

EVALUATION OF THE CHICAGO LOCAL REPORTING AWARDS INITIATIVE

By Coats2Coats
Janet Coats, Chief Executive Officer
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	4
Evaluator's Report	
Content Quality	7
Relevance	8
Diversity of Voices	9
Impact and Reach	10
Impact of <i>The Chicago Reporter</i> and Community Media Workshop	11
Best Practices	13
Recommendations for Future Efforts	17
Survey Analysis	19
Mini-Profiles of the Local Reporting Award Recipients' Work	20
About the Evaluator	35
Advisory Committee	35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report assesses the effectiveness of the Local Reporting Awards initiative conducted in 2011 as part of the Community News Matters program, a journalism funder collaborative supported by The Chicago Community Trust, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation and The Woods Fund of Chicago. It also identifies lessons learned that might be useful to others.

The goals of the initiative were to:

- Produce in 2011 a burst of impactful, relevant coverage of, by and for the project's target communities (low income communities on the south and west sides of Chicago) that sheds light on current and future decisions of city, county and state governments.
- Stimulate the emergence of sources and voices of coverage that can help fill the information gap in these areas.
- Develop new ways and channels to spread high-quality, civically relevant information and build interest and engagement among citizens.

The initiative made six \$10,000 and 25 \$2,000 awards to a variety of individuals, news outlets and nonprofits. It also made \$70,000 in grants to Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter* to help maximize the editorial quality and distribution of award winners' work.

Here is a summary of the evaluator's conclusions:

- **Overall, the quality of the journalism is high.** Virtually all of the content uses at least two sources and most use multiple sources in each piece. Presentation is clear, with appropriate background and context. Quality of writing is high; production values in video and audio are excellent. There is evidence of reporting beyond interviews – historical research, use of data, use of public records and public records requests. We have conducted content audits of clients who spent significantly higher sums of money and worked exclusively with professional journalists that did not achieve this level of editorial quality.
- **The stated goal to increase diversity of voices – to hear from people who do not regularly appear in traditional media – is overwhelmingly achieved in this work.** Diversity is evident in race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation but goes beyond those traditional measures. Perhaps one of the biggest accomplishments of the work overall is the inclusion of young voices, both as sources and contributors of content. The stories also represent the point of view of disabled people and the elderly. Topical diversity is excellent as well. From environmental issues to the arts to education to the class divide in the black community, these stories give us a sense of the breadth of life in these communities.

- **The decision to involve *The Chicago Reporter* and the Community Media Workshop as support systems for the award recipients was a game changer.** Virtually all of the award recipients told us that they received some level of assistance from one or both of these organizations. A look into the detail showed that both organizations served in the role of resource and editor. Alden Loury, formerly of *The Chicago Reporter*, is frequently mentioned by name as someone who helped shape stories. CMW provided both basic editorial guidance and helped award recipients connect with potential distribution partners. Without the involvement of these two organizations, we likely would have seen lower editorial quality and much reduced distribution of this work.
- **Award recipients showed a high recognition of the value of social media and in-person events for distributing content but needed help on effective execution.** The majority of award recipients used some social media to promote awareness of their work; a significant number used in-person events. In the communities the work focused on, the value of in-person events seems high. For future efforts, we would recommend that the tools of social media and events be used not merely for promotion after the fact, but as methods of reporting.
- **The key opportunity for improvement in the Local Reporting Awards process lies in impact.** This is not uncommon; in evaluation work we have done for other clients, this is consistently the area where efforts fall short. There are two reasons for that: the complexities of how news and information travel in a digital age and, more importantly, the failure to set measurable goals to track impact from the beginning of the work. Too often, in all media, we try to look backwards in time, after a story has been published, to determine who it reached and what results it had. That is an extremely difficult task; it also prevents us from shaping coverage as it occurs, to maximize impact. This most certainly is the case with the Local Reporting Award recipients.
- **The process for tracking and accountability of award recipients needs revision.** As the evaluator, we had difficulty reaching a number of the award recipients. Three recipients never answered our request for information, and a number of others provided only partial information or failed to complete the survey. Both the Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter* documented similar difficulties in keeping track of what some recipients were doing and getting responses to their inquiries. The sheer number of recipients is a factor, but a more rigorous tracking system and firmer reporting requirements throughout the process would be beneficial to measuring impact.

INTRODUCTION

By Vivian Vahlberg, Project Director, Community News Matters

Background

As is the case around the country, the city of Chicago, Cook County and the State of Illinois have been facing fiscal crises, political change, difficult choices and major challenges, with key decisions pending about taxes, jobs, education, public safety, social services, health care, housing, pensions and more. Many of these choices and challenges have significant ramifications for the area's low income population.

At the same time, research commissioned by Community News Matters ([*The New News: Journalism We Want and Need*](#)) reported a fear among civic leaders that with traditional media in distress, people aren't getting enough of the kind of information needed to make these important civic decisions – reliable, vetted, balanced information about key local issues, presented in a way that makes sense of the whole and creates community.

Further, an opinion poll commissioned by Community News Matters ([*News That Matters: An Assessment of Chicago's Information Landscape*](#)) found that residents of low-income communities are the least well served by the area's information ecosystem. The poll revealed that not only are residents of low income communities more likely than others to be unhappy with media coverage, they are also more likely to feel ill-informed about the region's challenges and to have trouble coping with or telling what's important in the news.

To respond to this triple problem, Community News Matters developed an experimental program in 2011 to stimulate a burst of impactful relevant news coverage of, by and for the very communities that registered the most stress in the *News That Matters* poll – those communities on the south and west sides of Chicago with a median income below the city-wide median average.

The funders were acting on their belief that high quality reporting and analysis is the lifeblood of civic life. With so many important decisions affecting their city, county and state coming up, they felt it was essential that citizens and policy-makers know what's at stake.

While the primary goal was to spur coverage to shed light on current and future governmental decisions, the program also sought to stimulate emergence of new sources and voices of coverage in low-income areas and develop paths of distribution to spread good information and build engagement among citizens.

Program Design

Community News Matters decided in 2011 to stimulate news coverage and analysis in low-income communities in Chicago by awarding a series of \$2,000 and \$10,000 Local Reporting Awards.

To ensure that award winning projects added significant amounts of new information to the local news ecosystem, winning proposals had to involve either original reporting or original data analysis – not just aggregation or opinion about events or information reported by others.

The work had to focus on how important issues facing the city, county and state were affecting or would affect the communities which research identified were least well-served by today's information offerings – communities on the south and west sides of the city with a below-average median income.

Target communities were Archer Heights, Armour Square, Auburn Gresham, Austin, Avalon Park, Bridgeport, Brighton Park, Burnside, Chatham, Chicago Lawn, Douglas, East Garfield Park, East Side, Englewood, Fuller Park, Gage Park, Grand Boulevard, Greater Grand Crossing, Humboldt Park, Kenwood, Lower West Side, McKinley Park, New City, North Lawndale, Oakland, Pullman, Riverdale, Roseland, South Chicago, South Deering, South Lawndale, South Shore, Washington Heights, Washington Park, West Englewood, West Garfield Park, West Pullman, and Woodlawn.

The program welcomed proposals for stories; series or packages; blogs; ongoing coverage of an issue, beat or geographic area; stories or reports based on original investigations, data analyses, surveys or computer assisted reporting. And it welcomed proposals for reporting in any medium (text, video, audio, photography, graphics, etc.) or platform (print, broadcast, cable, online, e-mail, mobile, etc.)

