



FIELD FOUNDATION LOCAL MEDIA AND STORYTELLING WHITE PAPER

OVERVIEW

Although most Chicago residents are people of color, they are typically left out of conversations about the future of local news, marginalized in mainstream media coverage and underrepresented in newsrooms. In a paradigm shift, this summer, the Field Foundation launched a media and storytelling grantmaking process informed by discussions with the city's African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American (ALAANA) media makers, journalists and storytellers.

Field's grantmaking strategy seeks to change how news production reflects and reinforces the city's historic segregation, and with support from the MacArthur Foundation, create a more equitable, connected and inclusive local media ecosystem in which the stories of all Chicagoans are told accurately, fairly, authoritatively and contextually.

"The News and Local Information Ecosystem of Chicago," a 2018 Democracy Fund report, provided a starting point for thinking about the grantmaking strategy. The study captures the abundance and variety of media outlets in the city, explores the potential for more collaboration among the organizations and identifies innovative nonprofit media that are engaging diverse communities in reporting and storytelling. But despite the variety of news and information sources identified in the study, white corporate media still defines what is newsworthy, if not for most Chicagoans, then certainly for its most powerful residents. Field's challenge is to identify the pivotal investments that will begin to change that.

CHICAGO'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

As the city grapples with its racial issues, exposed in events such as the shooting of African-American teenager Laquan McDonald and the ongoing gentrification of Latinx communities, Chicago's news ecosystem is in the throes of change. The arrival of national news organizations, the growth of homegrown digital storytelling platforms and the ongoing struggles at the city's two dailies are pushing its white-led media to reexamine how they relate to, report about and engage diverse audiences. The situation presents new opportunities for

ALAANA media and storytellers, many of whom have longtime roots in their communities, but limited resources to support their journalism.

With a few exceptions, the city's dozens of ALAANA-owned or led community media outlets, have not received support from local philanthropy and are not significantly engaged in philanthropic networks. As a result, many of these media outlets operate in an information gap regarding foundation initiatives, media innovations and resources for journalism. To create an equitable, connected and inclusive local media ecosystem, the information gap must be closed.

Locally, Public Narrative has worked closely with community and ethnic media for years, functioning as a connector to resources and an advocate for the content. Public Narrative once produced a curated blog of stories from ethnic and community media ("[Chicago is the World](#)"). Ethnic media makers are also members of the local chapters of the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, in addition to national groups such as the National Newspaper Publishers Association and the National Association of Hispanic Publishers.

Nationally, the 2017 closure of [New America Media](#), a collaboration of 3,000 ethnic media organizations, meant the loss of an important advocate in philanthropic circles. (New America Media founder Sandy Close has created a new organization, [Ethnic Media Services](#).) [The Center for Community and Ethnic Media](#) at City University of New York (CUNY), which connects ethnic and white-led corporate media, recently announced that it is expanding beyond New York City to fill the hole left by New America Media. Sarah Bartlett, the dean of CUNY's graduate school said, "At a time like this, when immigrant communities are so threatened, and the political climate has become so toxic, it feels more essential than ever for that work to continue."

SALONS AND INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

In August, Field convened seven salons in four neighborhoods—Woodlawn, Hermosa Park, Bronzeville and Avondale/Logan Square—to get input on its media and storytelling grantmaking. Fifty people attended the salons, which were organized into separate sessions for community members and journalists. In addition to the salons, individual meetings have been held with eight people to date, for a total of 60 people.

Here is a demographic breakdown of participants:

- 30 journalists, including 12 media owners
- 43 African-Americans; 10 Latinx; four Asians, and three whites
- 49 women
- Three people who identified as LGBTQ

Participants were asked two primary questions:

- If there was a grant program in Chicago to meet the needs of journalists, media makers and storytellers of color, what should it look like?

- What do funders need to understand to help create a local media landscape that better amplifies voices in communities that are marginalized?

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SALONS

Responses are organized into three broad themes.

Resource Sharing and Partnerships

- Convene journalists, storytellers, media makers and foundations on a regular basis. The meetings will support an exchange of ideas and information among the groups and address issues and needs involving local journalism.
- Create a resource service for small independent ALAANA journalism and storytelling organizations. More storytellers of color in Chicago are creating their own organizations instead of working for others. They need business and development support. Rather than apply for individual grants for general operating support, the start-ups could share various administrative and backend resources.
- Fund a citywide online news portal where people can post information about their communities and create news hubs at churches or schools in ALAANA neighborhoods. The portal would help inform communities about vital issues as well as link groups and issues across the city. Aside from information, the hubs would have a space for people to record their personal narratives, like StoryCorps.
- Award grants to ALAANA and community news outlets to partner with other media and/or create shared editorial and business-side positions.

