# About us

- Introduction
- Meet the partners

# Impact

- Goals & metrics
- Year one highlights

# Financials

- Resource fund distribution

# Current projects

- Pandemic relief: ecosystem grant
- Editorial project: “Missing Bridges”
Supporting a vibrant, diverse and independent local media ecosystem

Collaborative problem-solving. Sharing resources. Making connections. Advancing the profession — and the conversation. In our first year, the Pittsburgh Media Partnership proved its value as we helped its members through unrelenting pressures on the business while also helping to coordinate coverage of a public health crisis that changed the world.

PMP kicked off in late 2019. In January 2020, it launched with 20 founding partners representing diverse audiences, each signing an MOU to work together throughout the year. The early buy-in is notable: The effort brought together competitors in a local market to collaboratively report on a topic. Editors who have worked in the city for decades met each other for the first time, began sharing information, and discussed the impact of their coverage.

In March, the pandemic forced a quick change in our approach. Editors — and their staffs — were stretched thin covering not only the public health crisis, but also the large-scale protests launched in response to the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Several of our partners faced severe business cuts when losses of advertising and event-driven revenue threatened their ability to report the news. We pivoted to support them, both editorially to ensure the service journalism they were doing was amplified, and financially, by directly investing through emergency technology grants and by connecting them to external resources.

The work created a shared experience that we could not have created organically as quickly. Editors who had no time to give to anything extraneous joined our calls twice a month to connect, often more
than a dozen at a time. Those who had to miss a call typically sent regrets and followed up asynchronously.

Our impact, detailed more fully in the following pages, includes an intentional effort to shift the culture — to distribute and share power — and to address inequalities not just within the region itself, but within the media’s narrative of it as well.

As one of our partners, Marcia Liggett of Soul Pitt Media, described it, “Pittsburgh is known for its pockets of diverse cultures. Never has such an asserted effort been made to blend these cultures through a journalistic collaboration. PMP bridges the gap by giving an equal voice to small and start-up journalistic businesses, as well as large publications and local media. Such a feat has never been accomplished in Pittsburgh — until now.”

From the beginning, we have tried to design a process that values equity — the idea that everyone who participates gets value out of doing so in a way that helps them succeed. It’s work that is ongoing. But the past year left no doubt about its priority.

Or the need to invest in it. Collaborative journalism efforts are still very experimental. Similar projects across the country have shown the sparks of what is possible — but the industry model is still evolving. Our work is contributing to that conversation and helping to shape not just what happens in the local media market in Pittsburgh, but also the journalism industry overall.

We’ve learned from others doing this work that lack of good story ideas — or the will to better inform communities — isn’t the reason collaboratives don’t work. The ones that fail do so because of “the cracks in the foundation, processes and workflow,” Cassie Haynes, of Resolve Philly, said.

The sustained engagement of local editors and the value they are getting from the work we are doing are evidence of the strong foundation we are building.

In late summer 2020, we added two new partners. In early 2021, 21 partners renewed the MOU, and we added two new partners. And we continue to talk with other local news organizations who want to be a part of this.

Our success here is also illustrated in the additional resources we’ve been able to deliver in addition to those that were part of the original project. Supported by two additional grants totaling $300,000 provided by the Henry L. Hillman Foundation in the Fall of 2020, we launched a paid internship program in June 2021 to help develop a pipeline for talent. We are also working with the American Journalism Project on a community information needs assessment and a news ecosystem market study that will be released soon. And we are creating shared resources — both for story production and for business strategy and business processes — that can help support the long-term stability of both legacy and new media organizations.

It’s all toward an ambitious goal: To give local news organizations the room they need to think proactively and strategically, so that they can dig deeper into big stories that need to be told — in a way that tells the whole story.
About us

Committed to the process

The makeup of our collaborative tells its own story: Of the 23 partners, more than half (15) are for-profits and about a third (8) operate as a nonprofit. The majority (20) are controlled by local ownership. Six (26%) are owned or led by people of color. Half are led by women. Most operate with two or fewer full-time employees.

Learn more about the mission of each of our partners and who they serve below.

Meet the partners

90.5 WESA
90.5 WESA is Pittsburgh’s NPR news station, and Southwestern Pennsylvania’s only independent news station and information station. Its mission is to give voice to provocative ideas that foster a vibrant, informed, diverse and caring community. A 501(c)3, 90.5 WESA is a service of the Pittsburgh Community Broadcasting Corporation.

Ambridge Connection
Ambridge Connection serves the area encompassing the Ambridge Area School District in Beaver County — including Ambridge, Baden and Economy boroughs and South Heights and Harmony townships. An LLC, it shares information primarily through a Facebook page and is staffed by a small group of volunteers, many of whom worked or freelance for other news outlets.

Homewood Nation
Homewood Nation shares information of interest to the residents of the Homewood neighborhood in Pittsburgh through its Facebook page. Staffed by two volunteers, both with legacy newsroom experience, the “dream,” its founder says, is to provide 100% coverage of the neighborhood. It is published under Luminaria Productions LLC.

Allegheny Front
Allegheny Front is an award-winning public radio program covering environmental issues in Western Pennsylvania. Its mission is to explore those issues affecting the community through stories, interviews, news, and commentaries, along with special series and podcasts. A 501(c)3, Allegheny Front is fiscally sponsored by PCBC and airs on 90.5 WESA, but maintains its editorial independence.

Environmental Health News
EHN’s mission is to get good science on how environmental changes are impacting human health into the public discussion. It is a publication of Environmental Health Sciences, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and has a regional bureau in Pittsburgh that opened in 2018.