Because the program wanted to also encourage emergence of new voices and sources of news for target communities, it encouraged a wide range of applicants:

- News organizations or outlets with journalistic expertise (print, broadcast, cable or online, both traditional and emerging);
- Community organizations with expertise in the target communities;
- Nonprofit organizations or policy groups with expertise in issues affecting these communities;
- Individuals (from involved citizens to freelancers and bloggers to new-media entrepreneurs, etc.) who are passionate about these communities and have ideas about stories and issues that matter to them;
- Collaborations among organizations, companies and/or individuals.

While the program knew that the ideal applicant would “have it all” – from substantial expertise in journalism, community and issues to an already-established means to distribute coverage to a broad audience – the project anticipated that not all award winners would meet this standard. So the program also made two grants to provide assistance to award winners:

- \$35,000 to *The Chicago Reporter* (a local investigative reporting nonprofit) to provide ongoing guidance, editing and other assistance to award winners to help them maximize the quality of the reporting projects;

- \$35,000 to Community Media Workshop (a local nonprofit that works to enhance the effectiveness of nonprofit communicators) to maximize dissemination of the award winners' work, with a blog featuring reporting of award winners, active use of social networks and other joint dissemination efforts.

A diverse advisory committee selected 31 winners from among the 108 proposals received – six \$10,000 awards and 25 \$2,000 awards. Selections were based on projected importance, quality, newness, diversity, cost-effectiveness and impact.

Funding

The Local Reporting Awards program is part of Community News Matters, a collaborative effort led by the Trust. It seeks to increase the flow of truthful, accurate and insightful local news and information and help the region's cutting edge innovators develop new models for providing news and information.

Community News Matters is administered by the Trust on behalf of all the funders -- the Trust, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, and the Woods Fund of Chicago. It is part of the Knight Community Information Challenge, a five-year, \$24 million effort to help place-based foundations find creative ways to use new media and technology to keep residents informed and engaged.

Scope of Work

The consulting firm of Coats2Coats was engaged by the program to evaluate the work produced by 31 winners of Local Reporting Awards. The firm's task was to evaluate both the work of the individual recipients and to gauge the quality and effectiveness of the entire body of work. The evaluation was guided by the goals the Trust set in seeking proposals for the awards.

To evaluate the work, evaluators considered a range of factors that contribute to meeting the Trust's goals: coverage topic, reporting quality, quality of writing and presentation, diversity of voices, and impact and reach.

In the course of the review, Coats2Coats reviewed the work product of the award recipients; reviewed the distribution channels recipients used to publish their work; conducted a survey of award recipients about their work; and conducted targeted interviews to gain insight into some the best practices uncovered in the evaluation process.

Coats2Coats Chief Executive Officer Janet Coats led the evaluation project and conducted the content review. Loren Omoto analyzed the survey results and conducted interviews evaluating best practices.

EVALUATOR'S REPORT

By Janet Coats, Chief Executive Officer, Coats2Coats

Content Quality

In evaluating content quality, we used accepted journalistic measures of reporting, writing and presentation. We looked at the number and types of sources used; whether the stories provided appropriate context and background; the clarity of writing and presentation; and, in the visual and audio work, composition and production values.

Entering this evaluation, we were not sure what to expect when it comes to content quality. The mix of award recipients provided an interesting contrast: some clearly have journalism experience, some were projects focused on novices and some were the work of organizations or groups with an advocacy interest in the subjects they were covering.

To say our expectations for editorial quality were met would be an understatement. In all honesty, we were blown away by the quality of the work.

Across the board, the sourcing in this work is strong. There is an appropriate blend of the institutional and the grassroots in the sources the award winners used. We saw very little “he said/she said” structure in the coverage; sources are used to speak from their areas of experience and expertise, without a false confrontational construct.

We also were pleased by the number of sources the award recipients used in their work. Even in professional reporting, it is all too common to see single- or two-source stories. Again, across the board, we saw work that included multiple sources and viewpoints. It was clear that the award recipients invested time in the reporting process and talked to a range of people before producing their stories.

When they did produce their stories, the resulting work is clean, clear and filled with authenticity. Quotes are well chosen and well-framed. Stories contain context and background. We were pleasantly surprised to see almost no editorializing. Even the organizations with advocacy interests stepped back and let the content speak for itself. The result is coverage that reflects a passion for the community and subject matter but a generally dispassionate, more reportorial tone in presenting information.

A significant minority of the award recipients took a data focus in their work, an approach that can be a challenge even within traditional news organizations but that pays off in enhanced credibility and “stickiness” of the work. Stories on tax policy and health care reform particularly benefitted from the data approach; infusing data into the work of all the award recipients would be an opportunity in the future.

A number of award recipients used audio and video to tell their stories, and we found these efforts to be very effective. We especially appreciated the fact that the award recipients used readily available tools – YouTube and Vimeo – to produce their work, allowing them to focus on the content rather than the technology. Efforts involving young people were especially effective in video formats.

Perhaps the highest quality work we saw overall involved the recipients who used photography as the primary means of telling their stories. These projects (notably the work of Bill Healy and Carlos Ortiz) are of the highest caliber. Even as evaluators, we found ourselves drawn into this work for its engaging depiction of the subject matter. Photography is often overlooked in telling community-level stories; the examples here are exemplary in both quality and storytelling impact.

Relevance

Relevance can be a difficult thing to judge as an outsider to the community. In setting the goals for this project, The Chicago Community Trust described “relevant coverage” of the target communities as coverage that “sheds a light on current and future decisions of city, county and state governments.”

This can be interpreted as narrowly as public policy issues that are likely to show up on a public agenda (such as tax policy, health care policy, crime and policing) or as broadly as the quality of life issues (arts, relationships among diverse groups, the evolution of AIDS policy). Based on the diversity of subject matter among award recipients, it is clear the broader approach is the one intended for this project.

By that measure, all of the content met the standard of relevance – it all touched on issues of broader concern to a community, whether it is directly related to a specific policy or simply informs the policy environment. But it is also clear that many of the award recipients struggled initially to refine their topics to make them truly relevant.

We heard in the survey results that this process of refinement was a challenge. Many of them had submitted subjects in their proposals that were more like term paper topics than targeted stories, and they struggled to find that focus. Some switched topics as a result of their attempts to refine their original idea. And many lost valuable reporting time in the struggle to continue to refine a topic into something that was both relevant to the community and suitable for the time frame they had available to complete the work.

Both *The Chicago Reporter* and the Community Media Workshop were valuable assets in helping the award recipients hone and focus their topics. Spending time at the very beginning of the process with each award recipient testing the focus of their subject may be a best practice to pursue in future efforts.

Diversity of Voices

The communities The Chicago Community Trust chose to emphasize in this project are defined by their poverty relative to the rest of Chicago.

The magic of having people with deep knowledge of these communities do so much of the work is that they showed the great range of issues, people and concerns that make up daily life in these neighborhoods. These stories touched on poverty, yes, but also on environmental issues, cyberbullying among young people of color, class divides within the African-American community. These are not subjects traditionally covered within these neighborhoods by mainstream news organizations.

The goal of diversity is achieved not merely through a count of sources, then, but through the very rich tapestry of life in these communities evidenced in the collective work of the award winners.

Our content review turned up voices from a range of perspectives in virtually every story. The coverage focused not just on expertise but on experience. Unlike many traditional journalism organizations, the award recipients did not focus on community stakeholders as merely the means to providing an anecdote for a story lede. This coverage recognized that seeing topics through the eyes of people who are actually living the experience is a valid and relevant way to cover news.

As a result, we hear in depth from the folks who are struggling with health problems and no insurance – not just as a sound bite, but their entire story. We learn from a young gay black man traveling between two worlds – the Auburn Gresham community where he grew up and lives and the gay nightlife in Boystown. We hear from Latinas struggling with the issue of teen suicide.

