

How ASU is leading the national conversation on journalism and AI

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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As artificial intelligence continues to advance at a rapid pace, journalism faces both unprecedented opportunity and profound responsibility.

At Arizona State University, those challenges are being addressed head-on.

Through the work of the [Knight Center for the Future of News](#) at ASU's [Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication](#) and [NEWSWELL](#), the university is establishing itself as a national leader in helping news organizations navigate the AI era.

Backed by an investment from the Knight Foundation, the Knight Center for the Future of News was established to serve as a hub for research, experimentation and practical solutions designed to strengthen trust, sustainability and innovation across the news ecosystem. NEWSWELL advances local journalism by transforming small and midsize newsrooms with leadership, operational expertise and a nonprofit model that reinvests resources directly into independent, local reporting.

These initiatives will take center stage Jan. 6–8 when the Knight Center and NEWSWELL host the inaugural [National Journalism + AI Accelerator](#), an invite-only event that will convene nearly 200 leaders in journalism, technology and education from across the country for an in-depth exchange of ideas on how artificial intelligence is redefining the creation, distribution and sustainability of trustworthy news.

The accelerator is designed to help participants think about what journalism could become and act on it. Participants will engage in future-scenario planning where they'll translate those possibilities into actionable strategies for how, when and where artificial intelligence should be adopted.

[Nicole Carroll](#), executive director of NEWSWELL, and [Andy Pergam](#), executive director of the Knight Center for the Future of News, are helping steer this conversation at a critical moment.

Here, they share why the National Journalism + AI Accelerator matters now, what they hope participants will take away from the event and how ASU is helping shape the future of journalism in an age of artificial intelligence.

Note: Answers may have been edited for length and/or clarity.

Question: ASU is positioning itself at the forefront of AI and news innovation. From your perspective, what role do universities have in shaping how AI is used by the news industry?

Andy Pergam: Universities have a unique responsibility in shaping how AI is used in journalism because they fundamentally operate in the public interest. Institutions like ASU — and Cronkite in particular — create space to ask harder questions about power, trust and accountability, while also producing applied research and tools news leaders can use. In addition, universities are key to training future journalists to use AI while maintaining human judgment and critical thinking.

As AI rapidly reshapes how information is created, distributed and understood, supporting trustworthy information is not just a technical challenge, but a civic one. Universities can help set shared norms, test innovative ideas in the open and across disciplines, and convene voices that don't always sit at the same table.

Q: The National Journalism + AI Accelerator will convene leaders across journalism, tech and business. What kinds of interdisciplinary collaboration do you believe are most crucial for ensuring AI enhances — rather than erodes — public trust in news?

Nicole Carroll: The adoption of AI has moved so fast that each sector has been racing to create usage policies and ethical guidelines, develop best practices and training, and find the best ways to use AI to enhance creativity and expertise, not replace it. It's important that we share findings and ideas across education, journalism, government, health care and other industries so we can take advantage of the opportunities AI brings while learning from each other's mistakes. We cannot sacrifice trust for efficiency.

Q: As AI increasingly takes on tasks such as content creation and verification, how do you envision the role of journalists evolving over the next decade?

Carroll: As AI becomes more proficient in finding, summarizing and presenting information and data, the role of journalists becomes even more essential. Journalists must make sense of information and explain why it matters, verify sources and challenge assumptions, push for transparency and uncover wrongdoing, and take responsibility for fairness.

Q: What ethical frameworks or guardrails should guide the adoption of AI tools in newsrooms, and how can higher education instill those values in students from day one?

Pergam: Ethical guardrails for AI in journalism need to exist across the entire technology stack, including how reporters and editors use AI in newsgathering, how newsrooms deploy it in production and distribution, and how technology companies source, train and commercialize information at scale. No single group can shoulder that responsibility.

Journalism has long been guided by values like accuracy, transparency, accountability and independence. Those values must be carried forward as the work changes. That means designing systems that keep humans in the loop and decision-making visible.

By partnering with news organizations to experiment responsibly and embedding ethical reasoning into hands-on learning, universities can further values like impact, bias, accountability and accuracy so they become muscle memory rather than an afterthought.

Q: The accelerator event aims to explore the sustainability of trustworthy journalism. How might AI help reimagine viable business models for news organizations, especially local outlets facing financial strain?

Carroll: AI has the potential to reduce the cost of routine work, like transcribing interviews, summarizing notes from public meetings, and cleaning up and analyzing data. It can take a piece of content and help convert it into different formats, like podcasts, social media posts or newsletters. On the revenue side, it can help personalize ads for readers and target messages to potential donors or members.

At this stage, many news organizations are using AI to increase efficiency. One goal of the National Journalism + AI Accelerator is to see how we can take it further to truly transform business models while maintaining journalistic ethics and community trust.

Q: How does the AI Accelerator fit within the Knight Center's bigger plans?

Pergam: The National Journalism + AI Accelerator is an important early step in our work moving the news industry forward at a moment when both trust and sustainability are under real strain. Partnering with NEWSWELL allows us to ground this effort in the realities facing local and community newsrooms, while bringing together leaders across journalism, technology and business.

Ultimately, this work reflects the center's larger goal: accelerating meaningful transformation across audiences, business models and storytelling so journalism can better serve the public.

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Main image



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Andy Pergam



