

October 2021

Annual Report

Center for Cooperative Media

With a renewed focus on its strategic objectives, the Center prioritized support for journalists of color, ethnic media and a continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The Center for Cooperative Media
Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J., 07043
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

The entirety of 2021 was another exhausting year for anyone working in the media, one that revolved around continued pandemic response, attacks on the U.S. democracy and massive storms resulting from climate change.

The past year was no different for the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University. Challenges abounded. Reading back over the application for funding that the Center submitted to Democracy Fund in the fall of 2020 is like going back in time. Such hope!

Yet despite everything, the Center was able to deliver on several of its key initiatives, with groundwork already laid to address some of the areas where progress wasn't achieved as planned.

Cassandra Etienne joined the Center's staff in late summer 2021, a huge boon to the team. Additional fellowship opportunities were added for ethnic and community media in the state. The Center successfully fundraised \$75,000 to support the South Jersey Information Equity Project. The Center pivoted its travel scholarship fund for journalism affinity groups into a membership program, by which any New Jersey journalist who wanted could have their membership paid for in the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Native American Journalists Association and NLGJA, the Association of of LGBTQ Journalists. As a result, New Jersey membership in NAHJ tripled and doubled in PABJ. The Center spent a substantial amount of time assisting the NJ Civic Information Consortium. And the Center continued to provide regular training and communication to its flagship NJ News Commons network.

Please note that this annual report covers the period of Oct. 1, 2020 to Sept. 30, 2021.

History

The Center was founded in 2012 in 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 assistant director for membership and programming, Cassandra Etienne, oversees the flagship NJ News Commons program and all of its related projects and membership. The assistant director for events and products, Joseph Amditis, oversees all websites, social media, reports, and events for the Center across its New Jersey and national work. Additionally, the Center employs several part-time colleagues:

- 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.
- Ambreen Ali is a part-time staffer dedicated to the Loved and Lost project and the Diverse Source Database.
- 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, as well as social media accounts.
- 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 research work
- Meena Thiruvengadam is a part-time staffer dedicated to our Facebook Fundamentals program.

We have also worked with Kenneth Miles, Kleibeel Marcano, Xiaoqing Rong, Jongwon Lee, Caroline Porter, International Center for Journalists and Sameer Padania over the past fiscal year to execute funded projects.

Funding

The Center and its NJ News Commons project was financed in 2021 with operational funding from Montclair State University, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund and Abrams Foundation. Additional event and project-specific sponsorships have come from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, American Press Institute, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Democracy Fund, the John S. Knight fellowships at Stanford University, American Press Institute, Center for Public Integrity, Inasmuch Foundation, Lenfest Institute for Journalism, O'Brien Fellowship at Marquette University, Reynolds Journalism Institute and Gates Family Foundation.

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 2020) in 2021:

- ❑ \$300,000 from Democracy Fund
- ❑ \$100,000 from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation
- ❑ \$121,000 from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Civic Information Consortium and Local News Lab to support Newark News + Story Collaborative
- ❑ \$54,000 in Collaborative Journalism Summit sponsorships and ticket sales.
- ❑ \$25,000 NJ Children's Foundation fellowship program
- ❑ \$25,000 from the Abrams Foundation
- ❑ **TOTAL: \$625,000.00**

Achievements in 2021

Long-term success for the Center means building a strong, resilient network of news and information providers in New Jersey and a similar network for collaborative journalism practitioners nationwide. In 2021 the Center envisioned success as increasing support for ethnic and community media in New Jersey, fostering more collaborative efforts and expanding local news research.

To do this, the Center worked specifically on three key strategic objectives from its five-year strategic plan:

- Listen, create, and respond as pandemic conditions change. Accelerate services to CCM's constituents as they face unprecedented challenges.
- Enhance the Center's efforts in equity, diversity, and inclusion and make this work an urgent and visible focus in New Jersey.
- Improve the Center's ability to track and respond to its partners' key needs.

Details on successes for each of those objectives are below. It is important to note that the action plans detailed under each strategic objective—except for the objective related to the pandemic—were intended to be multiyear.

Listen, create, and respond as pandemic conditions change

In fall of 2020, COVID-19 cases were just beginning an incredible spike in the U.S. that would last through early January. Many non-essential workplaces and schools were operating virtually, if able. A vaccine was promised to be on the way.

At that point, the Center's action plan for this strategic objective was:

- Grow specific content-sharing processes for the COVID-19 pandemic between New Jersey partners.
- Continue and expand efforts to translate stories and other information regarding COVID-19 into languages other than English and learn from this process to apply as makes sense to other Center efforts.
- Identify and provide critical assistance, including financial support and training initiatives, specifically for ethnic, community, and immigrant media.
- Expand support for the Loved and Lost collaborative project.
- Support information needs assessments for underserved communities in New Jersey.

Everything that the Center did in regard to this strategic objective is listed in its [COVID-19 response report](#), first issued in December 2020. Several of those initiatives continued through 2021, which are noted below:

- 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. (Ongoing)
- A pop-up [daily newsletter](#) sharing NJ Spotlight content and other reporting resources. (Ended May 2021)
- Arrangements to provide [shared graphics and photos](#) for republication. (Ended May 2021)
- Daily communication of COVID-19 related journalism resources, including funding opportunities. (Ended May 2021)
- [Translation of COVID-19 content](#) into Spanish, English and Korean. (Continuing through December 2021)

- Creation of [a fellowship to support ethnic media](#) reporters covering COVID-19. (Continuing through December 2021)
- Creation of [a fellowship to support freelancers](#) covering COVID-19 in their communities. (Ended fall 2020)
- Launch of the [Loved and Lost](#) project. (Continuing)
- Distribution of 20 \$250 gift cards to support equipment purchases for journalists. (Ended summer 2020)
- Initiation of SMS-based information needs surveys in [Newark](#), [Atlantic City](#) and Camden in partnership with [Outlier Media](#) and [Free Press](#). (Ended in early 2021)

Content sharing

Content sharing had been a key part of the Center’s early pandemic response. In the spring of 2020, the Center launched a daily “[Covering COVID-19](#)” newsletter that included links to all NJ Spotlight News stories and videos about the virus and disease. The Center negotiated with NJ Spotlight News to make its content available for republication by NJ News Commons members, which proved very useful for several news organizations.

The newsletter was also a vehicle for shared photography, training sessions, grant opportunities, and more. It was distributed daily at 5 a.m. to about 350 subscribers. The final COVID-19 newsletter went out on May 13, 2021. At that point, the Center knew that pandemic fatigue had hit many of its NJ News Commons partners. Around that time, it was clear that true pandemic fatigue had started to set in: fewer people were opening and using the content sharing newsletter, fewer partners were signing up for events or responding to outreach, and national support for journalistic pandemic response seemed to be waning.

Translation program

The Center’s [translation effort](#) related to COVID-19 continued with full steam through 2020 and throughout 2021. Headed up by Anthony Advincula, the Center’s ethnic media program coordinator, the translation program began in early summer 2020 through a partnership with NJ Spotlight News, The Korea Daily, Sing Tao Daily, and Reporte Hispano. Multiple times a week, Anthony would send pandemic-related NJ Spotlight News stories to translators — who were also reporters for each outlet — to translate and run in their respective publications. NJ Spotlight News also created a Spanish-language landing page on its site.

The translators were all paid per article for their translation work, thanks to a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. By the end of 2020, the Center had also added NorthJersey.com as a partner, specifically for Korean-language articles.

The translation is a collaborative project at its best. It has given NJ Spotlight News the opportunity to be the first mainstream publication that has a Spanish-language portal on its website. For NorthJersey.com, it has also been a pioneering initiative to post stories in Korean, especially stories that are mainly focused on Bergen County, where there is a large population of Korean Americans in the state. Most important,

the translation project has provided ethnic media partners — specifically Reporte Hispano, Sing Tao Daily, The Korea Daily, Miju News, NJ Hispano, and Korean Christian News — firsthand and in-depth news content that they can use on a weekly basis. As of now, more than 150 stories have been translated into Spanish, Korean, and Chinese.

“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,” said Kleibeel Marcano of Reporte Hispano in the [Center’s full COVID-19 response report](#). “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.”

By spring 2021, the amount of translation happening in Chinese and Korean had waned, and the Center primarily focused on Spanish-language translation for the balance of the year. The entire effort will end by December 2021, as funding will run out.

