

June 2017

# Annual Report

## Center for Cooperative Media

The Center finds its voice during a year of change; renewed focus on its core mission guides portfolio expansion, sets stage for future growth

**The Center for Cooperative Media**  
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## **The mission of the Center for Cooperative Media is to grow and strengthen local journalism, and in doing so serve New Jersey citizens.**

We do this by assembling key communities of stakeholders, producing insightful, data-driven research, and keeping our finger on the pulse of the latest technological developments that will help build the future infrastructure for local news. We work with funders, news producers, technologists and audiences to identify critical information needs, and help meet those needs through the use of partnerships, collaborations, training, product development, research and communication. We have an excellent track record of networking with our 180+ partners, designing workshops and administering grants to build new capacity for local news and information ecosystems.

The Center, a grant-funded program of the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University, is at the forefront of helping to grow and strengthen local journalism ecosystems.

### **Executive summary**

The past 12 months have been full of change for the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University. The Center gained a new director, refocused its activities on its core mission and took on an expanded portfolio of funded projects.

The new director, Stefanie Murray, joined the Center in April 2016. Over the ensuing several months, the Center streamlined its internal operations and policies, developed a new strategic plan, revised and put renewed effort behind its core mission, expanded its staff and began executing a lengthy list of projects.

Among this year's accomplishments for the Center – which includes hosting two large national conferences in eight months, doubling its funding budget and launching a research agenda – perhaps the most notable is the renewed sense of purpose and buzz that was created. Several successes in conceiving, pitching and executing exciting projects energized the staff. Smart project management kept the trains running on time. And a focus on external networking gave the Center the marketing boost it craved.

As it wraps up the 2016-17 year, the Center has focused its priorities on two key areas: driving successful and smart news innovation in New Jersey and developing its voice as a national leader in the practice of collaborative journalism, especially as it benefits local media. Working toward both of those priorities using research, convenings, trainings, collaborations, partnerships, product development and re-granting will help the Center fulfill its mission to grow and strengthen the local news ecosystem for the benefit of New Jersey citizens.

## **History**

The Center was founded in 2012 as an answer to the downsizing of New Jersey news organizations and changes in ownership of regional public media. These shifts in the news and information landscape severely hurt the volume of local news available in a state that has historically had limited news coverage, due to its proximity to the major metropolitan areas of New York City and Philadelphia. With 565 municipalities in a densely populated state, New Jersey was – and is – ripe for innovation in local journalism.

Since its inception, the Center has seeded and coached news startups, hosted four national conferences, facilitated collaborative reporting projects, set up a content sharing system, published a daily newsletter highlighting important New Jersey stories, developed a partnership network of more than 150 news outlets across the state, and lead a deep array of training seminars and professional development sessions.

The Center is best known for its work with the NJ News Commons, which is the name of the partnership network referenced above. The NJ News Commons – the Center’s flagship project – is a network of news partners who share content, collaborate, communicate and serve as a de facto support system, especially for independent media organizations.

## **Structure**

The Center is housed as a program within the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University.

The Center director, Stefanie Murray, oversees all functions of the Center and all initiatives under funding contracts, as well as finances, fundraising, staff, strategy, communication, and coordination with key stakeholders such as the University, the School of Communication and Media and funders. The Center’s associate director, Joseph Amditis, has primary responsibility for managing and growing partnerships and collaborations, as well as other assigned grant-funded projects. The Center’s part-time research manager, Sarah Stonbely, has primary responsibility for research and integration with faculty, as well as other assigned grant-funded projects.

The Center also works with additional temporary and contract workers to execute its funded projects.

## **Funding**

The Center was funded in its 2016-17 fiscal year by Montclair State University, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Democracy Fund. Additional event and project-specific sponsorships have come from Rita Allen Foundation, Google and the American Press Institute.

Funding from Montclair State University supports the director’s salary and benefits, office space for the Center and its staff, equipment for staff and other infrastructure support for the Center including IT, development, marketing, administrative support, etc.

Operational and project funding supports the salary and benefits of all other staffers, as well as all costs associated with specific funded project. That operational and project funding for 2016-17 fiscal year included:

- ❑ \$150,000 Knight Foundation and Dodge Foundation funding for several projects, including Sales Academy training, coaching news entrepreneurs, national conference and providing shared services.
- ❑ \$75,000 Dodge Foundation funding for general operational support.
- ❑ \$75,000 Democracy Fund funding via the Dodge Foundation for the local/national news partnerships project
- ❑ \$20,000 Knight Foundation funding via the Dodge Foundation for a program for laid-off journalists
- ❑ \$60,000 in event sponsorship funding from Google, Democracy Fund, Knight Foundation and Rita Allen Foundation for the Collaborative Journalism Summit; \$25,000 of that money is being set aside for an open funding call.
- ❑ \$20,000 in event sponsorship funding from Democracy Fund, American Press Institute and a handful of external vendors for the Sustain Local 2016 conference.
- ❑ \$10,000 crowdfunded dollars for immigration reporting project
- ❑ **TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET: \$410,000.00**

## General operations

As part of its general operations, the Center pursues the following work.

