



Collaboration IS A VIBE

DESPERATE
SEEKING
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

#BLM

NEW JERSEY

Bee
honest

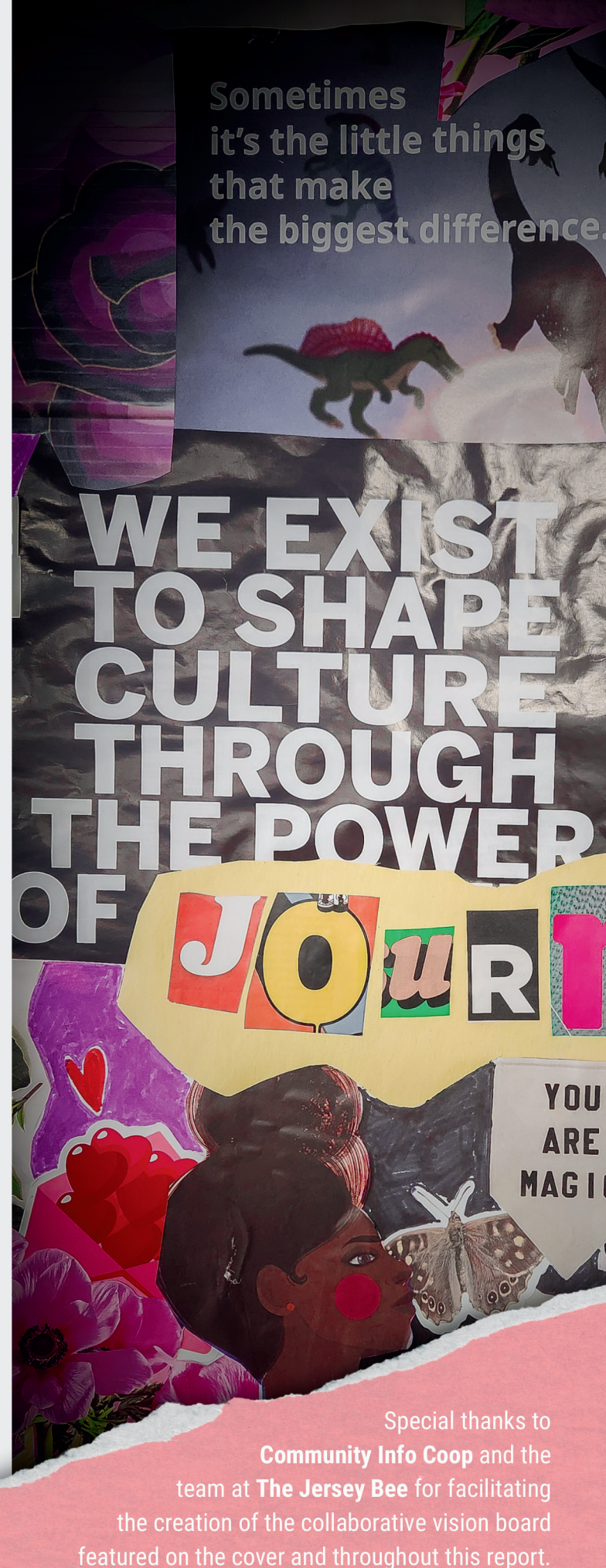
this place
has bu

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE MEDIA
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY • SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Letter from the director
3	About the Center
4	Our team
5	2023 by the numbers
7	2023 successes
10	Media equity
12	Collaboration
13	AI + technology
14	NJCIC support
16	NJ news highlights
19	Testimonials
20	Acknowledgements



Special thanks to
Community Info Coop and the
team at **The Jersey Bee** for facilitating
the creation of the collaborative vision board
featured on the cover and throughout this report.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



2023 was a year of focus for the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University.

After three years marked by the coronavirus pandemic and chaotic election seasons, the Center was able to spend this year

keenly focused on three parts of its strategic plan:

- Enhance the Center's efforts in equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Improve and expand the Center's connection with current local news and information partners and potential partners.
- Grow the Center's national influence and advocate widely for collaboration.

