

ISOJ 2021: Day 4, Keynote Session

Reimagining news for Black Americans: Paving a path toward equity in journalism

Chair: [Amanda Zamora](#), *co founder & publisher*, The 19th*

- [Lauren Williams](#) & [Akoto Ofori-Atta](#), *co-founders*, Capital B
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Rosental Alves Good morning, America. Good morning, the world. Good afternoon. Good evening. Whatever you are. We have about 7,200 registrants from more than 130 countries, so we have people tuning in from everywhere. Hello, my ISOJ'ers. Welcome to day four of ISOJ 2021, sponsored by Google News Initiative and Knight Foundation. It has been a fantastic week so far, and we hope you are ready for more. We have a lot. A few housekeeping reminders. You can follow the conversation by using #ISOJ2021 on Twitter, and you can drop questions and comments in the chat in Zoom and the chat on YouTube. Don't forget to use our page from our virtual swag bag to let the whole world know how you are enjoying ISOJ, the premiere online journalism conference in the world. Just click on the link in the chat to get to get to our Pick and Post page. If you would like to watch ISOJ in Spanish, please follow the link in the chat to navigate to a Spanish-translated version sponsored by Univision Noticias. If you are using Zoom, in the bottom part, you have a globe that you can pick the channel in Spanish.

Now let's get into our keynote session of the day, Reimagining News for Black Americans: Paving a Path Toward Equity in Journalism with co-founders of Capital B, Lauren Williams and Akoto Ofori-Atta. It's an honor for us to host Lauren and Akoto here to help us, keeping ISOJ's tradition of anticipating great, innovative, relevant projects coming up in online journalism. Last year, we had a similar session with Amanda Zamora and Emily Ramshaw, announcing the fantastic 19th News that was about to be launched when they came to to ISOJ. Now we have Amanda back here to keep that tradition in talking with with Lauren and Akoto. There will be a Q&A session following this panel, so be thinking now about about questions and post the questions in the chat or in Twitter using #ISOJ2021. So let's get to our keynote session.

Amanda Zamora Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for having me here and for that wonderful introduction, Rosental. I'm always so thrilled to be at ISOJ. I am Amanda Zamora. I am the publisher and co-founder of the 19th News. We are an independent nonprofit newsroom reporting at the intersection of gender, politics, and policy. And as Rosental said, I was here a year ago talking about our plans for launching this nonprofit before we knew that we would be in the midst of a global pandemic and so much news that has happened since in the last year. It's been an incredible year, and I am really thrilled to be here, really to learn from two incredible journalists, Lauren Williams and Akoto Ofori-Atta, who are here taking an incredible leap at a momentous time in this nation's history to start Capital B. Capital B is a Black-led nonprofit, local and national news organization reporting for Black communities across the country. And it's worth noting the "for," not about in that mission statement. And today we are going to learn more about their hopes and dreams for this new news organization, how they intend to advance equity in this industry, the ins and outs of their business model, and what we can expect when they launch this fall.

A little bit more about Lauren and Akoto. Lauren is the co-founder and CEO of Capital B. Before starting Capital B, she was the senior vice president and editor in chief at Vox, where she managed editorial and business operations. Before Vox, Lauren had editing roles at Mother Jones and the Root. She's the 2020-2021 digital media professional in residence at Columbia University's School of Journalism. Her partner, Akoto, is the co-founder and executive editor of Capital B. Before she took the Capital B leap, Akoto was managing editor at another nonprofit newsroom, The Trace, where she oversaw partnerships, special projects, and editorial operations. Before The Trace, Akoto held positions at The Root and Essence magazine. She's a 2015 alum of the John S Knight Journalism Fellowship at Stanford, where she focused on issues surrounding diversity and the Black press, and she's a 2019-2020 Institute of Nonprofit News emerging leader. We are so thrilled to learn from both of you all about Capital B. I'm going to actually throw it to you two to kind of steer us through your origin story. I love a good startup origin story, so we're really excited to learn a little bit more about what is inspiring you all to take this leap at this moment in time. I'm going to leave it to you two. I'll be back in a little bit as we move into questions from me and the audience.

