

December 2020

## **Annual Report**

# **Center for Cooperative Media**

In the midst of a pandemic, the Center refocused its work to respond to COVID-19 with an emphasis on translation and support for ethnic media, all while keeping its other programs on track for growth.

**The Center for Cooperative Media** 

Montclair State University
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www.centerforcooperativemedia.org



## 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.

We do this by assembling key communities of stakeholders, producing insightful, data-driven research, and keeping our finger on the pulse of how the journalism industry is evolving to ensure we are helping to build the future infrastructure for local news. We work with funders, news producers, community organizers 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 330+ partners, designing workshops and administering grants to build new capacity for local news and information ecosystems.

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

#### **Executive summary**

It goes without saying that 2020 was a difficult, tumultuous year. As the world struggled with the deadly new coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, a long overdue racial reckoning was under way in the United States in the middle of a highly consequential and divisive presidential election. It was a year filled with trauma, hardship and change.

Like nearly every other journalism-adjacent organization, the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University had to dramatically alter its work in 2020. Yet the Center had one of its best years ever in terms of its programming and fundraising. The organization spent much of the year responding to the coronavirus pandemic, which helped to focus its work narrowly on supporting its partners—especially ethnic media—in the midst of a crisis.

In terms of the pandemic, the Center quickly launched a response that grew to include translation, freelance grants, money to purchase PPE and other equipment, fellowships for ethnic media, regular telebriefings and a statewide collaborative to recognize New Jersey's COVID-19 victims. The Center finished its NJ Media Counts initiative with a final tally of 40 stories produced and a half-dozen forums hosted in multiple languages, among several other successful programs. In terms of fundraising, the Center finalized a large grant to support its first global research project and signed its first multiyear general operating grant, which is allowing the hire of a third full-time staffer.



#### **History**

The Center was founded in 2012 during a time of intense change within the New Jersey news landscape, including mass layoffs 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 the nation's most 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 annual national conferences, facilitated collaborative reporting projects, set up content sharing systems, published a daily newsletter highlighting important New Jersey stories, developed a partnership network of more than 330 news outlets and freelancers across the state, produced impactful research related to local news, provided funding opportunities and led a deep array of training seminars and professional development sessions.

The Center is best known in New Jersey for its work with the NJ News Commons, which is the name of the partnership network referenced above, and nationally for its work in collaborative journalism. 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. Its sister project is the NJ College News Commons, a replica of the NJ News Commons that focuses on serving university and college students.

#### Structure

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

The 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 such key stakeholders as the University, the School of Communication and Media and funders. The associate director, Joseph Amditis, has had primary responsibility for managing and growing partnerships and collaborations, as well as other assigned grant-funded projects. The Center also employs a number of part-time staffers with the following responsibilities:

- Sarah Stonbely is the part-time research director with primary responsibility for research and integration with faculty, as well as other assigned grant-funded projects.
- Anthony Advincula is a part-time staffer dedicated to work with the Center's ethnic and community media partners
- Denise Shannon is a part-time staffer dedicated to administrative support and our Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund project.
- Jeanette Beebe is a part-time staffer dedicated to doing the Daily News Roundup newsletter.
- Betsy Abraham is a part-time staffer dedicated to the Loved and Lost project and other collaboration support efforts.
- Nicole Wigfall is a part-time staffer dedicated to NJ News Commons database work.
- Mariela Santos-Muñiz is a part-time staffer dedicated to managing the collaborative journalism database.



- Malika Jenkins is a part-time staffer dedicated to the NJ College News Commons project.
- Manya Brachear Pashman is a part-time staffer dedicated to Voting Block.
- Carla Baranauckas is a part-time staffer dedicated to editing Center content and to producing the Local Connection newsletter.
- Heather Bryant is a part-time staffer dedicated to our collaborative journalism training and research work
- Ashley Woods Branch is a part-time staffer dedicated to our Facebook Fundamentals program.
- Ned Berke is a part-time staffer dedicated to our Facebook Fundamentals program.
- Martin Halo is a part-time staffer dedicated to web development.

We have also worked with Sarah Glover, Kenneth Miles, Kleibeel Marcano, Xiaoqing Rong, Jongwon Lee, Lindsay Green Barber, Meena Thiruvengadam, Tran Ha, and Fiona Morgan throughout the past fiscal year to execute funded projects.

#### **Funding**

The Center was financed in 2020 with general operational funding from Montclair State University, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the New Jersey Local News Lab Fund at the Community Foundation of New Jersey, Democracy Fund and Abrams Foundation. Additional event and project-specific sponsorships have come from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Facebook, The Nicholson Foundation, Victoria Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, American Press Institute, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Democracy Fund, the John S. Knight fellowships at Stanford University, Education NC and the North Carolina Local News Lab Fund.

Funding from Montclair State supports the director's salary and benefits, office space, some equipment and other infrastructure, 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 running the Center and its projects. It is important to note that grant cycles vary by funder, and are often different from the fiscal year of the University, which runs July 1 to June 30. The following funds were either received or mostly spent (arrived in the fourth quarter of 2019) in 2020:

\$200,000 from Democracy Fund
\$160,538 from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for NGO/journalist collaboration research (runs
August 2020-August 2021)
\$100,000 from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation
\$25,000 from the Abrams Foundation
\$50,000 from Facebook to support Facebook Fundamentals program (runs September
2020-September 2021)
\$55,000 from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for NJ Media Counts project
\$60,000 from The Nicholson Foundation for South Jersey Information Equity Project, Newark
Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund and Loved and Lost.
\$40,000 from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for COVID-19 work
\$40,000 in Collaborative Journalism Summit sponsorships
\$20,000 from Victoria Foundation for Newark Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund
\$10,000 from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for election work.
TOTAL: \$760,538.00



#### **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 300 news
  outlets and individual freelancers have agreed to be partners of the Center as members of the
  NJ News Commons and the NJ College 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.
- Support for ethnic and community media. In a 2019 research report, the Center identified well
  over 120 ethnic and community media organizations in New Jersey. In late 2019 and much more
  so in 2020, the Center began specifically focusing on better supporting this part of the media
  landscape.
- Daily aggregation of top New Jersey news stories. The Center publishes the daily NJ News Commons newsletter, which rounds up the top NJ news stories of the day. Since February, we've shared and distributed more than 1,200 stories from local and hyperlocal partners from across the Garden State.
- Regular newsletters. In addition to our Daily News Roundup, the Center publishes a variety of
  daily, weekly, and monthly newsletters. This includes a weekly Local Connection newsletter, a
  daily COVID-19 resources newsletter, a daily Votebeat newsletter, a bi-monthly collaborative
  journalism newsletter, and a monthly partner newsletter.
- 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.
- **Consulting and coaching.** The Center does quite a bit of consulting and coaching for NJ News Commons members and others in its national ecosystem.
- **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 organizations 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 the Collaborative Journalism Summit.
- **Research**. The Center has a research agenda focused on local journalism, with specific efforts focused on ecosystem mapping, collaborative journalism and ethnic media.
- National collaborative journalism program. The Center serves as a central convener and researcher of collaborative journalism.

#### **Primary accomplishments**

Key areas of progress in the 2020 fiscal year in terms of general operations at the Center include:



#### Strategic planning

In 2019, after a steady increase in the Center's programs, influence and reach, the staff decided to take stock of current activities and operations and spend time imagining and planning for its future. The goal of the planning process— encouraged by and funded by the Democracy Fund—is to build the Center's demonstrated strengths along pathways that are both the most meaningful to the local journalism field in New Jersey and beyond, and the most sustainable for the long term.

The Center engaged 8 Bridges Workshop, a St. Paul, Minnesota-based planning and strategy firm, and Dot Connector Studio, a Philadelphia-based consultancy, to design and drive the planning process. Efforts began with a thorough grounding in the Center's past activities, and desk research to compare its profile with that of other journalism support organizations across the United States. Consultants also interviewed Center staff, met with Montclair State University leaders, and spoke with programmatic collaborators and the Center's primary funders. Working with the staff, the consultants helped map the Center's strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats. They also helped build a rubric to map the hoped-for levels of impact and achievement for each of the organization's main programmatic strands. (see below)

The Center's strengths include its sustained, positive track record; its forward-thinking, energetic and knowledgeable staff; its high-quality training, events and workshops; and its collaborations and advocacy for collaborative journalism processes. The Center's dual position as both a strong local collaborator and a producer of national-level work can be challenging. Moving forward, the Center will need to balance these roles to better focus its efforts. Similarly, the Center's university infrastructure support is viewed as an organizational strength, but its external funding and presence must also be expanded and diversified.

Funders and peers acknowledged the quality, relevance and innovation of the Center's research and collaborative work. They see opportunities to share the Center's institutional knowledge more broadly. Observers see important ways that the Center has grown under its current director, but identify its small staff and lack of an external advisory board as limitations. They also raised concerns about the need to diversify funding sources, to prepare for ongoing changes in media funding.

The Center created this plan in part during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created an immediate opportunity to accelerate service to the Center's local news partners, to test new ideas and to bring visibility to crucial public health information at a time when citizens are especially vulnerable to news shortages. Center staff view the pandemic as a time to invest in activities, services and programming that help local news meet the needs of citizens at this crucial time.

One vital part of the plan was reaffirming the Center's mission and outlining its values.

As part of its strategic planning process, the Center embarked upon an exercise to define its vision and values and to revisit its mission statement. As a program of the School of Communication within the broader scope of Montclair State University, the Center adheres to the University's mission, vision and values. The University's mission statement can be found here and its vision and values can be found here in its Project Soar 2025 strategic plan. Although the Center's mission is tied to local news and information, it falls well within the University's wider vision and values. The exercise was beneficial to



Center staff and will help the team articulate its work to outsiders, especially funders, who seek to understand the Center's goals amid the broader context of a university setting.

The mission, vision and values that Center staff articulated are:

#### MISSION

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.

#### **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.
- Proaction: We believe in taking steps as quickly as possible to respond to problems presented to us and test solutions.
- Community and 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.

#### **Growth of the NJ News Commons**

The Center took several steps to strengthen and expand its flagship NJ News Commons and NJ College News Commons networks in 2020. Those included:

- Added 22 new partner organizations to the NJ News Commons.
- Nearly doubled the number of NJ College News Commons partners.
- Cleaned and updated the Center's master list of NJ publications and partners.
- Offered training and telebriefing series in preparation for the 2020 election (see section below).
- Expanded work with ethnic media partners.
- Launched several programs to address COVID-19 (see section below).
- Launched the third round of the Grow and Strengthen micro-grant revenue program.
- Began preparation for a "2021 State of the Media" summit.
- Continued the diversity, equity and inclusion conference award program.

#### **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 and NJ College News Commons networks, being part of the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists and helping to lead the Online News Association group in New Jersey, 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), Free Press and Solutions Journalism Network, among others. The Center has also been active in the ecosystem builders program hosted by Democracy Fund, and has been working more with organizations and networks outside of New Jersey, especially through its collaborative journalism program.

This fall, Center associate director Joseph Amditis was selected to participate in the 2021 cohort for Lead New Jersey, which the Center hopes will further broaden its network in New Jersey through Joe's active participation.

Additionally, three members of the Center's staff are participating in a six-month cohort centered on anti-racism and anti-oppression training along with dozens of other nonprofit leaders and grantees of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

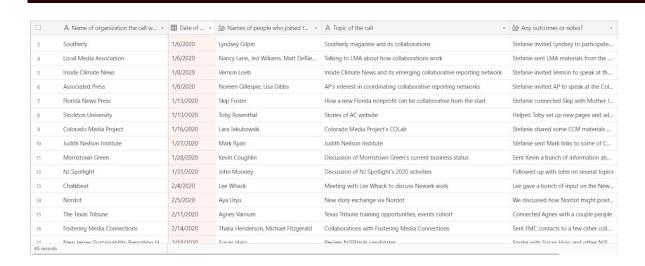
#### **Coaching and consulting**

A very important component of the benefits offered by the Center 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 for assessing 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 such metrics as volume, common topics and impact. This continues to be a work in progress; in 2020, the Center began using Airtable to catalogue these interactions.

The screenshot below is a small sample of the Center staff's coaching and consulting interactions, catalogued imperfectly but still representative of what the Center is able to accomplish. The Center began to formally track consulting actions in late 2020. That full list can be found as Appendix A.





#### Research

The Center's research agenda for 2020, led by Sarah Stonbely, focused on local news ecosystem mapping and collaborative journalism, in addition to several smaller projects as needed by the Center and our partners.

In Spring 2020, the Center released an interactive map showing local news dissemination to New Jersey by outlets' coverage areas. To house the News Ecosystem Mapping Project, which includes the map, Stonbely, along with Joe Amditis and Marty Halo, created the website newsecosystems.org.

The website is also a repository for a search function by which people can easily find the local news outlets serving their area, as well as other research on the subject. For each of New Jersey's 565 municipalities, the news provider map includes such structural variables as median household income, average educational attainment and municipal spending.

These data were used to analyze the correlates of local news provision according to the number of outlets serving each municipality – and thereby to identify potential local news deserts in the state. This phase of the project was supported by a \$25,000 grant from the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, and the map was announced with an article in *Columbia Journalism Review*, and the paper (forthcoming, January 2021) will be co-published with the Tow Center and *Columbia Journalism Review*. Stonbely was supported by research assistant Ashley Steimle. In conjunction with the mapping and analysis of local news providers, Stonbely spoke at two Tow Center webinars in 2020, one in May and one in September.

Several different research projects supported the Center's focus on collaborative journalism in 2020. In July 2020 the Center released a report by Caroline Porter, which argued that collaborative journalism is uniquely adapted to meet the challenges of reporting on climate change. Stonbely and Center director Stefanie Murray worked with Porter as she researched and analyzed the important ways in which collaborations have been leveraged by partnerships focusing on this complex and vitally important topic.



In August 2020, the Center released a report on different approaches to measuring the impact of collaborative journalism, co-authored by Lindsay Barber-Green and Stonbely. This project sought to generalize from the various ways that collaborations track and measure impact to identify what about tracking impact is unique in the context of collaborations. It also included case studies of how several prominent collaborations are pushing forward the practice of impact tracking.

In 2020 Stonbely was invited to write an entry on collaborative journalism for the SAGE Encyclopedia of Journalism.

2020 also saw the beginning of a yearlong effort to identify and analyze collaborations involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and journalists, a project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Stonbely is leading a global team of researchers, which will identify ongoing and recently completed collaborations between civil-society and journalism organizations, focusing in particular on Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, U.K., France, Germany, Spain, the United States and India. This research will address the question of how journalists and NGOs have partnered and may partner in the future to achieve maximum impact in the relevant fields. The final product will include a comprehensive review of the literatures on collaborative journalism, NGO-journalism collaboration, cross-border collaboration, and measuring impact in collaborative projects; a field scan and catalogue of contemporary and recently completed NGO-journalism collaborations — with an emphasis on agreed-upon locations; an empirically based assessment of best practices and common hurdles in these collaborations; a case study of 2-3 NGO-journalism collaborations showcasing different key themes; a thorough discussion of the measuring and tracking of impact, specifically in the context of collaborations; and recommendations for the structure of future NGO-journalism collaborations with an emphasis on maximum impact.

One of the other research projects conducted in 2020 was an analysis of New Jersey's Civic Information Consortium bill, which was passed into law in June 2018. With co-authors Chris Satullo and Matt Weber, Stonbely used the bill as a case study to look at how public funding for local journalism could happen at the state level. With the cooperation of Free Press, which provided much of its archival material associated with the advocacy effort, the authors used Kingdon's "garbage can" model of policymaking to showcase dynamics that contribute to the media policymaking literature. The paper highlighted the efforts of policy entrepreneurs and knowledge-brokers, who served as key advocates for the bill's passage. However, they faced strong oppositional political factors that dampened their efforts; specifically, a policy window narrowed by institutional pushback and the tradition of conservative opposition to public funding of media limited the ultimate outcome for the novel initiative. Looking at implications for policymaking and media, the results provided a framework for a new model of public funding for journalism, but the case study also highlights the headwinds facing these types of policy initiatives, at least in the current political climate.

Finally, in 2020 Phase 3 of the News Ecosystem Mapping Project, the content analysis, got under way. In November 2020 Internet Archive completed the 12-month monthly scrape of the 658 websites of New Jersey local news providers that had been provided to them in late 2019. This resulted in a large corpus approximately 2-3TB in size (before cleaning). Stonbely brought on a new research assistant, Zack Weland, to work on this phase. Both Stonbely and Weland are being trained on the qualitative research software QDA Miner and Wordstat from Provalis. Matt Weber and Jesse Holcomb will also be involved in this phase of the project.



#### **National conferences**

The Center hosted its fourth national conference focused on collaborative journalism in 2020.

In early 2020, the Collaborative Journalism Summit was scheduled to be held in Charlotte, N.C. The location was chosen for several reasons, most notably because North Carolina is a hotbed in the U.S. when it comes to collaboration. This is due in part to the investment of Democracy Fund in various news efforts in the state, the presence of Free Press and its News Voices program, Solutions Journalism Network's new Charlotte Journalism Collaborative and a new alliance of print newspapers across the state. There was also an opportunity in North Carolina to work with new funders as sponsors of the event.

By mid-February, the venue had been secured at Queens University and at the Myers Park Baptist Church. However, once the coronavirus pandemic was declared, in a matter of days it became clear that an in-person event in May was no longer feasible. As other journalism conferences were postponed or canceled altogether, the Center made a quick decision to host the conference online.

The Center alerted Summit sponsors, speakers and participants as soon as possible. The reaction was overwhelmingly supportive; this was early in the pandemic when virtual events were only beginning to take shape.