You'll see how we did this throughout the rest of this annual report, including an expansion of our Spanish translation program, national Democracy Day efforts, fellowships in South Jersey, civic science and journalism collaboration grants, launch of a statewide voting guide, and more.

2023 also brought renewed and multiyear funding to support the Center's work, including our first three-year grant. These investments from Democracy Fund and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation — along with support from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the NJ Civic Information Consortium, Independence Public Media Foundation, Inasmuch Foundation, and Rita Allen Foundation — allow us to continue to support our partners in New Jersey and beyond.

We are so grateful.

Stephanie Murray



ABOUT THE CENTER

MISSION + VISION

MISSION

As a program of the School of Communication within the broader scope of Montclair State University, the Center is situated within the University's mission, vision, and values.

Therefore, it's important to note the definition of the Center's own vision and values should be seen through the narrower lens of the Center's mission, which is tied to local news and information, and not outside the scope of the University's overarching guidance.

The mission of the Center for Cooperative Media is to grow and strengthen local journalism and support an informed society in New Jersey and beyond.

VISION

The Center for Cooperative Media envisions a world where people work together to create the news and information needed to participate in society, tell stories that reflect true experiences, and live with dignity and purpose.

FUNDING

In 2023, the Center received operational and project funding from Montclair State University, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation, Independence Public Media Foundation, Inasmuch Foundation, and the NJ Civic Info Consortium.

VALUES

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

People have universal critical information needs and we believe the work of providing for those critical information needs should be valued and promoted as a necessary public good.

COLLABORATION

We believe that by working together we can do better work than we can alone.

PROACTIVITY

We believe in taking steps as quickly as possible to respond to problems presented to us and test solutions.

COMMUNITY + INCLUSIVITY

We believe it is critical to create a sense of community that is open and welcoming among the people we work with and for.

EQUITY

We believe that access to and distribution of power and resources should be determined using a lens of justice and fairness.

JOY

We believe that enjoying our work is essential to successful outcomes.

CENTER STAFF

Not including freelancers and project-specific staff.



Oni Advincula

Ethnic + community media coordinator



Amanda Alicea

Membership coordinator



Joe Amditis

Assistant director of products + events



Adrienne Bauldock

South Jersey Information Equity Project coordinator



Yuliana Delgado

Spanish Translation News Service assistant coordinator



Cassandra Etienne

Assistant director of programming + membership



Stefanie Murray

Director



Mariela Santos-Muñiz

Collaborative journalism coordinator + newsletter writer



Denise Shannon

Administrative + events coordinator



Hanna Siemaszko

Research coordinator



Sarah Stonbely

Research director (through Aug. 2023)



Reet Starwind

Stories Invincible coordinator

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

1,554

'DAILY NEWS ROUNDUP' STORIES FEATURED

1,055

COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM DATABASE ENTRIES

246

INDIVIDUAL NJ NEWS COMMONS MEMBERS

202

NJ NEWS COMMONS ORGANIZATIONS

170

ORIGINAL STORIES TRANSLATED

150

FACULTY UPDATES IN 'THE WEEKENDER'

40

NJ NEWS COMMONS STAKEHOLDERS





From left: Ayinde Merrill, Yuliana Delgado, Cassandra Edwards, Chris Daggett, Bee Daggett, John Mooney, Aileen and Mark Bohannon, Carrie Brown, Joe Amditis, Simon Glickman, Becky Noah, Six Points Pub (Dec. 2023)



From left: André Natta, Eugene Sonny, Joe Amditis, ONA Philly (Aug. 2023)



Reet Starwind (left) and Paige Bates, Stories Inevitable showcase (Feb. 2023)



Adrienne Bauldick (left) and State Out, SLUTS! graduates (June 2023)



Alexandria (left) and Marlene Nava, CCM, (Sept. 2023)



Stefanie Murray, statewide collaborative network meeting (Sept. 2023)



Cuban Akkurt (left) and Joe Amditis, Turkish Cultural Center (Nov. 2023)



Reet Starwind (left) and Erik James Montgomery, Stories Inevitable showcase (Feb. 2023)



Ayinde Merrill, Stories Inevitable showcase (Feb. 2023)

OUR 2023 SUCCESSES



163

Newsrooms that participated in Democracy Day

U.S. Democracy Day helped newsrooms learn from each other, revamp their editorial approaches, and provide people with the information they needed to help shape the democratic process. In 2023, the 163 participating newsrooms produced 135 pieces of content and contributed to eight collaborations.

