

Center for Cooperative Media School of Communication and Media Montclair State University

2016 Annual Report

Our mission

The Center for Cooperative Media at the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University is a grant-funded program whose mission is to grow and strengthen local journalism, and in doing so serve New Jersey citizens. We do that through the use of partnerships, collaborations, training, product development, research and communication.

Our history

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

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

Our structure

The Center is housed within the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University. The Center director, Stefanie Murray, reports to Merrill Brown, who is the director of the school.

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

We currently have a fourth part-time staffer, Tim Griggs, who is on a limited contract to study local and national news partnerships.

Our funding

The Center is currently funded by Montclair State University, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Democracy Fund.

Our 2016-2017 operating budget is as follows -- note we are on a July 1-June 30 fiscal year:

- ❑ \$150,000 Knight Foundation funding via the Dodge Foundation for several projects, including our Sales Academy training, coaching news entrepreneurs, our national conference, and providing back-office services.
- ❑ \$75,000 Knight Foundation funding via the Dodge Foundation for general operational support.
- ❑ \$75,000 Democracy Fund funding via the Dodge Foundation for the local/national news partnerships project
- ❑ \$20,000 Knight Foundation funding via the Dodge Foundation for a program for laid-off journalists
- ❑ **TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET: \$320,000.00**

Our work

As part of its everyday operations, the Center pursues the following initiatives.

- **Nurture and grow the NJ News Commons partner network.** Currently, more than 150 news outlets have agreed to be partners of the Center as part of the NJ News Commons, which is our flagship project. Members of the NJ News Commons become part of a network of news organizations across the state that share content and support one another. We are currently evaluating what we offer for partnership and building a plan to renew our partnerships with current partners and expand the network. We just did a “Partner Needs Survey” in November 2016 that will prove valuable for us to build on.
- **Daily aggregation of top New Jersey news stories.** The Center publishes the daily NJ News Commons newsletter, which rounds up top news of the day in the Garden State. On Thursdays, that newsletter becomes the “Local Beat” and focuses on hyperlocal news stories.
- **Network building and communication.** The Center communicates regularly with its partners and helps them share content, advice, questions and tips through an email list, a Facebook group and Facebook page, a Twitter account and multiple Slack channels. We also write regularly about what’s happening in the New Jersey news ecosystem on our website.
- **Collaborative projects.** The Center is finishing up its support of the “Dirty Little Secrets” project hosted by the Center for Investigative Reporting and is in the midst of supporting a reporting project with NJ Spotlight and New America Media on immigration issues. The Center anticipates initiating and facilitating more such programs, including one focused on the 2017 NJ governor’s race.
- **Training, networking and professional development.** A key hallmark of the Center since its inception has been its ability to bring media professionals together for seminars and events. Our training programs are known for being accessible and affordable, and our development of a partner network has gone hand-in-hand with connecting disparate

media orgs across the state who share similar struggles but who otherwise would not know one another.

- **Research.** The Center has recently settled upon its inaugural research agenda, which is being executed by our new research manager Sarah Stonbely. This includes an examination of collaborative journalism models and an in-depth look at how many of the municipalities in New Jersey are lacking independent news coverage.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2016

Below is a list of accomplishments that we are most proud of from 2016.

Hiring of new Center director

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

'In the Shadow of Liberty' crowdfunded immigration reporting project

We partnered with NJ Spotlight to raise more than \$31,000 to fund a year-long series of stories about immigration in New Jersey.

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

We used our share of the money to fund an initial round of \$5,800 in grants to support nine immigration reporting efforts by ethnic, immigrant, community, and other small media outlets in New Jersey.

The winners of these reporting grants and the topics they chose to cover are as follows:

- **Brian Lorio** (\$500, Freelancer): Mexican-American community garden in Pulaski Park.
- **Jacque Howard** ([Trenton365 Show](#), \$750): Investigating the immigration process, step-by-step.
- **Tiziana Rinaldi** (Freelancer, \$750): Immigrant "brain waste" (highly-skilled immigrants working low-skill jobs).
- **Elinor Comlay** ([Route 40 News](#), \$750): Mexican and Central American students from elementary to high school.

- **Mary Barr Mann** ([The Village Green](#), \$750): Creole and Haitian communities in South Orange and Maplewood.
- **Rong Xiaoqing** ([Sing Tao Daily](#), \$500): Chinese communities and business in places like Edison and Jersey City.
- **Orhan Akkurt** ([Zaman Amerika](#), \$800): How will the next president (Clinton or Trump) affect Turkish communities in N.J.?
- **Laureen Delance** ([The Citizen's Campaign](#), \$500): Haitian, Filipino, Portuguese communities, and Italian communities in Orange, N.J.
- **Matt Skoufalos** ([NJ Pen](#), \$500): Notario fraud in Latino communities, specifically in Camden and the surrounding area.