Even the policy and data stories are deeply informed by community stakeholder voices. Coverage of tax-increment financing by the Grassroots Collaborative, for example, is rich with the voices of people directly affected by the policy and how it is implemented.

Perhaps the greatest achievement in the work overall is capturing young voices – both as sources and as practitioners – in a way that is authentic and avoids the often patronizing approach of journalists to the young. Having young people tell the stories of their elders, as the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corp. did, is a powerful way of illuminating different perspectives across generations.

From our evaluation, there is no question that the Local Reporting Awards recipients tapped into voices and communities that go uncovered by traditional media outside of crime and poverty coverage. As a whole, the award recipients painted a picture of life seen whole in these communities – and that is what truly good journalism should aim to do.

Impact and Reach

As we noted in the executive summary, this is the area with the most potential for improvement in future efforts. To us, the reason for that is clear: the Local Award recipients on the whole failed both to set impact goals and to put in place measurements for tracking both the reach and the results of their work.

Our task as evaluators was to do a bit of forensic work in trying to document both the reach of the content and the impact of it. We readily admit that our efforts here are less than illuminating; that has to do with the lack of data we had to work with in this effort. We relied on the award recipients to provide us baseline data; to research that data ourselves would have taken us outside the scope of our work on this project.

As part of the information we collected from award recipients, we asked them to identify the distribution channels they used to publish and promote their work, along with information about the size of the audiences they reached.

It is clear from the responses that award recipients do not have a clear idea of how audience is measured online – there was confusion about unique visitors and pageviews, for instance. In many cases, the award recipients were not able to give us concrete audience numbers for the distribution channels they used. Some of the guesses struck us as being, shall we say, optimistic.

Those who did provide us with concrete numbers generally reached relatively small audiences – pageviews in the low hundreds. Given the locally specific nature of much of the content, this is probably to be expected – and could be considered a success, depending on what people did with the information they received.

It seems clear from the goals outlined by The Chicago Community Trust that one desired outcome from the Local Reporting Awards project is not just to reach audiences but to enable action and results.

Social media and events are one way to measure that outcome. However, award recipients primarily used social media as a promotional tool – “Look at our story here” – rather than as a reporting or impact collection tool.

Likewise, events seem to have been viewed as an opportunity for presenting information and some dialogue, not as an opportunity to enable further reporting or action.

There is no question that the efforts of the Community Media Workshop dramatically expanded the distribution network for the work of the award recipients. As a result of that intervention, the work had significantly more eyes on it than would have been possible for the award recipients working alone or through their existing, necessarily small and narrow distribution channels.

But there is a significant opportunity in the future to set audience and impact goals at the beginning and to track them over time, rather than trying to document those

measurements after the fact. We also see opportunities to use social media and events for more than promotional purposes – as reporting tools themselves and as ways to enable communities to take action on the content.

Impact of *The Chicago Reporter* and Community Media Workshop

The Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter* partnered with The Chicago Community Trust in the Local Reporting Awards program. Leaders from both organizations completed the same online survey. Both surveys were 100 percent complete.

As was the case with the recipients, these partners answered 20 questions about use of award funds and learnings from the program. Follow-up interviews with representatives from both partners provided additional insight.

Representatives from the Workshop and *The Reporter* said the program delivered especially good “value for the money,” pointing out the high quality of work produced and how it aligned with the goals of the program.

Specifically, they cited stories that addressed the Trust’s desire that “the needs and perspectives of the city’s poorest communities are heard and understood,” and the drive to “increase the flow of truthful, accurate and insightful local news and information.”

“Some of the work was very insightful,” said Alden Loury, former publisher of *The Chicago Reporter*. “Ideas were sharp [and] unique. Individuals had deep understanding of the issues that were taking place in their communities – they were connected to people on the ground and could offer an interesting perspective.”

“The program delivered great value for the money invested,” said Thom Clark, president of the Community Media Workshop. “A lot of people saw this material, and they were blown away by the diversity of voices, the quality of reporting.”

Participants singled out the orientation session hosted by both partners as having been especially helpful; partner organization leadership agreed on this point. But as the project unfolded, both the Workshop and *The Reporter* began to want more accountability and communication from grantees.

“Despite our best efforts, it was challenging to stay on top of grantees and hold them to deadlines,” wrote the Workshop’s Nora Ferrell. “After we asked grantees to fill out a form explaining their publication plan, process and anticipated publishing date, we incorrectly assumed that most of the grantees would respect the deadlines they set forth and/or notify us when something was published. Although some grantees stuck to their timelines and followed instructions to alert us when they published, many did not and required extensive follow up.”

Clark noted a practical issue that arose after deadlines slipped from summer into fall: a pileup of publishable material “because a lot folks wanted that second check.” [Payment of the award was split into two checks.] One consequence of this late-season overload was less time devoted to improving the product and promoting distribution.

“It certainly meant that there were projects that would have gotten more attention from us,” Clark said. “You’re doing five a week instead of one a week...We were doing a more generic effort [for each story].”

Clark and Ferrell noted that accountability may have suffered more in projects funded at the lower end of the spectrum. For \$2,000, grantees were more inclined to “take the money and not jump through the hoops,” Clark said. “The \$10,000 grantees paid a lot more attention to getting stuff done on time and letting us know.”

“If we were to manage Local Reporting grants again, I would set firmer deadlines for grantees and try to do a one-on-one phone call with each grantee to confirm their deadlines and remind them to reach out to us...The Workshop’s biggest challenge was getting people to respond to email and phone inquiries and respect the deadlines they set forth at the beginning of the project,” Ferrell wrote.

On the editorial side, Loury found the communication shortfall led to difficulty with coaching participants and even knowing where they stood with their stories.

“Things were published and I wouldn’t find out about it until weeks later,” Loury said. “I saw the projects afterward and wished I could have gotten to them [before publication].”

In assessing the project’s overall impact, both organizations cautioned that applying traditional measures such as effecting major public policy change or receiving widespread notice in mainstream media might be inappropriate.

“Impact is a very tricky word when it comes to journalism,” Loury said. “There are loads of benefits that these projects can produce that don’t look like [major public policy change]. Unless you’re monitoring that, it can get by you.”

“From what we can tell, no one story changed a policy or became a major mainstream news story for days on end, but that’s not surprising given the size of the grants,” wrote Ferrell. “That said, several stories were relevant and timely for ongoing policy questions.”

For the partner organizations, the award program did result in lasting changes. Part of the grants to the two organizations enabled them to beef up their own content production with part-time help. In the case of the Workshop, new methods of communicating in the social media became more familiar and expected. For *The Reporter*, the experience led to a new vision for sustainability.

The Workshop’s Ferrell wrote: “Our long-time *Newstips* reporter and blogger moved more forcefully into the blogosphere with the approach to contextualizing the

stories....We also experimented with how to use social media tools and our own online sites to promote other people’s stories in an impactful way.”

At *The Reporter*, this grant activity informed an ongoing discussion about the future.

“What we started to realize is that growth for us had to come in some other form. We started talking about how we could do that,” Lory said.

The discussion at *The Reporter* included hiring more contract writers and publishing more content online – focusing on producing some multiple, short stories instead of focusing exclusively on long-form print journalism as in the past.

“The grant allowed us to bring on two additional bloggers, so we had three bloggers for most of 2011,” Lory said. “Maybe 3-4 months in [to the grant], the editor and I said ‘this is it’ – this is definitely what we should be doing.”

Both partner organizations strongly supported continuing the Local Reporting Awards as a means to support authentic, meaningful community reporting. Both felt that greater impact could be achieved with some modifications to the program – chiefly in administration and structure of grantee agreements.