Thanks to additional supplemental grants from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Center was also able to coordinate two rounds of collaborative translation for a dozen ethnic media organizations. The first was related to [voting and the 2020 elections](#); and the second was about the [COVID-19 vaccine](#). For the election, the Center made 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. Ethnic media reporters were paid to translate that story into 10 different languages, and it ran in 10 different ethnic media publications.

For the COVID-19 coordinated translation effort, the Center partnered with NorthJersey.com to translate some of its vaccine-related content into multiple languages for use by ethnic media outlets across the state. The Center combined two stories, [“The COVID vaccine has arrived in NJ. What to know about when, where to get it”](#) and [“COVID vaccine in NJ: Who gets it first? When can I sign up? Where can I get the shot?”](#) Paid reporters and editors at several publications translated the combined story into nine languages. It was ultimately published by 12 ethnic news outlets.

Critical assistance for ethnic, community and immigrant media

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit New Jersey, the Center has supported three COVID-19 reporting fellowships for ethnic and community media. Each fellowship has selected a cohort of 10-15 reporters and editors, who work mostly for in-language news outlets in the state. The Center has supported the fellows in the production of stories on various topics that reflect how their communities have coped and transitioned amid the pandemic.

To date, nearly 40 reporters and editors for ethnic and community media have been a part of the Center’s COVID-19 reporting fellowships, and more than a hundred (including the ones from the ongoing fellowship) have been produced in 12 languages, including Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Portuguese, Turkish, Filipino, Polish, Hungarian, and English.

Recipients of the fellowships have worked for Sing Tao Daily (Chinese), ABS-CBN News (Filipino), Gujarat Darpan (Gujarati), Bangla Patrika (Bangla), OSM! Magazine (Filipino), Brazilian Press (Portuguese), Reporte Hispano (Latino), Shore Line News (African American), WTTH 96.1 FM (African American), K-Radio 1660 AM (Korean), The Nubian News (African American), New Jersey Hispano (Latino), Asian Journal (Filipino), Urdu News (Pakistani), The Philadelphia Weekly (African American), Miju News (Korean), NJ Urban News (African American), Zaman Amerika (Turkish), The Latino Spirit (Latino), The Korea Daily (Korean), Turkish Journal (Turkish), WLFR 91.7 FM (African American), NJ Frontrunner (African American), Amerikai Népszava (Hungarian), and Nowy Dziennik (Polish).

Through the course of the fellowship, which runs from three to six months, the Center has conducted a series of press briefings on topics — from vaccination to the Delta variant, immigration, housing, and education — that matter to the reporting needs of the fellows and the ethnic and people of color communities that they serve. These press briefings have provided not only government and community resources for ethnic and community media but have also helped build an information infrastructure that reaches niche audiences.

Top state officials, including NJ Gov. Phil Murphy; NJ Department of Health Deputy Commissioner David Adinaro; Dr. Stephanie Silvera, epidemiologist and professor at Montclair State University; and Amanda Medina-Forrester, former executive director of NJ Office of Minority and Multicultural Health, have so far joined the Center’s fellowship briefings.

Expand support for Loved and Lost

[Loved and Lost](#) is a collaborative project led by the Center that brings together New Jersey media outlets to name and celebrate the life of New Jersey residents who lost their lives to COVID-19.

Since launching in early spring of 2020, the project has evolved from a solo effort shepherded by NorthJersey.com into a statewide media collaborative with more than 30 media partners coordinated by the Center. Early development of the collaborative was funded by The Nicholson Foundation.

Newsrooms both large and small have joined the program, as have independent journalists and storytellers. These media partners play a crucial role by promoting the project, identifying victims, and producing stories about those who have died of COVID-19.

Although the program initially aimed to name every person, the Center has found it challenging to collate a comprehensive list because there is no centralized place with that information. With nearly 28,000 deaths in New Jersey and only 1,300 listed on Loved and Lost’s Wall of Names, the Center would like to devote additional resources to outreach and promotion of this project so that more names are identified and submitted. In addition, the Center plans to re-engage media partners in those efforts and leverage their networks to advance the project.

Support information needs assessments for underserved communities in New Jersey

Newark was one of three cities in which the Center chose to host an ecosystem workshop as part of the Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund. But Newark was different from the others specifically because of its focus on identified information needs.

Initially, Newark's ecosystem workshop was set to be hosted on the campus of the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark in March 2020. However, due to the pandemic, the workshop was pushed back to late summer and was hosted virtually.

The Center partnered with Free Press to add Outlier Media as a partner in Newark. After the first gathering of about 60 local news and information stakeholders, Outlier used information from a text-based survey and data from 211 (a community resource hub) to conduct an information needs analysis. The [report found that severe information gaps existed](#) in Newark when it came to information about COVID-19, food, shelter, and utilities.

Outlier presented [its findings](#) during a second meeting, during which the Center announced an open call for award proposals that used journalism and community collaboration to address the identified information need gaps. A total of \$45,000 was raised from Victoria Foundation and The Nicholson Foundation. That \$45,000 in [Newark Peer Learning + Collaboration money was awarded](#) for project proposals ranging from the creation of an app to house critically needed information to producing public access and online news programs, a magazine/talk show and hosting a resource and opportunities fair for the community. The Center hired Kenneth Miles to help shepherd the projects, which kicked off in fall 2020 and were completed in early spring 2021.

Information needs assessments were also completed by Outlier in Atlantic City and Camden following the work in Newark. The Center intends to use Camden's report to inform some of its work in the South Jersey Information Equity Project.

Enhance the Center's efforts in equity, diversity, and inclusion and make this work an urgent and visible focus in New Jersey

In fall of 2020, the Center's action plan for this strategic objective was:

- *Establish benchmarks and targets internally and externally for staffing, contractual hiring, and membership in NJ News Commons.*
- *Be a member of and participate in community networks and affinity groups that support diversity in the journalism industry, such as NABJ, AAJA, NAHJ, NAJA, and NLGJA.*
- *Seek opportunities to partner with such like-minded organizations as the Center for Community Media at CUNY and Ethnic Media Services.*
- *Identify and help bring meaningful diversity and racial equity training initiatives to NJ News Commons members.*
- *Identify and support efforts to create meaningful relationships between community and ethnic media and mainstream media.*
- *Fundraise to support and execute on the recommendations of the South Jersey Information Equity Project; consider how its lessons can be replicated elsewhere.*

Successful outcomes so far for this action plan are detailed below.

Sponsored memberships

For the last few years, thanks to the support of its funders, the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University has provided money to help New Jersey journalists and students attend the conferences of organizations that promote diversity and equity in the media industry.

The Center has given out several thousand dollars for folks to attend annual events hosted by the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA), Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) and NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists, among others.

But when the pandemic put a halt to in-person events, it cut the amount of money people requested down to almost nothing. The Center did not foresee that changing in 2021.

The Center wanted to do something that was proactive and that didn't require a lot of effort on the part of its colleagues. Instead of travel money, the Center sought to pay for memberships for New Jersey journalists to join the above-mentioned organizations.

With funding from Democracy Fund and additional money pooled together from other gifts made to the Center, the Center paid for memberships for more than 300 individual journalists in NAHJ, NAJA, NLGJA, and the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. That far surpasses the number of people the Center helped on a yearly basis previously.

"This generous contribution from the Center for Cooperative Media will not only help expand our organization's impact beyond Philadelphia, but across the entire region," Ernest Owens, PABJ President, said in a statement announcing the program. "Our organization looks forward to welcoming more members from down the shore to the association that started it all."

Especially exciting for PABJ was that the program not only helped journalists renew their dues, but it also attracted 50 new members, which doubled its previous number of New Jersey members.

For NAHJ, its active New Jersey membership jumped to 226 from 77 — nearly tripling its number of active members in the state.

"We appreciate the thoughtful and practical effort by the Center for Cooperative Media to strengthen our Region 2 community and New Jersey chapter," NAHJ President Nora López said.

The program paid for 19 memberships for New Jersey NLGJA members and three NAJA members.

Commitments for event speakers, attendees

The Center remains committed to creating an inclusive, equitable, and safe environment at all Center trainings, conferences, workshops, gatherings, and events. This is especially important at larger events such as the annual Collaborative Journalism Summit. This year, the Center chose to explicitly outline those commitments on a separate web page.