The Center then changed the Summit's registration from a \$100 fee to free. Although initially the Center's instinct was to automatically refund the 100 or so people who had already registered at \$100 a ticket, instead refunds were offered by request. Staff figured most registrants would request their money back, but wanted attendees to have the opportunity to support the Center's efforts to bolster collaborative journalism across the nation and abroad. Amazingly, very few people requested a full refund.

Once it was announced that the Summit would be hosted in place instead of in person, registrations shot through the roof; all told, there were 750 registrations by the time the conference began and about 400 unique IPs were recorded as in attendance during the conference. (Typically, the Summit attracts 150–175 people.)

Sponsor packages changed quite a bit since the event was not going to be hosted in person. Every confirmed sponsor stuck with the Summit, even the North Carolina-based sponsors — a testament to their commitment to collaborative journalism and knowledge sharing. The new sponsorship package included showing on-screen sponsor slides and messaging during the conference, and sharing links in the chat.

All speakers agreed to keep their spots, and several speakers who had initially declined participation because of the travel required joined.



The Summit's two pre-conference events went ahead as planned, both virtually. The first was a daylong training hosted and presented by Press On, "Transforming Journalism Beyond Diversity." The Center had originally planned to help promote that training event, since it would be occurring the day before the Summit and also at Queens University. The second event was a workshop led by Heather Bryant of Project Facet that helped people develop and deepen ideas for collaborative reporting efforts.

A combination of Zoom meetings and the Zoom webinar function were used for the Summit. Among the engagement activities provided to attendees were:

- A live chat, kept active by Center staffers when things were quiet.
- A live question-and-answer session.
- Live transcription.
- Live note-taking in a Google document.
- Four separate networking sessions, including one with live animation and one that included a discussion about mindfulness and breathing techniques.
- A graphic illustrator who drew live on the screen during each session. That illustrator, Derrick
  Dent, was featured as a silent-but-busy "panelist" inthe Zoom webinar format the entire time,
  so at various times attendees could get an up-close look at his drawings.
- An "Asks + Offers" board using Padlet, which was password-protected. This was a place where
  people could post job opportunities, hype new projects, discuss their skills-for-hire, or anything
  else.
- Three Zoom bingo cards customized specifically for collaborative journalism.
- Zapier was used to automatically add attendees to a public Twitter list.
- A unique playlist of music created using BandLab, with a few lo-fi hip-hop tracks overlaid with the voices of speakers giving their talks at previous Summits, including Sarah Stonbely, Darryl Holliday and Heather Bryant.

#### Summit sessions included:

- Share + Learn with the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative, hosted by Glenn Burkins, publisher of Q City Metro, with speakers Alicia Bell, organizing manager of News Voices: North Carolina; Sherry Chisenhall, executive editor of the Charlotte Observer; Michael Davis, south regional manager of Solutions Journalism Network; Seth Ervin, chief innovation officer of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library; Hilda Gurdian, publisher of La Noticia; Amy Lehtonen, audience and community experience director for WCNC TV; Ju-Don Marshall, chief content officer at WFAE; Richard Thames, journalism professor and Knight-Crane executive in residence at Queens University of Charlotte's James L. Knight School of Communication; and Jim Yarbrough, publisher of QNotes.
- Practical guidance to improve collaborative reporting projects, facilitated by Heather Bryant.
- North Carolina: The state of collaboration, with speakers Lizzy Hazeltine, fund coordinator of the NC Local News Lab Fund; Melanie Sill, senior journalism consultant of the NC Local News Lab Fund / Democracy Fund; Rochelle Ford, dean of the Elon University School of Communications;



Charles Thomas, program director at the Knight Foundation; Richard Thames, visiting journalism professor and Knight-Crane executive in residence, Queens University's James L. Knight School of Communication; David Boraks, reporter and host at WFAE; Glenn Burkins, publisher of Q City Metro; Angie Newsome, executive director and founder of Carolina Public Press; Susan Leath, director of UNC's Center for Innovation & Sustainability; Robyn Tomlin, southeast regional editor and executive editor of McClatchy's News & Observer; Alicia Bell, News Voices organizing manager for Free Press; Cierra Hinton, executive director and publisher of Scalawag; and Nathan Morabito, investigative reporter at WCNC

- Coronavirus collaboration: A look at how newsrooms are partnering to cover the biggest story
  of our lifetime, with speakers Taylor Mulcahey, IJNet editor for International Center for
  Journalists; Tina Griego, managing editor of The Colorado Independent; Sarah Alvarez, editor of
  Outlier Media; Cristina Tardáguila, associate director of Poynter's International Fact-Checking
  Network; and Kathy Best, director of the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at the
  University of Maryland.
- A decade of public media collaborations, with speakers Ju-Don Marshall, chief content officer at WFAE; Kathy Merritt, senior vice president for journalism and radio at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting; Donna Vestal, managing director of Election 2020: America Amplified and director of collaborations at KCUR; Vanessa de la Torre, executive editor of the New England News Collaborative; and Jeremy Bernfeld, lead editor of Guns & America and director of collaborative reporting at WAMU.
- Local That Matters: How Carolina Public Press changed laws and lives with its 'Seeking
   Conviction' collaboration, with speakers Mark Fuerst, director of the Public Media Futures
   project at the Wyncote Foundation; Frank Taylor, managing editor of Carolina Public Press;
   Stephanie Carson, news and community partnerships manager of Carolina Public Press.

#### Lightning talks:

- Sandra Svoboda, program director of Great Lakes Now/Detroit Public TV, presenting Always Ongoing: How a digital/newspaper media company and a public TV station continue to collaborate ... and sometimes say "no."
- Todd Reubold, publisher of Ensia, presenting From Rust to Resilience: A climate change collaboration spanning the Great Lakes.
- Asraa Mustufa, digital editor of Chicago Reporter, presenting Lens on Lightfoot.
- Danielle Purifoy, race and place editor of Scalawag.
- Nation Hahn, director of growth for EdNC.org, and Terry Parris, engagement editor of THE CITY, presenting on how THE CITY and EdNC.org have partnered to explore engagement toolkits and playbooks, focusing on creating a listening funnel that supports engagement and impact.
- Teresa Gorman, senior program associate for local news at the Democracy Fund, presenting on developing funder collaborations.
- Lila Mills, communications manager of Neighborhood Connections, presenting on How the Cleveland Foundation led a local funder coalition to support media in Northeast Ohio.



- o Rachel Dissell, investigative reporter, presenting on Cleveland's The Witness Project.
- Donna Harrell, director of communications and marketing for Lines for Life, and John Schrag, executive editor of the Pamplin Media Group, presenting on Breaking the Silence.
- Daniel Bates, journalist ambassador for Hostwriter, presenting on How Hostwriter connects collaborators around the world.
- Larry Rosenthal, StoryShare project manager at the Associated Press, presenting on StoryShare.
- Jennifer Hemmingsen, project manager, presenting on IowaWatch's Seeking a cure: The quest to save rural hospitals.
- Election 2020: How U.S. news outlets are working together to cover races, fight
  misinformation with speakers Amy Kovac-Ashley, vice president and senior director at the
  American Press Institute; Juana Summers, political reporter for NPR; Rachel Glickhouse, partner
  manager for ProPublica's Electionland; Jacquelyn Mason, research analyst for First Draft News;
  and Donna Vestal, managing director of Election 2020: America Amplified and director of
  collaborations at KCUR
- Governance structures for ongoing collaboratives with speakers Cassie Haynes, co-executive director of Resolve Philadelphia, and André Natta, reporting collaborative editor of Resolve Philadelphia.
- Rising temperatures, rising collaboration: How the climate crisis has spurred journalism
  partnerships around the world with speakers Lyndsey Gilpin, editor and publisher of Southerly;
  Caroline Porter, presenting research on behalf of the Center for Cooperative Media; Allison
  Kopicki, writer and researcher of Climate Central; Vernon Loeb, executive editor of Inside
  Climate News; and Mark Hertsgaard, executive director of Covering Climate Now.

The full schedule can be found at https://collaborativejournalism.org/cjs2020/schedule/

The Summit's sponsors included:

- Knight Foundation
- Democracy Fund
- American Press Institute
- John S. Knight Fellowships program at Stanford University
- North Carolina Local News Lab Fund
- Education NC

The feedback the Center received from participants after the event was among the most positive ever. The Summit was cited by several other journalism conference organizers as being an inspiration, and a story that the Center published about how it conducted the conference was picked up by Nieman Lab and widely cited. Additionally, the Center earned revenue from consulting with other organizations on



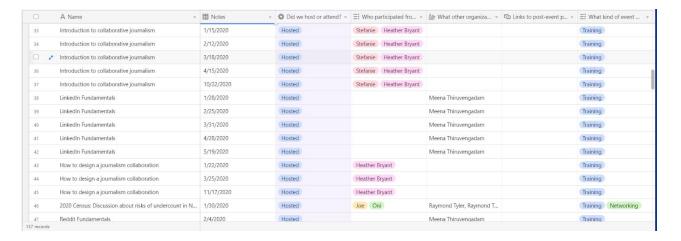
how to effectively host virtual events, including the Solutions Journalism Network and the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University.

Among comments from the post-Summit survey:

- "I thought it went amazingly well. Really impressive tech worked well, sessions stayed on time, and the presentations were super helpful."
- "Even though I couldn't participate all the time, you all did a superb job of putting this together virtually."
- "I found it to be a very innovative and engaging virtual conference!"
- "It was truly top-notch in every way."

#### Hosted and attended events

Offering training sessions and acting as a convener is one of the key ways that the Center engages its news partners. The following screenshot shows a sample of the 88 events that the Center hosted in the past year, including the trainings, meetings, conferences and virtual events. In addition to CCM events and trainings, Center staff also attended, spoke at and participated in a wide range of industry events, professional gatherings, conferences and other convenings. It's important to note that the pandemic altered many events in 2020, so the Center's participation was largely virtual. A full list of hosted and attended events can be found in Appendix B.



#### National collaborative journalism program

The Center's national collaborative journalism program continues to be an engine that supports the journalism industry, as well as attracts new partners and publicity to the organization.

In 2020, the pandemic greatly slowed the program's work but didn't impede progress. Among the key accomplishments:

 A successful in-place Collaborative Journalism Summit. The Summit is the world's largest convening of collaborative journalism practitioners.



- The publication of research about climate-related journalistic collaborations. This paper was cited by Yale Climate Connections at the Yale Center for Environmental Communication as one of the top climate research papers of the year.
- The publication of research into impact tracking for journalism collaborations.
- The publication of five new guides to create a new Collaborative Journalism Toolkit; topics include equity in collaboration, working with non-news partners and financial considerations.
- Growth in the monthly collaboration manager convenings to a group of more than 60 people around the world.
- Growth of the collaborative journalism database to include more than 350 projects.
- Center staff continue to be regularly quoted in the trade press about collaborative journalism efforts.
- Center staff have conducted consulting calls to coach early and midstage collaborations in such places as Northeast Ohio, Dallas, Brooklyn, Colorado and more.
- Eight training webinars were hosted, with a total of 358 individual registrations.
- More than a dozen articles and case studies about collaborative projects and best practices were published.
- A grant was finalized with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to do a global research study examining how journalists and NGOs can ethically collaborate to advance shared missions.

#### **Accomplishments: Independently funded projects**

The Center was funded for several specific projects in 2020, including:

- Journalism and NGO collaboration for impact research (detailed above in the "Research" section.)
- COVID-19 response
- Loved and Lost
- Voting Block
- NJ Media Counts
- 2020 Election support
- Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund
- Facebook Fundamentals
- South Jersey Information Equity project

Key areas of progress in the 2020 fiscal year in terms of those funded projects are detailed below.

#### **COVID-19** response

The novel coronavirus pandemic of 2020 deeply affected all aspects of daily life for millions of people around the world and disrupted economies in nearly every country.

The situation became dire in several hot spots, including the United States — and New Jersey, specifically. States began to lock down as the virus and COVID-19, the disease it causes, spread rapidly in February and March. New Jersey instituted statewide lockdowns in March. Businesses and schools closed and much of everyday life went virtual as residents were asked to stay at home.



By mid-May 2020, more than 160,000 people in New Jersey had tested positive for COVID-19 and the death toll had risen to nearly 12,000. New Jersey processed a record 1.1 million unemployment claims, totaling \$4.3 billion in payments. By mid-November, nearly 270,000 people had tested positive and nearly 17,000 people had died.

Journalists are first responders in a crisis, and especially in this global pandemic, information was critical to save lives. As the number of COVID-19 cases spiked, people needed access to basic information, including the virus's symptoms, how to get tested and where to get health care.

The lockdowns forced journalists to completely rethink how they did their work and how they were serving their communities. They had to figure out how to work in the middle of a stay-at-home order, a time when grocery shelves were running empty and personal protective equipment was hard to come by.

As the coronavirus pandemic unfolded, the Center began to mobilize as best it could to support members of its NJ News Commons network. The Center collected feedback from members about what they were facing and brainstormed solutions. That input, along with what was already known from previous work supporting news organizations in the state, helped mold a three-pronged initial approach to supporting NJ News Commons members in the midst of COVID-19; that first approach focused on information sharing, content sharing and funding. Shortly thereafter, the Center added translation and collaboration coordination to how it was approaching the pandemic. This work was aided by two supplemental COVID-19 response grants from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

What resulted were several initiatives to support NJ News Commons members, including:

- An arrangement with NJ Spotlight News to provide all of its COVID-19 statewide stories for republication by NJ News Commons members at no cost.
- A pop-up daily newsletter sharing NJ Spotlight content and other COVID-19 reporting resources.
- Arrangements to provide shared graphics and photos for republication.
- Daily communication of COVID-19 related journalism resources, including funding opportunities.
- Translation of COVID-19 content into Spanish, English and Korean.
- Creation of a fellowship to support ethnic media reporters covering COVID-19.
- Creation of a fellowship to support freelancers covering COVID-19 in their communities.
- Launch of the Loved and Lost project (detailed below).
- Distribution of 20 \$250 gift cards to support equipment purchases for journalists.
- Initiation of SMS-based information need surveys in Newark, Atlantic City and Camden in partnership with Outlier Media and Free Press.

The Center's full report on its COVID-19 response can be found in Appendix C.

#### **Loved and Lost**

Loved and Lost is pulled out separately in this report because of its significance and the fact that it was the Center's largest collaborative project of 2020. At the time of this report, more than 19,000 New Jersey residents had died of the coronavirus. To address this great loss – to families, friends, communities and the state – the Center has helped New Jersey media organizations collaborate for Loved and Lost, a large-scale effort to honor the victims of the coronavirus.



At the beginning of the pandemic, NorthJersey.com/The Record set out to memorialize every New Jersey resident who had died of COVID-19 through a project named Loved and Lost. Just a few weeks later — with the death toll growing rapidly — the Center joined forces with journalists there to take over project management of Loved and Lost, with a goal of making it a statewide collaborative. We soft-launched the new site, LovedAndLostNJ.com, in June. The project was supported by funding from The Nicholson Foundation, for whom the project was personal, as the organization lost one of its employees to COVID-19 early in the pandemic.

The project has two goals: First, to name as many New Jersey COVID-19 victims as possible and add them to the wall of names at LovedAndLostNJ.com; and second, to have journalists and storytellers do as many stories about the people who died as possible.

Early in the project, the Center created and promoted a submission form where families could share the names and stories of loved ones who died from COVID-19. Editors at NorthJersey.com had also identified hundreds of others through death notices, social media, tribute sites and stories written by news organizations. A Google Sheet was created to collect all the data, and it is continually updated as new names are identified.

More than 20 media partners and individual storytellers joined Loved and Lost. They have helped to promote the project, write obituaries, edit pieces submitted by freelancers and share profiles they published with other media partners. Funding allocated for freelancers also helped the Center recruit several writers.

As of this report more than 900 people have been identified and their names verified and added to the wall of names. With the help of media partners, freelancers and student journalists, well over 150 profiles of the deceased were produced.

#### **Voting Block**

In late 2019, the Center launched its second iteration of <u>Voting Block</u>. The revamped project was intended to amplify underrepresented voices in three New Jersey cities: Paterson, Newark and Camden. In each city, residents and journalists gathered over three meals where they engaged in civil dialogue about the issues that mattered to them. Voting Block was supported by a grant from the New Jersey Community News + Information Fund of the Community Foundation of New Jersey, a partnership of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The Center aimed to connect people of diverse ages, ethnicities, religions, political leanings and priorities – people who otherwise might never meet, let alone discuss shared community concerns. The Center relied on community partners who serve underrepresented communities to find the right mix of neighbors to invite, including Paterson Alliance, Project Ready, Free Press, Camden Fireworks, Office of Community Engagement at Rutgers University and houses of worship.



In each city, at least two journalists agreed to attend the dinners and explore concerns that were raised in follow-up stories. To facilitate the unconventional dialogue, the Center used materials about dialogue journalism from Spaceship Media to help the journalists and participants turn difficult conversations into productive and eye-opening conversations. Each city had a facilitator who was also trained in dialogue journalism; that included Rosie Grant, a professional trained in restorative practice in Paterson; Brit Harley, a community organizer and radio reporter in Newark; and Phaedra Trethan, a longtime local journalist in Camden.

The journalists were asked to produce at least one piece of content based on the conversations: a profile of someone they met at the dinners, an examination of an issue that was discussed, or a feature about the Voting Block project itself. Journalists were asked to follow up with participants after the project and participants were asked to do the same: check in with the journalists. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to publish their own thoughts. In Camden, WHYY and the Courier-Post sent community engagement editors to walk participants through the process of submitting content.

A local policy maker chosen by the participants came to the final meal to listen, answer questions and discuss issues. Paterson City Councilwoman Lilisa Mimms, Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, U.S. Congressman Donald Payne Jr., Camden City Councilwomen Shaneka Boucher and Sheila Davis readily accepted and attended.

