

June 2018

Annual Report

Center for Cooperative Media

The Center expands its scope of programs, establishes national reach that benefits New Jersey; more attention turns to collaboration

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 in doing so serve New Jersey citizens.

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

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

Executive summary

Last year, the Center for Cooperative Media spent much of its energy refocusing on its core priorities and centering its programs squarely within its mission of strengthening and growing local journalism. This year, we've been in growth mode.

In the 2017-18 fiscal year, the Center set a record for its fundraising efforts, executed more funded projects than ever before, expanded its profile in the national area, doubled the size of the NJ News Commons network, doubled its number of newsletters and published more than 120 stories about its work and the work of its NJ News Commons members. The Center also released its first full research whitepaper and hosted two national conferences.

As the Center heads into the 2018-19 year, we are focused on continuing to drive successful and smart news innovation in New Jersey, continuing to serve as a national leader in the practice of collaborative journalism, especially as it benefits local media, and on increasing diversity, inclusion and equitable partnerships in the New Jersey news ecosystem. Working toward these priorities using research, convenings, trainings, collaborations, partnerships, product development and re-granting will help the Center fulfill its mission to grow and strengthen the local news ecosystem for the benefit of New Jersey citizens.

History

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

Since its inception, the Center has seeded and coached news startups, hosted four national conferences, facilitated collaborative reporting projects, set up a content sharing system, published a daily newsletter highlighting important New Jersey stories, developed a partnership network of more than 180 news outlets across the state, and led a deep array of training seminars and professional development sessions.

The Center is best known for its work with the NJ News Commons, which is the name of the partnership network referenced above, as well as 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.

Structure

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

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

We have also contracted with Melody Kramer, Ned Berke, Toya Wilson-Smith, Public Narrative and Heather Bryant on projects throughout the past fiscal year to execute funded projects.

Funding

The Center was funded in its 2017-18 fiscal year by Montclair State University, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Democracy Fund and the Abrams Foundation. Additional event and project-specific sponsorships have come from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation, Facebook, American Press Institute, JSK Stanford, Airtable, Viafoura, Malheur Enterprise, Clickable, Piano, Broadstreet, WebPublisherPro and Pico.

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

Operational and project funding supports the salary and benefits of all other staffers, as well as all costs associated with running the Center and its projects. That operational and project funding for 2017-18 fiscal year included:

- ❑ \$100,000 Dodge Foundation operational funding (a \$75,000 grant and \$25,000 supplemental)
- ❑ \$100,000 Local News Lab Fund/Democracy Fund operational funding
- ❑ \$25,000 Abrams Foundation operational funding
- ❑ \$75,000 Local News Lab/Democracy Fund project funding for local/national news partnerships project
- ❑ \$15,000 Local News Lab/Democracy Fund project funding for scholarships to improve diversity in New Jersey news ecosystem
- ❑ \$233,000 Knight Foundation project funding for Social Media for Local News Initiative
- ❑ \$50,000 Facebook project funding to also support Social Media for Local News Initiative
- ❑ \$38,000 event sponsorship and ticket sales funding for Collaborative Journalism Summit
- ❑ \$4,300 event sponsorship and ticket sales funding for Reader Revenue event
- ❑ **TOTAL 2017-18 OPERATING BUDGET: \$645,381**

General operations

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

- **Nurture and grow the NJ News Commons partner network.** Currently, more than 180 news outlets have agreed to be partners of the Center as members of the NJ News Commons. Members of the NJ News Commons become part of a network of news organizations across the state that share content and support one another.
- **Daily aggregation of top New Jersey news stories.** The Center publishes the daily NJ News Commons newsletter, which rounds up top news of the day in the Garden State. On Fridays, that newsletter becomes the “Local Beat” and focuses on hyperlocal news stories.
- **Network building and communication.** The Center communicates regularly with its partners and helps them share content, advice, questions and tips through an email list, a Facebook group and Facebook page, a Twitter account and multiple Slack channels. The Center also works with other journalism organizations and fellow grantees across the country on various initiatives, including as a participant in different ‘communities of practice.’
- **Consulting and coaching.** The Center does quite a bit of consulting and coaching for NJ News Commons members and others in its national ecosystem.
- **Collaborative projects.** The Center encourages and coordinates collaborative reporting projects in New Jersey; such projects include coordinating reporting resources and content-sharing.
- **Training, networking and professional development.** A key hallmark of the Center since its inception has been its ability to bring media professionals together for seminars and events. Its training programs are known for being accessible and affordable, and its development of a partner network has gone hand-in-hand with connecting disparate media organizations across the state who share similar struggles but who otherwise would not know one another.
- **Annual national conference.** The Center convenes thought leaders in the local news and information space annually for a 1-2 day conference on topics related to local journalism.
- **Research.** The Center has a research agenda focused on local journalism, with specific efforts focused on studying business models and ecosystem mapping.

- **National collaborative journalism program.** The Center began last year to serve as a central convener and researcher of collaborative journalism.

Accomplishments: General operations

Key areas of progress in the 2017-18 fiscal year in terms of regular operations of the Center include:

Expansion of NJ News Commons

The Center took several steps to strengthen and expand its flagship NJ News Commons network in 2017-18. Those included:

- **Training, coaching, and professional development.** The Center hosted a series of trainings and professional development sessions. In addition, we hosted a wide range of formal and informal coaching sessions for organizations as well as individuals. See the sections below for a full list of CCM trainings, coaching sessions, and other impacts.
- **New organizational partners.** The Center added 80 new media organizations as partners over the last year, bringing our total number of partners to 260 from 180. The list of new partners also includes an increasingly diverse group of organizations and individuals. We created [a new interactive partner map and database](#) to showcase our growing network and make it easier for people to find local news outlets in their respective communities.
- **Freelancer network.** The Center launched a freelance network and community listserv for those who are looking for paid work in the New Jersey journalism industry. Since [its launch in February 2018](#), the list has grown to include 50 freelance reporters, editors, designers and others from all over New Jersey. We also created [an interactive map and a public database](#) for potential employers to use when searching for people to hire.
- **NJ College News Commons.** The Center is currently in the process of forming a college news commons to replicate the work we have done for corporate and nonprofit newsrooms and to provide similar benefits to journalism students and reporters at New Jersey colleges and universities.
- **Research.** The Center conducts academic and scholarly research to support the NJ News Commons by producing actionable knowledge for its members.

Network building

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

In addition to facilitating the NJ News Commons network through regular communication and discussion forums, the Center fosters formal and informal partnerships with other organizations aligned with its mission. Key partners include the Local Independent Online News (LION) Publishers group, the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), Free Press, Solutions Journalism Network, and the New Jersey chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). We've also been active in the ecosystem builders program hosted by Democracy Fund, and have been working more with organizations and networks outside of New Jersey, such as the Detroit Journalism Cooperative.

