

Leadership & Connecting with the Next Generation of Journalists

Austin Lewter,
*Texas Center to
Community
Journalism*

NYPA,
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Austin Lewter

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- MA- Stephen F. Austin State
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Texas Center *for*
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Department of Communication Studies







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The New York Times

2010

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The New York Times

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HIJACKED JETS DESTROY TWIN TOWERS AND HIT PENTAGON IN DAY OF TERROR

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GenZ
(born 1997 – 2012)
Stereotypes vs.
Reality

Common Misconceptions

- **Money:** Unlike the "lazy" stereotype, nearly 75% of Gen Z have adjusted their spending habits to cope with inflation.
- **Workplace Structure:** Rather than resisting structure, they desire clear, two-way feedback and transparent leadership.
- **Social Views:** While 45% identify as feminists, they also show diverse, sometimes unexpected, views on religion and tradition.

GenZ (born 1997 - 2012)

Stereotype

- **Lazy and Unmotivated in Work:** quiet quitting or having no work ethic.

Reality

- They seek meaningful work, purpose and flexibility.
- Working side gigs for financial independence.
- 47% more likely to seek external feedback than older generations.
- Demanding more communication, not less.

GenZ (born 1997 - 2012)

Stereotype

- **Entitled and Demanding:** expecting instant success without effort.

Reality

- Hold strong views on pay transparency and equity.
- Higher rates of salary discussions compared to older generations.

GenZ (born 1997 - 2012)

Stereotype

- **Extremely Liberal/Politically Active:** assumed to be a monolith of progressive views

Reality

- While socially conscious, many identify as moderate or conservative.
- Their political engagement is high, but they often care more about specific environmental or social causes than party politics.

GenZ (born 1997 - 2012)

Stereotype

- **Unhealthy and Reckless:** stereotyped as being reckless with life choices.

Reality

- They are more cautious than previous generations, with lower rates of drinking, smoking, and dating.
- They are also cooking at home more often to save money and improve health (and probably because it's cheaper).

GenZ (born 1997 - 2012)

Stereotype

- **Screen-Addicted and Isolated:** obsessed with phones to the detriment of real life

Reality

- True digital natives who use technology for connection, education and activism.
- Heaviest users of technology, spending over 4 hours daily on mobile, often experiencing insecurity without them.

GenZ (born 1997 - 2012)

Stereotype


- The Anxious Generation
- The Medicated Generation
- Tide Pod Generation

Reality

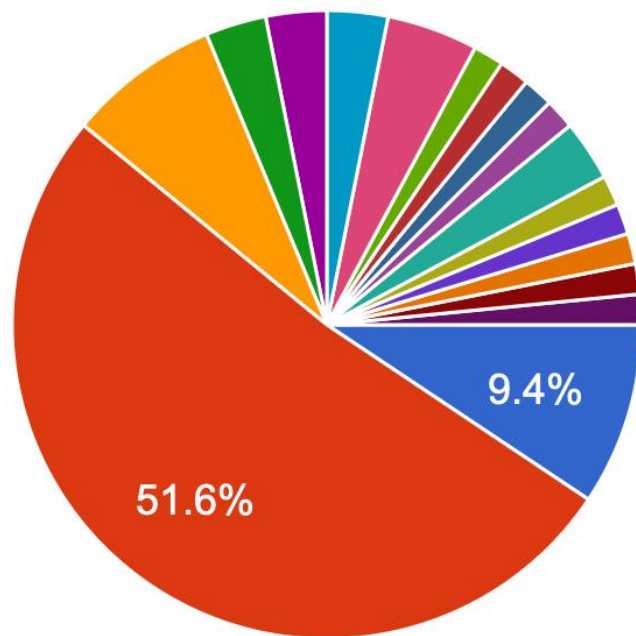
- The Inflation Generation (cost of living)
- School Shooting Generation



The Subjects...

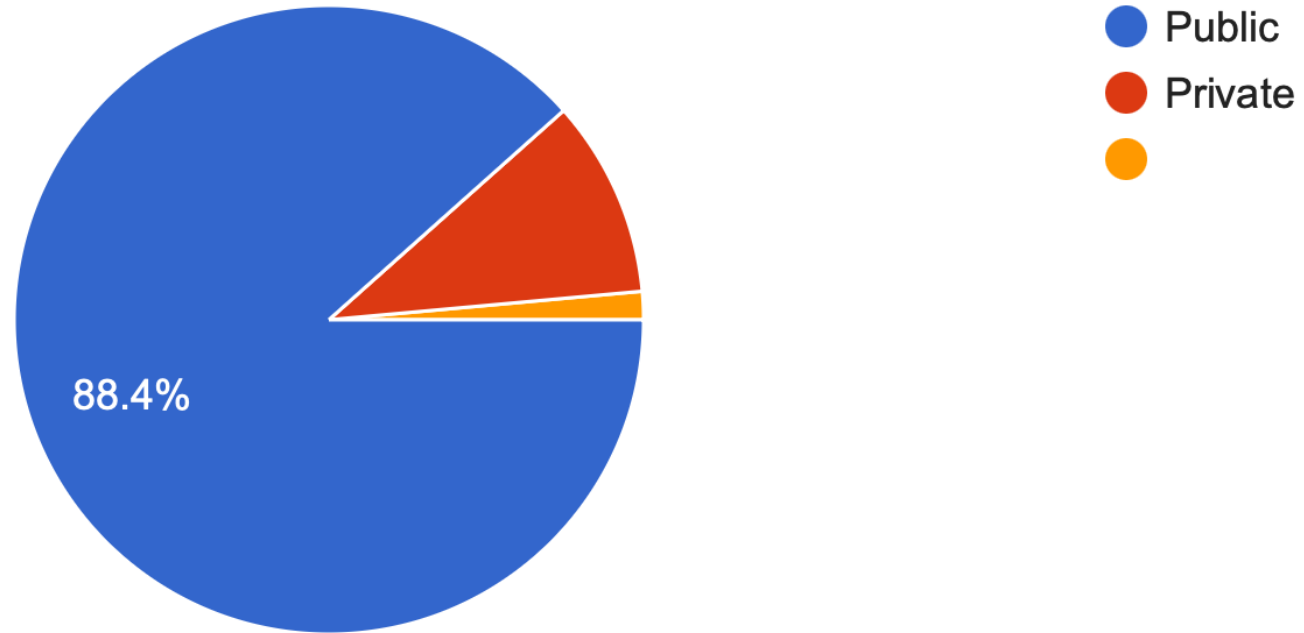
- **782 respondents (so far) from across the country.**
 - **College journalists.**
 - **Early career journalists in the field.**
 - **High School journalists.**
 - **All GenZ.**
- 

