

Stories of AC

A collaborative restorative narrative series

Outline and proposal for funding

Background

On Sept. 20, about two dozen community members and journalists [gathered at the Carnegie Center in Atlantic City](#) to learn about “restorative narrative” and how this kind of approach to storytelling could strengthen their community.

The [Center for Cooperative Media](#) at Montclair State University, [Free Press](#) and [Images and Voices of Hope \(ivoh\)](#) organized the initial effort, which was suggested by a group of community members who had participated in a [Free Press News Voices event in 2015](#).

Restorative narrative is best described as a “strength-based” approach to media. The term refers to journalism or storytelling that highlights the assets of a particular individual or community instead of the deficits and shortcomings.

A common thread quickly emerged during conversations that day: People who live in Atlantic City often have a much different perception of the community than people who don't. Ilsa Flanagan, the executive director of IVOH and workshop facilitator, encouraged the group to work together to “create stories and drive narratives that benefit our community.”

Idea

After the workshop, Evan Sanchez reached out via email to a group of attendees to propose a series of restorative narrative stories focused on Atlantic City, and said the Leadership Studio could be a place for interviews, could host a reception for participants, and could host potentially other events.

This idea gained traction with the group, and upon further reflection during follow-up calls, the group decided to focus on a collaborative project very similar to Evan's idea, one in which community partners led by the Leadership Studio in Atlantic City would source restorative narrative stories, media partners would then research/write/publish/broadcast the stories on an agreed-upon co-publication date, which would be followed up the next day with in an in-person storytellers event. We're calling this project “Stories of AC.”

We envision this being the launching point for a broader, longer-term effort, where community partners and local newsrooms continue to work together on Stories of AC to elevate unheard community perspectives and help journalists build trusted relationships with the people of the city.

Goal



The goal of this project is to showcase Atlantic City through a restorative narrative lens, one that highlights the resiliency, creativity and spirit of the people who live there.

Partners

Partners in this project and their roles include:

- Center for Cooperative Media, Stefanie Murray and Joe Amditis, project management and coordination of media partners.
- Free Press, Mike Rispoli, project management and coordination of community partners.
- Alexandra Nunzi, Co-Founder Leadership Studio and community partner.
- Evan Sanchez, Co-Founder Authentic City Partners & Hayday Coffee, community partner.
- Stockton University, Toby Rosenthal and Erin Hanlon, media partner.
- Route 40, Elinor Comlay, media partner.
- SNJ Today, Megan Wolf, media partner.
- Press of Atlantic City, Buzz Keough, media partner.
- Atlantic City Times, Earl Harvey, media partner.
- Breaking AC, Lynda Cohen

Details + timeline

Here's how we envision this project playing out.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2018

- Project plan finalized with the convening group.
- Plan for funding put into place.
- Funding proposal submitted to Local News Lab at Dodge Foundation.

JANUARY 2018

- Meeting with Leadership Studio (representing community partners) and media partners. At this meeting the media partners will discuss how they typically make news selections, what they look for in stories, what makes a good profile, and how they'll approach this project. We hope this will give folks from the Leadership Studio and community partners some food for thought as they go out and source stories. Also at this meeting, we will discuss the different forms of media we will use -- written word, video, audio, etc.
- After the meeting, Free Press and the Center will work with the Leadership Studio on an outreach plan for sourcing stories with community partners.
- Funds secured, plans put into place for distributing money.
- Infrastructure set up for documenting sharing and ongoing conversation.
- Logo and common branding created and shared.
- Website set up with basic information.

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2019

- Outreach begins, and the Leadership Studio works with Free Press and the Center to discuss the potential story sources and compile a strong list of six.
- By the end of February, we plan to have the six stories lined up and will host a second meeting between the Leadership Studio and media partners, in which the Leadership Studio will pitch the stories, we'll discuss them, and media partners will self-assign and volunteer to take each one.
- Co-publication date in May finalized.
- Event date in May finalized.
- Leadership Studio begins planning for April storytellers event.

APRIL 2019

- Media partners work on their stories.
- Plan put into place for content-sharing and shared language between the news orgs.
- Leadership Studio and media partners begin marketing for event.

MAY 2019

- Stories published.
- Event held.
- Post-event meeting among all the partners is held to discuss what worked in the project, what didn't, and what they could do together next.

JUNE 2019

- Article documenting the project and replicable toolkit published by Free Press and the Center.

Success metrics

Here are the ways we plan to track success for this project.

Six stories sourced

These metrics revolve around the sourcing of six untold stories about people in AC who otherwise would not be represented in local media.

This will be tracked by:

- Have the chosen stories or people been covered before, in any local media? If not, then this metric is satisfied

- Do the stories involve people representative of the population in Atlantic City, from an ethnic, racial religious or socio-economic standpoint?

Co-publication on agreed-upon date

This metric will track the co-publication on the agreed-upon date of those stories by six distinct and diverse AC media outlets, with cross-promotion to each other.

This will be tracked by:

- Were six stories text, video and/or produced?
- Were all published on the same date?
- Were all stories cross-linked?
- Did any media partners cross-publish?

Sold-out storytellers event

This metric will track interest in and attendance at the storytellers event. Our goal is to have an at-capacity crowd.

This will be tracked by:

- Number of views on Eventbrite registration page.
- Number of registrations.
- Number of actual attendees.

Stronger relationships between community members and media.

This metric will track how well this project is able to build relationships between the community and members of the local media.

This will be tracked by:

- Pre-project survey.
- Post-project survey.

Risks to mitigate

The following are risks that threaten to undermine the success of the project, and how we plan to proactively address them.

Stories lack interest

The stories that the community members source and bring back to the news partners are ones that the news partners think are not interesting or don't have "enough meat" to be told.

We will mitigate this by:

- Mike Rispoli will work closely with the community partners as the story ideas come in to help vet and think through them. Mike, as a former journalist, is in a good position to do this.
- We will discuss some of the leading story ideas among the project managers as they start to rise to the top.
- We will run some of the stories by some of the media partners in advance of our meeting, to get them assistance in vetting them before we convene.

Restorative narrative angle is lost

The news partners produce stories that aren't great representation of restorative narrative, and really are just traditional community profiles.

We will mitigate this by:

- Keeping Ilsa Flanagan involved in the project.
- Engaging Ilsa to coach the media partners before they start reporting, during the reporting process, and in the editing phase.

Partners leave

News partners back out of the project midway through it, or go rogue and don't follow the guidelines or coaching.

We will mitigate this by:

- Giving grants to the media and community partners.
- Stipulating agreement with the MOU as a grant requirement.
- Stipulating participation and successful completion of the project as a grant requirement.

Funding

To execute the plan as laid out above, external funding is needed. For this first phase of the project, we will approach the NJ Community News and Information Fund at the Community Foundation of New Jersey, a partnership of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

A cost estimate is below:

ITEM	COST
Grant to Leadership Studio for costs related to community outreach and coordination, story sourcing, being the lead on-the-ground project manager, engaging others as needed --Leadership Studio	\$5,000
Storytellers event (including food, space rental, AV) --Leadership Studio	\$3,500
Grants to individual media partners (\$1,000 each for stories and participation) --Press of Atlantic City --Route 40 --SNJ Today --Atlantic City Times --Breaking AC --Stockton	\$6,000
Marketing, for outreach, promotion of stories and promotion of event --Not sure how this will be spent yet	\$1,500
Website costs (initial setup, Wordpress	\$500

theme, hosting, graphics) --Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University	
Documentation of the project, including survey of partners involved and creation of toolkit for replication --Stockton grad student	\$2,000
TOTAL COST	\$18,500