

Elise Hu, culture reporter, NPR
Matt Stiles, data editor, NPR's news apps team

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Welcome to It's All Journalism, my name is Megan Cloherty joined today by fellow producer Michael O'Connell and two journalists from NPR, [Elise Hu](#) and [Matt Stiles](#).

Elise is a tech and culture reporter at NPR. She also hosts the "[All Tech Considered](#)" blog on NPR, and reports for the national news programs "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered."

Matt is the data editor of NPR's news apps team. Before coming to NPR, he was a reporter and data applications editor at [The Texas Tribune](#), a digital news startup in Austin. Elise also did a stint in Texas journalism before coming to NPR. She was a founding journalist at The Texas Tribune. Oh and I forgot to mention that they are also married. Welcome guys. Thanks for coming.

Elise Hu, NPR

Great. Thanks so much.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So just to get that out of the way. How did you guys meet? I mean print and TV colliding.

Elise Hu, NPR

We actually met before we started working together. I was in television and Matt was in newspapers. He was working at the Dallas Morning News at the time, and I was in my first year out of college -- Megan and I actually went to school together at Missouri -- and working at a television station in Waco, Texas, which is about 80 miles south of Dallas. And I hated Waco so much. Sorry Waco. That I drove up to Dallas to see friends, even just for dinner sometimes. We had a mutual friend who worked at the Dallas Morning News with Stiles, and we met through him.

Matt Stiles, NPR

The Belo Corporate cafeteria, very romantic.

Elise Hu, NPR

That is where we met.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So from Texas, how did you get to NPR? Did someone get the job first?

Elise Hu, NPR

Yeah I guess I did. I actually got a cold call from NPR while I was producing a podcast. So I was just finishing -- I used to moderate our weekly Texas political podcast at The Texas Tribune, and just as I was sort of cleaning it up and editing afterwards I got a call from a recruiter from NPR, who was looking for somebody for a state public policy network that NPR was starting, which was then called [StateImpact](#). They needed a digital editor to, sort of, set the vision, help hire the reporters from the member stations, and think about it as if it was start up within NPR. And so they thought somebody who had just done a digital startup might be good for it. Among the journalists that were hired, there was a spot for a data journalist, so somebody who could really teach and coach the reporters on different programs and how to really work with access and tell stories with data. I had not suggested my husband, of course. But there's good journalists at NPR, and they realized two or three months later after I had started that hey, my husband happened to fill those skill sets that they were looking for. And so they approached me and asked if it would be OK if they approached him. .

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

And so you had done data before obviously, but you were reporting before and now you went into apps. I mean tell me, kind of, your transition.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Well, so I was doing data applications for The Texas Tribune, and they needed a data journalist to work with these reporters that we were hiring for State Impact so it was a perfect fit.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So you guys got State Impact off the ground?

Elise Hu, NPR

That's right.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

And tell us, sort of, about how that happened because you had your little -- I like that the startup was within NPR ...

Matt Stiles, NPR

We were actually, we were in a studio isolated from everyone else in the newsroom and in the building essentially. We were in an old converted studio that was like an office. And so it was like we were in a pod working together launching this thing. It was a lot of fun. Like all startups, it was, you know, difficult but...

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Did you feel like you worked at NPR or did you feel like you worked in a little tiny pod inside?

Elise Hu, NPR

Well, I didn't know any different right? So when we started, we thought that we were part of the larger organization, and we always had really great relationships with the people who brought us in, managers, and so I didn't realize that StateImpact was, kind of, it's own pod until now that we're part of the larger organization. We realize that hey we were, kind of, like R&D, you know, within.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

It's like they opened up a door and like 'Look at all these other people here. I didn't know this was going on.'

Matt Stiles, NPR

We did all kinds of things. Because of that, we didn't have to rely on the infrastructure at NPR. So we did things like putting our data in the cloud. I mean innovative things for digital at NPR that the larger organization noticed and, in that sense, it was a good experiment.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

And so now that you are working for NPR as a whole instead of in a little pod, are you using some of that innovation that you worked on at StateImpact at the larger, in the larger branch?