What was is the size of your university/college?

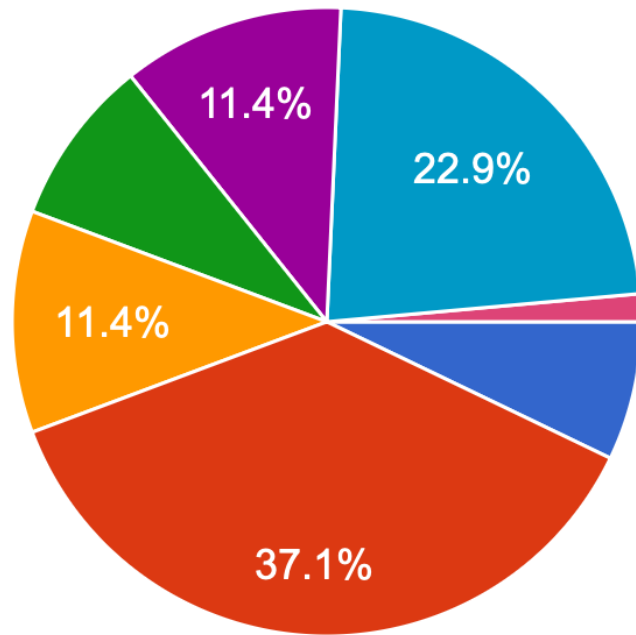


- Two-Year School
- Four-Year Division I School
- Four-Year Division II School
- high school
- Four-Year Division III School
- High School
- Highschool student

What is the structure of your institution?



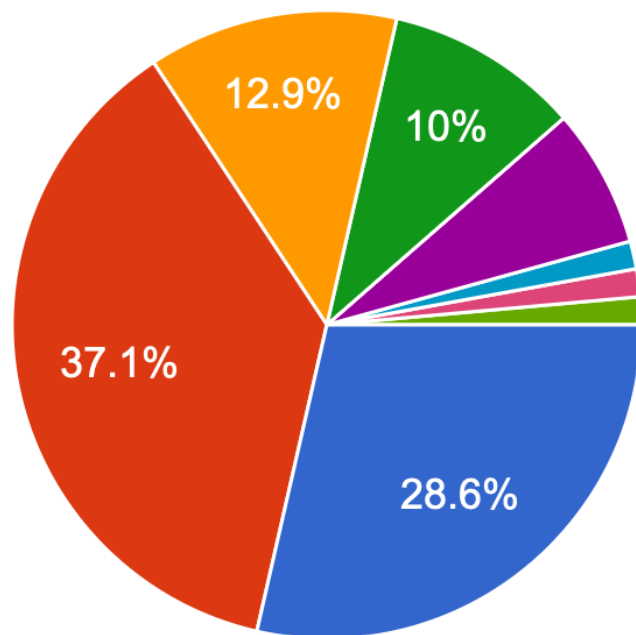
What is the population of your hometown?



- 1 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 5,000
- 5,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 25,000
- 25,001 - 100,000
- 100,000 and up
- N/a

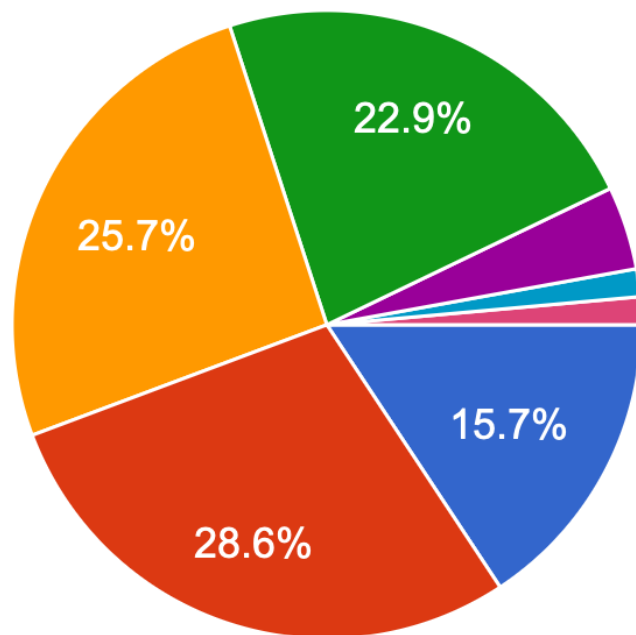
The Survey...

What type of journalism role are you most interested in?