Gazette 2.0
Gazette 2.0 is a biweekly community publication covering schools and local government in the West End of Pittsburgh (Stowe Township and McKees Rocks, along with Coraopolis, Crafton, Ingram, Kennedy, Moon, Neville Island, and Robinson). Published by hyperLOCAL Media, it was rescued from closure in early 2021 by its newest owner, a former contributing editor. Its mission is to provide community service through the delivery of quality journalism.

Why we do the work

“I was always seeking some kind of mission, whether it was a religious mission or a political mission. But I wanted to be a writer since I was 5. So I went in the direction of journalism.”

— Jennifer Szweda Jordan, Unabridged Press
Why we do the work

“I started at the Post-Gazette at the age of 52. That’s how I got my start. When I took the buyout, I continued working with my website .... A big part of the idea behind Homewood Nation was that Homewood and neighborhoods like it could not afford to be totally dependent on mainstream media on coverage of our stories.”

— Elwin Green, Homewood Nation

Mon Valley Independent
The Mon Valley Independent is a community publication based in Monessen, Pa. with an office also in McKeesport. It publishes in print six days a week with news on local government, schools and police in parts of Allegheny, Westmoreland and Washington counties. Formerly part of Trib Total Media, it was purchased by local business partners in 2015 “to give the Mon Valley its voice back.” It is published by the Mid Mon Valley Publishing Company, LLC.

New Pittsburgh Courier
The New Pittsburgh Courier is a publication written by and focused on the voice of the African-American community in Pittsburgh. Coverage includes Pittsburgh Public Schools, as well as business news, social announcements, and community events within the African-American community. It produces a daily newsletter and a weekly print publication. The Courier is owned by the Detroit-based LLC Real Times Media.

NEXTpittsburgh
NEXTpittsburgh produces city guides and job and event listings alongside neighborhood business news. Its mission is to cover the people driving change and the innovative, cool things happening in the city. An LLC, it was sold in 2021 to a local investor.

Qburgh
The mission of Qburgh, a new publication and podcast launched in 2021 as an LLC, is to be the source for LGBTQ news and community resources in Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania: “Always by the LGBTQ Community and always for the LGBTQ Community.”

Pittsburgh Business Times
The Pittsburgh Business Times is a weekly publication with daily breaking news updates focused on the Southwestern Pennsylvania economy, local industries and small business news. The organization is part of the portfolio of the American City Business Journals, owned by Advance Publications, Inc.

Pittsburgh City Paper
Pittsburgh City Paper is an independent alt-weekly publication with a mission focused on social justice and amplifying underrepresented voices in the community. It focuses coverage particularly on local politics and arts and culture and produces a weekly print edition along with its website. It is owned and published by Eagle Media Corp., based in Butler, Pa.

PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine
PRESENTE, a new bilingual publication launched in 2020, is focused on Western Pennsylvania’s growing Latinx community. Its mission is to share culturally relevant content that keeps the Latino population connected, empowers the community and elevates the quality of life of Hispanics in the region. It is published by PRESENTE Pittsburgh Media, LLC.

Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle
The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle is an independent multimedia Jewish news organization serving Southwestern Pennsylvania’s Jewish community. It is published in print and online every Friday by the Pittsburgh Jewish Publication and Education Foundation.

PublicSource
PublicSource is a digital-first newsroom with a mission to deliver public-service reporting and analysis in the Pittsburgh region. Its work focuses on meaningful enterprise and accountability stories, projects and essays, incorporating a commitment to elevate community voices. PublicSource is a 501(c3).

Postindustrial
Postindustrial Media, LLC, is a multimedia outlet that features podcasts and a quarterly print magazine. Its mission is to redefine the Rust Belt and Appalachia region on “our own terms, not those handed down to us by previous generations and the national media.” Its coverage area includes Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky and parts of New York, Maryland, and North Carolina.
About us, continued

Spotlight PA
Spotlight PA is an independent, nonpartisan and statewide newsroom with a mission of holding powerful private and public forces in Pennsylvania — especially government, businesses and special interests — to account through urgent and compelling investigative journalism that drives change and strengthens our democracy. The project is led by the Philadelphia Inquirer in partnership with PennLive/The Patriot-News, Tribune/Live/Pittsburgh Tribune Review and WITF Public Media. It operates under the 501(c)(3) status of the Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Soul Pitt Quarterly
Soul Pitt Quarterly serves the African-American population in Western Pennsylvania by sharing positive stories about people, including the successes of artists and business leaders. It also often gives writers their first opportunity to be published. The free quarterly magazine is published by Soul Pitt Media, LLC.

Storyburgh
Storyburgh uses video and live storytelling to give marginalized populations a voice by helping them tell their underreported stories. They also give organizational stakeholders a way to visualize and understand the causes they serve. It operates under the 501(c)(3) status of New Sun Rising.

Trib Total Media
Trib Total Media publishes local community news in Southwestern Pennsylvania, primarily focused on Westmoreland County, the Alle-Kiski Valley and Allegheny County. Its platforms include TribLIVE, the Tribune Review and 14 community publications. It is a registered LLC.

Unabridged Press
Unabridged Press focuses on disability issues and telling the whole story from the whole person. An LLC designed for the public benefit, it manages the educational project All Abilities Media, which trains people to tell their own stories, particularly using the podcast platform.

YaJagoff! Media
YaJagoff! is a podcast about cool stuff going on around Pittsburgh: Comedians, musicians, nonprofits, new businesses, the tech, the med, all the stuff. It is produced by YaJagoff! Media, LLC.