- **Nurture and grow the NJ News Commons partner network.** Currently, more than 150 news outlets have agreed to be partners of the Center as members of the NJ News Commons. Members of the NJ News Commons become part of a network of news organizations across the state that share content and support one another.
- **Daily aggregation of top New Jersey news stories.** The Center publishes the daily NJ News Commons newsletter, which rounds up top news of the day in the Garden State. On Fridays, that newsletter becomes the “Local Beat” and focuses on hyperlocal news stories.
- **Network building and communication.** The Center communicates regularly with its partners and helps them share content, advice, questions and tips through an email list, a Facebook group and Facebook page, a Twitter account and multiple Slack channels. The Center also works with other journalism organizations and fellow grantees across the country on various initiatives, including as a participant in different ‘communities of practice.’
- **Collaborative projects.** The Center encourages and coordinates collaborative reporting projects in New Jersey; such projects include coordinating reporting resources and content-sharing.
- **Training, networking and professional development.** A key hallmark of the Center since its inception has been its ability to bring media professionals together for seminars and events. Its training programs are known for being accessible and affordable, and its development of a partner network has gone hand-in-hand with connecting disparate media orgs across the state who share similar struggles but who otherwise would not know one another.
- **Annual national conference.** The Center convenes thought leaders in the local news and information space annually for a 1-2 day conference on topics related to local journalism.
- **Research.** The Center has a research agenda focused on local journalism, with specific efforts focused on studying business models and ecosystem mapping.

## **Accomplishments: General operations**

Key areas of progress in the 2016-17 fiscal year in terms of regular operations of the Center include:

### **Hiring of new Center director**

Stefanie Murray [joined](#) the Center in April 2016 as its new director. Previously an executive editor with Gannett at The Tennessean, Stefanie brought a deep background in digital journalism, analytics, community engagement and newsroom culture change to the Center. She was previously a business reporter, business editor, community director, director of new audience development, assistant managing editor for digital media, and executive editor at newspapers in Michigan and Tennessee. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and broadcasting from Central Michigan University and a master's degree in journalism from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

### **Expansion of NJ News Commons**

The Center took several steps to strengthen and expand its flagship NJ News Commons network in 2016-17. That included:

- **Defining membership.** The Center redefined what it means to be a partner of the Center and how that is different from being a member in the NJ News Commons. Much of this involved internal streamlining of policies and procedures, but also includes some external branding and repositioning. This is now concisely laid out on the Center's website and staffers have a clear answer for when news sites asks what is needed to become part of the NJ News Commons.
- **Partner needs survey.** The Center put out a comprehensive survey to its partners and NJ News Commons members in December 2016. The information gleaned from that survey helped inform activities for 2017.
- **Expansion to South Jersey.** The Center held multiple events in South Jersey this year to attract and engage potential new partners and/or members of the NJ News Commons, including a summit on sustainability in Haddonfield and a training with Solutions Journalism Network in Atlantic City. Center staff also made trips to South Jersey to visit partners, including SNJ Today.
- **Strategic plan for further expansion.** The Center put together an outline for how it can smartly expand the NJ News Commons to include more news and information providers in New Jersey and identified potential new members. The Center anticipates executing that plan at the end of the fall in 2017.

### **Network building**

Building, and being part of, vibrant and communicative networks in New Jersey and nationwide is an important component of the Center's work.

In addition to facilitating the NJ News Commons network through regular communication and discussion forums, the Center fosters formal and informal partnerships with other organizations aligned with its mission. Key partners include the Local Independent Online News (LION) Publishers group, the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), New America Media (NAM), Free Press, Solutions Journalism Network, the New Jersey chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ) and the New Jersey Press Association (NJPA).

The Center is also a participant in a nationwide community of practice of "ecosystem builders," a program being supported by Democracy Fund.

Among these networks and partners, the Center has put special emphasis in the past year in particular on efforts in the following three areas:

Outreach with the ethnic press: The Center has worked hard to deepen its partnership with New America Media, which is the nation's largest and oldest network of ethnic and community press. In addition to working with NAM on distribution of funds from the immigration crowdfunding campaign Shadow of Liberty, the Center held a roundtable for ethnic media in New Jersey with NAM and also invited representatives from several large mainstream media organizations in the state. That event was held at the offices for NJ Advance Media, home of The (Newark) Star-Ledger and NJ.com. The Center is also working in partnership with NAM throughout 2017 to coordinate collaborative coverage of the gubernatorial campaign.

The Center also made an effort to better connect with Hispanic and Latino press in the state, including holding [a roundtable discussion](#) at Montclair State University for Spanish-speaking journalists.

Civic Information Fund: In partnership with Free Press and its Action Fund, the Center has been an active partner advocating for the creation of a statewide Civic Information Fund out of the money New Jersey is making off selling some of its broadcasting spectrum space through an FCC-coordinated auction. The Center hosted and participated in multiple events brainstorming details of the proposal between fall 2016 and spring 2017, including a private discussion in December 2016 and a public event held at the Montclair Public Library in May 2017. A bill was finally introduced in June 2017 that calls for a \$100 million investment over five years to create the New Jersey Civic Information Fund, of which Montclair State University would be one of four central university partners.

Working with LION and INN: The Center has been the central liaison between Facebook and the LION and INN organizations throughout 2017, as part of a Knight Foundation initiative related to the Facebook Journalism Project. Center staff have coordinated training and access to Facebook's resources for both groups, as well as for the Detroit Journalism Cooperative. Additionally, the Center regularly attends LION and INN's annual conferences and works on other smaller projects with the groups as they arise.

### **Collaborative projects**

In the past year, the Center's main collaborative project has been the "In the Shadow of Liberty," crowdfunded reporting series. Additionally, the Center is separately funded to coordinate the Voting Block collaborative and is pursuing funding for a statewide project in partnership with Solutions Journalism Network. The Voting Block project is detailed further back in this report in the "Funded projects" accomplishments section.