Paterson was the first city, launching in late 2019 and wrapping up in January 2020. It was a success and the project then rolled out in Newark. But the coronavirus pandemic was declared shortly after the first in-person dinner, which meant the remaining two dinners had to be conducted virtually. To make up for the change, the Center had food delivered to participants and everyone joined via Zoom from their dining room tables. The entirety of Voting Block Camden was conducted virtually.

After the dinners, the Center aggregated a People's Agenda for each city, highlighting the top issues that neighbors said they wanted their local politicians to prioritize. Those agendas were sent to city council representatives, county commissioners and members of Congress. Additionally, a handful of participants went on to host their own virtual Voting Block dinners, for which the Center provided funding to cover the cost of food and delivery, as well as resources, including a "how-to" guide for conducting a virtual Voting Block and a facilitator's guide.

Editorial partners in the project included TAPInto Paterson, TAPInto Camden and TAPInto Newark, WHYY, WBGO, the Courier-Post, Paterson Press and Chalkbeat. Within the Center, Manya Brachear Pashman served as the project coordinator. She recruited participants, brought journalists on board, offered editorial and placement assistance to the participants who produced their own content, and with an assist from Denise Shannon, coordinated dinner logistics. Joe Amditis managed the Voting Block website. A video team was hired to film the dinners and interview participants for a short film about the Paterson project. An outside consultant helped document and assess the project.

The People's Agendas and the project assessment can be found as Appendix D.

#### **NJ Media Counts**

In summer 2019, the Center began NJ Media Counts, an initiative to boost the amount of media coverage – especially ethnic, community and in-language media – of the census in hard-to-count New



Jersey communities. Along with members of the Census 2020 NJ Coalition, the initiative began with a training and sourcing workshop for journalists about the 2020 Census,

Soon, the Center started its NJ Media Counts fellowship program, which provided support for 12 reporters and editors from New Jersey's ethnic media to produce in-depth stories about the challenges and opportunities of the 2020 Census in diverse communities — Gujarati, Turkish, African American, Hindi, Hungarian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Filipino, Chinese and Latino. Each fellow received a stipend that ranged from \$1,500 and \$2,500.

After the coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S. and Census Day was pushed back from April 1 to July 30, 2020, the Center initiated another round of fellowships, which provided a second round of funding and support so fellows could specifically report on census response rates and enumeration initiatives.

In total, 20 NJ Media Counts fellows produced more than 40 original stories for television, radio, online and print distribution in 10 languages: English, Spanish, Gujarati, Urdu, Chinese, Turkish, Tagalog, Bangladeshi, Korean and Hungarian. All of the in-language stories were translated in English, then posted on the Center's NJ Media Counts website and distributed via several newsletters.

The fellows received about \$35,000 total in awards to support their work, thanks to support from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

#### 2020 U.S. Election support

The 2020 U.S. elections came at a time of deep partisan divide amid a global pandemic and a painful national reckoning with racism.

Misinformation and disinformation coursed through social media platforms. The stakes could not have been higher. The pandemic dramatically changed the way politicians campaigned and how people voted, adding more stress to an already chaotic-feeling time.

News organizations around the country focused much more attention on the voting process in 2020, as mail-in ballots became commonplace in many states. In New Jersey, it was the first time that every registered voter was sent a mail-in ballot. While coverage of down-ballot races and ballot questions were important to statewide and local news organizations, the presidential election overshadowed many other things. Security was a big concern, as well – the security of the election itself and security for journalists who would be covering it.

In seeking to support our news partners across New Jersey, the Center put early emphasis on helping news organizations understand and explain the voting process. Additional training was offered, and incentives were provided to ethnic media and mainstream media to promote collaboration. Then in late fall, content sharing was added to the mix with the launch of Votebeat.

Among the initiatives that the Center spearheaded were:

An arrangement with NJ Spotlight News to make its statewide "How to vote in New Jersey" story
and video about mail-in ballots available for republication; social graphics about the voting
process were also created and shared with NJ News Commons members.



- Translation of the NJ Spotlight News "How to vote in New Jersey" piece from English into an additional 10 languages; the article was then published by 10 ethnic media outlets.
- Creation of a pop-up newsletter to share content produced by Votebeat with NJ News Commons members for republication.
- Fellowships with five ethnic and community media reporters to allow them to do additional election-related reporting.
- Telebriefings and training webinars, including one about disaster planning with Election SOS.
- The provision of legal help on and after Election Day for journalists facing legal issues regarding reporting at polling stations or covering protests or celebrations.

The Center's full election report can be found in Appendix E.

#### **Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund**

The Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund was launched in early 2019 primarily to support peer-to-peer learning in the U.S. by funding travel for journalists and prioritizing people of color, women and those who identify as having a high financial need. The Peer Fund also aimed to host news ecosystem workshops in at least three U.S. cities, and as well as a series of "Share + Learn" events with innovative news organizations.

Throughout 2019 and into early 2020, the Center awarded about \$60,000 in travel stipends through the Peer Fund, hosted two ecosystem workshops and four Share + Learn events. By late March 2020, however, it became clear that the in-person components of the program were no longer safe.

As a result, the Center paused the travel stipend part of the Peer Fund and converted three in-person Share + Learn events scheduled with Mother Jones, The Devil Strip and the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative to virtual convenings. Additionally, the third news ecosystem workshop, which had been set for March in Newark, was moved to an August virtual convening.

To support attendance at the Share + Learn events, the Center continued to provide stipends to participants who applied and qualified to pay for the investment of time they'd need to attend the event, rather than paying for travel to get to the event. Overall, the Share + Learns in 2020 were successful; a total of 182 people registered to attend them, in total, and the Center received positive feedback on all.

The Newark workshop took a bit more work to transform. The workshop relied heavily on in-person interaction and therefore had to be completely reworked. Additionally, early on in the pandemic the Center held onto hope that an in-person workshop might be possible in the fall; that hope quickly faded.

The Center reorganized the Newark workshop and hosted it in August. Instead of a full day, it was hosted over the course of three hours; the event included presentations about healthy news ecosystems, collaborative journalism, the information hierarchy of needs and Newark's ecosystem. Near the end of the session, which was attended by 80 people, participants were introduced to Outlier Media, which the Center had helped to engage to do an information needs assessment in Newark. Outlier worked with Free Press and WBGO to execute the survey in late August.



After that, a follow-up convening was hosted with 30 attendees to explore what the information needs assessment found, and to encourage applications for a follow-up award opportunity. Funding secured by the Center from The Nicholson Foundation and Victoria Foundation provided a total of \$45,000 in funding that was made available to Newark journalists and local storytellers for projects that would directly address the identified needs. Kenneth Miles, a Newark freelance journalist, was hired to lead the project.

In November the Center announced that five projects had been selected to receive funding. Each of those projects was set to get under way by early 2021.

Overall, the Newark workshop was not as successful as the previous ones hosted in Cleveland and Oklahoma City. The Center failed to think through the backgrounds of the two main facilitators, who were both white women, talking to a primarily Black audience, and that alienated some attendees.

Shortly after the Newark workshop, the Center prepared to relaunch the travel stipend part of the Peer Fund. The Center felt strongly that peer learning and mentorship was still needed and wanted to hold space – and money – to make it happen in a virtual environment. In consultation with funders, former judges and grantees, the Center redesigned this part of the Peer Fund to provide stipends for virtual mentoring, and also expanded it to consider collaborative reporting projects that directly serve communities of color.

During 2020, the Center awarded a total of \$18,500 for peer-to-peer mentorships and \$10,000 for collaborative reporting projects.

#### **Facebook Fundamentals**

Since 2017, the Center for Cooperative Media has been home to the Facebook Fundamentals desk, a partnership with the Facebook Journalism Project to provide ongoing support for small, independent and nonprofit news organizations via a virtual social media help desk and small group audience development webinars. This program was launched with support from John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Facebook.

Beginning in September 2020, thanks to a new contract with Facebook, the Facebook Fundamentals desk relaunched and expanded to offer free social media strategy audits for local, independent and/or nonprofit news publishers in North America, in addition to social media help desk support and audience development webinars.

These resources and the social audit program are free of charge and are available to members of LION (Local Independent Nonprofit News), INN (the Institute for Nonprofit News), members of the NJ News Commons, as well as Facebook Journalism Project grantees.

The Center brought on digital strategy consultant Ashley Woods Branch to oversee the program, working with Stefanie Murray and Joe Amditis at the Center. The Center set up a new web page, redirected from socialforlocal.org, for information about the Faceboook Fundamentals desk in September. An infrastructure was set up through Airtable to manage requests for help and scheduling for social audits. Finally, additional audience development webinars were added for the fall.



After that the Center reached out to begin promoting the program to members of INN, LION and the NJ News Commons.

Since relaunching the program in September, 18 local and nonprofit publishers received free one-on-one coaching and service from the social media help desk; nearly all of the requests were related to Facebook. In addition, the new social media audit program has provided 90-minute strategy sessions and customized reports and coaching to 10 local and/or nonprofit publishers working toward financial sustainability. As a reminder, our goal is to assist a total of 50 audits by the fall of 2021.

A total of nine webinars were planned for fall 2020, and eight ended up happening; one was canceled due to each having only a single registrant, who was helped individually. A total of 102 people registered for the eight webinars, four of which were focused on analytics and four on newsletters.

#### **South Jersey Information Equity Project**

The South Jersey Information Equity Project was a new initiative launched in 2020 in partnership with the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. It sought to examine news provided by and for communities of color in South Jersey, and to make recommendations about how the information needs of residents could be better met.

Creation of the effort was announced in March. By midyear, the Center had funded part of the project, thanks to support from The Nicholson Foundation, and hired Sarah Glover to lead the key first phase of the project.

Sarah is a veteran journalist, leadership fellow with The Press Forward – a nonprofit initiative dedicated to advancing news culture through education, training and research – and immediate past president of the National Association of Black Journalists. She is also a resident of South Jersey, giving her a personal investment in the work.

After bringing Sarah on, the decision was made to prioritize examination of news produced by and for the Black community in South Jersey first. Over the second half of 2020, Sarah examined the data that the Center already had on the news ecosystem in South Jersey, then surveyed and interviewed current journalists, former journalists and mediamakers there.

Her paper with recommendations is set to publish in the first quarter of 2021.

#### Articles published and CCM publicity

Among the stories the Center wrote and published this year:

- 1. South Jersey Information Equity project launches, works to examine media inequity
- 2. Our picks for the top 10 collaborative journalism projects of 2020
- 3. How the Center for Cooperative Media responded to the COVID-19 pandemic
- 4. Inside one of the largest college journalism collaborations ever
- 5. Ethnic and community media produce 40 Census stories, host 6 forums for New Jersey Media Counts initiative
- 6. Solutions needed to help fill information gaps in Newark
- 7. Center for Cooperative Media articulates its core values, 6 strategic objectives for future work



- 8. New Jersey ethnic media publications produce final stories for NJ Media Counts reporting effort
- 9. Measure the impact of collaborative journalism: Emerging trends from the field and how you can get started
- 10. How we organized one of the largest virtual U.S. journalism events to date
- 11. How journalists are working together to cover the COVID-19 pandemic
- 12. Loved and Lost statewide media collaboration launched to identify, remember NJ COVID-19 victims

Among some of the notable mentions we received in the trade and consumer press this past year:

- Collaboration in California's diverse journalism ecosystem, Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program
- 2. Maslow's Pyramid, Fake News and the Future of Journalism, City Bureau
- 3. Center for Cooperative Media Receives Research Grant to Study Impact of Journalism and Advocacy Collaboration, Montclair State University
- 4. New Jersey Funds the Civic Info Consortium, Recognizes the Vital Role Local News Plays During Crises, Free Press
- Project Funding for Newark Organizations to Fill Community Information Gaps through Collaboration, WBGO
- 6. Journalism beyond competition, Columbia Journalism Review
- 7. 13 major climate change reports released so far in 2020, Yale Climate Connections
- 8. Collaboration is the Future of Journalism, Nieman Reports at Harvard University
- 9. Can Digital Business Models Save Local News?, New Jersey Monthly
- 10. The topography of local news: A new map, Columbia Journalism Review
- 11. Is high school journalism still a pipeline for future journalists?, Poynter

#### **Key challenges**

This report would not be complete without reflection on some of the challenges and roadblocks that the Center faced over the past year and how they were dealt with and learned from. These learnings are also grouped by general operations and then by funded projects, same as above.

One thing that was a constant challenge was the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic fundamentally altered the way the Center engaged with its partners and stakeholders, and it completely changed the course of the year programmatically.

#### **Key challenges: General operations**

- While the strategic planning process went well, the timeline was a bit elongated due to the
  coronavirus pandemic, which delayed production of the final report as well as recruitment of an
  advisory board. The Center's director also struggled to carve out time to commit to finishing the
  report.
- Growing the NJ News Commons network was slowed in 2020 as the Center worked to combine
  its internal lists and update contact information. That process took nearly six months, in part
  because the staffer assigned to it worked a set number of hours a week. The Center also found
  that its existing membership network was really burned out in the second half of the year;
  engagement with communications and programs was steadily declining.



- Transforming events that were planned to be in-person to virtual platforms was tough all year; not technically, but programmatically. So many partners and stakeholders spent hours a day on Zoom calls, and it was a challenge each time to ensure any planned virtual events were engaging and useful. It meant that the Center hosted fewer events than it might have in a different year.
- While the collaborative journalism program had its best year yet in 2020, thanks to a highly successful Collaborative Journalism Summit and the publication of two substantial research papers and five new guides, its funding ended and the Center has not yet been able to fundraise additional money to keep it going at the same rate in 2021.

#### **Key challenges: funded projects**

- Loved and Lost was built to be a statewide collaborative with a low barrier to entry; any news organization willing to help promote the project and contribute obituaries was welcomed.
   However, growing the database of names proved a slow process. It was difficult to get news organizations to regularly promote the project, and the Center struggled to land the kind of high-profile placement that may have unlocked a wave of submissions. News organizations were overwhelmed with COVID-19 information and feeling that audiences were getting burned out on it by fall. It was also a struggle to maintain consistent promotion of a project that, while meaningful to families, was simply very sad and emotional.
- The re-launch of the Peer Fund was a slow go. First, in Newark, the Center failed to properly staff the first ecosystem workshop in Newark; although the total slate of facilitators was a diverse group, the two main hosts were white women. Not only was that a major mistake, it happened during an event hosted for journalists in a city where white people make up a small fraction of the population. Then when the Peer Fund's individual grants were re-launched in the fall, it was during an intense news cycle, promotion was difficult and very few applications came in.
- Voting Block ran into challenges moving from being an in-person event to a virtual event, as hosting intimate meals and political conversations did not translate well to a digital dinner table.

**Appendix A: Events** 

Appendix B: COVID-19 response

Appendix C: Voting Block people's agendas and IA report

**Appendix D: Election report** 

Appendix E: NJ Media Counts report

**The Center for Cooperative Media** 

Montclair State University

1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J., 07043

www.centerforcooperativemedia.org

### 2020 events

Event title	Featured image	Event start		Event end	
Intro to collaborative journalism webinar	<b>②</b>	1/15/2020	13:00	1/15/2020	14:00
How to design a collaborative project webinar	<b>(2)</b>	1/22/2020	13:00	1/22/2020	14:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	ANALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	1/24/2020	15:00	1/24/2020	16:30
2020 Census: Discussion about risks of undercount in NJ's Black communities	and the	1/30/2020	18:00	1/30/2020	20:00
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MINISTEE FUNDAMENTALS	1/31/2020	15:00	1/31/2020	16:30
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	AKALYTES FUNDAMENTALS	2/7/2020	15:00	2/7/2020	16:30
Intro to collaborative journalism webinar	<b>②</b>	2/12/2020	13:00	2/12/2020	14:00
2020 Census: Discussion about risks of undercount in NJ Latino communities	atr Late	2/13/2020	19:00	2/13/2020	21:30
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	SI PUNCAMENTALS	2/14/2020	15:00	2/14/2020	16:30
Workflow + tech for collaborative projects webinar	<b>\$</b>	2/26/2020	13:00	2/26/2020	14:00
Learn about Nordot and the return of the NJ story exchange	\$ \$A	2/27/2020	13:00	2/27/2020	14:00
2020 Excellence in Local News awards luncheon	(Manual)	3/5/2020	12:00	3/5/2020	14:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	ANALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	3/13/2020	13:30	3/13/2020	15:00

Event title	Featured image	Event start		Event end	
Intro to collaborative journalism webinar	<b>*************************************</b>	3/18/2020	13:00	3/18/2020	14:00
Working toward a healthy, collaborative news ecosystem in Newark	A STATE OF THE STA	3/19/2020	09:00	3/19/2020	16:00
AMA: Steve Stirling answers your questions about reporting on COVID-19	COVERING CW/ID-19	3/19/2020	13:00	3/19/2020	14:30
Help! I have to work remotely and I don't know which tools to use.	ZOOM O	3/23/2020	10:30	3/23/2020	11:30
How to design a collaborative project webinar	<b>©</b>	3/25/2020	13:00	3/25/2020	14:00
Share + learn about nonprofit news with Mother Jones	wae in	3/26/2020	10:00	3/26/2020	15:30
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MENTALTIES OF THE PROPERTY ALS	3/27/2020	13:30	3/27/2020	15:00
Help! I have to work remotely and I don't know which tools to use.	zoom o o	3/30/2020	14:00	3/30/2020	15:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	FUNDAMENTALS	4/3/2020	13:30	4/3/2020	15:00
Share + learn about local news co-ops with The Devil Strip	direct	4/9/2020	10:00	4/9/2020	16:00
Intro to collaborative journalism webinar	<b>(</b>	4/15/2020	13:00	4/15/2020	14:00
A telebriefing on the coronavirus crisis with NJ public health experts		4/17/2020	14:00	4/17/2020	15:00
Workflow + tech for collaborative projects webinar	<b>\$</b>	4/22/2020	13:00	4/22/2020	14:00
Crowdfunding Fundamentals with Kickstarter	FUNDAMENTALS	4/22/2020	13:30	4/22/2020	14:45