The Center understands that creating these kinds of spaces means confronting the roles that implicit bias, structural and systemic racism, and years of inequity play when organizing these kinds of events. Dedicating a page to the Center's commitments was one way to share them with others while creating a

space for those conversations and providing an idea of the kind of support attendees can offer to each other in the process.

The following commitments were adapted from the [Speaker Rider for Meaningfully Inclusive Events](#), created by Jan Diehm, Sisi Wei, and Erika Owens at [OpenNews](#) and [The Pudding](#). The commitments were also informed by the Center's work participating in Yancey Consulting's six-month training series, which wraps up this spring, titled "[Learning to Applied Practice: Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression.](#)"

These are the commitments unveiled at the [2021 Collaborative Journalism Summit](#):

1. We commit to being anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and meaningfully inclusive across all parts of our event. We draw from Yancey Consulting's guidance and [glossary of terms](#) in our view of anti-racism and anti-oppression; you can read those at the [bottom of this page](#).
2. We will [respectfully gather](#) speaker demographics and make the data accessible before the Summit, updating it as our speaker roster is finalized. We will also gather attendee demographics.
3. We commit to recruiting diverse speakers and we will actively prioritize minoritized and marginalized voices.
4. We have budgeted for and will publicize needs-based financial support for attendees and speakers who cannot afford to pay their own way. We have discounted tickets and other types of financial support available to make sure money isn't a barrier to participation.
5. We commit to ensuring an accessible, inclusive and welcoming space. We have an enforceable code of conduct with a response plan ([see this page](#)).
6. We will pay attention to the language we use and will respond respectfully and empathetically to criticism or recommendations for improvement.
7. We are learning and welcome feedback.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments

In addition to the Center's commitments to creating inclusive, equitable and safe environments at Center events, Center staff also worked together during a months-long collaborative process to draft a companywide set of commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion as an organization. These commitments are part of an ongoing series of steps the Center has taken to address issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In 2018, the Center launched a program to help journalists of color in the state attend conferences. In 2019, the Center hired [Anthony Advincula](#) to work with [Dr. Sarah Stonbely](#) to create [a report](#) about the state's ethnic media press corps and developed a full program to support them. Center staff also raised money to support [journalists of color](#) and, early in the pandemic, launched a [translation program](#) to support wider dissemination of critical information.

But by mid-2020, Center staff decided that these steps did not go far enough. Not nearly enough.

The racial reckoning that swept the U.S. following the murder of George Floyd deeply impacted the Center and its work. Center staff began to much more openly discuss race and how white supremacy finds its way into the Center's work and the systems within which it operates. Center staff began to name white supremacy regularly and look for ways to call it out and oppose it. Conversations were centered on building an anti-racist culture and news ecosystem. Thanks to support from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, three of the Center's staffers completed a six-month anti-racist and anti-oppression training

course with [Yancey Consulting](#).

As a result, the Center’s work has become more focused on actively supporting, advocating for, and being an ally of journalists and media-makers of color in New Jersey.

As this change occurred, the Center decided to [codify some of our commitments](#) to equity, diversity, and inclusion and make them public, so staff and members of the public could reference them easily and regularly — and so the Center’s stakeholders could hold it accountable.

Center staff decided that it wasn’t enough to simply write down a bunch of nice but ultimately empty words about DEI, jump on the bandwagon, and move on. Instead, Center staff wanted to be intentional about building a framework that would truly guide the Center’s work. The team has been working on its DEI commitments over several weeks starting in the spring of 2021, and has continued to reflect on them throughout the summer, including meeting as a group with people from Yancey Consulting to get feedback.

The Center will continue to assess its progress against these commitments once a year in the Center’s annual report and will revise as necessary.

Read the Center’s full statement on its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion [on this page](#).

South Jersey Information Equity Project

As the Center for Cooperative Media has studied New Jersey news ecosystems over the past two years, staff have identified news deserts and news oases in our state. One early finding that stands out is how underserved so much of South Jersey is. In particular, the Center believes communities of color in South Jersey face an acute shortage of information that is vital for healthy communities.

That is why the Center partnered with the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists to launch the South Jersey Information Equity Project (SJIEP) in April 2020. Its goal is to address media inequity in South Jersey, specifically by seeking to improve the quality and quantity of news and information produced by and for communities of color.

Phase 1

In its [first phase](#) — launched in April 2020 as New Jersey newsrooms adapted to a shrinking news landscape and economic stressors driven by the COVID-19 pandemic — the Center hired veteran journalist and South Jersey resident [Sarah Glover](#) to assess the news landscape for Black communities and journalists. Sarah’s hire was made possible thanks to the generous support of [The Nicholson Foundation](#).

As part of her research, Sarah interviewed a dozen Black journalists living and working in South Jersey. She conducted ten community town halls to help examine how traditional and nontraditional media serve South Jersey’s Black communities. Her work has identified a clear need for more resources to elevate the skills and visibility of Black journalists in South Jersey, more information sharing and storytelling by and for Black communities, and more support for Black-led media ventures.

Phase 2

Thanks to funding from the [Independence Public Media Foundation](#), the Center will continue its partnership with PABJ for the next phase of this project. The Center recently helped [double the number of PABJ members](#) living in New Jersey as a first step! And in 2022, the Center will work with partners to coordinate media co-creation workshops led by Black journalists targeting specific Black communities in Camden, Gloucester, and Burlington counties. These workshops will seek to recruit community members and Black journalists for conversation and action planning about local information needs, storytelling, and information gaps.

The Center will dedicate \$6,000 in funds for co-creation workshop participants in these three counties. Participants will work with Black journalists and media-makers to identify underreported stories of interest and work on a reporting project together for three sessions. Our goal is to build a trusted group of community contributors and local news evangelists.

Current plans also include a survey of 60 Black journalists from South Jersey who are PABJ members to assess training and resource needs. The Center will partner with PABJ to develop training and programming based on survey responses and allocate \$20,000 in funds for five SJIEP fellowships to support the work of Black journalists.

Our work through SJIEP seeks to support and elevate Black media makers — including those who identify as journalists and those who do not — and connect them with resources, funding, and platform partners to share their work. The Center will support a collective of South Jersey Black media makers to elevate their voices and visibility, and provide training and coaching as requested. Members will be able to request a fellowship to produce news and media that addresses information gaps with and for Black communities in South Jersey, and will be matched with various media partners to support the dissemination of that work.

To begin implementing these plans, the Center will hire a [part-time Project Coordinator](#) to assist CCM's Assistant Director of Membership and Programming, Cassandra Etienne, in implementing the South Jersey Information Equity Project's second phase. The Center estimates the job will average 10 hours a week over a year, with more hours being front-loaded at the beginning of the project.

Diverse Sources Database

The Center launched the New Jersey Diverse Sources Database in August 2021 with six media partners: NJ Advance Media, NorthJersey.com/The Record, NJ Spotlight News, The Press of Atlantic City, TAPinto, and WHY. The crowdsourced database highlights experts of color and those who belong to marginalized communities across topic areas, serving as a resource for journalists and editors to encourage newsrooms to use more diverse sources in their news coverage.

New Jersey is one of the nation's most diverse states, and its newsrooms need to do a better job of representing that diversity in the stories they write and the sources they call. Despite their knowledge and credentials, experts who identify as persons of color and individuals who hail from marginalized communities are not cited in the news as often as their white peers. The goal of this initiative is to amplify those voices and help news outlets make their coverage more reflective of the diverse

communities across our state.

The Center and NJ.com launched the database at a time when audiences were demanding more diverse and inclusive news that reflects their lived experience. Across U.S. media there is a push to diversify story sources. Among U.S. news organizations, Spotlight PA's database and NPR's database are other models. Melba Newsome studied this trend as part of her Reynolds Journalism Institute 2020-21 fellowship and as part of this initiative, the Center organized a training on inclusive reporting in October 2021 with her. The Center also plans to hold regular events featuring experts from the database on topic areas of relevance to New Jersey newsrooms.

Additionally, source auditing is gaining traction. Chalkbeat's Caroline Bauman is working with RJI to create a source diversity tracker that can be used by newsrooms to effectively audit sourcing. The American Press Institute also launched Source Matters this summer, which is an automated tool to help newsrooms track sourcing, and the Center is planning to raise money to support a Source Matters pilot in the state in 2022.