Lauren Williams Thanks, Amanda. And thank you, everyone who is tuned in. We really appreciate your interest in us and in Capital B. So Akoto and I are currently deep in fundraising mode for Capital B. We give presentations almost every day, and we thought that instead of giving a formal presentation about something that doesn't actually exist out in the world yet, that we might instead sort of just have a conversation with each other about the foundation of Capital B, how it came to be. And I think we can't really talk about how it came to be without really thinking about, I think, two really important dates that formed the foundation of what would eventually be Capital B. The first date would be October 2010. Do you remember October 2010, Akoto?

Akoto Ofori-Atta I do. I remember it very well. I was in grad school in Washington, D.C., and I had just started a position at the Root, working as an editorial assistant. And I ended up sharing a pod with a young editor who seemed very nice and also seemed very, very quiet. And that last impression, I could not have been more wrong about that.

Lauren Williams Very incorrect first impression. Yeah, I also thought that my new pod mate was quiet, but we very, very quickly figured out that that wasn't true. So that's where we met. October of 2010, I started at the Route as an associate editor. I had come from AOL, where I was a lifestyle editor. And just to sort of set the state of the Route, the Route was pretty new. It had just launched around the beginning of Obama's first administration. It was a news and views website. It was run by Henry Louis Gates. It was very much a new digital news organization in the spirit of kind of a new moment for Black America, and it was a really interesting and formative moment in my career and in Akoto's career. It was a fascinating newsroom to be working in. We were working with so many talented people when I started, Cord Jefferson, who just won an Emmy for his work on the Watchmen, was the politics reporter. Jenée Desmond-Harris, who's an editor for the New York Times opinion section, was there. You know, so much talent. It was such a really nurturing environment for Black journalists. We really forged lifelong friendships, learned a lot about the craft of journalism. We learned a lot about Black media, and I think we also learned a lot about, you know, some of the challenges of Black media. And it was where the seed was first planted for us that if one day we could do this ourselves, what might we do differently?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yeah, you know, like when I think back on that time, I think about all of the really important stories we covered, the Trayvon Martin shooting, Barack Obama's

reelection, and so many other stories like those that really helped shape the moment that we're in now. And as we were growing in respect and mutual admiration as friends, we also grew in respect for each other as journalists, recognizing that we had some real shared values around the kind of impact that journalism could have. And, you know, part of what I think about when I think about our experience at the Root is how we were all really punching above our weight, and really trying to do news that was important for Black Americans. And we were punching above our weight because so many Black newsrooms, whether they're digital or print, legacy or new, really don't get the same investments as other mainstream news organizations. And so, yeah, I mean, we would often think about, if we had enough resources, we had enough money, enough personnel, enough time, how would we run a Black-focused newsroom? And we had a lot of ideas and batted a ton of ideas around, but we also were not quite ready to start and launch our own thing. We still had a lot to learn, I think.

Lauren Williams Yeah. It was a moment where ambition ran against resource and experience in a serious way. But back to us sort of us kind of forming our working relationship, which is a very important part of the foundation of Capital B, at that point, particularly when Akoto and I first met. I think that Akoto is a very modest person and a very modest journalist. But at that time, audience positions, social positions were seen as really junior grunt work, almost. Like thinking about strategies for Facebook or Twitter, thinking about reaching audience off platform in any way, was just kind of seen as junior in our industry. It was evolving, but in that moment, people didn't quite get it. And Akoto really, really got it. And I think that her audience focus at that time, even as a really fairly junior journalist, I think it really helped me to really understand and value that focus much more, which in a way that stuck with me throughout my career and in a way that I think is really informing so much of the work that we're doing now. I think that it's so interesting how relationships forged in situations like this can really impact your career in such meaningful ways. And I don't want to fast forward too much, but it really is so much of how we work together. These many, many, many, many years ago that really, really, really influenced the decisions that we're making now.

Akoto Ofori-Atta And, yes, now you have entered the Akoto and Laurant love fest portion of this keynote. Thank you, Lauren. You know this, but working with you was also really, really formative for me. You are a really deft editor, a really sharp strategic thinker. But you also have a knack for compassionate leadership and leadership that inspires, and I think that is a real rare combination, especially in our industry. You set the standard for everyone to do and be better and coached toward higher performance. And yeah, I think the world of you. And so needless to say, I was very, very sad, devastated, when you left the Root in 2013, or so.