Specifically, both spoke of creating mandatory “checkpoints” within each project where progress would be assessed and assistance given on editorial, technical and distribution issues.

Suggestions:

- Hire a clipping service for the duration of the project to track output.
- Pay partners more to shoulder a greater share of grant administration.
- Enforce a schedule of check-ins for partners and producers of works-in-progress.
- Be clear about the degree of involvement and oversight by partners.
- Build in a mechanism for technical assistance and feedback.
- Mandate face-to-face meetings throughout the process.
- Handle smaller awards less like a grant – with fewer expectations.

Best Practices

In reviewing the work of the 31 Local Reporting Awards recipients, we saw examples of best practices that could be applied to such a program in the future. Among the best practices we examined were:

- Highlighting diverse voices
- Leveraging ongoing work
- Measuring impact and using social media

- Leveraging partner assistance from *The Chicago Reporter* and Community Media Workshop

In the following section, we will briefly describe the best practices we saw in these areas from award recipients and the applications they may have to future efforts.

Highlighting diverse voices

One of the real achievements of this work has been to spotlight voices and subjects that aren't traditionally covered in mainstream media. Part of the reason for this success has been drawing new players to the table to actually produce the content.

This is evident in the fact that two-thirds of the winning projects had at least one person working on the project from the target neighborhoods; people of color constitute the majority of the reporting team in more than two-thirds of the winning entries.

The Back of the Yard project is an example of elevating voices not heard in conventional coverage, both in terms of the sources in the story and those who were doing the reporting. The stories on undocumented youth were produced by student reporters and featured the voices of two Chicago teens who are not legal citizens.

One of the advantages of taking an experimental approach is the ability to take a chance on the unproven. The young reporters who produced the Back of the Yards project had no track record at all when it comes to generating quality reporting. What they did have was perspective and access to those young people who are living this story. Those two factors gave them an advantage a traditional organization would not have had, and the result is a fresh perspective on a topic directly from the stakeholders. Instead of talking about the issue, these stories help us understand the experience.

Best practice feedback

- Capturing young, diverse voices is dramatically enhanced when the reporters involved are young and diverse themselves.
- Recognizing that access and experience are just as vital to reporting of this nature as skill and track record enables work that reflects perspectives not often seen in traditional media.

Leveraging ongoing work

Carlos Ortiz has been working on his documentary project "Too Young to Die" for five years. The project, which aims to educate the public about the effects of youth violence on children, families and communities, is a powerful piece of visual journalism. Ortiz had created a significant body of work before receiving a Local Reporting Award.

The fact that Ortiz had a project that already was well underway, with an audience and a methodology that were well-established, meant that the Local Reporting

Award could serve as rocket fuel, boosting his work. He was able to add a reporter to his efforts, which brought a new dimension to the work.

The addition of Kari Lydersen's reporting to "Too Young To Die" meant that the project now has a strong written narrative to accompany the powerful images Ortiz has created. Lydersen's reporting picked up the tone of Ortiz's work and expanded on it, matching it in terms of quality and impact. The project reached new audiences through publication in *The Chicago Reporter*.

Another example of leveraging ongoing work is the Trust's continuing funding for the website Gapers Block. While Gapers Block did not receive one of the Local Reporting Awards, it has received two related awards from Community News Matters program. We are familiar with Gapers Block from another Coats2Coats project, and we reviewed the current status of the site as part of this evaluation.

Gapers Block has become an important piece of the Chicago news ecosystem. Editor and Publisher Andrew Huff reported 27 articles that were enabled by funding from The Chicago Community Trust, on subjects that varied from criminal justice to the arts to economic development. Further, Gapers Block served as a distribution outlet for other Local Reporting Awards content, either by publishing that content directly or by linking to it.

Best practice feedback

- By identifying work already in progress, a recipient has a built-in focus. This reduces time spent honing the subject matter, something that was an issue for other award recipients.
- Building on existing work means that you have some sense of an audience for that content. There are opportunities for distribution partnering and leveraging what you know about the existing audience to expand impact.
- Because the work is ongoing, there is a sense of momentum to it – there is a body of work to call back to, and there is a reasonable expectation that the work will continue after the award funding is spent.

Measuring impact and social media

This is an area where most of the award recipients fell short, and it is a vital element to gauging reach and impact. One award recipient focused more intensely on the areas of social media and measurement: Illinois Health Matters.

The folks at Illinois Health Matters did the most rigorous job of tracking audience and using social media to bring attention to their work. They kept a log of everyone who retweeted their content on Twitter. They were aggressive in using Facebook, and their Facebook posts were specific and directional. They actually used the metrics tools Facebook provides to track engagement with their content – the only award recipient we saw that did so.

They also used PR Web to distribute press releases on their content, and they used the analytics of that site to track how many times a release was acted upon in some way – read, used on a site, downloaded.

Their diligence in tracking their content allows us to gain a picture of how their content moved: We know that it was popular in the various online neighborhood portals around Chicago. We know that it was picked up by news organizations in other states. We know which Twitter followers showed a consistent interest in the content.

Illinois Health Matters now has the data that allows it to measure impact. It could now create baselines for coverage, watch how interest moves and changes over time, and more directly target key audiences.

Best practice feedback

- Measuring audience and impact are best done in real time, as you publish. Trying to replicate those measurements after the fact is time-consuming and guaranteed to be incomplete.
- Identifying a social media strategy is vital. Not every social media channel is appropriate for all content and audiences. Determining which channel best helps you meet your goals for viewership and engagement is an important step to take at the beginning of the project.
- Measuring impressions is not enough; you want to measure impact. That means measuring what actions people take with your content: do they share it, download it, link to it, base other work on it? The only way to measure this is to actively track how your content moves.
- You need to understand the metrics that are most important to you. Pageviews may be relatively insignificant for your work; time on site may be a better gauge of engagement. Don't count for the sake of counting; count to gauge impact.

Leveraging partner assistance from Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter*

While virtually all of the Local Reporting Award recipients received assistance in some form from either/both the Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter*, some recipients did a better job of documenting how that assistance impacted the work.

Eric Tellez of the Grassroots Collaborative described well how those interactions improved the outcome of their reporting project on tax-increment financing. This was a data-heavy project, and it involved using data that the recipients were not familiar with and analyzing it in ways that were new to them.

Grassroots Collaborative leveraged the expertise of Alden Loury at *The Chicago Reporter* to help them determine what data to look at in order to enrich the story. Once the appropriate data sets were identified, Loury worked with the Collaborative to provide Excel training so that the Collaborative could efficiently analyze the data.

The Community Media Workshop provided guidance in the critical thinking process about what the Collaborative wanted to achieve with the story. Workshop personnel helped edit the first draft to increase readability and sharpen its appeal to prospective publishers. The Workshop helped the Collaborative hone the story pitch and identify potential publishers. Finally, the Workshop helped the Collaborative to set up a media briefing with seven journalists representing local, community papers on the topic of the city's budget; at that briefing, the Collaborative was able to share the data analysis it had prepared for the article.

Eric Tellez described it this way: "Their help throughout the process made it more grounded and focused. At the end, we had a detailed article that was easy to read and comprehend. We were able to influence the frame of how the city's budget was covered overall."

Best practices feedback

- Award recipients should be encouraged to think about what they want to achieve with their work and what skill sets they need to acquire, develop or partner for in order to meet that goal.
- Regular coaching and story development sessions should be a requirement for all award recipients, to help them develop the full potential of their work, keep them on track toward timely completion and explore effective distribution strategies.

Recommendations for Future Efforts

Funders of the Local Reporting Awards have much to be proud of when it comes to the results of the Local Reporting Awards program. As we have noted, the quality of the work is high. The goal of including diverse voices was overwhelmingly achieved. A high percentage of the recipients not only met the goal of publication but published material that was relevant and compelling.