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

Work with ethnic press: The Center had a partnership with New America Media before it folded, and since then, we've been trying to figure out how we can better support ethnic media in our state. This will be a key component of our work in the upcoming fiscal year. We've been keeping in touch with ethnic media journalists in our state and hosted a luncheon earlier this year to hear their concerns and learn about their needs.

Working with LION and INN: Our work with LION and INN has deepened quite a bit over the past year, as a Knight Foundation-funded social media initiative has put us in direct contact with more than 150 members from the two groups. This has substantially deepened the Center's network across the country, as we now have had direct working relationships with dozens of news organizations. This has helped us in New Jersey, as we've connected several of our NJ News Commons members with LION or INN publishers who are facing similar issues for knowledge sharing and mentorship.

Expanding the NJ News Commons to freelancers and college journalists: As we worked to grow the NJ News Commons network, we zeroed in on four missing pieces: individual journalists in our state, ethnic media, freelancers and college students. We're addressing the individual journalists through our work with ONA New Jersey, and ethnic media as mentioned above. For freelancers we began a network specifically for them within the NJ News Commons, and we are starting the NJ College News Commons. Taken together, we think this will help us have a much stronger foothold across our state.

Launching ONA New Jersey: As will be detailed further down in this report, our work spearheading a local ONA New Jersey chapter is connecting the Center with, so far, a network of 100+ journalists, many of whom we previously didn't have relationships with. This will be important as the group grows into 2019.

Reaching out to build relationships with Creative NJ, Sustainable Jersey, Media Mobilizing Project, and the NJ Council on the Humanities: We haven't had much contact with these organizations in the past, but are hoping through our work with Voting Block that we'll begin to make inroads and establish strong relationships with these other Dodge grantees.

Coaching and consulting

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

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

Collaborative projects

In the past year, the Center's main collaborative effort in New Jersey has been the Voting Block project.

Voting Block aimed to bring neighbors together in dozens of communities around New Jersey for civil political dialogue over a meal, and to encourage more New Jersey residents to take interest – and vote – in the 2017 governor’s race.

We created this idea in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, at a time of extreme political rhetoric and divisiveness. We also knew there was a high level of voter apathy surrounding the 2017 New Jersey gubernatorial election.

We built Voting Block, from a journalism/editorial perspective, around a handful of key stories:

1. A profile story that would give an overview of the neighborhood and the neighbors who agreed to participate.
2. A story based off the conversation that was had by the neighbors, who we gathered to discuss the election over a meal.
3. Additional stories following up on points of interest expressed by those neighbors.
4. A follow-up checking in with the neighbors after the election.
5. Creation of a People’s Agenda, collecting all the top issues that neighbors said they wanted the new governor to tackle, which was submitted to the new governor.

Additionally, we built a guide for how residents and communities could host their own Voting Block-style potluck or meal, and we created a game show to engage other New Jersey residents who weren’t involved in the meals.

The Center organized the editorial components of the project, while the Center for Investigative Reporting coordinated the audience engagement components. New America Media, for most of the project, coordinated with the ethnic media partners on both components, although the Center and CIR took this over in early fall.

The core founding editorial partners in the project include WNYC, WHYY, The Record and NJ Spotlight.

Within the Center, Stefanie Murray worked as the overall project manager and coordinated all editorial components with the large news partners. Joe Amditis coordinated with the hyperlocal partners and managed the Voting Block website and content sharing efforts.

We held weekly conference calls with the large editorial partners beginning in March, and those continued through the week after the election in November. Weekly calls with the hyperlocal partners began in August and continued through the week after the election.

All partners recruited their own neighbors, set up their own meals (with funding and facilitation help provided by CIR), then wrote and published their own stories. The Center offered funding and coaching assistance for audio and video components, and we hired an editor to back-read the hyperlocal stories. We sent the edited versions to all the partners and encouraged them to consider the suggested changes. We also hired a photographer to shoot photos before and during meals.

Our partners at CIR worked with community organizations including ArtWorks Trenton to host other political potlucks that were not convened by media organizations. CIR also produced a dating show-style event at WFMU to engage residents around the governor's race.

In total, more than 70 news stories were produced and well over 100 neighbors were engaged. We touched an additional 300+ people through a text message campaign coordinated by WNYC to solicit priorities for the next governor. We also produced a People's Agenda for the new governor.

After Voting Block, we published a guide for how other communities could replicate the project, which included some of our lessons learned. We held a national conference call with more than a dozen people around the U.S. interested in creating their own version of Voting Block. And we engaged an outside consultant to help us document and assess the project; we released her full report publicly.

We are now looking forward to taking our lessons learned from the 2017 Voting Block project into the 2018 midterm elections.

Research

The year 2017-18 saw the publication of two major research papers, the white paper "Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism" (Sept. 2017), and the research report "What do New Jersey news consumers want? Assessing satisfaction with local news" (March 2018).

"Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism" was the first piece of research by the Center for its collaborative journalism program. For this project Sarah Stonbely conducted 25 interviews with experts in and practitioners of collaborative journalism, and did an in-depth review of industry and academic literature about collaboration. In the process Sarah identified two major variables of collaborative projects: duration, and level of integration among organizations involved. From this she developed a matrix of six different models of collaborative journalism, into which all known collaborations fit. She presented this research at a release event for the white paper on September 29, 2017, and Stefanie has presented it at several events as well. The final 68-page report was printed in hard-copy and has been widely cited.

The report assessing satisfaction with local news was based on data gathered by the technology and advocacy organization Free Press. Free Press had conducted an online survey of its membership about satisfaction with their local news, and had held several focus groups throughout the state as part of their News Voices project. The Center agreed to help make sense of this data in the interest of better understanding how New Jersey residents feel about their local news.

Sarah Stonbely cleaned the survey data and mapped such census data as median household income, and character of respondents' towns (i.e. rural, suburban, urban), onto the results. She used SPSS to relate satisfaction with local news to these items, finding that residents of lower-income and rural towns are less satisfied with their local news than are residents of suburban or urban and higher-income communities; other findings included levels of satisfaction as they relate to the medium by which respondents consume local news. The transcripts from the focus group provided supplementary qualitative data.

Both research reports got good industry press, including write-ups in Nieman Lab, Columbia Journalism Review, MediaShift, and Journalism.co.uk.

The third piece of research the Center conducted in 2017-18 was the first phase of a three-phase project to map the local news ecosystems of New Jersey. With co-authors Jesse Holcomb (Calvin College, formerly Pew Research Institute) and Magda Konieczka (Temple University), Sarah Stonbely wrote “Mapping local news ecosystems: Parsing the concept, offering a new typology, and suggesting a method,” which was presented at the 2018 annual meeting of the International Communication Association in Prague, Czech Republic, in May. The second phase of this project is now underway and is expected to be completed by Spring 2019.

In addition to these projects, Sarah Stonbely is also involved in research with SCM Professor Tara George on hyperlocal publisher business models and success strategies. This research was begun in 2016 and will be completed by the end of Summer 2018. Sarah also built and populated a research page on the Center’s website, which includes all Center-conducted research to-date, as well as other relevant academic and industry studies.