### 'In the Shadow of Liberty' crowd-funded immigration reporting project

The Center partnered with NJ Spotlight in 2016 to [raise more than \\$31,000](#) to fund a project called [In the Shadow of Liberty: Immigration in New Jersey](#), a year-long series of stories about immigration in New Jersey.

NJ Spotlight, an independent news organization focused on politics and public policy issues, used its share of the money raised to produce [a series of in-depth reports](#) on the issues and policies that affect immigrant communities in New Jersey: their struggles, achievements, and the impact that immigrants and their families have in critical areas like education, healthcare, jobs, housing and more.

The Center used its share of the money to fund [an initial round of \\$5,800](#) in grants to support nine immigration reporting efforts by ethnic, immigrant, community and other small media outlets in New Jersey.

The winners of the reporting grants and the topics each organization chose to cover are:

- **Brian Lorio** (Freelance, \$500): Mexican-American community garden in Pulaski Park.
- **Jacque Howard** ([Trenton365 Show](#), \$750): Investigating the immigration process, step-by-step.
- **Tiziana Rinaldi** (Freelancer, \$750): Immigrant "brain waste" (highly-skilled immigrants working low-skill jobs).
- **Elinor Comlay** ([Route 40 News](#), \$750): Mexican and Central American students from elementary to high school.
- **Mary Barr Mann** ([The Village Green](#), \$750): Creole and Haitian communities in South Orange and Maplewood.
- **Rong Xiaoqing** ([Sing Tao Daily](#), \$500): Chinese communities and business in places like Edison and Jersey City.
- **Orhan Akkurt** ([Zaman Amerika](#), \$800): How will the next president (Clinton or Trump) affect Turkish communities in N.J.?
- **Lauren Delance** ([The Citizen's Campaign](#), \$500): Haitian, Filipino, Portuguese and Italian communities in Orange, N.J.
- **Matt Skoufalos** ([NJ Pen](#), \$500): Notario fraud in Latino communities, specifically in Camden and the surrounding area.

The Center also spent \$1,000 to support an effort by Anthony Ewing of EthnicNJ to update and improve [a series of interactive maps](#) that showcase New Jersey's ancestry and migration history, and to create [a list of immigration resources and services](#).

In spring 2017, the Center began disseminating the last \$2,000 in grants to support four more reporting projects.

### **Research**

In fall 2016, the Center finalized and began to implement its first [research agenda](#). Led by Sarah Stonbely, the Center outlined four areas of focus: local publisher business practices and organizational contexts; collaborative journalism; local media ecosystems; and news deserts. Each of these areas of focus holds the potential for several research projects, as they align with the mission and goals of the Center at large.

The first research report released by the Center was motivated by widespread layoffs in local newsrooms in fall 2016. It assessed the impact on content that these layoffs had in local weekly newspapers. Titled “[Layoffs in Local Newsrooms: Documenting the changing New Jersey local journalism ecosystem, 2016-2017](#),” the report was self-published via the Center’s website, and generated robust interest in the community and beyond. Coverage included a mention in [The New York Times](#), articles in [Columbia Journalism Review](#) and [Nieman Lab](#), and strong social media sharing.

The second research project the Center undertook focused on collaborative journalism, in conjunction with its Collaborative Journalism Summit (see below). This project aimed to bring together all existing data and knowledge about collaborative journalism at what appears to be a tipping point for the practice in local newsrooms across the country. The final result is a “state of” report that both places the practice in historical context and provides best practices for organizations seeking to undertake such projects.

A third research project undertaken by the Center - in partnership with SCM professor Tara George and her students - leverages the Center’s access to its NJ News Commons partners to look at how different features of a local newsroom relate to economic success and organizational longevity. Sarah and Tara engaged Tara’s students to conduct structured interviews with local news publishers, and then supplemented those interviews with several more, to create a dataset of 27 publishers. An initial analysis suggested that within those 27, only 10 met the criteria for success, so the project is ongoing and will eventually reflect data from 50-60 local publishers. This type of research sets the Center apart because many people looking into these questions do not have this access; final results will be published on the Center’s website in the form of a white paper, presented at conferences, and eventually published as an academic journal article.

The Center is also in the early stages of a two-part mapping and theoretical project on local journalism ecosystems and local government news deserts in the state of New Jersey. In partnership with Free Press and New America, the Center has laid the groundwork for a comprehensive mapping project that will identify local government news deserts in the state of New Jersey, while in the process creating a research design that can be applied in other states in the future. Part of this project includes defining a “local journalism ecosystem” - putting the Center in conversation with leading practitioners and academics across the country who are working on this timely question.

### **National conferences**

The Center hosted two national conferences in the 2016-17 year. In October 2016, about 160 people attended [Sustain Local 2016](#), a conference about local journalism sustainability. In May 2017, 175 people attended the [Collaborative Journalism Summit](#), a conference about collaborative reporting projects and cooperative news networks.

#### Sustain Local 2016 national conference

Sustain Local 2016, the Center’s third annual conference, focused on sustainability issues – namely, diversified revenue streams – for local news and information providers.

Sustain Local 2016 was hosted on Oct. 6-7 at Montclair State University and featured a dozen panels and workshops for more than 160 attendees, including media executives, journalists, funders and students.

The conference was sponsored by the Democracy Fund, the American Press Institute, Broadstreet, iCopyright, Bizyhood and the New Jersey Chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists.