253

Registrants for 2023 Collaborative Journalism Summit

The Center hosted one of its largest Collaborative Journalism Summits ever in 2023 at George Washington University. The Summit was hosted in partnership with the Institute for Nonprofit News, which hosted its annual conference immediately following the Summit.

\$1.1 MILLION

Grant funding raised for operations and individual projects in NJ and beyond

In 2023, the Center took in grant funding for its operations and projects across New Jersey and the United States totaling \$1.1 million, including support from Democracy Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the NJ Civic Information Consortium, Independence Public Media Foundation, Inasmuch Foundation, and the Rita Allen Foundation.

101

New Jersey legislature candidates who participated in first statewide voter guide

The Center partnered with NJ Spotlight News to bring in a dozen news partners to help expand the NJ Decides 2023 voting guide. The first focus of the collaborative project was to get as many of the 246 candidates running for state senate and assembly to fill out candidate Q&As. About 41% of them did it, but some refused.



The Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair University plays a pivotal role in supporting ethnic and community media, including New Jersey Urban News, by providing invaluable resources, fostering collaboration, and championing initiatives that amplify diverse voices and perspectives within the media landscape.

— Penda Howell, NJ Urban News

\$74,500

Money invested in Stories Invincible + SJIEP fellows

The Center continued its **Stories Invincible** project in 2023, with the goal of increasing the representation and diversity of voices in New Jersey media, specifically in Camden. The Center also launched the second cohort of fellows for the **South Jersey Information Equity Project**. In total, the Center invested \$74,500 directly into the fellows through stipends in 2023.

100

Food access booklets distributed in Camden

Camden Food/Comida de Camden is a short publication that highlighted the food-based reporting of Stories Invincible fellows, by painting out the issue of food insecurity and profiling those in the city doing good work to help feed people. A total of 100 booklets were printed and distributed across the city in 2023.

140

Ethnic media organizations identified

In his 2023 report **"The State of Ethnic and Community Media in New Jersey,"** author Anthony Advincula found that the state is home to at least 140 ethnic and community media outlets including 94 daily and weekly newspapers and periodicals, 35 radio stations, and 11 television channels. About 85% of them produce content in languages other than English.

\$35,100

Money invested in Spanish translation

Thanks to funding from the NJ Civic Information Consortium, the Center worked with 6 Spanish-language and 5 English-language partners to translate 175 stories, an expansion of the work launched in 2022. In total, the Center invested more than \$35,000 in its translators, who are all reporters or editors with Spanish-language news organizations in the state.

"The Center is essential to hyperlocal journalism in New Jersey. It's the connective tissue of this fragile-yet-vital web of news sites, linking us to funding sources, providing training on legal and business matters, and advocating for us with funders and lawmakers. The Center operates platforms and hosts events that enable members to share their stories, ideas, and experiences, fostering a sense of community and purpose in what otherwise might be a lonesome calling. The Center's guidance and support have been invaluable to me."

— Kevin Coughlin, Morristown Green





From left: Jordan Phillips, Reet Starwind, Cassandra Etienne, Stories Inevitable showcase (Feb. 2023)



Segregated event in Newark (Oct. 2023)



From left: Sarah Stonbely, Stefanie Murray, Cassandra Etienne, On Advincula, Joe and his Ethnic and Community Media Luncheon (March 2023)



Josie Gonzales, Brian Branch-Price, Cassandra Etienne, Dr. Augustine A. Boakye, Nayaba Arinde, Dr. Aki Kokozyi Khaffani, Penda Howell at 11th State of the Black Writers Symposium, Essex County College (Oct. 2023)



Group photo at ONA Pools (Aug. 2023)



2023 SJIEP fellow showcase (June 2023)



From left: Jordan Phillips, Reet Starwind, Cassandra Etienne, Stories Inevitable showcase (Feb. 2023)



Group photo at SJIEP fellow showcase (June 2023)



Sarah Glover, SJIEP fellow showcase (June 2023)

MEDIA EQUITY



The Center focused heavily in 2023 on elevating the voices and perspectives of ethnic and community media outlets and people of color across the state – work that will expand further in 2024.