Finally, Sarah was invited to speak at and/or participate in other research-related events during fiscal year 2017-18 as a representative of the Center, including:

- Kettering Foundation convening: Journalism and Democracy (Dayton, OH; October 2017)
- Pluribus Project: Citizen Circle Convening (Tarrytown, NY; March 2018)
- Tow Center Research Methods Workshop (New York, NY; June 2018)
- Public Radio News Directors Incorporated annual meeting (Philadelphia, PA; June 2018)

National conferences

The Center hosted its second national conference focused on collaborative journalism in 2018, as well as a national event that was focused on reader revenue.

In April 2018, about 80 people attended [Reader Revenue](#), a conference held in partnership with LION that was entirely about building consumer revenue for small and independent publishers. In May 2018, 150 people attended the 2018 [Collaborative Journalism Summit](#), our second conference about collaborative reporting projects and cooperative news networks.

Reader Revenue

Many of our NJ News Commons members are considering, or have implemented, more aggressive consumer revenue strategies over the past 12-18 months. And indeed, building reader revenue is a hot topic in the media industry around the world.

We knew this was a topic around which we wanted to provide training and professional development opportunities. It was a natural fit for us to partner with LION Publishers to pull it off, since consumer revenue is important to that organization’s members, too. We also thought it could help LION recruit more members from New Jersey and the Northeast.

In close partnership with Matt DeRienzo, executive director of LION, we worked together to host “Reader Revenue: How news organizations can build a business with their audience” on Friday, April 6, at Montclair State University.

We were able to recruit some of the leaders in the field of news consumer revenue to present and speak at the event, and we designed it to include a morning of presentations and plenary Q+A, followed by a networking lunch, and then an afternoon of hands-on workshops.

Panels and speakers included:

- Gwen Vargo, director of reader revenue at the American Press Institute
- Emily Goligoski, research director of the Membership Puzzle Project
- Christine Shih of the News Revenue Hub
- Matt Skibinski, Lenfest Institute
- Maria Archangelo, Executive Director of The Philadelphia Public School Notebook
- Matt DeRienzo, executive director of the Local Independent Online News Publishers
- Jay Senter, editor and publisher of the Shawnee Mission Post

The afternoon workshops were focused on:

- Building your overall reader revenue strategy with Gwen Vargo.
- Building a digital subscription funnel and marketing to drive conversions with Matt Skibinski.
- Building a membership program with Christina Shih.

We had 90 people register and about 70-75 attended the event; many of the attendees were from out-of-state, which was a surprise, as we expected more interest from NJ News Commons members than we received. It also helped that LION put aside some money to help its members travel here for the event.

Although we had some training dollars set aside for this event, we were able to find several corporate sponsors. Their support along with ticket sales got us to come within just a few hundred dollars of breaking event. Sponsors included:

- Clickable
- Piano
- Broadstreet
- WebPublisherPro
- Pico

The feedback from attendees was overall extremely positive. People felt the topic was right on point, and the main morning presentations were rated highly. We’re considering what we can do in the fall to continue our work in this area around growing revenue and business models; one area we’re looking more closely into is vendors and platforms, as well as more training for startups specifically. Marketing was also a big area of training request.

2018 Collaborative Journalism Summit

Our second national conference of the 2017-18 fiscal year was our second Collaborative Journalism Summit, back by popular demand.

This year's event was more intimate than last year's event, and a bit more focused on connecting people who are actively doing collaborative projects to share what they're learning. We brought back the popular lightning talk-style presentations and hosted three keynotes and more than a half-dozen workshops. The event was held at Montclair State University.

In total we sold 150 tickets for the Summit and had about 125-130 people attend. We kicked off with a cocktail reception and keynote about collaboration with ethnic media on Thursday evening and continued on Friday morning with breakfast followed by a keynote presentation and discussion about election-focused collaborative projects that are popping up around the world, including a look at such projects in France, the U.S., Mexico and Brazil.

The Center premiered and released a 10-minute video at the Summit about the current state of collaboration, which was well-received. Solutions Journalism Network released its new playbook for collaboration, while Heather Bryant of Project Facet released her workbook for collaboration – both in keeping with our focus this year on actionable, useful resources for collaboratives.

Keynotes included:

- **Lessons from ethnic media collaborations: How partnerships between mainstream and specific community media benefit news ecosystems.** Speaker: Daniela Gerson, assistant professor, California State University Northridge; senior fellow, Democracy Fund. Research presented on behalf of the American Press Institute. Followed by a conversation with reporters and editors on the benefits, challenges and opportunities of collaboration between mainstream and ethnic media outlets, hosted by Daniela Gerson with panelists Anthony Advincula, formerly of New America Media; Rong Xiaoqing, Sing Tao Daily; Karen Frillmann, WNYC; Orhan Akkurt, formerly of Zaman Amerika.
- **How CrossCheck fought misinformation during the French elections (and how the U.S. could use its lessons for 2018 midterms).** Speaker: Gregoire Lemarchand, deputy global editor-in-chief and head of social networks for Agence France-Presse. Followed by a conversation and Q+A session about collaborative election projects happening around the world this year to fight misinformation, including ones in Brazil, Mexico and the U.S. Hosted by Jon Funabiki, Renaissance Journalism and San Francisco State University with panelists Gregoire Lemarchand, AFP; Aimee Rinehart, First Draft; Tom Trewinnard, Meedan; and Maria Sanchez Diez, partner manager, Electionland.
- **Managing a collaborative: Best practices and considerations for workflow, project management and technology.** Speaker: Heather Bryant, director, Project Facet.

Workshops included:

- **Partnering with public radio stations: Lessons from one of the most prolific collaborators in the business.** Speakers: Nancy Solomon, managing editor, WNYC; Lee Hill of WNYC; and Scott Klein of ProPublica.
- **How libraries can partner to serve community news needs.** Speakers: Eric Abrahamson, board chair, Black Hills Knowledge Network/South Dakota Dashboard; Charlotte-Anne Lucas, NOWcastSA; and David Beard, independent consultant.
- **Collaborative cross-border journalism workshop: Tips for how any reporter can build their own network and start collaborating.** Speaker: Guilherme Amado, JSK Fellow and investigative reporter for the Brazilian O Globo daily newspaper.
- **National-to-local collaborations: Lessons, best practices on localizing national stories and data.** Speaker: Ziva Branstetter, senior editor, Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting.
- **Tracking impact: Measuring the ‘So What’ in collaborative journalism.** Speakers: Kara Wentworth, Strategic Impact Analyst, Twin Cities PBS; and Sarah Stonbely, Center for Cooperative Media.
- **Solutions Journalism Network presents a playbook for collaboration.** Speakers: Liza Gross, vice president of newsroom practice change at Solutions Journalism Network.

The full schedule – including all the fantastic lightning talks – can be found at <https://collaborativejournalism.org/2018summit/schedule2018/> and a wrap-up from the event is at <https://collaborativejournalism.org/cjs2018wrap/>.

