

Fixing News Deserts, The Public Radio Way

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## **Abstract**

### **A Collaborative Hub**

As the journalism crisis deepens, cross-newsroom collaborations have become more common in recent years. These projects offer news outlets the possibility of sharing resources with each other to create original reporting that would otherwise be too costly or difficult for a single entity to produce. This study examines how one collaborative project in the American South is attempting to fix 'news deserts' by creating a regional newsroom integrated by National Public Radio and several of its affiliated member stations, the challenges they overcame to get the collaboration started, and the ways in which they are measuring success and trying to ensure its sustainability.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

I came to the United States in 2013 to pursue a journalism degree in hopes of becoming a sports journalist. With time, my interests shifted away from sports journalism and more toward human interest reporting as well as government and public policy.

Public radio is the main reason why my interests shifted. I became familiar with National Public Radio during my 45-minute commute to the University of Central Florida, and it opened a new world for me. Listening to my local public radio station, WMFE, provided me with engaging and thoughtful coverage from across the United States. Policy debates were slowed down and contextualized. Issues that affect Americans were localized and presented in the form of feature stories from member stations. These stories had an engaging narrative, captivating sound, and most importantly, they included the voices of the people at the heart of the issues.

It was around that time, in 2016, that I knew I wanted to be part of that form of journalism. I completed an internship with WMFE in 2017. Upon graduating in 2018, I accepted a position as a general assignment reporter at North Country Public Radio in Canton, New York.

My job at NCPR helped me understand just how important public radio is for the communities in which it operates, especially those without major papers. Canton is a very small college town less than 20 miles from the border with Canada. The station's area of coverage is the whole North Country of New York, a mostly rural area made up of eight counties and over 500,000 residents. Being a reporter at NCPR often meant having two reporting trips in a week which required a total five hours of driving just to speak with

the people who would feature in our stories. For many of these people, NCPR was the only available news outlet to access local reporting.

That's the beauty of public radio; its reach as a system is unmatched. As NPR (2021) notes in its website, "No other news organization has the same on-the-ground reach as public radio. More than 95 percent of Americans live within range of a public radio signal."

In many ways, NCPR is a microcosm of the public radio system. It was good at many of the things that make public radio special. It provides local coverage with a daily 30-minute news show. Our reporting emphasized the voices in our community and kept them informed of the most important issues in our region. But NCPR also faced many challenges familiar to medium and small stations. It lacked the resources to truly cover their area. Our newsroom was made up of only six people, two of whom also doubled as editors. There were many stories to tell and places to be that we simply did not have enough people to cover.

Recently, NPR announced a new collaborative initiative with member stations that will try to counter this issue. Member stations and NPR will pool together resources from regional and statewide stations that will ideally "allow for less duplication of effort, freeing up reporters and editors to do more original reporting in their communities. (2021)"

I believe collaborative journalism is the way of the future. For public radio, this emerging initiative offers an exciting opportunity to develop networks of collaboration that could help alleviate gaps in coverage for the communities that these member stations serve.

This professional project, examines how this collaborative initiative at NPR is being built, focusing specifically on the Gulf State Newsroom. For the Gulf States Newsroom, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting “is providing a 44-month grant totaling \$1,276,299 to launch the effort, which together with NPR's support enables the creation of six new beat reporting positions and two editing positions dedicated to regional coverage that will be based in each state. In addition, the Gulf States newsroom will hire a full-time managing editor, based at WBHM in Birmingham, who will direct news coverage and content collaboration among the regional partners and national news outlets (CPB, 2020)”. Even though the Gulf State Newsrooms is not the only hub NPR is launching as part of its ‘news hubs’ initiative, it provides the best option for study and examination. The initiative is already up and running and it is not concerned with only one kind of coverage, like investigative reporting, as is the case with the Midwest hub. Its structure is such that a study of it is more likely to produce lessons that would be more widely applicable for other newsrooms. The study seeks to understand what the biggest challenges are when setting up a decentralized operation that involves multiple organizations and has not been tried before within the public radio system. It also analyzes how the people involved in this project plan to make this initiative sustainable. This initiative could have major implications for the future of collaboration within the public radio system. From firsthand experience, I can tell that public radio reporters and editors are not only valued for the journalism they produce, but also for the ideas that they each bring to the stations about how to expand the reach of their journalism and the communities they serve. These ideas include collaborations like the one analyzed in this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Journalism as an industry has been in steady decline, particularly over the past decade. The PEW Research Center (2020) estimates more than half of newspapers in the United States have cut their newsrooms in half. Scholars have noted the importance of a thriving news sector for democracy and the emergence of nonprofit news actors is especially important in this context. Nonprofit outlets, especially over the past 15 years, have emerged as important actors in filling the gap in local coverage for communities across the United States. Their goals are largely aligned with democratic values of holding the powerful accountable and functioning as watchdogs (Zelizer, 2012; Konieczna & Powers, 2017; Benson, 2017). Given this context, it is important to study nonprofit news outlets. One of the main challenges for nonprofit news organizations is finding strategies to help them not only become sustainable in the long term, but also serve the communities they cover with quality reporting of local importance (Benson, 2017). There are many examples of successful independent non-profit news outlets, and they come in different forms. This project will focus on one initiative undertaken by several non-profit organizations and will focus on their efforts to manage a collaborative network between to expand local coverage and fight ‘news deserts’. National Public Radio is one of the largest nonprofit news organizations in the United States. Over 50 years, NPR has created a successful network that includes 1,800 journalists at more than 200 member stations across the country, plus another 400 reporters and editors that work directly for NPR. Collaborations have emerged as a method for nonprofit news outlets to accomplish their goals of serving their communities through their reporting while also helping them become more sustainable (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014). That is why, in



this context, it's important to give a closer look at how one of the largest systems in the country, the public radio system, is implementing strategies to increase collaborations that extend their public service role. Considering that NPR and its member stations are non-profit entities, this literature review will focus on these kinds of organizations. It will explore the relationship between non-profit news outlets and democratic values, the current journalism crisis, the growth of collaborative journalism and its challenges, and the factors that contribute to its financial sustainability. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (2020) projects an 11 percent decline in reporting jobs over the next decade. Because of this and other factors threatening the vitality of the journalism industry, we should research and ask what can be done to counter the decline.

### **Journalism and democracy**

Journalism and democracy are constantly talked as two partners that go hand in hand. Scholars have referred to both being inseparably linked (Konieczna & Powers, 2017). Situated in the American context, the practice of journalism has been thought as central and necessary to democracy, providing conditions for it to thrive, with scholars calling the trade 'the lifeblood of informed communities and functioning democracy' (Zelizer, 2012; Nesbit et al., 2018, p. 4). This necessity comes from the understanding that in a democracy, citizens are responsible to make their own choices. Hence, the work of journalists can be understood as one that advances democracy by providing a public service with their work. Journalists act under the assumption that providing truthful information to the public will create a more active citizenry (Gans, 1998). Journalists aspire to create reporting that informs about issues of public concern, function as a

watchdog of those in power, and represent the public in political matters (Deuze, 2005; Peters & Witschge, 2015).

### **Journalism newsroom crisis**

The landscape for journalism today is a challenging one. The industry is facing an economic crisis driven in part by significant declines in advertising revenue and circulations (Scott et al., 2019). Local journalism used to be a small business affair. Ferruci and Alaimo (2020) point to the 1980s as the decade when ownership of news organization in the United States began changing rapidly. Local families used to control a majority of the newspapers in the country, but a major shift happened as large companies began buying news organizations and developing them into regional chains. These chains then in turn were purchased by corporations to be turned into news conglomerates. Once profit margins of these conglomerates began shrinking, ownership slashed newsrooms to cut costs and maintain profitability. Since the economic crisis of 2008, newsroom employment in the US has dropped by 23 percent from 114,000 to 88,000 employees. 1 in every 5 newspapers in the United States closed in the last 15 years, with most coming in small towns that heavily depend on these outlets for important information. (Abernathy, 2018; Ferruci and Alaimo, 2020; PEW Research Center, 2020). Even those successful newspapers that remained in control of a family continue to provide quality journalism but profits remain top priority, as “what has been laid bare is what was only implicit before: that profits come first, and journalism second, that journalism can be served only to the extent that profits are already assured, that in any actual choice between the first dollar of profit and the next increment of journalistic quality the need for profit will prevail (Tofel, 2013, p. 9).” These challenging economic conditions laid

out before have led in a new type of journalism that seeks to fill the void left behind by layoffs and ever shrinking newsrooms: nonprofit journalism (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014).

### **Funding the nonprofit model**

Non-profit news organizations operate under a different system as for-profit entities. Their organizations are not managed to create wealth for shareholders and investors, but rather to maintain a running operation and invest in areas that would create better content. Nonprofits, however, are not immune to the challenges of a declining news industry. They still have to generate revenue as a means to continuing their work, and ultimately achieving their ultimate goal: sustainability (Kim et al., 2016). News nonprofits are heavily dependent on foundation support. This revenue stream provides an invaluable lifeline for them, as more than 60 percent of these actors receive half or more of their budget from foundations. Even those organizations that have diversified their revenue streams continue receiving substantial support from foundations. Driven by economic uncertainty in the journalism industry, nonprofit organizations are welcoming funds from foundations that also seek to create impact through journalism. (Ferruci & Alaimo, 2020; Nisbet et al, 2018; Scott et al., 2019). A study conducted by Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and Northeastern University's School of Journalism in 2016 found examined foundation funding in nonprofit media. The study analyzed over \$1.8 billion in grant money. Among the most substantial findings, researchers noted "many innovative projects and experiments have and continue to take place, but grantmaking remains far below what is needed," and "a heavy concentration of resources in a few dozen successful news nonprofits and on behalf of a

few issues (Nisbet et. al, 2018, p. 6).” The study also found that over a six-year period, approximately 70 percent of all funds went to just 25 organizations. This creates a concentration problem in which nonprofit news organizations across the country lack the funding needed to become major players in covering local and state news to fill the gap left behind by the newspaper industry collapse (Nisbet et al., 2018). Scholars also debate how much and what kind of influence, if any, foundations that support nonprofit news have over the editorial workings of the organizations they support. Some argue that the main change driven by these partnerships is not necessarily foundations overseeing the content creation of news organizations, rather the reshaping of journalism’s boundaries (Scott et al., 2019). This boundary changing concept means journalists at nonprofit news outlets are not being told what to cover and how, but are instead influenced to pursue and measure impact in their work. As Scott et al. note (2019), foundations are changing the role of journalists, both intentionally and unintentionally, by focusing the money they give toward outcome-oriented reporting, sometimes in niche categories. Konieczna & Powers (2016) would agree with that assessment. Their 2016 research on the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), found that the organization has embraced an impact-oriented view of its journalism, encouraging its reporters to conceptualize differently what they do for democracy and why. This mindset, they argue, is driven in part by the organization’s funders. This new approach could lead organizations to cross the line that has traditionally been drawn between journalism and advocacy (Konieczna & Powers, 2016). These, however, are newer examples and not indicative of the field as a whole. Even with concerns about changing journalism’s boundaries, studies have also shown a desire from funders to not overstep their roles as

supports and turn into editors. There are high levels of public transparency in nonprofit media and relatively low examples of editorial review by funders (Rosensteil et al., 2016). Funders rarely ever ask to see content pre-publication and journalists are aware of the level of separation that must exist between both camps, with journalists being wary of influence outside their newsroom (Ferruci & Alaimo, 2020; Rosensteil et al., 2016).

### **Collaborations**

Production of content is an expensive affair. The Columbia Journalism Review Editors (2009) argued collaborations might offer a solution to the journalism crisis: “Collaboration needs to become central to journalism’s mission—and the mainstream press needs to get on board. From foreign capitals to U.S. statehouses, it is a way to extend our shrinking newsrooms, begin to rebuild public trust, and ensure that the standards of the professional press help shape the development of new journalistic endeavors (The Editors, 2009)”.

For nonprofit news organizations, partnerships and collaborations can sometimes prove the solution to a budgeting problem. For local nonprofits, allocating resources into building networks of cooperation can be the key to sustainability. For funders this can be true too, as funding may achieve better results by funding collaborative projects rather than individual ones (Kim et al., 2016). Starting in the 2000s, collaborations began to gain momentum with Initiatives funded by The Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Recent examples include Electionland, which focused on voting issues across the country. It was a collaborative effort between ProPublica and several organizations, including the USA Today News Network. Perhaps the most consequential and biggest collaborative efforts have been led by The

International Consortium of Investigative Journalists’, which published analysis of a major leak in financial documents – multiple times. These projects were known as the Panama Papers and the Pandora Papers, efforts involving over 100 news outlets in 25 languages (Graves & Jenkins, 2019; Quackenbush 2020; Buzbee, 2021). Moura Santos (2020) points out that even as news outlets and newsrooms continue to shrink, the expectations for journalists has remained the same. That translates into doing more work with less resources. That’s why collaboration between newsrooms offers the possibility of better coverage of complex projects. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, these challenges facing newsrooms have become especially clear over the past year and a half, and collaboration offers a path to solve them. The coronavirus pandemic “highlighted the media’s own weaknesses — scarcity of resources, inability to do in-person reporting, shrinking budgets, especially for local media. While this is still a time of a high-stakes competition among news outlets, it’s also a time of high-reward collaboration. To meet the mounting challenges from mounting crises a historically competitive media culture is giving way to an accelerating trend of collaboration” (Quackenbush, 2020). In recent years, cooperation has also risen even between nonprofits and commercial outlets. Rosensteil et al., (2016, p. 6) found “The majority of commercial media who have partnered with or accepted money from nonprofits report they are doing more of it than they used to. Fifty-four percent said the number of partnerships with nonprofit of any kind have increased in the last five years.” These collaborations are not limited to working on projects together, but also having commercial media serve as platforms to distribute content produced by nonprofit media to enhance viewership (Rosensteil et al., 2016). The *Sopris Sun*, a weekly nonprofit newspaper in Carbondale, Colorado,

embraced collaboration by hosting a show with their local radio competitors. In it, the *Sun*'s editor talks with a radio host about what's new on the paper and their reporting. The *Sun*, instead of shunning the competition, embraced it to amplify its message and engage their audience (Ferruci & Alaimo, 2020). The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, another nonprofit outlet, commonly uses a strategy of applying for foundation grants with other news organizations and declares collaboration as being key to its sustainability. The center also applies its collaboration ethos by partnering with the University of Wisconsin – Madison to produce stories with student-journalists. (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014). The importance of collaboration has not gone unnoticed among major players in the nonprofit news media. The ProPublica Local Reporting Network funds investigative journalism in six small market news organizations every year in cities across the country (Nisbet et al., 2016).

### **Challenges in collaborations**

Collaborations in journalism pose different challenges for newsrooms and organizations. As The Editors of the Columbia Journalism Review (2009) pointed out, these challenges are not only of an editorial nature, but also operational and ethical. Organizations that engage in collaborations have to address challenges like conflicts of interests, whether perceived or real. They also must address how much, or little, of professional competition should be kept in a collaboration.

In a study for the PEW Research Center, Edmonds and Mitchell (2014) argue that collaborations are driven mainly to address economic challenges. To minimize the risk of failure in collaborations, organizations typically arrange their partnerships in simple and non-bureaucratic terms, but for many collaborations, that was not enough to ensure

operational success. Issues arose in cases where newsrooms had different workflows or used different tools, like content management systems. Working on these challenges will be fundamental for collaborations going forward.

Literature addressing collaborations in public and non-profit media is lacking, but a few examples highlighting challenges exist. Falk (2021) notes that collaborations between public media outlets (typically affiliated to state governments or universities) usually involves managerial obstacles. That means that partners must navigate different governance structures, procedures for billing, travel requirements, and more.

Ferrucci et. al (2015) conducted a case study looking into a collaboration between St. Louis Public Radio and the St. Louis Beacon. Both non-profit organizations shared similar missions and financial supporters. After merging their newsrooms, several challenges arose. One of these challenges was the internal communications: “As for disadvantages, journalists said a more hierarchical structure existed in the combined newsroom, reflecting in part a need for more formal communication within a larger organization (Ferruci et. al, 2015, p. 258).” Journalists from the Beacon struggled to adapt to their new organizational structure within St. Louis Public Radio. Operational challenges were also prevalent, as “former Beacon journalists also needed to learn the intricacies of the St. Louis Public Radio content management system. Although journalists received training in technical-related skills, the level of progress among the combined news staff varied (Ferruci et. al, 2015, p. 258).” In their conclusion, Ferruci et. al (2015) note that the routines journalists were used to working in were altered in three fundamental ways: though roles, technical changes, and a shift in news judgement. “This meant Beaconites and St. Louis Public Radio journalists had to adapt to a more



formalized beat structure and more specialized work roles. This forced journalists to learn new beats and build connections with new information sources, all while dealing with the other two main types of change (Feruci et. al, 2015, p. 260).”

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** What are the challenges of setting up a collaborative newsroom involving multiple organizations?

**RQ2:** What strategies are being implemented to achieve its sustainability?

### **Chapter 3: Professional Analysis**

In early February 2021, freezing temperatures hit Mississippi's capital city, Jackson, for a week. The unusually low temperatures caused terrible road conditions, widespread power outages, frozen pipes, and broken water mains.

Thousands of Jacksonians lost access to water for weeks. As the longtime news director of Mississippi Public Broadcasting, Teresa Collier knew this was a big story. But, as with any major story coming out of Mississippi, there was one problem.

"The story just became so big and so large that my small staff just couldn't cover it all. We needed resources," Collier said.

Collier's newsroom is responsible for covering all developments in Mississippi for the local public radio audience. Normally, that means having to make tough choices about what gets covered and what does not.

It's a numbers game.

"Right now, I'm operating with one reporter. But typically, we would have three, maybe four reporters to cover the entire state," Collier said.

In order to give the Jackson water crisis the attention it deserved, Collier needed help in the form of boots on the ground. Fortunately, help arrived thanks to a collaborative newsroom that MPB is part of: The Gulf States Newsroom.

The collaboration's managing editor, Priska Neely, assigned her reporters based at stations in Louisiana and Alabama to help out with coverage of the water crisis. What followed was reporting that centered the people at the middle of the crisis and covered it from multiple angles.

City workers trying to fix the pipes and get the supply running again. People getting in line for water to cook and bathe. Local officials scrambling to bring water back. The perspectives of African American residents, who make up a majority of the population of Jackson, on how their local leaders were responding to their needs. All of those stories were possible to tell because of the increased number of journalists from the Gulf States Newsroom that joined the reporting effort.

“It was just an overwhelming story that needed lots of resources and lots of reporting power,” Collier said. “And having all those reporters join in to help my reporters, it was truly an amazing collaboration that we really appreciated.”

The Gulf States Newsroom is part of an effort from NPR to increase local reporting in the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Many of the communities that public radio serves in those states are considered news deserts; communities that do not have a local news outlet to serve them.

The collaboration emerged as an effort to fight back against this trend. Armed with a \$1.2 million grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, NPR and the member stations that make up this collaborative network, WWNO and WRKF in Louisiana, WBHM in Alabama, and Mississippi Public Broadcasting, started working together in 2020 to plan coverage, share resources and add reporting power to a region of the country that has gone underreported for far too long. The stations are using the grant money to pay for, among other things, a managing editor and reporters covering health care, criminal justice, wealth and poverty, race, and more.

Kenya Young, the managing editor for collaborative journalism at NPR, says that while region had always had interesting and important stories to tell to a national audience, it

lacked the reporting power to do so. In her previous role as executive producer of Morning Edition, she would encounter that challenge repeatedly.

“The gulf was traditionally a place where, if I would call the [NPR] southern bureau chief to try to get a story that I saw out of there, the stations just didn't have the capacity to make it happen, and the bureau chief was very honest about that,” Young said. “The collaboration is doing things that we've never been able to do with stations that sometimes only have two reporters working.”

### **A collaboration is born**

Setting up this journalism collaborative was no easy task. Managers, directors, editors, and reporters from multiple organizations had to overcome several hurdles to make it work for all stakeholders.

Unlike other collaborative hubs set up by NPR in places like Texas and California, where public radio has a robust presence and is generally well funded, the Gulf States Newsrooms would almost double the reporting capacity of its member stations. It would also provide additional helpful resources, like professional training opportunities for the reporters in these newsrooms.

To begin, the collaborative needed a focus. Kathy Goldgeier, Network Hub Content Manager at NPR, says the network asked its partner member stations what areas or beats they would like to have more reporters working on. Once reporters were assigned to those beats, they would begin covering stories with a regional angle. That means that all member stations could run a story, as it would not be only of interest to one of their

audiences. This would also benefit NPR by making it easier to run those stories on their national shows.

“NPR has, for a long time had a relationship with stations where we bring their stories and air them nationally, and sometimes those [stories] need a little reworking to put them in a in a broader national context,” Goldgeier said. “These already are in the context of speaking to people in three different states. When you approach a story that way, it's already framed a little more broadly. So, it's been great for NPR, too, because we've gotten a lot of stories out of a part of the country that that we weren't getting as many stories.”

But setting up a successful multi-state collaboration required more than just a good sense of how it would run editorially. The collaboration would need to agree on things outside of the journalism they would produce, including hiring, content sharing and management, allocation of funds, fundraising strategies, distribution of power for executive decisions, and more.

### **Overcoming structural challenges**

To begin, the Gulf State Newsroom member stations and NPR signed a Memorandum of Understanding that structured the partnership's organization. “They [stations] are equal partners. NPR has a vote as a partner in the MOU, but so do all the stations,” Young said. The new hires, which included a managing editor, digital editor, and reporters, would be hired by the individual stations that make up the collaborative and based in their newsrooms, but the financial responsibilities for these positions would be reimbursed by NPR. “Our grant covers their salaries,” Goldgeier said. “Nobody, except and Kenya and

myself in this case, are NPR employees. Everybody else is an employee of one of the other partner stations.”

Logistical and technical challenges also needed to be solved before any kind of content could begin to be produced and shared among the member stations and NPR. These include how stories would be shared, what formats worked for each of the partners, and more.

“The public radio system at the member station level is the wild west, everyone's using different audio editing software, different email services, different, word-processing systems,” Neely said. “When you're collaborating, and you're trying to find systems that can work across all of those varying systems. That's a real challenge, just like basic logistics. How do we do put stuff together? How do we share content?”

Many logistical challenges needed to be solved, Collier said. Deciding if the audio files should be submitted in a specific format like .wav or mp3, posting the scripts for news directors to access, getting the non-audio components to go with a piece that will be posted online. To resolve this issue, the partners decided to create dedicated Slack channels to share content.

“We created a Slack channel and we decided that we will share all of those documents that way. And because we were all three stations that were in desperate need, or just wanted the increased reporting power, we were just excited to work through those logistical things,” Collier said. “We created the structure by which we could share stories, share ideas, and it's working. Certainly, there were a lot of bumps and hiccups, and but we didn't let it stop us or let it bother us.”

How the content is presented also required some adjusting not only from the stations and their news directors, but also the newly hired reporters that work directly for the Gulf States Newsroom. No single station manages their programming equally, which presents challenges for how stories from the collaborative ultimately get to air.

“Mississippi has a morning show called *Mississippi Edition*. And they're pretty flexible on the amount of time that they can have a story run. Whereas the show in Birmingham, they don't have a daily show,” said Gulf States Newsroom Health Care Reporter Shalina Chatlani. “So, a long story wouldn't work for that station. It might just be that you only do that story in Mississippi, and in Louisiana you do a longer version story because they have that long format where they can feature it. So, you have to think about the ways in which the story can actually fit into an actual news segment.”

### **Managing communication**

The partners in the collaboration have two different recurring meetings. One deals with executive matters and the other with editorial planning. The executive meetings involve the general managers of the member stations that make up the Gulf States Newsroom and the staff at NPR involved in this project. Goldgeier said these meetings happen “every other week.”

The editorial meetings include the news directors of the member stations, Goldgeier, and the Gulf States Newsroom's managing editor, Priska Neely. These meetings happen every Monday, and Neely said it's there where she informs the news directors what her reporters are working on and they in turn tell her what the local reporters are working on in case their stories could have a regional angle.

Neely said the meetings have proved incredibly useful as she must rely on the expertise of each news director to understand what important developments are happening at the local level in each state.

“I brainstorm with the news directors because I'm relying on their expertise. Another thing that I had to adjust to is that I can't try to be on top of local news [in all three states].

That's too much. I am not looking at the AP rundown for every state. I can't do that,”

Neely said.

To handle day to day communications, the directors, editors, and reporters use virtual tools like Slack and Zoom to share notes, schedule meetings, or just chat. All of the people interviewed for this project said that these tools were already widely adopted in their workspaces since the coronavirus pandemic began in early 2020. That meant there was not much difficulty getting used to communicating with others through these means.

### **Covering stories through a regional lens**

The central idea of the Gulf States Newsroom revolves around creating local journalism that has regional meaning. That presented a challenge for the editors and reporters in the collaborative. Framing stories for a regional audience means that sometimes there are good potential story ideas that they cannot report on because they only touch on a subject that impacts one state.

“There have been stories that I've seen that I passed up because they are just Alabama stories,” said Stephan Bisaha, the Gulf States Newsroom wealth and poverty reporter.

One story was pointed out by multiple people in the collaborative as an example of reporting that helped them understand a regional framing. As public health officials in all



three states began distributing vaccines against COVID-19, the team saw an opportunity to produce the journalism the Gulf States Newsroom seeks to address.

“Our region had the lowest vaccination rate in the United States and the highest number of people of color or minorities dying from the coronavirus,” Collier said. “So, we quickly realized that that's a story that we should cover across state lines.”

Chatlani, who covers health care for the newsroom, worked with NPR Investigations on a story that highlighted how Black and Brown neighborhoods across the South were missing vaccination sites. The story ran in all three states, as well as nationally on NPR.

“And in all three states, the public health officials started to say that they were going to focus on putting more vaccine sites,” Chatlani said. “The mayor of Baton Rouge even specifically called out the story and was like, ‘I'm appalled. I'm going to go put vaccine sites in this neighborhood.’”

But one lesson that the newsroom learned quickly is that trying to frame stories in a way that ensures there is a thread for every community in their listening area is not necessarily the best way to define what regional importance means. Neely said sometimes one of the states will be left out of a particular story, and that is fine.

“You can't make every story about all three states, because otherwise you won't be able to do anything meaningful,” Neely said. “The promise of public radio is that you are learning about things that are different from where you are. I think people say ‘Oh, this has to be like hyper local.’ And no, it doesn't. Just realizing that what makes a good regional story is what makes a good story, period.”

Neely said it took local news directors in the collaboration a little time to get used to that idea, but they got around it by embracing that the goal of any story they produce is to

highlight common issues in their states and bring relevant storytelling to explain them, even is if it not necessarily an issue in their “backyard”.

For Bisaha, that was also a very valuable lesson. “If I get two out of three states and I'm missing one of them, I'm okay with that,” Bisaha said. “I think we can get hung up on the idea of how we can make every story interesting for every person in all three states. I think that can become a trap really quick.”

### **Sharing resources**

The Gulf States Newsroom value to the member stations that integrate it goes well beyond the stories it produces for them. The newsroom is also providing training and support for the local staff that were already part of these stations. Some of these include sessions on investigative reporting, filing public record requests, crafting better narrative storytelling techniques, and many more.

Goldgeier sees the value of the collaborative newsroom as something beyond the stories that NPR would get out of the new hires. She says the new influx of stories coming out of the Deep South to a national audience are often coming from the local reporters who benefit from having access to the added resources of the hub.

“[stories] have come from station reporters who either edit with their own station editor, or sometimes they've edited with Priska,” Goldgeier said. “Part of the goal of these hubs was to fully integrate the newsrooms of the partner stations into it, so that we're adding more capacity for everybody.”

The differences of each of the member stations newsrooms made the training sessions very valuable for their reporter to get skills in areas that they do not normally get a chance to explore on their daily work.

“One of the things we found as we were building the Gulf States Newsroom is that the level of reporting or the skills of the reporters in the different stations is different. Some of us do daily news, some of us do only features,” Collier said. “The training that's involved and that we've instituted with the Gulf States Newsroom has been invaluable. Training on editing, writing, and audio training. That's certainly helpful, always training to beef up the skills of the reporters locally.”

Neely, who is often the person who puts these trainings together, also sees this aspect of the collaborative as one of the most important ones. “I see it as not just about the [increased] coverage but making sure that people are getting better coverage because we're uplifting the quality of the work that's happening on the local level as well.”

For Aubri Juhasz, WWNO's education reporter, these added resources have been invaluable. She experiences first-hand the challenges of operating in a small newsroom that would otherwise not have many resources available.

“Our news director is our audio editor. And for a long time, we didn't have any digital editor. So, we essentially had one person who had to look at everything,” Juhasz said.

“That made it really hard to get support as you're working on a story. It also slowed down the timeline by which we would be able to put out stories, because everything had to go through one person.”

As Juhasz puts it, the increased capacity of editors has lifted the morale of her newsroom. She also said Neely is very interested to know what she and her colleagues are working on and always makes herself available to provide feedback on stories they are working on, even if they are not part of the Gulf States Newsroom.

Both Juhasz and Bisaha mentioned that the fact that because the reporters who make up the Gulf States Newsroom are normally working on longer stories that require more time to report, Neely's schedule sometimes allows her to have a larger involvement in the day-to-day reporting of member stations.

Juhasz is currently working on a series of guaranteed income reporting projects that she framed with a regional lens. Multiple cities across the Gulf States, including Birmingham, New Orleans, and Shreveport are planning on giving hundreds of residents a guaranteed income, or as she puts it "providing money to people who need it, no strings attached." She says that she's learned that if she has an idea that is ambitious and can frame regionally, she will do so to be able to work with Neely.

"If Priska and the hub didn't exist, I don't know what I would have done with that pitch," Juhasz said. "It's just not the type of thing that our newsroom could have taken on and responded to. We would have had to go outside and hire an additional editor for me to work with. We don't have money for that. I think the hub just has created a space to do more and to pursue big ideas in a way that member stations don't always have the time or resources to think about even if their reporters have the ideas."

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways in which the increased resources that the hub are made available to its member stations is during breaking news scenarios. Just like the Jackson water crisis described at the beginning of this article, there have been other reporting situations in which the hub has made its reporters available to assist the local member station provide urgent coverage.

In late August of 2021, a category four hurricane made landfall in Louisiana. Hurricane Ida was the second most intense hurricane on record to reach the state, only behind

Hurricane Katrina. As the impact the storm would have on New Orleans and the surrounding communities in Louisiana, Neely mobilized all of her team to cover the storm exclusively.

Chatlani became the reporter NPR would contact for its national angle. Bisaha stepped away from regional coverage and worked with local energy companies to create a map that would display real-time power outages in Louisiana.

Chatlani says that freed up local reporters at WWNO to focus on the immediate reporting needs that a crisis like this one brings. “Local reporters are busy trying to get stories out to the residents who really need to hear [things] like ‘can I take this bridge into the city? Is my house going to be flooded?’ Literally, that's what people were listening to radio for. They wanted to know if there was electricity on their block.”

Juhasz was one of those local reporters. She said reporting during that time was extremely difficult because she was also affected by the same outages that every other resident was facing. That's when Neely's help became invaluable in putting stories out on the air.

“Priska basically [told me] ‘not only am I going to be your editor, I'm going to be your producer. So just record your sound using voice memos and track your parts using voice memos. Send me all the pieces, and I will put your stories together.’ I didn't have a laptop and I couldn't get on Audition,” Juhasz said. “I think we had probably quadruple the amount of coverage coming out than we would have if we didn't have the hub to assist in that process.”

### **A national spotlight**

Among the proudest achievements of the newsroom is the increased national attention that their stories are getting through NPR. In the short amount of time that the hub has been operational, their reporting has been consistently featured in shows like *All Things Considered*, *Weekend Edition*, and *Here and Now*. These are nationally syndicated shows with millions of listeners across the United States.

Some of the hub's national reporting includes the battle to form a union at an Amazon fulfillment center in Alabama, a series of bomb threats at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the resumption of prison visitations in Alabama for the first time in twenty years, the closure of over 400 Family Dollar stores across the South and Midwest which deeply affected rural communities that live in food deserts. Their reporting has become a consistent fixture in national shows.

Bisaha says that he likes to remind local listeners of this increased national spotlight during fundraising season, telling them “this is not just about your dollars being spent to bring national news to you. It's about telling the story of Birmingham to the rest of the country. It's about telling the story of the South to the rest of the country. That's what you're helping to support when you support our member stations.”

### **Aiming for sustainability**

As with most projects in public media, funding will determine if the early success that the Gulf States Newsroom has enjoyed gets to last beyond its original 44 month, \$1.2 million grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Some of the collaboration members are confident that the quality of their reporting will ensure that their work is funded beyond this original phase. To ensure this, the directors of the local stations and NPR are working on ways to raise funds off the work that they have already created.

“We hired a consultant about a year ago to do an analysis for us and their recommendation for sustainability is that we hire a major gifts officer,” Goldgeier said. “We’re hoping that that person will help us identify funding and set up a longer-term income flow so that we can keep this going. It’s possible we would apply for more grants. We haven’t quite gotten to that point, but the hope is that we could get a development operation going for this hub that would help sustain it over the long run.”

Collier said she’s hopeful whoever gets hired for the position can jumpstart the fundraising efforts. “We don’t want this to go away,” Collier said. “From a news directors’ perspective, look at all of the resources that I have right now that I didn’t have a year and a half ago. This is extraordinary. It is just this is the kind of journalism I think public radio should be doing.”

### **Potential areas of improvement**

Remote work was always going to be the way to go for this collaboration. Reporters based in different member stations meant that they would have to find a way to work together at a distance, even if the pandemic had never happened. But the pandemic did happen, and it made getting any face time among the team members almost impossible.

Neely, who is a big proponent of creating personal bonds with her co-workers as a way to boost morale, says this is one of the areas where things could improve most. She wants to encourage her reporters, and anyone involved in the collaboration to be more assertive in giving feedback.

“Slack and everything, they’re great tools. But I think what is really missing from that is feedback. When you’re in a physical space with someone, they tell you all sorts of things that they don’t tell you in writing. Both positive and negative feedback. In person, people

will tell you ‘I love that piece you had on this morning,’ and they won't text that to you,” Neely said.

Chatlani said the remote aspect of the job can be frustrating when trying to schedule a quick meeting or trying to figure out details of a story that would only take minutes to do in person.

“Things that I can accomplish by simply walking into someone's office and saying ‘Hey, do you have five minutes? Let's like hammer this out right now.’ and just get it done. It takes miles longer when you're trying to do something remotely and like schedule, a calendar meeting and try to work with everyone's schedules,” Chatlani said. “People don't think about how easy it is to just get something done in the minute and in the moment.”

To foster a stronger connection among its staff members, the hub held its first in-person retreat in April. Bisaha said that really boosted morale. “It's just something about building a connection with your coworkers just by sharing space with them. I think that's one of the biggest challenges for regional newsrooms.”

Neely also works to make sure her employees feel welcome and part of the team from day one. She even published a guide for the public radio trade magazine *Current* with steps that managers can take for a successful onboarding of employees. She said she constantly tells her reporters that they need to hype each other up.

Neely says she constantly reminds them that “If you heard on someone's piece this morning and you liked it, I need you to tweet about it. I need you to post on Slack about it. Do not just keep that thought to yourself and not tell anyone. Think about how



empowering it is when you get a piece of feedback from someone. So, do that to others. It radiates when you do that type of thing.”

The absence of feedback can be one of the hardest aspects of remote work. That is also an area where communication between NPR and the hub could be better. Neely says she hardly ever receives feedback, including from NPR. She said she is trying to make sure that does not become the norm with her team. “One of my mandates as a manager is to make sure that my reporters do not feel that way,” Neely said.

### **Defining success**

There are many metrics of success that can be used when evaluating a collaboration, but all interview subjects agreed broadly on the way success should be measured for this specific one. The two main ones were the quality and quantity of the reporting that the hub has produced, and the collaboration’s sustainability.

One of those two categories is already visible.

“The increase of content we're seeing in both audio and digital is an absolute measure of success,” Young said. “I think it can be measured in that way. Certainly, when it comes to actual deliverable and outputs, the increase in the content we're receiving is a huge success measure.”

Chatlani said she thinks the impact of the collaboration’s reporting will make it more likely that it outlasts its original grant funding. That’s why she sees the reporting as the best way to measure success.

“I think that the impact that we've made is definitely the way to measure success,”

Chatlani said. “I feel very proud of a lot of my reporting during this pandemic. The South is in a news desert, and we've been able to break stories in this region that other reporters

haven't been able to get to because they just didn't have time or they didn't have the resources.”

For Bisaha, the longevity of the collaboration will be its ultimate measure of success.

“Collaborations can come and go and making sure that this one stick around, I think that's going to be the real test. I think we're doing most things right,” Bisaha said. “But also that it can survive a changing of hands. I worry constantly that because Priska is such an amazing boss and is doing such a great job, that other people will try to poach her from us. There probably will be new leadership at some point. There will probably be someone new in my position at some point. How much does the bones of this thing still function when you have different faces in there?”

Collier, who knows first-hand about the challenges of reporting from this region, says it's all about the money. To her, success hinges on the survival of the hub.

“It was always about funding. With funding, a lot can be done,” Collier said. “That would be the biggest success story. If this collaborative lives beyond the initial seed grant money, because why create something this extraordinary and then it goes away?”

## **Appendix**

### **Interview Transcripts**

Disclaimer: All interviews were transcribed using an online audio transcription software.

These transcripts may contain some repeated words or typos, but they provide a mostly verbatim account of all interviews.

### **Kenya Young**

#### **Managing Editor for Collaborative Journalism, NPR**

#### **Fernando Narro**

As this collaboration was beginning, what do you think was the most either glaring or obvious obstacle or challenge that needed to be solved for this to take off?

### **Kenya Young**

Sure. I wasn't a part of it when it first started. From a point of view of being a show programmer at the time when these were started, the South in general, but the gulf states were particularly a very difficult place to get a story from as a Morning Edition executive producer. We just didn't have the muscle there. With NPR reporters, we just have a few southern reporters anyway. Deb Elliott, Wade Goodwin, Greg Allen, they can't travel and cover all the stories. And they obviously are set for the big one. But the Gulf was traditionally a place where if I would call the southern bureau chiefs, to try to get a story that I saw out of there, the stations just didn't have the capacity to make it happen. And the bureau chief was very honest about that. And even the stations will tell you that this collaboration is doing things that we've never been able to do as a station only having two reporters. It is true even before the whole local journalism is dying trends that we've seen the last 10 to 20 years, the gulf states were traditionally a very difficult place to get new

stories from. And this is the only model in fact of the four that is specifically about tackling and fixing the deficit of a news desert and getting being able to get more content out of a place that we were not getting content before.

**Fernando Narro**

And now that it's set up, as you say, how is the communication managed between all these different stations and NPR to make sure that they are producing the journalism that it seeks to produce?

**Kenya Young**

Priska Neely, the managing editor is the key to that making that happen. It's like running its own newsroom. She the managing editor of the newsroom. And there's, of course, the four stations. But she pulls it all together. They have weekly meeting. But she also was in very close contact with, you know, her project manager here who's Kathy Goldgeier, there's definitely a more the need for more connective tissue when it comes to the editorial and how the Gulf is, is, is kind of represented or entrenched in our newsroom, and how we're connecting, you know, part of what I'm doing is trying to figure out how those news rooms are pretty much kind of connected to our newsroom. And yes, we've got the project managers like the Sega and Kathy but that's not as editorial as being able to infuse operationally their news coverage. And so that's something that I'm working on, and trying to put some positions in place to make help make that happen. But the managing editor is really the key to all that for both of you know, the on the ground level, connecting the stations together and then the top level connecting that the hub with MTR.

**Fernando Narro**

I just wanted to ask regarding what you said, I don't know if Priska would be the better person to ask this, but like how much of input? Or do like each member station has or NPR has regarding the either editorial decisions or things that they should be covering that that we want to hear at NPR? Or is that completely managed by just the managing editor

**Kenya Young**

at the news completely managed by the managing editor? I mean, Krista will come up, she'll be able to talk to you more about the model. So, the station, you know, she's got her own. The way it's set up. She has reporters that are directly go seek newsroom reporters, but they are situated at the different stations. So, one of them that WWNO, the criminal justice person, I think is that that Jackson, but they are ghosts. So that's a part of the collaboration is you have Gulf States assigned, not even assigned hired reporters. But they sit in different places in order to feel like it is a collaboration, right. And so, so they're kind of all over. But they do report to the Gulf states and they work for the Gulf states. And so, what's nice is that you have representation and all the newsrooms, they do meet, they have editorial meetings, so the reporters and the news directors do meet weekly, in some cases daily, I think one of them to be able to talk about the coverage that needs to get done. So, there is input from the station. There's Kathy Goldgeier is in that meeting as well. So, there's, you know, there's, there's a collective mind now, right of what should be covered and how they're going to go about doing it with a lot of editorial heads. So that comes from, you know, you know, just kind of working together and like a pitch meeting, like your pitch meeting was right. But the pitch meeting just happened to be people of all different lengths. And then Priska greenlights and assigns and goes from

it in that way, you can think of it that way. Now, you know, when there's a story that let's say, again, Morning Edition wants a story out of Jackson, Mississippi, and is reaching out to the bureau chiefs, the bureau chief may go then to the Gulf and say, Hey, can we get the story if you have anyone working on this? Or can you get the story out there? It's not exactly the same as like when a story of the show is trying to get something from a station. But it is in the way that not that the stations serve NPR because they've done it's still an app, but the hubs are truly in the place where they're kind of doing their own thing. You know, if and this hub has beat in criminal justice, and health care, and I forget what the second one, the third one is, but there's three beats that they're covering primarily. Um, you know, if there is I don't know, like if there's a local story out of New Orleans about this new community, that building housing for the homeless, blah, blah, blah, like that's not quite in their alley, right. So, whereas the general story of show Mike when you're pitching Weekend Edition there and you might pitch in a general local story and the station you can see other stations covering, it doesn't exactly work that way. So, the hub isn't there to kind of serve and go get spots and stories no matter what it is, but if it's in the lane of what they're covering And then they can make something happen if that makes sense. No. Yeah,

**Fernando Narro**

that makes sense. And one question that I had, I think, is to the reporters working for the hubs that are like, beads. Are they exclusive to the gold states newsrooms? Or do they do they also file stories independently for their own newsrooms? They're working at, like you said, in New Orleans and Jackson. So

**Kenya Young**

I think it's, it's different for every No, I know, it's different for every hub. I don't exactly know what the makeup was for this one. You know, if the lines are blurry, but yes, when they are they are mostly what's happening is they are mostly filing for the news for the technical state newsroom. But then it is. It's, it's shared and distributed amongst all the stations. So, Selena is a Gulf States newsroom. And she's working out of WW. And oh, and she does a piece for the Gulf states newsroom. It is then going to air on WW No. And KSPs. And, you know, Jackson and Birmingham, right. So, I don't know. You'd have to ask Priska that I don't I don't think it's a model that they go FIOS. Like, she's not going to go cover like City Hall for New Orleans. You know what I mean? Yeah. So

**Fernando Narro**

yeah. And I guess my question was more of like, I used to be a reporter at a member station as well. And I was just thinking if there's like something that not necessarily regularly going and covering city hall or anything like that, but if something breaks, like they're available, right, like they can go and like just do that for that day, if that's happening.

**Kenya Young**

You know, I think stations work together enough in a way where they make, you know, crisscross rice and make something happen right. There. We're all covering the hurricane when it came in different ways, because they needed to and the station needed an NPR needed to be served. So, in that respect, yes.

**Fernando Narro**

What is the trend a little bit? And what do you think, has worked so far for this one like to say NPR is setting up a lot of hubs, but like this one has been now pumping source for

a while. We I know for a fact that in the two ones that having a weekend edition with her two of them already. So, what do you think has worked so far in the way that this collaborative was set up?

**Kenya Young**

This is the perfect and beautiful model of again, serving an area that was not traditionally served before. So, Priska is able to make stories happen on the ground level that are shared locally. But also, the content is coming to NPR as well, because one, that's very good storytelling, but also, we need it. We don't typically hear from this area. So, this collaboration is truly answering the news desert call, and is being able to feed national programming in a way the stations could not, because they're so small. And so, the benefit has been yet you know, I always say, you know, part of the goal of the collaboration is better, more ears on the same piece of content, instead of all making the content over and over again, how do we get more ears on that one? And so, it's a great example at the station level of content being shared. Yes, there's a WWNO story in normal times, that would just air on WWNO. But now since it's coordinated, and there's and Priska there to see that it's got a bit of a regional lens that would work everywhere. You now have one station reporter piece airing on four distinct different stations, and then possibly making it up to national programming as well. And it's just, you know, as you said, you've had two in the past two months, that that's unheard of, right when I was in before this morning edition. I was getting pieces from Priska all the time. And it just it just wasn't not that way before. And so, we're getting the stories and we're being on the ground, not only where NPR hasn't been before, but that traditionally as a news desert for most media organizations, it's definitely solving that problem that was in that area.



**Fernando Narro**

And I think that the answer is this gave me touches on this, but I still wanted to ask it directly, but how do you think success could be measured for an initiative like this?

**Kenya Young**

In this case, I think the increase of content we're seeing both audio and digital is an absolute measure of success. When you go from almost zero to you know, you're almost talking 100% change, right? So, I think it can be measured in that way. I think the difficult part of measure that we always want to see as the audience, that's just not as easy to measure, certainly digitally, you could see how many clicks something is different getting and if there's an increase in clicks, and, and, and engagement time with some of the pieces, but it would be great to know, I think the hardest part to measure is you know, what it may be doing for both our national audience and our and the local audience, if there's either an increase in audience engagement, and also the makeup of it, you know, our north star is diverse audience, younger audience, and it'd be great to know if the collaboration is helping to affect that change. And that's much harder for us to see. But certainly, when it comes to actual deliverable and outputs, the content that we're the increase in the content, we're receiving, it's a huge success measure.

**Fernando Narro**

And as far as making this initiative, continue going forward. I know I have read about the grant; the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has given for this to happen. But um, is there any anything being implemented so far to like, either try or make sure that this keeps going past that grant funding? Or, or what? What strategies are being implemented

**Kenya Young**

to make sure that yeah, so part of when we meet, there's an editorial team, but there's also an executive team, and I'm on that with like, the GMs from each of the stations. And most of what we talk about is, you know, one, the operations and to the sustainability, sustainability is a huge part of this. And when the grant is up, everyone wants to be able to continue this. So, there's a lot of conversation about what that looks like, you know, MPR and CPB or who whoever the grantors are on the different ones, you know, kind of set up the seed money, but then where does it go from there. And so we have to work with developments, obviously, to try to keep it going. But we also have to put some sustainability plans in place. So that the newsroom continues to be funded, either by the, you know, joint stations, or, you know, though, you know, the stations raising the money themselves as well.

**Fernando Narro**

Is there one factor that you think would be most likely to determine if this if that is successful? Or is it just too complicated to pinpoint to one thing?

**Kenya Young**

I think it's too hard to pinpoint one, if you know, the pinpointing is how aggressive the group is together, right? Are they able to raise the money? They do it all the time that they're, you know, for their own fundraising? I think the most difficult thing is they have to fundraise for their own operations as well, just to keep the station going. And then additionally, funds for this. So, there's, there's not one under underlining factor. But it really just, to me, the underlying factor is having that sustainability plan that someone's actually working on.

**Fernando Narro**

Okay, I'm in I know, we have very little time for questions remaining. So, I want to like, sorry, if I'm jumping from one topic to another problem, whatever you need to do, as far as executive decisions have, like made in this collaboration, like go, is there a higher hierarchy followed? Like, does NPR have something that I guess if an important suggested we made that they have to approve before the managing editor or the number of stations can do or is it decentralized? And

**Kenya Young**

it's, it's, we're actually considered, there's a what's called an MOU, which is a partnership between all of the stations and NPR. And actually, so they're equal partners. So, you know, I have a vote as an as a partner in the MOU, but so do all the stations. And we, if it comes to that kind of decision, make alignment. We all you know, we all have a vote, an equal vote in making something happen. But that's a part of the executive committee, not the editorial committee.

**Fernando Narro**

Are there any other either structural challenges that I should be aware of going forward when I interview people about to understand how so many different organizations are making this thing work? Right.

**Kenya Young**

Yeah, I mean, it's, it's a, there's a lot of layers, but I think it has to do with you know, depending on who you are, you know, the Gulf states how Often third executive team meeting, you know, each of us with the Texas we meet weekly, the executive team meets weekly with California, the team meets monthly. You know, obviously communication in

between. But there does have to be an executive committee of some sort that's meeting and communicating on a regular basis.

**Fernando Narro**

How does the collaboration communicate between each other? Are they like just using slack? And that's the way that daily, that's how we communicate? Or I'm assuming it must be hard to like, be able to maintain a proper line of communication between so many people base in so many different places, but or is it? Am I just overthinking it? And, yeah,

**Kenya Young**

not that bad. Editorially, they all have Slack channels. And that's editorially, that's mostly how they're working together. I can't speak to how that's working or not, because I don't partake in that very much. With the executive committee, we mostly, you know, are on email with each other. And like we said, we have our weekly meeting. So, you know, there's that there's not that much that needs to be decided on a daily basis when it comes to executive and governance of these editorially, obviously, there is, you know, as I mentioned, with the Texas when they meet daily, I think the Gulf States meets weekly, but Chris was on the phone slacking with them all the time. So, you know, but it actually is not that difficult. You know, it's been no different than us communicating in the pandemic over the past, you know, doesn't matter where we are, it could be all live on the same street in DC, but it really wouldn't matter, because we're so zoom, or we can all be in seven different states. So, I think, you know, it's actually I think, probably because the world has changed, you know, this may have been modeled communication before, that

seems a little difficult. But now that the world has changed, and we've all had to do it with everyone, it doesn't seem as kind of an anomaly as it would have before.

**Fernando Narro**

Though, I think I think I knew the antibiotic was my professor who wanted it in because most of the academic literature before was done pre-pandemic where this wasn't happening. Question. To me, at least, it's just everything I know.

**Kenya Young**

Yeah, I think, you know, again, it was probably abnormal beforehand. But now this is so much of what people have gotten used to, that it's just the way of the world and it works out just fine.

**Fernando Narro**

Finally, the three minutes that I have remaining, what are there any changes so far that either have happens is this the one that made the collaboration work better, or anything that you see right now, if you think maybe if we change this, then it would make this collaboration work a little bit better, or

**Kenya Young**

I think one of the changes they made along the way is, after getting a little bit of a review or console to look at their business model, they did make the decision, the executive committee made the decision to change one of the reporting positions to a development position. And I actually think that's it, that's a great idea that will be the only newsroom that does have a development position as director of development or gifts officer. And again, that that holds to the sustainability that will ensure that someone is working on their sustainability plan daily as their job. So that and that shows how much they are

committed to keeping this open is that they tramp they converted my reporting positions to a development position. And I think that was the right thing to do. They did it about halfway through sometime last year. Last summer, I think they made that decision. And again, you know, that that takes away the focus on the executive committee of having to think about this so much, and put them in the hands of one person owning that to make sure that the development and the seat sustainability is being taken care of and watched over. And that was, you know, obviously a big change to take it from your reporting lanes, but absolutely necessary for our business model.

**Fernando Narro**

And that ties with someone wishes before it's perfect. Ah, well, I I don't have any more times have we have more questions that I wanted to ask but I got to jump into my pitch meeting. Oh,

**Kenya Young**

worry. But you can you can scatter them from people that people you'll get a good picture.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, definitely. As they now started to answer my email, so I think I'm going to have a good amount of people that I can talk to this perfect. Well, I really appreciate it. Thank you so much. You're very

**Kenya Young**

welcome. Take care. Bye.

**Kathy Goldgeier**

**Network Hub Content Manager, NPR**

**Fernando Narro**

When talking about the gulf states, newsrooms, gold states newsroom, what would you say were some of the most glaring or obvious obstacles to solve before this could take off?

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Well, the challenge was to bring these stations together, that had never worked together before. And to sort of talk to them, I mean, NPR, his approach to this all along was to, to build these collaborations in a way that best served the stations, not for NPR to say, here's what you should do, but to work with the stations to say, what do you need? What do you want? And how can we serve? How can we best construct something that will meet your needs, and so, so that's what happened here. And, and, you know, it's it, they're in three different states, this is the first one. So, we had, we started with the Texas newsroom, which, of course, is all contained within Texas. And, you know, again, their stations working together, they had been working together a little bit already. So that one that was sort of what that made the natural makeup a natural place to start. And we had talked with stations in California, about working together in a collaboration all within the state of California. So, this was the first one that we were involved with, it had stations in three different states. And you know, so that's something of a challenge and, you know, sort of helping them see how we could identify we what they wanted was more boots on the ground reporting. And so, the model we chose for that was to hire report, hire editors, but hire reporters. And so, they decided on what they wanted to beats to be. And the idea

was, what are things, what are topics you want to cover anyway, not necessarily to make this something that we sort of layered on top of everything else, but really to make it integral with what they were doing. And they're small stations in these three places. So, they don't have huge reporting staffs of their own. So really, the idea was, what beats would you want to be covering anyway, and we can cover them from a regional approach. And that will give you more content in areas that you want it anyway. So. So that worked out really well, actually. And, you know, it's like any collaboration, I mean, when you create a partnership, the partners have to get to know each other, get to trust each other, get to understand each other's needs, wants limitations, challenges, all of that. So, you know, so that's something of a challenge as you get started. But, but this group has really gelled and they've really come together. And they really all feel really good about this. And they all really, I think, equally feel like there's a huge value to their station and their audience in working together in this way.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, I I, like I said, I've only been a week in addition for two months. And I think I've already heard a couple of stories that we have heard from them already. That

**Kathy Goldgeier**

they I mean, it's really been great. And they have really talented reporters, and a lot of the stories that they do have come to NPR partly because of the regional focus, one of the things. You know, NPR has, for a long time had a relationship with stations where we NPR brings in stories from stations and we air them nationally. And sometimes those need a little bit more reworking to sort of put them in a in a broader national context. These already are in the context of, of speaking to people in three different states. And so,



when you approach a story that way, I think it's an easier than sort of leap up to having it speak nationally, because you've already sort of taken out all the just very local specific language and framing. And it's already framed a little more broadly. So yeah, so it's been great for NPR, too, because we've gotten a lot of stories out of a part of the country that that we weren't getting as many stories from because, you know, they're small stations, they just haven't had the resources on their own in the same way.

**Fernando Narro**

And touching a little bit of what you said about this being stations that haven't necessarily worked with each other before. Would you say there were some adjusting adjustments required from each of these organizations to make this collaboration work or any examples you have of thinks that they have to change a little bit in the way they operate to make this work.

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Yeah, I mean, they've all changed. From a, from the perspective of how their newsrooms function, because they now have a once a week meeting, all the news leaders meet once a week, and they talk about, you know, what are we going to cover and what's going on and, and thanks to Priska Neely, who's the managing editor, who's fantastic. You know, she is always telling them, well, this reporter working on this, and that reporter is working on that, and so they've, you know, they've developed a way that they fold those stories into what they're sharing with their own audiences, both on the radio and, and online. And so, you know, they've adapted to having another pipeline that's feeding content into what's available to them.

**Fernando Narro**

And how would you say that, as far as because I know, this is most like it's a collaboration between these three different states that that have their newsrooms working together. But as far as communication with NPR, goes, how is it managed? Like, how often do you guys stuck with the three member stations, I mean, another three members, and the three, the all of the member stations that make up this collaborative and, and just how is communication managed to make sure that it functions?

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Well, there's sort of two different pieces of it. So that's part of my job. And I'm in close contact with Priska. And I attend the weekly planning meetings. And you know, when I'm in contact with all the news directors and with the GMs. And so I attend the meetings that the executive team, which is the general managers of each of the stations, and NPR is represented, and I attend those meetings, which happen every other week. And then I also attend the news meetings that happen every week. And then the bureau chief, the southern bureau chief, who's the person in the NPR newsroom, who's most directly responsible for bringing in stories for to for broadcast from that part of the country. That person, as often as possible, attends those editorial planning meetings also. So those are sort of the two and Kenya attends the executive meetings. So, I guess those are sort of the three-touch point. People at NPR who are most closely working with,

**Fernando Narro**

and he said the meetings but like on, I guess maybe this is not a question for you. And more a question for Priska, let me know if you cannot enter it, but for the collaboration, like day in and day out how they communicate what tools are being made? Sure.

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Yeah. So they are, it's a person has developed all sorts of things. I mean, we have a Slack chat with have a Slack workspace with multiple channels. So there are different Slack channels and slack for different beats that and there's a criminal justice channel and a Health Channel. And so people, both the hub reporters and the station reporters who cover those beats or cover similar topics, of conversations in the stock channel. So that's a great, like, in a lot of places, Slack is a great tool for communication. Yeah, and, and then Priska has a system for sharing out the content once it's ready. And she sends regular either slack messages or emails to say, you know, the stories ready. And she's got a system for putting all the elements of a broadcast story in and then the hub has a digital editor, Orlando, who, excuse me, who shares out digital contents. And he's got a great system for, you know, sort of creating a package and he sent social media suggestions. And, you know, the mean, some of the challenges are that they're on different systems. So, they don't, that you shouldn't use a different system for their CMS for their website. So, you know that that's something that would be easier if they were all in the same one. But at the moment, they're not. And I think they use different broadcast playout systems. I'm not sure about that. So, but you know, they've done all I know, I've developed systems where they can put the content in in a format that's easy for everybody else to then take out and use and, you know, then they have to set it up in their own systems. But I think it's been good and you know, there's so there's a lot of conversation and I would say slack, I mean that just the sort of day to day conversations, a lot of that happens in Slack.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah. Now that I think to me, that makes a lot of sense. This is just one of the questions but two of them committee professionals wanted to ask, but I think they haven't practiced journalism after the pandemic and did to me makes this pretty much all I've known.

Right. Well communicate.

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Yeah. Right. And, you know, the meetings have always been on Zoom. Because, you know, people aren't in the same place. So, you know, the pandemic didn't really change that a lot. So, yeah.

**Fernando Narro**

As far as how executive decisions in the in the collaboration are being made? Are they Is there a hierarchy followed? Like is it would NPR be at the top is a decentralized and each member station gets like their own level of say, how does it work when making those levels of decisions?

**Kathy Goldgeier**

So, the three stations that we call managing partners, which are Mississippi Public Broadcasting, WWNO, in New Orleans, and WBHM, in Birmingham, and NPR, are basically the for managing partners. They've all signed a legal document, a memorandum of understanding, that lays out how this all is going to work. And that was drafted by NPR lawyers, and then approved by lawyers at each of the other stations. And so those four partners, and probably one of the four have signed this memorandum of understanding, and, you know, so basically, in high level decisions, each partner has a vote, and, you know, that's how it works, you know, for the most part, a lot of the

decisions that we you know, have conversations and, you know, take a voice vote yes or no, and we do it. And, you know, with only four partners, there's certainly a goal of unanimity. And we mostly achieve that I can't think of anything, where we've had some major decision that somebody really disagreed with, and we went ahead anyway. So, you know, it's got to work for everybody. And so, so that's the, that's the governing body of the hub is that executive committee, which in this case, is the general is the three general managers. And then it's either Kenya or me, depending on who's at the meeting.

**Fernando Narro**

And as far as the editorial, content, all of that is responsible is responsibility of Priska or

**Kathy Goldgeier**

so the executive committee makes, you know, sort of high level decisions, and Priska makes editorial decisions, and they don't, you know, there's a separation between those two, so Priska, the editorial leader of this, you know, and then similarly, I mean, she talks to the other news directors at the stations, and, you know, they all try to reach consensus about how they're doing things and what they're doing, so that it works for everybody.

**Fernando Narro**

So far, what do you say, before I switch into this, probably the last question I have on how decisions are made, but or how communication works. But what would you say have some of the things that have changed since this started that like adjustments that have been made to make sure that things keep working better? Since it began? If there haven't been any, you can also tell me that and that's just challenges that you encounter from the beginning that have been solved, either, like through something that you noticed when it

began that okay, we should probably not do things that way. But do it this way? Or if again, if there if there aren't any, that that's also fine. I get lessons learned, on

**Kathy Goldgeier**

trying to think I mean, um, you know, things have continued to evolve, just in terms of how everybody works together. I mean, I can't think of any, like, giant hurdle that we then had to make a major change. Final think about that one. I mean, I can't nothing Priska might have other thoughts. I can't think of anything off the top of my head. That was something major. I mean, you know, we've just continued to tweak as time goes by, by, you know, what, as we, as more people have come on board, as we've hired, as we've continued the hiring, and so we have a bigger team. You know, and Chris, because a great manager and a great editor, I think the, you know, at the beginning sort of the flow, the editorial flow with NPR was something that we sort of had to make up at the beginning because it didn't exist in that sort of way. I mean, NPR is always had the bureau chief system, and that's the person responsible for bringing in stories. But you know, the bureau chief who was a different person than it is now at the beginning, you know, had to sort of get to know these people and see what they were up to and develop that relationship to, but you know, that's gone quite well. So, and now I'm You know, part of it to just like even inside NPR was people understanding what this is? And what's it about? And what does it mean for NPR. And I think now, as you've said, people are noticing that, that we're bringing in a lot more stories from the deep south than we used to, and that that a lot of them come from these reporters that we've hired as part of the Gulf state newsroom. Some of them also have come from station reporters who, you know, either edit with their own station editor, or sometimes they've edited with Priska.

And, you know, part of the goal of these hubs was not just was to fully integrate the newsrooms of this of the partner stations into it as well. So that, you know, we're, we're adding more capacity for everybody. So, there are reporters at the stations who've been on NPR a lot more than they used to be partly just because being a part of this has helped everybody sort of think about framing stories a little more broadly, and in a way that that they might appeal to a larger audience, or doing a version for local and then during the version for, for national. So yeah. Are the

**Fernando Narro**

reporters being hired? Exclusive for this gulf states newsroom initiative? Or do they also do work for their own members, nations in which they're based as a regular reporter, as well.

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Um, they're hired by the Gulf states newsroom. And our grant covers their salaries. And they do occasionally do stories just so each the model for this is that each that nobody isn't none of these people except me and pretend Kenya, in this case, are NPR employees, and everybody else is an employee of one of the other partner stations. So, all the report, each of the reporters is technically an employee of one of the stations. And as is Priska, and they, but in terms of their daily reporting, they report to Priska as their editor. And so they sometimes, you know, if there's something big happening at one of the stations, people pitch in the when there was a hurricane in New Orleans, I think when that was

**Fernando Narro**

within the past year, can you imagine the same example? I think, yeah,

**Kathy Goldgeier**

everybody pitched in. And so Shalina, who's the healthcare reporter who's based in New Orleans, you know, did a lot of stories about the hurricane that weren't necessarily, you know, some of them she tied to one of the things she looked at was hospitals, and that the, you know, medical response system and how it was affected, but she also does just other stories on the ground in New Orleans. And you know, how people were recovering and what was, you know, what was happening? The reporter in Mississippi has done some local reporting, for newscasts at NPB, and Mississippi, but for the most part, you know, their primary focus is on regional stories. Um, but you know, but if they can help out stations as needed,

**Fernando Narro**

and going to touch on something you said about these positions being grant funded, and then they get to work in their member stations. So is there any strategies being put in place to make sure that this is sustainable going forward? Or is it just relying on grants? Again, next time from NPR? What are some of the ways that this is working, so we can go past this first initial funding phase?

**Kathy Goldgeier**

So, for this particular hub, we hired a consultant about a year ago to do a, an analysis for us and their recommendation for sustainability, right? Because this is basically the three year grant we've gotten a this happens to have gotten, we've received two other grants smaller amounts. But you know, that was great, too. So that's helped us a little bit. And we, the consultant recommended that we hire a major gifts officer. And so we have that in motion. Now we have the position advertised, and we're going to try and have we're calling it a director of development. And we're going to try to and this is really an



experiment. I don't know of something else like this elsewhere in the system, though, it certainly could exist, but I'm not aware of it that so these three stations together, this hub is going to hire a development director who will do trying to raise money for this enterprise, which, you know, goes across the three stations and the three states. And so, we're hoping that that person will help us identify funding and set up a longer term. You know, income flow so that we can we can keep this going. And you know, it's possible we would apply for more grants, CPB, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has been a really generous funder of this, you know, to get it off the ground. And so I don't know, and we haven't quite gotten to that point about talking about, you know, whether we would seek additional grants, but the hope is that we could get a development operation going for this hub that would help, you know, sustain it over the long run.

**Fernando Narro**

And would that mean, just somebody dedicated to like fundraising, like traditional fundraising that member stations do? Okay, excellent. Yeah. Is there? There might, there might not be one, but just wanted to ask, do you think there is a most like a most likely factor that would contribute to this keeping going forward? Is it like the quality of the work that you guys do or just the type of the stories that you guys have reporting, or the attention that people are, are, are paying into to these stories now, what would you say is, if there's any the most likely factor to make sure that this, this does continue? Once you have a major officer of the be observed, you're hiring to ensure that this this does keep going and moving forward?

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Well, you know, clearly, I'm a big booster and total believer in this, but I think that, you know, I think we have a great story to tell, I think that these stations are all in on this, they I don't think any of them could imagine or wants to imagine going back to a time when they were not part of this. And they were just doing their own thing completely on their own. And I think that NPR, is very pleased with the work coming out of this hub with the quality of the work, the quantity of the work, that that we're really, we're getting stories from a part of the country in the public radio system, where the resources did not previously exist, to make that happen in the way it is now. And I think everybody is pleased with it. They, you know, people feel like this is an important region, there are important stories to tell. And people don't want to go back to a situation where we're getting less rather than more. And I think that funders, from what I understand, you know, people respond well to seeing what we're doing, seeing what we've produced here. And, and feeling like it's going really well. And so we're hopeful now, I don't know, you know, we need somebody who can successfully then tell our story out to funders, and, you know, figure out how we create that pipeline, then of money coming in?

**Fernando Narro**

How would you think that? Either I don't know if it's you or NPR? But how would success be measured for a collaboration like this? Would it be with longevity going forward, and this lasting a long time, or just, as we have discussed before, the quality of the stories that wouldn't otherwise have been reported that are now coming to the air, either for those three states or a national audience? How would you say it's success should be measured for a collaboration like this?

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Well, I think, you know, this, I mean, we're, I don't know, a year and a half, maybe two years into this one. So, I think, you know, at this point in time success, I mean, we're at success. I mean, we're, they're doing great work, it's reaching an audience locally, it's reaching a national audience. So I think it's doing just what we had hoped it would be doing at this point. And I think you're right, then, you know, success long, longer term is sustainability. Can we keep it going? And so, you know, I'm hopeful on both counts. I mean, I think people are feeling at this moment, like, like, we are achieving what we've wanted to achieve. I mean, you know, all these hubs were experiments, how, you know, what would this look like if we got these stations together? And like I said, I mean, I think NPR feels pleased with what the results are at this moment. I think the three stations are pleased with what the results are, I think, you know, I think Priska is happy with how, you know, the work that's coming out of this group. So I think, I mean, to my mind, that success that everybody loves, you know, each partner at each different level of all of this is feeling good about it. And so I think that's you No, that's successful. And yeah, and I, you know, I hope that we will certainly be able to keep it going and figure out I mean, I think the next hurdle for these hubs is figuring out what, what the economic model is longer term, you know, getting a grant to get things started, which is what we did for all four of the NPR hubs that were involved with. You know, it was great. And that was a great way to launch. And then the question is longer term, how do you? How do you keep going,

**Fernando Narro**

and that's where the new position would come in, right, trying to solve and that's

**Kathy Goldgeier**

where this new position will come in until, you know, different. Others of the hubs, you know, are looking at different strategies. And, you know, I mean, I think ultimately, speaking across all of the hubs, it's going to be a combination of, or at least, it's sort of looking, I don't want to say anything that hasn't happened yet. But I think it's going to be some combination of stations that are able to bring the hub people that we've hired, bringing them into the stations based budget, and sort of taking them on as a station, financial responsibility, and joint fundraising and whatever that ends up looking like whether it it ends up being going after more grants, or trying to do more traditional public radio style development, finding, you know, donors, corporate donors, individual donors, you know, sponsors, you know, those paths, but clearly, you know, in order to keep it going, we'll need to be able to pay for it. So the question is, was, you know, in which of these scenarios, will stations be able to onboard their people into their own base budget and cover the cost that way in which cases where we need to go out and do some more fundraising and development?

**Fernando Narro**

Excellent. I think that's all the questions that I have

**Kathy Goldgeier**

Well, good luck. And let me know if you need anything else.

**Fernando Narro**

Sounds good. Thank you. Take care.

**Priska Neely**

**Managing Editor, Gulf States Newsroom**

**Fernando Narro**

I wanted to ask, what would you say, were some of the most glaring or obvious obstacles to take care of before making sure that this collaboration could exist? As far as I know, you manage editorially, like, what happened? So, what were some of the obstacles to like, take care of before this could take off?

**Priska Neely**

Um, yeah, I mean, I guess just, you know, figuring out meeting people, I mean, you know, think there would be a different set of obstacles if this hadn't started during a pandemic, right. So many of the obstacles were certainly, you know, result of the, the, you know, unusual circumstances that we were starting with in globally. But yeah, basically just kind of gaining trust and communicating the mission. Kind of just saying the same things over and over again, because people are busy. People don't necessarily remember things people don't see you as a real person. When your kind of coming in as an outsider, you know, I'm not from the region. So, I think it took a minute for people to kind of trust that I was sincere and really wanting to, to do something meaningful here. And then, you know, I think I'd have envisioned the job is starting and you know, traveling right away, to meet everyone in person, because that's a really important part of that trust building. But I wasn't able to do that for like six months to get out and meet people in the other states. So, and then also, the stations are all very different. So, when you're working across states, you have to figure out what is a regional story? What's something that all of the stations can feel good about airing, because you can't make every story about all three states, because otherwise you won't be able to do anything meaningful. So it took a while for the news directors to understand, like, every story can't be about Mississippi, you know, and your listeners are going to have to feel okay,

listening to a story, you know, about Alabama or, you know, whatever the goal of this is to look at our common then, the shared issues that the states have, so that we can, you know, bring stories that are relevant to the audience's even if it may not be in your backyard. And so just kind of figuring out what is a regional story? And then how can we work together to share content? I mean, some of the biggest obstacles, were just logistics, because, you know, the public radio system at the member station level is the Wild West, everyone's using different audio editing software, different email services, different, you know, word processing systems, Macs PCs. So when you're collaborating, and you're trying to find systems that can work across all of those varying systems. That's a real challenge, just like basic logistics, how do we do stuff together? How do we share content? So that,

**Fernando Narro**

you know, no, yeah, that that was the second point. I was going to ask them. My second question, what were the biggest challenges of leading and organizing a collaboration between different member stations that are having to be in different states? I think you answered a part of it already. I don't know if you want to ask that? Or is there something that could add to this question?

**Priska Neely**

Yeah, I mean, I think NPR was starting something new with this, you know, regional. In this network of regional hubs there, there have been different collaboratives before. So, I think people are, you know, people who have been in the system for a long time are kind of skeptical of things that are kind of, quote, new when they're like, man, we've seen it before, you know? And yeah, you know, just kind of a matter of getting over some of

that. But the first things that NPR did was a Texas newsroom in a California newsroom. And so, when I started, there was a lot of like, oh, we'll talk to this person about this. This person did this. And so, I was having all these conversations, but then they were like, well, you know, that doesn't make sense for you, or they were telling me tips. And I was like, well, that doesn't make sense for me, because I'm dealing across different states. Texas has a statewide newscast every day, that's like a huge part of the revenue model, a huge part of what they're bringing to the audience is the statewide newscast. We can't do it. We can't do that. You know, there's no, there's no newscast to have across Mississippi, Louisiana, out Louisiana and Alabama. We don't have the same governor, we don't have the same leadership, you know, Louisiana, a whole other, you know, parishes like you know, so it was kind of learning what to say yes. And no to, you know, what, what makes sense? What makes sense? Defining what makes sense and getting confident, in what and knowing what doesn't make sense. And then knowing that that's fine, you know, that, that you just need to develop different systems. But I think when you're trying new things, a lot of times people are like, Oh, talk to this person, talk to that person. And especially for me, as a new manager, it took me a while to be like, Okay, I'm talking to these other people, but they're, we're doing different things, you know, so that doesn't make sense for me. So, it took me a while to figure out how to say no, to things that didn't make sense.

### **Fernando Narro**

And in that sense, what do you think so far have like now that the ghost leads newsroom has been putting out stories for a while now? What do you think some of the biggest lessons or so or what has worked so far in making those editorial choices? To make sure that the content does make sense?

## **Priska Neely**

I mean, I think sometimes it's easier for it's easy for people to overthink, you know, overthink the framing, right? Like NPR has stories from around the world. You know, local stations, supplement that with news from your own backyard, your weather, your traffic, whatever. But the promise of public radio is that you are learning about things that are different from where you are. So, I think it's like people are like, Oh, this has to be like hyper local. And it is like no, it doesn't, you know, we are providing something in the Gulf states newsroom. That's different from what California and Texas are doing, because they have bigger stations. I used to work at KPCC in LA. And they you know, they compete with KCRW. They compete with K KQED they compete with NPR wet. There's no competition here. There's no competition. There's no one else doing, there's no one else doing anything. So, our mandate is different. I have to look at it as we can't cover all the stories. But when we choose a story, it's important. And I'm going to try to put as much effort into that one story as possible to make it go further. So, I think just realizing that what makes a good regional story is what makes a good story period, a narrative, you know, a character that people can empathize with and connect to, and that's memorable. A few lines explaining, you know, Mississippi is doing this in you know, Louisiana is struggling with the same issue, and Alabama's going a different way. But not trying to make it like every story is like, Louisiana is doing this, and Mississippi is doing that to Alabama, because that's not interesting. So it's more about maybe setting it up in the intro, I think, intros to pieces have become more important for me than ever to be like, you know, Alabama has been dealing with this issue for a while, you know, this reporter is going to look at what the lessons are from Mississippi, you know, setting it up



in the intro so that the listener understands, okay, I'm about to hear a story that's from a different state. But I know immediately why I should care about this, really answering that question, why should you care, writing slightly differently, because we are writing for different audiences, trying to please to please the local interests of the news directors who want things to be written a certain way, with, you know, with without trying to make the reporters have to do like three versions of the story, because that's not a good use of time. But well, sometimes I have to say, you know, this is a story that we're doing for a feature. But if we want to dig into more what's happening in a specific state, like the member stations have local shows, so I'll have my reporters go on and do a two way out of it, you know, talking specifically about Mississippi or Louisiana, but just knowing that you can't please, everyone, but that's fine. You know, our mandate is different, because we are we are providing stories that wouldn't be hold, this is not competition, you know, the, this reporting would not be done.

**Fernando Narro**

And the fire, as you just mentioned a little bit about like not being able to like, please everyone, and I know that that the reporters that you are leading are in different member stations around these three states. Do the new staff or the new directors that does different stations? Do they have any editorial input as to what the Gulf states newsroom is doing? Or is it completely separate?

**Priska Neely**

No, we all meet every week when I meet with the news directors on Mondays. The new directors from the three different stations and someone from NPR. We have meetings every Monday to talk about. I'm like, you know, my reporters are working on these

things. Do you have a local reporter who's doing something that could be regional, you know, every so often there's a story like, okay, the local WB hm health reporter is doing a story about Medicaid expansion and the fact that that Alabama's opting out again, well, Mississippi also opted out Louisiana is in. So that's actually a more interesting story to tell to look at the comparison to neighboring states, that's like a better story than just looking at Alabama anyway. So I would jump in there and be like, Okay, I'm just going to work with that reporter on this as a regional piece. So sometimes that happens, where we take local reporters, I'll work with a local reporter on a regional story. But sometimes, yeah, I brainstorm with the news directors, because I'm relying on their expertise to like, I have whatever ideas I've hired these people, but they're the ones who know more deeply. Like what's interesting, or what's interesting about the legislative session, like another thing that I had to adjust to is that I can't try to be on top of local news. That's too much. I can't I can't try to stay on top of what I'm not looking at the AP rundown for every state like I can't do that. That's not my job. They I have that it took me a long time to realize what's my job. My job is not breaking news. If there is breaking news, and I need to put a reporter on it if there are hurricanes, you know, Hurricane Ida I put my whole team on hurricane it. We didn't do anything else for like two weeks. But day to day if NPR newscast needs some something I'm like, No, we can't do it. Yeah, that's not

**Fernando Narro**

good. Uh huh. That would fall to every individual member station, right? Who has the bandwidth to put

**Priska Neely**

good or sometimes I'm like, talk to this person, you know, I'm like, call this person, you know, call this professor like, you know, like, people just don't they don't know, things they don't know. And especially NPR, you know, having worked at NPR as a producer, starting from an intern, you know, so many people are interns, and then their producers, and then they're like, running shows, eventually, they don't have any reporting experience. They don't have any on the ground experience of actually having to figure stuff out yourself without a fixer, without a producer, figuring out by yourself. So they don't know what they're doing. So sometimes newscast calls, and they're like, Do you have a boo, boo, blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, this is actually not that interesting of a story. No, we're not doing that.

**Fernando Narro**

And as far as the chair, is there any changes to the current structure of the you guys are operating, operating under that could make this any changes that could happen to the collaboration that would make it better, or that have already happened? Since you guys started that made this work? Any better than from the beginning?

**Priska Neely**

Yeah, I mean, we were starting from zero, right? So, every team made it better, right?

Like, it was just me. And then I hired three reporters. And then that was really hard to do radio and digital. So I mean, so like, just so you know, like, the way that this these things work is like this. This, this was in discussion for years before I got involved, right, like, CPB and NPR wrote a grant, like people write these grants, so much does is controlled by grants. So, they write a whole thing, and you have to have a whole proposal. But that's totally different than what actually happens in real life, they didn't know there's going to

be a pandemic, they didn't know so many different things. So, then I get hired, and then they're like, take this grant and bring it to life. Like, here's all the positions that we created without knowing how anything would work, right. So, I have to come in and say, this job doesn't make sense anymore. So, then I have to, like do a whole proposal for this is what we're doing now. You know, so I had, you have to take this, like glide path, this like hiring glide path of like, someone who made up something based on no information, and then be like, you know, I'll do this. But now that I've had these three recorders, I will have to go to the executive team, like the general managers at that station and be like, you know, I've gotten to x point in hiring, I realized that, you know, I think this position needs to be changed to this, or there'll be certain pressures because of grant and funding deadlines. And I'm like, I'm sorry, I didn't know there was going to be a pandemic. I got hired six months later, then, then I was supposed to be so everything is behind. You can't expect I'm not superhuman, you can't expect me to now fill all the positions when I started later, you know what I mean? So, I'm like, it's a lot of it is just like figuring out what's real and what's not, what is real pressure, and what just needs to be changed? What's a line and a grant that needs to be rewritten? Because it didn't make any sense when they came up with it. So, you know, I hired three reporters. And then there was like, another editor position, but I was like, I actually would rather have a digital reporter first. Because then I can have someone who could own the digital space while I'm working on continuing to hire because I've been hiring I started in September 2020. It's whatever it is March 2022. I've been hiring the entire time. Now, I've never not been hiring. So, I'm, today are my seventh hire started. In she's the Senior Content Editor, so she's basically my deputy. So that to your original question is going to be a huge help.

Because I am just like, severely overworked, I just have too much. Because I'm building this whole thing I'm hiring. I'm dealing with all the bureaucracy, bureaucratic nonsense. And then I'm also editing stories in trying to be like thoughtful about the coverage that we're doing. It's very hard to do. It's very hard to do both of those things. A lot. So, the Senior Content Editor is going to be able to handle more of the day to day issues. And then I'll be able to like figure out whatever so that you know, so the digital editor was a huge help. And then now having more editorial power, you'll also be able to pitch in sometimes I help with local station reporters who need something or like when a news director was out last week, I like helped train a bunch of New reporters who they'd hired who didn't have any radio experience. So, a big part of what we're doing to is also training because I see it as not just about the coverage, but like, you know, making sure that people are getting better coverage because we're uplifting the quality of the work that's happening on the local level as well.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah. I want to be really respectful of your time. And I know you told me 20 minutes of

**Priska Neely**

your time, and we can come to 1130.

**Fernando Narro**

Okay, perfect. I just wanted to one question. I, like I said, I already talked to Kenya young and Kathy, Goldgeier, I'm actually speaking which Shalina right after you. I am asking everybody the same question, which is just what what's the way you would think success should be measured with this collaboration is a big impact of the work you guys

are doing, that this becomes sustainable going forward? How would you measure the success for this?

**Priska Neely**

project? I don't know. I mean, we grew up doing, we're not doing like metrics, good metrics, tracking or whatever. So I don't have I don't have a sense, you know, that's something that I'm hoping now that we have this new, new editor, and just kind of getting the team more cohesive, that we'll be able to get a sense of that in terms of audience engagement, audience understanding, because we don't have it, I mean, these stations are so small, they don't have a good system for that, like, maybe they're using Facebook analytics, or whatever to see. But that's not, you know, that's not real compared to like, what I've been doing at KPCC, where they have like, a whole audience team, you know, so, I would definitely like to dig into that more. But, you know, the Success for me is, like, when I look at all the news sites, and are like, Wow, so many of these stories are from my reporters, and you'd have to think that those stories wouldn't be there, they wouldn't be there, you know, the features that are airing so many of them are from us is their stories that just like, would not be assigned would not be produced. And that is, you know, that's huge. And then also just how it feels that, you know, the team, you know, having his starting remotely and, you know, making connections with people across state so that when I am out in the field, like last week, I was traveling around to all the stations, and for them to be like, Oh, we're so excited. Priska coming into town. And like bringing people together in like, in New Orleans, like they, every time I go there, they're like people meeting for the first time who work in New Orleans. And I'm like, guys, you know, you can get together without me, you know, like, but I think that I've done a really

good job of bringing people together and modeling that with my own team so that people are inspired to do that. I think that I've modeled as a leader the importance of thoughtful onboarding and training. I wrote a piece last year for current that was one of their top 10 pieces of the year just about onboarding. So, a lot of what I considered was, yeah, just what I considered basic information, but was apparently revelatory for people. So I think that that that's all success, but we're also starting to do more. And when we have this new editor, we're going to have, hopefully be able to do more like long form investigative stuff, have more capacity for that. And then we're also hosting our first event in two weeks. Oh, that's exciting, which is like a live storing live storytelling event. That'll be in person. And yeah, in person in Phoenix.

**Fernando Narro**

That's awesome. I used to work as a reporter for a member stations that have those types of events. I love them. They were pretty cool. Yeah. One last question that I will ask you, because in the five minutes that we have, because of the pandemic, I think that everybody has become used to the type of work that we're communicating through slack and having to meetings and all that do you think has it been difficult communicating with all your team in different places? Or have this just become routine and normal? It's not that difficult to manage that aspect of collaboration how you guys communicate with each other?

**Priska Neely**

Um, yeah, I mean, I think I think I think it's fine. And one of the big challenges I think, is, is not having, and this is the nature, like some of this is pandemic and some of it is just the nature of multi multi-state collaborations, we're never all going to be in the same

place, right? So, we will always not be together, you know, like this event next week, next month is going to be the first time we've all been together ever. So, yeah, Slack and everything is there great tools. But I think what is really missing from that is feedback. When you're in a physical space with someone, they tell you all sorts of things that they don't tell you in writing. Like, they'll tell you, I mean, most both positive and negative feedback, people will be like, Oh, I love, I love that piece you had on this morning, and they won't like text that to you. So, something that I've literally given like, small short lectures on in my team meeting for the new directors, and for my reporters is like, I need you guys to hype each other up publicly. Like if you think if you have a thought that you heard someone's piece on this morning, and you liked it, I need you to tweet about it, I need you to post on Slack about it. Do not just keep that thought to yourself and just not tell anyone. Because think about how empowering it is when you get a piece of feedback from someone. So, do that to others. And I'm like it will, you know, it radiates, you know, when you do that type of thing. So that that I think is one of the hardest parts for me, because I just don't get feedback. I don't get feedback, positive or negative. And when I go places, like last week, when I was at the stations, people were like, Oh, we love what you're doing. Oh, we have one of your stories on once a week. Oh, blah, blah, blah. Does anyone ever tell me that before? You know, like, in I tried to model like written feedback, public written feedback, Twitter slack. And it's just not reciprocated. And you know, people are really bad at email. Like, I'm thinking about pitching a life kit episode about emailing. Because people don't know how to do it, and they're not doing it. And they're not doing it. Right. So, I think that's one of the hearts. I think feedback. I



think remote, you know, remote work. And lack of feedback is one of the hardest things.  
Yeah.

**Fernando Narro**

I personally agree with that.

**Priska Neely**

And, you know, another example is, like, you mentioned the all staff meeting. I wasn't in the all staff meeting. I don't work for NPR. I don't know what was said about me, you know what I mean? Yeah, like, there's all this like talking around and about things and that's why it's so important to tell people directly tell people directly if something is meaningful to you, or if you know, if you're getting some type of praise, I don't know what was that I you know, people forwarded me those emails from NPR. I, you know, obviously, I participated in that piece that came out for NPR extra. But whatever, you know, Keith woods or Kenny Young is buzzing about can you talk to me a month? You know, I mean, like, I know that many things are being said about me but people do not say things to me and I try to I do you know, my one of my mandates as a manager is just you know, to make sure that my reporters do not feel that way that if someone says something about them in a meeting someone praises them you know, I screenshot thing by texting people so that they know but that's not the culture

**Fernando Narro**

Well, I really appreciate the time you gave me those were all the questions that I have. And I just want to say as a side note that I also appreciate the work that you guys are doing there's certainly some stories that I would have never heard coming out of those three states but I remember before I started working at NPR even like in my car hearing

the water the water issues of Jackson, now that I'm working we had in our in our show this story. The one I work in right now we have the Family Dollar closing, although I don't think I would have heard him otherwise. So really appreciate that as well.

**Priska Neely**

Thanks.

**Shalina Chatlani**

**Healthcare Reporter, Gulf States Newsroom**

**Fernando Narro**

There we go. Sorry about that. Thank you. No, that's

**Shalina Chatlani**

okay. Um, yeah, so this collaborative is about regional coverage, regional newsroom coverage. And so if you're just a reporter at a member station, you're thinking pretty locally or thinking about the ways in which the news that you're seeing affects your city or your state. And you're also really focused on characters that are like sort of local to the communities that you're serving. But in this type of collaborative newsroom, you're thinking more broadly, you're thinking about trends across the south, how the characters that might be in your area are relevant to people in places like Alabama, if you have, if you have something going on in Louisiana, you have to think outside of the scope of Louisiana and think of Mississippi and Alabama, and even nationally, how those trends play out. And then also what makes what's happening in those states, like unique to the rest of the country and unique to the region. So, it's much broader than working in a

member station and requires doing a little bit more work outside of the scope of your local area.

**Fernando Narro**

And what would you say are some of the biggest challenges and coming up with those stories that can speak to these three states that the newsroom is serving? Well, sometimes there are

**Shalina Chatlani**

stories that I would love to do that would make sense as a local reporter, because it would be very particular to New Orleans, for example, you know, like New Orleans is very culturally diverse. There are so many things that are historical here, like second lines, and some of the culture from the Caribbean that has migrated here. That may not translate to an audience in Alabama, for example. So sometimes there are stories that you want to do that you just say no to, and you give up to a local reporter, because it's just not relevant to the other audiences that you're serving. So, I think probably the biggest challenge is knowing when to say no to a story, because it's too hyper local, or, you know, figure out ways to make it broader, make it relevant to other people. So, I think that's probably the biggest challenge. And then there's also the logistical challenges of being in a collaborative, like you're talking to people in other stations that are obviously like, have, you know, other things going on in their lives, they're like overworked themselves, you know, like, the South is a news desert. So, we're constantly like covering things. And so, you might not be able to get an answer as quickly as you like, from people in your collaborative. And that might slow things down a bit. But the point of a collaborative is to do that more in depth coverage, that takes a little bit longer. So

**Fernando Narro**

it usually balances out. Oh, okay. Sorry, I was muted. Um, I, you jumped a little bit on the third question that I was going to ask, which I still will ask just in case, you want to add a little bit more to it, but just I was going to ask what structural challenges exist for reporters who are collaborating in the same newsroom, but like you say, a different breed not only in different states, but also technically employed by different member stations? So what are some of those challenges? And how do you guys go about him?

**Shalina Chatlani**

Um, yeah, like I said, there's the actual, like, communication challenges. You know, not everyone is available, not everyone is maybe as responsive as you would like. Again, that could be because they have other things going on. You know, these are very, like, under resourced stations, because we just don't get as many donations as, say, a station in New York, for example, there's just not as many donors. So, everybody is, is strapped basically doing like multiple jobs at once. So, communication can be an issue, then there's also the challenges is the challenges of like, different standards. So, the station in New Orleans might have different standards and the station in Mississippi, and Alabama, and that can, you know, make coverage priorities that could make when getting stories on that could make, you know, so many different things a struggle. And I have, I have been in situations before where like, the Birmingham station wants the story in a different format than the New Orleans station. And so that means that you have to make more time to make the story, you know, align with the format that they might be seeking. Those are just kind of the gives and takes of a collaborative because everyone has been doing everything kind of differently in their respective stations.

**Fernando Narro**

Does this apply? I'm speaking now as I worked as a reporter at two different member stations before it is and my experience in public radio stations is that nobody has like the same content management system everything is like different for each one is that kind of like what you're what we're sharing with you format? Or?

**Shalina Chatlani**

Well, yeah, well, there's the very practical, like, content management systems are all different, right? How you edit stories, it's all different. But it's also a, you know, like Mississippi has a afternoon has a morning show on Mississippi edition. And they're pretty flexible on the amount of time that they can have a story run. Whereas the show in Birmingham, they don't have a daily show. So, a long story wouldn't work for that station. So, it might just be that you only do that story in Mississippi, Louisiana, because, you know, do a longer version story, because they have that blog format, where they can feature it. So, you have to think about the ways in which the story can actually fit into an actual news segment.

**Fernando Narro**

Oh, no, that makes perfect sense. Yeah, that happened to me in the two stations that I worked with as well, getting one minute and a half in one would have been insane. And then the other one was like, Oh, give us four or five minutes is fine. Yeah, yeah. What can you talk a little bit about, like how communication works between the team? I think it would you say? Is it fair to say that because the pandemic pushed everybody to work in remotely through zoom and slack and all that, that it's, it's fairly easy to do that part of

communication? Or is it still challenging to be doing this to communicate with your team when everybody's in different places? Yeah, um,

**Shalina Chatlani**

I think slack certainly helps zoom certainly help. But it's always going to be more challenging doing things remotely than it is going to be doing things in person, because things that I can accomplish by simply walking into someone's office and being like, Hey, do you have five minutes, let's like hammer this out right now. And just get it done. takes miles longer when you're trying to do something remotely and like schedule, a calendar meeting and try to work with everyone's schedules. Because people don't think about, like, how easy it is to just get something done in the minute in the moment. They're not like, oh, well, this would take five minutes to figure out, let's just do it. Now. A lot of times, the response is like, okay, let's schedule something for this, and this and this, and let's figure it out, then. And it takes a lot longer than it would if we were all working in the same newsroom. like, regardless of the pandemic, we would all be working online, right, because there are regional newsrooms, there's not one central office. So, I don't know if the pandemic has made it easier or harder. I think this is just the status quo. And we've all just kind of been like, figuring out the best ways to communicate. And it does seem like the best thing to do is, you know, have a head person whose kind of in, you know, they're scheduled meetings with all of the news directors, and then you know, Priska is there and she can kind of relay the things that we're trying to get done to those instructors, so we can kind of like check it off at once. So, it's helpful to have sort of a point person. But it's also helpful to just like, repeat things over and over and over again, like you send it on Slack, you send it on email, you follow up on Slack,

you follow up on email, you mentioned it again, in a meeting like you just as many times as you can you bring it up to get it done.

**Fernando Narro**

Could you walk me through an example of something that you have reported, like how it came from? Idea, you have either pitching it, and then to actually producing that story that will help me understand how this collaboration works with like all the people involved?

**Shalina Chatlani**

So okay, so my, my particular role is a little bit more chaotic, I think, than the other reporters, because I've been covering COVID. And I'm in like, collaboratives, with NPR, and that there's just different chains of command. Um, and so but before that, you know, like before, everything got kind of like crazy, we would, I would like talk to this guy about a story idea that I would fill out a pitch form, like a form that explains what the story is about. And then all the news directors would get a chance to look at it, and say, if they want the story, you know, and if they had any questions, they could like, write questions down, you know, so that was like a relatively easy way for everybody to agree about a story. Now, it's like, and I still do the pitch forms, but now it's like, okay, there's a story happening, like, I'm going to go get the story done. And, honestly, most of the time, like these were here for a reason, which is that these stations need more coverage, they need more content. So most of the time, we'll figure out ways to make it relevant to the other states so that we couldn't get the coverage on because they need it, they need the more in-depth coverage. So usually it isn't an issue when it comes to will a story err, will a story be acceptable because you know, they need the coverage. And also, I've been

doing this for like a year and a half now. And I pretty much understand when a story is regional and when it's not, and how to make it relevant to the other news stations. So that's

**Fernando Narro**

also, helpful. Do you have responsibilities outside of collaborative to also report just locally for your member station? Or is that not part of what you do? I can always say no, although

**Shalina Chatlani**

there are times when it just makes sense for me to be helping the local station. And I'm happy to do that. Um, so like when Hurricane Ida hit in Louisiana, you know, I was like, I'm not, you know, focusing on regional coverage right now, because we're all under so much stress, like, for this next two weeks, I will be doing local coverage, or, or I'll be the NPR person, you know, because the local reporters are busy trying to get stories out locally to the residents who really need to hear like, Oh, can I take this bridge into the city? Or is the trashcan? Is my house going to be flooded? Or something? You know? Um, is there electricity in my neighborhood right now, like, literally, that's what people were listening to radio for was to see if you know, that, like their electricity on her block. So, you know, Stephen Bisaha, for example, he even stepped down from regional coverage for a minute to work with the energy companies to create a map of whether there was electricity in different parts of New Orleans, you know, so that wasn't something that ran regionally. He doesn't work for WWE, no, but we can like step in and help in times of distress. So, but there's never an obligation to forego the regional coverage for local coverage.



**Fernando Narro**

So that will be like kind of up to each reporter when they think they'd make sense or doesn't make sense to do that.

**Shalina Chatlani**

Yeah. But again, we're like, we are here for the station's Yeah. Like, we're here to help them here to give them you know, enhanced coverage, it doesn't make sense for me to step away from in depth regional coverage, to do a one-day local story. But if, if the station is really strapped and under resourced, for something that is very critical, then we are more than happy to step away from that regional coverage to help you know, like, there were tornadoes in Alabama, you know, all the folks in Alabama that are in the newsroom, we're like, Okay, we're going to help with covering that issue when the tornadoes came through. When there was the Jackson water crisis when basically Jackson was without water for like three weeks, you know, all of us were like, okay, like, we're going to go to Mississippi, we're going to help do this, because the local reporters were so strapped. So there have been multiple events where we've stepped aside and we said, Okay, let's go help the stations. And it's okay, if it's hyper local, because we're like, because they need us. That's part of our mission.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, I remember actually driving in my car and hearing about the Jackson story. Like a while. Yeah. So how this? Do you only go like when you're working on a story? And once you have it you edit only with Frisco? Or is there involvement from NPR as well, when it's going to go national? How was that editing process work? With you? Yeah.

**Shalina Chatlani**

It's very complicated. Um, so we get more freedom to kind of like work with other groups. So, you know, I've worked with NPR or marketplace here. And now, I've worked with Northern California public media for podcasts, the NPR investigations, just lots of other groups. And so, when that happens, you know, because it's basically CRISPR is not just an editor, she's a manager. So, you know, when I'm when we're not editing with her, she's still my manager. So, I'm keeping her, you know, like, updated on everything that I'm going on. So, if you know, there's an editor somewhere else, you can be working with us on a story. I mean, she's, you know, it's like make sense, because then she can be freed up to work with another, you know, another regional reporter on their story. So, that's happened many times, like all of us have had projects with NPR. You know, they've asked us like, Hey, can you go out and cover the story? And so, we'll go do that. So, we work with that editor. I've worked many times with like Eric Whitney at NPR. Kay, feeble on the science desk. The investigations desk, so yeah, and that's kind of the point of what ends of this collaborative with NPR too, is that you know, we're like a hub of NPR. So if national see something is going on to the self, we are a group of reporters that they know, are here to do that in depth coverage that they can come to you that maybe have a little bit more experience or expertise, understanding how issues impact regionally, which makes us more well suited to do national coverage, because we're not so hyperlocal where, like, already, our job is to basically be national. I mean, regional is anything regional can really be nationalized. As long as you know, as long as something that pertains to more than one state, it could be a national story, right? So yeah,

**Fernando Narro**

yeah, um, there's been examples, I remember the show that I'm working on now actually have I don't remember which of your colleagues was the one who did it. But the story about the Family Dollar closing Oh, like 400? Yeah, yeah. So, I Yeah, that makes sense. To me. I'm indebted last three minutes that I have you I wanted to ask. How would you measure success for collaborative like, this is the impact of the work you guys are doing? Or if this continues over the first grant funding, like money that was given or allocated? In which ways do you think success should be measured for something like this?

**Shalina Chatlani**

Um, I have like zero doubt that we're going to get more grant funding, because like, everybody knows us at this point. Um, and I kind of didn't have any doubt about the grant funding, like, you know, six months into it, I already saw that we, we were we were being used, you know, by NPR for, for coverage. So, I don't think that campaigning makes sense, as a way to measure success, because we're necessary, we're unnecessary, newsroom and entity that will be funded, because it's needed. Um, I think that the impact that we've made is definitely the way to measure success. Um, I feel very proud of a lot of my reporting during this pandemic. You know, like I said, the South is in a news desert. And we've been able to break stories in this region that other reporters haven't been able to get to, because they just didn't have time. They didn't have the resources. Maybe they didn't have investigative reporters who could look into those issues. And so yeah, I think that's the way we've measured our success is that we've all done very in depth, meaningful coverage that has really made a difference in this region. But I was I mean, in fact, the first story I did, I worked with NPR investigations, and it was about how black and brown neighborhoods were missing vaccination sites. And we ran that

story across all three states. And in all three states, the public health officials there started to be like, Okay, we're going to put, we're going to focus on putting more vaccine sites here, the mayor of Baton Rouge even specifically called out the story and was like, I'm appalled, like, I'm going to go put vaccine sites in this neighborhood. So, I'm very immediately we started to have an impact.

**Fernando Narro**

Excellent. Well, those are all the questions that I that I have for you. Thank you, a lot, for giving me the time.

**Shalina Chatlani**

Of course.

**Stephan Bisaha**

**Wealth and Poverty Reporter, Gulf States Newsroom**

**Fernando Narro**

when you're looking at story ideas, brainstorming something you could work on... How different is it to do it here than just it would have been reporting for a member station given that the stories that you guys are working on will at least run in three different states?

**Stephan Bisaha**

I feel like the differences are less the fact that it's regional newsroom that just the fact that each newsroom tends to be different, just, you know, different newsrooms just have different expectations of how much research you go, is going to a pitch. And this case, like because I'm lucky enough to work in person with Priska, Neely, it's nice to be to be like, okay, like, you could have those more casual conversations. Versus when I was in

the statewide newsroom in Kansas, because my editor was remote for me, he was based in Topeka. Those conversations tend to be a little more formal of like, okay, here's my pitch document. Maybe we met as much twice about slack on it. But like, Here's a more formal pitch. And while we have a formal pitch document at the golf six newsroom, I find it's it tends to be the more of a done because having much more of those like backboard conversations in the office.

**Fernando Narro**

So, it's a function of do I get it right? It's basically the same station as you are. Yeah, she's based in Birmingham as well. So that's one yeah, this wouldn't necessarily apply the same rhythm that you're feeling to let's say somebody like Selena, who's in New Orleans, right?

**Stephan Bisaha**

Yeah, she we feel like things differently. Because she because she's, again, in this position, I was in Kansas, where her main editor is remote to her. Got

**Fernando Narro**

it. And as far as it doesn't relate to the process, but like, just the regular journalism itself, how challenging is it to come with ideas that that can run a three different stations and appeal to the to the audiences of these whole three states? Right, if you're based in one place? You

**Stephan Bisaha**

know, I thought it'd be a lot harder than I suspected, it was one of the things I was most nervous about with the job is telling stories that are going to be relevant across three states. But in the way I've kind of viewed it as there's two different directions that your stories are coming from, it's either very often, there'll be something happening in one

small spot in like in Birmingham, or I hear about and then Jackson or New Orleans or some rural town, and then becomes, okay, does that exist elsewhere? Or if it's a solution to something that's a problem in all those states, which is very often the case is it okay, then that's the, the excuse to talk about. So sometimes there's two directions, there's taking a story that's very local, and then finding the regional aspect of it, which is, again, it's either that it is this is happening elsewhere, or it's not happening elsewhere, and why it's not happening elsewhere is really the story of itself. The other direction is coming from national. So, the stories on things like the rental assistance programs during the pandemic, okay, we know we know a national story about that. Let's look at what the regional version that is. So, it feels like if regionals and because it's in the middle, you either can bring up a local story to expand to regional or you could take a national story and see what it looks like specifically in your region. So, I found this out she'd been a very useful way of thinking about approaching stories. And almost easier than the like National to local or local to national like just because something's a local story doesn't mean it's a national story. And again, not all local stories are regional, but tends to be a little easier to make that leap to find something out.