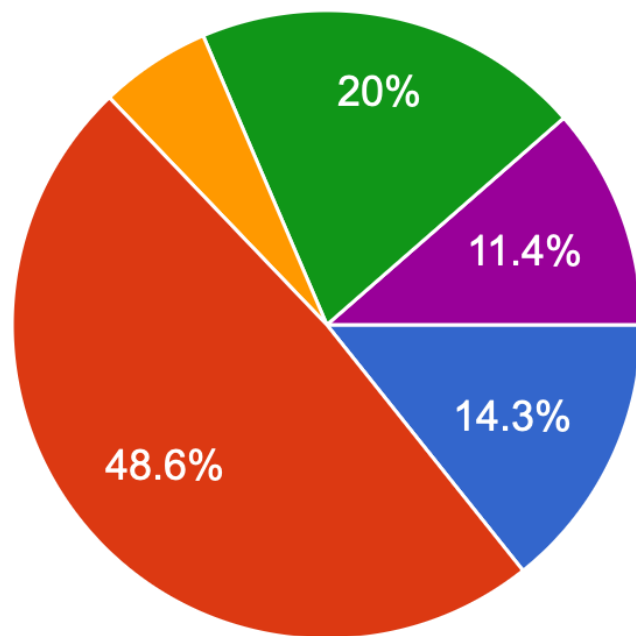
- Reporting (beat or general assignment)
- Multimedia (video, audio, photo)
- Audience engagement/social media
- Investigative/data journalism
- Editing/production
- just social media and sharing info like that or podcast
- Public Relations/ Editing
- PxP/Color commentary

Which platform do you feel most confident producing content for?



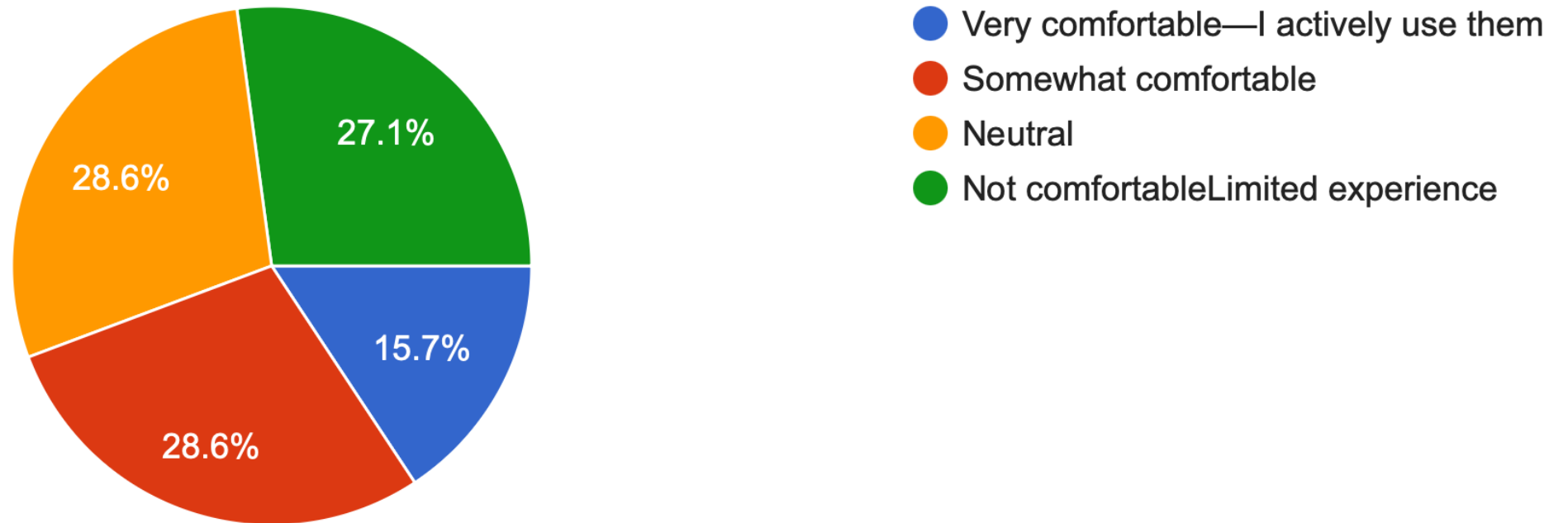
- Print
- Website/digital articles
- Social media (Instagram, TikTok, X, etc.)
- Video (YouTube, broadcast, reels)
- Audio (podcasts, radio)
- Audio, Video, Social Media
- only audio because of my disabilities it is the best I can do

Which skills do you most want to develop early in your career?

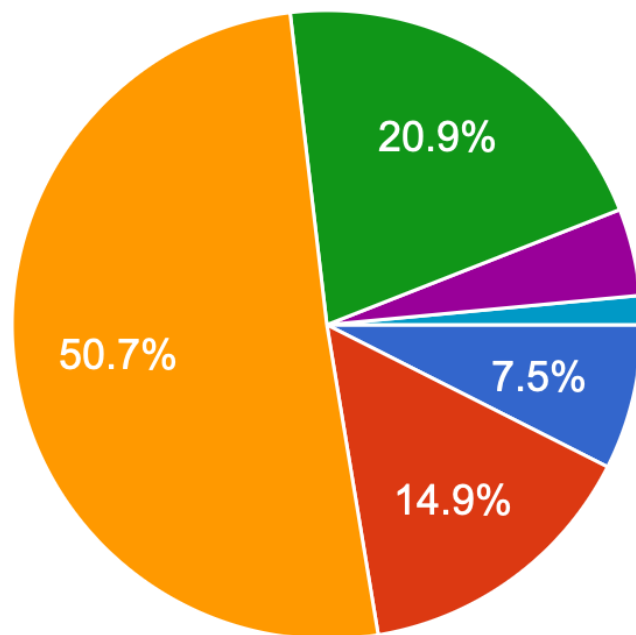


- Beat reporting and sourcing
- Multimedia storytelling
- Data journalism
- Audience growth and engagement
- Editing and headline writing

How comfortable are you using analytics (pageviews, engagement metrics) to inform your work?