The money we raised from last year’s Summit, especially the sponsorship from Google, helped propel the continuation of our national collaborative journalism work into 2018, so we were hopeful to raise enough money to do the same this year. While we didn’t quite hit our high-water mark from the previous year, we did raise enough money from foundation and corporate sponsorships to pay for the conference and net some extra dollars to spend on the program into 2019. One notable difference is the corporate sponsors; this was the first year we’ve been able to attract that kind of support.

This year’s sponsors included:

- Knight Foundation
- Democracy Fund
- Rita Allen Foundation
- American Press Institute
- JSK Stanford
- Airtable
- Viafoura
- Malheur Enterprise

The feedback from this year's Summit was overwhelmingly positive; once again the lightning talks were highly rated, and attendees enjoyed the open networking time that we built in to the program.

Training and professional development

Providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities is a hallmark of the Center. Below is a list of all trainings, professional development events and webinars hosted since July 2017:

- Syndicating your content with iCopyright’s repubHub portal
- Facebook fundamentals (multiple instances)
- Podcasting for local news workshop
- Using social media to build your local news brand
- How to avoid getting sued while reporting local news (and other topics)
- New Jersey ethnic and community media luncheon
- Data journalism and visualization (ONA NJ)
- Push notifications for local news using OneSignal
- Reader Revenue: Building a business with your audience
- Basic social media marketing for independent and nonprofit newsrooms (multiple instances)
- Intermediate social media marketing for independent and nonprofit newsrooms (multiple instances)
- Advanced social media marketing for independent and nonprofit newsrooms

Hosted events

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

| Title | Type | Date | Location | Attendees |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|----------------------|-----------|
| Facebook for INN + LION publishers | Training | Aug. 1-2 | Facebook in NYC | 20 |
| Syndicating your content with iCopyright’s repubHub portal | Webinar | July 19 | Webinar | 7 |
| School of Communication and Media grand opening + luncheon | Conference | Sept. 26 | SCM Building | 19 |
| Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism: Panel + reception | Conference | Sept. 29 | SCM Building | 50 |
| Open house + reception for NJ News Commons | Meeting | Sept. 29 | SCM Building | 13 |
| NJ Electorama game show | Event | Oct. 21 | WFMU | 100 |
| Election Night Open Newsroom | Event | Nov. 7 | SCM Building | 48 |
| Podcasting for local news workshop | Training | Jan. 26 | SCM Building | 35 |
| NJ News Commons Excellence in Local News awards ceremony | Ceremony | Feb. 2 | Alexus Steakhouse | 36 |
| New Jersey ethnic and community media luncheon | Meeting | Feb. 9 | Restaurant in Newark | 16 |
| Push notifications for local news using OneSignal | Webinar | Feb. 20 | Webinar | 5 |
| Reader Revenue: Building a business with your audience | Conference | April 6 | SCM Building | 89 |
| Using social media to build your local news brand | Training | April 12 | Calcia Hall, MSU | 70 |

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| How to avoid getting sued while reporting local news (and other topics) | Training | April 25 | Morehead Hall | 13 |
| Basic social media marketing for independent and nonprofit newsrooms | Webinar | April 25 | Webinar | Multiple instances |
| Intermediate social media marketing for independent and nonprofit newsrooms | Webinar | May 2 | Webinar | Multiple instances |
| Advanced social media marketing for independent and nonprofit newsrooms | Webinar | May 9 | Webinar | Multiple instances |
| 2018 Collaborative Journalism Summit | Conference | May 10-11 | SCM Building | 149 |
| Data journalism and visualization | Training | June 6 | NJ.com offices | 35 |
| Engaging with Your Community: A strategy workshop for news publishers | Training | June 21 | Rutgers Camden | 20 |

Events attended

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

| Title | Date | Host | Location | Staff |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Data journalism class at CUNY | July 20 | CUNY | New York, NY | Joe |
| NJ Spotlight trivia night | July 27 | NJ Spotlight | Newark, NJ | Joe |
| Civic Summit | Aug. 5 | Citizens Campaign | Summit, NJ | Joe |
| Google News Lab Summit in Palo Alto | Sept. 17-19 | Google | Palo Alto, CA | Stefanie |
| Civic Info Bill strategy meeting | Sept. 27 | Free Press | Trenton, NJ | Joe |
| ONA Local Open House | Oct. 5 | ONA Local | Washington, DC | Joe |
| Online News Association annual conference | Oct. 5-7 | ONA | Washington, DC | Stefanie, Joe |
| Voting Block game show (Electorama) | Oct. 21 | CIR/CCM | Jersey City, NJ | Joe |
| Democracy Fund ecosystem builders dinner | Oct. 25 | Democracy Fund | Chicago, IL | Joe |
| LION Publishers annual conference | Oct. 26-28 | LION | Chicago, IL | Stefanie, Joe |
| Newsgeist | Nov. 3-5 | Knight Foundation | Phoenix, AZ | Stefanie |
| Election Night Open Newsroom | Nov. 7 | CCM | Montclair, NJ | Joe |
| Kettering Foundation convening: Journalism and Democracy | Nov. 8-9 | Kettering Foundation | Dayton, OH | Sarah |
| NJPA annual meeting | Nov. 10 | NJPA | Monroe Twp, NJ | Joe |
| SPJ board meeting | Nov. 19 | SPJ | Montclair, NJ | Stefanie |

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Push It: Opportunities, Challenges and Best Practices in Mobile Push Alerts | Nov. 29 | Columbia Journalism School | New York, NY | Joe |
| CUNY SocialJ presentations | Dec. 13 | CUNY | New York, NY | Joe |
| Solutions Journalism Network NJ organizing meeting at NJ.com's offices | Jan. 9 | SJN | Woodbridge, NJ | Stefanie |
| Wikipedia Secrets | Feb. 12 | Sree Sreenivasan | New York, NY | Carla |
| Knight Media Forum | Feb. 19-21 | Knight Foundation | Miami, FL | Stefanie |
| NICAR annual conference | March 8-10 | IRE | Chicago | Carla |
| America East Media Business and Technology Conference | March 12 | Pennsylvania News Media Association | Hershey, PA | Stefanie |
| Pluribus Project: Citizen Circle Convening | March 22-23 | Pluribus Project | Tarrytown, NY | Sarah |
| Platforms + Publishers | March 23 | MediaShift | New York, NY | Stefanie |
| A New Wave of Mobile Innovation in News | March 26 | Guardian Mobile Lab | New York, NY | Joe |
| Facebook Subscription Accelerator kickoff | March 28 | Facebook | New York, NY | Stefanie |
| International Journalism Festival | April 11-14 | IJF | Perugia, Italy | Stefanie |
| ONA New Jersey launch event | April 18 | ONA New Jersey | Green Brook Township, NJ | Stefanie, Joe |
| NJ CASA Visionary Voice award luncheon | April 23 | NJ CASA | Lawrenceville, NJ | Stefanie |
| Lenfest Institute panel on email newsletter best practices | April 25 | ONA Philly | Philadelphia, PA | Joe |
| Women Warriors in Business | May 17 | NJ SBDC | Jersey City, NJ | Stefanie |
| Shorenstein/Lenfest meeting about local news business models | May 18 | Lenfest | New York, NY | Stefanie |
| Modern-Day Redlining: A Community Conversation | May 19 | CIR | Camden, NJ | Carla, Joe |
| International Communication Association annual conference | May 23-28 | ICA | Prague, Czech Republic | Sarah |
| NJ Libraries Association Conference | May 29 | NJLA | Atlantic City, NJ | Joe |
| Eastern Video Expo | May 30 | Jersey Access Group | Morristown, NJ | Joe |
| Social Media Weekend | June 1-3 | Sree Sreenivasan | New York, NY | Carla |
| ONA Local Summit | June 7-9 | ONA Local | Detroit, MI | Joe |
| Civic Info Bill lobby day | June 11 | Free Press | Trenton, NJ | Joe |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| Allied Media Conference | June 14-17 | Allied Media Projects | Detroit, MI | Joe |
| Tow Center Research Methods Workshop | June 15-16 | Tow Center | New York, NY | Sarah |
| IRE annual conference | June 14-16 | IRE | Orlando, FL | Carla |
| Public Radio News Directors Incorporated annual meeting | June 23 | PRNDI | Philadelphia, PA | Sarah |