In May, the Center released its updated report “**The State of Ethnic and Community Media in New Jersey**.” Authored by Anthony “Oni” Advincula, the updated research mapped 140 ethnic and community media outlets in New Jersey, about 85% of which produce content in languages other than English. Oni regularly works to support those ethnic media outlets through monthly press briefings, communication, fellowships, connection to networks such as URL Media, and more.

The state’s ethnic and community media outlets have adapted their business models to promote sustainability and fill significant news coverage gaps for their readerships. As part of our research, the Center **has identified at least a dozen Black-owned community outlets**. Publishers representing ten of these publications met in the summer of 2023 as **part of a new statewide collaborative** in support of New Jersey’s growing and 145-year-old Black Press. The group met to network, identify common goals, and strategize around building advertising revenue and philanthropic investment.

2023 also saw the expansion of the **NJ News Commons Spanish Translation News Service**, a project the Center launched in 2022 to provide Spanish-language news organizations access to high-quality statewide news content. Thanks to a grant renewal from the NJ Civic Information Consortium, the project expanded its number of partners and translators and added an editor. More than a dozen English- and Spanish-language news outlets have benefited from accessing and republishing these translations focused on issues impacting Latino communities.



Ethnic media luncheon (May 2023)



Ethnic media luncheon (May 2023)



First BPOC meeting (June 2023)



Ethnic media (May 2023)



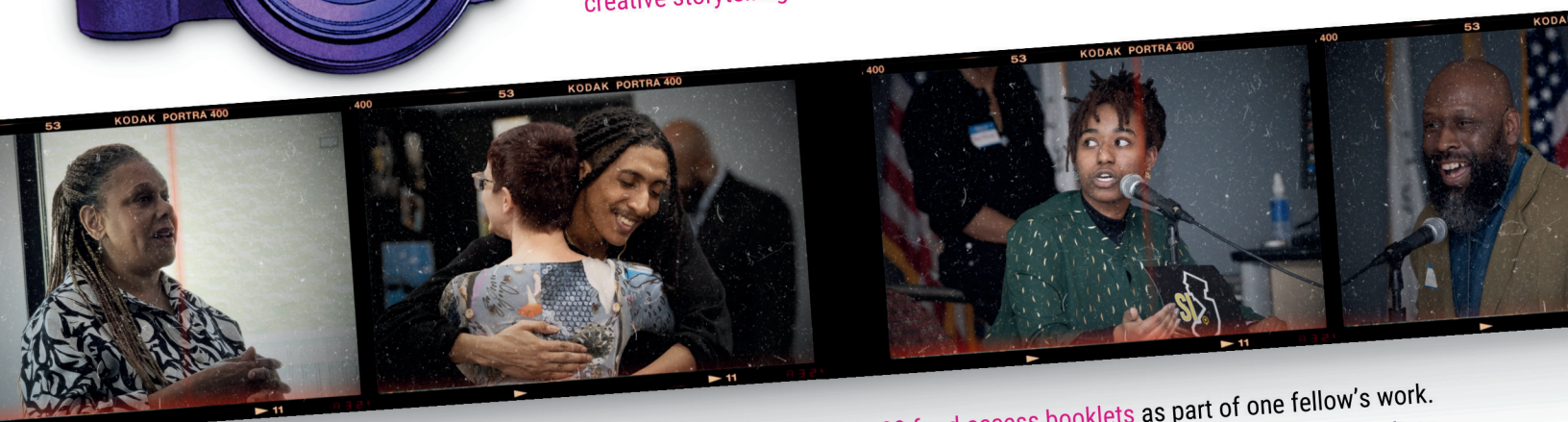
SJIEP ceremony (June 2023)





The Center continued to directly invest in the next generation of journalists of color and diverse media producers across southern New Jersey through the **South Jersey Information Equity Project (SJIEP)** and Stories Invincible, which both welcomed cohorts of early-career journalists and storytellers.

