The Jefferson Center to Launch Your Voice Ohio and Media Seeds Project

Both projects will explore the potential of community engagement and participation in journalism

Saint Paul (September, 2017) – The Jefferson Center is launching Your Voice Ohio, a collaboration among Ohio newsrooms geared toward producing more relevant, powerful journalism based on the needs and ambitions of Ohioans and Ohio communities. Your Voice Ohio builds on the work of Your Vote Ohio during the 2016 election, focused on supporting journalists to produce political coverage tailored to the diverse needs of communities across Ohio.

Your Voice Ohio will test, evaluate, and refine new approaches to journalism and community engagement, including leveraging digital tools for public engagement, hosting community conversations and events, pursuing collaboration between newsrooms, exploring new ways to present information, and more. The effort will also explore how to best inform the public on critical issues, unpacking the different information needs of individuals, groups, and communities across the state. Your Voice Ohio will focus initially on two topics: the opioid epidemic and the future of Ohio's economy.

In Ohio and around the country, local news organizations face shrinking revenues and declining audience trust. To address these challenges, newsrooms must rethink and renew their relationships with the communities they serve. The Jefferson Center will play a key part in this transition, helping newsrooms create more meaningful coverage of priority issues, foster robust public discussion, and experiment with new business models. The Jefferson Center will study how these new journalism practices can be adopted in local newsrooms in Ohio and elsewhere to increase trust and financial sustainability.

“Local news should serve the needs and aspirations of all Ohioans,” said Kyle Bozentko, Executive Director of the Jefferson Center. “Through Your Voice Ohio, we’ll work with our news partners across the state to help journalists listen better, understand the needs of folks regardless of their politics or background, and produce journalism that helps Ohioans, and their communities, thrive.

Your Voice Ohio is funded by a $250,000 grant from the Democracy Fund and a $75,000 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, with additional support from individual donors.
“Democracy Fund is excited to support Your Voice Ohio in strengthening the bond between communities and the journalism they depend on,” said Paul Waters, Senior Associate for the Public Square Program at Democracy Fund. “By connecting newsrooms to new audiences, especially those who feel ignored by media, The Jefferson Center’s project compliments developing engaged journalism experiments like New Voices New Jersey and 100 Days in Appalachia.”

“Local news organizations across Ohio and around the country are confronted with shrinking revenues and declining audience trust,” said Jennifer Preston, Knight Foundation vice president for journalism. “Your Voice Ohio aims to address this problem by developing ways to rethink and renew relationships with communities. The project will help create lessons that journalists can use to foster trust and develop more meaningful reporting, while creating new business models.”

Jefferson Center has launched Your Voice Ohio with a spinoff project in Southeast Ohio that focuses on seeding media innovations in communities lacking daily local news. Media Seeds, supported by the Democracy Fund and administered by Journalism That Matters (JTM), will work with community residents and stakeholders using JTM’s “Create or Die” model, which includes community dialogue, innovation gatherings, and community communication pilot projects. Dr. Michelle Ferrier, an associate professor in the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism will be the Media Seeds project director in southeast Ohio.

About the Jefferson Center
Jefferson Center is a nonprofit organization that partners with citizens, communities, and institutions to design and implement informed, innovative, and democratic solutions to today’s toughest challenges. For more information on our programs and mission, visit jefferson-center.org.

About Journalism that Matters
Journalism That Matters, a Seattle-based nonprofit, has been hosting breakthrough conversations with community and national stakeholders on the emerging news and information ecology. For more information on JTM, visit www.journalismthatmatters.org.

About Democracy Fund:
The Democracy Fund is a bipartisan foundation established by eBay founder and philanthropist Pierre Omidyar to help ensure that our political system can withstand new challenges and deliver on its promise to the American people. Since 2011, Democracy Fund has invested more than $60 million in support of modern elections, effective governance, and a vibrant public square. For more information, please visit www.democracyfund.org.

About the Knight Foundation:
Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. We invest in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Our goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which we believe are essential for a healthy democracy. For more information, visit www.knightfoundation.org.