Event title	Featured image	Event start		Event end	
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MEMBERITE PRODUCESTALS	4/24/2020	13:30	4/24/2020	15:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	AMALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	5/8/2020	13:30	5/8/2020	15:00
PressOn: Collaborative Journalism Summit pre- conference training	02-24	5/13/2020	09:00	5/13/2020	15:05
2020 Collaborative Journalism Summit	COLLABORATIVE CONTRACTOR CONTRACT	5/14/2020	09:00	5/16/2020	17:00
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	NEWSCHIE PRODUCTION OF PRODUCTION	5/22/2020	13:30	5/22/2020	15:00
How New Jersey reporters are covering the current coronavirus pandemic	C®VERING COVID-19	6/5/2020	15:00	6/5/2020	16:30
LinkedIn Fundamentals	FUNDAMENTALS	6/16/2020	13:00	6/16/2020	14:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	AMALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	7/17/2020	13:30	7/17/2020	15:00
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	NEWSCHIE PRODUCTION OF PRODUCTION	7/24/2020	13:00	7/24/2020	14:30
Reddit Fundamentals	FENDAM NIACS	8/4/2020	12:00	8/4/2020	13:30
Assessing Newark's information needs and filling the gaps		8/11/2020	09:00	8/11/2020	12:00
Facebook Fundamentals	FUNDAMENTALS  FUNDAMENTALS	8/18/2020	12:00	8/18/2020	13:30
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	AMALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	8/25/2020	13:00	8/25/2020	14:30
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MEMORITIES  FINIAMENTALS  GEORGE	8/27/2020	13:00	8/27/2020	14:30
LinkedIn Fundamentals	FUNDAMENTALS	9/1/2020	12:00	9/1/2020	13:30

Event title	Featured image	Event start		Event end	
Follow-up convening: What we found about Newark's information needs	- CB	9/3/2020	09:00	9/3/2020	11:00
Membership Fundamentals	MEMBERSHIP FUNDAMENTALS	9/8/2020	12:00	9/8/2020	13:30
Media briefing: Voting in New Jersey for the 2020 elections	AMERICAN PARTIES AND ASSESSMENT A	9/10/2020	15:30	9/10/2020	16:30
Google Fundamentals	FUNDAMENTALS	9/15/2020	12:00	9/15/2020	13:30
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	AMALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	9/24/2020	13:00	9/24/2020	14:30
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MEMOLETTE FURGAMENTALS SO	9/29/2020	13:00	9/29/2020	14:30
How Resolve Philadelphia uses Airtable		10/1/2020	14:00	10/1/2020	15:00
How to fight back when people discredit your political reporting	(nde	10/7/2020	14:00	10/7/2020	15:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	ANALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	10/15/2020	13:00	10/15/2020	14:30
Election SOS: Planning for post-election scenarios		10/21/2020	13:00	10/21/2020	14:30
Introduction to collaborative journalism	Continues purchas	10/22/2020	13:00	10/22/2020	14:00
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	SE FENDAMENTALS	10/22/2020	13:00	10/22/2020	14:30
How to create a community newsletter using basic automation	<del>Min</del>	11/11/2020	13:00	11/11/2020	14:00
How to design a journalism collaboration	Special and Assessing	11/17/2020	13:00	11/17/2020	14:00
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	ANALYTICS FUNDAMENTALS	11/19/2020	13:00	11/19/2020	14:30

Event title	Featured image	Event start		Event end	
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MENTANTALS  DESCRIPTION  MENTANTALS  MENTANTALS	11/23/2020	13:00	11/23/2020	14:30
Workflow and technology considerations for journalism collaborations	<b>6</b>	12/8/2020	13:00	12/8/2020	14:00
Newsletter Fundamentals: Tactics to grow your list + engage your audiences	MERSETTES FREAMENTALS	12/10/2020	13:00	12/10/2020	14:30
Google Analytics Fundamentals: Using data to drive engaged audiences	FUNDAMENTALS	12/29/2020	13:00	12/29/2020	14:30



# **COVID-19 RESPONSE**

DECEMBER 2020



#### PREPARED BY

BETSY ABRAHAM, ONI ADVINCULA, JOE AMDITIS, STEFANIE MURRAY, AND DENISE SHANNON

#### **ABOUT THE CENTER**

The Center was founded in 2012 in response to the downsizing of New Jersey news organizations and the changes in the ownership of regional public media. These shifts in the news and information landscape 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.

The Center coordinates statewide and regional reporting, connecting more than 280 local news and information providers through its flagship project, the NJ News Commons. The Commons helps partners to share content and encourages them to collaborate and to support one another.

The Center also conducts and publishes research on emerging ideas and best practices, focusing on local journalism, business models, and ecosystem mapping. The Center convenes national programs, including an annual national summit for journalism organizations to foster the conditions, ideas, and practices that lead to stronger collaborative journalism across the U.S. The Center's annual reports offer a detailed history of programs and impact.

The Center is a grant-funded program within the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. The Center receives core support from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Democracy Fund and the Abrams Foundation, as well as project support from many other grantmaking sources and sponsors.

#### INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus pandemic of 2020 deeply affected all aspects of daily life for millions of people around the world and disrupted economies in nearly every country.

The situation became dire in several hot spots, including the United States. As the virus and COVID-19, the disease it causes, spread rapidly in February and March, states began to lock down.

New Jersey instituted statewide lockdowns in March. Businesses and schools closed and much of everyday life went virtual as residents were asked to stay at home.

By mid-May 2020, more than 160,000 people in New Jersey had tested positive for COVID-19 and the death toll rose to nearly 12,000. New Jersey processed a record 1.1 million unemployment claims, totaling \$4.3 billion in payments. By mid-November, nearly 270,000 people had tested positive and nearly 17,000 people had died.

Journalists are first responders in a crisis, and especially in this global pandemic, information was critical to save lives. As the number of COVID-19 cases spiked, people needed access to basic information, including the virus's symptoms, how to get tested and where to get health care.

The lockdowns forced journalists to completely rethink how they did their work and how they were serving their communities. They had to figure out how to work in the middle of a stay-at-home order, a time when grocery shelves were running empty and personal protective equipment was hard to come by.

#### THE CENTER'S APPROACH

The Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University serves as a hub for news and information organizations in New Jersey. Through its flagship project, the NJ News Commons, the Center provides coaching, consulting, communication and networking to media professionals; it also runs collaborative journalism projects and seeks funding to support journalists.

As the coronavirus pandemic unfolded, the Center collected feedback from members of its NJ News Commons network about what they were facing and brainstormed solutions. That input, along with what the Center already knew from its previous work supporting news organizations in the state, helped mold a three-pronged initial approach to supporting NJ News Commons members in the midst of COVID-19; that first approach focused on information sharing, content sharing and funding.

Shortly thereafter, the Center added translation and collaboration coordination to how it was approaching the pandemic.

What resulted were several initiatives to support NJ News Commons members, including:

- An arrangement with NJ Spotlight to provide all of its COVID-19 statewide stories for republication by NJ News Commons members at no cost.
- A pop-up daily newsletter sharing NJ Spotlight content and other reporting resources.
- Arrangements to provide shared graphics and photos for republication.
- Daily communication of COVID-19 related journalism resources, including funding opportunities.
- Translation of COVID-19 content into Spanish, English and Korean.
- Creation of a fellowship to support ethnic media reporters covering COVID-19.
- Creation of a fellowship to support freelancers covering COVID-19 in their communities.
- Launching of the Loved and Lost project.
- Distribution of 20 \$250 gift cards to support equipment purchases for journalists.

#### **CONTENT SHARING**

As New Jersey journalists grappled with multifaceted and continually evolving scientific information about the coronavirus, there was a clear need for resource and content sharing among news providers in the state.

Access to the daily COVID-19 briefings hosted by the governor's office and coronavirus case statistics was a shared need early in the pandemic among NJ News Commons members. Similarly, the Center knew that it would save resources to share statewide content as much as possible to avoid having local reporters doing essentially the same work in multiple places.

The Center approached NJ Spotlight, New Jersey's only statewide nonprofit newsroom, about sharing its COVID-19 stories with NJ News Commons partners. NJ Spotlight had been a generous and accommodating partner in the past, and this time was no different; the organization quickly agreed to make its content available for republication. Center staff worked with NJ Spotlight to craft a tagline for the stories and began sharing content with NJ News Commons members by creating a pop-up daily newsletter called "Covering COVID-19." It is sent daily at 5 a.m.

In addition to sharing NJ Spotlight's content, the Center sought out and shared other visual and graphic content that could be republished by NJ News Commons members. For example, the Center worked with Holy Name Medical Center to make photos its staff photographer shot inside its hospital available for reuse; additionally, the Center worked with Montclair State University photojournalism professor Thomas E. Franklin to make some of his images available for republication. Graphics from Stephen Stirling's Coronaviral newsletter and from Big Local News' COVID-19 Global Case Mapper were sent via email to NJ News Commons members.

The daily newsletter and the NJ News Commons listserv and Facebook page also became vehicles for Center staff to share other tools, guides and grant opportunities. Early in the pandemic, a variety of journalism-related relief funds were available from a variety of sources, including Facebook and Google, among others. Two NJ News Commons members were awarded substantial grants, one as a direct result of the Center's assistance. And myriad guides and playbooks were published to help mediamakers better

cover the pandemic and learn to work within its confines. At an almost daily pace, especially in April and May, the Center shared each such item as it became aware of them.

The Center also focused its newsletter The Local Connection on COVID-19. The newsletter provides story ideas and frequently includes links to stories that are available for republication at no cost.

#### **TRANSLATION**

Over the past year the Center has worked to develop relationships and partnerships with ethnic, immigrant and community media in New Jersey. It was clear quickly that mediamakers in this space not only needed access to statewide COVID-19 stories, but they also needed them in languages other than English.

Due to language barriers in immigrant communities and the lack of nuanced and informed reporting from their languages and perspectives, many immigrants are at the bottom of the news chain. And with limited translated news information, if any, from state and federal health agencies, about the coronavirus, these already underserved audiences are more vulnerable to disinformation.

One of the earliest initiatives that the Center launched shortly after setting up its partnership with NJ Spotlight was a translation program for COVID-19 stories.

The Center tested the translation program in March 2020, with a focus on Spanish. By April 2020 the program was expanded to two more languages, Korean and Chinese. The Center selected reporters at three news organizations to serve as translators; this helped to ensure that in addition to accurate translation, the stories would run in an ethnic media publication. The reporters included Kleibeel Marcano of Reporte Hispano; Rong Xiaoqing of Sing Tao Daily; and Jongwon Lee of The Korea Daily.

Each week, the Center selected various COVID-19-related stories published by NJ Spotlight News and later by NorthJersey.com, had them translated into Spanish, Korean and Chinese, and made them available to all NJ News Commons partners to republish or rebroadcast with proper attribution.

This resource exchange also may have attracted new audiences for each partner. Reporte Hispano, Sing Tao Daily and The Korea Daily published most of the translated stories, sometimes on their front pages. NJ Spotlight News created En Español, a landing page on its website where it posted all stories translated into Spanish by Reporte Hispano.

The translation program was funded by a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

### ETHNIC MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS

In March 2020, when the novel coronavirus had rapidly spread and reached the stage of pandemic, Urdu News USA and The Weekly Bangla Patrika reported about hundreds of COVID-19-related deaths in their communities that almost none of the mainstream news outlets in New Jersey talked about.

And while the news coverage largely keyed on the lockdown as the number of coronavirus infections and deaths were increasing by the hour across the country, Chinese-language Sing Tao Daily and the Filipino OSM! Magazine looked at how their communities resorted to traditional medicine as preventive treatment of the coronavirus even though U.S. health care professionals continued to remain skeptical of its usefulness and efficacy.

The coronavirus laid bare not only the nation's racial disparities and health inequities, disproportionately affecting lower-income immigrants and families of color, but it also exposed, to a critical degree, scapegoating in American media.

For example, a number of African American newspapers reported that the media coverage zeroed in on diabetes or obesity as the major causes of higher rates of coronavirus infections and deaths among people of color. Early news coverage overlooked the systemic biases and economic inequities that had caused many of these pre-existing conditions, including limited access to healthy food and proper health care for people of color.

"It's not the stories that they are missing — it's the context," said Rong Xiaoqing, of Sing Tao Daily, one of the reporting fellows. "We can find the

threads and connections between today's stories and [the people we serve] because we have been deeply embedded in our communities — and that gives us an insight that the mainstream media could easily miss."

This is why the Center launched a COVID-19 Reporting Fellowship for New Jersey ethnic and community media. The six-month reporting fellowship was built to provide direct funding to support the production of at least two stories and a stream of news and information on COVID-19 to ethnic media reporters and editors via regular telebriefings. The 16 fellows each received \$1,500 to support their work.

The fellows were a diverse group of 16 multimedia reporters and editors who report on and for the African American, Honduran, Mexican, Peruvian, Korean, Filipino, Arab, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Hungarian, Arab, Pakistani and Chinese communities in New Jersey. The majority of the fellows have been reporters for ethnic media for more than 15 years.



Hong Su and 20 other acupuncturists in New Jersey formed a team to develop a traditional Chinese medicine formula as food supplements for COVID-19 patients. Photo by Hong Su.

Fellows' stories were published or broadcast in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, Bangla, Hungarian, English, Arabic and Filipino/Tagalog. Additionally, all stories not originally produced in English were translated into English.

Notably, one of the fellows from K-Radio AM 1660 did a two-part podcast series in Korean looking at how Korean families struggled to host a decent funeral service for loved ones who died of COVID-19. When one father died at the peak of the coronavirus outbreak, the family that he left behind had a hard time finding the right funeral services; for a time his remains were kept in a plastic bag with a name tag.

Another fellow from The Latino Spirit did a five-part series of video essays that focused on more than 10 Latino essential workers in New Jersey, examining how they kept themselves safe and healthy while helping businesses stay afloat.

The Shore News, a weekly serving the African American community, reported on the mental health of Black residents in Atlantic City. The Philadelphia Weekly examined how essential Black workers in Camden, N.J., were compensated as well as how businesses in South Jersey were coping with the shift from traditional in-person business to online only.

The hardships that undocumented immigrants face in the time of a public health crisis stood out in the fellowship stories.

Both Reporte Hispano and New Jersey Hispano looked at how the administration of Gov. Phil Murphy was helping undocumented Latino families, while Amerikai Népszava chronicled the lives of undocumented Jewish Hungarians in Teaneck, N.J. El Latino News/The Nubian News explored the condition of undocumented Latino families who refused to access public services and health care in New Jersey due to fear that I.C.E. or immigration authorities would apprehend them.

In total, the Center hosted four telebriefings to support its COVID-19 reporting fellows. A couple of weeks before the official announcement about the fellowship, the Center hosted its first virtual briefing about reporting on COVID-19 with Stephen Stirling, a former investigative reporter for NJ.com who started his own daily newsletter called Coronaviral to catalogue updates

and information about the way COVID-19 is impacting New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Stirling later did a second similar session for the Center.

After that, the Center hosted a seminar with Montclair State University epidemiologists Dr. Stephanie Silvera and Dr. Sze Yan Liu. This seminar gave fellows COVID-19 statistical data and context on race, age, gender and geography in the state.

A third webinar featured two veteran journalists who had been covering the coronavirus pandemic from a statewide perspective. Those journalists, Lindy Washburn of NorthJersey.com/The Record and John Mooney of NJ Spotlight News, shared insights from their reporting and ideas that others could pursue.

The COVID-19 fellowships were supported thanks to funding from Democracy Fund.



### **LOVED AND LOST**

At the time this report was written, more than 16,000 New Jersey residents had died due to COVID-19, leaving countless family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers to grieve. The impact of such a tremendous and swift loss was hard to imagine. However, many New Jersey media organizations tried to find their own ways to pay tribute to the lives lost.

At the beginning of the pandemic, NorthJersey.com/The Record set out to memorialize every New Jersey resident who had died of COVID-19 through a project named Loved and Lost. Just a few weeks later—with the death toll growing rapidly—the Center joined forces with journalists there to take over project management of Loved and Lost, with a goal of making it a statewide collaborative.

Thanks to support from the Nicholson Foundation, the Center relaunched Loved and Lost in June as a statewide collaborative. Chantee Lans was first hired to oversee the work, followed by Betsy Abraham. The ongoing project first aims to identify the more than 16,000 New Jersey residents who have died due to COVID-19 by including their names, hometown and links to obituaries or public tributes on the central website's Wall of Names. The secondary goal is to write profiles on as many of these individuals as possible, with the help of media partners, journalists and storytellers across the state.

Early in the project, the Center created and promoted a submission form where families could share the names and stories of loved ones who died from COVID-19. Editors at NorthJersey.com had also identified hundreds of others through death notices, social media, tribute sites and stories written by news organizations. A Google Sheet was created to collect all the data, and it is continually updated as new names are identified.

More than 20 media partners and individual storytellers have joined Loved and Lost. They have helped to promote the project, write obituaries, edit pieces submitted by freelancers and share profiles they published with other media partners. Funding allocated for freelancers also helped the Center recruit several writers.

By mid-November, Loved and Lost had collected and verified more than 800 names. And there is still much work to be done. One of the biggest challenges the Center faces with Loved and Lost is identifying the thousands of New Jersey residents lost to COVID-19. This is achieved in large part through project promotion, so family members know they have an easy, direct way to contact the Center about a loved one they've lost. Media partners have been a huge help in this regard by sharing information about Loved and Lost on their websites and social platforms as well as in their print products. Facebook ads about the project have also allowed the Center to engage a wider audience. Reaching out to community organizations, like houses of worship or funeral homes, did not seem to yield much information.