Matt Stiles, NPR

I think so yeah. I think, I mean, we both sort of developed a reputation there where people sort of trust that, you know, we're trying to do things that are innovative and different and have unique value. And on our team obviously, you guys had [Brian Boyer](#) on a couple of weeks ago. He definitely knows what he is doing.

Elise Hu, NPR

And StateImpact really pioneered a lot of and experimented with a lot of news apps and news app design that was forward thinking at the time that we did it. And so, the designer, the front end designer, who was on StateImpact is now on news apps. Matt is now on news apps and so, it was really good that we were able to sort of prototype some things and then bring them out into the wider newsroom.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

When Brian was here, we talked to him about [David Wright](#) and the whole idea about the clean design that NPR has. Can you talk a little bit about how you, from

an apps perspective, what you're doing differently? And sort of how you think about the news apps?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah I mean a big thing is that we design for mobile first. I don't know if Brian talked about that, but I mean that's really important, something that has really been a paradigm shift in the last year. And now everything we do works on mobile and we think that's important, just as it is for the regular site, so that people have a good experience. That's one area where we are trying to keep up with where our readers are, where our audience is. The other is that we do everything static. We don't have production servers so everything is baked out into flat files that are easily served. So we don't have to stay up nights worrying about the site going down because we get a lot of traffic. And that's also something that I think is on -- or we're on the forefront of a trend in news applications around the country.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Yeah because everyone hates when the app just stops and then closes on you.

Elise Hu, NPR

And that often happens because databases go down right? Databases that are getting pulled in order to serve whatever shows up in front of your screen.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Right. So you can spend a lot of time and make sure that your database never goes down, but that's expensive. And so it's an easy way for us to like, once we've set up a system -- which we have -- we can push these apps out and, you know, we don't have to worry about spending a lot of extra money on caching servers and all this other stuff that other news apps teams might have to worry about.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

So the app is then something that's self contained, like you're creating a product.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah. So it's basically like the 2000 Internet, or the 1995 Internet. I mean it's like it's HTML pages. They're baked out and they're very lightweight and easy to serve.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

They just load by themselves and you don't have to worry about it. OK.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Part of our audience, well our audience is kind of divided up into two different sort of groups.

One are young journalists coming in or new journalists coming in sort of trying to get a handle on the digital end of it. And the other are people who are journalists who are seeing a greater digital presence in their newsroom. You guys started work at Texas Tribune and what you are doing now at NPR, I mean you've been digital journalists for a while. How've you seen that sort of develop over the last five or six years? .

Elise Hu, NPR

I think being part of a startup really helped me think about things differently because when I was in television I felt like we all had our own roles. I felt like I, as a reporter, was responsible for my two minutes that went into part of a larger run down, and then the producer was in charge of the larger run down, and there were engineers who made sure the set signals and the live truck signals were coming in. And then there was an assignment editor who was solely responsible for assignments.

Now that organization was completely flattened when I went to a startup. In a startup, everybody did everything. You know, I helped buy trashcans, but I also thought about business development and we had to learn how to sing for our supper in some cases. I had to learn a lot more about technology and the technology back end that was keeping the Texas Tribune going.

And I think that is something that is going to -- actually becoming more well-rounded and understanding all the processes that surround what we're doing and what our organizations are -- is going to be critical for all journalists going forward, because we can no longer be just responsible for the inception and the production of our individual stories. We really have to think holistically about the organization.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

You're not a single role player. You have to think across the whole platform, which is something that we've been hearing from a lot of different people that we talk to.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Well and it is funny because I think it should be mentioned that Elise and I met at undergrad at Missouri and we went through very, I think it is rigorous to be fair, training for TV journalism and it is very role based. I mean it is very important that you are the expert at your part.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Get in this track and stay in this track.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Exactly and I think it's interesting that, you know, sort of the more traditional mediums you do have your space in it. And then when you go to digital, it's really kind of, you do whatever you can do and the more you can do the better. Do you guys find, I mean, do you consider yourselves radio journalists? When people talk to you, do they go 'Oh you work in radio.' You're like, 'Eh. Kind of.'