That said, there is always room for improvement. As we have noted earlier in this evaluation, measurement of audience and impact is perhaps the most glaring area in need of attention. Coming in a close second is the tracking and accountability process for the award recipients themselves.

Of the 31 recipients, three did not respond to our requests for information about their projects. An additional eight recipients provided us with incomplete data, primarily when it came to questions about distribution, audience and metrics.

That means that a third of the recipients did not comply with our requests for information about their projects. We were able to discover some of this material through our own research or through the Community Media Workshop website. Still, award recipients should provide a full description of their work, both from an accountability standpoint and so that The Chicago Community Trust can learn from the experiences of the recipients.

With these two critical areas for improvement in mind, we make the following recommendations for future efforts:

Measurement

- Setting measurements should be a priority from the beginning of the work. It should be part of the task of refining editorial focus. One of the questions award recipients should consider when refining focus is: What is the impact we want to have with this work? How will we know if we have had that impact?
- As part of setting measurements, award recipients should determine which distribution channels are most appropriate for their content and their desired audience. Not every channel is the right one; this is especially true for social media. A targeted distribution and outreach effort will have more impact than a scattershot approach.
- The award recipients should develop a process for regularly measuring their work as they are doing it and as it is published. Data collection at the end of the process is ineffective and incomplete.
- Social media should be used not just as a promotional tool but as a reporting and conversational tool. None of the award recipients did that effectively in this round. Thinking about social media as a conversation rather than as a channel through which to push promotion will yield more engagement.
- We believe events can be especially effective for the communities targeted in this work. Events should not be viewed as an opportunity to push information at people, but as an opportunity for conversation. Further, you should have a goal of asking those who attend any event to provide you with something: Ask them to fill out a feedback card, to give you a list of three stories they are interested in, to give you the names of three interesting people in their communities whose stories should be told.
- Beyond putting together events, award recipients should look for opportunities to go where the conversation is already happening. Community events and gatherings are a potent opportunity to both report and make people aware of your work.

Accountability

- Continue the involvement of Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter* (or other like-minded organizations) to partner with award

recipients. As we have noted, we believe the involvement of these two organizations was a game changer when it comes to editorial quality and distribution of the work.

- Set expectations for award recipients to regularly check in with Community Media Workshop to report on progress. This should be a requirement of funding.
- Send out regular surveys to the award recipients asking for progress reports – a short, 3-question survey could go a long way toward illuminating problems or roadblocks.
- Consider setting up a closed social group for the award participants to share their experiences – a Facebook group or Google + circle might help keep conversation going outside of the in-person training sessions.
- Examine expectations about publication cycles or stagger the award recipients so that everyone is not on the same publication cycle. As the Community Media Workshop noted, the cycle of the awards program resulted in an avalanche of content toward the end of the year, all seeking support and publication at the same time.
- Consider the number of individuals/organizations receiving awards in a given period. We are of two minds on this point. The fact that so many recipients were working at the same time increased the likelihood that at least some of them would succeed. But tracking 31 recipients, with varying degrees of experience in producing content, is a daunting task. Even reducing the number to 20-25 would increase the opportunity for closer tracking and individual attention.

Survey Analysis

Recipients of Local Reporting Awards were solicited via an online survey over a two-week period. This resulted in 24 collected surveys with a 100 percent completion rate. Recipients answered 20 questions about use of award funds and learnings from the program. An additional question sought contact data for individuals directly affected by Local Reporting Award work. All but one of the awardees completed this section.

Themes emerging in the surveys clearly reflect the community and neighborhood orientation of the program. Recipients took seriously the charge to deliver truthful, accurate and insightful local news. While their methods and media varied, the mission of being accurate, authentic voices for their audience did not.

Overarching needs for this diverse group fell mainly in two areas: **time** to pursue stories in depth and **resources** to acquire data and reach out to wider audiences. Significantly, although many made use of award money to compensate themselves or staff, payment *per se* was not widely mentioned as a need.

Program participants viewed partnerships with the Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter* as beneficial in a number of ways: they received focused assistance with reporting, production and distribution of quality journalism. They also gained infusions of expertise that changed the landscape of potential partners and, in some cases, changed the way they thought about their work.

The awards were viewed as transformational by nearly all the respondents. At the most basic level, individual creators felt recognition and validation from the program, leading them to pursue their own work with greater confidence and conviction. For some organizations, linkages nurtured by the program led to forging stronger ties with the community.

In the eyes of participants, the program increased capacity, added sophistication, expanded reach and amplified their journalistic voices. It raised awareness of new media and new methods to reach their communities. It also created connections among the organizations themselves that many expected would be leveraged in the future.

Mini-profiles of Local Award Recipients

Recipients of \$10,000 Awards

Carlos Ortiz

Too Young to Die

- <http://www.tooyoungtodieproject.org>
- <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/news/2012/01/more-young-people-are-killed-chicago-any-other-american-city>
- <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/slideshow/2012/01/too-young-die-examining-loss-generation>
- <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/news/2012/02/trying-survive-chicago-teen-keeps-his-head-even-after-taking-bullet-chin>
- <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/news/2012/02/chicago-youth-group-continues-its-slain-leader-s-fight-safety-housing-and-health-care>
- <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/news/2012/02/young-hip-hop-artists-speak-truth-about-violence-chicago>

Editorial Summary

This is a continuation of work Carlos has begun in the “Too Young to Die” project. The quality of the photography is extraordinarily high. With his award, Carlos was able to add reporter Kari Lydersen to the project, adding a dimension to his already-powerful photography. The result builds on work Carlos already has done with this project, extending it beyond the strong images into narrative that explains how individuals are responding to the issues raised by this coverage. This is an example of how The Local Awards program leveraged ongoing work to take it to a new level.

In the recipient's own words

"I have actually made a great connection with the subjects involved in my grant. As this project develops, I will follow their lives for the next six months as I finish my projects entirely. The Chicago Community Trust grant has actually helped me expand my project beyond (its original scope.)" -- - Carlos Ortiz

Health and Disability Advocates/ChicagoHealthMatters

Shining light on federal health care reform on the south and west sides

- <http://www.illinoishealthmatters.org/neighborhood-stories.aspx>

Editorial Summary

The "Neighborhood Health Stories" approach taken by this recipient is a very effective way of moving beyond policy to hear the voices of true stakeholders in an issue – in this case, the need for affordable health care and insurance coverage. We hear from diverse voices in stories that take a complex subject and make it very real and personal. This project demonstrated one of the strongest uses of social media among the Local Reporting Awards recipients and did the best job of any recipient in tracking the distribution and audience for the work.

In the recipient's own words

"I think the most important result has been that the program has given us credibility in reporting on health care reform and health care stories in general. This is essential for our agency's overall work on helping to implement health care reform, especially for vulnerable populations in Illinois." – Stephani Becker

In These Times

Young, Black and Marginal: African-American Chicago in Age of Austerity

- http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/11604/black_chicago_divided
- http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/11897/black_and_blue_chicago
- http://www.inthesetimes.org/article/12407/the_poverty_of_school_reform
- http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/12577/illinois_injustice_system/

Editorial Summary

Fascinating topic choices, focusing on stories that you do not see in the mainstream media (such as class divisions among African Americans). This recipient was not afraid to take on big topics: education, economic disparity, relationships with law enforcement. While the stories definitely had a point of view, they were not written with an editorial voice but instead were richly sourced and nuanced. Excellent use of distribution channels through other sites and media and good use of social media to promote coverage.