The New Jersey database is directly modeled after the Pennsylvania version spearheaded by Spotlight PA.

Direct support for reporters of color

As the Center shifted its work to put a focus on its strategic objective of being active and vocal in DEI work in New Jersey, it has begun to follow and amplify the work much more of individual reporters and publishers of color.

The Center provided coaching and early support for Kenneth Miles as he decided to start The Trenton Journal, and it has sought to ensure that other publishers of color in the state — including Clyde Hughes, Dorothy and Penda Howell, Tehsuan Glover, Kamau Kujichagulia, Josie Gonsalves and others — are aware of opportunities that could specifically serve them.

A unique moment presented itself this year when Tennyson Coleman, who at the time was employed as a reporter by NJ.com, publicly posted a video and essay about the racism he faced in his newsroom.

Tennyson's post was about his struggles as a Black journalist working for a news organization that is overwhelmingly white-led and focused on wealthy white readers. He asked for an independent review of his company's internal practices, public town halls, and declared that "racism in leadership must go."

The Center recognized that the nationwide reckoning with systemic racism and white supremacy that was sparked after the murder of George Floyd never quite got inside New Jersey news media — not in a public way, anyhow. Most of the state's news organizations developed diversity committees, provided anti-bias and anti-racism training, and declared DEI commitments. But racism had not been discussed openly across the New Jersey ecosystem.

There is clear precedent for this. In its essay about how anti-Black racism has been a core part of the U.S. media industry since Colonial times, Media 2070 documents several instances (page 70, "Upending White Supremacy in Newsrooms") where journalists of color spoke publicly about racism in their news organizations and how it led to apologies and change. The Center viewed it as a moment to build a movement among news outlets in our state to publicly discuss and address racism and inequity in New Jersey journalism, and wrote a public article to that effect.

Tennyson subsequently left his job, but the Center kept in touch with him and eventually advocated for him to receive the Center's scholarship to be part of CUNY's Entrepreneurial Journalism Creators Program, where he was accepted.

Additionally, the Center's director, Stefanie Murray, agreed to serve on NJ.com's external DEI committee.

Improve the Center's ability to track and respond to its partners' key needs

In fall of 2020, the Center's action plan for this strategic objective was:

- *Invest in improving the Center's tracking of relationships and partners, and their needs.*
- *Analyze and refurbish the Center's outward-facing presence as it relates to the NJ News Commons to make it clearer and easier to understand what the Center and the network do in New Jersey.*
- *Building off the Center's ecosystem mapping work, identify all news organizations that are not members of the NJ News Commons, prioritize them, and initiate relationships with the goal of bringing them into the network.*
- *Continue to publish research based on the Center's ecosystem mapping work that is useful and actionable to its partners.*
- *Re-engage with current NJ News Commons partners in a meaningful way, especially those that have not been active.*
- *Investigate ways to provide media credential services to NJ News Commons members.*
- *Assist news organizations in applying for Civic Information Consortium funds.*
- *Create and implement a plan to increase the visibility and reach of the Center's daily newsletter; create and improve other products.*
- *At the start of every project, consider ways to create guides, playbooks, and other explicitly replicable publications and toolkits to share across and outside New Jersey, both to document the project internally and assist in external promotion.*
- *Host informal summits to improve understanding of the news of local news providers.*

The Center's progress was much slower in 2021 for this strategic objective, in part because of the emphasis put on the first two strategic objectives and in part because the organization was waiting to hire its assistant director of programming and membership, who would lead these action items. The Center was thrilled to expand its team and add Cassandra Etienne as that assistant director in August 2021.

The Center's research into providing media credentials hit a wall when the legal liability they would entail was discovered. Instead, the Center supported and actively promoted the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists' efforts to provide credentials to all members of New Jersey Media.

And last, the Center's New Jersey research agenda stalled in 2021 as work on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation took priority over research director Sarah Stonbely's time. However, several small studies are in the pipeline to be released in 2022.

2020 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 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.

NJ Civic Information Consortium

Working on the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium added an extra workload for the Center in 2021, particularly for Stefanie Murray and Joe Amditis. As Montclair State was chosen as the Consortium’s host university, the Center knew the bulk of the work would fall to it, given that the board is composed of volunteers.

Throughout the year, the Center completed the following tasks:

- Paid for legal fees and setup costs to get the Consortium registered as a 501(c)3.
- Collected mail for the Consortium.
- Built the Consortium’s website.

- Set up the Consortium’s social media accounts and email list.
- Advised on and set up a grant application using Airtable.
- Advised on setting up a scoring rubric for applications.
- Conceived and hosted three workshops for potential grant applicants.
- Counseled nearly two dozen potential grant applicants on their applications.
- Worked with the grants committee to support their consideration process.
- Monitored the email inbox on behalf of the Consortium board.
- Sent grant letters to all grantees on behalf of the Consortium board, along with rejection letters.
- Collected all nonprofit documentation for grantees.
- Worked with Rowan to set up its process for being a fiscal sponsor for grantees.
- Collected addresses and prepared letters sent out with checks.
- Researched and arranged for community reporter training for grantees.
- Outlined, edited, and designed the Consortium’s annual report.
- Set up and hosted three public hearings.
- Kept in regular communication with the Board and grantees.

The Consortium board intends to hire an executive director by the end of 2021, which will alleviate the amount of work required by the Center.

New Jersey local media podcast and 2021 Local News Summit

Local media of all shapes and sizes are facing so many existential crises, but often without the decades of institutional legitimacy and financial reserves that larger publications enjoy. That goes double for ethnic and community media outlets that often serve communities of color or non-English speaking audiences.

With all that in mind, the Center gathered several New Jersey publishers and journalists for small-group conversations and asked them about the landscape here: What is the state of media in the Garden State?

The Center hired Alexandra Hill of WBGO to host the conversations, set up a few Zoom sessions, and produced a four-part series called the [2021 State of the Media in New Jersey](#). Each episode focused on a different sector of the NJ local media ecosystem:

1. Local independent media ([55:24](#))
2. Ethnic and community media ([54:24](#))
3. Statewide media ([1:01:00](#))
4. Vertical and niche media ([48:55](#))

Local independent media

For the conversation with local independent media, Hill spoke with Clyde Hughes of Front Runner New Jersey, Krystal Knapp of Planet Princeton, Tehsuan Glover of The Newark Times, and Jackie Lieberman of TAPinto Westfield.

The main takeaway from this session, somewhat unsurprisingly, is that the current demand for accurate and reliable local news is strong, but the revenue to support it is increasingly hard to come by. Many local outlets saw drastic reductions in ad revenue due to the pandemic, causing more layoffs, furloughs, and budget cuts in the newsroom. Amid all this, reporters are forced to deal with a seemingly endless

firehose of new and changing information while also competing with any number of bad actors and sources of mis- and disinformation.

Ethnic and community media

The conversation with ethnic and community media organizations in New Jersey included Jongwon Lee of The Korea Daily, Kleibeel Marcano of Reporte Hispano, Lazslo Bartus of Amerikai Népszava, Kaushik Amin of Gujarat Darpan, Marivir Montebon of OSM! Magazine, and Raymond Tyler of The Light on WTTH 96.1 FM.

One of the main takeaways from this session was that many ethnic and community media outlets simply don't receive the kind of resources and support that they need to properly meet some of the critical information needs that their respective communities have. The pandemic has made this worse. Without access to experts or accurate information in the language that many in their community speak, it becomes nearly impossible to sufficiently cover pandemic-related stories.

Statewide media

For the conversation with statewide media, Hill spoke with John Mooney of NJ Spotlight News, Kevin Whitmer of NJ Advance Media, Hollis Towns and Candace Mitchell of Gannett New Jersey, Ken Schlager of New Jersey Monthly, and Joe Hernandez of WHYY.

Aside from common revenue issues, this panel focused on some of the less obvious problems that have arisen due to the pandemic over the last year. That includes low staff morale and adjusting to a completely remote work life, as well as how to build, maintain, and improve the relationships between newsrooms and the communities in the midst of a lockdown. Live events, for example, had been a source of revenue for many publications and a crucial part of community engagement. How can newsrooms and journalists preserve those relationships (and that revenue stream) without the ability to gather in person?