Elise Hu, NPR

Yeah and I always push back when I hear that. Because when I came to NPR, the way I think of NPR is not as National Public Radio. And actually I think we dropped National Public Radio. We just call ourselves NPR because we consider ourselves a multiplatform media organization. And when I came to it, I came in a totally digital capacity.

But I can also tell radio stories. Obviously, we're very well trained in broadcast news storytelling and I can also think about products in the way that we think about digital products. There's different things that we can do. My advice to journalists that are kind of coming up is to make sure you know what is going in the field. Read the -- for better or worse -- the trades, the [Nieman Journalism Labs](#) and the [Poynters](#) out there to make sure you are knowledgeable about what is coming around the corner.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

I feel like it helps to have that background, to have a reporting background to get it. But I mean it seems like everyone we have in, most experts we have in, say you need to understand, have a basis of understanding about the whole, and then be really good at one thing. Matt would you agree with that?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah I mean I was a newspaper reporter for a long time, and I did a lot of everything. And now I am sort of more specialized. Sometimes I miss reporting but I think, because I am so specialized, that's why I am able to work at a place like NPR. Whereas if I went back to reporting, I don't know if I have the chops to do it at NPR.

Elise Hu, NPR

Different supply and demand.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah. I mean there's a lot of people who want to be a reporter at NPR. There's not a lot of data people who could, you know, that NPR could hire.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

The only other element to sort of add into this conversation from other conversations that we've had is the word entrepreneurial. That if you, yeah, get an idea of how all the different things work, but sort of an entrepreneurial aspect to what you are doing, that maybe you are going to do your own startup or you are going to do a podcast that you are going to get to use all of these other skills and sort of build on that.

Before we started the podcast we were talking a little bit about this project that you are doing for the ombudsman, this data project. Can you talk a little about that?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah we just wanted to look at, well the ombudsman wanted to look at, and I was asked to help -- to look at where NPR, where it's stories are focused. Where in the country are we focused? Are we too East Coast centric? Are we too California centric? Where are two big bureaus are -- Washington, New York, well three, and then California.

And so, the ombudsman spent some time putting together a list of all of our stories, where they were focused, and then asked me to help visualize that, and to see whether we, whether there was a bias toward one part of the country or the other.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

That's interesting. So did you do a map obviously? I mean my small brain would think a map, but I'm guessing you have other ideas.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Well, originally there was a map that was produced that showed where the stories were and it looked like a population map because clearly California is the most populous state so we are probably going to do a few more stories about California. So what we did was normalize it by population so you could actually see a rate, stories per 100,000 people. And what we saw was interesting things popped out like Louisiana got more stories per capita than other places probably because of Katrina, post-Katrina. Even like Vermont jumped out you know.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Is that sort of typical of the type of data projects that you do?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Sort of. I mean we're sort of moving away from maps as a vehicle to tell stories unless the geography is a variable in the data. But yeah normalizing data so that it actually makes sense and is in context based on a population rate is something

that we definitely try to achieve because you can, I mean, you can mislead your audience if you don't think about, sort of, statistical you know.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Right and one of the things that Brian Boyer was talking about when he was in on our podcast was your election coverage and he was just like, well maps, state sizes and shapes of states have nothing to do with the actual impact that they really have on the election. And you end up, that kind of drives the design and the thinking behind the way you are going to assemble that data and present it.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah I mean if you think about all the red states that are huge and not very populated in the West. It can skew the way the map looks. The same way if you look at a map of congressional districts. It's a sea of red because all the Democrats are in these tiny urban districts that you can't see when you look at a national map. So we put together a thing that just had little blocks that were all evenly sized and the more electoral votes you had, the more blocks you got. So that you could really see what the trends are.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Right because I'm sure there were a lot of people at the end of the last election and said well how come Romney didn't win because most of the country is red? But in actuality it really has nothing to do with the, wasn't based the population.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Going back to the ombudsman thing, I just think it's interesting that they are using you in house to give them data as opposed to publishing it. It would be cool to kind of pull back that veil and publish it for people to see where those stories are concentrated.

