

DEFINING SUCCESSFUL MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



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PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

Partnerships allow individuals and organizations to pool their skills and resources and better position themselves to achieve a shared goal than if they attempted to achieve the goal alone.¹ As both entities in a partnership work in collaboration to achieve common goals and make decisions together, they share responsibilities, risks, and rewards.¹ A partnership involves collaboration, whereas other terms (e.g., “grant-or-grantee”) can imply a more transactional relationship. Partnerships exist in a variety of sectors; this report focuses on the partnerships formed between philanthropic foundations and media organizations. Media partnerships between foundations and media organizations provide a variety of benefits, including broadening foundations’ reach and helping foundations achieve their goals in promoting the social good. Although foundations frequently partner with a variety of media organizations, it can be challenging to identify which partnerships will provide the optimal return on investment. This project was conducted by The University of Texas at Austin (see Appendix 1) in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to learn how foundations manage media partnerships. Our findings inform the processes of forming and maintaining media partnerships, and our recommendations are designed to help foundations better navigate their portfolio of partnerships. We aim to provide guidelines to foundations so that they can improve the outcomes of their media partnerships.

In this Summary of Findings, we seek to inform foundations about what constitutes a successful partnership between a foundation and its Media Partners (MPs). We present a model containing seven components that foundations could use to evaluate their current and future partnerships. Subsequently, we share important insights regarding the complexities inherent in each component. Finally, we include overall recommendations that foundations can use moving forward.

METHODS

We engaged in a multi-step, multi-method process of data collection and analysis, guided by social scientific standards for rigor and transparency.

Data Collection:

- Reviewed RWJF’s internal documents, including initial grant proposals and summaries of 32 current and recent media partnerships, 13 final narrative reports, and 36 additional internal documents such as typology reports.
- Interviewed nine RWJF staff members, 21 representatives from 12 of RWJF’s current MPs, and four staff members at peer organizations.
- Conducted a three-hour Media Partnership Dialogue workshop with 13 staff members from RWJF’s Communications and Research-Evaluation-Learning departments.

Data Analysis: All data coded using thematic analysis.²⁻⁵ Additional information about the methods can be found in Appendix 2.

FUNDING TYPES FOR MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS

Foundations partner with many types of media outlets, and each foundation organizes its media partnerships differently. RWJF staff identified four ways the Foundation supports MPs. They are:

- Organizational Support: Supporting MPs in hiring staff and/or providing funding to pay for coverage of health-related topics; RWJF does this with National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting System (PBS).
- Sponsored Content: Collaborating with an MP to produce RWJF’s content on external outlets; RWJF does this with Vox and *The Atlantic*.
- Education: Training journalists to write about health-related topics; RWJF does this with the University of Southern California Annenberg.
- Conferences: Bringing people together for a day or multi-day conference meeting/networking event; RWJF does this with the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ).

Funding different media partnerships enables foundations to meet different goals, attempt to reach different audiences, define and measure success differently, and employ different types of check-ins and communication. RWJF and other foundations can use these findings to work with different MPs and in doing so better fit both the foundations’ and their MP’s missions, organizational cultures, and needs.

THE SEVEN COMPONENTS OF SUCCESS

Our research indicated that successful media partnerships entail several components, or “puzzle pieces” that work together to create a larger picture. The theoretical model we developed comprises the following interconnected components:

1. GOALS:

Practice goal setting with MPs and discuss the importance of having shared goals and vision in media partnerships.

2. AUDIENCE:

Clearly define the target audience(s) and engage in best practices for prioritizing and expanding the foundation’s audience.

3. ADAPTABILITY:

Use media partnerships to adapt to the changing media landscape.

4. QUALITY:

Explore what constitutes a quality media outlet.

5. EFFECTS:

Determine the desired effects of the partnership.

6. MEASUREMENT:

Identify strategies for measuring intended effects.

7. COMMUNICATION:

Consider how to effectively communicate with MPs.