Lauren Williams Yes, I left the Root. I went to Mother Jones, where I was an editor. Then I went to Vox, when Vox was very, very new, about two months old, to be the managing editor there. I eventually became executive editor, and then editor in chief, and then senior vice president and editor in chief. But you left too, shortly after I left.

Akoto Ofori-Atta I left shortly after you left. I went to Essence magazine, and then I did the JSK Fellowship at Stanford University, where, as Amanda said, I was thinking a lot about Black digital press and about issues around diversity and inclusion in the news industry. I left that experience feeling really excited to try something different. Up until that point, I had been an arts and culture editor and writer, and there was an opportunity to work at The Trace, which was a brand new nonprofit, single-issue site covering gun violence, and the only one in the country that covers gun violence full time, 24/7. So I

started there as a senior editor in an audience role and left last year as managing editor. In between that time, I did a full range of leadership things. So, yeah, we went our separate ways, learned a whole lot about audience, leadership impact. We stayed very close. You traveled across the ocean to come to my wedding. You've had babies. Life has happened.

And then June 11, which I think is the exact date, is the next important date in our trajectory. June 11, 2020. Yes, and Lauren, think back to how you were feeling last June when everything was happening.

Lauren Williams I was feeling terrible. I was feeling terrible on June 11, 2020, but pick any day in June 2020, I was feeling terrible. It's so interesting. In the recent weeks, there have been many women newsroom leaders and particularly women of color in newsroom leaders who have stepped down from their positions, have talked about burnout. And I think that if I were a person who was like a little bit more generous with myself, I probably would have recognized in that moment that that's what I was experiencing. I do believe that anyone running a newsroom in that moment was pretty miserable. And I know because I talked to a bunch of people running newsrooms in that moment, and they were all miserable. It was a terrible time. Between the difficulty of pandemic coverage, between the work from home situation, between the reckoning that's happening in newsrooms everywhere, being at home with my two young kids, taking the journalism out of it, being a Black woman in this moment in time, all of those things happening at once were just sort of soul crushing. And I was really, really struggling, and I was struggling with figuring out how to kind of channel all of what was happening into basically like a choice for how to productively move forward, really.

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yeah, yeah. When I think back to that time, I think back to being furious, being scared, being really worried about the future in general. Worried for Black people, and really concerned about whether or not journalism was leading the moment, and I had a broad sense that overall it was not. And so, I sent a spicy text message, the full text of which will never be revealed, to our group chat. It was an angry text that Lauren, you really channeled into something much more productive.

Lauren Williams I mean, so look, what I came to in that moment was that I had spent almost, and this is just pure honesty, I'd spent almost seven years at Vox. And I was looking out at the landscape at what Black journalists in our industry were saying about their experience. And I was looking at a contentious presidential election, and I was looking and thinking about the local news crisis, and how little trustworthy news Black people were getting. And I was thinking about misinformation around COVID, and how it was literally costing people their lives. And you sent the spicy text, and I realized that it was a moment where I could channel this angst into solutions. And in that split second, I didn't have the exact solutions, but I knew what my talents were. And I knew that the moment called for something big, and I knew who I wanted to find the solutions with.

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yes. And so when you texted and said maybe it's time to start something new, I said "yes," without hesitation because of this deep sense that, like, the status quo had not been working, but especially now, it just felt irresponsible to try to think about doing things the same way. And so I didn't think twice about it, and obviously didn't think twice about doing it with you. So then the big question was, what is it going to be?

Lauren Williams Yeah, what is it going to be? And so we came together. And like the very interesting thing about this all is Akoto and I saw each other in January of 2020 in New York. That was the last time we saw each other. We have done all of this over Zoom. We

haven't seen each other in person. And we plan to see each other very soon, but this whole thing has been done remotely, which is outrageous. But so we hopped on to Zoom, and we we talked about our experiences, how are our past experiences in Black media have sort of informed what we think we could do to reimagine news for Black Americans. We came to basically like two different big ideas. One, the local news crisis is devastating to us. It's devastating to journalists. We all care very deeply about this. And when we think about Black audiences that are affected in their communities by the loss of local news, but then you think about the fact that maybe the local news that was there, didn't cover their communities or their story at all to begin with, or only came to their neighborhoods when there was a crime. You know, you start to think that there are issues there that are so much deeper than just the lost in advertising revenue is killing a local news business. And so we thought, you know, we want to create a new and different kind of local news that really caters to the information needs of predominantly, or large, Black cities across the country, and that felt really, really important to us.