Elise Hu, NPR

[It's public](#). It just was out.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Does that happen a lot? I mean do they use you guys to kind of --

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

-- answer an internal question that sort of becomes a story?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Not really. I mean I was a little bit uncomfortable working with the ombudsman because that office is supposed to be independent from what we're doing. That person should be working for the reader and not letting us influence the coverage.

But in this case, it was just a simple like 'Hey, you should probably normalize this data.' And then like, they said 'Oh, well, will you do it for us?' And I was like, 'OK. Sure.' You know...

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

'I guess.'

Elise Hu, NPR

But it's not a regular partnership that's for sure.

Matt Stiles, NPR

But it's not a regular thing.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

OK.

Matt Stiles, NPR

I mean there are some internal questions that we want to answer like we have this coffee machine. You can go get coffee just like you can here at WTOP, and we want to know which types of coffee are most common and what times of day people choose that coffee.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

He was explaining this in the elevator.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Coffee's very important to journalists.

Elise Hu, NPR

And they're super geeky so ...

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Yeah no, he realized there must be a way to track that data and then turn it into a story.

Matt Stiles, NPR

There's a little computer inside the machine that records that time people get coffee and what kind they get, the volume. We are going to get that data and we going to use it.

Elise Hu, NPR

See this is why he does what he does and I probably could never do it because I just don't think like that.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

You don't see the potential.

Elise Hu, NPR

I don't see the potential, but I'm glad there are people who do.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

OK so talking about, we kind of brought you guys in, in part, because you guys are both doing such interesting things. But also because you're married and it's a unique thing to have two people who are journalists who are making it work.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Well as near as we can tell.

Elise Hu, NPR

Yeah check back with us later. No this is the second job, or the second journalism organization that we've worked at together.

Matt Stiles, NPR

And the second startup, which is a whole different set of stress.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Right.

Matt Stiles, NPR

And in both places, we were not one of many people on the operation. We were critical to the operation so that -- it's been a nice ride.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So you guys have worked very closely together?

Elise Hu, NPR

I think it was bumpy when we first worked together because he was coming from the [Houston Chronicle](#), this major news organization, in Texas, a major newspaper in Texas, and I was coming from a television newsroom, a local television newsroom --

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Sounds like a sitcom

Elise Hu, NPR

It really could have been a good reality show, the startup days of The Texas Tribune. But and so television newsrooms are a lot smaller. It's fewer resources and they are louder, you know, the people are different. The people are more dramatic.

And so just learning those dynamics within a professional space, a new professional space, was difficult at first. But after the Tribune experience, which we were both at for more than a year, coming to NPR and working together was a lot more professional and smoother. And now, since he's on this dedicated apps team and I'm out reporting a lot, we don't actually see each other at work very often.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Have you had a chance to work on any story together NPR?

Elise Hu, NPR

We did [one blog post](#) together that I wrote and he did the data for about Oscar upsets. I'm constantly upset that *Brokeback Mountain* lost to *Crash* for the best picture Oscar a few years ago because *Crash* I just don't think it stands the test of time.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

You're still on it.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Let it go. There have been other Academy Awards since then.

Elise Hu, NPR

Right but there's been many upsets and a lot of upsets that we consider emotional and I wanted to see what the data actually showed. So upsets that were to the rest of the industry too. Movies that won all the directors guild and writers guild awards, but then lost the Oscar and so he helped with the data on that. And so that was the only example of something we worked on together recently.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

So what other examples were there?

Elise Hu, NPR

StateImpact, as an entire project, we worked on together. And so the entire network we really built out together side by side with the other four team members responsible for StateImpact.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So obviously, when you guys got here, it's difficult for anybody when they are starting a job, when it's that intense of a job, but when you guys were trying to think about -- I mean you guys had your little baby. You were thinking about family planning and all that stuff. Did that weigh in? I mean you work at the same place and you're working on something that you are so critical to.

