Collaboration comes in many flavors. They're all good. I like some better than others.

In the realm of citizen journalism the SilverStringer version has a lot to be said for it.

In 1996 the MIT Media Lab began serious dabbling in citizen online group journalism, starting with senior citizens in Melrose, Mass., about 10 miles north of Cambridge. That model, still flourishing at http://melrosemirror.media.mit.edu, has been copied by young and old groups in the US, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Thailand, Brazil and elsewhere.

It's a simple process called brainstorming that seldom occurs in mainstream media newsrooms, except on special projects. When practiced in a face-to-face environment the results, in my opinion, are better than virtual discussions, although the Junior Journal (http://journal.jrsummit.net) used the technique successfully for seven years. This worldwide group of journalists, aged 10-18 from 91 countries, communicated totally via email. Several junior Journal issues had as many as 70 stories, and some resulted from a theme in each issue that flowed from collaborative "discussions".

The SilverStringers include some members who hardly ever write. But when someone has a story idea, it gets totally fleshed out with input from anyone sitting around the table at their weekly meetings. "Do you remember when..." "Be sure to check..." "Talk to..." "Remember back in 1932 when..." It's almost like a counseling session, because the exercise often results in extracting suppressed memory of details that can help shape the idea.

The best time for this type of spirited exchange is before the reporter does any serious research. On the one hand it broadens the perspective of the idea; on the other hand it also can save time.

Collaboration is the element that sets group journalism apart from most other forms of citizen activity, most of which tend to be individualistic. It was my exposure to the group dynamic for 15 years after 40 years in newspapering that led me to write "Couch Potatoes Sprout: The Rise of Online Community Journalism."

Forming such groups is no different than starting a book club or a discussion club. Each member is walking around with a wealth of knowledge and insight into his or her community--its history, its culture, its idiosyncracies, its politics, its people. Plunging that database enriches the ultimate story. It's an exciting process to watch, from the germ of an idea to a fully-blossomed article -- with photos or artwork that also may result from the collaboration.

Two minds are better than one. Fifteen or twenty minds? Now you're really clicking.