And then we also thought about, you know, the ambitious, well-funded investigative and accountability journalism that big mainstream news outlets do and how Black audiences don't often get the benefit of really well funded, ambitious journalism made for them and about issues for them. That's a real issue. You know, why? You know, that doesn't make any sense. It's not fair. There is a real, I think, need for that type of journalism for a Black audience, a really, really high-quality reporting for a Black audience. And then we realized, that's not necessarily two different things. That is one news ecosystem in one, and that is how Capital B was born. A Network of local news bureaus across the country connected by a national hub that does big investigative and accountability journalism. And the way that we're seeing it is the national team and local teams really can feed off of each other. The national team works with the local teams to partner on projects to understand what's happening in local communities, not just like parachuting in to different cities and not really understanding the people or what's going on there. But actually like working with journalists who live there and know the communities. And then on the other side, local journalists working with national journalists on understanding like big national stories and then contextualizing them for their local audiences. So, yes, a big ambitious idea, but we felt like the moment called for something big and ambitious. And now the question is, how do we do it?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yes. So I want to give you guys a preview into how we're thinking about how we're going to prioritize audience with this very, very big idea. There are 40 million Black people across the country who all need this work, but we do think that there are some areas of the country that need it more urgently. So as we looked out into the landscape, we sort of settled on three criteria for us to understand who we would prioritize. And we became really interested in the Rust Belt, home to some of the starkest racial divides in the country, where very little media is focused on how Black people are faring and surviving, and how they've been impacted by the decline of industry in that region. So we expect to eventually have some presence there. We're also just looking at all of the big Black cities across the country, where local news has just been in steep decline and where access to local news has been slashed. That literally means that all the big Black cities are on the table for potential Capital B bureaus. And then finally, we're looking in places where demographics are shifting because we found that those areas make for contested political contest, and it's also where Black people are the targets for really sinister disinformation campaigns. And I should add here that part of what all of this is about is really combating that and becoming a trustworthy source of news for Black people who are facing mistruths online every day. And so that's how we're thinking about audience.

But I think I should take a step back and talk a little bit more about the local bureaus and talk about how we're thinking about service journalism. It can mean many different things in our industry. But I want to share an experience that I had that really sort of crystallized the kind of work that I think we all should be doing. The Trace participated in a gun violence reporting summit in Philadelphia in the fall of 2019, and it was a collection of journalists, public health officials, academics, really thinking about how to raise the quality of gun violence information, and the day ended with a panel of mothers who had lost children to gun violence. And one mother who lost a son in a high-profile shooting in Philadelphia talked a lot about how she had heard from the local magazine, and local TV, and the radio. And everyone was coming to her door to get the story, to learn more about her son, and, you know, write about it. And she also said, meanwhile, she was dying from the grief. I believe her exact words were she did not know how to live with a broken heart, and just was really in a dark place. And she just happened to stumble upon a support group of mothers, Mothers in Charge, I believe, is the name, who had been helping women in her circumstances for years. And so she noted that that is something that saved her, but also noted that none of the journalists who were reaching out to her were giving her information for something she really needed, and for the community of young people who were grieving the loss of her son as well. And the thing about Philadelphia is that there is quite a bit on mental health and resources for people to tap into, but there were no journalists being the bridge between getting people information they need. And I just remember thinking that that was an incredible failure for our industry. I should also stop here to just shout out all of the newsrooms that are prioritizing information needs in our space. City Bureau and Outlier who really helped to shape my ideas on this. But that's really what we want to do. We can't call people to these higher levels of engagement if we're not creating avenues for them to get information they need to live their everyday lives. And so that is going to be a big part of what Capital B does. Wow, we've talked for a long time. We could say a lot more, but we're happy to answer any questions. And we'll toss it back to Amanda to to get us started.

Amanda Zamora Well, first of all, I want to just start with a huge thank you from spicy text to now. I think particularly in that moment when people were burned out and distressed for such good reason, I think picking the safe route is maybe what you could have done. And what you're doing now is an enormous undertaking, and it is clear that you're identifying a really critical unmet need. And so I just wanted to note just the significance of the work that you're doing now, and to thank you for for taking the leap and not letting the spicy text just sort of like fall down in the scrolls and that you could have moved on to going back and reverting to what it was that you were doing.