National collaborative journalism program

We made quite a bit of progress this year in terms of furthering our national collaborative journalism program, especially considering we're still working with a shoestring budget.

We firmly believe that collaborative journalism will help power the future of information sharing; it's a core principle upon which we built and operate the NJ News Commons. And we're committed to helping drive the conversation around collaborative projects. No other organization in the U.S. is able to provide what we've built in less than two years on this topic.

The past year was especially notable for seven key reasons:

1. We released the full whitepaper "Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism," which was detailed above in the section on research.
2. Although we launched the open funding call for collaborative reporting projects in the 2016-2017 fiscal year – thanks to generous funding from Democracy Fund and Rita Allen Foundation – we executed it in the 2017-18 fiscal year. This included distributing the grants, tracking the projects, producing case studies as they each finished, and inviting the grantees to present on their work at the 2018 Collaborative Journalism Summit.
3. We launched the first database of collaborative journalism projects and have been able to catalogue about 150 projects involving more than 1,200 organizations.
4. We started a twice-monthly collaborative journalism newsletter.
5. We held our second Collaborative Journalism Summit, which was detailed above.
6. We continued to build out collaborativejournalism.org.
7. We're being cited as an expert in this area and are taking regular consulting calls.

More details on several of the projects cited above:

Open funding call. We were able to distribute six grants of \$7,000 each to collaborative reporting projects around the country in the summer of 2017. Judging of the entries was done by a panel of judges that included Scott Klein of ProPublica; Ju-Don Marshall Roberts of WFAE; Heather Bryant of Project Facet; Jon Funabiki of San Francisco State University and Renaissance Journalism; and Jan Schaffer of J-Lab.

We had about 70 submissions for the open call, which we were thrilled with. Narrowing it down to the finalists and the winners was challenging, and even after we announced the six grantees, two projects saw dramatic changes. A collaborative reporting focusing on gun training in Texas planned by the Texas Tribune had to be shelved following Hurricane Harvey, so that grant was

re-awarded to EducationNC and WRAL, which did a project about “restart” schools in North Carolina. A second grantee, Quartz, had to scramble to find a new partner midway into the grant cycle because The (McAllen, Tx.) Monitor could no longer handle the project.

Here are the six projects, five of which have already been published or broadcast:

Rattled: Oregon’s Concussion Discussion: InvestigateWest and partners the Pamplin Media Group and Agora Journalism Center released “Rattled,” which examined youth sports injuries in Oregon.

Giving Away the (Wind) Farm: This was an in-depth investigation lead by Kansas City PBS, using data collected and organized by the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting, following the money trail of wind turbine companies across rural Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Illinois, and how tax deals impact public school funding.

Inside North Carolina’s Restart School program: EducationNC and WRAL teamed up to take a close look at a little-known state education program called Restart that was affecting more than 100 schools in North Carolina and whether it was working.

The Wall: USA Today Network/The Arizona Republic examined and documented the current U.S. southern border and explored all phases of the proposed border wall between the United States and Mexico. The project used virtual reality overlaid with relevant data and included aerial video, as well as a series of documentary shorts.

Municipal mergers in New Jersey: NJ Pen partnered with SNJ Today, Courage to Connect NJ and Dave Maynard, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, to identify the challenges behind municipal mergers — combining towns into a single governmental entity — and to get at the roots of the ideas behind “home rule” politics.

Climate change and the border: Quartz is partnering with the Texas Observer on an investigative and data-driven reporting project that will investigate what happens when border dynamics intersect with climate change response and preparation in the lower Rio Grande Valley. To publish August 2018.

The USA Today Network project [The Wall was also awarded a 2018 Pulitzer Prize](#).

Over the last several months, the Center has produced case studies on [Rattled](#), [Giving Away the \(Wind\) Farm](#), [The Wall](#) and the [North Carolina Restart schools series](#); case studies are planned on the last two later in 2018. Additionally, Investigate West and Kansas City PBS presented on their projects at the 2018 Collaborative Journalism Summit.

Collaborative journalism database. In fall 2017, we contracted with Melody Kramer for work on our nascent collaborative journalism database. After the release of our “Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism” report, we realized that we had a great list of collaborative projects but no great place to display what we had collected, other than in our research whitepaper. Melody had also written a list for Poynter earlier in the year that had 55 collaborative projects.

Additionally, there were other past lists of collaborative projects that Sarah referenced in her report that we could pull from. We decided to put all of that data together and launch a public-facing database that could be used as an educational and research tool.

Melody, who works full-time in audience development for Wikimedia Foundation, was tasked with creating a form for organizations to input their projects, designing the initial database, promoting the form and publicizing the effort, then cleaning the data that came in. She also wrote a semimonthly newsletter for us.

Melody started by building the database with projects we already knew about, which helped us get a good handle on what we needed to include in the form and database. We announced the database publicly in January 2018 and asked for more submissions, and indeed, more came in. The data cleaning process was painstaking, however; since we were mostly asking for text-based answers, there was a lot of cleanup to do. Additionally, Melody found that some of the things we asked for weren't easily identifiable for some projects, such as the start and end date.

Then we ran into issues with some prolific collaborators, most notably ProPublica. When we reached out to them, Dick Toefel was happy to work with us, and he sent over his itemization of their collaborations. That list ended up being a 20+ page Word document that listed projects but had very few notes; it was helpful but really started Melody down a path that took up quite a bit of time, as she had to research every project herself.

By spring, however, we had a database that included 150 projects and more than 1,200 collaboration organizations.

