Creative New Jersey’s Statewide Conversations – COVID-19 Response

Call #3 – April 15, 2020

Editor’s note: This summary covers the general topics and resources shared during the third call in a series of statewide conversations hosted by Creative New Jersey to bring together our network and help people across our state keep connected, share information, and unite in solidarity as we navigate the Coronavirus response in New Jersey.

To register for Creative New Jersey’s Statewide Conversations on COVID-19 Response, click the following link: https://forms.gle/jkW4waMXoeZUZcXeA. Calls take place every Wednesday in April 2020 (April 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29) at 10am.

SUMMARY

Topic: Journalism – informing communities and fostering equity during COVID-19

Guest speaker #1: Stefanie Murray, Director – Center for Cooperative Media
https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/

Guest speaker #2: Brit Harley, News Voices Fellow, WBGO
https://www.wbgo.org/#stream/0

Guest speaker #3: Miriam Axel-Lute, Associate Director/Editor - Shelterforce
https://shelterforce.org/

Resources shared by speakers and participants during the call include:

- Demographic data sources on who is being affected by COVID-19, though these are still limited
- Community-centered journalism programming (digital town halls, phone tree info sharing,
- Mental Health hotlines and virtual offerings
- Hubs & Collaboratives looking for partnerships or providing information
- Artist resources

Watch the full recording of this conversation here: https://youtu.be/Jtah08vU-GE
Stefanie Murray (Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University)
https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/

The Center for Cooperative Media’s (CCM) flagship program - New Jersey News Commons – helps to grow, strengthen and improve the news ecosystem in the state of NJ. The Center provides coaching, training, collaborative reporting, and research into news ecosystems.

Stefanie minded us that Journalists are essential workers: having accurate information is imperative in times of crisis.

Many journalists have been struggling due to the change in the news landscape over the last several years. Now in a time of crisis, news is more important than ever and it is happening during a time journalists are struggling. CCM is helping journalists and focusing on communities that are underserved, have large immigrant populations, or don’t have technological access.

CCM asked journalists what they need and how CCM could help them. Here’s what they learned and how CCM is adapting to help support journalists:

- Journalists need financial support – many are freelance reporters, and the need for local reporting is even greater.
- Journalists need assistance applying for relief funds focused on journalism.
- Some need coaching with how to be on the front line of a crisis situation.
- CCM is providing small grants to freelancers and hosting tele-briefings on underserved communities and how to report on this.
- CCM is fostering a story sharing program to help the journalists be able to provide statewide information along with community info.
- CCM also collates a daily newsletter Covering COVID-19, which includes resources and articles that local journalists can reprint: https://mailchi.mp/centerforcooperativemedia/april-15-covering-covid
- CCM is working with a team of newspapers to chronicle the death of everyone who died in NJ.

Stories resilience or hope are so important. One anecdotal piece of evidence - on our daily newsletter, our “Everything isn’t terrible” section is often lately the most clicked on: https://us5.campaign-archive.com/?u=7f46611cb324e9e193acda7cc&id=bc2588ce16

**Questions for CCM included:**

Q: Since a lot of the folks on the call are not in the journalist space, but work closely with efforts in the community, what are some ways they can connect with the media?

A: Through the Center. We maintain a database of news organizations across the state. CCM can help you find a local news organization and connect you with journalists to tell your story. Some larger organizations have Tip
Lines but seek out local journalists who cover your community. There is a growing number of independent news organizations that will be helpful too.

**Q: How can we donate to support local journalists?**

*A: NJ has a handful of news nonprofits that can take tax deductible donations. WNYC, WHYY, and other public news sources also take donations and cover our areas. There is not a general fund to support local news as of now, but there is a new tool for the local media association - they have developed a tool to accept tax deductible donations and it runs thru the local media association. If you want to donate to local nonprofit news sources, here are some that were mentioned on the call:*

- **WBGO:** [https://pledge.wbgo.org/epledgenow](https://pledge.wbgo.org/epledgenow)
- **NJ Spotlight:** [https://www.njspotlight.com/member-benefits/](https://www.njspotlight.com/member-benefits/)
- **Shelter Force:** [www.patreon.com/Shelterforce](https://www.patreon.com/Shelterforce)
- **Civic Story:** [https://www.newsmatch.org/organizations/civicstory](https://www.newsmatch.org/organizations/civicstory)
- **Food Bank News:** [https://foodbanknews.com/donate/](https://foodbanknews.com/donate/)