Meanwhile, workshops like **"Building your online profile in journalism and media"** and **"The Toolkit"** offered participants **concrete tips for career advancement and creative storytelling.**



In Camden, Stories Invincible **distributed 100 food access booklets** as part of one fellow's work. Through hands-on training and funding opportunities, the Center materially aided journalists from underrepresented backgrounds in gaining a foothold in the industry.

We also joined the NJ Council for the Humanities in the **South Jersey Community Reporters initiative**, focusing on community healing and media response to hate speech and violence.

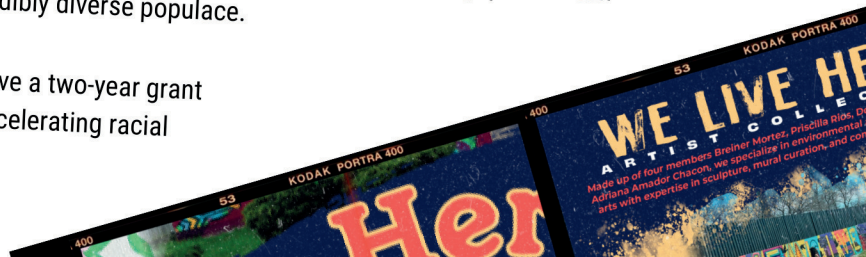
That partnership is ongoing and will continue into 2024 and beyond.



The SJCR partnership builds on SJIEP and on NJCH's **Democracy and the Informed Citizen program**, which trained "community scribes" from towns across South Jersey in grassroots storytelling.

Issues of equity and inclusion were also interwoven across additional aspects of the Center's programming. The documentary screening of **"Black in the Newsroom"** sparked dialogue on pay equity and media accountability regarding journalists of color, and the **"Diversifying New Jersey's Legislature"** event analyzed representation gaps between Trenton's political makeup and the Garden State's incredibly diverse populace.

The Center was also honored in the fall of 2023 to receive a two-year grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation aimed at accelerating racial equity in journalism in the Garden State.





COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM

The Center's collaborative journalism program has steadily grown since it launched in 2017. The Center was involved in a handful of New Jersey-based collaborative projects in 2023 and shepherded two national projects.

Nationally, 2023 was the second year for **Democracy Day**, a nationwide collaborative project that aims to bring more attention to issues facing democracy in the United States through training and focusing the media's attention on celebrating Sept. 15, the International Day of Democracy. 163 newsrooms participated, producing more than 130 pieces of pro-democracy content.

The Center partnered with the Rita Allen Foundation for the launch of **small grants to support collaboration between civic scientists and journalists** in the U.S. A total of \$180,000 was awarded by Rita Allen in support of 12 projects during the second half of the year. A full-time fellow will focus on expanding this work in 2024.



In New Jersey, the Center worked with NJ Spotlight on a few projects, including the state's **first collaborative attempt at a statewide voting guide**. More than a dozen newsrooms were part of the effort, which focused mainly on trying to get candidates for state assembly and senate on record with their views through a series of Q+As. (All assembly and senate seats were up for election in 2023.)

The Center participated in the **Stormwater Matters collaborative**, helped with the "**Segregated**" collaborative's community event, worked with NJ Spotlight on a **conceptual plan for a permanent statewide collaborative**, and partnered with Rebuild Local News to **analyze New Jersey's ad spending** and launch a coalition to advocate for more money to stay local.

The Center's biweekly collaborative journalism newsletter continued to chronicle projects around the world, job opportunities, and more. The year ended with a total of 1,056 projects tracked in the Center's **collaborative journalism database**.