In the recipient's own words

"The award enabled *In These Times* to give focused and sustained attention to one of the most important stories of our time: the social and economic fallout of the 2008 financial collapse, subsequent recession and lingering aftermath. We would not have been able to publish a five-part series exploring various facets, and we would not have focused on our immediate surroundings (Chicago) in ways meaningful to both local and nonlocal readers." – Jeremy Gantz, associate editor/web editor

Loyola University Chicago

Series of economic news stories on Pilsen community

- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/41659256@N02/6779579373/>

Editorial Summary

Loyola and *Hoy* partnered to produce a series of stories on the community of Pilsen, called "Pilsen: El Barrio y Su Cultura." The work included 13 stories, with upwards of 50 sources, highlighting voices that are often unheard in mainstream media. This package of stories was published as a 32-page insert in *Hoy*. The project called for an accompanying website to publish the content; to date, there is no indication that the site has been launched.

In the recipient's own words

"One of the reasons the special publication was so well received was the fact we provided news coverage Pilsen has not seen in years. The people of Pilsen believe their community is only newsworthy when crime takes place or [when] immigration issues occasionally get heavy play for a week of more in the national media." -- Ralph Braseth, project director

National Museum of Mexican Art-Radio Arte

Bilingual multimedia series focusing on Latina perspective

- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/09/16/joven-pintora-mexicana-destaca-con-su-arte/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/07/jackie-orozco-fotografa-de-alto-contraste/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/11/villapalooza-vibro-con-el-arte-local/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/24/una-banda-familiar-muy-especial-en-el-villapalooza/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/11/04/talento-juvenil-en-el-latino-fashion-show/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/09/24/en-la-villita-crece-el-cilantro/>

- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/27/mujer-activista-profesional-feminista-y-madre/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/11/04/sobreviviente-de-violencia-recupera-su-libertad/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/11/04/integrantes-de-grupo-juvenil-hablan-sobre-la-fe/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/enterate-sobre-las-enfermedades-de-transmision-sexual/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/bombardean-a-jovenes-latinos-con-anuncios-de-comida-rapida/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/10/03/video-sobre-el-encuentro-de-jaraneros-del-medio-oeste/>
- <http://radioarteentrenosotras.wordpress.com/2011/09/19/ellas-hablan-sobre-la-esencia-del-son-jarocho/>

Editorial Summary

This effort is impressive for its scope and topical diversity. Posts to this multimedia blog have covered young artists, spirituality, the ways that the fast-food industry targets young Latinos, sexually transmitted diseases and the Latino community, and surviving domestic violence. The site itself is beautifully done, and the production quality of the multimedia elements is high. One impressive aspect of this work is that it is produced by a team of young women from Radio Arte's media training program. This project also included publication of material in *Hoy* and *Extra*, as well as broadcasts on WRTE.

In the recipient's own words

"The most important result has been the affirmation that we needed a program dedicated to Latina women. We're in the process of securing funding to ensure the program continues." – Jorge Valdiva, Radio Arte

Windy City Media Group

AIDS resources and funding on the west and south sides

- <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/aids.php#>

Editorial Summary

Windy City Media Group used its award to fund a series on AIDS at 30. This comprehensive look at AIDS and HIV in Chicago was a 10-month series of stories on 200 ad-free pages in the *Windy City Times*. The series resulted in an exhaustive examination of the history of AIDS in Chicago, how attitudes, treatment and programs have evolved and what is happening now. The stories included a wide range of voices and topics -- young and old, scientific and medical, historical perspective, and the impact on family and relationships.

In the recipient's own words

“We really were able to maximize the money and get a lot of original reporting done, outside of our day-to-day work with a daily website and weekly newspaper.” – Tracy Baim, editor

Recipients of \$2,000 Awards

Amandilo Cuzan

Video documentary on turnaround at Wendell Phillips High School

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMQEozo1N8Y&feature=youtu.be>

Editorial Summary

Cuzan’s documentary on Wendell Phillips High School successfully tracks the issues facing not just the school but the community it serves. The documentary tracks the history of the school and its evolution, as its demographics and those of the community changed over time. This is no puff piece, and Cuzan faced some pressure from the school when it became clear that he would take on the tough questions about whether this school can be turned around.

In the recipient’s own words

“I think overall our coverage is encouraging the community to take a more sophisticated and politically nuanced stance with these issues. We’re not so much trying to change minds as we are trying to expand awareness and get people to see their stake in the issues. The students in particular appreciated the fact that they had an outlet for their views.” -- Amandilo Cuzan

AustinTalks.org

Investigative stories on use of tax-increment financing in Austin

- <http://austintalks.org/2011/07/just-a-handful-of-private-sector-tif-projects-approved-in-austin-over-the-last-decade/>
- <http://austintalks.org/2011/08/loretto-hospitals-tif-project-has-yielded-no-jobs/>
- <http://austintalks.org/2011/07/tif-program-designed-to-benefit-struggling-neighborhoods-does-little-to-help-chicago%E2%80%99s-most-populated-community/>

Editorial Summary

Tax-increment financing is one of those topics that can cause the eyes to glaze – important, but not accessible. The *AustinTalks* work focuses on smart use of data to help bridge that gap, revealing how this program has done virtually nothing to assist the Austin community. There is a strong investigative element, as the reporting reveals gaps in the documentation of the program. With the *AustinTalks* project, we

see that the Local Reporting Awards enabled not just strong narrative reporting but strong accountability reporting as well.

In the recipient's own words

"Given our limited budget, *AustinTalks* would not have been able to commit a reporter to this kind of comprehensive project that provided our readers with in-depth coverage of an issue that affects each and every one of them." -- Suzanne McBride

Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council

Daring to Dream: Youth and Parent Volunteers Document Education Challenges

- <http://www.thegatenewspaper.com/2011/10/undocumented-youth-dreaming-waiting-falling-through-the-cracks/>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJujsZrpRrU>

Editorial Summary

The power of this work is that it was done by young people and done very well. The stories and photos capture the frustrations and fears of undocumented youth, teens who are living and attending school here but face an uncertain future because of their immigration status. The video is especially impressive, both because of its strong content and its high production values.

In the recipient's own words

"Our biggest success was incorporating youth into the entire project. Though the article's final draft was written by one of *The Gate's* staff, the youth journalists from our summer program helped with interviews, transcribing, and video editing. Coordinating this effort slowed us down at times, but overall having long discussions with the youth and learning more about the issue, as a group, was one of our greatest successes." --Adriana Cordona, *The Gate*

Beyondmedia Education

Digital Abuse and cyberbullying among low-income youth of color

- http://www.chainofchange.net/blog/view/are_youth_of_color_affected_by_cyber-bullying/
- http://www.chainofchange.net/blog/view/los_jovenes_de_color_son_afectados_por_cyber-bullying/

Editorial Summary

The issue of cyberbullying is a familiar topic in the mainstream media, but those stories rarely focus on the subject from the point of view of youth of color. Beyondmedia focused on the issue from this perspective, documenting some of the

differences both in media usage and the possibilities of abuse among minority young people. The project has a strong event focus and leverages the “Your Social Life” educational video from Beyondmedia to that end.

Bill Healy

Audio slideshows documenting a day in the life of five individuals on the southwest side

- <http://www.wbez.org/story/change-and-challenge-auburn-gresham-94708>
- <http://www.wbez.org/story/house-music-legend-shaped-childhood-auburn-gresham-94817>
- <http://www.wbez.org/story/neighborhood-pushes-pulls-auburn-gresham-teenager-toward-adulthood-94925>
- <http://www.wbez.org/story/women-build-muscles-and-connections-auburn-gresham-94869>
- <http://www.wbez.org/story/young-gay-and-black-auburn-gresham-94843>

Editorial Summary

This is truly lovely work. The voices are strong and there is a strong sense of neighborhood, of place, in this work. The use of the personal voice is extremely effective here. The images are powerful and the production values are high; it is a model for compelling online content that invites engagement. This recipient also did an excellent job of using social media and tracking feedback through those channels.