### FREELANCE FUND AND EQUIPMENT GRANTS

At the height of business shutdowns, journalists from various newsrooms across New Jersey experienced pay cuts or were furloughed or laid off. But in the midst of a health crisis, information can save lives. The Center attempted to support freelancers in the state by creating a freelancer fund and reporting equipment stipend to support local COVID-19 coverage and help local reporters pay for the tools and tech they need to work during a statewide lockdown.

Fifteen freelancers, many of whom were journalists of color, worked for ethnic media news outlets or reported on underserved communities, each received a \$1,000 reporting grant to support production of up to three stories, depending on the medium used and length or depth of work. All the freelancers—writers, audio producers, photographers, mapmakers, videographers, data visualization reporters and other media makers—worked with the Center as needed to get their stories published or broadcast by local New Jersey news organizations.

The freelancers wrote and produced stories on first responders, how creativity flourished in communities across northern New Jersey, the CARES Act, food stress, the rise in domestic violence cases during the pandemic, and how COVID-19 would impact elections, along with other topics.

"In early March, when I walked around the PATH Train station in Jersey City, I saw how businesses struggled and how scared people were," said Gregg Morris, a freelance journalist for The Amsterdam News and an associate professor at Hunter College's Department of Media and Communications. I wanted to document these struggles using my camera. The Freelance Fund helped me carry out my project idea, and I was able to produce a series of photo essays, tackling the economic and mental impact of COVID-19 on the lives of New Jerseyans."

A \$250 stipend for reporting equipment was given to 20 New Jersey journalists to support the purchase of tools needed to better cover the pandemic. Such equipment purchases could include a webcam, microphone, backpack, personal protective equipment or a software/service subscription.

The funding for the stipends came from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Funding for the freelancers came from the Center's general operating funds.

### MAIN OUTCOMES

Among the main five initiatives that the Center pursued, the following outcomes were identified:

- The Center built a framework for partnerships that could extend beyond the coronavirus and brought new partners to the table.
- Invited investigative journalists with extensive experience covering health issues in New Jersey to share their insight on how to cover a complex public health crisis. The training also enabled fellows to develop new knowledge and reporting skills related to covering a pandemic unprecedented in modern history.
- Built and strengthened relationships with ethnic media covering New Jersey.
- Included COVID-19 fellowship stories in a monthly newsletter sent out to the Center's members, journalists, funders and supporters, which improved access to critical information about the ethnic and immigrant communities affected by the coronavirus crisis in the state.
- More than 40 original multimedia stories including podcasts, videos, photos and narrative stories were produced and published or broadcast in eight languages—English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Urdu, Bangla, Hungarian and Korean. The fellowship funding enabled reporting that otherwise would not have been possible.
- More than 70 NJ Spotlight News stories about COVID-19 were translated from English into Spanish, Chinese and Korean. These stories were republished in Reporte Hispano, Sing Tao Daily and The Korea Daily. The translated stories catalyzed interest among some mainstream media partners; NJ Spotlight News created a landing page on its website where it posted all the stories that were translated into Spanish. NorthJersey.com posted several of the Korean translations on its site.
- The original stories and the translated stories helped to inform readers and viewers in their native language about the coronavirus (most of the information on COVID-19 that the CDC and state agencies released was not translated into multiple languages). "The limited number of our staff, which focuses mainly to cover issues related to

the Hispanic community, has not allowed us to provide a broader and more general coverage of the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in the state," says Kleibeel Marcano of Reporte Hispano. "However, having these translations has allowed us to fill that gap and keep our readers abreast of the most relevant facts related to the pandemic."

- Through the fellowship program, fellows attended as many as four separate training sessions and had access to other resources and support activities to boost their professional reporting capabilities. These activities also helped to strengthen the fellows as a cohort and developed a broader knowledge about other communities. "It was great to be able to talk through ideas and issues in other communities," says Jongwon Lee, reporter for The Korea Daily-New Jersey. "What's happening in the Black and Hungarian communities may be different from Korean, but we have a lot of things in common. These conversations helped each of our fellowship projects to be successful."
- The 15 freelance reporters produced 35 stories published in 14 online, and print outlets.
- More than 800 COVID-19 victims in New Jersey were identified as part of Loved and Lost and nearly 200 profiles written, most of them by NorthJersey.com/The Record staff. Additionally, about two dozen news organizations and freelancers joined the project.

# **CHALLENGES**

Among the five core initiatives, some challenges and limitations encountered were directly related to the impact of the coronavirus. Others were logistical in nature.

### Some of the challenges included:

- Tracking content sharing was difficult and often a manual process.
   Since the Center was sharing NJ Spotlight News stories and
   translations via email and allowing news organizations to copy and
   paste them into their own content management systems, there was
   little way to track how widely the shared content was being used. The
   Center, after the fact, set up Google Alerts on the tagline it asked
   people to use on all republished content but it didn't catch everything
   and was unable to catch anything that was broadcast or printed.
- Because offices and businesses were closed due to COVID-19, one of the challenges that fellows encountered was the difficulty of finding the right sources for their stories. Most of them did interviews on the phone or by email—and, in the beginning of the project when it was the peak of the pandemic, the photos used for their stories were taken by the people they interviewed.
- While the fellowship selection process was intended to identify reporters who had sufficient time to devote to their projects, working for a newsroom with a small staff and a big daily workload became overwhelming for several. A couple of fellows, unfortunately, were not able to complete their project requirements.
- The large pool of fellows contributed to a much longer process of editing and translating stories. Additionally, because the statistical data and information on COVID-19 often changed abruptly, making sure the stories were up to date on the day of the publication was challenging, especially for ethnic media outlets that are weekly or biweekly.
- It was difficult and time-consuming to onboard media partners to Loved and Lost, especially over the summer months when election news ramped up and news related to the coronavirus slowed. Some media partners were not interested or were confused about how they could participate.



Report designed by Joe Amditis.



# Center for Cooperative Media: Voting Block, 2019–2020 December, 2020

# Background

The Center for Cooperative Media's second iteration of Voting Block took place from late 2019 through August 2020. The program connected community members in three New Jersey cities – Paterson, Newark, and Camden – with local journalists, government officials, and one another in an effort to spur civil dialogue. The initial design was to create these connections over intimate dinners across several months of time. The pandemic disrupted a great deal of these plans, forcing Newark and Camden to go partially or fully virtual.

According to pre/post survey results from community participants and one-on-one interviews from journalist participants, Voting Block effectively engaged and connected participants, while also increasing trust with local media and tangibly increasing community involvement. However, it must be noted that the participants were already largely civically engaged. Voting Block 2020 enhanced the civic mindedness of its community participants, but it didn't necessarily engage the indifferent.

### **Event Sites**

### **Paterson**

Voting Block in Paterson took place from December, 2019 to January, 2020. There were ten participants, although one person stopped participating partway through. The group included a mix of people who were plugged into local politics and media, as well as those who were less engaged and were new to this type of community-based experience. All three dinners for the Paterson group were in-person. Paterson was the first to launch because networking efforts paid off right away, which led to a diverse group of community members willing to participate in the dinners. Rosie Grant, a professional facilitator, served as moderator for the Paterson group.

### Newark

The Newark Voting Block met for its first dinner in person in January, just before the COVID-19 pandemic overtook the U.S.. The project paused, then resumed virtually, with the last dinner being hosted in August. Most of the 11 Newark participants were local leaders, and some participants already knew each other; however, the participants weren't as connected to local

media. Participants were guarded at the first in-person meeting, more willing to boost Newark than call out issues of concern. The first virtual meeting often turned to local despair as a result of the pandemic, which led to raw and honest conversations about Newark. WBGO reporter Brit Harley facilitated the dinners. As a community organizer and journalist, she had crossed paths with some of the participants and was sensitive to their concerns about the media.

### Camden

The Voting Block dinners in Camden in August and September 2020 were all held virtually and had nine participants. Because the dinners were virtual as a result of the pandemic, a local restaurant delivered food to participants in anticipation of the meeting. The first of the three dinners, each of which lasted two hours, was the most successful in terms of engagement and subject matter. The designated facilitator, journalist Phaedra Trethan, had a hard time engaging the participants, which led the Center's Manya Brachear Pashman to participate in facilitation more than initially planned.

### Discussion

### **The Community Perspective**

Prior to the Voting Block events, we surveyed participants to understand their current level of civic engagement and experience interacting with local journalists, and we followed up after the events to identify if and how Voting Block influenced changes in their thinking or behavior.

We found that despite the already high level of civic engagement and connection to information in New Jersey, participants indicated that Voting Block led them to be even *more* engaged and connected.

Among the 30 Voting Block community participants, 27 took the pre-survey (90% response rate). The respondents represent a broad socio-economic cross-section of community members. Eleven (40.7%) respondents have a household income below \$30,000, nine (33.3%) have a household income between \$30,000 and \$74,999, and the remaining seven (25.9%) have a household income \$75,000 or higher. The demographic characteristics of the respondents was less broad: 19 (70.3%) were women and the rest men; just over half of participants (14, 52%) identified as Black, five (18.5%) identified with two or more races, and three each (11.1%) identified as white and Hispanic/Latinx, respectively. In terms of age, 16 (59.3%) were between the ages of 25 and 44, with just one participant between 18 and 24 and the remaining 10 (37%) 45 years of age or older.

Politically, the respondents tended to describe themselves as liberal and engaged. Thirteen (48.1%) said that "liberal" or "very liberal" best characterizes their political views, while 10 (37%) said "moderate" does. The remaining either did not answer or said "apolitical" was the best description for them. No respondent identified "conservative" or "very conservative" as the best characterization of their political views. Regarding local political engagement, 11 said they were

"moderately engaged" (40.7%), eight (29.6%) said they are either "extremely" or "very" engaged, four said they were "slightly engaged," and only one person said they were "not at all engaged."

This self-identified level of engagement is evident in behavior. We asked about voting practices, and 23 (85.2%) said they either "always" or "usually" vote. Just one person said they "rarely" vote. We also asked participants if they've ever talked or written to a state government official, and 17 (63%) indicated that they had.

In terms of interpersonal engagement, 11 (40.7%) respondents said that they "occasionally" talk to people with whom they disagree with about politics either online or in-person, which was the most common response. Eight (29.6%) said that they "frequently" do, three (11.1%) said they "rarely" do. One respondent indicated that they "very frequently" talk with those with whom they disagree politically, and one respondent selected "very rarely." No respondent said that they "never" do.

When asked how informed they feel about New Jersey politics, most (55.6%) said that they feel "moderately" informed. Four (14.8%) respondents said they feel either "extremely" or "very" informed, while five (18.5%) said they feel either "slightly" or "not at all" informed. In terms of news habits, the predominant ways respondents access local news is through online newspapers and social media, as 40.7% of the respondents indicated they "very frequently" get information in these ways. Most (59.3%) also said they had previously talked to a journalist for a news story, almost half (44.4%) said they have been recorded for public broadcast, and a quarter have written a work published either online or in print about civic issues in New Jersey (25.9%).

After the conclusion of all Voting Block events in Paterson, Newark and Camden, we asked participants about how much the experience influenced them in terms of civic engagement and feeling informed about New Jersey politics. In all, 22 of the 30 participants (73% response rate) took the post-event survey: 10 from Newark, seven from Paterson, and five from Camden. Overall, participants identified positive change as a result of Voting Block.

The vast majority of respondents felt more informed about local politics, more engaged in community, and had more trust in local media after Voting Block. While not every participant identified these changes for themselves, no respondents selected "disagree" or "strongly disagree" when asked to assess the impact of the events.

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
After participating in NJ Voting Block, I feel more informed about my city's politics.	40.91% 9	31.82% 7	27.27% 6	0.00%	0.00%	22
After participating in NJ Voting Block, I feel more engaged in my community.	40.91% 9	36.36% 8	22.73% 5	0.00%	0.00%	22
After participating in NJ Voting Block, I have more trust in local media to provide relevant information to me and my community.	40.91% 9	31.82% 7	27.27% 6	0.00%	0.00%	22

Some of the specific issues participants felt more informed about include policing, pollution, the digital divide, prison reform, resources for change, and local activism. Understanding other community perspectives was another way participants expressed being more informed. One respondent said "I understand a lot more about Paterson," and another said, "I am more informed about the issues which are important to others."

Participants also provided specific examples about how Voting Block influenced their trust in local media and connection to their community. A participant from Camden said it "felt like all the journalists displayed compassion and concern about Camden City." Another said "The people were invested and that's a start. They took the time to listen and that's a major part that's missing." Continuing the theme of listening as fellow community members, another participant said "the journalists were merely participants in a group of like minded individuals." And in response to a question about identifying specific relationships formed as a result of Voting Block, one participant said "I think I will be more inclined to contact the media involved in this project, whereas before I was hesitant."

Regarding connections to communities, there are examples of participants taking concrete actions as a result of Voting Block. One respondent stated "I had the pleasure of being invited to community board meetings and organized community platforms." Another made contact with "leadership in Paterson," while others mentioned things such as joining local nonprofits, attending town meetings, and sharing new insights with others.

Respondents indicated a high degree of interpersonal connection as well. Seventeen (71.3%) participants said they formed a new relationship as a result of Voting Block, while three (13.6%) said they were "unsure" whether or not they did and two (9.1%) said they did not form a new relationship. The pre-event survey indicated that most respondents already engaged in conversation with those they disagree with politically, but the post-event survey shows that after Voting Block, participants are even more likely to do so. Sixteen (72.7%) of the respondents said that they were either "much more likely" or "more likely" to engage in this type of conversation, while the remaining six (27.3%) said they were "neither more nor less likely" to do so. None of the participants said they were "less likely" or "much less likely" to engage in these types of conversations.

### The Journalists' Perspective

We spoke with the three journalists who participated in the discussions but who did not serve as meeting facilitators: Steve Lenox from TAPinto Paterson, Patrick Wall from Chalkbeat (based in Newark), and Steve Rodas from TAPinto Camden. Participating in this type of event was new for each journalist, and all three of them reported a positive experience with lasting impact.

One tangible way the events impacted the journalists was by providing new sources. All three journalists said they made new connections at the events that later served as inspiration for new local journalism or as a new connection. Similarly, all three journalists reported that they produced journalism as a result of the conversations at the events. For example, Steve Rodas from TAPinto Camden said that illegal dumping was a major theme from the conversations. One participant even took advantage of the virtual format and showed illegal dumping taking place outside of the participant's residence. This led to a story about illegal dumping and what the city of Camden is or is not doing about it.

Otherwise, Lenox, Wall, and Rodas all identified the open conversation and welcoming atmosphere as one of the best aspects of the events. They appreciated the fact that the conversations were not about one theme. Because the conversations were wide-ranging, the journalists were able to hear about multiple issues that concern community members. For instance, Patrick Wall is an education journalist, but the conversations were not focused on education. As a result, Wall said he came into contact with community members and community issues he probably wouldn't have while on his regular education beat.

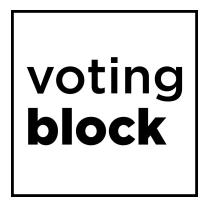
While each journalist identified the open conversation as a positive, it also prevented them from going deep on an issue in the moment. One possible program change would be to reserve the first meeting for a broad discussion about many themes, and then to use the subsequent meetings to dig deeper into one or two specific issues. While the journalists did not offer many critiques of Voting Block, Rodas did indicate that he and at least one other participant felt that the final meeting in Camden with public officials felt lacking. The reason was because the issues and questions the group discussed in the first two meetings didn't come up enough.

### Recommendations

Voting Block 2019-2020 achieved its primary goals, despite the disruptions to initial plans. Still, there are concrete ways Voting Block can fine tune future events.

1. Engage the unconnected. While Paterson had a mix of community participants that were civically engaged and relatively unengaged, the participants from Newark and Camden were well connected and already had a share of voice in the community. Using the methods that worked in Paterson in other regions could lead to a greater overall mix.

- **2.** Leverage discrete networks to find participants. Many participants were referrals from other participants, which led to some insularity. Pulling from non-overlapping networks could lead to a more diverse mix of participants.
- **3.** Use each meeting to determine the next meeting's agenda, and stick to it. Let the meetings organically build upon one another and sharpen the focus as the meetings take place.
- **4. Follow up with participants.** Keep participants engaged and show them tangible results of their participation, including links to journalism that resulted from the conversation, or any other tangible actions taken by participants, such as volunteer work or organizing efforts toward local causes.



# The People's Agenda

### **Paterson**

January 2021

For the past year, residents and news organizations in three New Jersey cities, including Paterson, have gathered to break bread, listen to each other and discuss priorities and concerns in their communities as part of a project called Voting Block.

This was the second time the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University has coordinated Voting Block, a project intended to amplify underrepresented voices. The 2019-2020 program was focused in Paterson, Newark and Camden. In each city, small groups of residents shared meals and discussed issues that mattered to them. The dinners connected people of diverse ages, ethnicities, religion, political leanings and priorities – people who otherwise might never connect. It also connected journalists to community members they might not ordinarily cover.

At each dinner, residents discussed what they like and love about the cities they call home and listened to each other suggest priorities and improvements. City Councilwoman At-Large Lilisa Mimms joined the third and final dinner in Paterson. Topics included education, public safety, quality of life, youth recreation and leadership accountability. There was disagreement and unexpected common ground. Accusations turned into opportunities to see others' perspectives and pledges to help each other do better.

Journalists also participated in the conversations, fielding complaints about their coverage while at the same time seizing the opportunity to address those complaints by listening to new points of view, connecting to new sources and building lasting relationships. Journalists and residents themselves produced stories based on the conversations they had and the connections they made.