I think of you both as digital natives in journalism. You have an extensive digital portfolio, and you've worked in mainstream media and Black media. And I guess you've talked a little bit about the aspirations that you have for Capital B, can you get into some specifics? What are the things that you're intentionally setting aside from those experiences and the things that you want to pick up or create anew? I think a lot of times newsrooms think about, particularly with equity, that this work is externalized in the journalism, but it's also how you build the newsroom that you're building. So can you talk a little bit more about what are the things you are definitely like, "we're not doing that"? And what are the things that you really are trying to figure out how to get right?

Akoto Ofori-Atta I think we both have a lot to say on this. I'll start. I think one big picture I am very interested in, I talked about the status quo, and I understand how every part of the process from J-schools, to hiring, to coaching, to writing, we need to sort of question all of our practices if we're going to try to change this thing around. So I'm very open to doing

things in a way that they haven't been done before. I think one thing that I want to rethink is hierarchies and newsrooms and how we are defining leadership, and management, and support. Capital B is a response to, yes, the protests, yes, the pandemic, but also to the stories from my peers about the ways they have been treated in their journalism careers. We want to provide a space that is supportive for Black journalists because we believe that Black journalists are the ones who need to tell these stories that are most affecting Black Americans. And so really thinking about how hierarchies can inhibit or support building a really, really nurturing and affirming newsroom.

Lauren Williams Yeah. I think one of the things that we've done, and this is on a totally different side of the coin, is we've talked a lot about different entertainment or opinion journalism. We both really like those types of journalism, and we've done them to various degrees at different parts of our career, and that we really want to kind of focus Capital B in these first few years around really specific beats and really directly focus them around reporting. And that's something that we truly at the beginning went back and forth on around, I think, culture in particular, and really had to kind of realize that in order to do this and really to give these really, really important subjects that are meaningful to people's lives their due, that we, at least in the first couple of years, really need to focus around some of the newsier beats.

Amanda Zamora You've touched on trust. It's a huge issue, well, for the entire industry, really. I think the last Gallup report on this was that 40 percent of Americans had expressed great trust and that was up from a low of 32 in 2016, so not doing great. But when you look at sort of the reasons or the disconnect with Americans and the media, there's a little bit of a different picture when you ask Black Americans about their relationship with the media versus Latinas and Latinos and white Americans. And according to Pew, Black Americans are significantly more likely than other groups to say that the reason that they feel misunderstood by the media is because of their identity, their race. And that has to be a huge factor in that mistrust. So can you talk a little bit more about how you envision the journalism playing out in practice in a way that fosters trust with the audiences that you are hoping to cultivate? One example that also comes to mind is the work that Mitra Kalita is doing in Epicenter New York, where that newsroom is just covering the pandemic and the vaccines notably differently by really being on the ground and again, covering for a community, not just about. So can you imagine, like, how are some of the stories that you're going to tackle in that sense, going to play out differently? And what kind of reporters do you want to hire? What skills do you want them to bring to the table that might be different from what a mainstream newsroom might be looking for?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yeah, Lauren, I can start with just talking about how we're going to prepare to be in the position to cover these stories, and maybe Lauren can talk more about reporters. But one of the things that we are really excited about is thinking about how we are going to reach Black Americans specifically. And when it comes to our national newsroom, we're going to think really strategically about all the different ways we can partner with the spaces where we know Black people are congregating, which is not something I've ever gotten to do as specifically in mainstream newsrooms. But also in our local bureaus, we are really cognizant of the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach is not going to work. Black people across the country are different. They have different needs, and each place has their own characteristics, right. So in order to build trust and also in order to be in a position to cover stories in the ways that Black Americans need, we are going to pay real attention to how people get their news in certain areas and what the priorities are in certain areas. We are not going to go into any cities without doing long-

term community listening campaigns or really talking to stakeholders and trying to get as much information about the city as we possibly can.

But then also in terms of distribution, you know, we're not going to go into a city that might have really bad or really low literacy rates and expect people to read thousand-word stories. Right. Like, that is not how you get people to trust you. That's not how you get in front of Black Americans, or in front of the Black Americans you're trying to reach. So, you know, being really nimble and thinking about where there is low access to broadband or low literacy rates, should we focus on radio? Where audiences are skewing older, do we need to focus more on print, or maybe like big partnerships with local TV? Where they skew younger, we're going to prioritize social and emerging platforms and just really being flexible in how we're reaching people so that way we can meet the need as best we can.