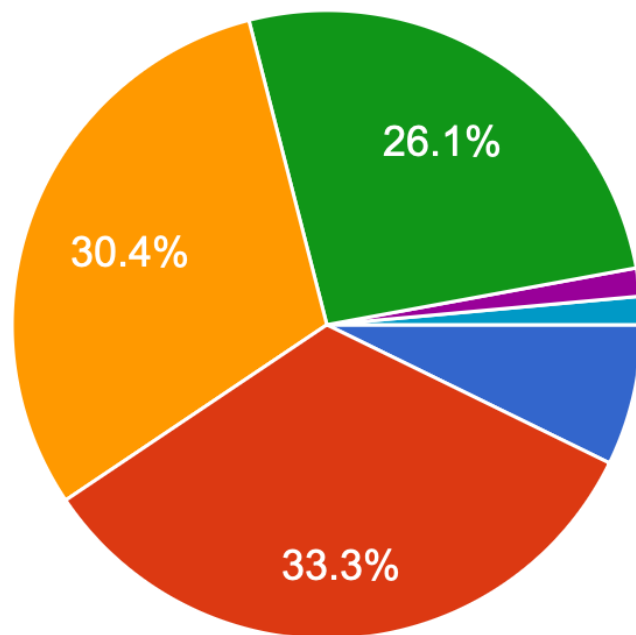


How important is salary compared to mission/impact when choosing a job?



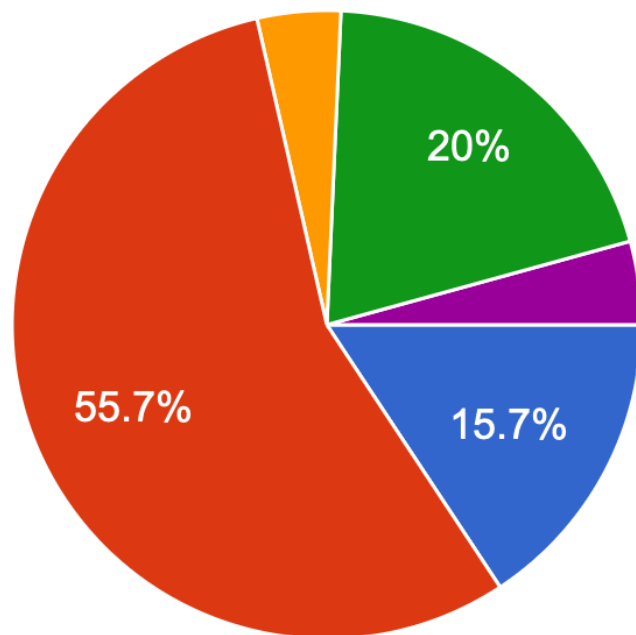
- Salary is my top priority
- Salary slightly outweighs mission
- Equal importance
- Mission slightly outweighs salary
- Mission/impact is my top priority
- I think it would depend on the mission/impact, but probably closer to salary.

What kind of newsroom culture do you value most?



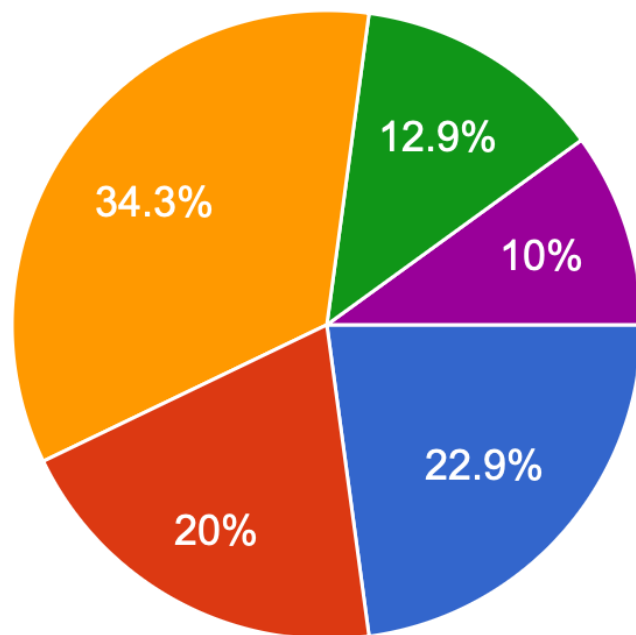
- Fast-paced, breaking news
- Collaborative/team-oriented
- Flexible/remote-friendly
- Mission-driven/community-focused
- Structured with clear hierarchy
- I like to work with friends and in groups its easier for me with my limited movement

What is your preferred work structure?