Sustainability and Institutional Development

- Award general operating grants to ALAANA media and provide them with business development training to help the organizations become more sustainable. Benefit Chicago, an impact investment program created by MacArthur, the Chicago Community Trust and Calvert Impact Capital, could be a funding model. The program issues loans to community-based organizations that have limited collateral but show promise.
- Fund organizations that can function as connectors between Field and potential grantees in ALAANA communities. People and organizations that are new to philanthropy need someone to help them navigate the process. The connectors would help identify and prepare organizations to apply for funding and increase the number of grant applicants of color. The Crossroads Fund, which supports grassroots organizations, is an example of a potential connector.

- Related to the previous recommendation, offer more support and coaching to first-time grantees. The focus would be on the period from project start to project launch.

Training, Retention and Mobility

- Offer paid fellowships to mid-career and veteran ALAANA journalists who want to return to or remain in journalism but don't have full-time jobs. Mid-career journalists who have been laid off or are working as freelancers have few options to stay in the industry. Local ALAANA journalism organizations say they have members who would benefit from these fellowships, and owners of ethnic media say their outlets would benefit from seasoned journalists who can hit the ground running.
- Create non-traditional pipeline programs for journalism. Four-year journalism programs are one source of journalists. The pool could be more diverse if funders supported journalism-track programs at community colleges and internships and fellowships at community and ethnic media, which are already pipelines for journalists of color.
- Support training and skills development to help retain and advance ALAANA journalists in the news industry. Funding has focused on training programs for emerging journalists of color, but representatives of local ALAANA journalism organizations emphasize that mid-career and veteran journalists also need training to remain relevant in an age of digital news.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Moving forward, there are three major challenges for the grantmaking: understanding the needs of foreign-language media (excluding Spanish-language media), defining criteria for storytelling grantmaking and managing the expectations of ALAANA media and journalists.

- Chicago is a racially segregated city, but it is also a global city. Although we cast a broad net for salon attendees, we have not engaged the full spectrum of the area's ALAANA media. Notably missing from the salons were news outlets and information sources that target Asian, Southeast Asian and African communities. Many of these organizations serve closed diaspora communities and their needs differ significantly from those of Latinx and African-American media.
- The conversations about storytelling produced the least feedback. Many of the organizations we invited that are working in the narrative change space did not attend the salons. Those who attended the salons focused on support for messaging, how to tell their own stories and connect with journalists. The most powerful example of narrative change work came from a South Side community group that launched a

campaign using billboards, murals and youth-produced videos to transform negative internal and external perceptions of the neighborhood. The organization's work can provide one of many templates for storytelling grantmaking.

- Ethnic media includes a range of platforms, languages, audiences, coverage areas, sizes and production standards. Yet the news organizations under this broad umbrella often are treated the same. Univision Chicago, part of a for-profit national corporation, has among the highest local news ratings in the city. WVON, an African-American talk radio station, serves a citywide audience. Their role is distinct from community newspapers or hyperlocal websites. Along with Telemundo, Univision and WVON are information anchors for many Chicagoans. Field's grantmaking program cannot provide the large institutional grants these organizations may want. For example, WVON would like to create a newsroom. Field, however, can be a connector and advocate for these organizations with other foundations who could provide more funding.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

Here are some final observations about the process, what issues are missing in the discussion, and how they intersect with and inform the big picture of the grantmaking strategy.

Innovation, engagement and digital media – Field's grantmaking approach has focused on traditional journalism structures and actors. To some extent, that is the result of who attended the salons. (From the beginning, we understood that how we set the table would affect the quality and scope of salon discussions.) For example, there were very few people under the age of 35. Also missing were the authors and curators of influential list serves, blogs or social media accounts, as well as young cultural and political activists who would have brought a different perspective to the discussions, especially around storytelling. We should continue to reach out to people working in more innovative news and narrative spaces to think outside of restrictive journalism norms.

Race and power in newsrooms – Editors play a more powerful role than reporters in framing stories. Yet only a handful of journalists of color in the city hold senior editing or leadership positions at white-led media organizations, and none currently leads a newsroom. This includes nonprofits such as ProPublica Illinois, Chalkbeat and Block Club Chicago, which are supported by local foundations. If they want to change mainstream media narratives about race, funders need at the very least to develop procedures to hold the gatekeepers accountable for hiring ALAANA journalists in decision-making positions. Such work with white-led media outlets complements Field's efforts to provide resources, training and platforms for ALAANA media makers, storytellers and journalists.

Generational divide in ALAANA media — There is a generational divide among ALAANA media makers and storytellers. Rather than work with white-led media or even legacy ethnic media, a new generation of media makers has started its own digital and mobile platforms. Some got

their start in ethnic and community media. As part of its grantmaking, Field should look for opportunities to build intergenerational collaborations that would strengthen the storytelling of both legacy and new ALAANA media. Field should also look beyond the known actors in the ethnic media space if it's interested in finding and supporting a robust media landscape.