**Q: What is the role of photography in telling the story of what is happening?**

*A: Photography is massively important. Unfortunately, photography is not being allowed in a lot of the places where the story needs to be told. A few healthcare systems have let photographers in, which is great. Newsrooms have been using freelancers a lot, and those freelancers are also putting themselves at risk because they have to be on the frontline. There is a small handful of photographic journalists in our state that have the financial backing and PPE (personal protective equipment, i.e. face masks) to actually do this. Tom Franklin from Montclair University is doing it. I’m concerned we are not visually capturing the pandemic as much as we could be right now.*

**Q: It’s concerning that there has not been any demographic information released about those who have been tested and those who tested positive. Is anyone in the media covering this issue?**

*A: Yes, nationally this issue is finally starting to get more scrutiny. NJ has started to give demographic data but there is not a lot of data period. Some NJ state reporters are starting to dig into this. There is not enough being done to prevent a lack of data collection and not enough information being released. Here are some sources for data shared by Stefanie and other participants on the call:

- **Worldometer (also has a lot of interesting statistics):** [https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/)
- **A Gates Foundation sponsored research group at the University of Washington has forecasts through early August by country and US state. This model is projecting no deaths past June 27 (though this forecast changes frequently)**
• Ryan Haygood at the Institute for Social Justice is also advocating for more data: https://www.njisi.org/institute_and_partners_request_racial_data_on_covid_19_impact

• Oliver Wyman (management consulting firm) (https://www.oliverwyman.com/our-expertise/insights/2020/apr/covid-19-pandemic-navigator.html) has 8-week forecasts for about 40 countries, and in the US the forecasts are at county level, if the county has >100 confirmed cases. OW does require you to enter your name and email if you want to look at the projections.

Q: Do you know anything about the Epoch Times? We got a paper inserted into the Star Ledger and it seems highly inflammatory: the lead story was ”Lies Kill, Truth Saves, the Chinese communist party has been endangering the world.”

A: That is not familiar to me (Stefanie). Was it an advertising insert masquerading as news? Mis and disinformation is a massive issue currently, globally. CMM works with the First Draft News – an organizations that works with journalists around the world to combat this information. That particular insert could have been an advertorial insert. We are also seeing a lot more dis information through social media, though NJ is not considered a “hot spot” for disinformation.

• Fact checking on misinformation and disinformation: https://firstdraftnews.org/

• Another fact checking resource is the International Fact Checking Network at Poynter: https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/

• Mike Rispoli of Free Press added that, “Epoch Times is typically perceived as being a propaganda paper and should be ignored or read with caution. Epoch Times isn’t allowed to advertise on Facebook, for example, because of its misinformation.”

Brit Harley (WBGO)
https://www.wbgo.org/#stream/0

Brit Harley is a Newark native, who values community, family, love. Brit joined the news department at WBGO through the News Voices program. WBGO’s Newsroom has been covering what has been happening in Newark, NJ, and nationally. You can reach Brit Harley for resources and collaboration opportunities at: bharley@wbgo.org

As a Newark resident, Brit’s work focuses on how to include Newarkers in the news process, and as a News Voices Fellow Brit also tries to figure out where the gaps are. For example, Brit has been speaking to a resident that has been in a high-risk housing location who received an eviction notice last week. There are residents who are struggling to get clean water, and people are scared of over-policing, among many other stories. WBGO has been including these people’s voices in their on-air newscast.

WBGO also has programming to help widely share news with community members and include their voices, including:

• Monthly “Newark Today” call-in show with Newark’s Mayor Baraka to talk about concerns within the community.
• “Rona Call” Community-Info Phone tree: In partnership with Free Press, WBGO is thinking about how to get information out to residents with limited technology access: They are setting up a community info tree, and are actively seeking people to be “Phone Captains.” This strategy gives people a connection to other people, and growing resources from within communities, provide mutual aid efforts and then share with local officials. The Phone tree is also being used in Atlantic City:
  o Download the Phone Tree (English): https://freepress.actionkit.com/mailings/view/14357

• “Story Fund”: WBGO will be announcing a “story fund” soon - if you are covering COVID-19, collecting stories and serving communities of color - WBGO wants to be a hub! Opportunities will be available to apply for funding to work in partnership with WBGO.