In their own voices
We launched our YouTube channel in early 2021. Our first series focuses on each of our partners: Learn about the organizations and the people doing the work behind-the-scenes. Interviews and production are conducted by students at the Center for Media Innovation.

Credits: Monae Findley, Zoey Angelucci, Jordyn Hronec, Olivia Valyo, Frank Smith, and Kumar Simms.

Why we do the work
“There was information not being passed along in each community. What drew me in was figuring out how do [we] communicate with each other?”
— Felicia Mycyk, Ambridge Connection

“There is such a need for hyperlocal news. It is just something that helps bring everyone together. It helps to create a unity.”
— Caitlin Spitzer, McKees Rocks Gazette 2.0
Impact

Our goals
The work of community-building and capacity-building helps us tell deeper stories, digging into their complexity and exploring the nuance.

Building community
Connecting local journalists and providing space to talk and room to think about how we deliver the news in an industry being constantly disrupted.

Facilitating collaboration and capacity-building
Pooling resources to help experiment and innovate to support enterprise journalism that benefits all of our audiences.

Advancing the conversation
At the same time, we provide a feedback loop, hosting conversations with audiences to make the process of newsmaking more transparent and accessible — and newsmakers accountable.

How we helped
At the end of 2020, we asked our partners to give us feedback on our first year working together and had them define the value of the Partnership. Below is how our partners said we helped:

COLLABORATIVE BRAINSTORMING / PROBLEM-SOLVING
The Partnership provided peer support and a place for newsroom leaders to exchange information on coverage strategies, managing resources, engaging audiences and supporting their staffs during a year of relentless news cycles.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
The Partnership provided opportunities for peer-to-peer skills sharing among the partner organizations, as well as access to training and information from national industry experts.

SHARED RESOURCES
Collaborative reporting, shared content and shared reporting resources such as data, tips and strategies, helped partners’ stretch their own resources. The opportunity to work together also resulted in new relationships that led to collaborations outside the Partnership’s primary editorial focus.

AMPLIFICATION OF WORK
A centralized project site, thebigstorypgh.com, a shared “support us” campaign, a newsletter strategy and a commitment to crediting each other generously made each partners’ work more visible, expanding the reach of their stories.

DIRECT INVESTMENT
The Partnership invests directly in the partners’ work through a Resource Fund that supports collaborations among the partners, a Freelance Fund, which commissions work from the independent journalism community, and a Programming Fund, which pays for professional development and community engagement opportunities that benefit all the partners. In 2020, emergency technology grants were also provided to help partners do the job remotely and reach audiences digitally.

CONNECTIONS
PMP staff consulted with individual partners, helping increase access to external resources, matching organizations with regional and national grant opportunities and outside expert advice on both editorial and business strategies.
**Measuring our impact**

We’ve adapted a framework published by the Center for Cooperative Media to help us measure the systemic changes that our work facilitates. Impact, defined in this context, is “a change in the status quo at the level of an individual, network or institution, ....”

**Internal impact** considers how “journalists and organizations experience a shift in their thinking, perspectives and processes” that helps build their capacity for the long-term and serve the information needs of their communities, particularly those who have historically been left out of the story.

**External impact** is “change catalyzed by reporting.”

*We are also considering LION publishers’ new metrics to help us measure progress toward sustaining an independent ecosystem. Along with journalistic impact, that approach also considers the financial health of organizations and their operational resilience.*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact level</th>
<th>Examples External</th>
<th>Examples Internal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDIVIDUAL</strong>&lt;br&gt;Increased knowledge or intent to take action.</td>
<td>The audience response indicates the information is useful or substantially moves them to think differently. The profile of a source / expert without regular access to the media is raised in a meaningful way.</td>
<td>A journalist learns new skills, expands beat expertise, and/or diversifies sourcing network. An editor is supported in a way that helps them overcome a challenge in coverage strategy or people management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NETWORK</strong>&lt;br&gt;New connections formed around content or established groups making use of content in their own work.</td>
<td>Audiences create new connections as a result of the work (such as a one-time event or ongoing social media group to continue the discussion). A movement is sparked to push for an institutional change.</td>
<td>Partners share or stretch resources to produce work that was unlikely to be produced on their own. Partners leverage their group to improve access to government information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INSTITUTIONAL</strong>&lt;br&gt;Regulatory change or policy (such as corporate or personnel) changes or a cultural change to how a process works in practice.</td>
<td>Leadership changes or new government legislation is introduced in response to the information presented. An underrepresented group gains more influence in a traditionally closed process.</td>
<td>A shift in coverage or publishing strategy across the organization or within a team. A change in process such as hiring, onboarding, promoting and/or paying employees that supports DEI.</td>
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“This model assumes that impact ... is a complex process and is neither linear nor unidirectional. Instead, long-term change requires interaction among these different types of impact: individuals and networks ensure that there is not backsliding of institutional change, while institutional changes can affect the material reality of individuals.” — *Collaborating for Change*

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*Source: “Collaborating for Change: approaches to measuring the impact of collaborative journalism”*

*Authors: Lindsay Green-Barber, Impact Architects and Sarah Stonbely, Center for Cooperative Media, published summer 2020.*
Building a collaborative: Year one highlights
Our work together formally kicked off in January 2020 with a plan to focus on a collaborative editorial project about Pittsburgh’s “Missing Bridges” — but we quickly pivoted to respond to the forces of the pandemic. That included coordinating editorial coverage, creating shared resources in response to the moment, triaging technology challenges, and helping partners work through business challenges. On the following pages are highlights of how our work made a difference.