Our collaborative journalism newsletter list grew to more than 2,000 by spring as well.

Our intention is now to contract with someone else to take over the database and newsletter for us heading into the second half of 2018.

Consulting and noted expert in collaborative journalism. As we continue to write about collaboration, host events and conduct research in this area, we are finding ourselves called upon to do consulting and serve as an expert in the field.

And by consulting, we don't mean formal relationships; more often, these are phone or video calls scheduled with journalists or funders who are information-seeking.

Some examples – please note this is not an exhaustive list – of that this past year include:

Citation in Tow paper: Carlos Martínez de la Serna published "[Collaboration and the creation of a new journalism commons](#)" on behalf of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, which heavily referenced and used material from our "Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism" whitepaper.

Citation in ethnic media collaboration series: Daniela Gerson and Carlos Rodriguez interviewed the Center for their series on [ethnic media and collaboration](#) for the American Press Institute.

Call with Michigan radio station collaborative: Stefanie discussed the Michigan Public Radio Network and offered ideas for its future with Peter Payette of Interlochen Public Radio.

Project Facet: Stefanie is serving on the advisory board for Project Facet.

Feedback for Center for Investigative Reporting's collaborative cities project: Prior to the announcement of a large Knight Foundation grant for CIR to launch collaborative projects in multiple cities, Stefanie gave the project editor Ziva Branstetter extensive feedback on potential partners and cities.

California Dream collaborative: Stefanie had a long conversation with Adriene Hill, Senior Editor of the new California Dream reporting collaboration between KPCC, KQED, CalMatters, Capital Public Radio, and KPBS, about best ways to organize and run the collaborative.

Presentation to Norwegian journalists at LION: In October, Joe and Stefanie presented about collaborative journalism to a group of journalists visiting from Norway, including several who are part of Faktisk.

MediaShift article about top collaborations of 2017: Stefanie was asked to write an article for MediaShift about the top, most interesting collaborations of 2017 for a year-end wrap-up.

National coaching call about Voting Block: We coordinated and hosted a call to discuss how other cities in the U.S. could replicate a version of the collaborative project Voting Block for their area. Prior to the call, we met one-on-one with some people pursuing the idea, including Cynthia Farrar from Purple States TV.

Creation of materials for Better News: We worked with Tim Griggs to write and publish a section on collaborative journalism on the Better News site, which is run by the American Press Institute.

International Journalism Festival: Stefanie was invited to Perugia, Italy, to attend the International Journalism Festival, where she was on a panel about collaborative journalism.

Detroit Journalism Cooperative: Stefanie did multiple phone calls with members of the Detroit Journalism Cooperative and Knight Foundation, giving them ideas about how other cooperatives work across the country and thoughts on the Detroit experiment. She was also interviewed for and cited in the Knight Foundation's internal report on the DJC and its future.

Webinar for 120 Associated Press editors: In June 2018, Stefanie presented during a webinar about collaborative journalism for editors across the U.S. who are members of the Associated Press.

Co-sponsorship of Agora Journalism Center's engagement and collaboration event in Detroit: Stefanie worked with Andrew DeVigal of Agora to help coordinate a late July 2018 event in Detroit that will focus on community engagement and collaboration.

Discussions with journalists in South America and Europe: We've had conversations with journalists from the Latin American Data Journalism Network and Hostwriter about how we can work together, especially to expand our database in their countries/regions of the world.

Interviewed for research projects: Members of the Center were interviewed for multiple research papers over the past year that touch on collaboration, including by Joaquín Cestino, a visiting scholar at Rutgers Business School Newark, and Matthew Spector, a master's candidate at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, among others.

Accomplishments: Funded projects

The Center was funded for several specific projects in 2017-18, including:

- Social Media for Local News Initiative, funded by Knight and started with Facebook, INN and LION.
- Year 2 of the local/national news partnerships project.
- Voting Block.
- A scholarships initiative to help improve diversity in the New Jersey news ecosystem.
- Administering a \$50,000 open call to support collaborative reporting projects.

Key areas of progress in the 2017-18 fiscal year in terms of those funded projects are detailed below.

Social Media for Local News Initiative

We kicked off this large Knight Foundation-funded project in mid-2017 with a goal of better connecting small, independent and nonprofit publishers with social media platforms, and helping those publishers better leverage the platforms to grow audience and revenue.

The program was launched in partnership with INN, LION, the Detroit Journalism Cooperative, the NJ News Commons and lead platform partner Facebook. After initial funding from Knight, Facebook added an additional grant, which will help us extend the program later in 2018.

The project has been a huge lift for the Center, specifically for Stefanie, as the scope changed after the first few months. We originally envisioned that the project would involve multiple cohorts of publishers working with a lead project manager on specific projects. However, once we got into the project, we realized that we could scale the project more efficiently if we pursued a multi-layer, one-on-one training program. Additionally, it became clear quickly that the Center needed to serve as one main point of communication for Facebook, which can be time consuming.

Here are some of the major accomplishments from this project over the last year:

1. Coordinated a cohort with 3 LION and 3 INN organizations, who worked directly with Facebook and consultant David Beard on defined projects. All of those projects focused on marketing, and utilized \$3,000 each in ad credits.
2. Arranged a daylong training event in Detroit for the Detroit Journalism Cooperative.
3. Coordinated extensive information sharing between INN and LION and Facebook, including escalating issues day-to-day that arose from the membership, looking into other trending issues,

arranging special training sessions and coordinating regular phone calls between Facebook and the executive directors of INN and LION.

4. Conceived and launched a course we called Facebook Fundamentals to scale our training efforts. The Fundamentals program paired more than 50 INN and LION news orgs with individual trainers for one-on-one coaching sessions in fall 2017. This was especially important ahead of NewsMatch for INN, so we onboarded them first. In 2018, we've expanded the program and have now touched dozens of LION organizations, as well.
5. Coordinated with MediaShift on the launch of the peer-to-peer network. A lot has been accomplished there – there are 5 groups currently – and we think is a much more efficient way to approach cohorts.
6. Kept in touch with the News Revenue Hub to offer support to NewsMatch participants in their use of Facebook.
7. Offered open office hours and in-person meetings at INN Days and ONA, and presented at the LION workshop about the project.
8. Published articles about the Facebook Fundamentals project, CrowdTangle, verification, Instant Articles and AMP, Facebook's algorithm changes and Facebook's political ad changes.
9. Retooled the Facebook Fundamentals project in early 2018 after Facebook's changes, altering the curriculum and putting additional emphasis on Google and soon Twitter's platforms.
10. Launched a full Audience Development Fundamentals training program as a one-stop shop for news publishers; this is run by Ned Berke, who has quickly become our leading consultant.
11. Launched a Google Fundamentals training course.
12. Launched training sessions for verification and IA/AMP/Apple News setups.
13. Engaged a developer to help local news orgs understand the implementation of Instant Articles and AMP. To date, he has set up about a dozen news organizations on these platforms.
14. Launched a basic-intermediate-advanced series of webinars on social media digital marketing, led by Toya Wilson-Smith.
15. Launched a site to house all of our resources, training sessions and articles at collaborativejournalism.org/socialmedia (password is INNLION)

To date, we've worked directly with 150 news organizations through LION, INN, the DJC and the NJNC. Those publishers have either been involved in a cohort or taken part in a training session.

