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Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association Foundation announces grant recipients of inaugural
Pennsylvania Lab for Journalism Funding

PNAF will award three news organizations \$20,000 each for projects focused on civic journalism

HARRISBURG, Pa., (Oct. 8, 2024) – The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association Foundation has announced three grant recipients of the inaugural PA Lab for Journalism Funding program, aimed at strengthening community reporting through philanthropic efforts.

The Butler Eagle, SPIRIT Media Group, Inc., and WITF & the Steinman Institute for Civic Engagement were selected from twelve Pennsylvania news organizations who participated in a rigorous four-month PNA/LMA Lab for Journalism Funding. The lab was made possible by funding and participation from Google News Initiative, Knight Foundation, Lenfest Institute and PNAF. Each news outlet will receive a \$20,000 “kick-starter” for their top-scoring projects.

The PA Lab for Journalism Funding is a first-of-its-kind partnership between Local Media Association and an individual state press association. Using the techniques set forth by LMA’s nationwide training lab, the cohort was established to teach newsrooms how effective fundraising can boost revenue to support civic journalism. The capital raised provides additional resources needed to provide in-depth reporting on topics that resonate strongly with the communities they serve.

“We are grateful to LMA and the lab funders who recognized the opportunity to work with PNA and engage with news organizations, large and small, who are dedicated to making a direct impact within their respective communities across the commonwealth,” said Tanya Henderson, executive director of PNAF. In addition to the coaching and philanthropy studies, other benefits of this tight-knit group emerged. “Twelve participants, initially brought together by a geographic boundary, have gained new relationships and will continue to work together on like opportunities.”

Lab participants attended virtual group sessions every other week and received individual training with industry experts. Newsrooms crafted and initiated strategies for fundraising while putting together a capstone project to highlight their plans of action.

A panel of five judges presided over the twelve presentations at LMA Fest in Chicago where scores were based on the following criteria:

- Importance of the problem to be solved.
- Level of need in the community/audience to be served.
- Robustness of plan detailing how newsrooms will approach the problem.
- Rationale for budget and resources needed.

- Likelihood of meaningful impacts and outcomes
- Scalability of lessons learned for other communities and news organizations.

Three capstone projects received top recognition.

Butler Eagle – *Civics & Civility*

Political discourse in America not only shapes public opinion but also behavior. In recent years, dialogue from political candidates and their supporters has become more vitriolic. In Butler County, PA, a red-leaning northern suburb of blue-leaning Pittsburgh, the editorial staff of the Butler Eagle believed they had a unique perspective on the political divide and crafted a proposal based on the return of civility in public discourse. In the aftermath of the assassination attempt of Republican presidential nominee and former president Donald Trump, in their own hometown, that idea took on an entirely new sense of urgency.

Assignment Editor Tracy Leturgey, who presented on behalf of the Butler Eagle, acknowledged the importance the funding had on a topic that hits very close to home. “The funding and the lessons learned make a huge difference to our team as we launch “Civics and Civility,” a journalism project that we believe can bridge divides in Butler County, addressing a lack of civility and a misunderstanding of civics along the way.” She continued, “The PA Lab for Journalism Funding encouraged our team to envision how our newsroom could make an even greater impact through our journalism and how to make that work sustainable by seeking funding around our plans.”

The SPIRIT Media Group. Inc. – *Infant mortality and healthcare inequality*

The infant mortality rate in Chester, PA is the highest of any municipality in the state. The region has suffered from economic hardship for decades. Leaders at SPIRIT Media Group, who cover the area with a weekly newspaper and dedicated online news site, recognized the disparity and submitted a capstone project to address the needs of an underserved community.

Julie Flandreau, associate editor of SPIRIT Media Group, delivered a powerful and moving presentation with a thorough and well-designed plan to address the dire situation and bring about real change for families in the community.

Publisher Paul Bennett acknowledged the importance of journalism philanthropy and that a new era was opening in the news media industry. "The SPIRIT was honored to participate in the first LMA Lab cohort," he said. "It was an opportunity that appears to lead to new pathways of funding local journalism. Philanthropy and the practice of journalism, however, are cultures now finding ways of collaboration that will set new support for media working hard to serve their communities. We are excited for what comes next."

WITF and the Steinman Institute for Civic Engagement – *Empowering tomorrow’s content creators and consumers*

Social influencers have a substantial impact on Generation Z, ages 12-27. Recent polling shows an increased number of adults under 30 turns to social media apps such as Instagram, Discord, TikTok and YouTube to consume news. Meanwhile print and mainstream news websites continue

to see declines in Gen Z readership. Many young people feel traditional media does not reflect their lifestyles and even ignores them outright.

WITF and the Steinman Institute for Civic Engagement created a plan to engage teens and young adults in central Pennsylvania by allowing area high school students to create content that addresses the issues most important to them. Two professional journalists will mentor students with no school oversight and give young people the opportunity to express their own unique perspectives while learning the importance of journalistic integrity. The platform will be of the students' choosing.

Kevin Ditzler, associate director of development at WITF and presenter at LMA Fest, appreciated the on-going efforts of PNA to champion local journalism in Pennsylvania. "WITF is excited and honored to collaborate with PNA and our incredible peers throughout the state. We are impressed by their vision and grateful for their support of our innovative work to sustain local news and information by investing in future generations."

The PNA Foundation will formally announce the \$20,000 grants to support these fundraising projects at PNA's 100th Anniversary Gala on Thursday, Nov. 14 in Hershey.

About PNA:

PNA, founded in 1925, is the nonprofit trade association for print and digital news media in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Its mission is to advance the business interests of Pennsylvania news media organizations and to promote a free and independent press. Membership includes newspapers and media-related companies, as well as college newspapers and online publications.

About PNA Foundation:

The PNA Foundation is an independent, nonprofit corporation organized as a public foundation. Its mission is to provide training and resources to PNA members, to develop the next generation of readers and journalists, and to educate the public on the importance of the First Amendment and the role of a free press.

About Local Media Association:

LMA brings all media together to share, network, collaborate and more. More than 3,000 newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, digital pure-plays, and research and development partners engage with LMA as members or constituents of our programs. As a 501(c)(6) trade association, LMA is focused on the business side of local media. Its programs and labs focus on revenue growth and new business models. LMA helps local media companies develop their strategies via cutting-edge programs, conferences, webinars, research and training.

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