Panels included:

- Monetization strategies: Diversify your revenue by thinking creatively about selling. ([video](#))
- Nonprofit business models: How 501(c)3 news organizations are finding sustainability. ([video](#))
- What's next? A peek into the future of business models supporting local journalism. ([video](#))
- Friday midday keynote by Michael Oreskes of NPR. ([video](#))
- Attracting new money: How local outlets can capture national marketing dollars. ([video](#))
- Revenue diversity: The importance of building a pipeline of consumer revenue. ([video](#))
- New Jersey's \$2 billion question: It's time to reimagine public media. ([video](#))
- Building a revenue strategy: Make sure you've got a foundation for success.
- Events: Lessons from building a revenue and engagement strategy IRL. ([video](#))
- The importance of engagement: How investing in a deep audience connection can pay dividends. ([video](#))
- Spotlight on local news entrepreneurs. ([video](#))

#### Collaborative Journalism Summit

The Collaborative Journalism Summit was planned as a conference to bring together people working in different types of media organizations from across the country who have participated in, or want to be a part of, collaborative reporting projects.

The Collaborative Journalism Summit was hosted on May 4-5 at Montclair State University and featured a keynote by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists about its Pulitzer Prize-winning Panama Papers project, the presentation of three different research papers related to collaborative journalism, several panels about various kinds of collaboration, the release of an in-depth case study by Google and ProPublica about Electionland, and the launch of an open funding call to support new collaborative reporting efforts. [Click to see the full conference recap.](#)

More than 175 people attended the summit, including journalists, media executives, trade groups, scholars, students, funders and independent consultants. The summit was sponsored by Google, Rita Allen Foundation, Democracy Fund, the Knight Foundation, the Dodge Foundation and the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, with additional in-kind technology sponsorships from shineBIG, Evrybit and Opinary.

The Center was particularly proud to launch the [open funding call](#) at the Summit with the Rita Allen Foundation, a program that will award three \$7,000 reporting grants in summer 2017 to support collaborative reporting efforts.

Panels and presentations at the Summit included:

- Presenting welcome from Google News Lab, including a look at Electionland.
- Keynote: The Panama Papers
- Research paper: A look at local and national news partnerships
- Research paper: A look at nonprofit and commercial news organization partnerships
- Pain points: What makes collaboration hard and how to address it.
- Midday panel: Organizations that live to partner
- Case study: Charlottesville Tomorrow, Brian Wheeler
- Case study: Open:Housing, Ben DeJarnette, Agora Journalism Center
- Case study: One River, Many Stories, John Hatcher & Jennifer Moore, University of Minnesota-Duluth
- Case study: Your Voice Ohio, Andrew Rockway, Jefferson Center
- Case study: Harlem Heat Project, Matthew Schuerman, WNYC
- Case study: Newest Americans, Julie Winokur, Talking Eyes Media
- Case study: Alaska Energy Desk, Jennifer Pemberton
- Case study: The Next To Die, Tom Meagher, The Marshall Project
- Building platforms and systems that make collaboration easier
- Research paper: Comparing models of collaborative journalism
- Building a cooperative news network: Different ways to conceive, build and grow them

### **Training and professional development**

Providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities is a key hallmark of the Center. This year, the organization focused on two main training areas: sustainability and innovation.

The Center paid special attention to improving its partners' ability to sustain their organizations during second half of calendar year 2017. In terms of innovation, the Center hosted a series of trainings that dealt with mobile news practices and alternative content delivery methods. This phase of the training schedule coincided with the launch of the [NJ Mobile News Lab](#) project, led by Associate Director Joe Amditis. Seminars included teaching how create a Flash Briefing skill for the Amazon Echo and other scheduled sessions and webinars that focused on mobile content creation, web design and other emerging technologies.

Below is a list of all trainings, professional development events and webinars hosted since July 2016:

- Developing a quality sales prospect list
- Tactics for recruiting, hiring salespeople
- 2016 Sales Academy
- Local Beat Newsletter talkback session
- Sustain Local 2016 National Conference
- Election night open newsroom
- Life After The Newsroom
- New America Media roundtable: Issues facing NJ ethnic media in covering Trump
- Mobile lab ideation event
- New Jersey Latino and Hispanic media roundtable
- Learn how to create a Flash Briefing for your publication
- Solutions Journalism Network training in New Jersey
- Learn basic data skills for local journalists
- Collaborative Journalism Summit
- Navigating the weird world of OPRA requests
- Solutions Journalism Network training in New Jersey
- Training: WordPress tools, tips, and tricks for local publishers

**Hosted events**

The following chart lists all events that the Center hosted in the past year, including the trainings noted above, as well as other meetings, conferences and virtual events.