Vertical and niche media

The cohort of vertical and niche media organizations included Jay Lustig of NJArts.net, Esther Surden of NJ Tech Weekly, Patrick Wall of Chalkbeat, Meg McGuire of Delaware Currents, and Tom Bergeron of ROI-NJ.

In a crisis, vertical and niche media are often among the first to see drops in revenue. In a pandemic, where people are forced to stay inside their homes, that effect is compounded for publications that cover such topics as the arts or the outdoors — especially if universities and theaters are some of your largest advertisers. At the same time, interest in technology, education, business, the arts, and the environment seem to be at an all-time high. Our guests discussed how they've been making the case to their readers that the work they do to provide the coverage they love does in fact cost money to produce.

The podcast series was part of a larger focus on New Jersey's local media landscape and it served as a prelude to the Center's upcoming 2021 NJ Local News Summit.

2021 NJ Local News Summit

There are many inspiring and groundbreaking local news initiatives underway across the Garden State, and the [2021 NJ Local News Summit](#) was designed to share them.

The 2021 NJ Local News Summit is set to include a half day of presentations, panel discussions, and lightning talks from noon to 5 p.m. ET on Nov. 18, 2021. All of the sessions will be presented virtually on Zoom Webinar. Tickets are free and the event is open to the public.

The lineup includes:

- A look at a collective agenda and vision for New Jersey local news
- A review of what community information need assessments by Outlier Media found in Atlantic City, Camden, and Newark
- A peek behind the scenes of the NJ Civic Information Consortium
- An examination of why reporters and producers across New Jersey have voted to unionize
- A look at the South Jersey Information Equity Project
- A series of lightning talks from people from across the New Jersey local news ecosystem about projects they are working on, ideas they have, and support they can offer

View the full Summit schedule on the [event page](#).

Ad Lab

One of the most consistent requests from NJ News Commons members over the years has been support for advertising sales. In 2019 the Center began exploring the idea of how a shared sales professional might benefit small newsrooms in the Commons. After several meetings in 2019 and one in-person in February 2020, the Center turned to Broadstreet to administer the program, which was supported by a \$30,000 grant from the New Jersey Local News Lab Fund.

Broadstreet got started in early 2021, following a meeting in November 2020 where its CEO, Kenny Katzgrau, presented his plans. All NJ News Commons members who opted in to the program received coaching on advertising sales beginning in April 2021 from Broadstreet. That by itself was a success, with one participant, Mary Galioto of MercerMe, telling the Center *“I wanted to let you know that I found the Ad Lab classes to be extremely helpful. They gave me the tools and confidence to be a much better salesperson. I’m seeing more success than I ever have — still slow — but a huge improvement. If you ever have an opportunity to continue with virtual offerings like that, I’ll be there for sure.”*

After that, the Broadstreet team collected data from participants and had them place code on their websites for the shared ad sales. A shared sales professional was hired, Annette Batson, who is well-known to many Commons members for her work at Baristanet in Montclair. Annette sold three ads for the network as of October 2021. In an email to participants in September 2021, Annette said, *“The unanimous reaction has been very positive and everyone is intrigued by the concept. I’ve gone after a selection of advertisers in many vertical markets: medical, festivals, PACs, tourism & travel, etc. As always, it’s always about timing, budgets, and planning. Decisions to advertise sometimes take a while to germinate and take root. Especially if, as in many cases, I’m cold calling, and introducing a novel concept*

that they have to wrap their heads around. It's a process. But I'm confident we'll snag a few more advertisers. We have an excellent product!"

Newsletters products

Daily News Roundup

Over the last year, the Center has received and disseminated 734 stories from local and hyperlocal media partners across the state. Those stories have appeared in a daily consumer-facing newsletter called the [Daily News Roundup](#) (DNR). The DNR newsletter goes out to roughly 1,700 subscribers every morning around 7:00 am ET and is one of the Center's longest-running newsletter products. It was first launched in 2012 shortly after the Center was founded.

Over the last few years, the number of newsletter subscribers, along with its open and clickthrough rates, have been steadily declining at a level commensurate with the standard attrition rate for a similar newsletter. Despite multiple attempts to increase our subscriber base, however, the Center was unable to turn that trend around.

Eventually, it was determined that the cost of continuing to produce the newsletter outpaced its value to both our partners and the Center. As such, the Daily News Roundup is scheduled to cease publication by the end of CY2021. There have been discussions about restructuring and relaunching the newsletter at a later date and in a different, more sustainable form, but at the time of this writing the last edition of the DNR will go out Nov. 18, 2021.

The Newsroom Digest launch

While the Center's daily newsletter product is coming to an end, Center staff recently launched another bi-weekly, partner-facing newsletter called [The Newsroom Digest](#) (the Digest). The Digest focuses exclusively on informing Center partners and equipping them with the tools and information they need to improve their reporting, find paid reporting jobs and gigs, learn about upcoming events and trainings, and apply for grants and other revenue opportunities.

The Digest also features stories and reporting about the NJ news ecosystem from a wider, industry perspective as a way to keep track of various developments at NJ newsrooms and media support organizations. For example, journalist and media-maker profiles, reports highlighting member organizations, including ethnic and community media, and updates on NJ newsroom staffing changes will keep NJNC members apprised of the achievements, news, and contributions of their peers and outlets throughout the state. Coverage of newsroom trends and unionizing efforts also reinforce the Center's role as an expert voice and definitive resource for the study and analysis of the NJ news ecosystem.

The Local Connection

The weekly [Local Connection newsletter](#) by Carla Baranauckas will continue for the foreseeable future. At the beginning of the pandemic, the content of the newsletter shifted to include primarily COVID-related stories and topics. Toward the end of summer 2021, Carla began to shift the focus of the newsletter away from COVID-only stories and back to more general topics.

Ecosystem visioning sessions

In early 2021, the Center was asked to join a small planning group including Meghan Van Dyk of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Mike Rispoli of Free Press, Chris Daggett and strategic advisors Due East to start conversations about what an ecosystem-wide collective visioning process and end result would look like. Stefanie Murray participated on the planning committee for the efforts.

Meetings as part of that group continued twice a month for the rest of the year. In the spring, a broader planning committee was recruited for the collaborative effort and a broader coalition was formed shortly thereafter. The Center heavily promoted the first event to its NJ News Commons constituents, encouraging them to attend. It helped; a majority of the early attendees came as a result of the Center's outreach. While that was positive, it also tilted the balance of participants much more in the favor of journalists than non-journalists.

Two additional coalition-wide visioning sessions were hosted, along with regular planning committee meetings. Stefanie also participated in fundraising meetings as well.

Results of the visioning — a collective agenda for news — was set to be presented at the 2021 New Jersey Local News Summit hosted by the Center. After that, the Center has agreed to serve as a “backbone” organization to help move the effort forward into 2022, likely through coordinating work groups and organizing meetings and events to keep momentum going.

Relaunch plans for the NJ News Commons

The New Jersey News Commons, a flagship project of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, is a network of 280 local news and information providers and 80 freelancers. The Commons helps members and partners share content and encourages them to collaborate and support one another. This project represents a broad range of news organization types and sizes, including traditional media organizations and a variety of new and hyperlocal outlets, public media outlets, and multimedia news organizations.

The Center has conducted research about the New Jersey news ecosystem, identified news and information gaps and underserved communities, and implemented programming to engage newsrooms and community members — particularly those in more marginalized communities who have historically been responsible for producing and disseminating information at the community level — to improve the quality and quantity of news and information sources across the state.

Progress and Challenges

The NJ News Commons has served as an umbrella project for programming and resources that support more than 280 news outlets and 80 individual freelancers. Since the Center launched in 2012, The Commons has increased membership and attracted a growing network of partners. Through the Commons, the Center for Cooperative Media has provided support for ethnic and community media, published a variety of daily, weekly, and monthly newsletters — including the Local Connection and the Newsroom Digest — and provided fellowships and grants, coaching, training, and networking opportunities. The Commons has also created Spanish, English, and Korean language translation partnerships and established pathways for content sharing. A recent example is an arrangement with NJ

Spotlight to provide all of its COVID-19 statewide stories for republication by NJ News Commons members at no cost.