These seven components work together to help form and maintain successful media partnerships. Although it is not necessary

to consider each component in a linear order, *goals* is mentioned first because it is the guiding consideration when entering into a partnership and it has significant implications for the subsequent components. Likewise, *communication* is addressed last because communicative practices influence the other components of the model.

The components in our model reflect the inherent challenges and complexities of media partnerships. A close examination of the challenges and complexities of each component helps to illustrate why each is more nuanced than one might initially think. Challenges are difficulties that arise in a partnership. For example, it is challenging to deal with limited financial resources within a media organization or a foundation. However, dealing with these challenges sometimes involves complex negotiations between foundations and their MPs. Working in the confines of a limited budget is a challenge that may require trade-offs in other areas of a foundation’s partnerships. When organizational members understand the challenges and complexities surrounding their work, they are better able to navigate them. This model helps foundation staff identify and find ways to manage relevant complexities.

In an ideal partnership, each MP would effectively manage the opportunities and challenges in all seven components of the model. In reality, not every MP will be able to succeed in every respect. For example, an emerging media outlet may be more capable of fulfilling a foundation’s need to *adapt* to new platforms, but it may also be less established and thus still building its reputation for *quality*. Conversely, a reputable legacy brand (*quality*) may not be innovating with new strategies or techniques (*adaptability*). We recommend that foundations consider the extent to which each MP meets expectations, as well as whether the entire portfolio of partnerships demonstrates strength across the seven components of the model. An initial consideration is how media partnerships fulfill internal and external goals; therefore, we turn to the *goals* component first.

GOALS

Goals are the objectives the foundation wants media partnerships to fulfill. They guide the foundation in setting benchmarks for success and should be one of the first considerations when partnering.

What Emerged from the Data

Goal-setting occurs on two levels that relate to media partnerships: internal and external. *Internal* goals specify what a foundation seeks to get out of their entire set of media partnerships. They also help foundations decide which MPs to partner with to meet those goals. When asked about goals for media partnerships, some foundation staff identified the vision and mission statements of the foundation. Vision or mission statements are useful starting points for goal-setting, yet are typically aspirational and broad in nature and should not be used as goals themselves.^{7,8}

Vision-goal alignment was defined in the data as the extent to which the vision, mission statement, and/or internal goals of a media organization correspond with those of a foundation. The extent to which visions, missions, and goals naturally align can be determined in the initial phases of the relationship, although alignment can shift as the primary goals of foundations and media organizations change. Both MPs and foundation staff perceive partnerships with a high amount of vision-goal alignment as more successful.

External goals apply to individual media partnerships and specify what the MP will accomplish during the grant period. External goals can be highly specific, and MPs listed a wide variety of goals specific to their individual partnerships, from expanding in-depth news coverage of vital health-related issues to training journalists to report on health in communities of color.

Support from Scholarly Literature

Our findings suggest that setting clear and measurable goals for partnerships can be challenging. We propose using a S.M.A.R.T. goals framework adapted from literature on public health⁹⁻¹³ to set effective *external* goals with MPs:

- Specific: What specific action will take place?
- Measurable: Can this goal be measured qualitatively or quantitatively?
- Achievable/Attainable: Is the goal realistic given available resources?
- Relevant: Does this goal positively impact issues that matter to the foundation?
- Time-bound: What is a reasonable timeframe for achievement?

The S.M.A.R.T. goals framework can also be useful when setting clear *internal* goals. In some cases, it may be preferable to set an internal goal that is less specific, such as “support local MPs,” instead of a more specific goal like “partner with four local MPs within the next year.” Foundations should consider using the S.M.A.R.T. goals framework as a general guideline for setting internal goals that are adequately specific, realistic, and useful for the foundation.