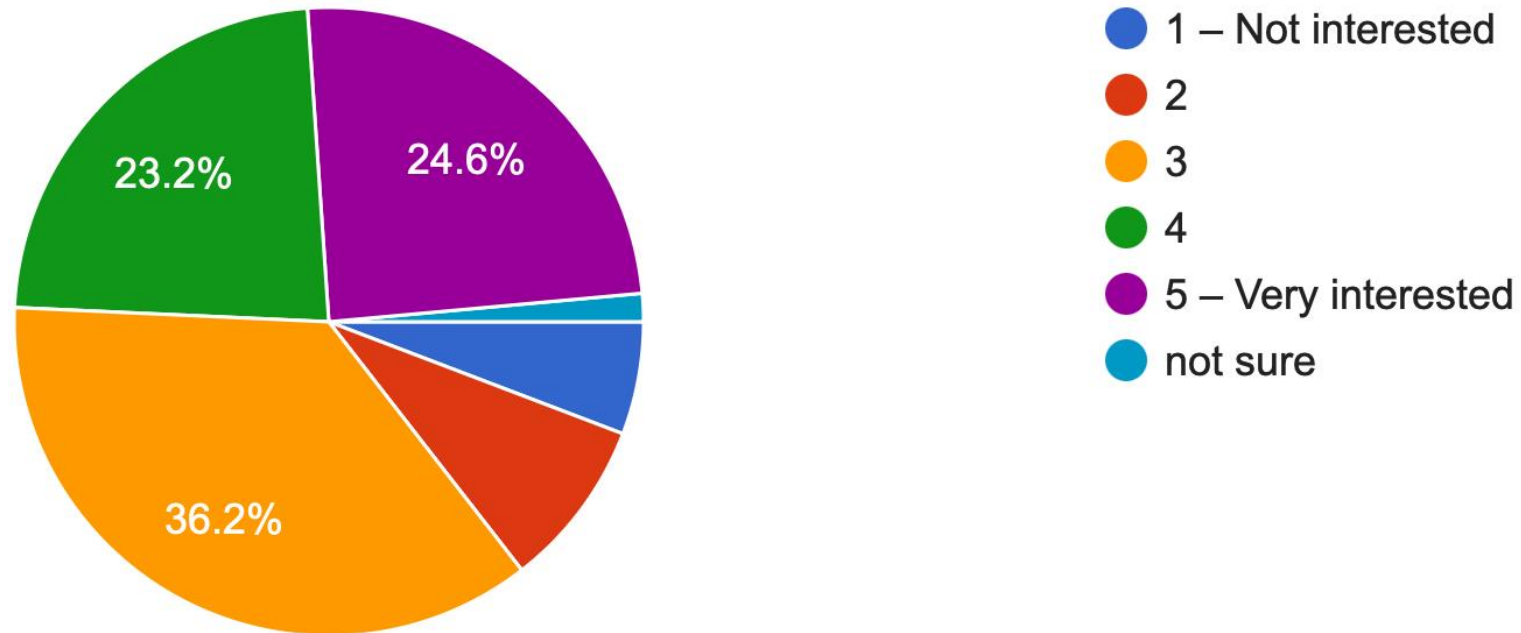
- Fully in-person newsroom
- Hybrid (mix of in-person and remote)
- Fully remote
- Field-based with flexible office time
- No preference

What factors most influence your decision to stay at a newsroom long-term?

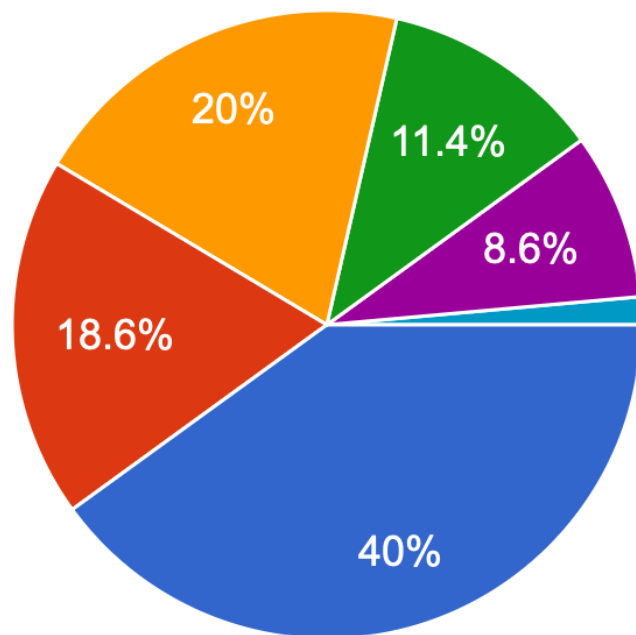


- Pay and benefits
- Career advancement opportunities
- Work-life balance
- Editorial independence/mission
- Mentorship and training

How interested are you in working for a community (local) newsroom?

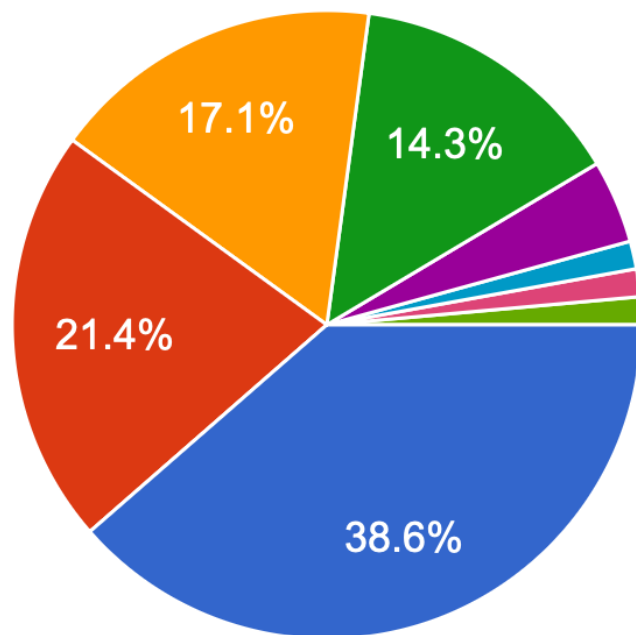


What appeals most to you about community journalism?



