciated this beautiful and inclusive space to unpack and examine what care looks like in our daily practice. I learned a lot of new tools, strategies and content that I can adapt into my storytelling work in the social justice movement, from an ethical and sustainable care perspective. I also found the care of ethics discussion very helpful within my advocacy work, especially how to implement lessons we learned into tangible practices in our community and strategic leadership work. These discussions deeply moved me to commit to be a better human being, facilitator and storyteller. **— Meghna Bhat, Independent Consultant, Storyteller**



So much inspiration! We get to hear from someone super brilliant, talk to other brilliant, interesting people. We've approached this important topic from so many different and interesting angles. It's been super helpful as I design listening sessions. I keep getting great ideas about how to be thoughtful about people's time, the end product, ensuring people are being heard and feeling heard. I value this space and the ability to learn from others — it's been lovely. **— Corinne Kappeler, Social Impact Consultant, BenitoLink**



It's been a gift to connect with other people who think deeply about an ethic of care — in the workplace and in journalism. How we treat each other and how we treat our communities HAS to be part of our evolution. **— Joy Mayer, director, Trusting News**



Each session there were many helpful prompts that helped us to guide our small group discussions. The prompts put everyone in an especially thoughtful head space. A core take away for me is how to ensure I am designing care moments into a future workshop. **— Liz Miller, Documentary Maker and Professor of Communication Studies, Concordia University**



To have regular peer meetings for expansive learning, exploration and resource sharing, meaningful conversations with inspiring people—I don't experience this anywhere else in my practice, this meta-level of thinking around care in of itself. The regular opportunity for open-thinking without expectations to produce something. I've taken specific strategies around ethics of storytelling into proposals for new projects, developing a new working vocabulary of tools and strategies, especially the offering around the power of creating our own working definitions of terms. — *sue mark, Cultural*

Researcher and Artist



One of the biggest things I gained from this was perspective about the diversity of storytelling practices across a range of fields and industries and the definitions of care we bring to them. It's been eye opening and reaffirming to think about how storytelling intersects with so many different roles and affects people's lives daily, in ways we don't often think about. When we do start to think about them, it becomes even more important to consider how we show care, by giving people agency over their own stories. As I move forward, I'm most thinking about how to create care practices and structures to bring into the institutions I work with in the future. — *Jillian*

Melero, Multimedia Journalist and Editor



Take Care, Make Care: Fruits of Our First Season

Jennifer Brandel



“Care is a form of power. It’s what will lead us out of this mess.”

“Care is a resource. What should we divest our care from to hasten the change we want to see?”

When Jesikah Maria Ross and I heard these words at the 2023 Engaging Emergence convening, we locked eyes across the room and mouthed to one another: write that down!

We hope that the harvest from season one of the Care Collaboratory has deepened your appreciation of the power of care and what a magnificent, renewable resource it is. There’s no shortage of work to be done on advocating for care, experimenting with ways to care, integrating care practices into everyday moments — both the big and seemingly tiny.

And we hope that in spending time paging through this publication, you’re inspired to envision a future in which care

practices are the norm, and not the exception, in our journalism or other forms of community centered storytelling. At present, there is no metrics dashboard that newsroom staff can pull up to chart how much care was present in their reporting. Most reporters aren’t following up with those they interviewed or covered to ask — did they feel respected? Did they feel they were fairly characterized? Did they sense the reporter cared? And newsrooms aren’t surveying those who consume their content to ask, “Did you feel a sense of dignity, agency, hope after reading / watching / listening to this?” Asking or knowing this information hasn’t yet been seen as the job of journalism.

One fine day, care could be something newsrooms and other storytelling initiatives value enough to orient around, track and measure. We believe if they did, journalists, the communities they serve, all of us, would be better off. And we hope this effort is one step closer to that reality.



Resources

Throughout the Care Collaboratory, conversations would inevitably lead to people asking, “Have you seen this guide?” “Have you read this book?” “Do you know about such-and-such’s work?” So, naturally, we decided to create a list of the group’s recommendations!

Here, for you, is a curated selection of resources that have care at the core of the community storytelling efforts. Most relate to the process of journalism, while others explore facilitation, leadership, ethics, healthcare, and listening. We’ve also included a list of projects that role model what care looks like in journalism, art, and community media.

Use this QR code to access [Care in Storytelling Resources](#)



Take Care / Make Care

Dispatches from the Future of Local News Care Collaboratory
(November 2023)

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The Care Collaboratory is supported by the Future of Local News Camp. We are an independent, peer-led community of newsroom leaders, community organizers, media researchers, and cultural workers building equitable civic media organizations and ecosystems.

The FLN Care Collaboratory was co-created by:

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To learn about the next season of the Care Collaboratory or to support it with your time, talent, or treasure, reach out to jesikah maria ross at jmr@praxisprojects.net.





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