Sharing common visions, missions, and goals is an important characteristic of successful collaboration.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ A shared vision/mission provides partners with a common language for determining value and success,¹⁵ especially in cross-sector partnerships where each party may have different languages and ways of assessing value. The more collaborators see their individual interests as linked, the greater their commitment to the collaboration.^{14,18}

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

Many journalism organizations value editorial independence and prohibit outside forces from influencing the content they produce. The goals component is complex in that foundations may desire to maintain vision-goal alignment between partners, while also respecting the editorial independence of the media organization and not dictating alignment. This makes goal alignment a complicated negotiation that must be done in ways that both meets the foundation's goals while honoring the MP's editorial judgment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understand that foundations' vision/mission statements are too broad to be used as goals for partnerships.
- Use the S.M.A.R.T. approach to set internal and external goals.
- Consider the extent to which vision-goal alignment impacts the success of partnerships, keeping in mind that alignment may need to be negotiated.

AUDIENCE

Audience describes individuals and/or groups of people that are exposed to media.¹⁹ One goal that may be identified by the foundation and an MP is to reach a certain audience.

What Emerged from the Data

Staff from RWJF and other foundations described successful partnerships as those where the MP prioritizes their audience and puts important issues in front of individuals who need to hear the message.

Foundations identified a variety of audiences they wish to target, which can lead to confusion over which are a priority. Although it may seem beneficial to try to reach everyone, doing so is typically not feasible given allotted resources. We recommend revisiting internal goals to ensure that the target audience is clearly specified.

Support from Scholarly Literature

Foundations must first have a firm understanding of their goals because goals act as a guide to determine the audience they want to reach.²⁰ Audience research can further help a foundation determine their target audience. One such strategy is audience segmentation, the delineation of populations based on similarities.²¹ Three possible methods of categorization include geographic location, demographics (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income) and psychographics (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, values).²² Consider investing in audience research to determine the makeup of the foundation's target audiences. Throughout the grant period of each media partnership, continue to evaluate whether the media organization is successfully reaching and influencing the desired audience(s).²¹

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

The challenge in dealing with audience is that foundations may want to reach an existing audience who is well-served by current MPs and their messaging, while also trying to target new and different audiences not reached with current MPs and messaging. This is complex because existing messaging may have to be altered for it to resonate with new audiences, and that may require forming new partnerships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understand that the foundation is primarily responsible for identifying target audiences that help accomplish internal goals.
- Identify the target audience via audience segmentation, using markers such as demographics and psychographics.
- Consider MPs that produce messages that resonate with multiple, even competing, audiences.

ADAPTABILITY

Changes in journalism and audience habits present new challenges and opportunities that require media organizations to adapt and remain open to adopting new strategies.

What Emerged from the Data

MP and foundation staff discussed three key types of new media opportunities, which are also discussed in journalism literature on new trends in the industry:

- Social networking sites (SNS): A panoply of SNS exist—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, Reddit—with more and more sites available every year. Our data demonstrate organizations' interest in these new sites.
- BuzzFeed-style content: The adoption of BuzzFeed-style quizzes, listicles, memes and videos, already adopted by some news websites,²³ represents a new and desired way to engage younger audiences. Foundation staff in our study expressed interest in exploring this type of content to reach new audiences with their messages.
- Live events: Debates, live shows and community forums can be used to extend an organization's reach. Community forums provide a way for news outlets to engage with community members rather than just reporting on the area.

Support from Scholarly Literature

The current media landscape has been described as a “significant time in the history of journalism when almost every aspect of the production, reporting, and reception of news is changing.”²⁴ Two significant changes in this landscape have occurred that affect foundations and their relationships with partners.

- Changing business model: More competition and less advertising revenue require a restructuring of funding streams and strategies to capture audience attention.^{25,26} Some news outlets are increasingly using sponsored content, articles created or influenced and financed by a specific funding agency.
- Audience engagement and platform types: Today's audiences consume media in a variety of ways—print, digital, live events—requiring MPs to experiment with a diversity of platforms. Media outlets should maintain traditional platforms while adapting to new platforms, modes of information sharing, and audience engagement.

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

The complexity of adaptability is maintaining traditional platforms and audiences while innovating alongside the changing media landscape. Media organizations should be open to innovation and engage in thoughtful assessment of new media experimentation. Foundations should evaluate new media forms to reach their target audiences to further their goals, and then look for MPs that allow them to do so.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Assess how adaptable MPs are to the changing media landscape.
- Consider the number and variety of platforms and new media opportunities that MPs use.
- Encourage MPs to experiment with innovative practices in addition to maintaining traditional audience engagement strategies.