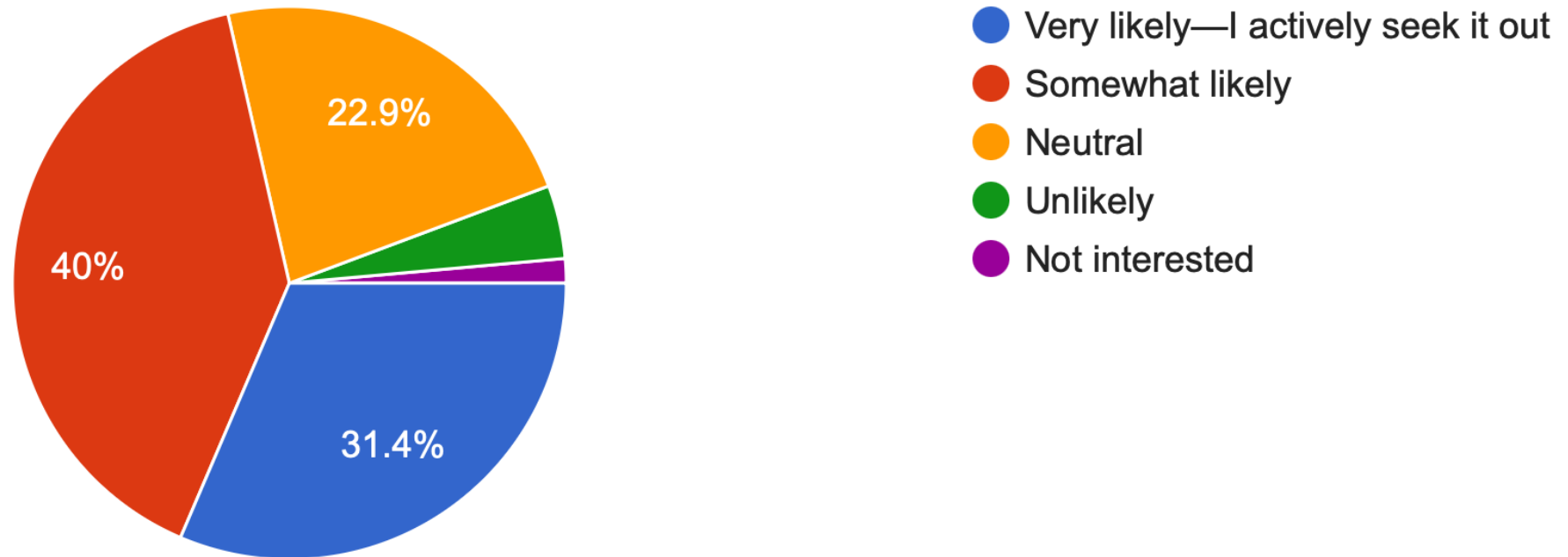
- Direct impact on local communities
- Opportunity to build relationships with sources
- Broad storytelling opportunities (covering many beats)
- Leadership opportunities early in career
- Slower pace than large metro outlets
- All of the Above

What concerns (if any) do you have about working in a community newsroom?

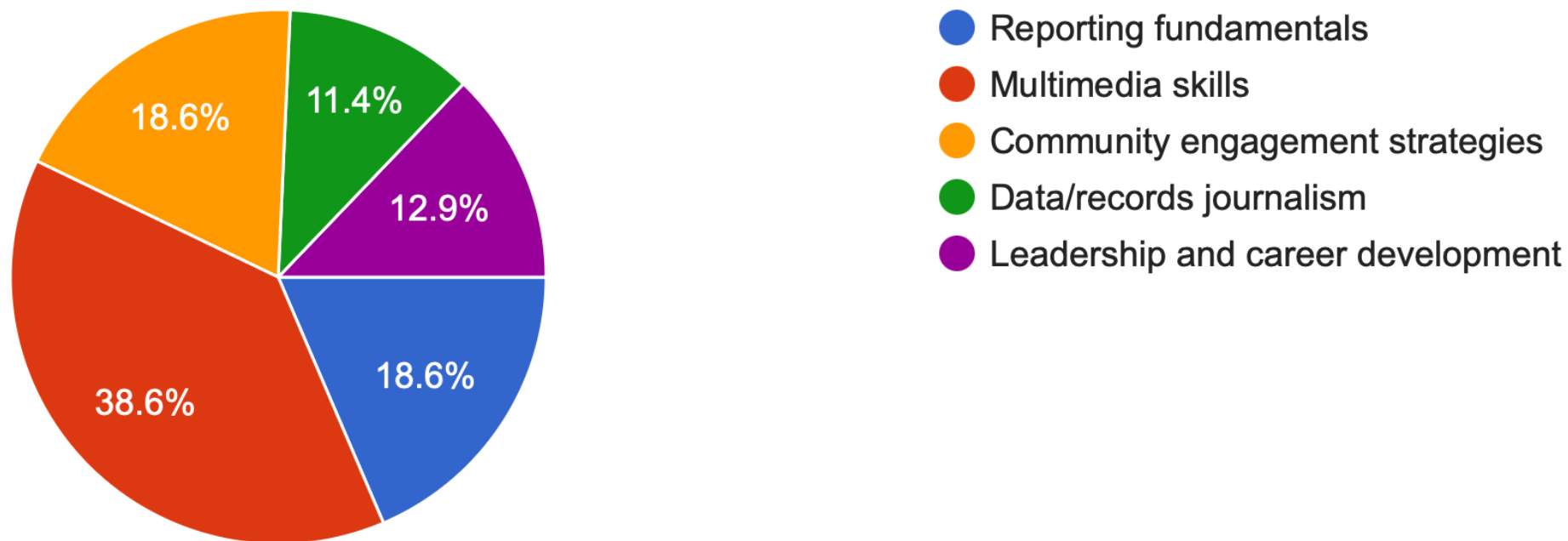


- Lower pay
- Limited advancement opportunities
- Smaller staff/resources
- Geographic location
- None
- Flexibility
- It's a high stress environment where staff can often be limited, leading to a lot of one persons plate. So in short, wor...
- Job security

