



2024 IMPACT REPORT

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ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (the “Consortium”) was established in 2018 by the State legislature and governor as an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to fund initiatives to benefit New Jersey and in response to the growing local news crisis affecting communities across the state’s 21 counties.

As a first-in-the-nation project, the Consortium builds on the foundation laid by public media in the United States and reimagines how public funding can be used to address growing problems like news deserts and misinformation. The Consortium provides grants for projects that achieve the following goals:

- **Perform a public service:** Public funding for media in the United States historically has focused on supporting public-service news and information that fills gaps left by commercial media. The ongoing local news crisis in New Jersey has widened these gaps and left many communities without access to important information about where they live. The Consortium’s grantmaking will continue the rich legacy of public funding for media by supporting news and information that performs a public service and supports civic engagement in media-deficient communities.
- **Center community information needs:** People need access to a variety of news and information to have their basic needs met, to participate in their community and civic life, and to thrive and fully realize their potential. Too often, though, local media systems fail to meet people’s information needs – such as reporting that demonstrates a problem without offering actionable solutions, lacking information sources in languages other than English, or disseminating news in ways that don’t actually reach those who can benefit most. The information needs of New Jersey residents are at the center of The Consortium’s work, and we will dedicate resources to projects that allow greater access to news and information that improve people’s lives.
- **Support media that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive:** A media system that does not reflect and lift up the rich racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of New Jersey cannot serve residents adequately. The Consortium believes it is fundamental to support

ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM (CONT.)

a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive media system in order to create more informed and engaged communities and build a future generation of media makers that look and sound like the residents they serve.

- **Promote media by, with, and for:** It is essential that people can participate and lead in the creation of media. Listening, engagement, collaboration, and community ownership are essential priorities for the Consortium, and we will seek to support projects that democratize the journalistic and media-making process, promote equitable collaboration, center community participation and needs, and build the capacity for everyday people to help shape what local news looks like.
- **Provide training and education:** Media is something we all consume, but doing so with rampant disinformation and misinformation available across platforms has promoted distrust in community institutions. Historically, the privilege of creating media has not been available to people of all backgrounds unless they have the resources to do so. Better understanding how media works and creating it go hand in hand. Teaching people how to discern fact from fiction, responsibly consume media, and tell their own stories with impact is critical to strengthening news and information at the community level.
- **Strengthen networks and infrastructure:** No single outlet or project alone will be able to improve access to local news and information in New Jersey. Many conditions are required to create more informed communities and sustainable local media across the state. Efforts that build capacity, promote learning and cross-sector collaboration, and provide essential services are necessary to support those performing the essential functions of journalism and media-making.

The Consortium brings together six of New Jersey's leading institutions of higher education – The College of New Jersey, Montclair State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, Kean University, and Rutgers University – in partnership to address the lack of access to local news and information. The Consortium is eligible for funding from the State of New Jersey and can obtain funds from private foundations, individuals, and other charitable organizations. Montclair State University serves as the host university for the Consortium.

The Consortium received State funding of \$500,000 in FY2021, \$2 million in FY2022, \$4 million in FY2023, and \$4 million for FY2024. That has been supplemented by \$400,000 in foundation funding. To date, approximately \$8 million have been awarded in more than 80 grants to more than 50 organizations in 16 of New Jersey's 21 counties.

ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM (CONT.)

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium's 46 current grantees have projects with a variety of aims. Some projects act as a pipeline for journalists, creating pathways for up-and-coming reporters. Other projects create content that fills a specific void in the state's media ecosystem reporting, whether it be education, mental health, or Washington, D.C. news and Congressional delegation activities. Some projects deliver news to a specific community, such as a geographical region or an ethnic or racial group. And, some projects focus on providing information valuable to a community, such as COVID testing locations and availability. Finally, some projects provide in-depth investigative reporting, placing checks on those in power. When taken as a whole, the projects have had a profound impact in a variety of ways; describing the details of that impact, however, can be challenging.

As part of their grant requirements, Consortium grantees were asked to work with Center for Cooperative Media researcher Hanna Siemaszko to track their impact. After doing that work for several months, Siemaszko was able to analyze the effort and pull out key themes and learnings, which will be explored in detail in this report.

For Consortium grantees, impact can be categorized into two buckets: **impact on organizations** and **impact on the community**.

There are four subcategories of impact on the community. The first two are public sphere impacts, such as feedback from the public, and institutional/structural impact, such as changes to a policy or another organization. Additionally, some projects generated a quantitative impact on the community, such as an increase in the number of people viewing an outlet's content or attending an organization's events. A final example of impact on a community is cultural impact, which is defined by researchers as long term change of a community's foundations, individuals, and other charitable organizations. Montclair State University serves as the host university for the Consortium.

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The second bucket, organizational impact, has three subcategories: deliverables (e.g., story counts or events held); institutional/structural (e.g., partnerships); and cultural (e.g., change in one's organizational mindset).

The grantees are very different from one another; therefore, the impact they produce varies greatly across the projects. There also are some commonalities. Each of the impacts is represented in the findings herein, except for cultural impact on communities, likely because that impact occurs over time, and most of the Consortium grantees have been funded only for a brief period of time. Additionally, cultural impact is the hardest category to demonstrate. Deliverables and public sphere are the kinds of impact seen with the greatest frequency. This correlates with findings from quantitative analysis that grantee deliverables, such as stories, events, or trainings, are generating narratives within the community which are indicative of the grantee's influence.

Most projects are still in the early stages of development and will only show significant impact later on, as the work grows and matures. However, to institutionalize impact tracking, it is essential to build organization capacities to perform these tasks from an early stage. This can be accomplished mostly with training and increased funding.

IMPACT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Impact, defined for the purposes of this paper as the measurement of the successes and failures of philanthropy-funded projects, has become increasingly popular in the news industry.

Analytics are often understood as a precursor to impact. The advent of analytics software and other metric-tracking technologies producing real-time dashboards brought greater insight into audiences and were an opportunity for revenue generation (Nelson and Tandoc, 2019). That said, some critiques of the prevalence of analytics software tied to journalism have emerged, mostly in regard to how interpreting such data may affect professional autonomy and editorial decision-making (Christen and Petre, 2020; Tenor, 2023). Some have argued that analytics fail to serve the public good by prioritizing content that ‘does well’ over content that otherwise would be prioritized for other reasons; in other words, the news provider is giving the public what they want at the expense of what they need (Tandoc & Thomas, 2015; Nelson and Tandoc, 2019).

Impact emerged as an alternative to analytics, often in nonprofit settings, where philanthropy is a major source of revenue and an impact report is increasingly an expected requirement (Rosenstiel, et.al., 2016). Impact can be a more holistic image of an organization’s successes, often including both quantitative and qualitative metrics within the scope of what is defined as ‘doing well’ (Rosenstiel et al., 2016). Konieczna and Powers (2016) discuss how funders mainly desire impact when it comes in the form of policy changes, whereas Rosenstiel, et.al. explains in the same year how funders often request metrics which convey reach in impact reports, e.g., traffic; however, Rosenstiel also mentions that approximately a third of funders request qualitative evidence of increased awareness or changes in public opinion (2016). It must be noted, however, that nonprofit outlets must show that they are meeting an educational need in society, and thus, ‘doing well’ becomes intrinsically tied with serving the public good (Mitchell et.al., 2013).

What makes the Consortium different from other ventures seeking to enhance local news and information is that the Consortium is largely publicly funded. Accordingly, tracking impact carries the extra challenge of demonstrating its importance and value to legislatures and taxpayers.

Almost inevitably, not all impact will be captured. While quantitative impact data – page views, unique visitors, social media followers – are relatively easy to gather, qualitative data are more difficult and time-intensive. It requires institutionalizing impact tracking within an organization, which requires a

mindset shift and staff capacity. Before tracking impact, one must first be able to recognize accomplishments as impact. Only then can grantees start developing a process in which they capture their impact in a systematic way. This shift in mentality, and habit, is crucial for successfully capturing impact.

METHOD + CAVEATS

The process of creating a method for tracking impact required a great deal of experimentation and modification as more was learned about what kinds of impact the Consortium's diverse grantees generate. Consortium grantees are broad in their range of production, content creation, and community activity: for example, some grantees are training community members in journalism and media literacy, some are arts organizations communicating change through art installations, others are newsletter-based outlets that cover one of New Jersey's many ethnic communities with long-form stories. Yet, this only scratches the surface of the kinds of organizations the Consortium is funding.

As a result, the taxonomy for impact must be broad enough to capture all of the unique elements a grantee has to offer, while simultaneously being detailed enough to provide some nuance for an analysis. Sarah Stonbely, the previous research lead for the Consortium, created the organization's first iteration of impact-tracking taxonomy, consulting with Impact Architects and using their [Impact Tracker](#) and taxonomy as a baseline. The taxonomy was refined after speaking with this year's grantees and assessing their impact-tracking needs.

The categories of impact that Consortium grantees track are as follows:

Impact of CIC program/grant on individual grantees

Types:

- **Deliverables:** what your organization produces or does as a result of the grant (story counts, service hours). The grantees are diverse in what they produce. Some are purely journalistic outfits, creating content and delivering news stories to diverse audiences. Others measure their work in the number of art installations commissioned or how many trainings have been run in a grant period.
- **Institutional/structural:** the organization grows or changes (e.g., partnerships, new hires, new skills learned, trainings, increases in volunteers). The changes to an organization's structure are an often overlooked metric. Institutional growth may indicate steps toward greater capacity to serve the community.