QUALITY

The question of what constitutes quality journalism has taken on new salience in recent years as the news industry has undergone significant changes in revenue streams, business models, platform types, and storytelling techniques.

What Emerged from the Data

Foundation and MP staff identified six criteria used to judge the quality of a media outlet:

- Well-respected by other media outlets and the public.
- Good storyteller, produces engaging/interesting content.
- Accurate and truthful, fact-checks.
- Maintains editorial independence.
- Puts the audience/community first.
- Produces timely and relevant information.

Support from Scholarly Literature

Corresponding with these six criteria, journalism literature suggests ten guidelines for quality to which traditional journalism outlets should adhere²⁷:

- Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
- Its first loyalty is to citizens.
- Its essence is a discipline of verification.
- Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
- It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
- It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
- It must strive to keep the significant interesting and relevant.
- It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
- Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.
- Citizens, too, should be able to interpret and judge journalism.

Whereas these ten guidelines are considered industry standard for Western journalism,²⁸ the principles do not apply to all media outlets that a foundation may consider funding. Some foundations fund sponsored content partnerships and produce articles based on the foundation's goals or values. These endeavors represent a different type of media partnership, yet foundations must still ensure that prospective partners uphold the relevant standards of quality for that MP type.

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

A challenge of MP quality is maintaining trusted, reliable partners while expanding relationships to include new partners. Foundations should balance the trade-offs between partnerships with an established relationship for quality and those who seem promising and contribute new benefits.

A complexity is that foundations simultaneously want to promote a specific message while partnering with outlets that maintain standards of journalistic integrity, such as editorial independence. Foundations should expect potential MPs to demonstrate high quality in their organization and work, recognizing there may be different standards of quality for different media types.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Consider a media outlet's quality at the initiation of the partnership.
- Identify relevant standards of quality for each MP type.
- Consider expanding media partnerships to include new and non-traditional media outlets that may be less well established but seem promising.

EFFECTS

Effects are the outcomes that a foundation would expect an MP's content to produce. The effects described in the literature and by interviewees include reach, awareness, engagement, and impact.

What Emerged from the Data

- In addition to reach, awareness, engagement, and impact (see descriptions below), MP and foundation staff also described a fifth effect, "intangibles," which are markers of success that are difficult to measure, (e.g., the formation of professional network relationships that yield subsequent value).
- Our findings suggest inconsistencies regarding the definitions of various effects. Most interviewees defined "reach" similarly, but there was crossover in the definitions offered for "engagement" and "impact."

Support from Scholarly Literature

Media organizations produce different kinds of effects. There is a lack of consensus in the literature regarding the definitions of some common effects, including the ones frequently mentioned by the interviewees. The following are definitions we drew from literature that also support the definitions given by interview participants:

- Reach: Number of people able to see or hear the content created.²⁹
- Awareness: Knowing and understanding that a certain concept or idea exists, though the audience does not have to attribute the idea to the source for awareness to occur.³⁰
- Engagement: Interaction with the content, such as sharing content via social media.³¹
- Impact: Action that leads to a change; impact can occur on a micro, meso, or macro level.³²

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

One complexity regarding the effects component is managing the desire to require more well-known effects, such as the number of page views associated with a specific article, while still allowing for other less-easily-measured effects that indicate success. This is illustrated through our conceptualization of "intangible" effects above. Less widely-recognized effects may serve as reliable indicators of the work that foundations and their MPs achieve.

A challenge is that it may not be realistic to expect MPs to produce all types of effects. We recommend that foundations consider negotiating with MPs to set realistic expectations for the effects desired from the partnership and then maximize the breadth of effects across the partnerships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Define and understand, at the initiation of the grant, the meaning of desired effects with MPs such as reach, awareness, engagement, and impact.
- Consider other "intangible" effects in addition to common effects such as reach, awareness, engagement, and impact as indicators of success.
- Prioritize outcomes most meaningful to each partnership.