Challenges that emerged during the pandemic include slow membership growth in 2020 due to limited Center staff dedicated to growing membership, and a delay in aggregating internal lists and updated contact information. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has discouraged virtual member participation and communication, which declined in the second half of 2020. However, in 2020 and 2021, the Center conducted successful virtual events, including the Collaborative Journalism Summit, which attracted widespread participation and was well-attended by NJ Commons members. By the end of 2021, the Center hired Cassandra Etienne as Assistant Director for Membership and Programming to support Center initiatives, including the New Jersey News Commons relaunch.

NJ News Commons Relaunch

The New Jersey News Commons relaunch will coincide with the 10-year anniversary of the Center in 2022. Starting in the fall of 2021, the Center is beginning a series of programming and engagement activities to reconvene current NJ News Commons members and partner organizations and expand the Commons network.

These efforts include a relaunch survey and the virtual 2021 Local News Summit —a half-day of presentations, panel discussions, and lightning talks about the many groundbreaking local news initiatives currently underway across the Garden State. Topics include The NJ Civic Information Consortium and unionization efforts in New Jersey newsrooms.

The Center aims to re-acquaint members with its mission and array of services, introduce potential members and partners with the Commons' role as a networking and resource hub for New Jersey newsrooms and freelancers, and launch new programs while building on the success and reach of previous offerings. The following is a list of initial relaunch and programming goals.

Growth of the NJ News Commons

- Conduct outreach and surveys of current members, including newsrooms and freelancers. The goal is to assess awareness, perception, and value of NJ News Commons offerings to identify new areas for research, supportive programs, and resources. The Center will also encourage members to renew this free membership and enter additional information about their newsrooms and information services.
- Relaunch a new, updated membership program for the NJ News Commons.
- Continue to clean and update the Center's master list of NJ publications, freelancers, and partners.
- Increase efforts to recruit ethnic and community newsrooms as Commons members and partners
- Add another 100 new partner organizations NJ News Commons

Growth of the NJ College News Commons partners

- Increase the current number of active NJ College News Commons (NJCNC) partners. NJCNC is the sister project of the NJ News Commons that focuses on serving university and college students.
- Conduct at least two virtual/in-person events every quarter.
- Re-engage NJCNC partners with new collaborative reporting opportunities for university and college students.

- Increased promotion of the NJCNC newsletter to grow its subscriber base and boost partner and student engagement.

Amplifying the reach and platforms of ethnic media

- Ethnic and community media have deep and trust-centered ties to the communities they serve. In a 2019 research report, the Center identified well over 120 ethnic and community media organizations in New Jersey. By 2020, the Center began specifically focusing on better supporting this part of the media landscape. The Center intends to expand work with its ethnic media partners, including increased Center coverage of these outlets as part of the New Jersey news ecosystem and promotion via Center social media and newsletter content.
- Work with Center Ethnic and Community Media Coordinator Anthony Advicula to continue to identify and build on partnerships with ethnic and community media in New Jersey.
- Continue to support COVID-19 reporting fellowships and other grants and fellowships that further ethnic and community news reporting.
- Increase networking and communication between ethnic and community media and others in the news ecosystem to build trust, respect, and accuracy in ethnic and community media coverage of ethnic communities by mainstream media outlets

Content sharing and translation services

The Center hopes to expand opportunities and funding for content sharing and translation services for Commons members. These efforts will follow successful partnerships, 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.

Accomplishments from Center programs related to other strategic objectives

In addition to the focus on the strategic initiatives discussed above, the Center also made progress on its other priorities, which are:

- Grow the Center’s national influence and advocate widely for collaboration.
- Broaden CCM’s revenue resources by aggressively exploring ways to expand the Center’s revenue base.
- Regularly exercise the team’s strategy and forecasting muscles, and continuously evaluate program effectiveness against strategic objectives to focus on those with highest relevance and impact potential.

That progress is outlined in the sections below.

Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund

As fall 2020 continued to be a difficult one for journalists across the U.S., the Center felt strongly that peer learning and mentorship was needed and wanted to hold space — and money — to make it happen in a virtual environment. The Peer Fund was relaunched for an in-place rather than an in-person world.

U.S.-based journalists and media-makers had the opportunity to apply for Peer Fund money to support virtual peer-to-peer mentorships, or reporting collaborations that directly serve communities of color. Support for collaborations was new.

As in the past, the Center also produced two virtual Share + learn workshops to highlight the work of organizations that applicants would have wanted to visit. The first was a workshop on community engagement with Ashley Alvarado of KPCC. The second highlighted growing membership and audience with the team at Scalawag.

- In total, 55 recipients were supported with awards ranging from \$250 for mentorships up to \$1,000 per collaborator for reporting projects.
- Of those, 47 recipients (85%) identified as a person of color or a member of another underrepresented group.
- 56% of recipients identified as having high financial need, while 40% of recipients indicated medium need.

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.

Among the key accomplishments are:

- The Center hosted a successful second virtual Collaborative Journalism Summit. The Summit is the world's largest convening of collaborative journalism practitioners; more on this year's event is below.
- Creation of a playbook for collaboration managers, set to be published in fall 2021.
- Growth in the monthly collaboration manager convenings from a group of more than 60 people around the world to more than 80 (and that list is missing several).
- Growth of the collaborative journalism database from 350 to 550 catalogued projects.
- Center staff have continued to conduct consulting calls to coach early and mid-stage collaborations in such places as Atlanta, Northeast Ohio, Dallas, Colorado, Utah, New Hampshire, and more.
- More than a dozen articles and case studies about collaborative projects, Q&As with collaboration managers and best practices were published, including two highly read lists of permanent collaboratives and their funding structures.
- Work continued under a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant on the Center's global research study examining how journalists and NGOs can ethically collaborate to advance shared missions.

The [2021 Collaborative Journalism Summit](#) was hosted virtually for the second successive year due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. A total of 360 people registered for the event and \$54,000 in sponsorship and ticket sales money was raised. For the first time, the Center offered registrants a choice of three ticket tier costs to suit individual budgets; participants could choose to pay \$25, \$75, or \$150.

A total of 80 people spoke at the Summit during nearly [two dozen sessions](#), including a special co-creation session for project managers to build a playbook and a Solutions Journalism Network collaborative graduation ceremony.

Also new this year was the Center's published [commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) at the Summit. Those commitments included:

- We commit to being anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and meaningfully inclusive across all parts of our event. We draw from Yancey Consulting's guidance and glossary of terms in our view of anti-racism and anti-oppression; you can read those at the bottom of this page.
- We will respectfully gather speaker demographics and make the data accessible before the Summit, updating it as our speaker roster is finalized. We will also gather attendee demographics.
- We commit to recruiting diverse speakers and we will actively prioritize minoritized and marginalized voices.
- We have budgeted for and will publicize needs-based financial support for attendees and speakers who cannot afford to pay their own way. We have discounted tickets and other types of financial support available to make sure money isn't a barrier to participation.
- We commit to ensuring an accessible, inclusive and welcoming space. We have an enforceable code of conduct with a response plan (see below).
- We will pay attention to the language we use and will respond respectfully and empathetically to criticism or recommendations for improvement.
- We are learning and welcome feedback.

Of the nearly 350 registrants who answered the demographics questions, 52.6% identified as women and 37.6% identified as a person of color.

The composition of our speakers aligned with our goal to recruit more diversity. Of the speakers who answered the demographic questions, 50.6% identified as a person of color and 43.1% identified as women.

Organizations that agreed to [sponsor](#) this year's Summit included the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the North Carolina Local News Lab, Facebook Journalism Project, American Press Institute, the John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford, Inasmuch Foundation, Education NC, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, the O'Brien Fellowship in Public Service Journalism at Marquette University, the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri, BlueLena, the Center for Public Integrity, and of course Montclair State University.

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 the 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. In spring 2021, members of California Black Media and Ethnic Media Services were added.

The early part of this second phase of the project was slowed down when the initial project leader, Ashley Woods, left to take a contract job with Google News Initiative. The Center hired Meena Thiruvengadam to replace her.

To date, since relaunching the program in September 2020, 63 local and nonprofit publishers requested 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 received 51 requests for 90-minute strategy sessions and customized reports and coaching for local and/or nonprofit publishers working toward financial sustainability. The goal is to assist a total of 50 audits by the end of 2021.

A total of 20 webinars were hosted over the last year with about 260 registrants. Those webinars included Facebook Fundamentals, Paid Acquisition on Facebook, Social Media 20.21, SEO Basics, analytics and newsletters.