Matt Stiles, NPR

We were just arguing about that this morning actually.

No, I mean we've tried to work out schedules and things where if Elise is going to be busy later, I'll come home so that I can feed the baby and vice versa. And I've gotten up a lot earlier and gone to work a lot earlier than I've ever have in my career so that I can leave early to come home to help the baby.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So you have more flexibility as far as your schedule goes because you can go in early.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah. Brian, if you listening to this, thank you for the flexibility.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

What a good guy that Brian is.

Elise Hu, NPR

No we are lucky to work at a news organization that supports this notion of family too and balance. And so I'm sure all the parents out there understand that time becomes more critical to you because you realize that every moment that you are not at work you could be with your family. You could be with your child. And so, we've been very lucky to work out a balance, you know, a way to both share in on domestic duties and, you know, domestic household duties and on childcare duties. So being sort of partners in that is very helpful. Then also work has been supportive.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Yeah and it's probably also helpful that you both do, are working in the same industry and work for the same company, and so you have an understanding of what that person is doing in the office and what sort of things are pulling at him or her so that you can say 'Oh yeah, I can understand that.'

Elise Hu, NPR

That's right. He's never gotten mad at me for hanging up on him for example, because you know how you just have to leave. You just have to go for a story or

something happens and you're gone. That might be something that a non-journalist might not be as sympathetic to. But the fact that we're both journalists that is something that we are understanding of.

Matt Stiles, NPR

And working at the same news organization, I think it -- I can physically see how busy she is. And so I understand that I need to step up and vice versa.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

She's not faking it.

Matt Stiles, NPR

Right.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

She's not saying she's really busy when she's not.

It's funny because when Elise and I are in school they taught you like how to do your eyebrows. I mean they you taught you everything. No, but I think it's interesting that that is not taught how to balance, you know, work/life balance.

If you are in a relationship or whatever, if you want to have a family, and I know in TV especially, it's a big deal if you are going to be gone, if you're pregnant, and you're going to be gone for a certain amount of time. I mean, are you going to be replaced? Are you going to be able to come back? It's sort of an unspoken thing, and I don't know, I'm not picking on one station or one organization but I think, as women too, coming up, you're kind of like, 'I guess I'll deal with it when it comes, and I'll see where I'm at.' But it's not something that's talked about, especially when you are trying to plan your career.

Elise Hu, NPR

Right. When I was pregnant, this came into full focus for me because it is something that I hadn't thought about until it was really smacking me in the face. It was a reality and so, I had a great experience all around, and my organization has been very supportive, but I know it hasn't been the case for other women.

I've really wanted to just personally, to have more of a dialogue about it and so, you know, if there's folks that are listening to the podcast and want to continue the conversation, please reach out to Megan, reach out to myself, and we can continue this dialogue because I do think as women in journalism we should be supporting each other, especially when it comes to the lack of sort of a community for childcare or the costs of it. And the fact that there is still a lot of variance in terms of the parental leave policies, family flex time and all of that.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

And also it comes down to a lot of our personalities. We are really ambitious. We want to get back into it. We want to have really strong careers so, but then you, like you said, you want to spend your free time with your kid. Yeah, it's an interesting thing.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Well, and this isn't just for journalists as well. I know my wife went through the same thing with all of our children. The fact that she was, she was the main breadwinner because I'm a journalist and we needed to eat. So she needed to work and she has a really good job. She has a real job. Thank you very much dear.

But the fact that there are a lot of women, you know, they come to that point where they've got to figure out how to balance that career and their family and their children. You know, it really pulls on them. I know that was an issue ongoing with my wife.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

I was wondering because we had Bethany Swain, who's a photojournalist for CNN, and she was talking about having that same pull. So, I mean, I don't think it matters where you....