2020 STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION
On Jan. 23 and 24, 2020, editors from publications across the region met — many for the first time — at the Center for Media Innovation at Point Park University for a half-day brainstorming session to define their 2020 project together.

REPORTING DURING A PANDEMIC
By March, plans changed. Point Park University students and the Center for Media Innovation produced a short documentary on what it was like for our partners to do journalism during COVID. To watch, visit our YouTube channel.

Credits: Monae Findley, Zoey Ange- lucci, Jordyn Hronec, Olivia Valyo.
Impact, continued

Editors of nearly two dozen local news organizations coordinated coverage of the coronavirus pandemic and extended the reach of their service journalism by working together.

Starting in March and throughout the rest of 2020, editors met twice a month to share editorial strategies for covering the pandemic and management strategies for supporting their staffs. This collaboration led to the sharing of information, too, around coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement and the 2020 general election.

The curation of the Partners’ pandemic coverage through a central project site, thebigstorypgh.com, meant we could also reflect on how they were collectively covering the pandemic by showing which topics and people were receiving the most attention from their newsrooms. This information helped editors shape their newsrooms’ direction, allocate resources and reduce duplication.

How we helped:
- COLLABORATIVE BRAINSTORMING / PROBLEM-SOLVING
- SHARED RESOURCES
- DIRECT INVESTMENT

Impact level:
- NETWORK

A central, curated project site ...

The bigstorypgh.com launched in late May 2020, along with social media accounts. A weekly newsletter (launched in late June) and a social media campaign helped cross-promote the work each organization was doing and provided a base for campaigns to support local journalism.

... a shared campaign ...

... and a weekly newsletter.
Impact, continued

Stories within the local Latino community are being written and shared by its own members and crucial service journalism related to the coronavirus and 2020 election was distributed in Spanish.

PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine publisher Maria Manautou-Matos launched the new publication in March 2020 to serve the region’s Latino community, and to focus on trending Latino news, events and opportunities for the region’s fast growing demographic.

Manautou-Matos said she pushed through early challenges in part because of the connections, advice and resources provided through the Partnership.

PMP also helped by connecting Manautou-Matos to grant opportunities through the Facebook Journalism Project, which in partnership with the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, awarded her a $5,000 FJP Community Network grant in June.

Throughout the fall, Manautou-Matos collaborated with 90.5 WESA to translate multiple stories into Spanish on topics including the pandemic and the election. She also worked with Spotlight PA to do the same for its investigative and accountability state government stories.

And she continued to feature business owners and others in the community who were finding ways to succeed in spite of the new environment they were working in.

“My experience with the Partnership has been rewarding and enriching. The group meetings have been invaluable in realizing my dream of publishing a bilingual news portal for the Latino community in the Pittsburgh region.”

— Maria Manautou-Matos, PRESENTE

Free legal services are being provided to help local journalists pursue enterprise and investigative stories in their communities and to defend an open government throughout the commonwealth.

The Partnership collaborated with the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association and the Philadelphia Inquirer in the Fall of 2019 to apply for a statewide legal bureau staffed by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The bureau is one of five launched in 2020 through RCFP’s Local Legal Initiative, which is funded by a $10 million investment from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The attorney staffing Pennsylvania’s bureau, Paula Knudsen Burke, was hired in late summer 2020 and immediately became actively engaged with the Partnership.

When one partner, Ambridge Connection, received a subpoena and reached out to PMP for help, we were able to connect her within the hour to Knudsen Burke, who quickly quashed it. Felicia Mycyk, founder and publisher of the volunteer-led community resource, said the subpoena caused unnecessary emotional stress. Paula’s “knowledge, calm demeanor and quick handling of the situation with feedback allowed our energy to focus on giving the community clear communication and direction during a time of uncertainty.” The bureau has also helped other partners fight for access to public information and become a valuable resource for connecting the local media industry as it considers ways to strengthen the Commonwealth’s open government laws.

“How we helped:
• COLLABORATIVE BRAINSTORMING / PROBLEM-SOLVING
• CONNECTIONS
• SHARED RESOURCES
Impact level:
• NETWORK

“Without the Legal Bureau support, PublicSource would not have had adequate resources and expertise to take Allegheny County to task on responding transparently to records requests on jail operations. Our subsequent reporting with records in hand has led to changes in oversight of the jail.”

— Halle Stockton, PublicSource
Impact, continued

The voices and leadership of people with disabilities have been strengthened by the Partnership.

"Unabridged Press's participation in the Partnership's meetings has raised awareness among other news outlets about the company's focus on disability news and information.

For a small news organization, networking with the community's emerging and legacy publication leaders is invaluable," said its founder, Jennifer Szweda Jordan.

Unabridged Press also took advantage of technology consultation and services through the Partnership, which helped a team of reporters and analysts rapidly launch "A Valid Podcast" about the disability community in the pandemic.

Unabridged Press tapped into networks that “exponentially magnified the depth and breadth of media coverage about and with people with disabilities.”
— Jennifer Szweda Jordan, Unabridged Press

How we helped:
• COLLABORATIVE BRAINSTORMING / PROBLEM-SOLVING
• CONNECTIONS
• SHARED RESOURCES
• DIRECT INVESTMENT

Impact level:
• NETWORK

On connections made

A physically disabled woman, Alisha Grishman, was a leading voice at the kickoff for the Partnership’s project, in October 2019. At the workshop, in front of leaders from a broad range of news organizations, she offered information about how to best cover disabilities, particularly in this 30th anniversary year of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“Grishman is a very visible and striking figure — with bright blue hair, tattoos, and a wheelchair studded with disability slogans. It was strikingly positive to have her in a room of journalists who need a shot of diversity,” said Jennifer Szweda Jordan.