We also used \$1,000 of the money raised to support an effort by Anthony Ewing of EthnicNJ to update and improve [a series of interactive maps](#) that showcase New Jersey's ancestry and migration history.

We are currently in the process of issuing an additional \$2,000 in grants to support four more reporting projects with the remaining funding. These projects are expected to be completed over the first several months of 2017.

Launch of NJ Mobile News Lab

This fall, we launched the NJ Mobile News Lab. The lab's first initiative will be to seed mobile platform-focused experiments at three New Jersey news and information providers. Many of the Center's partners have consistently told us that times are tough, money is tight, and resources are scarce. They expressed these concerns during phone calls, at our workshops and trainings, in partner needs surveys, and through a variety of other channels.

Many are left unable to survey or adapt to the challenges on the digital horizon at a time when new frontiers in mobile communication and media technologies continue to grow in both number and complexity. The terrain is treacherous and the weather can shift dramatically, often without warning. Local newsrooms need to be able to scan the horizon, adapt to the changes, and find the resources to support those adaptations without putting their entire operation at risk.

Few have the time, the resources, or the funding required to do what needs to be done and to gather the information they need — so most of them simply don't. Failing to seize the right opportunities and adapt to the new realities that mobile platforms create — especially when it comes to reporting and presenting the news, engaging with diverse publics, and raising sustainable revenue — will undoubtedly leave them stranded as the industry moves on without them.

We received a total of 15 mobile lab proposals, and are currently in the process of evaluating and creating a shortlist of the most promising applications. Those who make it onto the shortlist will be invited to a one-day ideation and feedback session at Montclair State University, where they will be given individual feedback on their proposals from industry leaders and practitioners in the mobile news business.

Over the next several months, we will select three of the most promising proposals for mobile experiments and issue up to \$15,000 in grants to the publishers that submitted the winning proposals. Those publishers will be required to document their efforts and provide relevant data and information to the Center so we can incorporate it into our research efforts.

Sustain Local 2016 national conference

In October we hosted our third annual conference. This year's event was focused on sustainability issues -- namely, diversified revenue streams -- for local news and information providers.

Sustain Local 2016 was hosted on Oct. 6-7 at Montclair State University and featured a dozen panels and workshops for more than 160 attendees, including media executives, journalists, funders and students. The conference was a profitable event for the Center and was sponsored by the Democracy Fund, the American Press Institute, Broadstreet, iCopyright, Bizyhood and the New Jersey Chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists.

We kicked off the conference with a cocktail networking reception on Thursday evening and an American Press Institute presentation on data-driven content strategy, followed by a keynote by Gordon Borrell on building the media company of the future.

Panels included:

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

[Click here to read a full list of stories](#) from the conference, as well as check out our videos and photo galleries.

Expansion to South Jersey

Mid-year we made our first strong effort to engage with media organizations in South Jersey by holding a summit about sustainability issues in Haddonfield. We reached out to around 30

different media organizations in South Jersey and invited them to a daylong summit with lunch to discuss their biggest business challenges. We concluded the day with a cocktail reception.

We had a dozen people attend, representing organizations ranging from hyperlocal digital-only publishers to printed weeklies to a television station. It was a lively discussion and excellent networking opportunity.

We've continued to include South Jersey media operations in our work. We have developed strong relationships with Elinor Comlay of Route 40 and Matt Skoufalos of NJ Pen, among others. We made a productive site visit this fall to SNJ Today in Millville, and we continue to work with WHY?/Newsworks and the Philly.com/Philadelphia Inquirer on different initiatives.

'Life After The Newsroom' support for laid-off New Jersey journalists

This summer The (Bergen) Record and its large stable of North Jersey weekly properties were sold to Gannett Co. Promptly thereafter, Gannett announced a reorganization that included laying off about 200 staffings, including 130 in the newsroom.

We knew this change could have a major impact on news in the state, especially for some of the smaller weeklies with already tight staffing structures. To help, we organized a "Life After The Newsroom" luncheon and networking event, which drew about 60 people. We also partnered with The Poynter Institute to offer free training through the News University to displaced Jersey journalists. We reached out to some laid off folks who were interested in becoming news entrepreneurs and discussed the process with them and provided coaching. And last, we are preparing a white paper looking into the actual impact that these layoffs by Gannett had on community news in New Jersey.

Second round of Sales Academy training

Sixteen people enrolled in our 2016 Sales Academy, led by Eleanor Cippel and Joe Michaud. This was the second iteration of the training program, which consisted of two days of work onsite at Montclair State, Aug. 17-18, 2016, followed by 6 virtual sessions conducted via Zoom conference into November 2016.