Impact of grantee work on communities

Types:

- **Quantitative:** the reach of an organization's work (e.g., web metrics, social media likes, attendees at events, etc.). Quantitative impact is where reach in a variety of metrics is considered: digital metrics are taken into account, but also include everything from attendance at events to gallons of water delivered to citizens. These metrics, however, are when grantees are overperforming - when a story gains more traction than usual or an event garners more interest in terms of participation.
- **Public sphere:** influence on public discourse or other places in the public sphere (e.g., a third party promotes an organization's work; winning an award; testimonials from the public, job placements, etc.). Crucial to Public Sphere impact is showing that the grantee's work had an influence on someone or an organization. Testimonials from the audience or public officials, awards given, job placements after a pipeline program, and re-publications are examples of how grantee work had an influence and how others engaged with their work.
- **Institutional/structural:** e.g., policy change, other organizations change because of another organization's work. Institutional/Structural impact, when referring to impact on communities, can entail government intervention or political change. It can also refer to catalyzing a change in another organization's structure or policies.
- **Cultural:** long-term change in ways of thinking or behaving resulting from an organization's work (e.g., climate journalism increasing awareness of climate change). Cultural impact shows a shift in a community mindset surrounding a particular issue or topic over a span of time. Like Public Sphere impact, Cultural impact shows influence - but here it shows widespread and long-term change as a result of grantee work surrounding a particular issue area.

Impact on grantees is often overlooked but shows the immediate results of the CIC funding; in other words, this impact shows what changes happened in the organization and what the organization produced with the grant funding.

Impact on communities is what people typically understand as impact; this encapsulates everything from overperforming in traffic to policy changes, from an article being republished to evidence of a long-term change in a community's awareness around a given issue.

Caveats

There are some challenges that are important to consider in this report, all of which must be taken into account when considering the results of the impact report. First and foremost, there is uneven reporting across the data set depending on the capacity of grantees. Those with a greater capacity have more time to dedicate to impact tracking. Second, impact tracking was only just made mandatory for grantees this year; it was optional but encouraged in previous years. Therefore, there is greater impact data from those who opted to participate in previous years; this also correlates to those who have a greater capacity to do this work. Third, since this was previously optional, there was resistance from some grantees — many still saw this as an optional task or found it too difficult to add to their already busy schedules. Fourth, approximately half of the grantees received funding in June of 2023, whereas half received funding right before the start of 2024; therefore, some have made more progress in their projects than others simply because of timing. And, fifth, a transition took place from Stonbely to Siemaszko in holding the responsibility for impact tracking, which led to some instability in collecting this year's impact data.

CIC-FUNDED IMPACT: 2022-2024

The mandate and goal from the founding statute of the Consortium is to “...to advance research and innovation in the field of media and technology...” Therefore the impact from the projects it funds must advance that goal. To learn more about the 46 current grantees, please see the index. To provide context, a brief summary is provided describing the kinds of impact seen from grantees in 2024.

Of the 46 projects funded this year, 37 completed entries in their individual impact trackers. All told, the grantees reported 624 instances of impact. Of those 624 instances, 53.2% of the anecdotes were impact on the organization, and 46.8% were impact on the community. The slight tilt towards impact on the organization is likely because many projects are still in their early stages of development.

Of the impact on the community, 72.2% of the instances of impact fell in the category of “public sphere.” The highest frequency of impact seen in impact on the organization fell in the category of “deliverables” (53%). These numbers are extremely promising, as can be deduced from grantee deliverables, whether, for example, in feedback from the public, re-publications of content, or job placements after a training program.

The impact collected was as diverse as grantees themselves, and as a result of the impact-tracking efforts, the Consortium collected inspiring stories of impact from across the state. The next section outlines a few of the projects that saw significant impact this year.

Civic News Company, Chalkbeat Newark

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS



About the grantee

Chalkbeat Newark aims to foster civic engagement in the city's public schools through its rigorous and in-depth education reporting. Much of its funding from the Consortium is devoted to reporting on school segregation litigation, but also supporting its [Student Voices program](#), which trains local high school students how to write stories about the issues shaping their lives and education.

Institutional/structural impacts on the community

One area of focus for Chalkbeat Newark has been tireless reporting on the continuous racial harassment students and teachers faced in Newark's School of Global Studies (see articles by Jessie Gómez, "['I want Black students to feel valued': Newark Global Studies students describe pattern of racism](#)" and "['Racist slurs, parent pleas: Emails reveal long battle to address harassment at Newark's Global Studies'](#)"). As a result of Chalkbeat Newark's ongoing reporting, a study was conducted by Newark Public Schools regarding the racial and cultural dynamics at the school. This is an example of institutional/structural impact on the community. The Newark Teachers Union followed Chalkbeat's articles and pushed for greater transparency on the issues the school was experiencing. After attempting to gain access to the report with a [public records request](#), which was denied by Newark Public Schools, union officials took further action. They filed a lawsuit seeking to order the release of the report. [Superior Court judge ordered the Newark Public Schools district to hand over the report, and will make a decision as to whether it can be made publicly available.](#) This is yet another example of

institutional/structural impact on the community.

Another area where Chalkbeat Newark has seen impact is through its Student Voices program, spearheaded by Gabrielle Birkner alongside her other responsibilities as Features Editor and Fellowship Director. She works with two juniors and seniors in high school per fall and spring as they work through two stories from conceptualization to publication, meeting regularly for virtual workshops. One of the fellows wrote a piece about his coming out experience and it was incorporated into his school's English curriculum. This kind of change on an external organization is an example of institutional/structural impact on the community. Institutional/structural impact on the organization

Regarding segregation litigation, Chalkbeat Newark has been extensively following the court case of Latino Action Network vs. NJ. Currently, where advocacy groups are attempting to appeal a mixed ruling stating that they were unable to definitively prove that the state's education system is socioeconomically and racially segregated across every district. The ruling also found that the state failed to remedy segregation present in a large portion of the state's school districts, and rejected the state's defense that it should not be held responsible. To cover this issue with more breadth and provide greater insight, Chalkbeat Newark formed a small collaborative with local news organizations, including Gothamist/WNYC, NJ Spotlight, Village Green, Press of Atlantic City, Montclair Local, Central Desi, and Jersey Bee. The collaboration, a form of institutional/structural impact on the organization, culminated in the production of more than 20 stories, and an example of deliverables, and ended with an event titled "State of Segregation" at the Newark Public Library, on October 26, 2023. The event — a panel discussion featuring academics, journalists, teachers, and students exploring the issue and lived experience of school segregation — was well-attended, with more than 60 participants.

Takeaways

Overall, Chalkbeat Newark's impact has been both organizational and on the community - the most powerful impact has driven institutional and structural change through the inspiration of political movements leading to court filings and legislative action.

Slice of Culture



PHOTO: GLENN CLARK

About the grantee

Slice of Culture is a small, local newsroom based out of St. Peter's University, serving Hudson County. Slice of Culture creates media that caters to the changing demographics of Hudson County. The two leaders of the newsroom, Neidy Gutierrez and Adrienne Romero, are reimagining how their newsroom can gain the attention of readers, especially Gen Z readers, in their community. They emphasize that it's important to respect standard journalistic practices and ethics in terms of how Slice of Culture conducts its reporting, as they strive to deliver information in a way that reaches their audience. Also important is reflecting the community they are trying to serve; their 12-person team is primarily people of color.

Impact on the community

The response from the public indicates that Slice of Culture's approach is worthy of consideration. Visits to Slice of Culture's website have increased by 57.3% since the organization received its grant from Consortium and just surpassed 1,000 followers on Instagram. This increase in reach is an example of quantitative impact.

Even more fascinating, however, is the response from readers in the form of story ideas pouring in from community members, suggesting that Slice of Culture reporting is not only seen as fact-based but also as trustworthy. These tips from the public are a form of public sphere impact. For example, People's Park Foundation reached out to them to cover the

different opinions on the Liberty State Park Project, which is a current debate in Jersey City regarding the future of the state park as it undergoes remediation and restoration. The story that was written showed both sides of this contentious debate. Additionally, Slice of Culture was given a tip about a local Puerto Rican percussionist named Little Johnny Rivero. As a result, the organization produced a story and a video about his life, his inspiration, and his music. Finally, a graduate from Memorial High School in West New York, N.J., asked Slice of Culture to write about the high school's new soccer coach who was improving the soccer program at the school. The story they wrote emphasizes the drastic changes to player morale as a result of the change in coaching style. This story also was shared 55 times on Instagram.

Of particular note is peer recognition. Two Slice of Culture team members won awards this past grant year for their coverage, another form of public sphere impact. New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists (NJSPJ) awarded Adrienne Romero second place in sports coverage for her story "Undefeated Middleweight Steven Cosme Gets Toughness From New Jersey, Seeks To Continue Puerto Rico's Boxing Legacy." NJSPJ also awarded Kevin Guevara a 1st place award for best digital news video for his piece, "Rafiq'z Hair Cutters."

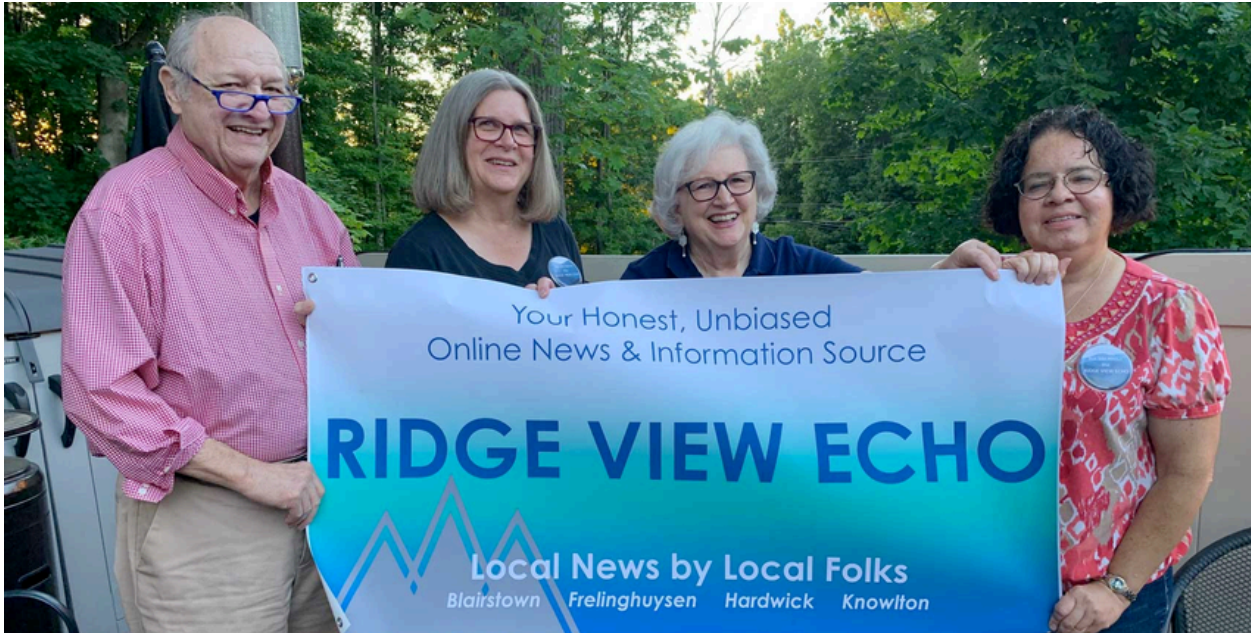
Impact on the organization

Slice of Culture has reported that the grant funding has changed the overall culture of the outlet. Though funding outside of the Consortium's support remains unstable, the team is "seeing the bigger picture" according to Gutierrez and Romero. They see a future for Slice of Culture now, according to Gutierrez and Romero, in which the outlet is the new medium for the Gen Z population of Hudson County.

Takeaway

The grant funding has enabled Slice of Culture to grow internally and see themselves in a new light, which marks an example of cultural impact within an organization. This growth as an organization has enabled them to produce award-winning content that engages their community, as evidenced by both the quantitative impact, such as the increased traffic, and the public sphere impact, such as the tips from the community and journalism awards.

Ridge View Echo



About the grantee

Ridge View Echo (RVE) is a small local news outlet that was born of Consortium funding in May 2021. Publishing content every two weeks, it aims to serve the townships of Frelinghuysen, Blairstown, Hardwick and Knowlton. It has seen tremendous growth since the start of the project: the leaders estimate that RVE had about 2,000 readers when it launched; at the end of its first year, it had 14,000 unique users. It only continues to grow; last year the organization brought in approximately 65,000 unique users to its site.

Impact on the community

As it continues to grow, RVE is having an increasing impact on its community. This is evident in the positive feedback it regularly receives from readers, an indication that relationships are being forged between community members and the outlet. Further, it may be an indication of trust in a news provider, as well as a form of public sphere impact. In a routine survey by RVE, the responses were overwhelmingly positive with feedback like, "I am aware of what's happening in Blairstown. Keep up the good work!" or "I appreciate learning more about our local businesses!" Similarly, Ridge View Echo often receives praise via email, such as this message from Pete Peterson, the Frelinghuysen fire chief, who said that "'Ridge View Echo' fills a wonderful void! Thank you!"

It is not surprising that RVE is filling a void. From February 2022 through March 2024, the organization published 1,360 posts, or deliverables, which includes all original content,

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

obituaries and press releases. RVE has an agreement with Newbaker Funeral Home where it is allowed to post all obituaries that are printed on the funeral home's website. RVE also has a partnership with Blair Academy, where the outlet is allowed to post all articles pertaining to the Academy's Society of Skeptics visiting artists and guests that appear on the school's website. RVE also has a volunteer columnist, Jennifer Correa-Kruegel, Warren County Naturalist, Warren County Department of Land Preservation, who has provided articles on nature and wildlife free of charge to RVE since October 2023. Correa-Kruegel sees RVE as a valuable and reliable platform for education: "I look at writing articles as a way of educating people about our environment and therefore, as a part of my position in Warren County as a Park Naturalist. I feel like Ridge View Echo has [a] reputation for providing quality content to the local community and I have been honored to be a part of it in this capacity."

Also indicative of RVE's reputation as being a beacon for quality content is the traffic it garners, which also is a form of quantitative impact. Some of its top-performing articles get anywhere between 750 to 1,500 pageviews. One obituary, a tragic story about the loss of a 13-year-old boy from Blairstown, reached more than 1,900 people.

Takeaway

RVE's impact shows that its community is looking to it for reliable local news, as shown in the deliverables it produces (e.g., story counts), its quantitative impact (e.g., the instances where stories over-perform in traffic), and public sphere impact (e.g., consistent positive feedback from the public).

Morristown Green

About the grantee

Morristown Green is a hyperlocal news outlet that has been serving Greater Morristown, Morris Township and Morris Plains since late 2007. It was launched as a pilot project for The Star-Ledger, with Kevin Coughlin as Morristown Green's editor and its public face. Coughlin has owned the publication since 2010, producing much of its content and training many of the outlet's reporters and volunteers.

Impact on the community

The outlet is the epitome of "all-hands-on-deck." Currently Morristown Green is composed of a staff of eight freelancers, with a few more in the pipeline, featuring two former newspaper reporters, a school teacher and a few volunteers.

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

Additionally, Morristown Green has a number of unpaid op-ed contributors who regularly submit columns to the outlet. One example is Linda Stamato, the Co-Director of the Center for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. She contributes multiple times monthly on articles about conflict and mediation. As an active member in the Morristown Community, she serves on the trustee board of the Morristown and Morris Township Library Foundation and is a commissioner of the Morristown Parking Authority. Also submitting monthly columns is Barbara Franz, Ph.D., a Morristown resident and professor of political science at Rider University, on the topic of immigration.

Another approach that Morristown Green takes is forging close relationships with youth. Every Monday, the outlet posts Morristown High School's Colonial Corner News video report, produced by students. After Morristown Green established this partnership, TAPinto Morristown, another local news outlet, followed suit and established a partnership of its own with the high school paper. Additionally, a local high school student contributes coverage of school and local events. Finally, Morristown Green introduced The Near Side, a weekly comic strip by a local 4th grader.

The Consortium's funding has been fundamental to Morristown Green's growth: it has eased financial pressures on the outlet, allowed Coughlin to buy insurance, and enabled him to hire additional freelancers. One of the freelancers has produced roughly 20 stories. Morristown Green has produced since the start of its Consortium funding (between June 1, 2023, and March 18, 2024) 600 articles, or deliverables.

It cannot, however, be assumed that this growth is a direct result of Consortium funding — Morristown Green thrives because there is demand. Coughlin regularly gets stopped by community members who urge him to continue his work. This type of feedback from the public is considered public sphere impact. In one instance, a local cop told Coughlin, "I read your stuff all the time. I think you are pretty fair," while on another occasion a public librarian said to him, "What would we do without you to inform us?" Morristown Green's growing reach also demonstrates this demand, which can be seen as a form of quantitative impact. Since June 2023, MorristownGreen posts have had 1.4 million interactions on Facebook, where the outlet has more than 16,000 followers.

Takeaway

Morristown Green has managed to capture the attention of its target audience not only by producing local relevant stories, or, its deliverables, but also by forging partnerships with various stakeholders in the Morristown area. The "all-hands-on-deck" approach exemplifies how committed the volunteers (all local residents) are in keeping Morristown Green operational. This impact on the public sphere — which comes in the form of feedback from the public — shows just how necessary this outlet is for the community.

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

Contributor Stamato describes Morristown Green’s impact succinctly: “It’s a stark reminder, with so many news deserts dotting the nation’s landscape, to keep our eyes on our prize, Morristown Green, our community’s public square. Without it, Morristown would not know itself, its residents would be less likely to engage in civic life, and our future would feel less secure.”

Stories of Atlantic City, Stockton University



About the grantee

Stories of Atlantic City (SOAC) is a collaborative project based out of Stockton University that focuses “on telling restorative, untold stories about the city and its people.” The project aims to share information and stories that inspire “hope and change and highlights resilience despite challenges.” The project takes a multifaceted approach to information sharing, from teenage reporter pipeline projects, to artist meetups and intergenerational story exchanges.

Impact on the community

SOAC organized a Teen Reporter Camp in August 2023, in partnership with Atlantic City Youth Services, under the direction of founder Christina Noble before she left to take a job with Atlantic City. The program ran for three days and trained about 10 middle and high school students, where they worked with community members to learn about civic engagement and journalism, created media products, and learned how to use engagement tools. The program will be repeated in 2024.

Another event that garnered a lot of attention was the Intergen Reunion, which started in fall 2020. The project partnered with Christina Morus’ civil rights class at Stockton University. The students interviewed Black elders from Atlantic City about civil rights and published stories on the SOAC website. They later had a reunion on November 17, 2023.

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

arranged by Noble and Morus, with all the living elders, students and faculty, totalling more than 30 people. The group reminisced and reflected on the impact this experience left on the elders and the students, especially in regard to the critical importance of Black history education. SOAC later published a video showing the panel discussion, along with stories. On the subject of history, one of the elders reflected that, "Education is something you have to take serious[ly] because your children learn what they learn. They spend seven hours a day for 12 years in these classrooms with these teachers, and the teachers aren't giving them what they need."

This type of event lends hope to the community. One student remarked that "It was such an invaluable experience, there was so much I learned. The people of Atlantic City are so strong, they're so friendly." Another student participant spoke about the impact the project had on her: "You could read the best book, and it still just hits a lot deeper when you're hearing it from someone who lived and experienced it." As a result of this project, SOAC has been invited to Generations United, the Center for Cooperative Media's annual Collaborative Journalism Summit, and other speaking engagements to discuss its work.

SOAC also regularly arranges meetups to bring together local artists to discuss their relationship to art, their work, and their community: "Held monthly, the Artist Meetups seek to [invite communication between the communities](#) of Atlantic City artists, as well as to act as a bridge into the Atlantic City arts culture for artists of the greater South Jersey area who are interested in developing artistic relationships in the city." The feedback for these meetups is overwhelmingly positive. Frequent attendee Joyce Hagen says that, "The meetings foster connections between attendees and provide an opportunity for information sharing, but they also are structured so that each individual is encouraged to give deeper consideration to themselves and to assess how they as artists want to present themselves and their views to others." Another regular at these events, Kimisha Turner, discussed how valuable these meetups are for connection: "Being that I am new to the area, it has been a blessing to find the Stories of AC meetup group and connect with like-minded artists. The SOAC team [is] amazing at allowing all of us [to] be creative, honest, and vulnerable in [a] way that fosters a collaborative and empowering environment."

One final event organized by SOAC worth highlighting is the Douglass Day Transcribe-a-thon. The event on Feb. 14, 2024 (Frederick Douglass' chosen birthday) taught students and community members about Fredrick Douglass' life and work, and [helped transcribe and digitize his writings to make them searchable online in the Library of Congress](#). In a post-event survey, almost 65% of attendees said they strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "I am knowledgeable about Fredrick Douglass and his life." Additionally, a little more than 60% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "I am experienced with sharing knowledge and ideas in various formats, including transcribing, web-based communication, and handwritten texts." In essence, the event helped the majority of participants learn about Frederick Douglass' life while also developing valuable skills.

Takeaway

SOAC provides essential resources to Atlantic City community members for civic engagement — from journalism trainings to information exchanges (both examples of deliverables), the organization builds relationships across various constituencies in the community for a more dynamic and rich dialogue within Atlantic City. The feedback from the public (a form of public sphere impact) regarding these events indicates that the community not only appreciates these events, but desires more of them.



The Jersey Vindicator

About the grantee

The Jersey Vindicator, run by Krystal Knapp, aims to fill a gap in New Jersey’s news ecosystem, providing non-partisan, investigative and solutions reporting to the state’s residents, prioritizing stories that meet the needs of underserved communities. It reports on issues at the state, regional, and local levels.

Impact on the organization

Its most recent success is in its extensive reporting on New Jersey’s Open Public Records Act (OPRA).

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

The Vindicator broke an initial story in November 2023 about the Legislature's plans to revamp OPRA during a lame duck session. This story was shared by [Politico](#), and referenced on [NJ.com](#) (Star Ledger) and the [Stein Public Law Center blog](#). To keep tabs on changes to OPRA and legislative updates, the Vindicator convened a network of more than 30 journalists for exchanging information via Zoom. Participants discuss story ideas and also share stories. The network is currently called the NJ Media Government Transparency Working Group. The Vindicator shares its OPRA stories for republication through this network, which is made up of dedicated hyperlocals and some larger entities (e.g., the president of the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists is a member).

Impact on the community

Later in March 2024, the Vindicator [wrote an article about the abrupt gutting of the public records act \(OPRA\)](#), which Knapp said inspired people to start making calls to officials. People went on the record and pressured the legislature to table the bill, at least temporarily. The article was republished by numerous outlets, including [Society of Professional Journalists](#), [Morristown Green](#), [Jersey City Times](#), and [NJ Urban News](#). Soon after, the Vindicator secured an exclusive interview with [Congressman Andy Kim about the Open Public Records Act](#) bill, which led to more discussion. This interview was read by more than 7,000 people, according to the Vindicator's online metrics.

The next step that the Vindicator took was consulting a local government policy expert, Marc Pfeiffer, on the OPRA legislation and running an [editorial](#) and [solutions blog post](#) about his suggestions, which was picked up by [NJ.com](#) on the same day it ran. The bill was tabled a few hours later; [the Vindicator is referenced in NJ Insider, a political news website, which discusses the pausing of the bill.](#)

Takeaway

The Vindicator's impact has been twofold: on the organization and on the community. The former is indicated by its collaborative efforts, which are a form of institutional/structural impact. The latter is indicated by three distinct examples: a high-traffic story, a form of quantitative impact; the rallying of citizens to call public officials, or public sphere impact; and the tabling of the bill, a kind of institutional/structural impact.

Hopeloft, Inc., Follow South Jersey

About the grantee

Hopeloft, based in Bridgeton, is a community development organization with a mission to support marginalized communities and achieve social and economic justice, bringing about

lasting change. Follow South Jersey is a 5- to 6-week civic journalism training and reporting project run by Hopeloft that promotes public health in the state. It was initially funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2020. It received Consortium funding in 2021. Each session typically has three to five interns.

Impact on the community

We can see the quantitative impact of Follow South Jersey through the impressive reach of some of its stories. Since the start of its funding, the 21 Consortium-funded interns have produced more than 300 stories, or deliverables. While most of its stories range in reach from 250 to 5,000 pageviews, some the stories have garnered significant traffic. [One small business feature about the Barnsboro Inn](#) had 91,200 pageviews. [Another story about a dead humpback whale found on Long Branch Beach](#) generated 46,558 pageviews. [An article about the establishment of New Jersey's very first veterinary school at Rowan University](#) attracted 15,800 pageviews.

The fundamental impact that this project produces, however, is serving as a pipeline for students who desire a career in media or journalism. On January 11, 2024, Professor Kathryn Quigley (chair of Rowan University's Journalism Department) posted on LinkedIn expressing frustration at the lack of journalism internship opportunities in the South Jersey/Philadelphia area. In her post, which is a clear example of public sphere impact, she specifically mentioned Follow South Jersey as one of the few local organizations providing valuable internship experiences for young journalists in the area. From her post: "I remain grateful for WPHL-17, South Jersey Magazine, Wyanoke/Healio, and Follow South Jersey and NJ Family Magazine for consistently providing internship opportunities to my students. I truly appreciate all of you!"

The value of this internship as a pipeline is evident in the jobs secured by some of the internship alumni, another example of public sphere impact as it demonstrates that other organizations see Follow South Jersey's work as influential. In December 2023, one of its interns, Taja Johnson, finished her internship and immediately stepped into a full-time role as an Associate Editor at News Media Group. Another intern, Katie Francis, who worked with Follow South Jersey in Summer 2021, recently posted to LinkedIn that she accepted a job working with the Wilmington Blue Rocks as a part of the organization's Creative Services and Social Media Team.

Also indicative of this program's value as a pipeline are the examples of students who change their major to journalism either during or after this internship. One example is of a Freshman at Penn State, who, following her internship, changed her major to journalism and, with a reference letter from Follow South Jersey's internship coordinator, applied and was accepted at Fordham University as a transfer student. A second intern had worked as a

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

Production Assistant for Netflix, but decided to change careers to journalism. She enrolled in a masters program for journalism, and wanted real-world experience while still in school. She interned with Follow South Jersey toward the end of 2022, and in May 2023 completed a masters degree program. She plans to get a full-time job in journalism.

Takeaways

In summary, Follow South Jersey is a significant journalism pipeline and reporting project that simultaneously trains a new generation of reporters while contributing content in the local media ecosystem.

NJ Spotlight News

About the grantee

NJ Spotlight News, acquired by The WNET Group in 2019, is the state's largest watchdog outlet. The Consortium funded two projects for NJ Spotlight, which are detailed separately below.

About the first grant-funded project

First, NJ Spotlight was selected in 2021 to be a Report for America Newsroom, hiring mental health reporter Bobby Brier partially through Consortium funding. The purpose of Report for America (RFA) is for the host organization to provide mentorship, career training and experience to the RFA corpsmember, while the reporter is simultaneously producing quality content for that organization. Brier speaks of the importance of his coverage in New Jersey: "Mental health is one of the most pressing issues in the state today, but there has not been a reporting beat dedicated specifically to this critical topic — until now. Through the partnership between Report for America and NJ Spotlight News, I have been given the opportunity to report on this topic with nuance and depth to fill a void in statewide coverage and to write about an industry that is expected to have tremendous growth in the years ahead."

The success of Brier's beat at NJ Spotlight led to RFA granting it a second corpsmember, Hannah Gross, who focuses on education and child welfare. Gross believes her work fills a critical gap in New Jersey's media coverage. "As one of a few reporters covering education statewide, I'm often the only reporter at State Board of Education meetings and meetings of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees," she said. "Being in the room allows me to ask questions of education officials and stakeholders to add more depth and perspective to conversations about New Jersey's public schools."

Impact on the community

Since June 1, 2023, both Gross and Brier have each produced more than 60 stories, or deliverables — some of which had quantitative impact, as is shown by how they overperformed in the number of views they attained as compared to other NJ Spotlight news articles. For example, Gross' story "[NJ high schoolers must soon fill out college-aid form to graduate](#)," generated more than 26,000 pageviews; the story discusses how New Jersey high school students starting in the graduating class of 2025 will be required to fill out financial aid application forms to graduate from high school, as a way to open more doors to universities. Additionally, Brier wrote a story "[Moving patients with behavioral health crises out of the emergency room](#)" about how Overlook Medical Center in Summit, will move patients in behavioral health crises from the emergency room into a new unit specifically for their needs; the article attracted more than 3,000 pageviews.

Part of Gross' and Brier's responsibilities as RFA corpsmembers is to complete service projects. Brier volunteers weekly at George Washington Carver High School of Engineering and Science in Philadelphia where he assists in teaching the foundations of reporting. Gross volunteers once per week at Maplewood's Columbia High School and helps edit stories for its student newspaper, The Columbian. Describing Gross' impact on the paper, the student editor-in-chief says that "having Hannah assist us at The Columbian has been a tremendous help, especially considering our loss of a publication-related journalism class at Columbia. Over the course of the year, Hannah has helped reinforce and teach staff writers, editors and chiefs necessary journalistic skills to cultivate a successful publication." This type of feedback from the public is considered public sphere impact, as it describes the influence Gross has had on the publication's success.

About the second grant-funded project

The second Consortium-funded project with NJ Spotlight allowed the outlet to hire a Washington, D.C.-based news correspondent to provide regular reporting on federal developments affecting New Jersey.

Impact on the community

The correspondent hired, Ben Hulac, has produced more than 30 stories, or deliverables, to date since being hired in mid January 2024. Some of these stories have generated significant instances of traffic, or quantitative impact. An article "[New filing alleges Menendez urged NJ mayors to use lab with ties to his wife for COVID testing](#)" received 2,291 pageviews. The article discusses how Menendez persuaded mayors to use a lab for COVID testing that was paying his wife. A [story which discussed Menendez' forthcoming reelection announcement](#) received 2,194 pageviews. Another article, "[How Fred Daibes spent big on](#)

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

politicians long before being indicted in the Menendez case,” describes how Fred Daibes, who was recently charged with bribery, since the late 1980s, has given more than \$250,000 to politicians running for federal office. The article generated 2,210 pageviews.

The greatest impact of this project is that Hulac is filling a void. Hulac describes this:

There are conversations that only happen in the halls of Congress because journalists start them. In the month and a half since I received my congressional press badge, I've started a lot of conversations with New Jersey lawmakers.

Last month, Reps. Bill Pascrell and Bonnie Watson Coleman told me about their goals for Ukraine and a federal budget deal. Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill explained her fears about women's health care and Rep. Jeff Van Drew said he thinks in vitro fertilization is different from abortion. Senator Bob Menendez told me first of his election plans, and Rep. Donald Norcross vaguely hinted at the security threats of TikTok, the social media platform.

I don't claim any special powers. I'm not more talented than the rest of the congressional press corps. And I don't have decades' worth of highly placed sources. But none of these stories happen without me roaming the halls of Congress and pressing the New Jersey delegation for answers.

Plenty of states' delegations to Congress don't have reporters from regional publications to cover them. They walk to and from committee meetings and votes unscrutinized and without nosy reporters pestering them. I'm glad New Jersey is not one of those states, and I'm delighted to be in Washington minding the public's business. This would not happen without the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium.”

Takeaways

NJ Spotlight is making an impact by filling gaps in New Jersey's media ecosystem, especially in education and mental health coverage, and by employing one of the state's only Washington, D.C., correspondents. NJ Spotlight's work is essential to providing coverage of these topics, which is quantified through its **deliverables** (number of articles). Thus, it can be said that this coverage is valuable to the communities it serves as indicated by the **quantitative impact** it produces (e.g., over-performance in number of views).

Front Runner New Jersey

About the grantee

Front Runner New Jersey (FRNJ), run by Clyde Hughes, is a digital news website that covers the African American and Latino communities, as well as other marginalized groups, in South Jersey. FRNJ covers Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties. FRNJ has posted 201 news articles, or deliverables, since the start of its latest grant in August 2023, through mid-April 2024. FRNJ averages about 25,000 pageviews on its website per month.

Impact on the organization

One of the more unique civic engagement tools that FRNJ implements is its small business expos, where it (alongside event co-sponsor Bully Pest Management) arranges for approximately 20 local businesses to gather, ranging from real estate companies to the local NAACP chapter, to notaries and construction companies. These expos enable FRNJ to build relationships with the community, find advertising, and get tips for story ideas. Hughes has hosted three of these expos to date during this grant period. The expos have resulted in a multitude of advertising partnerships for FRNJ.

Impact on the community

The positive feedback, an example of public sphere impact, from the business leaders who attend these expos has been extensive. Tyrus Ballard, President of the Southern Burlington County Branch of the NAACP, said that, "The SJ Small Business Expos have been a phenomenal way to not only highlight minority-owned businesses but to be a hub for advocates and community servants in South NJ." Sarah L. Fraley, owner of C My Kolor Graphics, LLC, said of the expo that it "is a great way to network with local small businesses, non-profit organizations and startup business owners. It's an excellent way to promote your business and build new relationships in the South Jersey area." Wade Loatman, Owner, Bully Pest Management said, "This expo helps bring the Black and Brown entrepreneurs together in the South Jersey area and has made a huge impact on helping build relationships. These relationships help each other flourish and build strength in our community. Front Runner New Jersey has been a beacon by getting these businesses out to the public sector of New Jersey and highlighting their success and their impact in our community."

Takeaways

FRNJ has shown that bringing local businesses together for an expo yields not only positive feedback from the community, or public sphere impact, but potentially leads to increases in revenue via advertising partnerships, which is a form of institutional/structural impact on organization. This type of innovative approach might be instructive for local news outlets seeking ways of generating revenue via advertising.

South Jersey Information Equity Project



About the grantee

The South Jersey Information Equity Project (SJIEP) was conceived in 2019 through a partnership between the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University and the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. The goal of the SJIEP is to improve the quality and quantity of news produced by and for communities of color in South Jersey by supporting and elevating BIPOC media makers and connecting them with the resources they need to create content. SJIEP provides training to the fellows and places each participant in a partner newsroom for on-the-job experience and the chance to be mentored by a professional newsmaker. SJIEP has facilitated six trainings this year, ranging in topics from social media to editing and design. The eight fellows have produced about 20 stories, or deliverables, to date.

Impact on the community

The SJIEP partners with local BIPOC media organizations Black in Jersey, Front Runner New Jersey, Atlantic City Focus, and Scoop USA. These relationships are beneficial to the partner

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (CONT.)

newsrooms, as they receive extra help. Hughes from FRNJ said the relationship has had an impact on his outlet because “being based in Atlantic City, those counties (Burlington, Camden and Gloucester) are the hardest for me to get to and the writers have been great [at] helping me provide coverage in those locations.” Tennyson Donyea of Black in Jersey said of SJIEP: “Through this collaboration, we have been empowered to recruit and cultivate a diverse team of local journalists who not only share the same neighborhood but also the triumphs and struggles of their neighbors. This partnership has been instrumental in enriching our community reporting, allowing us to deliver more authentic, insightful, and impactful journalism that resonates deeply with our audience and upholds the essence of what it means to be a community-focused publication.” Thus, the local media makers are strengthened in their capacity to serve their audiences, both in terms of increasing their output, but also in producing content that better relates to the communities they cover.

The greatest impact of this project, however, is the growth of these new reporters and the opportunities they otherwise would not have received. The majority of them report an overall positive experience in a feedback survey. This is an example of **public sphere impact**, as it shows the influence of SJIEP on community members. When posed the question, “How do you feel being involved with SJIEP has impacted your career in journalism,” the responses had a common theme: building relationships. One fellow said in response, “Absolutely, by connecting me with writing professionals and mentors.” Another fellow explained, “Being involved with SJIEP has introduced me to other news professionals and expanded my network circle. It has also shown that working with a team can sometimes be better [than] working solo.” One other fellow mentions, “Yes, SJIEP has many resources that are sent out to our emails, by acting on them I got to be able to meet many other journalists in the NJ/PHL area.”

Another area where SJIEP excels is helping with career development. As Hughes described, “these writers have benefited by having edited and published stories they can add to their portfolios and show to potential outlets to be hired.” The pipeline created by SJIEP has seen one very promising result, and yet another example of public sphere impact. One former fellow, Charles Curtis, III, is currently a co-leader of the [South Jersey Community Reporters Project](#).

Takeaways

The SJIEP is a promising example of a journalism pipeline project for aspiring journalists of color. The **public sphere impact** it has seen indicates that the project is helping BIPOC community members who desire a future in journalism gain the skills and the connections necessary to pursue careers as reporters.

This index is composed of quotes or descriptions from the grantees about how they perceive their respective organizations and how they are fulfilling the mission of the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium.

Cranford High School

“The NJCIC grant for podcasting and film equipment has empowered students by providing hands-on training in community storytelling, journalism, and media production, fostering invaluable skills for effective communication and civic engagement. Through this initiative, students have gained practical experience in crafting narratives that amplify local voices, promote civic awareness, and catalyze positive change within their communities.” - Susan Ritter

Mental Health Association

The Mental Health Association of NJ, a nonprofit striving to improve the lives of adults and children struggling with mental health disorders and substance abuse issues, partnered with the NJCIC on a research project assessing community college student feedback to determine how students are receiving information about mental health services and their preferences on how they receive information on mental health services.

New Jersey YMCA State Alliance

“Community Conversations: Pandemic Perspectives, NJ’s COVID-19 Storytelling Project aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the pandemic’s impact on NJ communities and chart a path forward by gathering direct insights, experiences, and feedback from residents. Integrating resident public health priorities from the project’s story collection phases, the project’s third phase engages NJYSA’s network of NJ YMCA associations to facilitate dialogue around key policy and programmatic gaps to plan for collective action. Responses will include localized programming and advocacy around areas that address the ongoing needs of NJ residents from the pandemic and beyond.” - Julia Wieczorek

Vietlead

“VietLead’s JerseyRoots Project develops the leadership capacity of high school students in Camden City and Pennsauken Township by growing their skills for deep democracy, centering storytelling as a tool for civic engagement and communication using personal self-expression to connect the ‘me’ to the ‘we.’ Students strengthen skills for writing, reading, and analyzing information as part of learning about social and civic issues at local, regional, national, and

global scales using a year-round program design and curriculum arc. Most importantly, the project prioritizes students' transformation from a position of apathy and defeatism to a position of deep care and radical optimism in the face of overwhelming oppression, galvanizing them to organize fellow community members to build people power and take back control of our governing systems." - Bay Nguyen

Wayne Hills High School

"Wayne Hills High School is one of two public high schools in Wayne Township, Passaic County, serving a diverse community of learners. The digital journalism program at Wayne Hills seeks to train future journalists and citizens in media literacy, storytelling, technology, and understanding the power of local news and civic engagement. The Podcasting Studio gives students and staff the opportunity to learn cutting-edge technological skills and engage with students and community members in an immediate, engaging manner." - Sarah Schillaci

NJ Advance Media

Project faltered, grant returned

Asbury Park Media Collective

"The Asbury Park Reporter (APR) is an online newspaper focused on grassroots local news production and media literacy that inspires and supports civic engagement and community building in Asbury Park. APR provides a vital service to residents by livestreaming City Council and Board of Education meetings and events, shining a spotlight on government activities and providing a microphone to our community members. Our online newspaper serves as an incubator for emerging community reporters and local media makers of all ages to film, write and publish stories and columns about the issues that directly affect their lives. Our priority is to give a voice to those who are often underrepresented and most at risk of being displaced by hyper-gentrification in our changing city." - Kerry Butch

DataSourceNJ Inc.

"The mission of DataSourceNJ Inc, a 501c3 organization, is to construct sustainable models for local investigative journalism. In conjunction with New Jersey Institute of Technology's Ying Wu College of Computing, DataSourceNJ's flagship project is the NJ Data Repository.

The Repository will offer users free, unfettered, and objective insights regarding public interest matters involving NJ's and NJ localities' government performance and other quality of life matters. The platform will be a continuously operating, comprehensive online, relational data repository containing local, county, and state government reports and data and related public interest content. Embedded within the Repository will be user interface, analytical and presentation tools enabling users of all levels of sophistication to benefit. In so doing, users, especially journalists, will focus on value-added activities, liberated from the opportunity cost of sourcing and working with data." - Michael Goldstein

For years now, we have been training community leaders to work as street reporters (reporteros callejeros), reporting the news and covering stories that have been ignored by the corporate media. As of today, we have community journalists based in Passaic County, Hudson County, Essex County, Union County, Middlesex County, Ocean County, Mercer County, and Cumberland County, and they use the platform, training, equipment, and stipends provided by Radio Cosecha to produce media and cover stories of importance to their communities. Radio Cosecha journalists have hosted Know Your Rights trainings for tenants in communities rife with abusive landlords, we have worked with lawyers and other orgs to hold and promote DALE (deferred action for labor enforcement) clinics, and we have covered local, statewide, national, and international issues and campaigns. From mass evictions in Plainfield to the (successful) fight for the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights in NJ, from rallies to demand a ceasefire in Gaza to the Salvadoran election (during which a Radio Cosecha journalist interviewed the FMLN's vice presidential candidate)—Radio Cosecha journalists have been on the ground, keeping our communities informed with accurate and reliable information. And in a media landscape awash with misinformation, Radio Cosecha earns the trust of its audience through its consistent dedication to journalistic integrity, and because the community journalists we work with are already trusted community leaders.

Thanks to the generous support of the Civic Information Consortium, we have recently been able to open a radio studio and community journalism training hub in the heart of downtown Elizabeth NJ, a working class neighborhood. This community journalism center is the first of its kind in New Jersey. With your continued support, this space will enable us to onboard a whole new generation of community journalists.” - Carlos Castaneda

Newark News and Story Collaborative

“At Newark News & Stories, our mission is to inform, engage, and empower residents through authentic and impactful storytelling. We are committed to improving the quantity and quality of civic information in Newark and Essex County, addressing the information needs of underserved communities, and nurturing better civic engagement and dialogue. Through innovative media production and community storytelling initiatives, we aim to bridge information gaps, amplify diverse voices, and foster a more connected and informed community. Investing in community storytelling and journalism training is essential for building a more equitable and sustainable media ecosystem that serves the needs of all residents.” - Brit Harley

NJ Coalition to End Homelessness

“The Garden State Leaders is a free leadership and advocacy training program that since 2015 has been giving NJ residents with lived experience of homelessness and poverty an opportunity to learn how to effectively tell their stories and further their advocacy goals while learning about the issues that impact them. Each session focuses on different topics such as understanding how the legislative process works in NJ, opportunities to make a

difference on the local government level, working with the traditional media, and understanding how to utilize social media to further an advocacy agenda. In addition, the over 100 graduates of the Garden State Leaders program interact regularly together to share their successes and struggles and identify opportunities to help further their advocacy goals and engage with their communities.” - Kate Leahy

Stories of Atlantic City, Stockton University

“Stories of Atlantic City spent the last year developing new strategies to reach our community and provide innovative strategies for engagement and education. From working with youth and undergraduate students to regular meetings with the artist community, we have focused on creating opportunities and events that center the city and its people. As an organization, we continue to be strategic with each project and honor community-centered storytelling, journalism and media production.” - Toby Rosenthal

Atlantic City Focus

“Atlantic City Focus provides a safe space where residents and natives can tell their own stories in their own way. We enlighten, inform, and entertain as we celebrate African American culture, history, and traditions. We also provide civic engagement information to the Atlantic City Community. Two of our finest accomplishments this year were creating the 2023 Atlantic City Focus Civic Engagement Guide and providing extensive election coverage, with support from the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium. Our 2023 general election coverage provided fair and balanced reporting and the Civic Engagement Guide continues to show our readers where to go to get the answers they desperately need. Our partnership with the NJCIC has helped us take our project to the next level and we are extremely proud of the work we have been able to do with the consortium's financial support.” - Mark Tyler

Black in Jersey

“With the support from the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, Black In Jersey has made significant strides in local storytelling and reporting. Our initiative to develop a dynamic social media-first news platform and citizen journalism training has subtly yet profoundly impacted how information is shared and consumed in our communities. This approach has not only connected more people to essential civic and public information but has also cultivated a space for dialogue and storytelling. Since receiving the grant, our digital presence has grown impressively, adding over 600 new followers on Instagram, a testament to our deeper connection with the community and our collective push towards sustainable media practices.” - Tennyson Donyea

Camden Fireworks

“Camden FireWorks (CFW) is partnering with Neighborhood Collaborative Community Gardens (NCCG) and Porter's Daughter's Garden (PDG) to document community-centered perspectives on environmental justice. As a result of these collaborations, CFW is producing

a documentary of NCCG's work in community gardening and youth development as well as creating a children's book by PDG on the benefits of pollinator gardens in Camden. CFW's mission is to use art to create social change. Documenting these narratives is but the latest in our nearly eight years of success in activating our work in a non extractive and inclusive way." - Asiyah Kurtz

Camden Parent & Student Union

"The Camden Parent and Student Union serves as an entity empowerment and connectivity in New Jersey communities. By fostering dialogue, leveraging innovative technologies, and amplifying community voices, it addresses the pressing need to enhance civic information, nurture engagement, and bridge gaps in media representation and access, especially for underserved populations. It embodies a commitment to equipping individuals with the skills and platforms necessary for improving the quantity and quality of civic information in New Jersey communities with useful government data and access to public information." - Byheijja Sabree

Center for Cooperative Media / MSU

Project: **South Jersey Information Equity Project** - "The South Jersey Information Equity Project was conceived at the Center for Cooperative Media in late 2019 through a partnership with the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. Its goal is to address media inequity in South Jersey, specifically by seeking to improve the quality and quantity of news and information produced by and for communities of color. SJIEP seeks to support and elevate Black media makers, specifically in Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem, Cumberland, and Atlantic counties — including those who identify as journalists and those who do not — and connect them with resources, funding, and platform partners to share their work. The project also aims to build trust and community connections through media making and strengthen the networks between Black journalists, media, and communities in South Jersey." - Adrienne Bauldock

Project: **Statewide Voting Guide** - This project was a partnership between the Center for Cooperative Media and NJ Spotlight News which created a 2023 voting guide: Spotlight's NJ Decides 2023. The partnership filled the voting guide with as many additional stories and state senate and assembly candidate Q&As as possible. In addition, the group sought to translate some key articles into multiple languages.

Project: **Research and Development** - This funding goes towards the impact tracking budget for the CIC. Additionally, the funding covers the Center for Cooperative Media's other research aims.

Project: **The NJ News Commons Spanish Translation Service** - "The NJ Spanish Translation News Service is an initiative to harness the state's best statewide reporting and make it

available to news organizations that serve Spanish-speaking communities in New Jersey. Due to language barriers in the Latino communities and the lack of nuanced and informed reporting from their languages and perspectives, many Latino immigrants in the state are at the bottom of the news chain. And with limited translated news information, if any, from state and federal health agencies, these already underserved audiences are more vulnerable to disinformation.

That's why partnering with the largest Spanish-language and mainstream media outlets in the state to translate statewide news into Spanish is vital. The NJ News Commons Spanish Translation Service will aim to fill this gap, building on the Center for Cooperative Media's work over the last two years partnering with ethnic and community media across the state to translate important COVID-19 and election content. A nuanced Spanish translation, culturally and linguistically, is crucial to mitigate language barriers and narrow information gaps in the Latino immigrant community, most especially during the election or an unprecedented public health crisis." - Anthony Advincola

Central Desi

"Central Desi is a news outlet serving New Jersey's fast-growing South Asian population. Our fellowship project funded by NJCIC enabled us to bring on four young journalists of South Asian descent to report on news, culture and lifestyle stories relevant to the community. During the six month fellowship, they also received regular trainings from a host of established journalists across mediums, and the project is culminating in an in-person event featuring South Asian authors at the Princeton Public Library next month. We have successfully trained the fellows and empowered them to launch careers in journalism, while nurturing better civic engagement and dialogue through regular reporting on our community." - Ambreen Ali

Civic News Company, Chalkbeat Newark

"Chalkbeat is the only nonprofit news organization in New Jersey that focuses on a single topic: education. Our mission is to inform actions that lead to better outcomes for children and families, especially in low-income communities where improvement can have the most impact. Chalkbeat Newark fosters civic engagement in Newark's schools through our journalism. Chalkbeat's targeted, community-centered reporting has followed key issues, from school segregation, to covid relief spending, and beyond. We recently launched a texting service to keep parents and stakeholders informed about school board meetings, aiming to reach those unable to attend. Chalkbeat Newark also published a 2024 school board election guide to help our audience learn about prospective members' agendas in a clear manner. Chalkbeat is a necessary resource in Newark, a documented news desert. Rutgers found that Newark has the lowest income among New Jersey cities, yet has far fewer original, local news outlets than comparable New Jersey cities. Chalkbeat Newark's work meets a critical need not filled by traditional news media. Through unbiased reporting,

our journalists help the community examine how schools are operating, scrutinize key policy developments that often happen behind closed doors, and gain access to important data that would not otherwise be transparent.” - Joanna Kadieva

Clinton Hill Community Action

“Our goal is to improve the quality of life for our neighbors by engaging and training 50 neighborhood residents to tell their stories, using the arts as a tool for community change. As a community, we seek to empower residents with story-telling skills to advocate for themselves and address the access to information gap by providing training for students on story-telling as a tool for advocacy and teaching high school students how to develop programming on multimedia platforms to facilitate community dialogue by adopting a policy advocacy agenda using the insights from neighborhood residents.” - Rhenotha Whitaker

coLAB Arts

“Teatro Esperanza seeks to support community-based narrative development and storytelling, and de-center institutions by training Spanish-language community members in New Brunswick in oral history, participatory action research, and performance. The resulting theater performances synthesize and respond to community issues in real time, providing relevant information and spaces for community dialogue. Teatro Esperanza will be producing two performances this year, with the first at the end of the summer responding to oral histories collected through 2023, and a second performance this winter responding to oral histories collected in 2024. Community members continue to drive narrative development, oral history, and research work, with support from professional practitioners.” - Daniel Swern

Corporation for New Jersey Local Media

“The Northern NJ News Collaborative is a group of media outlets using solutions journalism to report on important issues in New Jersey. Its ‘Stormwater Matters’ initiative reports on solutions to the issues of flooding and stormwater management, and uses that reporting and community engagement initiatives to increase individual knowledge of the importance of stormwater management, improve the connection between local media outlets and their audiences, and nurture more civic engagement within the communities where it reports.” - Amanda Richardson

Front Runner New Jersey

“Front Runner New Jersey is the news and information website that covers the Black and Latino communities in South Jersey highlighting the positive news in these groups and [other] communities of color along with the topics and people the mainstream media can no longer reach. For the past two years, Front Runner New Jersey has partnered with local small businesses to put on network and collaboration events called the South Jersey Small Business Expo. This bi-monthly event has allowed Front Runner New Jersey to learn about

small business, owners and events going on [in] the community that may have been hard to reach while giving these businesses much needed news coverage and exposure. We have been able to grow our readership and allow [ourselves] to immerse ourselves into the community at the grassroots level. Front Runner New Jersey has allowed [people to meet face-to-face] to talk about their interest and concerns about the media and community to build a faithful readership following and messengers who will spread the word about what we're doing.” - Clyde Hughes

Hammonton Gazette

“The local Spanish translated pages [Noticias] published in the Hammonton Gazette newspaper play a crucial role in supporting the goals of the CIC and our own. By providing accurate and relevant content in Spanish, they contribute to improve the quantity and quality of civic information provided to our large non-English speaking residents who are employed mostly in the agricultural farmlands in the community who otherwise have no resource for such news. Here at the Hammonton Gazette, we were able to turn a grant designed to employ students, professionals, and community members in community storytelling, journalism, and media production into a sustainable practice. That grant was not renewed last year because we were able to develop a sustainable system to continue that work without governmental assistance. We look forward to continuing our partnership with CIC and presenting grant proposals that continue, extend, and enhance our service to New Jersey residents.” - Craig Richards

MorristownGreen

“MorristownGreen.com is committed to filling the void left by legacy media that once competed vigorously in Greater Morristown. We show up. Every day. We have eyes on our public officials. We cover their meetings—especially the ones they would prefer that we didn’t. Like the zoning board. And the housing authority. Our coverage forced the town to deal with disgraceful conditions foisted on tenants during privatization of their public housing. We show up for trials. And run down tips, hot and cold, from a readership that demands and deserves truth. We cover the school plays and cultural events and personalities that make this a community. Morristown Green is where citizens comment about galloping development and soaring taxes. We endeavor to keep things civil. It’s a high-wire act; it has been since 2007. There is never enough money, enough time, enough sleep. “The Daily Miracle,” for sure, made possible in part by devoted readers—\$5 a month from a widow in seniors housing, \$500 from parents of a teen who asked them to donate in lieu of a birthday gift. Amazing, engaged volunteers are a big part of the story: From a 4th-grade cartoonist and high school- and college correspondents (who we mentor), to insightful columnists, a library historian, and retirees with skills and life experience to share. And — significantly — Morristown Green soldiers on thanks partly to C.I.C. support. This has enabled M.G. to recruit freelancers for the first time, replace outdated equipment, start a long-overdue overhaul of the website, and plug operational gaps as local advertising grows increasingly challenging. Many thanks to the C.I.C. for helping Morristown Green to continue serving an audience that has come to depend on us.” - Kevin Coughlin

New Labor

“New Labor is a migrant worker rights center with 5,000 members, the majority of whom are recently arrived migrants from across Latin America. In our 25 years we have trained thousands of workers to identify and push for solutions to the hazards in their workplaces - from chemical hazards to low wages to discrimination from the boss and customers. After the past year of identifying leaders and compiling stories from across industries, we are launching a program to develop those leaders into community journalists. Our aim is to equip workers in the lowest paid, most hazardous and yet most “essential” jobs with the skills to document and share their stories. They will be trained to produce hard-hitting journalism that will situate the stories of their exploitation in context. They will craft stories that not only portray their struggles at work, but that help everyone understand exactly who benefits from exploiting migrant workers. With context, we can all come together for system-changing solutions.” - Anna Barcy

Newark Water Coalition

“Newark Community Voices has changed the way people view legacy media. News organizations often leave low socio economically disadvantaged people out of the camera lens. NCV has completely gone straight to the people to get their thoughts on what is happening in their community. What has been clear through our project is that there is opportunity in the gap between what is being reported and how that information is making it to community members. NCV views on its stories are gaining momentum and even was recently followed by Senator Booker. It is clear that tv news and print [are] still important, [but] Social media cannot be discounted. Newark Community Voices wants to live in that gap and make sure that all opinions and voices are being shared so that people know that news doesn't have to look like CNN or CNBC.” - Anthony Diaz

NJ Spotlight - Mental Health and Education Project

“Thanks to NJ CIC funding, NJ Spotlight’s Report for America project has created dedicated reporting beats for two key areas that were previously under-reported: mental health and education & child welfare. This project has given two young journalists invaluable long-term workplace and mentorship experiences, while dramatically increasing the coverage on these important subjects and better informing the reporting for the newsroom as a whole.” - Sylvia Baber

NJ Spotlight - DC Correspondent

“NJ Spotlight has been proud to recruit and host New Jersey’s D.C. Correspondent, thanks to NJ CIC funding. Through this project, the state once again has a dedicated reporter on the ground at the federal government level. Our D.C. reporter is dedicated to gaining access to people and civic information otherwise not available to news outlets in New Jersey, reporting for NJ Spotlight News on how developments on the federal level affect people on the ground in our state, and collaborating with newsrooms across New Jersey to make sure their information needs are met.” - Sylvia Baber

Public Square Amplified

“Public Square Amplified (PSA) is a grassroots local nonprofit newsroom founded by a team of Black women headquartered in Newark, New Jersey. PSA positions journalism as a civic tool and creates a pipeline for a new cadre of local journalists of color representing their geographic and ethnic communities. Our reporting centers on democracy, social and economic justice, racial equality, and the immigrant experience.

PSA positions our journalism to deconstruct our shared racialized space and the power of construct and context in curating and consuming news. PSA recognizes that non-white designated people must own the storytelling apparatus and shape our narratives if the fourth estate must exist as a call for democracy for all.” - Josie Gonsalves

South Jersey Climate News Project at Rowan University

“South Jersey Climate News is a collaborative, student-driven, environmental journalism initiative that explores the effects of climate change on a local and regional level in southern New Jersey. The goal is to better inform the public about the challenges of climate change in our communities and to explore potential solutions and ways to adapt. The project also seeks to diversify journalism education and to support local news organizations’ capacity for environmental reporting. We have collaborative agreements with three news partners – the Press of Atlantic City, Follow South Jersey and Green Philly – that republish and redistribute our work to a wider audience.” - Mark Berkey-Gerard

The Jersey Bee

“The Jersey Bee improves the quantity and quality of civic information in Essex County by producing thousands of verified local news briefs and distributing them through daily newsletters, social media, events calendars, and text messages. We prioritize delivering useful civic information that increases access to basic resources, improves community well-being, and supports social connections. One in six of the nearly 3,000 pieces of news we reported from October 2023 to March 2024 were ways for people to access aid or resources. One-third were upcoming local events accessible within 15 minutes. Ten percent were opportunities for volunteering or activism.” - Simon Galperin

Unidad Latina en Acción NJ

“Radio Jornalera NJ is an independent media outlet for the working class, where community issues are exposed and we come together to provide solutions by summoning experts and professionals. We build narratives about the working class, immigrants, men and women of color and laborers by using their voices, expressions, and culture. These stories come from experiences that give testimony to fellow laborers’ lives here in this country. Our vision is to give a voice to immigrant workers by amplifying their stories and needs. We envision being a safe space, an alternative media outlet where workers come to share experiences and knowledge based on community, solidarity, and respect.” -Ana Paola Pazmino

Hopeloft, Inc.

“Follow South Jersey provides local journalism for residents of South Jersey. Highlighting our diverse communities, we foster transparency through robust, localized, and vital reporting that holds leaders and institutions accountable, addresses critical information needs, supports people in navigating civic life, and equips people with the information necessary to partake in effective community engagement. We also work to train the next generation of civic journalists by providing a 15-week paid internship opportunity to anyone interested in the craft of journalism and the duty of civic engagement.” - Christian Oberly

Industry Media Arts

“The Online Journalism Mentorship Program is an innovative project aimed at leveraging technology to promote civic engagement for high school students working alongside college journalism majors. Our program provides a space for students to dive into local news stories as well as pressing social issues. By aligning with the Consortium, we aim to amplify student voices from diverse communities and foster dialogue that promotes informed citizenship and social change. We seek to empower students to participate in shaping their communities and democracy through storytelling, journalism, and media production.” - Neal Bennett

Muslim.co

“Muslim is a newsroom, media house, production studio, and training institute committed to the pursuit of truth by delivering independent news coverage, creating dynamic media, producing authentic content, and developing journalistic talent to genuinely represent inclusive, and diverse perspectives, while striving to connect and amplify Muslim voices. New Jersey contains the highest concentration of the Muslim population in the United States and with the support of the CIC, we were able to maximize our coverage on news that affects our community. The support from CIC helped us maximize our presence to deliver news through the use of our social media and reach millions of impressions on our stories.” - Ameer Al-Khatahtbeh

NJ Council for the Humanities and Journalism + Design

Project Description: “New Jersey Council for the Humanities and Journalism + Design at The New School are partnering with four community colleges around the state – Sussex County Community College, Middlesex College, Mercer County Community College and Atlantic Cape Community College – to design and deliver free noncredit certificates in community journalism that equip people with tools to better understand and articulate what's happening in their communities. These certificates, unique to each college and created in response to local needs, are giving participants transferable skills from a variety of disciplines – including journalism, design, the humanities, media literacy and systems thinking – that challenge them to explore creative ways to better inform their community and circulate high-quality news. These programs are also creating new infrastructure and capacity for journalism in each college's surrounding community by helping to forge

partnerships between community college faculty, student media, local news organizations, libraries, and other community-based organizations.” - Cole Goins

Ridge View Echo

“The Ridge View Echo has been online since February 2022 and has become the local news source for residents of Blairstown, Frelinghuysen, Knowlton and Hardwick, providing coverage on township committee meetings, school board meetings, local events, business spotlights, interesting people and breaking news. The RVE has been steadily increasing its coverage of these four towns with the number of articles published every two weeks and has incorporated ‘This Just In’ pieces that are published as necessary, becoming the ‘go-to’ source for civic information and encouraging engagement through social media platforms and the RVE newsletters. The RVE has included in its staff of reporters a student who started writing articles based on events at his high school from the time he was 16 years old and he continues to write for the RVE, honing his skills even further now that he is in college. The RVE plans to better serve these communities in the coming months by implementing technology and practices it has learned through the NJCIC Technology & Sustainability Accelerator. The Ridge View Echo welcomes and maintains a diversity in reporters, as well as top management. There are currently more than a dozen females on staff. Besides a Managing Editor who is Puerto Rican, four reporters, to date, represent African American and Asian ethnicities bringing an invaluable perspective and readership of their stories.” - Susan Wilinski

Saint Peter’s University/Slice of Culture

“Slice of Culture (SOC) is an online publication focusing on informing and sharing community stories through interactive and accessible forms of media including article, video and/or infographic. Our NJCIC grant allows us to offer opportunities to aspiring community storytellers and professionals who want to mentor. We are jump starting conversations and acknowledging concerns because Hudson County and New Jersey locals confide in us. Our team is mainly BIPOC who all come from New Jersey; we believe local concerns should be covered by those who live in the community. We have interviewed potential mayor candidates and questioned how they’d address said concerns. SOC emphasizes the importance of community voices because without them we wouldn’t be as aware and, without their financial support, we can’t continue. They are the strong foundation that continues to champion local journalism.” - Adrienne Romero

The Jersey Vindicator

“The Jersey Vindicator seeks to spotlight truth, advance accountability, and empower residents of the Garden State. We aim to tell stories no one else is telling about how the government functions in New Jersey, in an effort to spark change that improves the quality of life for residents. We seek to partner with independent local news organizations across the state, offering our stories for republication for free to reach more residents. In addition to improving the quality and quantity of civic information available to residents of the state, we

seek to provide residents with tools to protect and strengthen democracy through a series of guides on topics like how to file a public records request. Plans for 2024, based on feedback from residents, include a bill tracker and the coverage of county commission meetings by citizen journalists we are currently training. We also seek to help journalists across the state learn and strengthen their investigative reporting skills, serving as a resource to guide them in seeking public records and conducting investigations. We also seek to educate and alert journalists across the state about potential legislation that affects transparency, including the Open Public Records Act and the Sunshine Law. We act as a liaison between media and good government groups to share information about threats to government transparency.” - Krystal Knapp

Trenton Journal

“The Trenton Journal is a multi-media publishing company that aims to address the information gaps and highlight the positive voices in Trenton through original reporting and solutions-oriented journalism. Since we began publishing we have provided several local high school and college students internship opportunities and freelance writing opportunities. Last year Trenton Journal teamed up with student reporters from the College of New Jersey on a series of environmental stories impacting Trenton residents, such as lead in the Trenton Water Works water supply and remediation of brownfields in the capital city. I'm grateful to serve the community I live in.” - Kenneth Miles

CONCLUSION

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium was established in response to the growing local news crisis affecting communities across the state. The impact reporting of many grantees shows how the Consortium is responding to this crisis.

As highlighted in the excerpts above, the grantees' projects serve a variety of functions. They consist of projects that act as a pipeline for journalists, fill a specific void in the state's media ecosystem, deliver news to a specific community or marginalized group, and provide investigative reporting in New Jersey, holding those in power accountable.

Two kinds of impact were highlighted in this report: impact on organizations and impact on the community. Some projects discussed quantitative impact on the community, such as using metrics like traffic or attendance at events. Others include public sphere impact, such as feedback from the public or awards won, and institutional/structural impact, such as changes to a policy or another organization. Examples of impact on the organization include deliverables (e.g., stories, events, trainings), institutional/structural impact (e.g., partnerships), and cultural impact (e.g., change in organizational mindset).

The projects have had a significant impact on some local communities in New Jersey. Also evident is how different the grantees are from one another, and thus, how impact varies greatly. Every type of impact is represented in the findings, except for cultural impact on communities. The reason is likely because that category requires long-term change, and most of the grantee's projects require more time and greater capacity to track that type of impact. The type of impact we see is overwhelmingly with deliverables and the public sphere.

Going forward, impact tracking should be prioritized, as the Consortium is now emphasizing. Many projects are still in their infancy and should be seeing significant impact further down the line. In order to institutionalize impact tracking within Consortium grantee organizations, capacities to perform these tasks must be built. This can be accomplished with training and increased funding.

CONCLUSION

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