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Well, we're long overdue, we've been talking about doing a panel about, bringing some women in to talk about the issues that are sort of unique to a professional women trying to --

Elise Hu, NPR

Oh I have great stories if you want to have me back for that podcast.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Yes. I know a woman who's water broke when she was on the air.

Elise Hu, NPR

Yeah Tamara Keith, our congressional correspondent, yeah she was in the middle of a story.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

I need to leave now.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So going forward at NPR means that you kind of have a new role now.

Elise Hu, NPR

That's right. So StateImpact was a pilot project and it was a two-year grant funded project and so that is coming to an end in a couple of months. The stations are actually continuing with the StateImpact name. We're really excited.

We helped 17 reporters in eight different states, and those individual states created collaborations and websites that are built out. And so those websites and that reporting on public policy will continue on. But NPR's official involvement as coaches and as technical support will not. And so everyone on the StateImpact family is kind of going different places.

The director of State Impact, who was the head of the project, Lynette Clemetson, is going to be a senior supervising producer over Morning Edition, which is really exciting. Matt and Danny are on news apps, and I have moved into covering the intersection of tech and culture. So not necessarily just gadget reviews or really we're not doing gadget reviews at all, but how technology is sort of changing the way we live and behave and relate to one another, which has been a lot of fun.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Oh that's really interesting. I've been thinking about that quite a lot.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

That is really interesting. So you're obviously not an entertainment, when people hear culture, they think entertainment sometimes.

Elise Hu, NPR

No, I don't get to cover red carpets.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So tell us, I mean, what are you working on right now?

Elise Hu, NPR

I'm really interested in sort of the changing nature of work. So because of software companies, a lot of organizations -- workplaces -- have become flatter. So my next story that I'm working on is about bossless workplaces. So places where employees teams vote on each other's promotions, vote on each other's salaries, vote to fire each other. Valve, a software company, has been doing this. Gortex is basically completely flat. I'll be visiting Menlo Innovations, which is a software company in Ann Arbor, where there are no bosses too.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

That sounds interesting. That's a reality show easily.

Matt Stiles, NPR

And I'll be at home taking care of the baby.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

What's the apps team working on now besides the coffee situation?

Elise Hu, NPR

Can you offer a teaser for your big project?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Well, yeah, so we're working on this really great project. It's totally like a public service. It's going to have a small audience. But it's basically a Yelp-like feature for parents who have kids with special needs.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Oh neat.

Matt Stiles, NPR

And there's no database for it. There's no census data of every one of these places we are trying to identify, and so we are building it by hand.

Elise Hu, NPR

Yelp-like services: restaurants and things like that?

Matt Stiles, NPR

No, it's actually playgrounds. Playgrounds where you can go and there are feature there if you're in a wheelchair, if you have autism or if you're blind. The playground is built out in a way so that you can participate in a playground the same way that kids who don't have special needs do.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

I can speak - I have two autistic daughters. I can tell you that that's a resource that just is not there at this time.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

That surprises me that the government didn't assemble data.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

There are places that you can go. I know that there is an adaptive park in McLean, Va., that has got a Ferris wheel and everything. Or not a Ferris wheel - it's a merry-go-round. And that they have ramps to all of the equipment and everything.

There are other issues that, especially with autistic children, movie theaters that show movies that sort of played a lower volume that make it easier for people with various disabilities to participate in something as a "normal person".

Matt Stiles, NPR

In the past, I worked on these sort of things that were kind of like sexy, attention-grabbing applications, like where the red light cameras are? How much money do your state officials make?

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

In D.C., it's always like what's the best restaurant?

Matt Stiles, NPR

And so this one kind of like, it makes me feel good to go to work. But yeah there's not -- you can get databases of every park in the country or every church. That stuff kind of exists, but a narrowly focused, special needs specific, ADA compliant playgrounds -- that data doesn't exist, at least in a public way.

Elise Hu, NPR

And soon it will.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

And they're are plenty of organizations that serve those communities that once you make that available, they're just going to "We just found out that NPR is doing this.' They are going to hear this and spread it to their membership.