After the meeting, PublicSource managing editor Halle Stockton told Jordan she had been seeking funding to cover the ADA anniversary and that she was interested in working with her.

“I was thrilled,” Jordan said. “The Partnership creates opportunities to reinforce existing relationships and forge new ones, to foster these kinds of face-to-face encounters (even on Zoom) that lend to respectful, successful collaborations.”

How it started: Brian Cook, PBMF president, helps Alisha Grishman pitch at PMP’s 2019 kickoff.

Illustrated: “6 weeks”

Pittsburgh City Paper and Unabridged Press published a first-person story from a Washington County nursing home patient told through illustrations in the style of "comics journalism."
Impact, continued

An emergency technology grant “alleviated some of the hardships during one of the most difficult years of [Pittsburgh City Paper’s] recent history.”

The company faced significant lost advertising funds — about 60 percent — in March as the pandemic hit. Later that summer, they went from 19 employees to 12, furloughing six employees and eliminating one full-time position.

At the same time, the City Paper was one of the key newsrooms in the field covering the Black Lives Matter movement locally and the police response. The Partnership provided an emergency technology grant to help their photographer — who uses his own equipment — to pay for professional repairs and cleaning. It also paid for a professional Zoom account for the City Paper staff, helping them to stay connected and safely run the paper remotely.

“It has been a life-saver on multiple accounts for our editorial team when conducting long weekly meetings and virtual interviews,” said Editor-in-Chief Lisa Cunningham, adding that it is also being used to host the daily Lynn Cullen Live podcast. “Our sales team has also been able to use this on multiple occasions as well, which has been an added bonus for our entire (small) company.”

“Learning more about how other organizations’ newsrooms operate and working with them closely in meetings and workshops has been a huge learning experience. It’s really nice [that] in such a competitive field that journalists have been able to work together towards a common goal.”

— Lisa Cunningham, Pittsburgh City Paper, in an April 8 interview with the Point Park Globe.

On fellowship

Peer support: The Pittsburgh Media Partnership facilitated connections in ways unexpected and offered support to editors who are often left to tackle hard situations on their own.

In-kind resources: In their many collaborations throughout the year, Pittsburgh City Paper frequently amplified the work of others, including featuring PRESENTE, a new publication for the Latino community (and PMP partner), on its cover when the publication launched in the Spring.
The Mon Valley Independent modernized its email and document-sharing capabilities, helping them reliably reach their readers, sources and business customers throughout 2020.

As the pandemic forced all workflows and communication digital, the Mon Valley Independent’s publisher and IT director reached out to PMP, describing their situation as a 911 call for help.

Emails being sent by both the editorial and sales departments were not being delivered reliably — they were delayed, bouncing back and being flagged as spam. It was having a significant negative business impact, as readers, sources and advertising customers could not contact the staff in a timely manner.

PMP “changed the way the MVI communicates electronically.”
— Kevin Iacovangelo
Director of Digital Marketing and IT

PMP connected MVI with a consultant to help diagnose the real, underlying issue — and then implement the transition to Google G-suite.

“No only was Paul knowledgeable with Google G-suite, he has also brought his security expertise to help secure our system,” said Kevin Iacovangelo, MVI’s IT director, adding that the other features of G-suite are also helping MVI transition to a digital workflow.

“This project “has made a major positive impact on the Mon Valley Independent.”

Impact measures:
- COLLABORATIVE BRAINSTORMING / PROBLEM-SOLVING
- CONNECTIONS
Impact level:
- INSTITUTIONAL

Gazette 2.0 expanded its audience reach and revenue opportunities by transitioning from a print-focused publication to one that also publishes digitally.

Gazette 2.0, a bimonthly print publication, had to go online only in April as the lost advertising revenues meant reducing costs by pausing their primary means of distributing the news. But its existing website was not up to the task. “Although readers could access articles on the site, it was difficult to navigate and some functions, like online subscriptions, did not work.”

The staff used the technology grant from PMP to hire a web designer to not only re-design the site but also to train staff in how to maintain it.

The results?

“We have been able to offer more services, such as buying and uploading advertisements online, as well as easy subscription sign-ups. We have had a steady increase of online subscriptions, as well as a noticeable uptick in page views and engagements. As a result, we have been able to bring in more revenue with website ads. Readers have noticed the difference and reiterated positive feedback.”
Connections made by PMP brought in additional resources from regional and national organizations to support local journalism and raised the profile of individual outlets and Pittsburgh.

PMP helped its members seek regional and national grants, sharing opportunities, encouraging applications and providing one-on-one consulting during the process when needed. This led partners to receive at least an additional $35,000 to support local journalism in 2020. Those awards included:

- **Soul Pitt Quarterly Magazine** — $20,000 from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation grant to update Soul Pitt’s digital publishing platform.
- **PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine** — $5,000 from the Facebook Journalism Project Community Network grant.
- **Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle** — $5,000 from the Facebook Journalism Project Community Network grant and $5,000 from the Google News Initiative.
- **Ambridge Connection** — $500 from the Peer-Learning + Collaboration Fund (facilitated by the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University and supported by Democracy Fund).