Title	Type	Date	Attendees	Students
Developing a quality sales prospect list	Webinar	7/20/2016	12	0
Tactics for recruiting and hiring sales people	Webinar	7/27/2016	13	0
2016 Sales Academy	Training	8/17/2016	8	0
Local Beat Newsletter talkback session	Webinar	9/1/2016	7	0
Sustain Local 2016 National Conference	Conference	10/6/2016	136	7
Election night open newsroom	Collaboration	11/8/2016	22	12
Life After The Newsroom	Conference		75	0
Spectrum auction brainstorming session	Meeting	12/12/2016	15	0
New America Media roundtable: Issues facing NJ ethnic media in covering Trump	Roundtable	1/24/2017	15	0
Mobile lab ideation event	Roundtable	2/17/2017	9	0
Learn how to create a Flash Briefing for your publication	Training	3/17/2017	1	0
New Jersey Latino and Hispanic media roundtable	Roundtable	4/13/2017	8	3
Solutions Journalism Network training in New Jersey	Training	4/19/2017	11	0
Learn basic data skills for local journalists	Training	4/28/2017	9	0
Collaborative Journalism Summit	Conference	5/4/2017	168	32
Navigating the weird world of OPRA requests	Training	6/6/2017	32	0
Solutions Journalism Network training in New Jersey	Training	6/13/2017	TBA	TBA
Training: WordPress tools, tips, and tricks for local publishers	Training	6/27/2017	TBA	TBA

**Events attended**

In addition to CCM events and trainings, Center staff also attend a wide range of industry events, professional gatherings, conferences, and other convenings. Below is a list of the Center’s attendance at such functions over the past year.

Title	Date	Host	Location	Staff
Local news academic conference	6/2-6/4/17	Ryerson University	Toronto, Canada	Sarah Stonbely
Media Impact Funders private roundtable on Pittsburgh media ecosystem	5/24/2017	Media Impact Funders	Pittsburgh, PA	Sarah Stonbely
Future of Local News	5/8/2017	Paley Center for Media	New York, NY	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray, Sarah Stonbely
Ecosystem Builders event	5/3/2017	Democracy Fund	Montclair, NJ	Joe Amditis, Sarah Stonbely
CreativeNJ Statewide Convening	6/1/2017	CreativeNJ	Monroe, NJ	Joe Amditis
Speak Up Montclair! News Voices: New Jersey	5/16/2017	Free Press	Montclair, NJ	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray
Guest speaker at CUNY	4/27/2017	CUNY Graduate School of Journalism	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
Guest speaker at MSU	4/24/2017	Montclair State University	Montclair, NJ	Joe Amditis
Conversation with Marty Baron	4/26/2017	Montclair State University	Montclair, NJ	Joe Amditis, Sarah Stonbely
Citizens Campaign gala event	4/17/2017	Citizens Campaign	Somerset, NJ	Joe Amditis
Facebook training with Detroit Journalism Cooperative	4/10/2017	Knight Foundation & CMM	Detroit, MI	Stefanie Murray
UNC’s news deserts and rise of the new media baron launch event	3/27/2017	Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media & Newseum	Washington, DC	Sarah Stonbely
MediaShift private roundtable at Facebook	3/24/2017	Facebook	New York, NY	Stefanie Murray
"Fake News" lecture at Red Bank High School	3/16/2017	Red Bank High School	Red Bank, NJ	Joe Amditis
Media Learning Seminar at Knight Foundation	2/13/2017	Knight Foundation	Miami, FL	Stefanie Murray

What's new in NJ media law?	2/9/2017	Rutgers University Law School	Newark, NJ	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray
Learn to build mobile news alerts without and app	1/28/2017	Guardian Mobile Lab	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
Tow-Knight Emerging Tech Petting Zoo @ CUNY	1/26/2017	Tow-Knight Center	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
New America Media roundtable	1/24/2017	New America Media & CCM	Woodbridge, NJ	Stefanie Murray, Joe Amditis, Sarah Stonbely
NJ-SPJ Strategy Meeting	1/22/2017	New Jersey Historical Society	Newark, NJ	Joe Amditis
Knight Media Innovation Awards & Reception	1/5/2017	CUNY Graduate School of Journalism	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
Newsgeist	12/8/2016	Google/Knight	Phoenix, AZ	Stefanie Murray
Local Journalism Committee meeting	12/7/2016	Citizens Campaign	Metuchen, NJ	Joe Amditis
Build-a-bot workshop	12/7/2016	92nd Street Y	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
MSU School of Communication and Media Board of Visitors meeting (presenter)	12/7/16	MSU	Montclair, NJ	Sarah Stonbely
Lester Holt colloquium	12/2/2016	Montclair State University	Montclair, NJ	Joe Amditis
Site visit to SNJ Today	11/21/2016	SNJ Today	Millville, NJ	Joe Amditis, Sarah Stonbely
Democracy Fund meeting about media literacy	11/18/2017	Democracy Fund	Washington, DC	Stefanie Murray
Local Journalism Committee meeting	11/17/2021	Citizens Campaign	Metuchen, NJ	Joe Amditis
Judges and Journalists: Accuracy and Access	11/14/2016	3rd Circuit Court	Philadelphia, PA	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray
New Jersey Press Association annual meeting	11/11/2017	NJPA	Monroe Twp, NJ	Stefanie Murray, Joe Amditis
Post-Election Press Call: Immigrant Communities & the Trump Presidency	11/10/2016	New America Media	Online	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray

Electionland	11/8/2016	ProPublica	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
New America Media teleconference	11/10/2016	New America Media	Montclair, NJ	Joe Amditis
Electionland training session	10/31, 11/5, 11/6/2016	ProPublica	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
New America Media meeting	10/18/2016	Montclair State University	New York, NY	Stefanie Murray, Joe Amditis
Media bias/literacy lecture at Pascack Hills High School	10/17/2016	PHHS	Pascack Hills, NJ	Joe Amditis
NJ Spotlight on Cities	10/14/2016	NJ Spotlight	Newark, NJ	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray
Electionland meeting	10/13/2016	ProPublica	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
2016 LION Summit: Local Independent Online News Publishers	9/29/16	LION Publishers	Chicago, IL	Stefanie Murray
ONA16	9/14/2016	Online News Association	Denver, CO	Joe Amditis, Stefanie Murray
Democracy Fund Friends and Partners Breakfast	9/17/2016	Democracy Fund	Denver, CO	Joe Amditis
Crowdsourced, Too	9/14/2016	Online News Association	Denver, CO	Joe Amditis
Toxic Comedy World Tour	9/10/2016	WFMU	Jersey City, NJ	Joe Amditis
10UP Conference	8/29/2016	Poynter	New York, NY	Joe Amditis, Sarah Stonbely
Speak at 2016 Writer's Circle Summer Intensive	8/1/2016	Drew University	Madison, NJ	Joe Amditis
CIR writers meeting and workshop for Toxic Comedy show	8/1/2016	WFMU	Jersey City, NJ	Joe Amditis
Social video workshop with Jeremy Caplan	7/19/2016	CUNY Graduate School of Journalism	New York, NY	Joe Amditis
Journalism educators event	7/15/2016	CUNY Graduate School of Journalism	New York, NY	Joe Amditis

**Accomplishments: funded projects**

The Center was funded for several specific projects in 2016-17, including:

- Individual coaching of NJ News Commons members.
- Revenue-building training program.
- Exploring shared services.
- Collaborative reporting projects support.

- Launching a mobile news lab.
- Launching a year-long study into local/national news partnerships.
- Coordinating a program to assist laid-off journalists in New Jersey.

Key areas of progress in the 2016-17 fiscal year in terms of those funded projects are detailed below.

### **Individual coaching for NJ News Commons members**

A very important component of the benefits offered by the Center for members of the NJ News Commons is one-on-one coaching and support. Especially for small, independent organizations, having someone with whom they can discuss sensitive content and ethical issues, as well as someone who can connect them with other resources, is critical. The individual coaching and mentoring the Center does is vital to the New Jersey ecosystem.

However, it's also one of the more difficult things to measure to assess impact. The Center worked with different technologies and systems during the past year trying to find one that could accurately capture and catalogue staffers' interactions with partners and NJ News Commons members so it could track metrics such as volume, common topics and impact. This is still a work in progress.

### **Revenue-building training program**

The main component of the Center's revenue-building training was the second year of Sales Academy.

Sixteen people enrolled in the 2016 Sales Academy, an intensive, multi-month sales training program led by Eleanor Cippel and Joe Michaud. This was the second iteration of the training program, which consisted of two days of work onsite at Montclair State University in August 2016, followed by six virtual sessions lasting into November 2016.

**Feedback** after the Sales Academy ended included:

- All respondents reported business impact at some level from the training, as well as increased sales confidence.
- The amount of time on-site was right (one would have liked a little more).
- All found the follow-up virtual sessions useful.
- On a 5-point scale, all ranked the two days of training, as well as the quality of content either "good and useful" (score of 4) or "exceptionally good and useful" (score of 5).

### **Shared services**

Over its five years in existence, the Center has received an increasing number of requests to provide trade association-like services, such as pooled insurance, access to reduced-cost legal assistance and group access to marketing professionals. This year, one of the Center's funded projects was to specifically explore what could be possible in this area.

It is important to reiterate here that the Center is a grant-funded program at Montclair State University. It is not a standalone nonprofit, nor is it a membership organization. It has no independent legal or tax status of its own. This limits what the Center is directly able to provide for partners in its network and members of the NJ News Commons.

In exploring this topic, the Center had multiple conversations with different membership organizations to see if they could extend some of their benefits to its partners. Particularly with the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), the executive director offered services of its technology professional at the same cost it offers to members and offered to add New Jersey members to its group insurance policies. The Center offered those benefits to its network, but no organizations joined the insurance. It is still too cost-prohibitive for many and is something the Center will continue to explore.

The Center has also had multiple conversations with the New Jersey Press Association about the possibility of extending some of its benefits to more digital organizations.

The Center was able to make headway in terms of legal services. In spring 2017, the Center undertook an effort to update its legal resources page on its website and promote what is available already to journalists through organizations such as the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press and the Media Law Center. The Center was also able to set up a three-month “test” with notable Philadelphia law firm Pepper Hamilton, by which Pepper Hamilton lawyers will be available to members of the NJ News Commons at a reduced cost that the Center is paying with grant money. At the end of the trial period, a report will be generated by Pepper Hamilton that details the kinds of requests it got and what the resolutions were. The Center plans to use that information to help it set up a low-cost referral network in New Jersey.

### **Collaborative reporting projects**

Mid-year, following a suggestion from the news director at WHYY, the Center facilitated several discussions with New Jersey editors about potential collaborative projects around the 2017 governor’s race. The result of that work is [Voting Block](#), a collaborative project that launched in early June 2017. The project started with large news organizations including WHYY, WNYC, The Record and NJ Spotlight. Each outlet recruited one “block” of neighbors who agreed to meet with their fellow neighbors and discuss the governor’s race, and share those conversations with reporters who would follow them throughout the summer and fall into the November election. This effort was funded with project money granted from Dodge in 2016-17.

The Center received an additional commitment of funding in June from the Dodge Foundation to help it expand Voting Block to hyperlocal and ethnic media publications. That money is expected in July 2017, at which time Voting Block will grow to include more than 20 different news partners across the state.

In addition to Voting Block, the Center is working on a proposal with the Solutions Journalism Network for a solutions-oriented statewide reporting project for 2017-18.

### **NJ Mobile News Lab**

The Center launched the [NJ Mobile News Lab](#) in the latter half of 2016. The Mobile Lab program is meant to help the Center for Cooperative Media become a mobile guide for New Jersey’s local news ecosystem. The goal of this program is to bridge the troublesome innovation gap that currently exists between large and small publishers by creating a mobile news innovation lab and funding mobile news experiments among three of the Center’s hyperlocal partners.

In its first year, the primary activities and goals of the Mobile Lab include:

- A round of three mobile experiments, conducted by NJ media partners, aimed at building a better understanding of the mobile media landscape by local publishers
- A body of work that includes editorial, commentary, and analyses of the Center's efforts in the form of a Medium publication, as well as a monthly email newsletter to keep partners and subscribers up to date on the state of the mobile media and journalism industry
- A series of workshops and trainings designed to ensure that the Center's partners remain well-versed in the latest mobile tools, trends, and technology
- A series of reports documenting the Center's efforts and placing them in a larger academic and professional context
- A stronger relationship with the Center's partners and a better understanding of the state and future of mobile media at the local and hyperlocal level

All of the Mobile Lab's blog posts, articles and monthly newsletters can be found at [www.mobilenewslab.com](http://www.mobilenewslab.com).

The Center received **15 proposals** for grant funding as part of the Mobile Lab. A **handful were selected** to attend a one-day ideation and feedback session at Montclair State University, where they were given individual feedback on their proposals from industry leaders and practitioners in the mobile news business.

Of that group, **three winners** were chosen:

- **Matt Skoufalos of NJ Pen (\$5,000)** will launch an SMS-based reader engagement tool that will allow subscribers to receive news and updates in real time.
- **Megan Wolf of SNJ Today (\$5,000)** is creating a mobile app that will allow their viewers to become "Certified Field Reporters" by capturing and submitting video and other mobile content to SNJ Today.
- **Mary Barr Mann and Carolyn Maynard-Parisi of The Village Green (\$5,000)** plan to optimize their website's mobile capabilities, functionality, and overall user experience.

In addition to the three mobile lab grantees, the Center also **partnered** with ICFJ fellow and creator of the Push App for local publishers, Christopher Guess. As part of the Center's arrangement with Push App, Guess agreed to create a customized mobile news app for five of the Center's partners and provide app support for up to a year, free of charge. The partners chosen to receive free mobile news apps via Push App are listed below:

- Julie Maxwell Allen of **Banana Tree News**
- Meg McGuire of **Delaware Currents**
- John Heinis of **Hudson County View**
- Elinor Comlay of **Route 40**
- Krystal Knapp of **Planet Princeton**

Finally, the Center has worked with several professionals and practitioners in the mobile news industry, including [John Keefe](#) and individuals the Guardian Mobile Lab, to schedule a series of trainings and workshops

### **Local/national partnerships project**

In September, the Center [launched a one-year pilot project](#) aimed to study partnerships between local and national news outlets. Tim Griggs, a former New York Times staffer and publisher of the Texas Tribune, was hired on a part-time basis to lead the effort. The premise of this project was to catalyze such partnerships between New Jersey journalists and national organizations.

Griggs spent several months interviewing journalists at news organizations of various sizes and mediums on their feelings regarding collaboration and partnerships between local and national outlets. He also studied several such partnerships and worked to collect a list of all the national news sites that offered their content for reuse.

Griggs' findings were shared in [a series of five articles](#) he wrote on the topic, which were published on Medium, on the Center's website [www.centerforcooperativemedia.org](http://www.centerforcooperativemedia.org) and on Nieman Lab's website. He also presented his research at the Collaborative Journalism Summit and submitted full [findings](#) in a report in June.

The Center is working with the funder of the project, Democracy Fund, to conceptualize year two for the project in the hopes that the work can continue.

### **Support for laid-off New Jersey journalists**

In summer 2016, The (Bergen) Record and its large stable of North Jersey weekly properties were sold to Gannett Co. Promptly thereafter, Gannett announced a reorganization that included [laying off](#) about 200 staffers, including 130 in the newsroom. An additional round of layoffs followed in spring 2017.

The Center immediately knew this change could have a major impact on news in the state, especially for some of the smaller weeklies with already tight staffing structures. The change was similar to the reduction made in the state by Advance Publications several years ago, which was in part the original catalyst which launched the Center.

With additional project funding from Dodge, the Center took a multipronged approach to the downsizing. First, it organized a "[Life After The Newsroom](#)" luncheon and networking event, which drew about 60 people for a discussion with journalists who had previously been through a downsizing who offered support and advice. The Center also partnered with The Poynter Institute to offer [free training](#) through the News University to displaced Jersey journalists. The Center reached out to some laid-off folks who were interested in becoming news entrepreneurs and discussed the process with them and provided coaching.

Last, and perhaps most significantly, the Center prepared [a white paper](#) looking into the actual impact that the layoffs by Gannett had on community news in New Jersey. That study found a noted decrease in the number of substantial news stories in four sample community weekly newspapers. The results of this research were published on the Center's website and cited in stories by the [Columbia Journalism Review](#), [Nieman Lab](#) and the [New York Times](#).