In the recipient’s own words

“I would say the most important result is the confidence I gained while reporting this series. I am committed now to being a journalist and photojournalist for the rest of my life. I say this is the most important outcome from my series because I am just getting started and I have a lot more work left to do. The Local Reporting Awards really boosted my morale when I needed it most.” -- Bill Healy

Enlace Chicago

Moving Past Juvenile Records

Editorial Summary

The recipient changed both subjects and writers after discovering that its original topic had lost relevance. The refocused project was intended to focus on the local economy; it has been completed, but is being repackaged.

Grassroots Collaborative

Tax-increment financing

- <http://www.progressillinois.com/posts/content/2011/12/05/tif-abuse-buoys-downtown-fat-cats-neighborhoods-suffer>

- <http://www.thegatenewspaper.com/2011/11/tif-spending-whos-really-benefiting/>

Editorial Summary

This is the best data project among the award recipients. The recipient did a thorough job of analyzing and presenting complex data in a way that was extremely user-friendly. This is also the only recipient that used graphics to any extent, which helped with visualization of the data. The recipient also developed a video component that strengthened the overall presentation. Strong accountability and investigative focus.

In the recipient's own words

"This experience allowed us to consider how we can create our own content and share it with journalists, aldermen, and the public. We will seek to continue creatively sharing our story and information." -- Eric Tellez, Grassroots Collaborative

Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corp.

Multimedia oral history by youth reporters of their elders in 3 south side communities

- <http://theyoungdefenders.wordpress.com/>

Editorial Summary

A strong example of young voices, this project is a valuable teaching tool in several respects. The participants learn about storytelling and reporting, developing audio and video skills as part of the project. But they also gained an appreciation for the history of their community, the lives and contributions of those who came before them and a connection to the elders in their neighborhood.

In the recipient's own words

"This project gave the youth in the community an instant voice in their respective communities. Most importantly, it started safe dialogue with youth and seniors and increased the youth awareness of history in their community, as told by everyday people who live here." -- Norma Sanders, Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corp.

Illinois African American Coalition for Prevention

Coverage of youth-led violence prevention programs

- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/930>

Editorial Summary

This project had as its focus youth-generated coverage of youth violence prevention

efforts. One story of the three-part series has published on the award recipient's website. That story explored the issue of whether unemployment among young people is a contributor to violence. It is adequately sourced and clearly written. The remaining pieces were unpublished at the time of the evaluation.

In the recipient's own words

"It has reaffirmed our commitment to developing youth communication skills and leadership ability, so that they can be the mouthpieces for their issues." -- Chris Sang, Illinois African American Coalition for Prevention

Irasema Salinas

Site featuring local Latinas working in the arts and beyond

- <http://proyectolatina.org/?p=3067>
- <http://proyectolatina.org/?p=3153>

Editorial Summary

This project is still very much a work in progress, and its editorial content and impact are difficult to judge as a result. Proyecto Latina's Reportera Series is an excellent idea: recruiting Latinas to write about the issues that directly affect them. The early content that we saw was encouraging – pieces on diabetes and the framework for stories on suicide. But the overall body of work is thin at this point, and contains only sporadic examples of reporting – there are some personal blogs and some event coverage/announcement stories.

Kalyn Belsha

Series examining Chicago Public School implementation of dual language program

- <http://www.readoz.com/publication/read?i=1046034#page2>
- <http://www.readoz.com/publication/read?i=1046077#page2>
- <http://www.readoz.com/publication/read?i=1046145#page2>

Editorial Summary

This work was well-sourced and professionally written. It is a thorough examination of the dual language program and the fact that its long-term nature is in conflict with the pressure to produce immediate results in schools. This 3-part series explored those tradeoffs, representing the viewpoints of all of the stakeholders involved in the program. The recipient worked through issues of language translation herself for this story, and her persistence paid off in a report that is thorough, compelling and accessible to Spanish speakers.

In the recipient's own words

"The project has definitely made me more aware of how long it takes to get sources in public education to feel comfortable with you and the importance of persistence and what a difference it makes when you have the time to do in-depth reporting." -- Kalyn Belsha

Kari Lydersen

Series covering southeast side environmental challenges and future in a green economy

- <http://www.chicagonewscoop.org/plenty-of-fights-and-a-few-big-wins-for-southeast-side-fishermen/>
- <http://www.chicagonewscoop.org/touring-toxic-chicago/>
- <http://www.chicagonewscoop.org/new-industry-to-bring-jobs-soot-to-southeast-side/>

Editorial Summary

This was solid, professional reporting on a subject that provided a different view into concerns of under-covered communities. So many of the award recipients focused on social issues, the arts or education. Looking at environmental concerns provided important topical diversity. The variety of stories Kari produced helped demonstrate the range of environmental issues these communities face, and the stakeholder voices were strong. Kari's work on this package, along with her work with Carlos Ortiz on "Too Young To Die," is among the standout pieces of reporting work among the award recipients.

In the recipient's own words

"The group events with other award winners were extremely inspiring to me -- hearing about all the important stories people were doing and receiving institutional affirmation of the importance of reporting on the south and west sides really increased my already serious dedication to searching out and reporting more such stories in the future." -- Kari Lydersen

Latinos Progresando

Effects of Mexico's drug war on Chicago's Mexican communities

This recipient did not respond to repeated requests for information. No content or data available.

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

El Cilantro: Youth, media and environmental justice

- <http://www.elcilantro.org/>

Editorial Summary

This project took more the form of a true blog than enterprise or narrative reporting. For a blog approach to be successful, frequency and reliability of publication are key. This effort was hurt by the infrequent nature of posts; the recipient did not seem to achieve the rhythm of regular posting that a blog needs to engage audience; posts are separated by weeks and sometimes months. The mix of content and youth voices is a plus, but the effort remains unfocused and more than a bit disjointed.

Megan Cottrell

Series exploring correlation between lead poisoning and academic performance

Work on this project was delayed; not included in this evaluation.

Metropolitan Tenants Organization

Slumlord Millionaires articles looking at one publicly supported and one privately owned building

- <http://progressillinois.com/posts/content/2012/02/29/guest-article-princeton-park-homes-tenants-suffer-owners-prosper>

Editorial Summary

The story on Princeton Park homes paints a vivid picture of life for tenants in a complex where repairs aren't made and living conditions have become unsanitary and damaging to both property and health. The story has appropriate background and context, explaining some of the underlying principles of tenant law and how those are being violated in this case. Unfortunately, there is no indication that of an attempt to contact the property owners for their response, which weakens the story.

Mujeres Latinas in Accion

Multimedia reports from Latina perspective on being undocumented and on teen suicide

- <http://latina-voices.com/wp04/2011/10/14/why-are-latina-teens-at-risk-for-suicide-attempts/>
- <http://latina-voices.com/wp04/2011/10/28/latinas-face-barriers-to-mental-health-treatment/>
- <http://latina-voices.com/wp04/2011/10/14/latina-teens-face-suicide-risk/>

Editorial Summary

The subject matter is an important one and something we do not often see in mainstream media: mental health issues among Latinos. The recipient focused on two topics: the mental health concerns of undocumented Latinas and the issue of

teen suicide among Latinas. The stories were well sourced and included voices of both experts and stakeholders. The profile of a family who lost a daughter to suicide was both a compelling narrative and served as a window into the larger issue. This is serious and important work.