MEASUREMENT

Measurement refers to the assessment of the effects that MPs produce. Whereas measuring effects is a challenging task, working with MPs to develop measurement tools helps to ensure that effects are consistently and reliably tracked and that goals are met.

What Emerged from the Data

The following measurement challenges were highlighted by foundation officers and MP staff:

- **Varied MP metrics:** Each MP has different ways of measuring intended effects. Foundations and MPs should collaborate near the beginning of the grant on how to best define and measure the desired effects.
- **Resource constraints:** Foundations and MPs (particularly smaller MPs) are limited by time, funds, and human capital.
- **Measuring impact:** Impact was commonly cited as the ultimate goal in media partnerships. Interviewees discussed two main challenges in measuring impact: (1) causation— it is difficult to demonstrate that a news story caused a specific impact; and (2) long latency period—impact often happens over a long period of time.

The following are opportunities for improving measurement:

- **Metric goals:** Setting clear and measurable goals at the beginning of a grant will reduce confusion over how to measure the success of the partnership.
- **Metrics in context:** Requesting that MPs provide more background and context for their data may contribute to more meaningful metrics.
- **Dividing tasks:** Consider having a third-party evaluator analyze MPs' progress toward the desired outcomes to provide a more objective assessment and better use of resources.

Support from Scholarly Literature

Effects of public health mass media campaigns are difficult to measure.³³ News outlets also grapple with finding or identifying the right way to evaluate their campaigns,³⁴ and there is currently no industry-wide standardized set of metrics to assess the influence of a message.

- Traditional measures of ratings, impressions, and circulation numbers no longer provide a complete picture of the number of people who saw a message. Holistic measurement approaches that include online and offline media are necessary.
- Obtaining more data is not as important as obtaining more meaningful data.
- Measurement expectations may vary depending on the scope of a partnership.

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

Considering the resource constraints and the difficulty in determining impact measurements, even ideal MPs are likely to have imperfect metrics. That is, even well-established media organizations may not be able to provide all-encompassing, accurate data about the impact of their stories or even definite numbers on the audiences reached through their various platforms. It may not be feasible for funders to expect the desired level of detailed metrics from MPs.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Set realistic measurement expectations with MPs at the initiation of the grant, recognizing that even ideal MPs may produce imperfect metrics.
- Focus on meaningful metrics in context rather than establishing more metrics.
- Consider supporting MPs with additional resources, such as software or outside evaluators, to assist with measurement.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is the final and central piece of the model because it influences and interacts with all other components of the model. Effective communication among MP and foundation staff throughout the lifespan of the grant is vital to the success of the partnership.

What Emerged from the Data

Communication before the grant was described by both foundation and MP staff as frequent, highly detailed, and mostly informal. The initial conversations between foundation staff and potential MPs are collaborative, allowing both potential partners to share and clarify expectations and set major goals.

Communication throughout the grant consists of check-ins between foundation and MP staff. Four aspects of check-ins were discussed:

- Frequency: At what time intervals will check-ins take place?
- Structure: Are the reports written/verbal, formal/informal?
- Clarity: Who will initiate the contact and monitor check-ins?
- Collaboration: How will knowledge and information be shared between MPs and the foundation?

Two communication challenges emerged from the data:

- Time: Limited staff time makes it difficult to maintain consistent communication between partners.
- Ending the Partnership: Some foundations find it challenging to manage the communication surrounding the termination of a partnership.

Support from Scholarly Literature

Communication is essential when forming and maintaining a relationship. Effective communication between individuals at different organizations can increase worker efficiency, while also allowing for increased collaboration between individuals.³⁵

- Communication before the grant begins is more frequent in part because there is an urgency to distribute funds. This urgency stems from the foundation's legal requirement as a nonprofit organization to distribute funds to other organizations.¹⁶
- Communication throughout the grant should be collaborative and is effective when trust is established. Trust increases the amount of honest information that is exchanged between partners.^{16,36}

What Makes this Challenging and Complex?