Western Pennsylvania is more represented in the coverage of Harrisburg, and a wider local audience sees investigative and accountability journalism on state government through connections PMP facilitated between Spotlight PA and local community news publishers.

In August 2020, Trib Total Media became a founding partner of Spotlight PA, an independent newsroom based in Harrisburg that produces accountability journalism about Pennsylvania state government and urgent statewide issues. As part of the new partnership, a full-time reporter was added to Spotlight PA’s team, focused on bringing western Pennsylvania issues into coverage priorities. The collaboration between the two newsrooms is the “centerpiece” of Spotlight PA’s commitment to the western half of the state, said editor in chief Chris Baxter. Spotlight PA provides its journalism free of charge to 67 newsrooms, 24 of which are in Western Pa.

The connections facilitated through PMP helped increase distribution in this part of the state, Baxter said. In addition to Trib Total Media, Spotlight PA shares its work with 90.5 WESA, Gazette 2.0, Postindustrial, NEXTpittsburgh, PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine, and the Mon Valley Independent.

Spotlight PA became a formal partner in PMP in July 2020.

“To an independent quarterly publication like ours ... PMP has introduced new opportunities and increased our visibility within the community.”

— Marcia Liggett, *Soul Pitt Media*
Financials

Resource Fund distribution
BEGINNING BALANCE: $30,000

The COVID-19 pandemic created financial pressure and restrictive working conditions for the members of the Partnership even as their newsrooms worked around the clock to cover the outbreak’s impact on their communities. The Partnership used its Resource Fund (with approval from partners and funders) to help relieve some of the immediate pressure by offering grants that could create new capabilities to do the job remotely and reach audiences digitally. The technology grants were offered in two parts:

- **Direct grants which could cover:**
  1. Equipment
  2. Subscriptions / purchases of digital tools
  3. Product development related to distributing information

- **and CTO Consulting**

The Partnership contracted with a shared, on-call “Chief Technology Officer” who could advise individual partners on immediate challenges they faced related to product, operations and revenue as a result of COVID-19.

Each partner had access to a 20-minute pre-consultation and up to a 90-minute follow up consultation throughout 2020. Partners were also able to ask for additional consulting hours.

### Emergency Technology Grants

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION(S)</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protect photography equipment, enable remote work and audience engagement</td>
<td>Pittsburgh City Paper</td>
<td>$1,922.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host digital events</td>
<td>PublicSource</td>
<td>$408.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design / develop website &amp; train staff to maintain it</td>
<td>Gazette 2.0</td>
<td>$2,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce a podcast and multimedia stories remotely</td>
<td>Soul Pitt Quarterly Magazine</td>
<td>$2,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access in-studio software to broadcast remotely</td>
<td>90.5 WESA</td>
<td>$828.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire headsets to equip additional people as host/ producers remotely and transcribe programs to make more accessible</td>
<td>Unabridged Press</td>
<td>$1,350.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fix workflow issues with existing Wordpress site</td>
<td>Postindustrial</td>
<td>$1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fix email delivery issues affecting editorial and business staff</td>
<td>Mon Valley Independent</td>
<td>$1,728.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase a digital camera and audio recorder to help produce multimedia stories</td>
<td>New Pittsburgh Courier</td>
<td>$800.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replace local server with cloud-based file storage and sharing system (matching grant)</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle</td>
<td>$2,418.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$14,954.84</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emergency technology grants (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION(S)</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CTO Consulting</td>
<td>• Postindustrial</td>
<td>$2,750.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PublicSource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unabridged Press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ambridge Connection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gazette 2.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mon Valley Independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How we distributed the grants

Grants were offered on a sliding scale to individual organizations based on the immediate need. No maximum limit was set for the requests, but partners were told the goal was to allocate the pool of funding — ~$20,000 — equitably.

To apply, partners answered three questions:

1. What challenge do you want to solve? Or what opportunity does trying something new present?
2. What is the solution?
3. What is the cost?

The grant program was announced in mid-April 2020 and a deadline for the first round of applications was set for May 1. Grants were awarded to the Partners by May 18.

Proposals were reviewed, scored based on how critical the need was to the work, and allocated by a committee that included:

- Project editor: AmyJo Brown
- CMI director: Andrew Conte
- DEI consultant: Amber Thompson
- Technology expert: Mike Tigas

Other resource fund distributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared data reporter</td>
<td>$7,962.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRE data workshop</td>
<td>$1,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative reporting projects</td>
<td>$927.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance fund</td>
<td>$2,300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$12,690.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details about these projects are provided on the following pages.
Financials, continued

**Shared resources**
The Resource Fund is allocated collaboratively — by consensus whenever possible and majority vote when necessary among the partners. It can be used to support the overall project, by investing in central resources or professional development, for example, or to help support collaborative work among the partners themselves. On this and the following pages are descriptions of the other projects we funded through it in 2020.

**Data tools**

**Tracking COVID.** In June, the Partners voted to allocate a portion of their resource fund to contract with a data reporter to create and maintain a central resource for tracking COVID-19 case and death counts throughout the region. At the time, getting data in useful formats from state and local government agencies was difficult, as was understanding the data’s possibilities and limitations — what we could reasonably conclude from it given the collection practices.