The **2023 Collaborative Journalism Summit** was hosted at George Washington University. The Summit was planned in partnership with the Institute for Nonprofit News, which hosted its annual conference immediately following the Summit at GWU. More than **250** people registered for the Summit, which included **46** speakers across **29** panels and workshops.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE *and technology*

Shortly after OpenAI released **ChatGPT**, the generative AI tool that has since taken the journalism industry by storm, the Center started experimenting with and trying to understand this emerging technology and its implications for local news.

Joe Amditis, assistant director of products and events at the Center, released **a comprehensive prompt engineering guide for small and local news publishers** in March 2023. We also hosted several webinars and virtual trainings on how newsrooms can – and should – adopt these new tools into their reporting operations.

Joe was invited to speak at conferences, workshops, and other events for newsrooms across the country and around the world.

Joe also worked with journalists and newsrooms individually to consult on best practices, security concerns, and ethical considerations associated with generative AI and journalism.

In October, we published a **beginner's guide to image generation** using tools like DALL-E 3, which includes a style gallery with more than 70 image generation prompts, keywords, and tips.

Then in November, Joe published his latest **guide on how small and local newsrooms can create Custom GPTs** that are tailored to their specific newsroom and reporting needs. The guides and the associated blog posts about them were our most-read publications of 2023, garnering more than 20,000 views on Medium.

Joe has since been asked to serve on the advisory council for the Aspen Institute's generative AI and journalism initiatives.





NJ CIVIC INFO CONSORTIUM

support

The Center is proud to be the home office for the **NJ Civic Information Consortium**. The Consortium is an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that funds initiatives to benefit the State's civic life and meet the evolving information needs of New Jersey's communities.

Through its close partnership with the Consortium, the Center works to primarily support the research and grantee training/support needs of the organization. The Consortium made its first two full-time hires in 2023, **program officer Ayinde Merrill** and **grants and communications manager Madison McCool**, who Center staff helped to train and onboard. The Center works closely with those staff members, and the Consortium's board, to collaboratively work to support the growth of the growing news ecosystem in New Jersey.

In 2023, the Center kicked off a two-year research grant from the Consortium, focusing on impact tracking for the Consortium's grantees and shepherding additional ecosystem research.

Each of the Consortium's grantees were required to track impact beginning in the second half of the year.



That work was led by Dr. Sarah Stonbely and Hanna Siemaszko on behalf of the Center.

Additionally, Rutgers Prof. Matthew Weber and a small team began a two-year ecosystem content analysis as part of the research agenda.

A statewide poll was also planned to go into the field in early 2024 to give the Center and the Consortium baseline data about news consumption habits of New Jersey residents.



OF JOURNALISM

NJ NEWS

ECOSYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS

In reflection, 2023 was a relatively stable year for news providers in the New Jersey news ecosystem.

There were a handful of layoffs in the local news industry but none at the scale we've seen at other times in recent years. A few new organizations launched, most notably The Jersey Vindicator. The NJ Civic Information Consortium continued to pump money into the news and information projects in our state. More collaboration happened between news organizations than we've seen in a long time — or ever, really.

The following page lists some of the most notable milestones from 2023. The Center regularly communicates about changes in our state's news ecosystem through its biweekly newsletter, *The Newsroom Digest*, which I compile and write. The Digest rounds up openings, closing, hirings, grant opportunities, and other big news from around the journalism industry in our state. I hope you'll subscribe to it — [click here to check it out](#).

— **Cassandra Etienne**, assistant director of programming and membership



NJ NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Here's a look at some of the other major news and developments we saw across the New Jersey news ecosystem in 2023. The Center tracks these achievements and milestones in its biweekly partner newsletter.