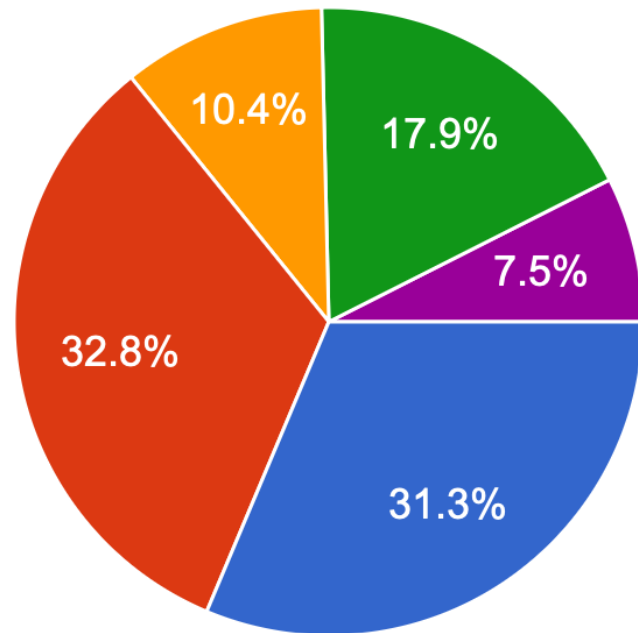
How likely are you to experiment with new storytelling formats (newsletters, short-form video, etc.)?



What type of training would be most valuable to you in your first year?

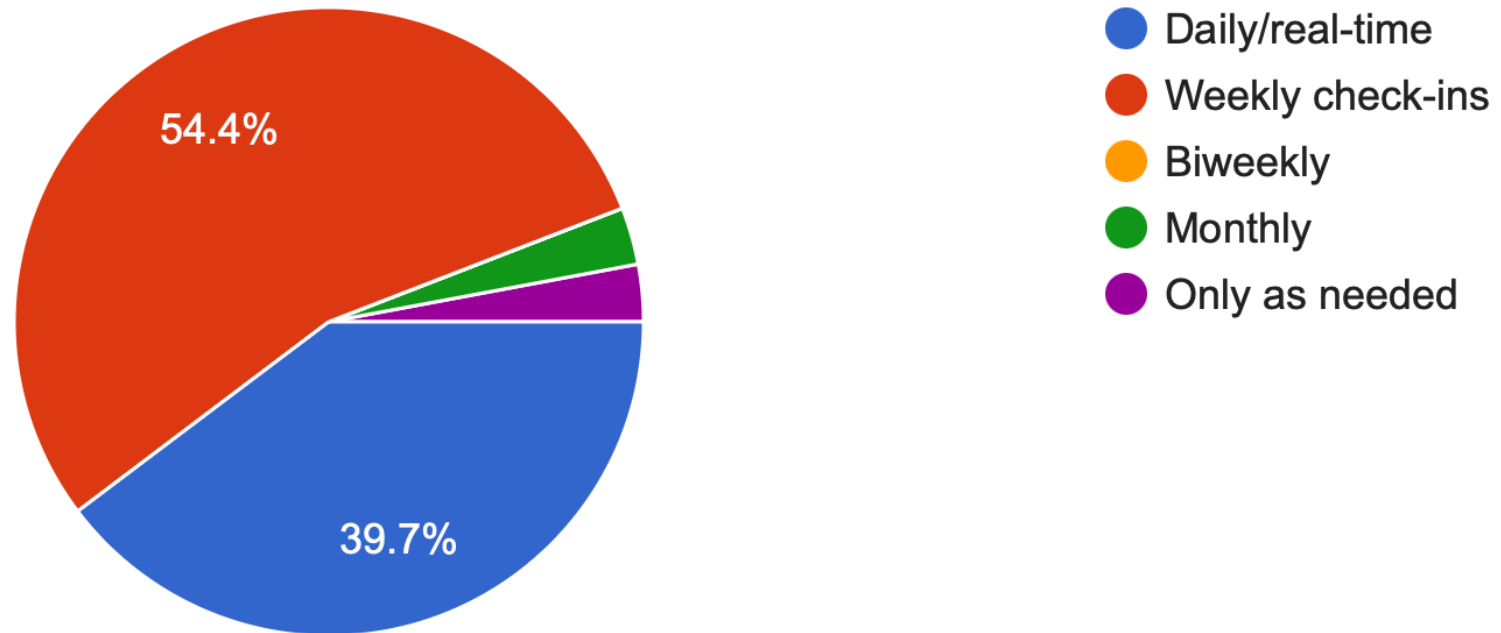


What leadership style do you respond best to?