- **Shared research, analysis** — A detailed fact memo documented how Pennsylvania and Allegheny County were tracking cases, testing and deaths along with definitions. Informational sessions were held with reporters to share the findings.
- **Central source of truth** — We set up a central spreadsheet that updated automatically daily, saving reporters from manually updating their own duplicative spreadsheets. The central sheet could be used as both a reporting tool and as the base for partners’ custom visualizations.
- **Sets of embeddable infographics** — Sets of auto-updating, embeddable graphics were designed for each of the seven counties in the Pittsburgh MSA, along with a summary county dashboard, and made available to partners to publish as needed.

Resources created included:
Financials, continued

Data tools

Reopening schools. In late July 2020, PMP launched a project to help track reopening decision-making across more than a hundred public and private school districts within Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington and Westmoreland counties — and to show where disparities or creative solutions were occurring.

The resources included:

- **District demographic data, contextual snapshots** — PMP made enrollment data published by the Pennsylvania Department of Education usable for reporters and provided a series of data snapshots to help partners compare and put their districts’ decisions in context.

- **Central source of truth** — We set up a central spreadsheet that PMP staff and interns manually populated and kept up to date with the current status of schools’ reopening plans. A version of this resource was also published on thebigstorypgh.com.

- **Shared records access** — PMP set up a document sharing tool that allowed journalists across the partners’ organizations to collect draft and approved health and safety plans from the school districts in one place for note-taking, comparison and publication.
**Data workshop.** Partners also allocated a portion of the resource fund for a custom-designed three-day data workshop that provided hands-on training to teach reporters how to gather, analyze and visualize data for daily stories and deeper projects.

The training was conducted by Investigative Reporters & Editors. Nineteen people attended the training. They represented: Gazette 2.0, 90.5 WESA, Spotlight PA, Homewood Nation, Storyburgh, The Incline, Postindustrial, Trib Total Media, Ambridge Connection, Soul Pitt Media, Unabridged Press, and PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine.

> “This training was really helpful... this made it feel a lot less overwhelming...”
> — Francesca Dabecco, Unabridged Press

**Freelance fund.** In early September 2020, the collaborative published an in-depth enterprise piece on a new movement of Black farmers in Pittsburgh focused on creating a better system for Black-owned agricultural businesses. The piece was collaboratively commissioned by the 22 leaders of the Partnership and funded from their resource fund in order to bring freelancers and independent journalists into the project and have them contribute to the overall narrative (vs. just accepting assignments). The story was reported and written by Hal Klein. Photography by Brian Cook. Edited by PMP project editor AmyJo Brown.

It was republished and amplified by 90.5 WESA, Environmental Health News, New Pittsburgh Courier, NEXTpittsburgh, PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine, PublicSource, Pittsburgh City Paper and The Incline, which also published an additional Q&A with one of the farmers featured in the series. The story was picked up nationally and the farmers in the story were featured on Good Morning America, in a segment on how small farms are feeding people during the COVID crisis.
Endless Buffering: Local schools try to solve students’ internet access issues on their own

The reopening schools data set the groundwork for a collaborative reporting project produced by The Incline, Mon Valley Independent and Gazette 2.0, with additional contributions from PublicSource, and students at Point Park University and Lehigh University.

“Endless Buffering” published Jan. 7, 2021 and examined how schools across the Pittsburgh region reacted to their students’ struggle throughout 2020 to find reliable and/or affordable high-speed internet access. The nearly 4,000-word story with photos was printed in full in both the Mon Valley Independent and Gazette 2.0 print editions, as well as digitally through their sites and the Incline’s. It was also republished and amplified by PublicSource, NEXTpittsburgh and PRESENTE Pittsburgh Latino Magazine.

Colin Deppen, of the Incline; Jeff Stitt, of the Mon Valley Independent; and Jamie Wiggan, of Gazette 2.0 reported and wrote the piece. TyLisa C. Johnson of PublicSource and Jordan Wolman of the Brown and White at Lehigh University contributed reporting.

The reopening data reporting resource created by PMP project editor AmyJo Brown and Data Reporter Amanda Treible was maintained by Point Park University student interns Zoey Angelucci and Logan Garvey and provided key facts to tie the work together and show the scale of the problem across the region. Angelucci and Garvey also conducted the fact-checking for the work.

Photographer Nate Smallwood was hired by the 22 leaders of the Partnership through the resource fund to help tell the story visually. The story was edited by Brown.
Financials, continued

Programming highlights
While the “Missing Bridges” project was on hold throughout most of 2020, partners kept the conversation going in June as civil unrest caught the region’s attention.

Ambridge Community Conversations. PMP supported a series of conversation hosted by Ambridge Connection exploring the area’s experiences with racism. Publisher Felicia Mycyk said that the wave of change in the world sparked the need. “Change must come to the community by its leaders and citizens, and it starts with identifying where we fall short, and at times it may be uncomfortable. But through healthy and productive dialogue, we can move forward as a community.”

“The Change Exchange.” PMP partners collaborated in a discussion hosted by the Pittsburgh Podcast Ya Jagoff! on racial inequality. The conversation featured panelists: author Jim Rooney, Emmy and Grammy award-winning artist FRZY, Ambridge Connection publisher Felicia Mycyk, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust program manager of festivals and special projects Sarah Aziz, radio personality and retired Pittsburgh Steeler Arthur Moats, director of the CMI at PPU Andrew Conte and vice president of the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation and Emmy-nominated producer Olga George.
**Pandemic Relief: ecosystem grant**
In the Fall of 2020, PMP received two additional grants totaling $300,000 from the Henry L. Hillman Foundation for projects to help members of the Partnership and the overall media ecosystem respond to the financial and operational challenges they faced after an especially difficult year.

The four initiatives funded are listed to the right.