[You can click here to see those archives.](#)

NEWS	DETAILS
Hudson Reporter closes; News12 lays off staff	The Hudson Reporter chain of local weekly newspapers closed down abruptly, shuttering nameplates including the Bayonne Community News and editions of the Hudson Reporter. Layoffs also happened at News12 New Jersey, including Alex Zdan, James Gregorio, and Brian Donohue.
Broadstreet buys Red Bank Green	Broadstreet, an ad management company, acquired Red Bank Green, one of the state's oldest hyperlocal news sites launched in 2006 by John T. Ward.
Baristanet, Montclair Local merge	Montclair Local and Baristanet joined forces to create a unified digital news platform. Baristanet is a pioneer, known as the first original hyperlocal digital news outlet in the state.
TAPinto hits 15 year milestone	TAPinto, New Jersey's largest hyperlocal news network, celebrated its 15th anniversary, highlighting the growth and evolution of digital local news platforms.
Supreme Court ruling a setback; OPRA faces legislative challenges	A ruling by the New Jersey Supreme Court said individuals seeking public records under common law must bear their own legal costs, a decision seen as a setback for transparency advocates. Later in the year, several legislators began pursuing an overhaul of OPRA laws that threatened to weaken the public's access to government records.
Changes in coverage of Washington, D.C.	J.D. Salant, a longtime Star-Ledger congressional reporter, was laid off in March, leaving the NJ press corps without any D.C.-based reporters. The NJ Globe quickly sent reporter Joey Fox to D.C., and by year's end NJ Spotlight hired a D.C. reporter, too.
Patch settles defamation case	Patch, a local news outlet, settled a defamation lawsuit filed by former State Sen. Raymond Lesniak over false content published on its platform.
Black publishers form statewide collaborative	Ten of the state's Black publishers met to network and identify common goals, such as building advertising revenue and philanthropic investment in support of NJ's growing Black press.
Millions invested in local news by NJCIC	The NJ Civic Information Consortium awarded more than \$3.2 million in grants to local news organizations across New Jersey. It also announced an audience and revenue accelerator program for 20 news outlets and the launch of the Documenters program.
Bloomfield Info Project expands, rebrands as The Jersey Bee	The Bloomfield Information Project, a nonprofit newsroom and initiative of the Community Info Coop, rebranded as The Jersey Bee and expanded its coverage area to include all of Essex County.

42

EVENTS, TRAININGS, AND
WORKSHOPS IN 2023

53

MENTIONS IN PRESS AND
INDUSTRY PUBLICATIONS

89

BLOG POSTS, ARTICLES,
AND STORIES PUBLISHED





"In 2023, the Center for Cooperative Media played a pivotal role in bolstering Urdu News, enabling me to be recognized as Best Reporter of the Year. Thanks to the Center's support, Urdu News has flourished with numerous opportunities to engage with New Jersey elected officials, gaining invaluable insights into immigrant communities and providing our readers with substantial information."

— Mohsin Zaheer, Urdu News

"2023 was a year of tremendous personal change for me as I transitioned genders. There were many different groups I had to share this news with, including my colleagues in the New Jersey media. The folks at the CCM gave me both their personal support and a way for me to share this with other local journalists."

— Bernie Wagenblast, Cranford Radio



"Joining the NJ News Commons Spanish Translation News Service in 2023 has been a pleasant experience for which I am grateful, especially because we have the opportunity to offer more in-depth news about the main issues facing our community, and it also provides income."

— Maria Amado, New Jersey Hispano

"The Center has been a tremendous friend and a valuable resource for me at Front Runner New Jersey. We had a major hacking incident over the summer and a law firm challenged the publishing of a photo. In both cases, the Center gave incredible guidance and help, and we were able to survive both of those crises. I am so grateful to have found the Center as we continue to grow to sustainability."

— Clyde Hughes, Front Runner New Jersey



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Center thanks its host institution, the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. We'd like to thank the School's director, **Keith Strudler**, as well as College of the Arts Dean **Dan Gurskis** and Associate Dean **Christine Lemesianou**, for their ongoing support of this work.

We'd also like to thank partners and members of the NJ News Commons network for all the work they do to meet the news and information needs of our state's communities.