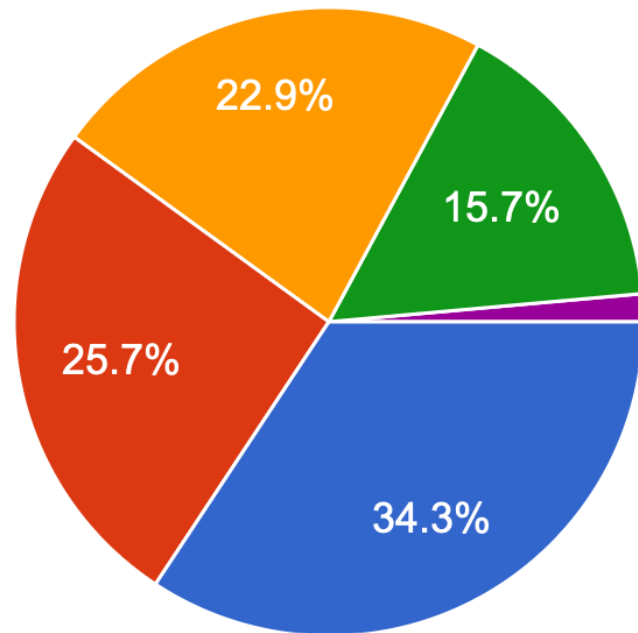


- Hands-on and directive
- Collaborative and team-based
- Hands-off with independence
- Coaching/mentorship-focused
- Structured and process-driven

How often would you prefer to receive feedback from your editor?

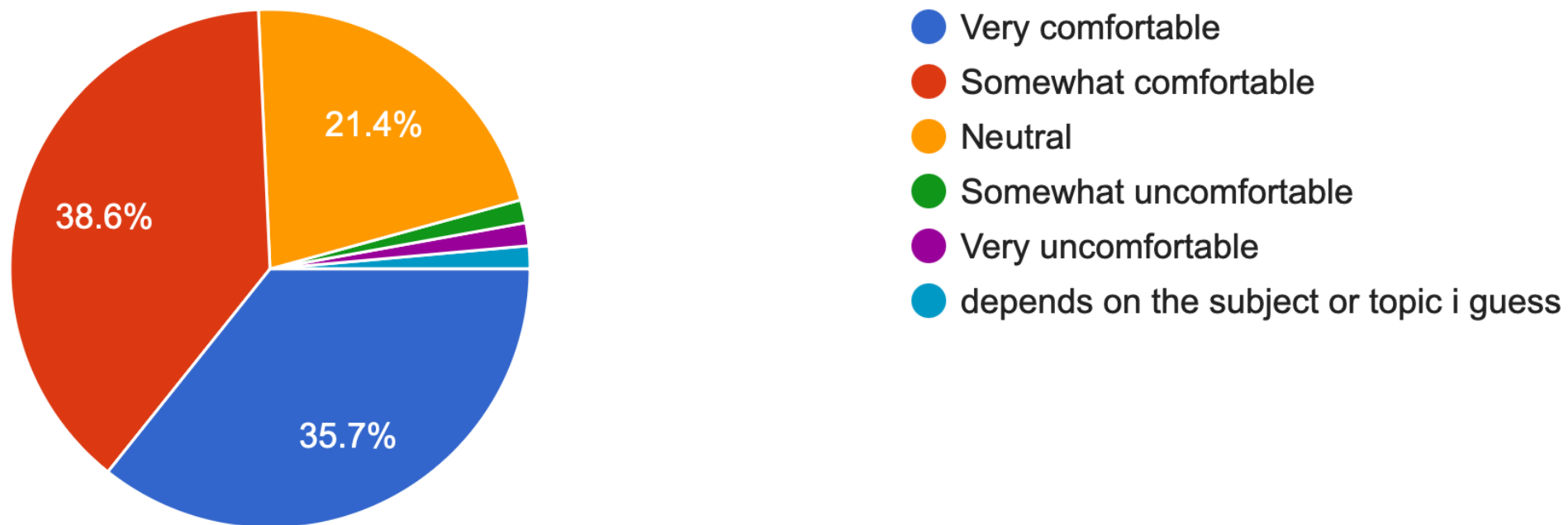


What kind of leadership support matters most to you?



- Clear expectations and direction
- Regular feedback and coaching
- Opportunities to take initiative
- Recognition of work
- Advocacy for career growth

How comfortable are you sharing ideas or pushing back with editors?



**What would make a
community newsroom
your “ideal” first job?**

- Clear expectations, good feedback, opportunities to explore beats and advance career. Ability to work one-on-one with editors and other reporters.
- Confidence and feedback
- If it's somewhere I can get to and adapt to and can afford being there
- Working closely with community members
- Working with people who are less liberal and don't want to make every story doom and gloom.
- It is a better bridge to start small and at home. It can lead to bigger connections
- Decent pay that'll cover rent
- I would love to give back to the community and give the community a sense of pride.

- It would let me be close to home while getting experience in the field. It will also expand my work like hopefully working on writing and getting on camera.
- Lots of snacks. But seriously, a place where i can feel comfortable and express my ideas with helpful feedback.
- Ability to afford to live in work city
- It would be a good opportunity to diversify my skillset and build relationships.
- Good pay, team oriented, opportunities to move up, healthy work environment and
- A newsroom that is good with hands on training and preparation to advance in all fields.
- It would plug me into the community.

- Hyper local, don't need to move. Small targeted stories.
- Teamwork within coworkers. Helping each other. Learning a lot on the job.
- Livable salary, leadership that meets the balance between being hands-on and authoritative, but still takes to time to offer praise and recognition, a culture where the whole team is involved in meetings and editorial decisions, resources aren't limited and help is available when deadlines are tight.
- In a community newsroom, you really get to see how much journalism can impact the community you live in and it really does show the cliché of giving a voice to the voiceless.

- An ideal first job in a community newsroom would be a supportive, an environment that gives learning opportunities and high-energy environment.
- A community newsroom would be my ideal first job if I could have a consistent and important beat. Covering politics and local issues is my main interest, so covering local and impactful issues would make it my ideal first job. On top of that evolving and progressing newsrooms, like utilizing multi-media, social media, and online content would be interesting to me.