**Progress as of June 2021:**

- **13 students have been placed in 13 newsrooms** — the internship program kicked off June 2. The program received 36 applications for the program, which pays $12 an hour and offers a parallel training and career counseling program. An internship coordinator, hired in March by a subcommittee of the Partnership members, helps manage the program.

- **11 newsrooms are benefiting from resources offered by Pittsburgh Community Television** — the first offering of the shared technology library includes membership to PCTV, giving partners access to studio space, field equipment, technical support and classes in video and audio production.

- **AJP’s community information needs assessment will be released soon** — the AJP project, which launched in January 2020, is wrapping up and the results of their study is expected in July.

**Initiatives currently underway:**

- **AJP Community needs assessment and market study**
  A comprehensive study of the information needs of people living in the Pittsburgh region and the existing media landscape will help Partners identify gaps and opportunities for serving their audiences.

- **Pathways internship program**
  News outlets value young journalists, but often cannot afford to pay them. This initiative established a paid internship program for up to 15 students who were embedded in Pittsburgh Media Partnership newsrooms during the summer of 2021.

- **Shared technology library**
  This initiative seeks out technical resources for members of the Partnership, helping to leverage the group to find and create affordable resources to support their multimedia work.

- **Back-office support: business and innovation resources**
  These projects are intended to support new and young media outlets in getting a news business set up as well as legacy organizations with cost-sharing opportunities.
Missing Bridges 2021
Our “Missing Bridges” editorial project is focused on inequality and diving deep into its complexity in the region at the same time that it explores potential solutions.

On Jan. 22, to focus the Missing Bridges project for year two of the collaborative, 39 members of the Partnership met (virtually) for their annual strategic planning session after participating in asynchronous brainstorming exercises to help them narrow the list of ideas. Together, they then discussed the short list and then voted to choose the final direction: A focus on people who need access to mental health services — the next pandemic.

The project went through a listening phase in the Spring, and partners recently pitched anchor projects and submitted their requests for support through the Resource Fund. The fund will be allocated soon and the project is expected to launch in July and run through the end of the year.

Forms of brainstorming together virtually: In January, the partners prioritized topics to report on. Their votes were displayed on posters hanging in the home office of the project editor. Later in the Spring, a subcommittee pre-reported to help further define potential story ideas for the project. Partners then met in small groups over a week to decide which ones had the most potential for the anchor series.

Project focus:
Our public health system responds to people with mental health illnesses primarily in moments of crisis, often asking those ill-equipped — school resource officers, local law enforcement and judges — to respond, evaluate and determine treatment. How can our communities coordinate better care? How can we reduce our reliance on the criminal justice system as the primary solution, and adapt to support the growing need for mental health care?
CREDITS

Many people have contributed time and expertise to the Partnership and helped shape the form it takes today. Below are those who have helped and the roles they’ve played.

Partner representatives who serve as liaisons, contributing to the conversations and helping guide the direction of the collaborative:

- John Allison
- Chris Baxter
- Donna Baxter Porcher
- Jim Busis
- Richard Cerilli
- Tracy Certo
- John Chamberlin
- Lisa Cunningham
- Francesca Dabecco
- Colin Deppen
- Patrick Doyle
- Larissa Dukiewicz
- Elwin Green
- Will Halim
- C. Denise Johnson
- Marcia Liggett
- Kristie Linden
- Maria Manautou-Matos
- Kristina Marusic
- Felicia Mycyk
- Kimberly Palmiero
- Sonja Reis
- Rachael Rennebeck
- John Rhoades
- Mila Sanina
- Jim Sheppard
- Halle Stockton
- Jennifer Szweda Jordan
- Toby Tabachnick
- Rob Taylor Jr.
- Naz Victoria
- Jamie Wiggan

Hiring committee for the internship coordinator:

- John Allison
- Lisa Cunningham
- Dr. Ervin Dyer
- Olga George
- Marcia Liggett

Internship application review committee:

- Will Halim
- Lizzy Hardison
- Marcia Liggett
- Toby Tabachnick

AJP project committee:

- John Allison
- Donna Baxter Porcher
- Dr. Letrell Crittenden
- Patrick Doyle
- Marcia Liggett
- Mila Sanina

Innovation initiative committee:

- Chris Baxter
- Will Halim
- Jennifer Szweda Jordan

Shared resources committee:

- Jim Busis
- Tracy Certo
- Terry O’Reilly
- Kim Palmiero

Technology grant committee:

- Amber Thompson, DEI consultant
- Mike Tigar, software engineer, ProPublica

Outside expertise:

- Amber Thompson, DEI consultant
- Brian Boyer, “CTO” consultant
- Paul Schreiber, “CTO” consultant
- Amanda Treible, data reporter
- Arjuna Soriano, product specialist
- Paula Knudsen Burke, RCFP Legal Bureau

Support, advice and connections:

- Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair University & its community
- Angilee Shah, “Building Equity in Journalism Collaborations.”
- Brian Cook and Olga George, Pittsburgh Black Media Federation
- Ecosystem Builders community & Piece by Piece Strategies

PMP staff interns:  CMI support:

- Monae Findley  Dr. Andrew Conte
- Zoey Angelucci  Kristin DeLuca
- Logan Garvey  Lisa Knapp
- Frank Smith  Olivilia Valyo
- Kumar Simms  Jordyn Hronec

PMP internship program coordinator:

- Lizzy Hardison

PMP interns:  CMI support:

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- Zoey Angelucci  Kristin DeLuca
- Logan Garvey  Lisa Knapp
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