Lauren Williams Yeah, and just to go back to that Pew study, which I think is so interesting. I see Capital B as joining a really important and amazing tradition of Black press in America. You know, the Chicago Defender helped spark the Great Migration. The Black press in this country has fallen victim to the same forces that local newspapers have fallen victim to, that all local newspapers have fallen victim to. In some ways worse, because many of them are small independent operations. And so some of them have had to close, or are very, very small, or have been purchased by private interests. And so in many ways, what Capital B is trying to do is really think about a way to reinvigorate that spirit. This idea that 58 percent of Black news consumers feel like mainstream media doesn't get them, let's create a new kind of model in that spirit with news that Black Americans will feel differently about, that they can trust, that is high quality, but tailored to them, and news that they feel like does get them and who they are. That's what we're trying to do.

Amanda Zamora You're also talking about being responsive and adaptive, not treating your audience like a monolithic audience. And as you know, as we all know, that requires resources, which brings me to the business model. So I want to back up a step and ask, what is the model? Why did you go nonprofit? What do you imagine your big revenue streams being at this point to help get Capital B off the ground in a sustainable way?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yes, so we chose the nonprofit model because, you know, one, this work is urgent, and two the work that we want to do, particularly on the local level, you know, there are not great viable market resources for. I worked at a nonprofit newsroom, and I saw all the ways that nonprofit news can have impact and can really be hyper focused on a particular issue, or particular challenge, or a particular community. And taking the pressure of profit off the table can really sort of drive a lot of impact. And then in terms of revenue streams, we're looking at a few revenue streams to drive our business. Major giving, obviously support from media funders and other local and national foundations that have racial equity initiatives. We are looking at corporate sponsorship and support because so many of them have come out with racial equity initiatives, and we want to make sure we're riding that momentum while it's here in front of us. We're going to look at an events program. We've seen that work for a lot of our peers in the nonprofit space, including the 19th. And we're also looking at a membership program. We were really encouraged what we saw after our soft launch in November and how many people supported our work, and we are really excited about how we can grow a program once we have content and once we have a dedicated staff to think through how to grow that audience.

Amanda Zamora To the extent that you're comfortable, how is it going? Y'all had hundreds of people donating, I think, within weeks of your launch. How is the fundraising going? But most importantly, how can people help now?

Lauren Williams Yeah, we sent out two emails, and with just the announcement of our intentions to do this on Twitter, we've had almost 500 small donors and raised about \$35,000 in small donors. And you can go to our website, CapitalBNews.org, if you'd like to become a founding member. But on the fundraising end, we are excited that we just reached our first fundraising milestone after two months of full-time fundraising. We actually surpassed it, and we've raised \$1.5 million. So we're excited about that.

Amanda Zamora That's incredible. Exciting. A great testament to your talent and vision and the need for this project for sure. So I'm getting some questions from the audience. People are really interested in the editorial model, the national versus local. And they want to know if you can talk a little more about the beats you're envisioning hiring first? How they'll work with sort of the national newsroom? What cities? Do you envision covering a small number of cities and then expanding? Can you talk just a little bit more about how you're figuring out where to even start?

Lauren Williams Yeah, we can talk a little bit about that. And so the core beats, and I think these will change a little bit, because, again, different cities have different things going on. So it might be different in different locations. But the core beats we're thinking about both on the national and the local level, are education, health, criminal justice, politics. And what am I forgetting? Housing. Yeah, housing and economics. And so those are the ones that most directly affect people's lives, how they live their lives, and we feel like kind of translate into every community out there. In each community, I think we'll prioritize different beats to start given what's going on in the community. But obviously we're launching in the fall. Health is going to be just an enormous beat for us because of the moment of time we're in. Criminal justice is a huge beat for us. But those are sort of the core areas that we're always thinking about.

We are not trying to flood the zone with Capital B bureaus when we launch. We want to make sure that we get it right. Our five-year plan is to be in eight bureaus, but we are going to make sure that we are not rushing into that. We want to make sure that we are researching the communities before we go into them, we are listening to what communities need, that we are identifying local funding opportunities, and making sure that we are going to be able to locally sustain these bureaus in the long term. And so there is a lot of work that goes into planning for opening these bureaus, and we want to make sure that we're building really strong foundations for the bureaus. So we're starting slowly with bureaus.