Throughout Voting Block, we knew that one of the outcomes we wanted for the project was the creation of a **People's Agenda**: an agenda that we could present to lawmakers that was built entirely upon what Patersonians said they wanted to see happen in their city.

In the weeks before and immediately after the election, we checked back in with our Voting Block neighbors to make sure the priorities they expressed during those dinners still rang true.

On behalf of those residents and Voting Block, we respectfully ask you to consider these priorities as you continue to lead this city through the second wave of the pandemic and beyond.

# ▲ The People's Agenda ▶

The following items were compiled from longtime Patersonians who participated in Voting Block.

### **EDUCATION**

Two main themes emerged from the voters who cited education-related issues as their main priority: an outdated and whitewashed social studies curriculum that fails to engender any sense of community or cultural pride, and a lack of youth recreational opportunities to help kids see other options besides the streets and sports.

"Why don't we revamp the social studies curriculum to include Paterson pride? The purpose is for the students to understand heritage so they can change the narrative from negative to positive. Reform is important as it relates to students understanding the connections between their existence and their environment." —Tanya W.

"I'm struck by the very nice sense of community I found here but also struck by the lack of resources that the kids have, especially when you travel to other high schools in the area. Compared to our high school it's shocking. Every child deserves an equal opportunity." — Faatimah H.

"Being able to have that voice and have that choice should be all our parents' No. 1 concern. Everyone is worried about college tuition, but we don't have the means to make sure our kids are prepared to go to college in K-12."

—Ashley C.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Bottom line: residents of Paterson don't feel safe. They don't see police doing an adequate job. More importantly, they see the lack of emotional support, financial education and recreational opportunities for young people perpetuating the problem for generations to come.

"I've lived in Paterson more than 40 years. I live in the Towers and it's not so great. You basically have to just pray that when you come outside that it's not your last time you're walking out of the building. My concern is what we can do to eliminate gangbangers in our neighborhood and drug dealers. My first thought was to put the police back on the beat because without the police presence they do whatever they want." —Doreen J.

"I know that the public schools in Paterson have financial education as part of the curriculum. But I don't think it's enough. Nobody gets into the drug trade because they want to be a drug dealer. They get into it because they want to make quick fast money. That quick fast money they can make a plethora of other ways. In the free time I have, I mentor and tutor at-risk youth in Paterson and they don't know anything about how to invest their money. They see the only opportunity to make money is getting a job or the streets. If we can educate especially the young people and show them another life, another way of making money that would decrease the crime. It would decrease the drug trade." —Sebastian M.

A lot of people in Paterson face trauma every day in the streets at their home and we have to find a way to address it. Young kids should be screened for adverse childhood experiences. If we find kids that have these we need to deal with it immediately. Kids going into middle school need incredible recreational opportunities: bowling, dance. The high school students could be employed to offer this supervision. Keep these young kids out of the gang and the underground economy. Without that we're just going to keep having people drift."

—Faatimah H.

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Driving down some Paterson streets makes many residents sad, especially when they see landmark buildings such as current and former libraries that should be beacons for the community sitting vacant or surrounded by empty, trash-filled lots, boarded up buildings or liquor stores.

"Urban gardening creates a sense of community, which in many sections of this town there's a lack of. Once you see life growing in your community, you're going to think twice about bringing death into your community."

——Sebastian M.

"I'm socialized to believe that it's OK to have this many liquor stores in my neighborhood. In one area, we have an overabundance of liquor stores. We're talking in a 1.5-mile neighborhood, we have eight liquor stores."

—Andre A.

### LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY

"Our trust in our leaders is very broken. Nepotism, I'd like to see dealt with. Voter fraud, I'd like to see dealt with. Corruption in general has become problematic in this city. It hurts. It's personal when the people that are in positions of power that you trust to care, don't. You wonder how much longer are we going to see people who are unqualified for good paying jobs receive them? There are plenty of opportunities that could've gone to Patersonians that don't. What has changed, what is better than it was two years ago? More people are being shot. Everything seems more corrupt than ever. The schools lost teachers. I want to know that our leaders are meaningfully doing work and that we can trust them." —Elizabeth V.

### YOUTH RECREATION

Residents reminisced about how sports and the arts changed the course of their lives and the lives of their children.

Competitive boxers, football players, basketball moms and artists all shared their dismay that Paterson did not offer nearly enough outlets for children to express themselves, tap into their talents and dress the wounds caused by trauma.

"They should set up a strike force for children in Paterson. If kids are under a lot of stress, their brains don't actually form properly and they can't learn. Paterson needs to have recreation for every single child. Schools should be updated with the best gymnasiums, lots of athletic fields, we should hire high school students, actually train them and let them earn money helping with these recreation programs, and that's an emergency. It needs to be done immediately." —Faatimah H.

"Gangbangers are children. They are from 11 to 16. They are babies. Where do they get these guns? They still need as much help as the ones already in school. They need to learn that they are loved unconditionally in order to help them." —Doreen J.

"I was a kid on the brink of the school-to-prison pipeline. I witnessed that first thing in Paterson in the 70s where I was taken out of regular elementary school because whatever the teacher viewed was combative, they had to isolate me and many other students and put us in a classroom that was designed for kids that were on the verge of going to a youth corrective facility. What I can say I really love about Paterson as a boxer from 12 up to 25, I was proud of being from Paterson. The best fighters came out of Paterson." —Andre A.

"Sports is something that's essential. I can recall being in school and got in trouble when it wasn't football season. When football season came around, I was good. How 'bout addressing the school to prison pipeline? I

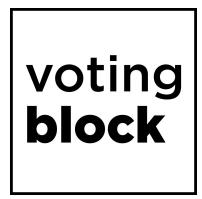
was put in handcuffs at the age of 8 at school over a fight with another child. That obviously affected me. We need to address the trauma." —Marquise M.

### LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA AND DRUG REHABILITATION

Voters expressed concern that Paterson is home to one of the few drug rehabilitation centers in Passaic County because other suburban governments will not approve such facilities. As a result, when suburban law enforcement agencies make drug arrests, they bring people to Paterson without compensating the city for offering this service.

"How 'bout laying off these guys with dime and nickel bags and focusing on the real problems?" —Gemelly C.

"I grew up in Bergen County in a wealthy area and I had a drug problem as a teenager. I'd come to Paterson to buy cocaine all the time because it was easy. But when Haledon drops off people because we have a needle exchange that other places don't. We have rehabilitation centers that other places don't. ... We're taking all of your people, but you're not giving us money. If your police officer is going to bring your criminal to my city, I want \$10,000 for that person." —Elizabeth V.



# The People's Agenda

### **Newark**

January 2021

For the past year, residents and news organizations in three New Jersey cities, including Newark, have gathered to break bread, listen to each other and discuss priorities and concerns in their communities as part of a project called Voting Block.

This was the second time the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University has coordinated Voting Block, a project intended to amplify underrepresented voices. The 2019-2020 program was focused in Paterson, Newark and Camden. In each city, small groups of residents shared meals and discussed issues that mattered to them. The dinners connected people of diverse ages, ethnicities, religion, political leanings and priorities – people who otherwise might never connect. It also connected journalists to community members they might not ordinarily cover.

Although Voting Block began with in-person meals, it pivoted to virtual dinners due to the pandemic, with local restaurants delivering meals to neighbors' doorsteps so they could join the conversation from the safety of their homes. In many ways, the new format evoked more honesty and empathy as participants grappled with illness, job loss and schooling for their children.

In Newark, Mayor Ras Baraka and Congressman Donald Payne Jr. joined us for our third dinner. Topics included education during the pandemic, economic development, affordable housing, mental health, and transportation. There was disagreement and unexpected common ground. Accusations turned into opportunities to see others' perspectives and pledges to help each other do better and make life better for those around them.

Journalists also participated in the conversations, fielding complaints about their coverage while at the same time seizing the opportunity to address those complaints by listening to new points of view, connecting to new sources and building lasting relationships. Journalists and residents themselves produced stories based on the conversations they had and the connections they made.

Throughout Voting Block, we knew that one of the outcomes we wanted for the project was the creation of a **People's Agenda**: an agenda that we could present to lawmakers that was built entirely upon what Newarkers said they wanted to see happen in their city.

FILL IN BLANK, on behalf of those residents and Voting Block, we respectfully ask you to consider these priorities as you continue to lead our city through the second wave of the pandemic and beyond.

# ▲ The People's Agenda ▶

The following items were compiled from Voting Block participants and residents of Newark.

### **EDUCATION**

Three main themes emerged from the voters who cited education-related issues as their main priority: the lack of access to technology, the proper measurement of student achievement during the pandemic, and education in Newark's history.

"With the state not looking to administer the state-level assessments that provide districts and families information about students' performance and achievement, gains and declines, I feel like the lack of data critical for advancing school equity will be lost. Losing all this data may make it a challenge to understand and address the disruption during the COVID-19 crisis that occurred in our students, especially for those who are historically underserved. Blended learning has been an overlooked necessity for years. Now as students are forced into virtual learning scenarios and hybrid situations, school administrators need to figure out how to accommodate different learning styles of students with different resources, so they don't get left behind." —Stacy R.

"We fought long and hard for local control and we finally get it and then this situation happened and I'm sure it affected a lot of our children's grades and efficiency in the classroom. Is this something we'll have to worry about again in the view of the state?" —Elijah G.

"The year was so crazy for our students here where a lot of them fell through the cracks where they didn't have devices or the internet. Some are homeless. Some are immigrants whose parents don't speak English. Is the city or state doing anything to fix those issues from last year so we don't have those children, even those who do better in the classroom because virtually doesn't work for everyone? Unlike suburban parents, our parents can't afford to pool their resources, hire a tutor and teach in a bubble. How can we use this moment to reimagine what education looks like and get kids acclimated to the way the world looks? Nothing beats the in-person system. We need the community." —Isaiah L.

"Young people don't respect the history of the city and the disenfranchised people already here who are striving to do better with what they have. How do you mesh the two and get them to understand we've got to co-exist? We need to highlight all the positive things that have happened in the history of Newark. We have a history of arts, activism, sports that needs to be highlighted. We've always been inviting and welcoming to people, but we fear outsiders are going to come in and do things we don't want to happen." —Aaron F.

"In Governor Murphy's bill earlier in the pandemic he had spoken about resources and training for staff and parents to assist in the gap in the technology area. The superintendent in his reopening plan talked about scrutinizing technology experience when hiring new employees. Has he addressed teaching new tech to the current employees? With the new monies allocated through that new bill, if the city is getting any of that money, does the city have any plans to assist parents in the learning gap for tech knowledge and tech information so they can help with their children's education?" —Stacy R.

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

"Since we've been going through the pandemic I was seeing a lot of extra litter everywhere with the masks and gloves. What are we doing to beef up the cleaning of the city and what can we do to help besides clean up in front of our places? Are there any new programs that are being developed as far as litter like in the West Ward? Could we designate people or get people to volunteer to clean up on all blocks?" —Amina H.

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

"Can there be a moratorium on rental increases and moratoriums on evictions to hold the line until things get more normalized and people get back to work and do what they're supposed to do to pay their rent? We had an issue even before COVID. What is the process behind housing development in the city of Newark and the availability of affordable housing and rental assistance?" —Vanessa L.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

"About 50% of the folks who live here don't drive or don't have cars so when we talk about transportation, if we're not prioritizing what our community calls alternatives we're missing the mark. There's a huge disadvantage for folks who need to get to school, who need to get to work and need to take advantage of our corridors. People should be able to walk down the street in an environment they feel safe and comfortable in. Everybody should be able to walk everywhere they need to go. Part of the culture shift has to be mandated so when possible, like on University Avenue where they put in speed bumps, we have to control the way drivers engage our streets to help shift culture, slowing them down and also providing amenities for pedestrians."

—Bryan E.

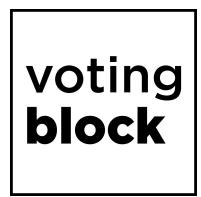
"We need a quarter of a cent sales tax and participatory budgeting practices to support transportation and public art projects among others." —Isaiah L.

### **EMPLOYMENT**

"The available positions that are being presented many times offer low wages, minimal hours, high risk or they're out of the city, which presents obstacles around transportation. Those positions that supply higher wages and benefits typically do not go to Newark residents. And there are excuses made around training, education, and certification. How do we ensure those positions that can offer quality of life go to qualified Newark residents?" —Laura C.

### MENTAL HEALTH

"That sense of community and community-based sense of safety and healing. How do we broaden these programs to offer direct support and healing for our fellow community members? We need those resources. At the end of the day what can we do to heal each other and help each other ensure safety in our community? We need to be a trauma-informed city. Police officers need to be trained on trauma practices. City hall and school board employees need to know how to identify trauma and how to respond to it." —Jessica L.



# The People's Agenda

### Camden

January 2021

For the past year, residents and news organizations in three New Jersey cities, including Camden, have gathered to break bread, listen to each other and discuss priorities and concerns in their communities as part of a project called Voting Block.

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Although Voting Block began with in-person meals, it pivoted to virtual dinners due to the pandemic, with local restaurants delivering meals to neighbors' doorsteps so they could join the conversation from the safety of their homes. In many ways, the new format evoked more honesty and empathy as participants grappled with illness, job loss and schooling for their children.

Camden City Councilwoman-At-Large Sheila Davis and her colleague Councilwoman Shaneka Boucher joined for the third and final dinner. Topics included education, illegal dumping, public safety and community engagement. There was disagreement and unexpected common ground. Accusations turned into opportunities to see others' perspectives and pledges to help each other do better.

Journalists also participated in the conversations, fielding complaints about their coverage while at the same time seizing the opportunity to address those complaints by listening to new points of view, connecting to new sources and building lasting relationships. Journalists and residents themselves produced stories based on the conversations they had and the connections they made.

Throughout Voting Block, we knew that one of the outcomes we wanted for the project was the creation of a **People's Agenda**: an agenda that we could present to lawmakers that was built entirely upon what Camden residents said they wanted to see happen in their city.

On behalf of those residents and Voting Block, we respectfully ask you to consider these priorities as you continue to lead our city through the second wave of the pandemic and beyond.

# ▲ The People's Agenda ▶

The following items were compiled from Voting Block participants and residents of Camden.

### **EDUCATION**

Three main themes emerged from the residents who cited education-related issues as their main priority: inequality in public schools, wasteful spending and the process of hiring professional staff.

### On inequality:

"Kids need an education. It's become a business now. They're plucking off the best from the charter schools. But it's about the marketing of it. Public schools need to market better and promote how good they are. It goes to economics." —Rashaan H.

### On wasteful spending:

"Education is almost tied into the gentrification of Camden where you have less children overall in the school system. And they seem to be privatizing the Camden city school system with these renaissance schools which are private but not private run by outside agents that are not in the city of Camden. Basically, all this money is being given out to all these outside agents while the Camden city school district is crying 'we have a bunch of deficits.' But if you cut these contracts that you're giving to the outside agents, you have the money."

—Candida R.

### On hiring:

"The process of hiring needs to be reevaluated. They're just plugging in folks into spots. Then you have these teachers and supporting staff not treating the children right, abusing them verbally, bullying them or expressing racism. They should interview them better and get some more back door information before filling up a spot. That's a problem." —Evangelista B.

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Two main themes arose when talking about the challenges of daily life in Camden: noise pollution and inadequate waste management, including but not limited to illegal dumping.

### On noise pollution:

"Waterfront South has a lot of issues – neglect and destruction – the kinds of things that arise from drug violence. It's also adjacent to a lot of industry. There's been, over the years, very active participation by residents who make life better in this area concerning those environmental issues. It constantly feels like a really heavy lift. It's heartrending how many people live in this community that are being impacted daily by these things, almost on a subconscious level between the smell and the noise and whatever is floating in the air. And that's not to mention the johns dropping women off on the street. Through the night, I can hear the scrap metal facility at work. It sounds like Godzilla vs. Radon out there sometimes. Should they be allowed to do this at 1 a.m.? I can hear it through my bedroom window. It's waking me up. I have no idea where to begin to address that." —Cassie M.

### On illegal dumping:

"The big problem is the dumping and the upkeep of the neighborhood. Outside my house there are two dumpsters that have trash spilling out of them. They've just been there. On Magnolia Avenue there's this lot that people just dump trash into sometimes. You can't have that happening on a business corridor because that doesn't attract business. It drives people away." —Shaniyla J.

"You'll see industrial stuff – tires and stuff. People working on properties don't want to pay to dump this stuff. People put their old mattresses out and they don't call the Department of Public Works because waste management doesn't pick up everything now. So they take it to a vacant lot. It amazes me that people are comfortable dumping on Camden. They just dump everything here. They just dump. It should be constant upkeep. We need accountability all the time." —Tracy C.

### On waste management:

"The alleyways are a major problem. They're not taken care of. They're not paved. The trash is out of control. You can't even drive down some of these alley ways in the city because there's so much trash. What type of funding would we need to get the lidded trash cans that the suburban communities have? How cost effective would that be for Camden to invest in trash cans like that?" —Rashaan H.

### **DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

Two main themes arose regarding the lack of community engagement in Camden: neighborhoods are isolated, disenfranchised and operate on their own with limited resources, especially when the city government forgets them in the rush to revitalize downtown. Compounding that problem is the lack of civic education among residents in those neighborhoods who don't know how to advocate for themselves.

### On neighborhood empowerment:

"People don't really understand at the very lowest level their own responsibilities and what's expected of them. These are the expectations that have been placed on us as residents. You are poor therefore you must live poorly. We talk about taxpayers, but it doesn't matter if you pay taxes or not. Renters, temporary housing people, people who live in shelters are all residents of your city and they deserve to be counted too. They're also part of that solution. It's going to take a lot, but awareness and healing is where it needs to be at a grassroots level. Neighborhood associations where you have blocks getting together is the only way that's going to happen. I don't step into your neighborhood. I don't know what's going on in there. It's scary." —Candida R.

"When you wake up one morning and suddenly there are three enormous telephone poles behind your house, it's so demoralizing. Pretty soon as a little ole resident you start to feel like what happened? That sense of being disenfranchised that people complain of, that's where it comes from. I feel there must be a way to create channels of communication. I don't think anyone has bad intentions. We haven't created the mechanism for people who want to plug in and find out the facts and what we can do about it. I want to feel like I can participate in my own life. Democracy with a small d. This is not national politics. This is, how can I work with my neighbors and other people who are impacted to do something effective? I think it's possible but somehow there's this structure we have to break through and create a new pathway. There needs to be power built from the ground up." —Cassie M.

"The problem here in Camden has always been accountability. No one wants to be accountable for their role or their position – not the appointed people, not the non-appointed people. It has become an area of the haves and the have nots. Because you're a resident of Camden people disregard the fact that we're taxpayers. And we deserve certain amenities for our taxes. The quality of life is bad here because there's no accountability. They want downtown to look great so they pushed everybody our way, all the addicts. And now nobody wants to do anything about it. Because they want the heartbeat to beat. But they don't care about the veins." —Tracy C.

### On civic education:

"You have to get parents to understand the value that their kids represent. Why should they pay taxes? Why should they attend city council meetings? Why should they attend school board meetings? The city of Camden gets a lot of things pushed through because a majority of the people in the city don't come out. It's always a small group of people that really fight for policies and laws because people are uneducated about why they should be fighting for those things. Education is important, not just in the structure of the school sense, even just educating people period about how a city works and what parts of government affect other things. A lot of people probably don't know what city council is for and what it does, not just our kids, but adults as well."

—Rashaan H.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Two themes emerged in the conversations about public safety: a lack of transparency about criminal activity in the city and an apathy and disrespect on the part of law enforcement in certain neighborhoods.

### **Apathy in law enforcement:**

"When I'm walking down my block to go to my job, you better believe I'm hyperaware of everything that's going on around me. When you have drug houses that are wide open, when it's so clear and blatant and in your face, I don't understand how it hasn't been addressed. Police know exactly where they are. There's foot traffic and there's even been bodies. Cleary the police know. There's a process to the law. They can't just go and arrest everybody. There's no room in Camden jail. You must be extremely aggressive. But in the climate today, you can't have a police force or a system that's going to be aggressive in a city like Camden. So, the solution is very difficult. First you have to work with the people." —Candida R.

"They were talking about the reveal of Black Lives Matter Boulevard. That sounds like something good and moving in the right direction. But at the same time they tried that with the peaceful protests of Metro but after the protest they were talking about misconduct with Metro. I don't understand this whole thing where they're trying to beautify and talk about the Black Lives Matter movement and at the same time doing away with MLK's house when people were trying to fight for that to be a landmark. It seems like with certain things they do they're just trying to be a spotlight for the rest of the world and the next day everything goes back to the way it is." —Christine A.

### Lack of transparency:

"The way they record the crime that's going on is making it seem like Camden is safer. But in the last two days, the hospital received three gunshot victims and three stab victims. Yet we haven't heard anything about it as residents. I know I didn't. They've got residents thinking that it's safer but they're keeping it under the radar to give it the illusion that it's safer." —Tracy C.

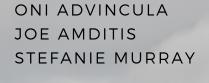
"I've done so many stories about violence in Camden and what I discovered really was that the statistics that they are compelled to part with are the homicides. They don't tell the media about all the shootings and stabbings. I learn about them from Facebook, from my friends. I did a report on how often shots are fired. It's every few hours in Camden. It's insane. They're saving a lot more lives now. But a couple years ago when the murder rate was so low, the rate of people being shot was the same." —April S.

2020

# ELECTION REPORT

CENTER FOR COOPERATIVE MEDIA
AT MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

# PREPARED BY:



### **EDITED BY:**

CARLA BARANAUCKAS

### **ABOUT THE CENTER**

The Center was founded in 2012 in response to the downsizing of New Jersey news organizations and the changes in the ownership of regional public media. These shifts in the news and information landscape 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.

The Center coordinates statewide and regional reporting, connecting more than 300 local news and information providers through its flagship project, the NJ News Commons. The News Commons provides a communication network among its members, helps partners to share content and encourages them to collaborate and to support one another.

The Center also conducts and publishes research on emerging ideas and best practices, focusing on local journalism, business models and ecosystem mapping. The Center convenes national programs, including an annual national summit for journalism organizations to foster the conditions, ideas, and practices that lead to stronger collaborative journalism across the U.S. The Center's annual reports offer a detailed history of programs and impact.

The Center is a grant-funded program within the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. The Center receives core support from Montclair State University, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund and Abrams Foundation, as well as project support from many other grantmaking sources and sponsors.

# **INTRODUCTION**

The 2020 U.S. elections came at a time of deep partisan divide amid a global pandemic and a painful national reckoning with racism. Misinformation and disinformation coursed through social media platforms. The stakes could not have been higher.

The pandemic dramatically changed the way politicians campaigned and how people voted, adding more stress to an already chaotic-feeling time. News organizations around the country focused much more attention on the voting process in 2020, as mail-in ballots became commonplace in many states. In New Jersey, it was the first time that every registered voter was sent a mail-in ballot.

While coverage of down-ballot races and ballot questions were important to statewide and local news organizations, the presidential election overshadowed many other things.

Security was a big concern, as well — the security of the election itself, and security for journalists who would be covering it.

# THE CENTER'S APPROACH

The Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University serves as a hub for news and information organizations in New Jersey. Through its flagship project, the NJ News Commons, the Center provides coaching, consulting, communication and networking to media professionals; it also runs collaborative journalism projects and seeks funding to support journalists.

In surveying the landscape and talking with partners, the Center decided to put early emphasis on helping news organizations understand and explain the voting process and on providing additional training and incentivizing ethnic media and mainstream media collaboration. Then in late fall, content sharing was added to the mix with the launch of Votebeat.

Among the initiatives that the Center spearheaded were:

- An arrangement with NJ Spotlight News to make its statewide "How to vote in New Jersey" story and video about mail-in ballots available for republication; social graphics about the voting process were also created and shared with NJ News Commons members.
- Translation of the NJ Spotlight News "How to vote in New Jersey" piece from English into an additional 10 languages; the article was then published by 10 ethnic media outlets.
- Creation of a pop-up newsletter to share content produced by Votebeat with NJ News Commons members for republication.
- Fellowships with five ethnic and community media reporters to allow them to do additional election-related reporting.
- Telebriefings and training webinars, including one about disaster planning with Election SOS.
- The provision of legal help on and after Election Day for journalists facing legal issues regarding reporting at polling stations or covering protests or celebrations.

Details for each of these initiatives follows.

# **TRANSLATION**

More than 23 million immigrants in America are eligible voters, making up roughly 10% of the nation's overall electorate, according to Pew Research Center estimates based on Census Bureau data.

Notably, 61% of these 23 million voters live in just five states: New Jersey (1.2 million immigrants who are eligible voters), after California (5.5 million), New York (2.5 million) and Florida (2.5 million) and Texas (1.8 million).

But the lack of news and information about the election in languages other than English threatens to disenfranchise many immigrant voters.

As part of the Election 2020 initiative, the Center supported 12 ethnic media outlets covering parts of New Jersey to translate NJ Spotlight News' story "NJ Election 2020: Voting in New Jersey. Your questions answered" and publish it a few weeks before Election Day. NJ Spotlight News is a respected nonprofit statewide news organization.

The ethnic media outlets that took part in this election initiative were Amerikai Nepszava, Zaman Amerika, The Korea Daily, Sing Tao Daily, Bangla Patrika, Urdu News, Brazilian Press, Nowy Dziennik, Gujarati Darpan, and Reporte Hispano, publishing and translating the story into Hungarian, Turkish, Korean, Chinese, Bangla, Urdu, Portuguese, Polish, Gujarati and Spanish, respectively.

"The article was so valuable for my community, especially when all of us are bombarded with misinformation and disinformation," said Mohsin Zaheer, publisher and editor of Urdu News. "Because New Jersey had a hybrid election due to the pandemic, translating NJ Spotlight's piece was vital information to many Pakistani American voters who, for the first time, had the choice to either mail their ballots or vote in person."

The translation program was funded by a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

# **COLLABORATIVE REPORTING**

To take the translation initiative to the next level, the Center introduced Reporte Hispano general editor Kleibeel Marcano to politics editors at NJ.com/The (Newark) Star-Ledger and helped arrange for a joint reporting project about the election.

The partnership resulted in two stories that were co-reported by Kleibeel and Rodrigo Torrejon. The first story examined the top issues — immigration, COVID-19 and racial equity — that Hispanic voters said were motivating their votes; the second looked at DACA recipients and their top concerns related primarily to the presidential election. The articles, written in Spanish and English, were simultaneously published on the digital platforms of both organizations. The stories also ran in the print products of both publications, including on the Sunday front page of The Star-Ledger, which is the largest circulation newspaper in New Jersey.

The Reporte Hispano and NJ.com collaboration was supported by funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

The Center also paired Jongwon Lee of The Korea Daily with NorthJersey.com/The (Bergen) Record for election co-reporting. The Center hosted two meetings between the organizations and Jongwon put together a pitch deck, including several story ideas. However, Jongwon and NorthJersey.com did not end up co-producing any content.

They had already been working together to translate NorthJersey.com content — including stories, videos and social graphics — from English to Korean, and despite Jongwon's effort to suggest stories, the editors at NorthJersey.com did not go forward with the work. It's unclear if this was due to miscommunication or simply lack of time and resources.

### **VOTEBEAT**

Votebeat is a new pop-up nonprofit newsroom that launched in fall 2020 to cover local election administration and voting in eight states. It was created by Chalkbeat. New Jersey was one of the states where Votebeat placed reporters.

Both New Jersey Votebeat reporters were based at NJ Spotlight News. They include Jeff Pillets, a former longtime reporter for The Record, and Genesis Obando, a reporter and video journalist who recently graduated from Montclair State University.

All of the nonpartisan coverage that Jeff and Genesis produced for Votebeat was freely available for republication. To assist with getting the word out about republication, the Center created a pop-up newsletter that was sent 2-3 times a week to all of its NJ News Commons members with links to the latest Votebeat stories. That newsletter began in late October and continued through the end of the year.

In addition to Votebeat stories, news from NJTV that included embeddable videos was shared in the newsletter, along with other election resources.

# ETHNIC MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS

Misinformation and disinformation campaigns surrounding the election continued to be aimed at communities of color in 2020. To help support journalists of color in New Jersey with their election reporting, the Center created a short-term fellowship program that provided financial assistance to five fellows, allowing them each to produce and develop two to three additional election stories.

Five journalists from Front Runner New Jersey, the Philadelphia Weekly, NJ Urban News, ABS-CBN's The Filipino Channel and Sing Tao Daily — serving the African American, Filipino and Chinese communities, respectively, in the state — were selected. Three of the fellows reported on pre-election stories, providing more information on how to participate and engage their communities in the democratic process, while the remaining two fellows looked at how eligible voters in their communities responded to the election.

Clyde Hughes of Front Runner New Jersey conducted a three-part series on how Black churches impacted voter turnout, how NAACP helped instruct Black voters in New Jersey on mail-in ballots, and on who were the Black and Latinx candidates running for office in South Jersey.

"I am honored for the election fellowship afforded to me and the opportunity to report on the election in the Black community in South Jersey," said Hughes, editor of Front Runner New Jersey. "I hope that my reporting helped inform members of my community and get their voices heard in the election."

Kevin McNeir of NJ Urban News produced an in-depth story looking at how voter intimidation and suppression tactics were prevalent in the Black community in New Jersey a few weeks prior to Election Day. McNeir's story attempted to urge Black voters to vote.

ABS-CBN's The Filipino Channel also did a three-part series that explored voter suppression and mail-in ballots in the Filipino communities, and followed several Filipinos who participated in a Democratic drive-in rally in Bergen County.

"When I started the fellowship, reports showed that Democrats were dominating early voting compared to Republicans," said Don Tagala, reporter for ABS-CBN. "Filipino Republicans were very active. But Joe Biden's supporters were not leaving to chance his potential victory in the November election, despite his favorable numbers in several opinion polls. Thanks to the Center for giving me the chance to report on these stories for my community."

The fellowships were supported by funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

# TRAINING AND TELEBRIEFINGS

The Center hosted a series of training webinars and telebriefings with NJ News Commons partners to ensure that they had all the information and

resources necessary to cover an election that was sure to be quite different from previous years.

Three election-related webinars and telebriefings were hosted on the following topics:

- Voting in New Jersey for the 2020 elections
- How to fight back when people try to discredit your political reporting
- Planning for post-election scenarios

The first session was held in early September and focused on various changes to the actual voting process as a consequence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The panel of experts included Henal Patel, director of the Democracy and Justice Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice; Elizabeth Matto, director of the Center for Youth Political Participation at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University; and Brigid Harrison, professor of political science and law at Montclair State University.

The panel discussed mail-in ballots and proper vote-by-mail procedures, in-person voting and provisional ballots, voter education and how to understand the system better, and how to contact county clerks and other local and state election officials.

The second session was hosted in early October and was meant to help news organizations fight back against attacks intended to discredit their political or election-related reporting. The speakers were Joy Mayer and Lynn Walsh of Trusting News. The session included information about why newsrooms shouldn't ignore claims of bias or "fake news" and how journalists can strategically, efficiently, and effectively defend their work. The strategies outlined during the webinar included:

- Committing to standards of transparency and ethics
- Dedicating staff time to understanding distrust
- Explaining their purpose, their decision-making, and their process alongside their journalism

 Using every available medium and method of communication to demonstrate credibility and actively invite and respond to audience feedback and questions

The third and final session was geared toward preparing local NJ newsrooms and reporters for a variety of possible post-election scenarios, particularly in the event that the U.S. saw widespread political and civil unrest after the results were in. The Center invited members of the Election SOS team to help local reporters map out a post-election plan.

Attendees were asked to consider what and how they would report on Election Day and in the days that followed, as well as how their coverage might impact people's sense of security and calm, how to cover misinformation without amplifying it, and what to do if a candidate declared victory when they didn't actually win.

#### **LEGAL HELP**

To assist with legal questions from reporters about coverage on Election Day, the Center partnered with the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists organization and Jennifer Borg, a media attorney with Pashman Stein Walder Hayden to produce a one-page memo about state law as it relates to interviewing at polling places. That memo was distributed to SPJ and NJ News Commons members.

Additionally, the Center and SPJ arranged for Jennifer to be available, pro bono, to answer questions from reporters on Election Day. Two criminal defense attorneys were also lined up to assist in case a reporter was detained.

After the election, that arrangement was kept in place in case protests or celebrations got out of hand in New Jersey, which did not happen.

### **OUTCOMES**

The Center accomplished the following:

- Ten ethnic media organizations translated NJ Spotlight News' "How to vote in New Jersey" story, published it in 11 languages, and posted it on social media platforms. Translated languages were Hungarian, Bangla, Urdu, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Polish, Brazilian, Gujarati and Turkish.
- Five reporters for digital and broadcast ethnic media produced 11 fellowship election stories before and after the election, informing eligible voters in their communities on how to vote mail-in or in-person and combat disinformation and voter suppression and intimidation tactics.
- The fellowship grant helped ethnic media reporters conduct in-depth reporting on election issues that matter to the communities they serve.
- The translation initiative resulted in a collaborative reporting project with Reporte Hispano and NJ.com. Two in-depth stories, focusing on the Latinx community in the state, were produced and written in Spanish and English and simultaneously published in The Star Ledger and Reporte Hispano.
- A total of 12 NorthJersey.com election-related stories, videos and social graphics were translated into Korean — and all of these stories were published in The Korea Daily.
- A total of 118 people registered for the three webinars.
- A total of 15 pop-up Votebeat newsletters were sent to about 300 NJ News Commons partners between late October and December.
- No one made use of the legal assistance, which is actually a good thing.

### **CHALLENGES**

Among a few key challenges faced in the Center's work to support news organizations in New Jersey during the 2020 U.S. elections:

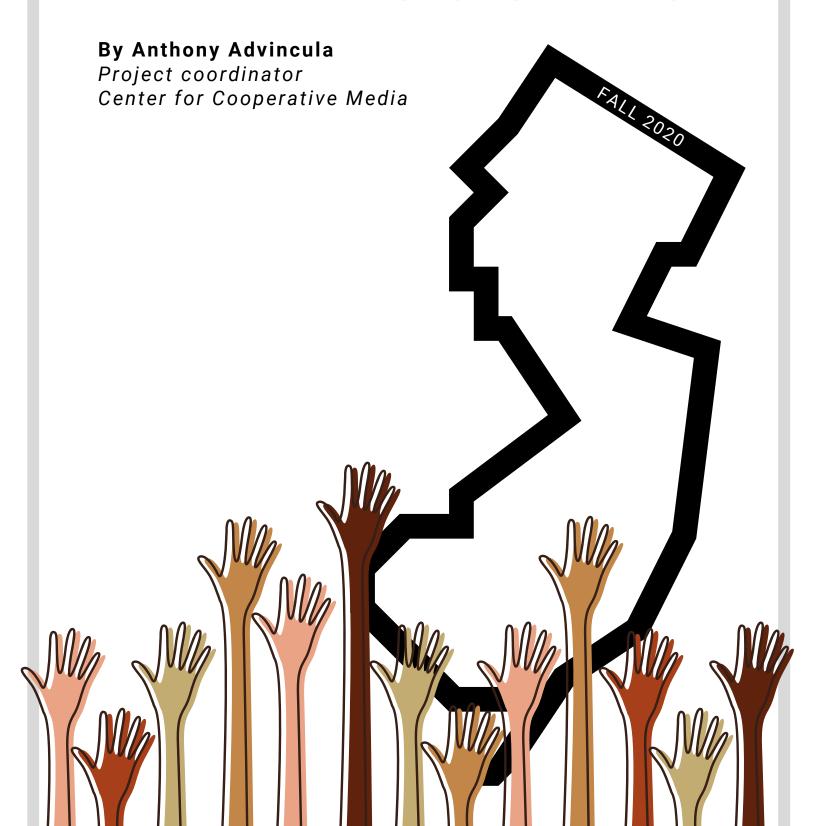
- The Center struggled to get input at times from members of the NJ News Commons about what, if any, support they needed around the elections. This can be attributed to a few different factors, including information overload, pandemic fatigue, and the fact that the volume of this year's mail-in ballots meant Election Day was much less of a climax than it has been in the past when immediate results were a key service the Center helped to provide.
- The Center started its support around the elections late. Two fellows did not finish the fellowship requirement before the election mostly because of tight deadlines. Planning earlier in the year would have resulted in stronger offerings.
- Several fellowship and translated stories were picked up or aggregated by news outlets, but it was also challenging for the Center to track them, particularly for in-language stories.



