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Movement & Media Convening Recap & Needs



What Happened:

On January 26 - 28 2023, 41 people representing various media organizations, social movement organizations, and philanthropic institutions gathered in Austin, Texas, to build relationships, strategize, and vision what a collaborative environment between media and social movement organizations would look like. The convening started with a fireside chat with historian and organizer Joe Torres to ground the space in the history of how media and movement have worked together. The next day featured group discussions/fish bowls to set the context of our current political reality, conversations about what individual organizations need, and broader visioning about what is missing in the sector. The day concluded with breakout groups of media organizations, social movement/civic organizations, and philanthropic donors to discuss what people could do together and what they would need from other groups to move on to possible projects.

The convening was brought together by a leadership team of Borealis Philanthropy Racial Equity & Journalism Fund (Alicia Bell), Democracy Fund Public Square Portfolio (Lea Trusty), Piece by Piece Strategies (Jessica Pierce & Bryan Perlmutter), Ohio Organizing Collaborative (Prentiss Haney), and Scalawag Media (Cierra Hinton). This leadership team, through conversations with others in the sector, developed five guiding questions it seeked to answer during the convening that were:

Guiding Convening Questions:

1. How does Black, Indigenous, and People of Color media influence civic participation?
2. How does a Black, Indigenous, and People of Color media sector build power and activate new members of base-building organizations and participants in social movements?
3. Do communities risk anything by not having a strong Black, Indigenous, and People of Color media sector?
4. What strategies are civic & social justice organizations using to tell their narratives? How could collaborations with media organizations deepen that work?
5. What are the interventions that can be made to change the dominant narratives & local narratives to increase civic participation and build sustained social movements? What role should media organizations, civic/power-building organizations, and donors/philanthropy play in accomplishing it?

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What we heard: Throughout the convening leaders from social movement organizations, media organizations, and funders wrestled with the convening guiding questions and the role of different organizations and institutions in our movements. As we could only gather a limited number of people, we committed to ensuring that the needs and opportunities identified by the organizations present would be shared. The following gaps and proposed solutions were developed and named by the leaders who attended the convening.

Gaps/Needs:

Individual Level

- Organizational leaders are over capacity and do not have the flexibility to think about new sector-wide projects. They are often in the weeds of organization and it is difficult to lead.
- Organizational leaders who respectively come from media organizations/journalism training, movement/organizing, or philanthropy do not have the relationships with leaders in other spaces to brainstorm and understand strategy
- Burnout and transitions continue to be a driving barrier to build long-term sustainable strategy. Leaders are often filling gaps and stepping into roles rather than building skill-sets to lead campaigns.

Organizational Level

- Grassroots and social movement organizations need more communication capacity. Most organizations do not have a dedicated communications person and the coms department rarely thinks about media strategy.
- There is a gap in media training with social justice frameworks that exists in both media and movement organizations.
- Organizations lack money/in-house expertise to purchase key expertise in things such as SEO search and web presence
- Philanthropic leaders are often restricted from accessing the dollars needed to move big strategy as they are often locked out of larger conversations including endowment spend and grantmaking budgets.

Ecosystem Level

- A knowledge gap exists between what media organizations do and what social movement organizations do. There are no clear frameworks or spaces for how these organizations build relationships, shared language, or have regular communication.

- A training gap exists between media strategy and communication strategy. The sector at large
- The sector is missing firms and intermediaries that are trusted to do media buys and place stories that will not co-opt leaders, sensationalize issues, and be accountable for their work. Many people had negative experiences with the current infrastructure.
- Media publications at large are not owned by local communities which results in directly impacted community members, journalists of color, and social movement strategists being locked out of key framing and distribution frameworks.
- Siloed funders that only want to resource one part of movement building or one type of capacity building. This specifically manifests in media organizations being unable to find money for research and reporting around justice issues from policing to elections. While movement/civic organizations are unable to access media dollars for larger reach on getting their stories out and being able to scale who they can reach. Lastly, funders in both the media sector/information sector and advocacy/civic engagement/racial justice do not know each other and rarely share space.

Where do we go from here: Proposed Interventions:
The following concepts were both ideas generated from the leaders at the convening AND include a dedicated group of people who are interested in driving the project forward. These strategies include:

- **Build physical and virtual space for training, relationship building, and collaborations;**
    - Media Freedom Schools - training program for movement communications leaders to learn media strategy and for media/journalists to learn movement strategy. These schools would be grounded and led by organizations on the ground.
        - Start by creating physical training space where both journalists and movement organizers & communications staff can build relationships, share best practices, and understand each other's work
    - Expand and build a leadership body that includes media leaders, movement leaders, and funders to explore interventions/experimentations, share lessons, and coordinate action steps
- **Create ownership & sustainability models for media**
    - Creating models of sustainability and ownership frameworks for Black and Indigenous leaders to own sustainable media entities that have the capacity to reach masses of people

    - Change purchasing habits of institutions to funnel more money into accountable intermediary and media firms that can uplift the stories that are essential to movement building
- **Data projects**
    - Central list/database and sharing of vetted firms and intermediaries who do trainings, media buys, and planning that are aligned and are committed to movement building.
    - Archive history, gather existing content, and identify case studies of how independent media has worked in conjunction with advocacy campaigns to win material changes.
- **Fundraising dollars for work at the intersections of media and movement**
    - Identify ways to support groups to build more collaborations, increase capacity, and fund interventions that grow the ecosystem and capacity of the sector
    - Organize additional institutions and donors to understand the connectivity and possibility along with the needs of growing frameworks and infrastructure to support movement and media.
    - Secure funding and resource 4-5 different projects that seek to build the capacity of the media and movement sectors.

Target Goals for 2023 & 2024:

Where we are headed: Media organizations are more politically aligned with movement organizations. This results in several programs and concrete initiatives of media organizations in alignment with movement organizations to advance civic engagement interventions. These programs are supporting movement organizations to grow their bases and increase the visibility of their organization, while the media organizations support storytelling and mass electoral engagement. The programs are evaluated to understand how to combat misinformation, highlight local issues, and increase impact.

- Build out the leadership team/advisory body of this project to include philanthropic partners, media organizations, and movement/civic organizations.
- Resource local/regional media publications and local/regional movement organizations for cross training and relationship building (Media Freedom Schools)
- Identify clear interventions that both media organizations and movement organizations want to collaborate on.
- Build infrastructure and networks that make collaboration and communication streamlined and easy between organizations