Soon after the final webinar session in November, Eleanor and Joe asked all participants to take part in a phone feedback survey (They opted for phone interviews rather than an online survey, so they could dig deeper where needed). Survey participants were told their responses were intended to help improve the next round of training, that their responses would not determine whether there would be further trainings, and that the Center needed their honest feedback to improve the program. Verbatim survey responses are available by request.

Generally, the feedback was consistent on several points:

- All respondents reported business impact at some level from the training, as well as increased sales confidence.
- The amount of time onsite at MSU was about right (one would have liked a little more).
- All found the follow-up virtual sessions very useful.

- On a 5-point scale, all ranked the two days of training , as well as the quality of content either “good and useful” (score of 4) or “exceptionally good and useful” (score of 5).
- Feedback remained positive around the bi-weekly trainings , although there was less unanimity. Responses ranged from “Good but I still need more help to make the learning useful” (score of 3) to “exceptionally good and useful” (score of 5). This is a good sign, showing that participants are realizing additional areas of growth and business help needed beyond foundational sales training.
- All gave low scores to “Connecting with class partners between the webinars for support and sharing updates,” ranking that aspect unsatisfactory (score of 1) or not useful (score of 2). This strategy was designed to encourage roleplaying, partner accountability and sales planning with a partner. Many participants dropped off at this juncture. There is an underlying feeling that the competitive environment, particularly in New Jersey, discouraged participation in this portion of the program. Certainly, this is the equivalent of self-study and in this instance the approach was not adopted or utilized as hoped.

Eleanor and Joe gave the following recommendations on how to improve and build on the program in the future:

1. Communication, marketing and messaging:
 - a. Initial planning for the next sales academy program should include a full communication plan and detailed calendar, with the messaging framework and dates for posts, emails, and other means of recruitment. Messaging should include testimonials (with permission) from previous participants’ feedback statements. Eleanor and Joe have offered to be more involved in this planning and outreach.
2. Continue the Sales Academy training 1-2 times per year:
 - a. The sales academy foundational training program has been developed and can now be conducted for facilitation and organization fees. As a result, the investment required for the next rounds of training should be significantly reduced in terms of cost and scope.
3. Explore webinars and short trainings for publishers to help guide and inform areas of business including:
 - a. *Operational options.* Tools and services vendors and products for everything from ad serving (including and beyond Broadstreet) to ad design outsourcing, web development, CRM, email vendors, etc.
 - b. *Partnerships and expansion.* They need insight and help on partnering with one another and how to structure fees, partnering with other businesses who complement or add to their offerings and how to add complementary partner products.
 - c. *Legalities.* This includes everything from understanding sweepstakes rules, political advertising rules to protecting themselves in their business set up (sole proprietor, LLC etc.) to Quickbooks set-up, structuring a simple P&L form to track their business and everything in between.
4. Advanced sales skills programming training:

- a. Many publishers now are in a position to advance their sales skills. They are trying to land larger corporate accounts, deal with agencies, break through with decision makers, and they need to develop and communicate a value story that will resonate with large accounts vs. mom-and-pops. This programming could be developed in a webinar style format with “how-to” sessions that feature an interview with a publisher, seller or marketer who has been having success in this area. Bringing these examples from outside of NJ will encourage more participation and be very helpful.
5. One-on-one business coaching:
 - a. Publishers who have had one-on-one business coaching with us share how impactful it was to their business. They have made substantial progress, planned for it to make sure they got the most out of it and utilized it to accelerate growth. It would be great if there could be a scholarship program of sorts to enable publishers to get 90 days of business coaching as part of our program.

Local/national partnerships project

In September we launched a project aimed to study partnerships between local and national news outlets. Tim Griggs, a former New York Times staffer and publisher of the Texas Tribune, is leading the effort on our behalf.

In early 2017, we'll facilitate a handful of experiments of collaboration between local and national news partners and will report out the progress at our Collaborative Journalism Summit May 4-5.

Partnerships with LION, INN, CIR, NAM and more

We continued to foster formal and informal partnerships with other organizations aligned with our mission, including the Local Independent Online News Publishers group, which has its original roots in New Jersey, and the Institute for Nonprofit News. We also worked with the Center for Investigative Reporting and New America Media on different programs.

