



## Wisdom of the crowd

This book calls for more community engagement in journalism. Many American journalists, often those in smaller news organizations, already are community focused. In the 1990s, the names [“civic journalism”](#) or [“public journalism”](#) were given to techniques such as polling, town meetings, community advisory groups or seeking citizen questions for candidates. But some big-city editors said that the wisdom of the crowd can turn into mob rule and warned against a loss of journalistic independence. Others insisted that these techniques had been used for generations and that news leaders who use them are simply trying to play their part in the democratic process. Some online publishers are now letting [readers](#) fill space. Does this cross the line?

### Activities for students:

**Flashlight:** Type your zip code into the [search box of the U.S. Census website](#). Look at the demographics of your community. Now study the local newspaper’s website. Does its journalism reflect the city’s population? What could reporters do to diversify their coverage? Can you imagine what stories might be of interest? Now find a member of an underrepresented group. Discuss your story ideas. Do they have different ideas?

**Spotlight:** Read this [New York Times story](#) about an experimental collaborative newsroom at Mercer University in Macon, Ga. Professionals from the local newspaper, the [Telegraph](#), are joining those from [Georgia Public Broadcasting](#) and [Mercer students and professors](#) to all work in the same newsroom. With journalists collaborating, the idea is that Macon will be provided with more and better news than it otherwise might have had. The news organizations have agreed to work together on [special projects to engage the community](#). Class discussion: What do you think? Can professionals and students work together to improve news in a community? What are the potential pitfalls? How could they be overcome? Is there anything about Macon that might make community engagement especially important?

**Searchlight:** Comedian Jon Stewart says CNN anchors are “news DJs,” and wonders what the actual reporters are doing. Watch [this clip from Jon Stewart’s “Daily Show”](#) on CNN’s 2011 efforts to include its community. Is Stewart’s criticism fair? Can crowd-sourcing go too far? Where is the dividing line between engagement and pandering? Check [CNN.com](#). Can you find examples of gratuitous community engagement?

**Extra credit:** Study this [guide to community engagement](#) produced by the Reynolds Journalism Institute. Imagine you run a local news organization. Design a model company policy on the issue of community engagement. Would your journalists report the news differently? If not, why not? If so, how?

**Double extra credit:** Before he became USA TODAY president and publisher, digital pioneer Larry Kramer wrote the book [C-Scape](#), arguing that every company is now a media company. Find an online summary like [this one](#). Kramer says “curation” – the ability to filter the ever-flowing news stream -- is important. How would your news organization curate the news? Kramer also says companies should know what people are saying about them and join the conversation when need be. Should news organizations do that as well?