Amanda Zamora How big is the newsroom going to be in the fall? Can you say?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yes. We are, nationally, in both the editorial and business side and the local side will be roughly 20 by launch.

Amanda Zamora Great. Sarah Childress says she's so inspired by your vision and appreciates hearing your thinking behind it. She's curious how you're thinking about accessibility in areas like the Rust Belt, and how you are planning to distribute your journalism. In addition, she expects that other people of color, indigenous, Asian-Americans, Latinx folks, would also benefit from this model. Do you envision ultimately expanding to a broader focus. And I guess kind of back to the original point about the

Black community not being a monolith, like how are you approaching intersectionality, too, with respect to building your team and cultivating an audience?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yeah. So, I mean, you know, Lauren and I believe this deeply that we cannot execute this mission if our newsroom is not radically diverse. If we are not thinking about regional diversity, socioeconomic diversity, gender, sexual orientation, all of that, we won't be able to do our best work. So that is something we're thinking very strategically about now and will carry with us forever, really. And then in terms of the Rust Belt question specifically, again, it goes back to what I was saying about community listening and really, really understanding how people are getting news. What are the information hubs that people are most likely to gravitate to? We found in our community listening that there are also tons of people who don't call themselves journalists, but who commit acts of journalism all the time, and who sort of act often as like information traders or distributors in their communities, and thinking about how we can work them. Like that journalism. So like we want to identify those people and see how we can work with them or partner with them to make sure that Black people are getting the high-quality news that we're going to deliver.

Amanda Zamora We've got questions on the distribution model, let's see.

Lauren Williams I also think that we can't promise like full comprehensiveness. Right? Like that every story is going to check all the boxes for every Black person in America. But that would never be our promise and that would be an outrageous thing for us to say. But I think that our audience is going to be an audience that cares about these issues, even if they are not going to be directly affecting them or directly match their experience, and that will be the tie that will bind our audience.

Amanda Zamora Another question is wanting to know more about your outreach and promotion strategy. He's the executive director of a nonprofit news organization who says he's constantly facing the challenge of getting the word out about the news service without access to a large advertising budget. The 19th is in the hustle to grow our audience. Akoto, you know this stance well. So I think one of the challenges, particularly starting out that we all face is we're trying to grow is like picking your spots. And you talked a little bit earlier about trying to be where your audience is, but you can't be everywhere at first. So any guidance to other nonprofit news leaders who are trying to figure out how to prioritize small budgets, small staffs and big news moments and big goals?

Akoto Ofori-Atta Yeah, I mean, that's a good question, and obviously we have not launched yet. What I found, and Amanda, you know this, is that so much of what you learn about audience is by actually doing it. You got to get in there, and get started, and pivot as you learn along the way. Starting these community listening campaigns has really been eye opening for me, and there are a lot of people across the industry that do them. But so much journalism is executed without that, and it's kind of wild when you think about it. And obviously, like, the news business is the news business. Things happen fast. Things need to be reported on. But I really, really think that if you are embarking on a long-term audience strategy or really trying to overhaul it or rethink it, you really got to spend a lot of time with the people you're trying to reach and invest in that some way. And I think, you know, talking to five people in a community that you're trying to reach is far better than talking to none. The things you'll learn from those conversations are going to give you some insight into how to do your best work as it relates to reaching people, and I think people really should prioritize that.

Amanda Zamora I have one bigger question before we wrap, which is to kind of come back to the moment and the reckoning that we are in the midst of as a country, but also in newsrooms. One of the things that has struck me even before last year in doing mentoring and working with younger journalists, particularly young journalists of color, that they're grappling with feeling connected to this industry in the newsroom. And even before the pandemic brought, you know, another just really tragic round of furloughs and layoffs and departures, people were making that choice to just leave journalism altogether or really questioning whether they could do the journalism that they wanted to do in mainstream newsrooms. And so I would love to hear from both of you. What advice do you give to those journalists of color who are grappling with where to go, where to be? And then what would you say to the majority of newsroom leaders who are still predominantly white men, like the single most important thing that they need to be addressing in this moment of reckoning that is not yet being addressed sufficiently?