Research agenda

The Center's research agenda in 2021 focused on a 12-month, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded project looking at collaboration between civil-society and journalism organizations. This project is led by the Center's research director, Sarah Stonbely, and co-authored by Heather Bryant. It began in January 2021 and will formally end on December 31 2021, though publicity and conference presentations will extend to 2022.

The project has a global scope and aims to identify, analyze, and better understand collaboration between journalism and various entities, including NGOs, universities, civic-tech outfits, and others that fall into the broad category of "civil society." The research paper that results will identify best practices that can guide similar collaborations in the future.

Other research activities in 2021 included:

- Slow and uneven progress on Phase III of the New Jersey local news mapping project, which is a content analysis of all the online news produced by local outlets serving New Jersey. This project will eventually make use of a 2.5TB corpus produced for us by Internet Archive, with support from our 2019-20 Tow grant and some funding from Matthew Weber (Rutgers). The pandemic

and unforeseen technical issues frustrated efforts to move forward, but there does appear to be momentum going into 2022.

- With Heather Bryant, Stonbely presented early findings from the collaboration research at the 2021 Collaborative Journalism Summit.
- Worked with TV Kitchen (Nancy Watzman, Dan Schultz) on capturing closed-caption data from local television news broadcasts for possible content analysis (Joe Amditis is also helping with this project).
- At the invitation of Free Press, Stonbely took part in a policy discussion with U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell's team about implementing something like the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium at a national level.
- Devised an agenda for the 2022 release of a series of small white papers about New Jersey news and journalism, including journalism wages around the state, costs of memberships/subscriptions, employment numbers, unionization rates, etc.

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.

Below is a brief list that represents a snapshot of some of the coaching, connecting, and other support work Center staff have undertaken over the last year:

- **March 6, 2021:** Helped Spotlight PA understand how to better use programs like ManyCam to enhance their virtual events and webinars
- **March 22, 2021:** Worked with a local public access station in New Jersey to strengthen its application to receive funding from the NJ Civic Information Consortium
- **March 23, 2021:** Worked with a staff member from NJ Urban News to help find her a mentor
- **March 24, 2021:** Assisted Morristown Green with an RSS feed issue related to the Morristown Green podcast
- **May 5, 2021:** Helped someone from Creative NJ obtain press lists for the NJ/NY metro area
- **June 14, 2021:** Connected the founder of a prospective local news site in the South Jersey/Philadelphia area with local stakeholders and potential partners
- **June 16, 2021:** Helped staff from the Village Green local news outlet with their grant application to the LION News Revenue Hub
- **July 19, 2021:** Helped URL Media brainstorm platforms for a collaborative advertising network
- **July 26, 2021:** Helped Prison Journalism Project understand models of collaboration available to them and resources

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.

☐	A Name of organization the call w...	📅 Date of ...	👤 Names of people who joined t...	A Topic of the call	📝 Any outcomes or notes?
3	Southerly	1/6/2020	Lyndsey Gilpin	Southerly magazine and its collaborations	Stefanie invited Lyndsey to participate...
4	Local Media Association	1/6/2020	Nancy Lane, Jed Williams, Matt DeRie...	Talking to LMA about how collaborations work	Stefanie sent LMA materials from the ...
5	Inside Climate News	1/8/2020	Vernon Loeb	Inside Climate News and its emerging collaborative reporting network	Stefanie invited Vernon to speak at th...
6	Associated Press	1/8/2020	Noreen Gillespie, Lisa Gibbs	AP's interest in coordinating collaborative reporting networks	Stefanie invited AP to speak at the Col...
7	Florida News Press	1/13/2020	Skip Foster	How a new Florida nonprofit can be collaborative from the start	Stefanie connected Skip with Mother J...
8	Stockton University	1/13/2020	Toby Rosenthal	Stories of AC website	Helped Toby set up new pages and ad...
9	Colorado Media Project	1/16/2020	Lara Jakubowski	Colorado Media Project's COLab	Stefanie shared some CCM materials ...
10	Judith Neilson Institute	1/27/2020	Mark Ryan	Judith Neilson Institute	Stefanie sent Mark links to some of C...
11	Morristown Green	1/28/2020	Kevin Coughlin	Discussion of Morristown Green's current business status	Sent Kevin a bunch of information ab...
12	NJ Spotlight	1/31/2020	John Mooney	Discussion of NJ Spotlight's 2020 activities	Followed up with John on several topics
13	Chalkbeat	2/4/2020	Lee Whack	Meeting with Lee Whack to discuss Newark work	Lee gave a bunch of input on the New...
14	Nordot	2/5/2020	Aya Uryu	New story exchange via Nordot	We discussed how Nordot might posit...
15	The Texas Tribune	2/11/2020	Agnes Varnum	Texas Tribune training opportunities, events cohort	Connected Agnes with a couple people
16	Fostering Media Connections	2/14/2020	Thalia Henderson, Michael Fitzgerald	Collaborations with Fostering Media Connections	Sent FMC contacts to a few other coll...
17	Newark Journal Sustainability Reporting H...	2/19/2020	Susan Main	Review NJSPHub candidate	Spoke with Susan Main and other NJ...

Hosted and attended events

The Center hosted a total of 64 virtual events over the last year. Below is a sample of our most recent events and training sessions. To see the full list, please [view the database](#) in Airtable or click the link in Appendix A.

Facebook Fundamentals: St...		5/3/2021	13:00	5/3/2021	14:30	Learn the Facebook best p...	https://www.eventbri...
SEO Basics for News Publis...		5/6/2021	14:00	5/6/2021	15:30	Don't have a dedicated SE...	https://www.eventbri...
Paid audience acquisition ...		5/11/2021	14:00	5/11/2021	15:00	https://zoom.us/j/9794706... We'll help you figure out w...	https://www.eventbri...
Social Media 20.21: Instagr...		5/13/2021	13:00	5/13/2021	14:30	Want to build a sustainable...	https://www.eventbri...
2021 Collaborative Journali...		5/19/2021	13:00	5/21/2021	17:00	Join the world's only event ...	https://www.eventbri...
Facebook Fundamentals: St...		6/8/2021	13:00	6/8/2021	14:30	Learn the Facebook best p...	https://www.eventbri...
Facebook Fundamentals: St...		6/29/2021	13:00	6/29/2021	14:30	Learn the Facebook best p...	https://www.eventbri...
SEO Basics for News Publis...		7/13/2021	14:00	7/13/2021	15:30	Don't have a dedicated SE...	https://www.eventbri...
Social Media 20.21: Instagr...		6/15/2021	13:00	6/15/2021	14:30	Want to build a sustainable...	https://www.eventbri...
Paid audience acquisition ...		7/20/2021	14:00	7/20/2021	15:00	We'll help you figure out w...	https://www.eventbri...
Sensitivity, accuracy and cu...		6/16/2021	14:00	6/16/2021	15:00	It is crucial for NJ journali...	https://www.eventbri...
Using social media to gro...		7/14/2021	13:00	7/14/2021	14:00	Using social media to gro...	https://www.eventbri...
Press event: Tracking the D...		7/29/2021	14:00	7/29/2021	15:30	Join us for a press briefing...	https://www.eventbri...
Public hearing about the N...		9/27/2021	18:00	9/27/2021	19:00	This is a public information...	Other https://www.eventbri...
Public hearing about the N...		9/29/2021	18:00	9/29/2021	19:00	This is a public information...	Other https://www.eventbri...
Public hearing about the N...		9/23/2021	18:00	9/23/2021	19:00	This is a public information...	Other https://www.eventbri...
SEO Basics for News Publis...		10/19/2021	14:00	10/19/2021	15:00	Don't have a dedicated SE...	Training https://www.eventbri...
Tips for building email new...		9/21/2021	14:00	9/21/2021	15:00	Strategies for building em...	Training https://www.eventbri...
Facebook Fundamentals + ...		9/13/2021	14:00	9/13/2021	15:00	Learn the Facebook best p...	Training https://www.eventbri...
10 steps to more inclusive ...		10/7/2021	13:00	10/7/2021	14:00	A virtual training for journa...	Training https://www.eventbri...
Press event: The impacts o...		9/17/2021	14:00	9/17/2021	15:30	Since February 2020, more...	Webinar https://www.eventbri...
2021 NJ Local News Summit		11/18/2021	12:00	11/18/2021	17:00	You're invited: Get ready f...	Conference https://www.eventbri...
Same Old Sources: How to...		11/10/2021	14:00	11/10/2021	15:00	Join us as we learn how to ...	Convening https://www.eventbri...
Is your local news site ADA...		10/27/2021	13:00	10/27/2021	14:00	Martin Halo will help you ...	Webinar https://www.eventbri...