One complexity of communication is managing the desire for more communication, including check-ins, while coping with limits of time and other resources at foundations and media organizations. Efficient reporting that does not sacrifice the quality of the communication is ideal.

A second complexity is that foundations may desire to continue funding MPs with whom they have established relationships while still allowing for evolution in partnerships. Personal relationships that are formed between staff at foundations and their MPs are beneficial and rewarding. However, the comfort surrounding close relationships might lead partners to stay connected for the sake of the relationship, impeding the formation of new partnerships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Establish intentional communication between partners at the initiation of the grant.
- Check-in with MPs regularly while also balancing resource constraints.
- Consider MPs with whom your foundation does not have an established relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Three key recommendations emerged from our analysis. These recommendations are based on our main findings and overall model and serve as starting points for continued consideration of new and current media partnerships.

1. ENGAGE IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

Our first recommendation is to engage in a strategic planning process to clarify your foundation's goals and objectives specific to their media partnerships. Using this report as a starting point, you should develop clear internal goals for media partnerships that support or spread your foundation's broad mission. One way to engage this process is to use the S.M.A.R.T. goals framework introduced in the goals component of the model, recognizing that internal goals for media partnerships may not be as specific as external goals for individual partnerships. We also recommend you target specific segments of audiences that correspond with your foundation's internal goals. Once internal goals and target audiences are established, foundation staff should communicate this information internally so that everyone involved in media partnerships is working toward the same objectives. Revisit internal goals on an annual or semi-annual basis to track progress on existing goals. Over time, some goals will become less relevant and new goals will become salient, potentially warranting changes in media partnership strategy. We recommend that the foundation continually engages in strategic planning to foster the continued success of their media partnerships.

2. CONSIDER THE CHALLENGES & COMPLEXITIES

The seven-component theoretical model provides foundations with a systematic way to assess potential and current media partnerships. Successful media partnerships should address goals, audience, adaptability, quality, effects, measurement and communication. Although our research demonstrates the importance of each of these components, we recognize that each component of the model is complex and challenging in certain ways (see "What Makes this Challenging and Complex?" in each section). We encourage your foundation to discuss these complexities internally and with MPs, brainstorm solutions, and recognize that success in one area may necessitate trade-offs in other areas. It may be necessary to prioritize certain components for some partnerships, but no portion of the model should be overlooked altogether.

3. DIVERSIFY YOUR MEDIA PARTNERSHIP PORTFOLIO

A third recommendation, emergent from the data, is to consider your assemblage of media partnerships as an investment portfolio. We recommend you diversify your media partnership portfolio to optimize potential benefits and ultimately maximize return on your investments. Having a variety of partnerships demonstrating success in different components of the model can help to mitigate the complexities inherent in each component. A comprehensive view of how each partnership addresses the seven components of the proposed model will be helpful to diversify the portfolio. To maintain a balanced portfolio over time, you should review the foundation's partnerships annually in relation to the foundation's larger communications and program strategies. When your foundation's goals evolve, the partnerships portfolio should reflect those changes.

APPENDIX 1: AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Erin E. Donovan (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) specializes in interpersonal and health communication. Her research centers on how people communicatively cope with major life stressors. The primary foci of her work involve the strategic management of sensitive information and difficult conversations, especially pertaining to health, illness, and risk. Dr. Donovan's publication topics range from the antecedents and consequences of conversations about cancer and HIV to the confusion that patients experience while reviewing consent documents prior to medical procedures. Her current projects examine the efforts involved in managing information across the illness trajectory.

Keryn E. Pasch (Ph.D., University of Minnesota) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education at The University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Pasch was a National Cancer Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in Cancer Prevention and Control in the Michael and Susan Dell Center for the Advancement of Health Living at The University of Texas School of Public Health—Austin campus. Her research program focuses on the influence of media on youth risk behaviors and the factors that may alter the influence of advertising. She also studies how risk behaviors, including substance use, obesity-related behaviors, sleep, and energy drink consumption, may co-occur among youth and developing preventive interventions to address these behaviors.