• Digital Town Hall: Next week, Tuesday, April 21st @ 3pm, WBGO and Free Press will be hosting a digital town hall, giving community members a chance to connect with each other and have questions answered.
  o To register for the Digital Town Hall (on Zoom platform): bit.ly/newarkneedsinfo

Miriam Axel-Lute (SHELTERFORCE)
https://shelterforce.org/Shelterforce

Shelterforce is a non-profit publication born in Orange, NJ in the 1970s and has grown to cover national issues for the community development world, affordable housing and those who work in revitalization, regional equity, and tenant rights, among other topics.

Shelterforce’s coverage include long form articles and trends in the field. With COVID-19, they have pivoted to focus more on breaking news, freelancers, more timely information. While that is a big shift for them Shelterforce underscored the need to stay flexible.

An example of their COVI-19 work includes a current article examining all the phases of eviction - filing, surviving, enforcing, etc. They are telling the complex stories about how nonprofit housing organizations are leading the way and won’t evict residents due to nonpayment, but also examines how those nonprofits will handle the lack of income and stay afloat for the future.

Shelterforce is looking to work more collaboratively to tell local stories that put a face to some of the larger national issues around these core issues of housing and community development. Please reach out if you have issues that are challenging and not finding solutions too, but also if you have gotten things resolved and contacts to help others find solutions.

• If you have tips on stories: info@shelterforce.org
• Shelterforce weekly newsletter sign-up: bit.ly/SFWeeklySignUp
• Shelterforce COVID-19 resource & news page: https://shelterforce.org/category/covid-19/
Questions for WBGO and Shelterforce:

Q: Shelterforce covers arts and culture and WBGO being a jazz station, so can you talk about how the arts can help heal and how to look at the effects of COVID-19 through that lens? Are you highlighting stories of resilience and through the arts?

A: (Brit) Now that we’ve pivoted into the digital space we’re asking ourselves [at WBGO] how do we engage while still creating an experience? We’re still figuring out what that looks like. A big part of info sharing and conversation in Newark happen in and through our arts and culture community here. Finding ways to bridge [the arts/culture and news spaces] is important – things like storytelling imitations. If we can offer WBGO as a partner to independent creatives and media types of organizations, we can talk about how WBGO can use our platform to amplify what those smaller organizations or individuals are doing. That’s something we’re already doing, but we’re also looking to push that further.

(Keli Tianga, Shelterforce Senior Editor) Shelterforce has been collecting stories they have seen with regard to the long-term effects on arts and culture and community development. Many artists are just starting get their footing and COVID-19 effects could be a huge blow to them. Shelterforce is about to repost a piece from an artist who is talking about trying to live and eat at this time because she no longer has an income. There are a lot of organizations that support artists but we also know there is no way that support is enough to address the huge need. We are trying to get an understanding on how these folks are literally going to survive and keep a roof over their head without being able to do what they do.

(Miriam) The long-term story is about resilience. Residence service coordinators are working to combat the isolation for people who are already in isolation. Recently, Shelterforce ran a story (in the works before COVID-19 hit) about artwork created by people who were formerly incarcerated, which was a great example of people to use art to deal with struggles and challenges.

(Elizabeth Murphy, Creative New Jersey) Here in New Jersey, arts organizations are working to help artists: ArtPride NJ is starting to help organize artists to get their work online, New Jersey Theatre Alliance has been holding weekly roundtable zoom calls with their members to try and help that community figure out how to continue to create their work. A lot of individual arts organizations that are offering innovative online content. I recommend that you reconnect with the arts organizations that you were previously engaging with!

Q: Do you know what is happening to people living in shelters or transitional housing?

A: (Brit) Newark has concerns of over-policing and how to properly social distance. For people living in transitional housing or shelters, they are planning their day on where to get hot food and meals because in shelters and transitional housing you’re rarely able to keep a refrigerator or have access to a stovetop to make food. People in these situations have concerns about properly sanitized spaces, access to gloves, masks, food. What are ways that we can meet the needs that are in different types of living situations during these times.

