

News Ambassadors Pilot Gearing Up

News Ambassadors is a reporting project that will help American communities that hold vastly different political views to better understand each other, while giving young reporters a valuable learning experience in the creation of credible reporting.

The project originates in prestigious journalism schools and organizations in a range of locations. We will create the pilot this Fall 2022, along with our partners, **The University of Missouri School of Journalism** in Columbia, MO; and the Audio Department at **Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism** in New York, NY.

Teams of student reporters will engage with community members to surface their own locality's views on contentious issues. And they will work collaboratively with students from different backgrounds, to answer each community's questions about the 'other.' The products of their reporting will be broadcast locally and possibly nationally, and be widely disseminated online.

The divisive partisanship that threatens democracy today makes it urgent for communities to bridge differences and forge dialogue based on shared understanding of established facts. Journalists have a critical role to play. *News Ambassadors* will empower a new generation of journalists to tackle this challenge through news literacy, on-the-ground reporting, and a process designed to facilitate collaboration across divides. *News Ambassadors* will surface the kind of insights which can only be found by exploring the perspectives of those whose views are different than our own. We will prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion in the selection of partners and in decision-making. The perspectives of the local communities where the young reporters are located will be a key element in informing the topics of the reports.

Each semester, the reporting teams in both locations will each assemble two reports. The first will be created in consultation with local groups and will describe their community, including some key issues they are facing. Working collaboratively, the second report will answer questions posed by the team in the other locality, about one controversial issue. In the course of the semester, under the supervision of professional editors, students will gain hands-on reporting experience and build empathetic listening and self-reflection skills, as they challenge themselves and their counterparts to dig beyond stereotypes. The idea is to give young journalists tools to help them address the divisive rancor that challenges us all, and give communities a form of fact-based journalism that unites them in understanding.

Last year, we created [this series of short audio pieces](#) with student reporters, exploring the regional differences on issues surrounding the COVID virus in the US. Along with our pilot partners, others that participated in that test project were Mercer University's Center for Collaborative Journalism in Macon, GA; USC's Annenberg Media Center in Los Angeles, CA; YR Media (formerly Youth Radio) in Oakland, CA; University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications in Gainesville, FL; and CUNY Newmark Graduate School of Journalism in New York. We look forward to working with these great reporting institutions again as *News Ambassadors* progresses.

News Ambassadors is part of InterAct's [Digital Citizen](#) Project, which has been connecting Americans to their leaders, each other and the world since 1998. The project designer was [Shia Levitt](#), a longtime public radio journalist who has reported for NPR and many other outlets and has taught radio to young people with WNYC's Radio Rookies, UNICEF, and at the college level.

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