Joshua B. Barbour (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) studies the confluence of macromorphic structures and communicative processes in organizational life. He focuses on the difficult conversations that professionals have in the conduct of their work. His research is concerned with how and why individuals, groups, and organizations manage information and meaning and how they can (re)design conversations, change groups, and help individuals to do so with more sophistication. His current and past projects include collaborative, engaged scholarship in organizations where the management and interplay of information and meaning have important societal consequences (e.g., a toxic waste storage facility; nuclear power plants; organizations involved in disaster preparation, response and recovery).

Natalie (Talia) Jomini Stroud (Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania) is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies and Assistant Director of Research at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at The University of Texas at Austin. Since 2012, Dr. Stroud has directed the grant-funded Engaging News Project, which examines commercially-viable and democratically-beneficial ways of improving online news coverage. Dr. Stroud is interested in how the media affect our political behaviors and attitudes and how our political behaviors and attitudes affect our media use. Her book, *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice* (Oxford University Press) explores the causes, consequences, and prevalence of partisan selective exposure, the preference for like-minded political information.

Crystal D. Wotipka (Ph.D., The University of Iowa) received her doctorate in communication studies with an emphasis in interpersonal communication. She currently works as a research program coordinator for the Center for Health Communication at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on the processes and outcomes of conducting interpersonal relationships, and she is especially interested in how relational partners use computer-mediated channels to convey difficult messages to one another.

Mindy J. Price (M.P.H., University of South Florida) received her Master of Public Health in global health practice. She is interested in small-scale agricultural systems, food security, gender and political agroecology. She was a US Borlaug Fellow in Global Food Security in Kenya and Tanzania. Ms. Price's past and current projects include community gardening as community engagement; coalition partnerships for improving child health insurance coverage; women's empowerment in livestock for improving household nutrition.

Alexis A. Alizor (M.A., University of California Davis) received her Master in Sociology with an emphasis in gender and identity. Her graduate research project used a virtual ethnography methodology to understand how gender, race and identity play out in online communities. Her continued scholarly interests include civic and community engagement in online spaces. Prior to working with the Center for Health Communication, she worked as a research assistant for the Engaging News Project at The University of Texas at Austin.

Evelyn S. Gaucin (B.S., The University of Texas at Austin) received her bachelor's degree in public relations with a specialization in business foundations. Her academic interests include intercultural communication, especially in regard to international business. Prior to working for the Center for Health Communication, she spent six months in Buenos Aires, Argentina, working with a non-government organization on a project design to identify how to best recruit international volunteers for nonprofit projects. She also facilitated the Free Day of Dance, a city-wide event in Austin, TX, by focusing her efforts on promotion and sponsorship.

Brittney M. Calhoun (B.S.A., The University of Texas at Austin) received her bachelor's degree in human biology with a specialization in business foundations. She is interested in healthcare and patient-provider communication, and plans to pursue an M.D. Prior to working for the Center for Health Communication, she held an internship at MD Anderson Cancer Center, where she shadowed anesthesiologists in the operating and emergency rooms. She also worked in a neuroscience laboratory at the Texas Tech Health Science Center on projects concerning schizophrenia in Latino populations.

APPENDIX 2: OUTLINE OF DATA ANALYSIS STEPS

1. Interviews and Dialogue workshops were recorded and transcribed.
2. Comparative Coding: Five coders read through and familiarized themselves with the first four interview transcripts. Each coder engaged in comparative coding in which they identified and assigned codes to relevant sections of text. If the text matched a previous category it was assigned to that code; if not, a new code was created.
3. Codebook Creation: Group discussions on coding were focused on collapsing similar codes, resulting in the formation of a codebook, containing definitions and examples of each code.
4. Agreement: Two coders independently coded each remaining transcript and coding discrepancies were discussed with a third coder until agreement was reached.
5. Software: Codes were input into NVivo 11 software. The data were used to further inform each section of the model.

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