(Miriam) The situation for these folks is really serious. There are weekly calls happening with national coalitions of housing to address the issues these individuals face.
Q: Is anyone covering the local small business journey through COVID-19, their ability to access the stimulus funding and how entrepreneurs/storefronts, especially, are anticipating the potential for their survival, ability to navigate, and growth through the process of reopening of the economy?

A: Some resources to look at shared by call participants:

- ROI NJ covers the business community in NJ and has done reporting on small business challenges: [https://www.roi-nj.com/](https://www.roi-nj.com/)
- NFIB Research Foundation has a large section for small businesses on COVID-19 and had been doing a multi-part survey project on the effects on small businesses across the country: [https://www.nfib.com/content/analysis/coronavirus/latest-on-coronavirus-from-nfib/](https://www.nfib.com/content/analysis/coronavirus/latest-on-coronavirus-from-nfib/)

**RESOURCES**

**Mental health services and support:**

- Mental Health Association NJ: Please feel free to share our free virtual support offerings: [https://www.mhanj.org/virtual-support-and-learning-opportunities/](https://www.mhanj.org/virtual-support-and-learning-opportunities/)
- Our call line is open 7 days per week for emotional support 866.202.HELP(4357)
- Any questions, feel free to reach out to Jaime Angelini: [jangelini@mhanj.org](mailto:jangelini@mhanj.org)

**Hubs & Collaboratives looking for partnerships or providing information:**

- Newark Business Hub supports entrepreneurs with training and network support. Reach out to Jeff Billingsley (Co-Founder) & Kimberlee Williams (Co-Founder and Rutgers Newark Assistant Director of Communications)
  - Open to working with organizations that want to tackle the aspects of diversity and inclusions: [http://www.newarkbusinesshub.com/](http://www.newarkbusinesshub.com/)
- American Conference on Diversity is looking to work with organizations that want to tackle aspects of diversity and inclusion: [https://americanconferenceondiversity.org/](https://americanconferenceondiversity.org/)
- News Voices: if anyone wants to strengthen news and info in their community, News Voices wants to help! Email Mike Rispoli: [mrispoli@freepress.ne](mailto:mrispoli@freepress.ne)
  - Free Press has also hosted virtual story circles for communities to share stories of resiliency. It’s a good way to share information, create connections, and lift up storytellers in our communities. There are lots of ways other forms of art can do similar things: [https://www.freepress.net/our-response/advocacy-organizing/stories-field/stories-atlantic-city-launches](https://www.freepress.net/our-response/advocacy-organizing/stories-field/stories-atlantic-city-launches)
- CivicStory is interested in this conversation: integrating creativity, health, and environmental sustainability could be a unifying ‘going forward’ goal.
  - CivicStory runs the NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub: [https://srhub.org/](https://srhub.org/)
- Nonprofit Development Center of Southern New Jersey – looks to educate, connect and celebrate nonprofits in south Jersey: [https://npdcsnj.org/](https://npdcsnj.org/)
- Center for Non-Profits email list sign-up: [http://www.njnonprofits.org/EmailSignup.html](http://www.njnonprofits.org/EmailSignup.html)
- South Jersey Strong Website gathering regional municipalities' postings: [http://www.southjerseystrong.com/](http://www.southjerseystrong.com/)

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Convening communities at the intersection of creativity, collaboration and inclusion.

info@creativenj.org    www.creativenj.org
Arts, culture, and artist resources:

- ArtPrideNJ: https://artpridenj.org/covid19
- New Jersey Theatre Alliance: https://njtheatrealliance.org/
- Monmouth Arts is hosting an online gallery for local artists, as well as a weekly Virtual Stage + Showcase where we are highlighting teen visual arts, performers, and writers. You can find these online programs on our website: www.monmoutharts.org. Additionally, we have gathered an extensive compilation of resources for artists, arts organizations, and other members of the community, which can be found here: https://www.monmoutharts.org/resources
- Resource for artists of all disciplines: https://www.morrisarts.org/2020/04/08/artists-and-arts-organizations-online-resources/
  Freelance artist resource page: https://covid19freelanceartistresource.wordpress.com/
- NEA resources for Arts and Culture: https://www.arts.gov/covid-19-resources-for-artists-and-arts-organizations
- Folks can reach out to your county’s arts council