And a huge thank you to our funders, including **Montclair State University, Democracy Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, NJ Civic Information Consortium, Independence Public Media Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation, and Inasmuch Foundation.**

Contributors to this report include **Stefanie Murray, Joe Amditis, Cassandra Etienne, Denise Shannon, and Oni Advincula.**

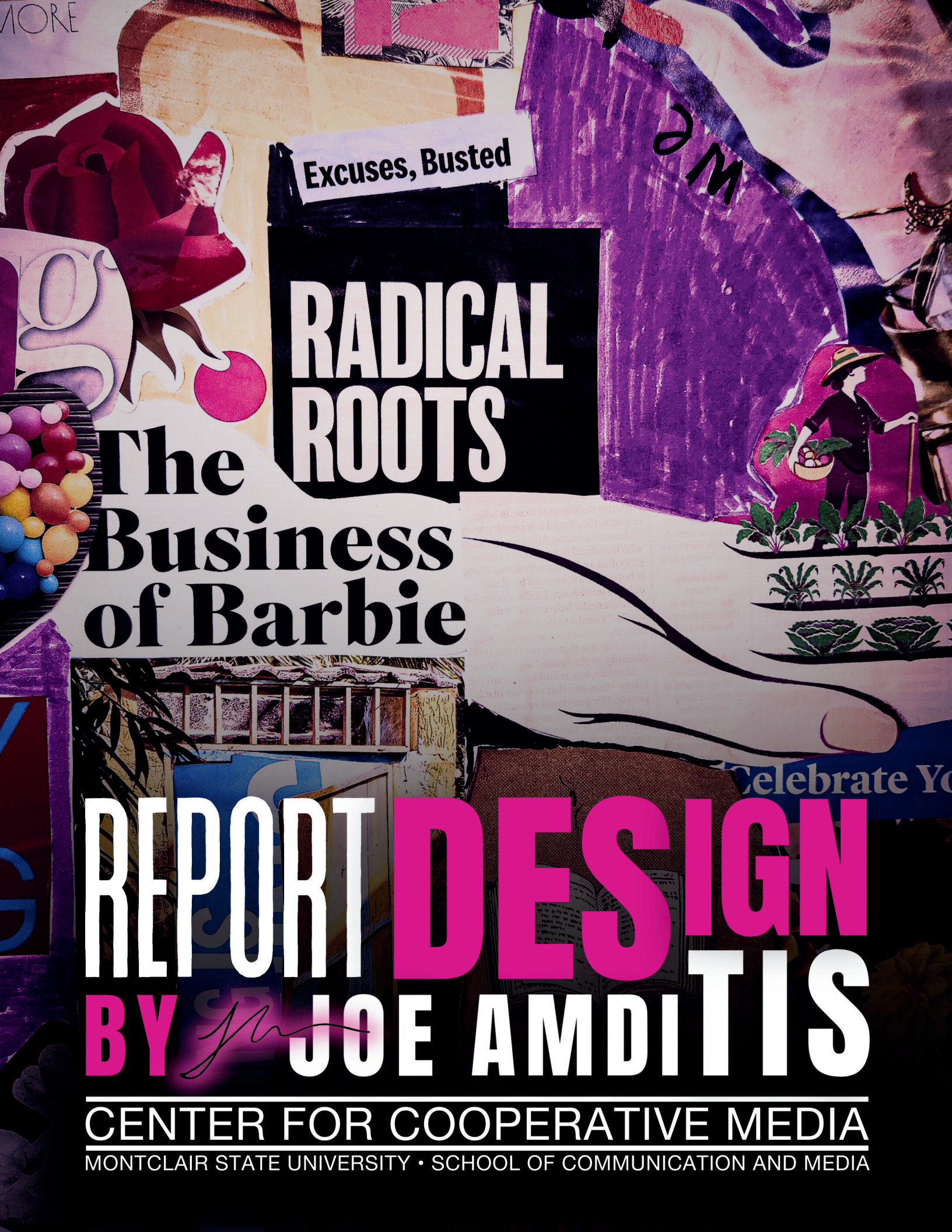
Report designed by **Joe Amditis.**

To learn more about the Center, **visit our website.**



CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE MEDIA
School of Communication and Media
Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave, SCM 2109
Montclair, NJ 07043
centerforcooperativemedia.org

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT



Excuses, Busted

RADICAL ROOTS

The Business of Barbie

REPORT **DESIGN**
BY *Joe* **JOE AMDITIS**

CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE MEDIA
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY • SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA