



Groundbreaking New Jersey Initiative Announces Inaugural Series of Grants to Fund Local News and Information

MONTCLAIR, NJ — On Wednesday, the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium announced its inaugural round of grants, a milestone in the years-long effort by residents, journalists and local organizations to invest public funding to foster more informed communities.

The Consortium has awarded 14 news-and-information initiatives with grants of up to \$35,000. Grant recipients come from every part of New Jersey; their work focuses on diversifying journalism, improving government transparency and providing community-health information, among other issues.

The Consortium represents a first-of-its-kind state model for public funding to support quality local journalism, promising media startups and other efforts meant to better inform people and promote civic engagement. The state of New Jersey provided \$500,000 in funding for FY2021.

In 2017, a broad coalition of universities, journalists, advocates, lawmakers and state residents began working together to create the Civic Information Consortium. With State support, the Consortium will continue to provide grants for local journalism and civic technology projects, with an emphasis on efforts designed to better serve low-income communities, communities of color, immigrants and rural residents.

“Thanks to the bipartisan foresight of the legislature and governor, New Jersey has set a national precedent for public funding to inform and engage local communities through the groundbreaking legislation that created the Consortium in 2018,” said Civic Information Board Chair **Christopher J. Daggett**. “Today’s announcement marks a new beginning for civic information in New Jersey. These grants are funding 14 innovative projects aimed at bolstering access to local news and information, increasing access to community health and training more people in journalism. We received 74 applications this round, from almost every county in New Jersey, which shows a tremendous interest in the Consortium’s mission. We look forward to working with these grantees and thank everyone who applied for this inaugural round of grants.”

“The grants committee had a tough time picking grant recipients from the 74 applications we received,”

said Civic Information Board member **Therise Edwards**. “This is a testament to the creative and civic-minded spirit of groups across New Jersey. “The grants awarded in this round touch urban, suburban and rural New Jersey and a wide array of issues. The Consortium is thrilled that several of the grantees will be engaging student populations to become active advocates for their communities. We are excited to see the positive impact these programs will have for New Jersey residents.”

The inaugural class of grantees:

- **Beyond Expectations** will continue its outreach work with young people in Burlington County by launching “be.tv eStudios,” an initiative that provides students with the resources they need to better participate in immersive interactive learning.
- The **Blairstown Enhancement Committee** will address the loss of local-news outlets by launching the Greater Blairstown News Project. This effort will provide residents with vital and timely government announcements about public health and safety, and foster greater connection to and awareness of local issues across northwest New Jersey.
- The **Bloomfield Information Project** will launch a community-reporter corps pilot program that trains residents in news gathering, writing, and production and provides paid reporting assignments that prioritize the information needs of underserved populations in the surrounding community.
- **Cosecha**, a New Jersey grassroots organization run by and for Latinx immigrants, will work with Rutgers University to establish *Radio Popular*, a twice-weekly Spanish-language internet-radio program for the state’s Spanish-speaking immigrant community.
- The **Conservatory of Music and Performing Arts Society** will support Let My People Learn-HistorVic Education, a project that helps young people learn more about the workings of local governments and how policies and laws impact their communities.
- The weekly **Hammonton Gazette** will make its news coverage more representative of Hammonton’s southern New Jersey community. The paper will offer news articles in Spanish and initiate outreach to seasonal agricultural workers and more permanent members of the local Spanish-speaking community.
- **If I Can, You Can Inc.** will help revitalize the online neighborhood news franchise TapInto.net in Salem County with the goal of sharing news articles across New Jersey towns to create a more sustainable information ecosystem.
- The **Newark News and Story Collaborative** will train community members to tell their stories and produce news that fills information gaps in local and national media.

- The **Newark Water Coalition** will create Newark Community Voices, a digital-media and community-organizing training program for Newark youth. The program will produce and distribute multimedia health and environment stories that center Newark community-information needs.
- The Facebook group **Old Bridge NJ Residents** will create a comprehensive and searchable archive of local-government activity spanning more than two decades. The tool will be made available to area residents and journalists.
- The **Paterson Alliance** will manage the library-based Paterson Information Hub to provide the community with training in citizen journalism and news-production technology. The alliance will also convene local events to assess community-information needs.
- The collaborative **Stories of Atlantic City** project will pilot an initiative to train community members to serve as reporters covering the local city council and planning and educational board hearings. The initiative will develop new ways to engage community members in the decision-making processes that impact their lives.
- The hyperlocal **Trenton Journal** will train more local contributors to increase the frequency of its editorial output and help change the narrative about what it's like to live in Trenton.
- Princeton-based health-information website **VaccinateNJ.com** will add more features to its online resource to help residents statewide — including native Spanish speakers and others in underserved communities — get real-time information about vaccination appointment locations and vaccine availability.

Created by the state of New Jersey in 2018, the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium is an independent, nonprofit organization that funds initiatives to benefit the State's civic life and meet the evolving information needs of New Jersey's communities. The Consortium has five member universities, The College of New Jersey, Rutgers University, Rowan University, New Jersey Institute of Technology and, acting as the host university, Montclair State University. A first-in-the-nation project, the Consortium builds off the foundation laid by public media in the United States, and reimagines how public funding can be used to address the growing problem of news deserts and misinformation, and support more informed communities.