Report designed by:

Toe Anditis

# NEW JERSEY MEDIA COUNTS





### **About the Center for Cooperative Media**

The Center was founded in 2012 in response to the downsizing of New Jersey news organizations and the changes in the ownership of regional public media. These shifts in the news and information landscape 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.

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#### About the author

Anthony "Oni" Advincula is a New York City-based journalist and communications consultant. Formerly the national media director, writer and editor for New America Media, he managed and organized ethnic media projects in 45 states. He was a correspondent for The Jersey Journal and the communications director and managing editor of the Independent Press Association-New York, where he co-edited Voices That Must Be Heard (now known as CUNY's Voices of NY).

Oni can be reached at advinculaa@montclair.edu.

#### Introduction

New Jersey is one of most diverse states in the country. Nearly one in four New Jersey residents is an immigrant and nearly one in six is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent, according to the latest census data. About 20% of the state's population is Asian, 14% is Black and 19% is Latino.

The most diverse towns in New Jersey include Paterson, Camden, Elizabeth, Jersey City and Atlantic City.

Yet, according to the Advocates for Children of New Jersey, those New Jersey towns are also among the hardest to count when it comes to the decennial census.

More than 30 percent of New Jersey's population lives in areas that are at risk of being undercounted or not being counted at all in the decennial census, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The state's immigrants and people of color are most in danger.

An analysis by The Associated Press and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice showed that in Newark, 99.62% of the population lives in hard-to-count neighborhoods Atlantic City and Jersey City, that number is 98% and 80.12%, respectively.

Research shows that Latinos, African Americans, Asians, non-English-speaking immigrants and children under 5 are the hardest to count. This is particularly true in low-income communities with nontraditional or extended families, non-English-speaking households, people with informal living arrangements, and immigrant families with mixed immigration status.

Those challenges, experts say, have been compounded by the Trump administration's efforts to put a citizenship question on the census questionnaire, impose a "public charge" rule that could discourage undocumented immigrants or families with mixed immigration status from participating in the census and, most recently, exclude undocumented immigrants from the 2020 Census count for the purpose of congressional reapportionment.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the citizenship question and a three-judge panel in New York blocked the ban on undocumented immigrants from being counted, the damage was done; it's likely that many immigrants were scared away from participating in the decennial count.

## Advocating for more media coverage

In the summer of 2019, the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University began an effort to boost the amount of media coverage of the census in hard-to-count New Jersey communities.

The Center is a grant-funded program based at the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State. Its mission is to grow and strengthen local journalism and support an informed society in New Jersey and beyond. The Center runs the NJ News Commons and serves as a central hub for local media in the state — especially independent, ethnic and nonprofit media — providing coaching, training, communication, networking, fellowship programs and more.

The Center's census work was spurred by conversations its team had with members of the Census 2020 NJ Coalition in regard to how local media — especially ethnic, community and in-language media — could be motivated to do more coverage of the 2020 Census.

The initiative began with a training and sourcing workshop for journalists about the 2020 Census, which was hosted on the campus of Rutgers University in Newark in August 2019. The workshop, organized by the Center, included several speakers and presentations from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Census 2020 NJ Coalition, along with two local journalists who had experience covering the census. About 50 people attended the event, including several reporters from ethnic media publications in New Jersey. The New Jersey training was based in part on a national series of training workshops led by the Poynter Institute and D'Vera Cohn.

The goal of the convening was to raise awareness about the 2020 Census — especially the timeline — and seed coverage ideas. Afterward, the Center worked with OpenNews to publish a guide for other journalists about how they could organize a similar training event. OpenNews arranged to provide small grants to help offset costs.

Following that event, the Center worked with one of its longtime funders, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, on a grant that would provide stipends to ethnic and community reporters for their work on census coverage. That grant also allowed the Center to hire Anthony Advincula to join the project as its coordinator.

By October, the Center was able to bring Anthony on for additional hours, thanks to support from Democracy Fund.

# **NJ Media Counts begins**

Soon the Center announced its NJ Media Counts fellowship program, which provided support for 12 reporters and editors from New Jersey's ethnic media to produce in-depth stories about the challenges and opportunities of the 2020 Census in diverse communities — Gujarati, Turkish, African American, Hindi, Hungarian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Filipino, Chinese and Latino. Each fellow received a stipend for their participation.

The NJ Media Counts fellowship was intended to allow each reporter and editor from each community to decide what approach and information their community needed and structure their work accordingly. Especially in immigrant communities, understanding of the U.S. Census varies widely; in some cases, journalists felt their communities needed a basic understanding of what the census was; in other cases, journalists felt their communities needed persuasion on why participating would matter.



Turkish Americans, mostly heads of their families, attending a Census forum hosted by the Center for Cooperative Media and Turkish Center Center New Jersey.

Each fellow worked with Anthony to design their fellowship. Most of the fellowships included two-three stories that were produced about the Census between the late fall of 2019 and mid-2020. Several also included community forums that were organized in cooperation with other local stakeholders, beginning in late fall 2019 and lasting into early 2020.

"With the Center's support, my census fellowship stories were published not only by The Korea Daily NJ-NY but also by other Korean publications in the U.S. and in South Korea," said NJ Media Counts fellow Jongwon Lee, a reporter for The Korea Daily.

The novel coronavirus pandemic hit just as the last forums were wrapping up; the Center was not able to attend the last in-person forum one of its fellows hosted because of restrictions placed on employees of Montclair State. The final two forums were hosted virtually.

Most of the fellows had finished at least one of their stories and several had hosted a forum by April, right around when the Census Bureau postponed its field activities. Census Day was pushed back from April 1 to July 30. After that, fellows who were still producing content changed the focus of their second stories to examine the impact of COVID-19 and census postponements on hard-to-count communities.

Over the summer of 2020, it became clear that there was still a need to promote the Census. Response rates in key communities were low and the



The elephant in the room is that I also didn't have to care about my foreign accent when I raised my hand and asked my questions!



news was dominated by other topics, most notably the pandemic. And enumeration efforts, which kicked off in mid-March in New Jersey, had encountered a number of challenges, including households that did not open their doors because of COVID-19 or immigration-related fears.

For these reasons, in late summer 2020 the Center extended the reporting fellowship and provided a second round of funding and support to fellows so they could specifically

report on census response rates and enumeration initiatives. The Center arranged to host two virtual press-briefings with census sources on each topic so that the fellows could ask questions and start their initial reporting.

"The census telebriefing (was) an eye-opening experience for me," said NJ Media Counts fellow Abu Taher, publisher and editor of Bangla Patrika and TiME Television, a Bangladeshi-language weekly and TV channel, respectively. "As a journalist, it has truly helped me understand the broad, nationwide perspective on the census, which enables me to tie it up with the specific nuances of the issue in the Bangladeshi community."



Abu Taher (standing) of TiME Television and Bangla Patrika speaking to Paterson Councilmember Shahin Khalique (middle) at a Bangladeshi community forum on March 12, 2020.

"Because of COVID-19, we have been stuck at home. But the CCM census fellowship, especially its online training and briefing, has been so valuable for me and my paper, providing us direct reporting while in quarantine. It has brought experts together all at

once," said NJ Media Counts fellow Mohsin Zaheer, editor and publisher of Pakistani News, an Urdu-language print and online publication.

The fellowship extension produced about 20 more in-language and English stories, including Hungarian, Spanish, Chinese, Gujarati, Tagalog and Korean.

#### **NJ Media Counts goals**

Both rounds of the Center's NJ Media Counts reporting fellowship aimed to inform, educate and promote 2020 Census participation and engagement in New Jersey's vulnerable communities and most at-risk of being undercounted.

Specifically, the Center wanted to:

- Provide a new opportunity for journalists from ethnic media to cover the 2020 Census through the perspectives of the immigrant and people of color communities that they serve in the state.
- Expand and increase understanding of census issues, and therefore response rates, in hard-to-count communities by increasing local reporting.
- Collaborate with local community partners, including organizations that are a part of the Census 2020 NJ Coalition.

# Findings and outcomes

As a result of the NJ Media Counts initiative, 40 original stories were produced and published in television, radio, online and print editions in 10 languages, including English, Spanish, Gujarati, Urdu, Chinese, Turkish, Tagalog, Bangladeshi, Korean and Hungarian. All of the in-language stories were translated in English, and then posted on the Center's NJ Media Counts website and distributed via several newsletters.

In total, the Center distributed about \$35,000 in award stipends to support 20 fellows.

"The census project has allowed me to find and develop new sources and resources," said NJ Media Counts fellow Kleibeel Marcano, editor and publisher, of Reporte Hispano, a Spanish-language biweekly print newspaper. "It has given me and my publication fresh ideas and information, which our readers need."

Additionally, five of the fellows — in addition to their individual reporting projects — organized a four-hour, in-language forum on the census in the communities that each serve . Those forums were hosted for the Gujarati, Turkish, Bangladeshi, Latino and Black communities.

With the help of the Center's coordinator, the fellows looked for the most accessible venue (most of them took place in churches, senior and community centers and city council offices) and the right speakers, including community leaders who were known and trusted in their community. Each forum included partnerships with immigrant rights advocates, community organizations, academics, researchers and Census Bureau personnel. The forums on the census also resulted in a partnership with Councilmember Shahin Khalique, the first Bangladeshi American cabinet member in Paterson.

#### In total, six community forums were hosted:

- Gujarati community, Oct. 24, 2019, at the Iselin Adult Care Center. About 65 attendees. Forum was conducted in both English and Gujarati.
- Turkish community, Dec. 2, 2019, at the Turkish Cultural Center in Clifton. More than 70 attendees. Forum was conducted in Turkish and translated into English by community volunteers.
- Black community, Jan. 30, 2020, at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Atlantic City, N.J. About 60 attendees. Forum was moderated by a representative from the NAACP.
- Latino community, Feb. 13, 2020, at Make the Road New Jersey in Newark.
   More than 50 attendees. Forum was conducted in Spanish and translated into English by Make the Road NJ and Wind of the Spirit volunteers and staff members.
- Bangladeshi community, March 12, 2020, at the Office of Paterson
   Councilmember Shahin Khalique in Paterson. About 30 attendees. Forum was
   conducted by representatives from the Asian American Federation, and it was
   translated from English to Bangla.
- Black community, April 9, 2020, online meeting, About 20 attendees.

Through NJ Media Counts, the Center worked with 15 community groups across the state, including Advocates for Children of New Jersey, Asian American Federation, The Paterson Alliance, Wind of the Spirit, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, NAACP Atlantic City, National Coalition of 100 Black Women South Jersey, Make the Road New

Jersey, Turkish Cultural Center New Jersey, Inspiring South Asian American Women, YWCA Northern New Jersey, and Iselin Senior Center.

The Center, along with the Census 2020 NJ Coalition, Advocates for Children of New Jersey and the Census Bureau, conducted five reporting training and seminars for the fellows to provide them the information that they could use to educate and engage their audiences about the census.



Gujarati residents listening to the census presentation during the forum.

"I was able to dig deeper about Census issues in my community without the staring eyes from mainstream journalists who'd cover it differently," said NJ Media Counts fellow Laszlo Bartus, editor and reporter of Amerikai Nepszava, a Hungarian-language weekly. "The elephant in the room is that I also didn't have to care about my foreign accent when I raised my hand and asked my questions!"

"It was very purposive, targeting the issues that we report on and the kind of information that ethnic communities need," said NJ Media Counts fellow April Xu, reporter, Sing Tao Daily, a Chinese-language daily. "The initiative has provided me granular data on the

Chinese community, which I don't usually get from a general or mainstream-focused press conference."

# **Measuring success**

The NJ Media Counts initiative is measuring its success based on three primary success indicators, including the impacts of community forums, the scope of coverage and readership generated by each reporter's fellowship stories, and the diversity of audience reached in the state.

The census forums in Turkish, Gujarati, Black, Latino and Bangladeshi communities that the Center and ethnic media fellows organized in various parts of the state — including Iselin, Paterson, Newark, Atlantic City, Vineland and Elizabeth — provided an important and unique opportunity for members of these communities to gather and learn about the 2020 Census.



Latino residents in Elizabeth, N.J., participating in a census forum.

For many of these community members, most particularly newly arrived immigrants or those who originally came from countries that do not have decennial counting, the forums allowed them for the first time to hear what the census is about and how it could benefit their families and communities.

"It is remarkable to see about 75 people, along with community leaders and reporters in Atlantic City, all in the same room for the first time to talk about the 2020 Census," said NJ Media Counts fellow Raymond Tyler, reporter and radio host, Shore Local News and 96.1 FM WTTH. "As a journalist covering the census, I learned a lot."

Community leaders and grassroots partners in New Jersey proved to be the most effective and trusted communicators on census issues. And having census speakers and experts in the same room during these forums allowed ethnic media journalists to interact directly and confidently with them, asking nuanced questions and obtaining background information. The speakers, in turn, served as a news source and resource for the journalists.



The initiative has provided me granular data on the Chinese community, which I don't usually get from a general or mainstream-focused press conference.



From the perspective of the speakers and experts of these forums — demographers, academics and advocates — it gave them a chance to get to know and draw a very diverse cross section of ethnic representatives and leaders to the table to hear from and exchange views with them. It also expanded their links to local ethnic media, which they find it difficult to penetrate.

"I am so glad we did this forum," said Howard Shih, director of policy and research at Asian American Federation. "We have been trying to reach out to these

communities, but we have not had much luck. Now, they are all gathered in the same room. It's wonderful to see them opening up their issues and concerns."

NJ Media Counts also helped build cross-cultural alliances and strengthen the relationships and engagement between ethnic media, experts and academics. The Center was able to create deeper linkages and partnerships with other organizations, advocates, campaigns, and/or coalitions during the project.



Residents listening to a census presentation at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Atlantic City, N.J.

In terms of readership and coverage, the initiative was not able to track readership in a way that neatly tallies up total potential readership because of the differences between how each outlet tracks its audience. But an estimate can be made from looking at the coverage of the news outlets that each fellow worked for.

For example, *Reporte Hispano* distributes 45,000 print copies twice a week, and its online edition gets more than 100,000 page views a week. To add its readership on social media, particularly Facebook, the largest Spanish-language newspaper in the state has more than 250,000 readers a week.

Sing Tao Daily has a daily print circulation of 150,000 and more than 200,000 digital readers a day. The largest Chinese-language in the New Jersey area serves as the main source of information for Chinese immigrants.

The project was also able to reach hyperlocal ethnic communities. The Spanish-language publications have reached into multiple ethnic groups, including Mexicans, Hondurans, Peruvians and Salvadorans. There is a similar level of diversity in the Asian community: Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Filipino, Pakistani and Bangladeshi.

# **Challenges and limitations**

The decennial census, even for veteran journalists who have been covering it for years, is a complicated issue to tackle. It requires more time, broader resources and, in most cases, more manpower to extensively look at the 2020 Census from various perspectives.

While NJ Media Counts fellows in New Jersey said they would have liked to cover more stories related to the census, limited budget operations and small staffs were a challenge for most of them. As a result, they tended to work on stories in which they had easy access to sources and information, which often relegated additional census coverage to a secondary priority.

Ethnic media reporters also found it challenging to access current data and facts by ethnic groups, if any existed, to help localize stories specifically to their communities. For example, when Mohsin Zaheer



The CCM census fellowship, especially its online training and briefing, has been so valuable for me and my paper, providing us direct reporting while in quarantine.



started looking at the early response rate for Pakistanis in Paterson, such granular data about his community was not available.

Additionally, not all Census Bureau press releases or advisories are translated into every language. Laszlo Bartus, of Amerikai Nepszava, noted that some census terms in English are too technical for him to understand and thus made it difficult for him to translate these terms into Hungarian.

## **Moving forward: The next steps**

Feedback from NJ Media Counts fellows, community partners and local Census Bureau representatives indicated that the program was successful and all parties would like the work to continue in some way.

Ethnic media partners said they would like to see the Center continue to serve as an intermediary, connecting them with advocates and organizations working in the elections, racial justice, public health (COVID-19), voting rights, immigration and other issues that matter to their communities. Ethnic media reporters and editors also would like the Center to organize more press briefings exclusive for them, which gives them more sourcing opportunities for first-hand information specific to their audiences.

The biggest challenge to continuing the work is raising money to finance additional reporting fellowships or even social media or advertising-driven campaigns. Nearly every fellow said they would not have been able to participate had there not been funding made available.

The Center intends to continue nurturing all the partnerships built through the NJ Media Counts initiative, and intends to continue raising money to support additional press briefings, fellowship opportunities and more.



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