Going forward, we are continuing the one-on-one training and plan to expand the number of webinars we offer. We will also be doing more with NewsMatch and will likely host some in-person sessions this fall.

Local/national news partnerships project

In early 2018, we received funding to continue year 2 of our local/national news partnerships project, and in February we hired Carla Baranauckas to run the project. Carla is an experienced former editor for The (Bergen) Record and The New York Times who has a long track record of working with teams of reporters and editing copy ranging from breaking news to enterprise pieces.

During the first year of this project, consultant Tim Griggs focused on a research agenda that laid the groundwork for how local and national news organizations currently work together, and what could be done in New Jersey. Carla picked the project up with a focus on actionable items, especially catalyzing such partnerships in New Jersey.

Carla spent part of her early weeks at the Center producing the daily newsletter, to get a good feel for stories being reported across the state, and meeting Center partners. She debriefed with Tim Griggs and read through all his notes and reports before making appointments and phone calls with a variety of other stakeholders. Carla also spent quite a bit of time trying to get local NJ News Commons members to localize the great datasets and reporting from Reveal about redlining, which was shown to be a problem especially in Camden.

We then set out the following action items for Carla over an April-June timeframe:

1. Launch of weekly communication to the NJ News Commons.
2. Compilation and publication of ongoing list of content available for re-use.
3. Creation of regular data sheets to help NJ News Commons localize national stories.
4. Creation of page housing all of the information we are sharing and producing.
5. Identification of partners and projects for national/local collaborative projects.
6. Article about how national and statewide organizations are sharing content with local, and vice versa.
7. Continue meeting with local NJ News Commons members (ongoing).

By June, we had made significant progress on those items.

The weekly communication we launched for the NJ News Commons actually quickly gained a national audience. Dubbed the Local Connection, it's a weekly newsletter – published on Mondays – that rounds up 3-4 national stories and goes deep on how each of the stories could be localized, with potential story angles, questions to ask and potholes to be aware of. We doubled the size of the newsletter list in just a few weeks, from around 200 to more than 400, and we've maintained an open rate between 35%-40%.

Carla created two data sheets for local partners to reuse, one about nationwide protests against gun violence and one about sports betting being legalized. We launched the page on our site housing all of this information as well, and will soon publish the list we have of content that is regularly available for re-use.

Carla has also continued to pursue national partners for local projects, including Reveal, HuffPost and The New York Times.

Some of the challenges she's had include the fact that, despite our best efforts, it's hard to get our local New Jersey news organizations interested in ways they can localize national stories. Even when it appears to be a slam dunk for them – a dataset with specific information about coastal flooding in New Jersey, for example, or even an article that can be entirely republished about ticks in the state – we've had few takers. We aren't sure why at this point; we think it's likely because our local partners are busy and aren't seeing this info or just don't prioritize it very highly.

We also continue to struggle to interest national partners in New Jersey. We are considered a sort of coastal “elite” state for news organizations who are looking for rural and “middle America” partners.

Voting Block

We’re very proud of our work with Voting Block, which is detailed above.

Open call for collaborative reporting projects

And, of course, we are also extremely proud of our work on the open funding call for collaborative reporting projects, which is detailed above.

Scholarship fund

At the beginning of 2018, as part of our Local News Lab Fund funding from the partnership between Democracy Fund, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and the Community Foundation of New Jersey, the Center was granted \$15,000 to use on scholarships to help improve the diversity of the New Jersey news ecosystem. We’d spent some money here and there in the past to help folks attend events like the Asian American Journalists Association boot camp for entrepreneurs of color in New York City, but we had never launched a sustained effort.

So in March, we launched this new scholarship fund dedicated toward helping New Jersey journalists attend trainings, events and conferences in 2018 put on by organizations that work toward improving diversity, equity and inclusion in media. Such organizations include the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA), the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ), the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) and NLGJA — The Association of LGBTQ Journalists.

Our fund allowed for stipends of \$500 on average for these local journalists to attend eligible events. As of mid-June, we had awarded more than a dozen scholarships, including a handful for \$1,000, to help New Jersey journalists of color travel to conferences and events. We also connected the award recipients via email so they could seek out one another at the events they are attending together.

The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive. A few of the recipients told us that without this funding, they would not be able to go because they couldn’t afford it themselves and their employer provided no support. But we didn’t get as many applicants as we hoped for. We think that is because of several factors, including that our own networks – all the places we advertised the scholarship – aren’t very diverse. We hope this program will be a step in the right direction to help us change that.

As of mid-June, we still have about \$6,000 left in the fund. Our plan is to re-launch the application process in the early fall.

Accomplishments: Continuation of previous projects + other work

The Center also continued to grow its NJ News Commons network and its national influence in other ways that aren’t reflected above, including some project work that continued into the 2017-18 year from the 2016-17 year. These include the following areas.

NJ Mobile News Lab

The Center launched the [NJ Mobile News Lab](#) in the latter half of 2016. The mobile lab issued three \$5,000 grants to fund three mobile news experiments in New Jersey: an SMS-based reader engagement tool; a mobile app to turn news consumers into “Certified Field Reporters”; and a campaign to optimize a publication’s mobile capabilities, functionality, and overall user experience. We used the remaining \$5,000 to fund mobile trainings, workshops, and a partnership with the creator of Push App to create a custom mobile news app for NJ News Commons partners.

Push App was developed by Christopher Guess during a two-year ICFJ Knight fellowship. The app is entirely open source and works on both Android and iOS. Push allows users to read stories, watch videos, share to social media, and comb through archived articles. It also lets readers access content on the go, even when they don’t have access to the Internet. But the feature focused most on was the eponymous push notification function, which allows publishers to deliver stories directly into the hands of readers.

We also hosted a series of trainings and workshops related to mobile news, including [a sold-out podcasting and flash briefing training](#) for hyperlocal news publishers.

The New Jersey Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists announced the winners of the 2017 Excellence in Journalism Awards for work done in 2016, and the NJ Mobile News Lab took first place in the Media-Affiliated Blog category. In particular, the NJSPJ highlighted our post on [what it’s like to set up Facebook Instant Articles for local publishers](#).

Another less-public success that came out of the NJ Mobile News Lab involved one of our non-profit hyperlocal publishers which, over the course of working with CCM staff, realized that she was paying roughly \$4,000 per year more than she needed to for an outdated personal publishing arrangement. Through several coaching sessions, she was able to find a new publishing solution and process, for a fraction of the price.

Business model and sustainability efforts

When the Center was launched, part of its original mission was focused squarely on news startups: funding them, coaching them and even incubating them. As our mission and network has broadened, we do less work today with startups and more work on business model and sustainability questions.