Publicity

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

- [The Facebook Journalism Project seeks to strengthen its ties to the news industry](#) by Lisa Lacy | The Drum | Jan. 12, 2017
- [There is a Bright Future for the Media, At Least in New Jersey](#) by Mike Shapiro | NewarkInc | Jan. 10, 2017
- [In New Jersey, Only a Few Media Watchdogs Are Left](#) by David Chen | New York Times | Jan. 3, 2017
- [Here's A Fabulous 2016 Charitable Donation Idea: Saving Journalism](#) by Howard Homonoff | Forbes | Dec. 23, 2016
- [Community News' Fight to Succeed: 'Sustain Local 2016' Put It All Together](#) by Tom Grubisich | Street Fight | Nov. 10, 2016
- [22 Medium publications about journalism and technology](#) by Catalina Albeanu | Journalism | Nov. 9, 2016

- [Liar, liar, pants on fire: NPR editor on Trump, truth and the media](#) by Brian LaMuraglia | Morristown Green | Oct. 10, 2016
- [Collaborate or die: A new initiative wants to make it easier for national and local outlets to work together](#) by Ricardo Bilton | NiemanLab | Sept. 28, 2016
- [Introducing Reveal Labs, a new engine for local investigative reporting](#) by Cole Goins and Joaquin Alvarado | Reveal | Sept. 15, 2016
- [How to turn toxic contamination into stand-up comedy](#) by Cole Goins | Reveal | Sept. 6, 2016
- [Finding humor in toxic contamination. Seriously.](#) by Cole Goins | Reveal | Jul. 6, 2016
- [NJIT Journalism Students Take First Place in Environmental Contest](#) by Miriam Ascarelli | NJIT News | Jun. 30, 2016
- [Local news publishing on Medium: Exploring pros & cons](#) by Amy Gahrn | Knight Digital Media Center Blog | Jun. 14, 2016
- [How a New Jersey couple’s battle with a leaking oil tank became theater](#) by Cole Goins | Reveal | Jun. 10, 2016
- [A new play explores a real-life environmental battle in Teaneck](#) by Bill Bodkin | NJ Advance Media | May 31, 2016
- [Dark Comedy STORYWORKS: TERRA INCOGNITA Premieres at George Street Playhouse](#) by Marianka Swain | Broadway World | May 25, 2016
- [TV and radio stations, working together? It’s possible — and potentially powerful](#) by Dru Sefton | Current | April 21, 2016
- [Montclair State University presents panel on Italians and media](#) by Gwen Orel | The Montclair Times | Apr. 9, 2016
- [Thinking outside the \(newspaper\) box: The Local News Lab seeks to revive community news](#) by Dan Kennedy | NiemanLab | Feb. 17, 2016
- [In the Shadow of Liberty: NJ Spotlight’s Year-Long Study of Immigration in NJ](#) | NJ Spotlight | Feb. 8, 2016
- [How New Jersey newsrooms are working together to expose local contamination](#) by Cole Goins | Reveal | Dec. 30, 2015
- [Investigative local reporting has a future—but it won’t look like the past](#) by Molly de Aguiar and Josh Stearns | Columbia Journalism Review | Dec. 18, 2015
- [CIR to convene investigative collaboration in New Jersey](#) by Cole Goins | Reveal | Jul. 23, 2015

Attendance at industry conferences and events

During the last year, we attended or presented at events including:

1/26/17	Tow-Knight Emerging Tech Petting Zoo @ CUNY
1/24/17	New America Media roundtable: Issues facing NJ ethnic media in covering Trump
1/22/17	NJ-SPJ Strategy Meeting
1/5/17	Knight Media Innovation Awards & Reception
11/14/16	Judges and Journalists: Accuracy and Access

11/10/16	Post-Election Press Call: Immigrant Communities & the Trump Presidency
10/17/16	Pascack Hills High School (Media bias & literacy class)
9/29/16	2016 LION Summit: Local Independent Online News Publishers
9/15/16	ONA 2016 in Denver, CO
8/29/16	10UP Summit: 10 years of user participation
8/1/16	The Writer's Circle Workshop
7/15/16	Entrepreneurial Journalism Educators Summit 2016
2/9/16	What's new in NJ media law?

CCM Stats (preliminary):

- Startups seeded: 22
- Grants issued: 35
- Crowdfunding total: \$31,000+
- Coached: 36 instances (wayyy more than this)
- Local Beat newsletters: ~260
- Local Beat stories shared: ~1,300
- Newsletters published: ~1,158
- Newsletter stories shared: ~5,790
- Newsletter subscribers (daily list): 1,847
- Newsletter subscribers (monthly list): 2,059
- Collaborations reporting projects: 5
- Blog posts: ~970
- Trainings and events: 71+
- Twitter followers: 2,843 (+77 on our second account)
- Facebook page likes: 866
- Private FB group: 216 members
- Additional publications (Medium, SplashThat, etc.): 7 (at least)