Neighborhood Writing Alliance

Series of individuals with disabilities living and working on Chicago's south and west sides

- <http://www.jot.org/blog/2011/10/25/disability-in-chicago-part-1-bullying-in-chicago-public-schools/>
- <http://www.jot.org/blog/2011/11/15/disability-in-chicago-part-2-isolation-and-disability/>
- <http://www.jot.org/blog/2011/12/15/disability-in-chicago-part-3-domestic-violence-in-the-disability-community/>
- <http://www.jot.org/blog/2011/12/22/disability-in-chicago-part-4-state-compliance-to-olmstead-decision-increasing/>

Editorial Summary

There is a lot to like about this work. The choice of subject matter is strong. These are voices we do not often hear, talking about experiences that few of us share. The stories provide context, putting the individual accounts into the broader perspective: the challenges facing those living with disabilities. Issues related to policy are explored, as are the complexities of issues such as domestic violence and the disabled. This is an example of diversity in voices that extends outside some of our traditional thinking.

In the recipient's own words

"We found that delving deeply into one community's issues and sharing that with a broader public helped create connections and build community support that expanded beyond the targeted community." -- Hollen Reischer, Neighborhood Writing Alliance

Rainbow Gal Inc.

Radio series investigating the City of Chicago's program for black and female business entrepreneurs

- <http://emilieandfriends.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/cctreport.pdf>

Editorial Summary

The major editorial output for this recipient was a 54-page report on the history and effectiveness of the city's Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Program. The report is comprehensive and detailed, presented more in an academic or institutional tone than a reportorial tone. It would be a significant resource for those seeking to understand the intricacies of this program. The recipient also

produced television programming exploring the issues raised by this program; however, we were not provided with links to that content and were unable to locate it through search.

In the recipient's own words

"The biggest success was being able to collect valuable information and present it as concisely as possible, and also making it easy for people to access documents and materials referenced in the report by providing web links. By presenting the report in this way, those who read it will hopefully have a better understanding of why the WMBE program was created, the obstacles faced to maintain it, and where the program currently stands." -- Emilie McKendall

Samuel C. Cholke

Examination of county health reorganization and effect on low-income populations'

This recipient did not respond to repeated requests for information. No content or data available.

Serethea Matthews

Examination of 911 response and lack of equitable distribution of police services in Austin

- <http://austintalks.org/2012/02/police-response-slow-in-austin-compared-to-near-north-neighborhoods/>

Editorial Summary

This recipient clearly faced serious obstacles in gathering data for her work. She is transparent in outlining the information requests she submitted to police authorities and how she had to find alternate sources of information when those requests were denied. She paints a vivid picture of the neighborhood and the concerns of the residents who live there about this issue. She provides context and comparisons to build her case. Her story would have been strengthened with comment from police.

In the recipient's own words

"(This project gave me) credibility. I expect to be able to leverage this recognition for other projects and to gain other funding." -- Serethea Matthews

Strategic Human Service – North Lawndale News

Multimedia investigation of impact of poverty in seven west side communities

- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/783>
- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/818>
- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/777>

- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/376>
- <http://nlcn.org/news/?p=432>
- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/733>
- <http://nlcn.org/news/archives/722>

Editorial Summary

There is a lot of potential in the work of this recipient: a variety of topics, voices (both as writers and as sources) that we do not see in mainstream media, a sense of urgency and connection to community and a focus on what is being done to help. We believe this potential could have better been achieved if the recipient had worked more closely with the Community Media Workshop and *The Chicago Reporter*; this work was largely done by recipients on their own. The recipients did not respond to our requests to complete the survey or provide information on distribution or audience, so we lack information to make a more complete evaluation.

Sarah Ostman

Prostitution court in practice: Stories on individuals leaving the sex trade

- <http://gapersblock.com/mechanics/2012/01/09/nina-prostitution-recovery-and-the-wings-court/>

Editorial Summary

This recipient focused intensely on one woman: Nina, a prostitute for more than 30 years who was offered the opportunity to participate in a program aimed at helping women like her break the cycle of prostitution and drugs. The recipient clearly spent significant time with Nina and came to deeply understand her life. Her audio report is compelling; production values are high, the quality of the content is strong. This recipient directly gives us the voice of this woman, unadorned, so that we can gain insight into her experiences.

In the recipient's own words

"It gave me the push I need to do a project I'd been thinking about for a long time. I was aware of the prostitution court and its challenges, but this award really inspired me (and allowed me financially) to take the time to investigate it." -- Sarah Ostman

The Voice Newspapers

Series documenting correlation of academic success and youth engagement with juvenile justice system

This recipient did not respond to repeated requests for information. No content or data available.

The Westside Writing Project

Research and reporting on efforts to revitalize Chicago Avenue and other topics

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKzRgALTwLg>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s45xPDNBBH0>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGfcxZuLtCw>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGfcxZuLtCw>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34KuFHB_gL4
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y208IrGmmdo>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=804-szmvB54&feature=youtu.be>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7EUdpKKfY8&feature=youtu.be>

Editorial Summary

Let's toss objectivity out the window here: We loved this project. This is the ultimate expression of young voices. The idea of doing this through a YouTube channel is inspired; it creates a strong body of work in a format that young people are familiar with and willing to explore. The student reporters are clearly engaged and excited about the work they are doing, and the production values of that work are quite good. This is the kind of effort that pays dividends not just in the information it provides to the community, but in the sense of accomplishment it creates in the young people doing the work.

In the recipient's own voice:

"Our biggest success was that we were able to conduct a Summer Digital Media Workshop working with 10 students from 6 area schools to form a news team reporting on local issues affecting the community." -- Frank Latin, Westside Writing Project

EDITOR'S NOTE: The links above may not capture all of the online activity and reporting generated by Local Reporting Award winners.

About the Evaluator

Janet Coats is the founder and chief executive officer of Coats2Coats, a consulting firm focused on helping clients achieve a media future that is participatory, mobile and profitable.

Before starting Coats2Coats with her husband, Rusty Coats, Janet was a newsroom leader for nearly two decades. She served as executive editor of the Sarasota Herald-Tribune and The Tampa Tribune. In both of those roles, she was an industry leader in emphasizing news presentation across multiple platforms – online, print and television.

Her focus as a newsroom leader was on the need for newsroom change, both to adapt to new technology and to changing audiences. Her goal has been to shift journalists' perspective from "telling the news" to understanding that news is a conversation with the community.

Janet served as a juror for the Pulitzer Prizes five times; she chaired both the public service and the investigative reporting juries. She has judged numerous state and regional newspaper competitions and has been a judge for the ASNE and the Scripps Howard Awards. She was a board member of the American Society of News Editors for six years and twice chaired the ASNE annual convention.

Advisory Committee

Members of the Community News Matters advisory committee, with their 2011 affiliations, were:

- Clark Bell, McCormick Foundation
- Rich Cahan, Richard H. Driehaus Foundation
- Kathy Chaney, *Chicago Defender*
- Thom Clark, Community Media Workshop
- Nancy Day, Columbia College Chicago
- Fernando Diaz, *Hoy*
- Sunny Fischer, Richard H. Driehaus Foundation
- Rich Gordon, Northwestern University
- Mark Hallett, McCormick Foundation
- Don Heider, Loyola University Chicago
- Kathy Im, MacArthur Foundation
- Tom Irvine, The Chicago Community Trust
- Ngoan Le, The Chicago Community Trust
- Alden Loury, *The Chicago Reporter*
- Michele McLellan, Knight Foundation
- Elspeth Revere, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Greg Sanders, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Mike Smith, Media Management Center, Northwestern University
- Hai Long Tran, DePaul University
- Vivian Vahlberg, The Chicago Community Trust
- Laura Washington, Woods Fund of Chicago