Among our work in this area over the past year:

- **Coaching and connections.** We often work one-on-one when it comes to business model questions with local news publishers. A recent example of this is our work with Mary Galioto of MercerMe. Mary attended our Reader Revenue conference and reached out afterward to get help – she enjoyed the event but didn’t know where to begin. We had a couple of calls with her to discuss her ideas, connected her with a couple of LION publishers who could provide advice, connected her with the Center’s developer for advice, shared with her a list of potential vendors to consider for a subscription or payroll service, and connected her with Pico for a test of that company’s CRM, which is low-cost for local publishers with less than 10,000 subscribers (Mary is starting with zero).

- **Community information districts idea.** Center staff have been working with the [Community Information Cooperative](#), an institutional RJI fellow, to develop a research framework for the [launch of community information districts](#) in a handful of NJ communities. The goal of these special districts would be to create a local fund for news and information projects at the municipal level.
- **Reader Revenue event.** The national event focused on consumer revenue that we held in April, which is detailed earlier in this report, was a key part of our effort in terms of sustainability.
- **Vendor list.** The Center has always received regular pitches from technology vendors, but we haven't done a good job of organizing and cataloguing those pitches. Especially over the last several months, we've fielded quite a few questions from NJ News Commons members about vendors: which paywall vendors are out there, what experiences we've had with various CRMs, and if we can help them get in touch with folks who use different services. Thus, in spring 2018, we began to formally collect such vendors in a detailed spreadsheet that we're converting now into an Airtable database with a form. It's already helped us to sort and be able to share lists of potential vendors our NJ News Commons members, and we think it could grow in its usefulness as we build it out.
- **Ad network.** There is always discussion of building an ad network, it seems, among NJ News Commons members. And there are solid, evidence-based reasons as to why such networks don't often work. But since it's still such an important topic for so many of the organizations we serve, we hosted a conference call in late spring to discuss the topic with a group of interested NJ News Commons members. What they are interested in is essentially a shared sales rep who would target a curated list of regional advertisers to interest them in a bulk display ad buy for multiple hyperlocal websites. We're working through the details of how we can help achieve this goal for the second half of 2018.
- **Business accelerator program.** In late spring, we started talking with Spirited Media about working with them to launch a business accelerator that could be tested in New Jersey.

Support of Civic Information Consortium bill

For the last year, CCM and MSU staff have provided personal, testimonial, and other forms of support for the Civic Information Bill, which seeks to establish a consortium of civic-minded institutions and individuals to support and fund civic information projects in New Jersey.

CCM staff attended lobby days to urge lawmakers to support the bill, provided and delivered testimony to the NJ legislature, and rallied partners to voice their support for the bill. We also attended a series of community engagement events across the state to hear directly from residents and assess their critical information needs.

Shared services

The Center often receives requests to provide trade association-like services, including pooled insurance, access to reduced-cost legal assistance and group access to marketing professionals. In the previous fiscal year, one of the Center's funded projects was to specifically explore what could be possible in this area.

It is important to reiterate here that the Center is a grant-funded program at Montclair State University. It is not a standalone nonprofit, nor is it a membership organization. It has no independent legal or tax

status of its own. This limits what the Center is directly able to provide for partners in its network and members of the NJ News Commons.

In exploring this topic during the previous year, the Center had multiple conversations with different membership organizations to see if they could extend some of their benefits to its partners, including INN and the New Jersey Press Association.

At the end of the previous fiscal year and for most of the 2017-18 fiscal year, we worked with the Philadelphia law firm Pepper Hamilton to make their attorneys available to members of the NJ News Commons at a reduced cost that the Center paid with grant money. We also retained a developer who specializes in Wordpress to be on call for members of the NJ News Commons at a reduced cost that the Center also paid for with grant money.

The outcomes of these two tests were starkly different.

Only one person ended up using the Pepper Hamilton services, and that was Kevin Coughlin of Morristown Green, despite our advertising the service multiple times to the NJ News Commons. On the other hand, our developer was kept busy the entire time with requests from NJ News Commons members, some of whom went on to retain his services on their own when our test period ended.

We are continuing to explore other shared services that we can provide or provide access to.

Launch of ONA New Jersey

After Stefanie and Joe attended the Online News Association conference in fall 2017, one of the things we were struck by was the fact that there was no local ONA group for New Jersey. There are active groups in New York City and in Philadelphia, but none here. We wanted to change that, and we felt we would be in a good position to help drive the group as the Center has an extensive network and lots of experience in events. We also thought it would help us grow our reach across the state, since we don't currently have a strong network in terms of individual journalists, especially those who work for larger news organizations.

So in late 2017, we created and began distributing a form to collect interest among New Jersey communicators for an ONA New Jersey group. We quickly amassed a list of nearly 100 interested people, including close to 20 who expressed interest in being part of the leadership team.

After training with ONA's national organization and a couple of organizing emails and phone calls with the leadership team, we were up and running. The Center continues to play the driving role in running the group, although we are hopeful that will change as more people get involved. So far we've hosted two events: one was a kickoff networking happy hour and the second was a data journalism training session.

Articles published and publicity

Among the 130 stories we wrote and published this year:

1. [What publishers need to know about Facebook's policy on political ads](#)
2. [We launched a newsletter to help you localize national news stories](#)

3. [Small publishers have 10 advertising advantages over large pubs — and here’s how to capitalize on them](#)
4. [New report shows New Jersey residents are frustrated with local news, want better government coverage](#)
5. [Audio, soundtracks and transcribing: Tools to make a journalist’s job easier](#)
6. [Need inspiration? Here’s how librarians, scientists and academics can help create impactful journalistic collaborations](#)
7. [Can national and local media find a sustainable way to collaborate? We’re trying to figure that out](#)
8. [How to launch Voting Block for your 2018 state or local election](#)
9. [‘One of the most helpful things’: Pilot program provides tech help to NJ News Commons members](#)
10. [Looking back on five years of cooperative media in New Jersey](#)

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

1. [NJ Mobile News Lab wins Excellence in Journalism award](#) | Medium
2. [Who’s who in local news: A guide to the biggest brains and bank accounts in the fight for local journalism](#) | Nieman Lab
3. [NJCASA Awards 2018 Visionary Voice Award to Stefanie Murray](#) | NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault
4. [Center for Cooperative Media Creates Collaborative Journalism Database](#) | Editor & Publisher
5. [Combining investigative journalism with stand-up comedy can improve public engagement](#) | Journalism Research News
6. [How Voting Block Used Collaboration, Potlucks to Bring Together Newsrooms and Communities](#) | MediaShift
7. [Block by block, New Jersey news organizations are hosting potlucks and telling voters' stories](#) | Poynter
8. [This is what happens when you turn a governor’s election into a dating game](#) | Reveal
9. [How can collaborations between ethnic and mainstream outlets serve communities in the digital age?](#) | American Press Institute
10. [The 4 things successful newsroom collaborations share](#) | Poynter

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