Center staff also attended and participated in a variety of events and workshops over the last year. Below is a snapshot of our event tracker. To see the full list, please [view the database](#) in Airtable or click the link in Appendix A.

Learning to applied practice; Anti-racism, anti-oppressi...	3/25/2021	Attended	Joe Oni Stefanie	Yancey Consulting
Shaking Up the Color of News	3/4/2021	Attended	Stefanie	URL Media - Mitra Kalita, S...
Resilience and Recovery: Health Care, Vaccines and Th...	3/11/2021	Attended	Stefanie	The 19th
NC/NJ Press On Level Up Planning Session	3/15/2021	Attended	Stefanie Joe	
Tackling misinformation: Lessons from 2020 for 2021	4/16/2021	Attended	Stefanie	
Transformative Transparency Exchange: Support and s...	4/20/2021	Attended	Stefanie	
Local News Policy Exchange Forum: Replanting	4/23/2021	Attended	Sarah	The Tow Center
Paid audience acquisition on Facebook: What you nee...	4/8/2021	Attended		Meena Thiruvengadam
Ecosystem leader group call	5/5/2021	Attended	Stefanie	Due East partners
Utilizing Non-Profit Power for Anti-Racist Action	5/25/2021	Attended	Stefanie	Center for Nonprofits
WHYY Summit	5/27/2021	Attended	Stefanie	WHYY Philadelphia
Informed & Engaged: What can local news learn from i...	5/27/2021	Attended	Stefanie	Knight Foundation
Lead NJ in-person session (day 1)	6/16/2021	Attended	Joe	
Lead NJ in-person meeting (day 2)	6/17/2021	Attended	Joe	
Newsgeist '21 - NA Discussion Sessions	6/17/2021	Attended	Stefanie	
Lead NJ in-person session module 4, day 1 (in person)	7/14/2021	Attended	Joe	
Lead NJ in-person session module 4, day 2 (in person)	7/15/2021	Attended	Joe	
Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression... continued	8/5/2021	Attended	Stefanie	
Ecosystem Builder Community Call	8/5/2021	Attended	Stefanie Sarah Joe	

Published content and Center publicity

Among the stories the Center wrote and published this year, in chronological order from Oct. 2020 to Oct. 2021:

1. [Solutions needed to help fill information gaps in Newark](#)
2. [Center for Cooperative Media releases 3 more collaboration guides, including budgeting, selecting partners](#)
3. [Ethnic and community media produce 40 Census stories, host 6 forums for New Jersey Media Counts initiative](#)
4. [How the Center for Cooperative Media responded to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
5. [Translation, support for ethnic media, training and legal resources highlight 2020 election support in New Jersey](#)
6. [New Jersey residents discuss policy priorities as part of Voting Block](#)
7. [Vaccine story translation project reaches marginalized communities about COVID-19 shots in New Jersey](#)
8. [Loved and Lost project hits milestone, identifies 1,000 COVID-19 victims](#)
9. [Racial disparities in vaccination distribution the focus of recent fellowship for Black journalists in NJ](#)
10. [Stories show how students, parents across New Jersey without consistent access to Internet or tech are faring](#)
11. [Center for Cooperative Media shifts diversity scholarship program to focus on paying dues in 2021](#)
12. [Tennyson Donyea Coleman's public plea for change at NJ.com marks a pivotal moment for New Jersey news media](#)

13. [Peer Learning + Collaboration grantees help to fill in Newark's information gaps](#)
14. [Center for Cooperative Media restructures, welcomes Cassandra Etienne to team](#)
15. [South Jersey Information Equity Project enters phase two, seeks project coordinator](#)
16. [Our commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion](#)
17. [Introducing the New Jersey Diverse Sources Database](#)
18. [Here's a list of 40 current permanent journalism collaboratives in the U.S.](#)
19. [How a small Korean newsroom in New Jersey finds a way to serve the community and thrive](#)
20. [Will Murphy set aside advertising money for ethnic media in New Jersey?](#)

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

1. Maslow's pyramid, fake news and the future of journalism ([City Bureau](#))
2. Announcing more than \$700,000 in COVID-19 relief, election integrity support ([Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation](#))
3. What makes for strong local news coverage? Questions with Sarah Stonbely ([U.S. News Deserts](#))
4. How a simple grant is helping my nonprofit news site ([Medium](#))
5. Forecasts for Journalism in 2021 ([Center for Journalism and Liberty](#))
6. Q&A: Sarah Stonbely on remapping local news at the municipal level ([Columbia Journalism Review](#))
7. NorthJersey.com wins 35 awards in annual state journalism contest ([NorthJersey.com](#))
8. Local news is suffering. So are underserved communities ([Digital Content Next](#))
9. One Atlanta victim's family got \$3M, another \$6,600. Is bias to blame? ([NorthJersey.com](#))
10. 2021 Community Voices and Digital Equity Grants ([Independence Public Media Foundation](#))
11. Collaborative Journalism from a Latin American Perspective: An Empirical Analysis ([Journalism and Media](#))
12. NJ Journalism Impact Awards to be presented at Byrne Kean Dinner ([Insider NJ](#))

Key challenges

The coronavirus pandemic continued to present a challenge to the Center. It was difficult to tend to relationships and support partners without the ability to host in-person events or travel to meet with stakeholders.

Getting the NJ News Commons reconfigured and relaunched has also been a challenge, partly due to the fact that it took several months to find and hire Cassandra Etienne as the Center's assistant director of membership and programming. It has been frustrating to have an updated master list of news outlets in the state, half of whom are not members of the NJ News Commons, but little to no staff time to make a regular, concerted outreach effort.

The length of time needed to complete the Center's research into collaborations between news organizations and civil society groups has been tough. That project has been extended a few times already, and it has cut into the time the Center hoped to dedicate to New Jersey-focused research. To alleviate this, the research director and Center staff recently outlined a series of small studies it will launch beginning in early 2022, thanks to the hiring of a Montclair State grad student.

Appendix A: Events

- View the database of hosted events. ([Airtable](#))
- View the database of attended events. ([Airtable](#))

Appendix B: COVID-19 response

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. What resulted were several initiatives to support NJ News Commons members.

- Read the full COVID-19 response report ([PDF](#))
- Learn about the ongoing fellowship, “After the pandemic: Reporting on NJ underserved communities” ([URL](#))
- Read about the Center’s COVID translation project ([URL](#))
- View the campaign archive for the COVID-19 content exchange newsletter ([URL](#))
- Read about the Center’s reporting fellowship for ethnic, community, and immigrant media ([URL](#))
- Read about the Center’s reporting equipment and freelancer stipends ([URL](#))

Appendix C: Election report

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.

- View the election reporting handout prepared by Jennifer Borg, a well-known attorney specializing in media law at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden ([PDF](#))
- Read the stories by Reporte Hispano and NJ.com, which teamed up to produce collaborative reporting on the election ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- View the “How to vote story” from NJ Spotlight News, which the Center had translated into multiple languages ([Google Drive](#))
- View the “How do I return my ballot” social graphic ([PNG](#))
- View the “How do I return my ballot” flyer ([PDF](#))
- Download these social graphics on how to return a mail-in ballot ([Google Drive](#))
- View this list of experts and sources who are willing to speak to reporters on the record about everything from voter registration to NJ election law, compiled by the Center ([Google Docs](#))
- View the recording from the webinar, “Election SOS: Planning for post-election scenarios” ([YouTube](#))
- View the recording from the webinar, “How to fight back when people discredit your political reporting” ([YouTube](#))
- View the recording from the webinar, “Media briefing: Voting in New Jersey for the 2020 elections” ([YouTube](#))
- Read a sampling of election-related coverage from NJ News Commons partners ([URL](#))

The Center for Cooperative Media
Montclair State University
1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J., 07043
www.centerforcooperativemedia.org