Lauren Williams It's a good question. For the young journalists, I would say that you definitely shouldn't stay in a situation that feels very wrong to you. But I would also say that you shouldn't leave the industry. You should try something else. There are different types of newsrooms out there. There are different types of jobs. It's good for a young journalist to try a couple of different beats or a couple of different types of types of outlets. It won't hurt you at the beginning, and it's so much better than jumping out because it's really hard to get back in. And the industry really needs you. And so, no, don't stay in. And I don't care if it's like a fancy name that feels good on your resume. Don't say if it's not right. But don't leave industry. Go somewhere else. Go somewhere smaller. Go somewhere nurturing. Just don't leave the industry. That's my advice.

Akoto Ofori-Atta To the young journalists, I'd also add, as you're looking for something new, as Lauren was saying, you know, yes, you're interviewing for roles, but you should also be researching and interviewing to try to understand the space that you're entering. The industry is wacky for a reason because there are too many bad actors in leadership, but there are people who are trying to change their newsrooms and understand how urgent it is that we create more inclusive spaces. So identify the individuals that are doing that work, and whether they're your editor or middle management, having someone there can mean the world as you navigate your career.

Lauren Williams For the newsroom leaders, I would say two things. Like, one, don't just listen. Listen and figure out a plan of action. And don't just feel defensive. I mean, not everything that you are hearing is going to be 100 percent correct, and that's OK. But it deserves respect and response. And I think a lot of the problem is a lot of the feelings in the newsroom fester because it feels like what they're saying is not being respected by the leaders, and it's just going into a black hole, and nothing's being done with it. And something has to be done with it, and you need to figure out what that is for your newsroom. The other suggestion would be like maybe it's time to step aside.

Akoto Ofori-Atta And I would just add, I think if you are a white newsroom leader, I think you should probably be centering your Black reporters, your reporters of color, and your career reporters in your decision making. Doing that will ensure that you're doing things in a more inclusive way than if you're not. Thinking about how everything that you are planning for your organization and things that you're doing are not only going to help you recruit a diverse staff, but it's also going to help you retain the ones that you have, which I think is something that a lot of newsroom leadership is failing on, thinking about retention. But, yeah, just center the most marginalized, and that is a good place to start.

Amanda Zamora Thank you for that. We are out of time. Is there any final call to action apart from going to CapitalBNews.org? Is that right URL to donate and to subscribe to the email list? We want to help root you two along as you are on the march to building this incredible and much needed organization that we can be looking out for in the fall. Anything I'm missing there of how people can get involved?

Akoto Ofori-Atta I would just add that my DMs are open. You know, Lauren and I, we love talking about Capital B, and we're trying to build as many relationships as possible. So if you have questions, if you're from a news organization, if you're someone who's looking to maybe make a move in the fall, just DM me. I will set up some time for us to talk, and we can chat more.

Amanda Zamora Reporters waste no time. Get in Akoto's DMs right now.

Akoto Ofori-Atta Do it. Do it.

Lauren Williams And my email address is in my Twitter bio.

Amanda Zamora Thank you two so much for this work. So great to talk to you and learn more about Capital B, and I'm going to throw it back to Rosental. Thanks for being here with us at ISOJ for this keynote.

Akoto Ofori-Atta Thank you so much for having us. Thank you.

Rosental Alves Thank you. Thank you, Lauren, and thank you, Akoto. Thank you, Amanda. This was really awesome. We learned a lot, and I think we we can all agree that the journalism world needs to do more in order to achieve equity across Black American communities that you want to serve with this project. We wish the best to Capital B. It's indeed a very innovative and bold example of entrepreneurial journalism for the digital age in America. You have my full support, and I'm going to go there to that site, CapitalBNews.org.

All right. Thank you so much. So join us back here in 30 minutes for our workshop covering climate change. Another very important issue, right? Covering Climate Change: Best Practices for How to Localize a Planet-Sized Story, with the great line up of speakers from Local Media Association, Climate Matters, and Texas Observer. Before the workshop, though, you can use the next minutes to chat with your other ISOJ'ers about this session that we have just ended in our Wonder room. The Wonder room tries to replicate the meet and greet among attendees of in person conference, when things happen out of the sessions. Right. So go there. You can just follow the link that we are posting now on the chat. So see you there at the Wonder room. OK, so see you soon. Bye.