Elise Hu, NPR

Yeah so maybe our audience won't be so small.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

No, I think you'll find that there will be a huge demand for that.

Matt Stiles, NPR

As opposed to like our "Arrested Development" app, where like, you know, we know that there is going to be a huge audience for that. And a key part of this thing, which will be coming out soon, and I hope nobody scoops us now that I have just mentioned it on the podcast.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

The coffee thing?

Matt Stiles, NPR

No, not the coffee thing. The key part of the playgrounds thing will be that parents and advocates or whatever can upload the add part -- the add playgrounds, add

pictures of playgrounds. They can also tag playgrounds for the specific features that they have based on whether it has sight-impaired playing components or special ramps.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Again, that's something that I think is going to be hugely appreciated by those communities.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

So it sounds like you're really excited about what you're doing and sort of where things are going app-wise at NPR. Do you feel like, I mean, from a data journalism perspective, do you feel like things are going in the right direction? Do you think that things are getting creative and breaking out of the box even more?

Matt Stiles, NPR

Yeah. I mean I feel like, I would like to work with radio reporters more. I would like for us to be more integrated into the larger newsroom.

The folks in our digital newsroom, well we are all in the same newsroom, but the folks in our digital department get what we are doing. They are excited about it and they constantly have ideas. And I would like to work with more radio reporters.

I mean recently we did a project for Ari Shapiro when he was to Africa. We made him [a Tumblr](#) so he could post his travels with the president, and it was wildly successful. And he's a great photographer it turns out. And so more projects like that, I think, are going to be coming for us in the future. Now that we are in this new building and everyone sees us everyday we are starting to develop all these new relationships.

But not only just on the app side, we would like to support the radio newsroom with just computer-assisted reporting, like helping them with data like the ombudsman project. 'Hey, you're working on this? We could do a more empirical story if we looked at this data set that you didn't know about.'

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

There is still sort of that division - the Web and the broadcast division. I mean we have that here too. I mean as much as you want to integrate it, there is still sort of the – you've got to reach out to each other.

Elise Hu, NPR

Yeah and it's actually different than bringing together a print news organization with the digital end of a print news organization because those are both inherently text-based. But if you're bringing together television, or television

storytellers or radio storytellers, with digital, which is a text-based storytelling. Like, you are having to change the entire way you write, the entire way you conceptualize.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Yeah you can't just put an audio report from the radio onto -- more often than not you can't. Sometimes you can sort of fudge it, but quite often it's just a whole different animal.

Matt Stiles, NPR

I would argue that we can be sound-based and be digital. And so we are working on a lot of things, not our team, but the organization as a whole is working on ways to continue the tradition of wonderful sound reporting if there are no FM radios, which may happen in the future.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Well and that is something that is, I was going to say problem, but it is a really a challenge that we deal with every week here.

I work for WFED. We do lots of long form interviews and it's just like 'Is somebody really going to listen to a 20-minute interview?'

Well, we have to hope that because that is how long our podcasts are, but on the website, and so, how do you present that? What kind of text element are you going to have in it? What are the things that you can blend in to it? It's constantly just trying to be creative and come up with new ways and work, etc.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

I was going to say though, the more creativity you have though, the more examples of it, then people sort of start getting it and saying 'Oh, this could be supported in other ways.'

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

And I think circling back to what you were saying in terms of designing for mobile. I think mobile is going to be a huge help for audio in a lot of ways.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

And journalism in a lot of ways.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Yeah and journalism, but just speaking of audio and, you know, radio reports and podcasts, that's content that is designed to go with you and to be with you as you're listening or driving in your cars.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Well we look forward to seeing this come to fruition and seeing your guys' work in the future. Can you tell us where our listeners can find your work online?

Matt Stiles, NPR

For us, you can go to blog.apps.npr.org. And you can see posts about the things that we've built.

Megan Cloherty, It's All Journalism producer

Alright guys, thanks so much for joining us, we appreciate it.

Michael O'Connell, It's All Journalism producer

Thank you.