### **Publicity**

Among some of the [notable mentions](#) we received in the trade and consumer press this year:

1. The Facebook Journalism Project seeks to strengthen its ties to the news industry by Lisa Lacy | The Drum | Jan. 12, 2017
2. There is a Bright Future for the Media, At Least in New Jersey by Mike Shapiro | NewarkInc | Jan. 10, 2017
3. In New Jersey, Only a Few Media Watchdogs Are Left by David Chen | New York Times | Jan. 3, 2017
4. Here's A Fabulous 2016 Charitable Donation Idea: Saving Journalism by Howard Homonoff | Forbes | Dec. 23, 2016
5. Community News' Fight to Succeed: 'Sustain Local 2016' Put It All Together by Tom Grubisich | Street Fight | Nov. 10, 2016
6. 22 Medium publications about journalism and technology by Catalina Albeanu | Journalism | Nov. 9, 2016
7. Liar, liar, pants on fire: NPR editor on Trump, truth and the media by Brian LaMuraglia | Morristown Green | Oct. 10, 2016
8. Collaborate or die: A new initiative wants to make it easier for national and local outlets to work together by Ricardo Bilton | NiemanLab | Sept. 28, 2016
9. Introducing Reveal Labs, a new engine for local investigative reporting by Cole Goins and Joaquin Alvarado | Reveal | Sept. 15, 2016
10. How to turn toxic contamination into stand-up comedy by Cole Goins | Reveal | Sept. 6, 2016
11. Finding humor in toxic contamination. Seriously. by Cole Goins | Reveal | Jul. 6, 2016
12. NJIT Journalism Students Take First Place in Environmental Contest by Miriam Ascarelli | NJIT News | Jun. 30, 2016
13. Local news publishing on Medium: Exploring pros & cons by Amy Gahran | Knight Digital Media Center Blog | Jun. 14, 2016
14. How a New Jersey couple's battle with a leaking oil tank became theater by Cole Goins | Reveal | Jun. 10, 2016
15. A new play explores a real-life environmental battle in Teaneck by Bill Bodkin | NJ Advance Media | May 31, 2016
16. Dark Comedy STORYWORKS: TERRA INCOGNITA Premieres at George Street Playhouse by Marianka Swain | Broadway World | May 25, 2016
17. TV and radio stations, working together? It's possible — and potentially powerful by Dru Sefton | Current | April 21, 2016
18. Montclair State University presents panel on Italians and media by Gwen Orel | The Montclair Times | Apr. 9, 2016
19. Thinking outside the (newspaper) box: The Local News Lab seeks to revive community news by Dan Kennedy | NiemanLab | Feb. 17, 2016
20. In the Shadow of Liberty: NJ Spotlight's Year-Long Study of Immigration in NJ | NJ Spotlight | Feb. 8, 2016
21. Why local and national newsrooms should collaborate on projects | Journalism.co.uk | June 6, 2017
22. After Fits and Starts, Collaborative News Is Finally Making Headlines | StreetFight Mag | May 18, 2017
23. In North Carolina, these 2 women are bringing journalists closer to the public | Poynter | May 9, 2017

24. The Collaborative Journalism Summit Explained Using Lyrics from ‘Crazy in Love’ by Beyoncé | MediaShift | May 9, 2017
25. Here are some takeaways from Electionland, a 1,000-person effort covering Election Day voting issues | Nieman Lab | May 4, 2017
26. Electionland: The Inside Story – A case study about our Electionland project was published today. | ProPublica | May 4, 2017
27. Hands across America: How to make local/national journalism collaborations work | Nieman Lab | May 4, 2017
28. Collaborative Journalism Summit Showcases the Future of News — and the Future Is Now | Evrybit | May 3, 2017
29. New Report Documents Devastating Impacts of Consolidation on Four New Jersey Weeklies | Free Press | April 28, 2017
30. With Push, small publishers have a cheaper, quicker way to develop their own mobile apps | NiemanLab | April 7, 2017
31. Analysis without benchmarks: An approach for measuring the success of innovation projects | NiemanLab | April 3, 2017
32. Software Engineer Starts Unlikely Business: A Weekly Newspaper | New York Times | March 27, 2017
33. RBR Holds Forum on "Fake News" | Red Bank Regional High School | March 18, 2017
34. Gannett’s push into New Jersey saps local coverage | Columbia Journalism Review | March 17, 2017
35. Hundreds of local reporters in New Jersey were laid off this past year. What does that mean for the state? | NiemanLab | March 17, 2017
36. How U.S Publishers Are Using a New App to Reach Mobile Users More Affordably | International Center for Journalists | March 16, 2017
37. In 2017, Journalists Have to Partner, Not Parachute | Democracy Fund | January 18, 2017
38. Facebook Journalism Project Announced to Tackle Fake News | PC Quest | January 12, 2017
39. In New Jersey, Only a Few Media Watchdogs Are Left | New York Times | January 3, 2017
40. Here’s A Fabulous 2016 Charitable Donation Idea: Saving Journalism | Forbes | December 23, 2016
41. The Media is the Message at Montclair State University | Hispanic Outlook | November 22, 2016
42. Community News’ Fight to Succeed: ‘Sustain Local 2016’ Put It All Together | Street Fight Mag | November 10, 2016
43. 22 Medium publications about journalism and technology | Journalism.co.uk | November 9, 2016
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46. Introducing Reveal Labs, a new engine for local investigative reporting | Reveal | September 15, 2016
47. How to turn toxic contamination into stand-up comedy | Reveal | September 6, 2016
48. A Promising New Start on News Collaboration, but There’s Another Non-Starter as Well | StreetFight | August 25, 2016
49. Finding humor in toxic contamination. Seriously. | Reveal | July 6, 2016

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