### **Fernando Narro**

And which one just out of curiosity for me, which one do you think has been more used by you so far, looking to audition nationally, and then bringing, bringing the local angle or the other way around, as you were explaining, probably, I'll be a

### **Stephan Bisaha**

bit more the other way around from the local to a regional aspect. So, like, some nerdy thing I do that I use an excuse to talk about, like I have, from my Kindle, I bought a

scraper that sends me like news, three different news like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama news organizations. So, I get that like, couple times a day, and they go into that, it's very much be like, okay, like, because they're because their audience is very, is if these be statewide, or its local, was very much like, okay, like, they're talking about this. And then this gives me a chance to then like, be like, Okay, is there is there a thread here something that touching on that, I think is worth expanding? And, and I think that's, that's useful, because So, for example, of extending a story further, like I don't I view it as a larger number. It's like, even though what it's like might not be working together, like, we are contributing to a knowledge about the world. So, to take someone else's reporting, and not copy and paste it, but to see like, okay, they're talking about this idea, and how it's happening in Jackson, Mississippi. What does that look like regional? Yeah. I think,

**Fernando Narro**

because I also work at NPR at Weekend Edition. And I think it was your story and correct me if I'm wrong. But did you do the story about the family dollar stores that were closing all over the region as well? Yes. Yes, that one? I did. Yeah. Because we had on our show, I remember that one. Yeah.

**Stephan Bisaha**

That one was more like. I did see that in one of the, one of the articles came through and like, Einstein was busy with things. And then I think, a, an editor in Jackson had spotted it and kind of brought it to the NPRs attention, which didn't trickle down to me. And I was like, Okay, let's, that was a case where, I mean, it's very much a regional story. And that was six states that were being affected. But at that point, it was so like, there is national rugby, it's such a wide area. And then, like, that's also a difference of like, how

you're approaching telling the story. Because if then it became like, well, let's zoom into like a very hyper, like, one small town, like, that was a regional national story moves tool from 110.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah. And the reason I brought it up is because it was, again, it didn't happen in any of the areas where people in our show would be located. But we got to hear it. And I was, I used to work as a reporter for North Country public radio in upstate New York. And that region was there were so many times I depended on Family Dollar Stores or voter dollar generals, or all those like I don't think that's nearly a people understood how big those stores can play have an impact on people's daily lives, for any rural community in America. So I brought it up just because of that, because I, that one resonated with me going like, why would that have happened where I was where I was living, so many people will be able to have access to having groceries. So yeah,

**Stephan Bisaha**

yeah. And so much of our like, national reporting is focused in cities. Yeah. And there is a very important story about family dollars and how it affects like, particular urban neighborhoods. And that what it does as far as creating food deserts, but there's less of a discussion of what it means for rural communities. And so, I was happy I got to do that. And to not go too much on a tangent. But that was the first story where I really tried to apply this principle called asset framing, which I'm not sure if you've heard of before or not, no, it started become a more popular idea. But it's I think we spend a lot further. It's the I first heard this from Priska brought up to me, and only recently had I started diving more into it, but it's the idea of like, so often when we when we talk about that issue, it's



like, particularly on things like poverty, it's, here's the problem, and the person dealing with it. So, it's like, person is the problem is the person getting evicted? And then because you're talking about them through the lens of that problem, that's how they get framed. This is a person who's facing eviction, eviction versus dead being like, this is a person who works from home was created her own home office who, who wants to have a quiet place where she can do this great work. The problem is, she's facing eviction. So, like freeing people by their, their assets and their aspirations, and then the problems that get in the way of those things. It's a subtle shift. But then, like with the Family Dollar story, it was not, it did not start with this is a shrinking town. And it's another rural town that doesn't have a grocery store. And they're lacking less food access started with, Hey, here's this trucker, he can live anywhere in the world. He chooses to live here. Why is us live here? Because it's quiet. Nice people know each other. So then through that, it was like, nothing he said, was particularly like, Whoa, this is like a mind-blowing piece of tape. But it was the lens to then go. Okay, now when we talk about them lacking grocery store, and we talk about, Oh, it's this like, Oh, it's a stricken town, who cares? Like people were

### **Fernando Narro**

not highlighting the virtues in that person? And then why this issue affects them that way?

### **Stephan Bisaha**

Yeah, exactly. Because I mean, because I'm very, I was very wary about that where isn't the right word. But I was concerned about my ability to tell stories about poverty, knowing how easy it is to them out. Yeah. And I found as a framing as a way to help

avoid that. And that was the first story where I really like specifically went in like, I need to ask these questions to get to that point.

**Fernando Narro**

And you say, you were encouraged to do that, specifically, that first guy.

**Stephan Bisaha**

She mentioned it a many, many months ago. And somebody kind of said, My Hezekiah was somebody I should I should be trying to do more. And then I heard the idea brought up again, because she heard two solutions, journalism. And then I had heard it again, through on being discussed it. They had an interview with think the guy who came up with the concept, an interview with him like, oh, this puts us in costume. I kind of understand that more. So, some of them are trying to approach the better. Sorry, I guess that's a that's a tangent.

**Fernando Narro**

It's interesting, because that was the story I remember, like listening intently the first time not only because it was something that I already knew that I wanted to look up and coming from the gold signature, but it happened to were in the show that I'm working on as well, which is where the reason I remember this. So, well. I wanted to ask you, because you've told me you've worked in different collaborative before. Having been in one where you are not based at the place where the editor was like you just told me and now actually being in when were your managing editors at the same place as you are? What would you say are some of the biggest challenges of working in a collaborative in

general that has reporters scattered in different places? And how does this compare to the previous ones now that you are in the opposite side of the coin? The tricky thing

**Stephan Bisaha**

is that like when you first walk into a newsroom, and like, there's immediately like, Oh, you're the new person and like, but you're still you're getting the feel people and how they interact with each other in this quick first impression, which can be flawed, but like, there's a warmth there versus like, or when a new person comes aboard like that. So like sizing people up and that camaraderie, it can be built, but it takes longer to build. And things like Slack are wonderful tools for that from just a little thing. I was sharing gifts to each other and having reporters only channels were like, good places go and complain. Because you always need to complain. Those are helpful, but and I feel like a lot of even non-regional reporters felt the lack of that when they started working remotely. And it's also something like we've kind of gotten used to. And then when I came back here, and I got back into the office, and just like that camaraderie with like your different coworkers like oh, yes, this this I have missed. There's just I think it affects morale just to be in the same space as people. We just had our first retreat last week for the Gulf states us and where we had everyone, nearly a book we just hired an editor who's based in Alaska who's going to be coming or she's in Alaska. Now. She's going to be based in Birmingham. She hasn't come yet. But it was her that hire we finally had everyone in the same city we were all Birmingham and go and it's just something about building a connection with your coworkers just by sharing. Literally space with them and just you're just a drink after work. It's just such a I think that's one of the biggest challenges for regional newsrooms.

## **Fernando Narro**

I think that was the point that Priska touched the most in my interview. of how important it is to have that like camaraderie revealed and how important it is to let people know from day one that they are just already like part of a team and like, don't be afraid to communicate with each other. So, I was wondering now that you've been through it, how do you think this specific collaborative is doing with that, right? So many times, we only have that, like, I don't know, like I get together when somebody's leaving. And it's a shame that it happens at the end only not at the beginning and all that. So how does that How has that process been? In this specific one,

## **Stephan Bisaha**

I do think it'd be much more explicit. In a situation like this, where like, kind of, I mean, the WB hm series was so thorough to go to like a potluck or something and do like deliberate things to try and book robbery. But a lot of it's just like chit chatting with each other across the cubicle versus with its, it has to be so much more deliberate, because it's so easy to get isolated. And I think Priska does a very good job of it again, like, I think she being in person, like, it's less of a need for me, like, I'm not the person who's like fear of dropping off the cliff and out of contact. But even then, she like because we're not always in office the same time like, I try to go in every day. I don't go in every day, though some as a work from home, and she doesn't work in the office every day. But she still makes a very concerted effort to check in like, Hey, how you doing? How are things? And like making sure we have check in time on the calendar? There? Yes, it is just so much more explicit, the work has to be put in I do think Priska does a very good job of it. My last collaboration, they did a good job. As far as like a Tuesday meeting, or on a

Friday evening meeting, we would like that evening. As well, too, we would have we were like everyone get together, which is important to have those calls. It just, I think we also tried to like make sure we were staying in touch a lot through like docs, like get some info like Now next, which was useful from the standpoint of like, here's I'm working on now, here's the next thing I'm working on, like keeping the editors updated. And I think I think there's value that I think there's also other tools rather than the writing such as, like, it's much more like video chat connection. That seems so much more needed to hear up people's voices and talk through that way. Yeah, it's getting some virtual base time, I think is incredibly useful.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, I interned for NPR over the summer, and it was all remote. And then they hired me in January, and I started, and I moved to Washington, but I've been to the office three times. Man, those three days have been awesome. Just because like I get to put like, I get to put a face to people. I mean, I know their faces. Could we have the meetings in zoom and all that. But if I just want to say a random comment to somebody who's sitting next to me, and like, in two days, I felt like I knew my colleagues better than I did over the like, four months that I've been working with them. Yeah, you're

**Stephan Bisaha**

going to overshare in person. Yeah, I am a terrible overshare. Like, everyone knows.

**Fernando Narro**

I'm exactly like that. Yeah,

**Stephan Bisaha**

yeah, I tell them, it's going on my personal life in a way that like, maybe everyone's phone with a colleague, like will kind of like, chat about that kind of stuff over slack for the most part. Like, it's not nearly the same level. We're just like, No,

**Fernando Narro**

it totally makes sense. I mean, I was, if you don't know that people, you don't want to like interrupt him and slack was here, and like they're doing something important or not. But like, the first day I was there at the office, I heard somebody talk about like, I don't remember which movie it was, but it was a movie that I love. And they thought it was terrible. And I was just like, hold up a minute, I stopped what I was doing and went to the cubicle. And then we chatted about movies for like 30 minutes, you know, like something like, yeah,

**Stephan Bisaha**

in a remote scenario, that would have been a DM that you wouldn't even have known about. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Like, maybe there might have been a movie Slack channel, which is, like, we try and like keep like, like, we have like a What's cooking Slack channels? Like, we'll post our recipes and things of what we're making. And that's great. But it's also very useful. It seems like I kind of fall by the wayside, or it's like the fog more direct one on one conversations with people. So, it just has to be smooth workouts could be so much harder and so much more effort to get those things to work, right. Yeah,

**Fernando Narro**

no, absolutely. What would you say is a good area or, or for either room for improvement or area of growth that this collaborative still has? It could be that it's working pretty well

and you don't have any you know, but like something that in the way that this is being managed that you think like, oh, maybe we could do this a little bit better. Or maybe there's not because of the constraints of people being in different places.

### **Stephan Bisaha**

But I think some of it is a matter of like what we're starting to do now now that we Russia chose me I was It's her last name, Roger, a new editor who's coming on board. Like, she's working much more on us and developing our beats. Because the past year has been so I mean, you got the pandemic for me, you had all the union activity. So, stuff that's like, it's been very much like, there's not been a shortage of stories. And there has been beat development. And this understands of like, this thing's happening to cover a kind of stuff like and again, we're not at the point where like, we're chasing stories very much not like a chase a breaking news situation here. But now, I think we're at this opportunity, okay, like, let's really define our beats. And that's something like I've had almost too much of a in my career very much a general assignment reporter mindset of like, even within like, education was before and welcome poverty. Now, it's very much like jumping on all these different topics within that topic, and not really developing very specific lanes of coverage, like, Alright, I'm going to be the person who knows all about housing, and diving in on that. And you see, that was like someone like Chris owner, or who like Arnold, where he's just been so on top of housing, and things like that, like he is he's this economics reporter. It's such a wide. I think it's personal finance, I think it's it actually gets defined, but essentially, like it's so very wide area, but he has very specific lanes that he's covering. And I think we're starting to work on that more. Now. We talked about during the retreat of really developing areas have specific expertise, which again, has

challenged me in some ways, like, I want to, I love hopping on very different topics, including learning something new. And so yeah, I think that at least I know, I can be better at that. And we've been working on our bike. It's been the same to other reporters, but it's something we're honing in on.

**Fernando Narro**

Perfect. I have two more questions that I wanted to ask you. I know, we will only have like five more minutes of what I ask you for.

**Stephan Bisaha**

Yeah, I'm in no rush by the rest of my days, like I met that. We were talking about that today. How like, sometimes you're like a rush of stories, and only afterwards, first, like, what am I doing now? And because I just had that big rush of like six weeks with nonstop like stories now going like, okay, things are still down. I'm trying to just take a breather. So, I'm in no rush after this.

**Fernando Narro**

Oh, excellent. Excellent, man. Yeah, I mean, it totally the two other questions that I that I have. But I'll take my time with Olson. One. One thing that I wanted to ask him, I asked this to all of your colleagues as well as the people at NPR that I interviewed that are involved in the Gulf states newsroom. But how would you like to? If success were to be measured in a way for this collaborative? How would you measure that success? This is the impact of the work you guys are creating the engagement that you are receiving with the people in the stations that you I mean, in the area of coverage that you guys have the sustainability of it, if this gets like refunded going forward, what are the ways in which you would say success should be measured for collaborative like this?



## **Stephan Bisaha**

Kind of leaning on the sustainability option of all of those because I think by many measures we can we can point to ourselves as a success. Weaver expanded the news coverage of the region where we've added new reporters to this region. From a national perspective, our stories are getting picked up a ton. There's a lot of interest in them. We've been getting great feedback from the community. You mentioned that a Family Dollar Store, I remember getting feedback about that particularly one woman who tweeted like, I as a child, I used to drive up and down that part of the country, it was so nice to hear those voices on the air. And so by though by those measures, I think we're already we're already pretty successful. But I think the next measure is these collaborations can come and go and making sure that this one sticks around. I think that's going to be the real test. Because I think we're doing most things right. And making sure and as I'm not sure which is in our power as reporters, which is other people's power, but just kind of be passing the buck. I feel like other making sure this actually sticks around beyond this, and also like that it can survive, changing of hands in that. I worry constantly that because Briscoe is such an amazing boss. And is that such a great job that like I do know people have been trying to poach her from us. And I'm like, I don't know. Like I hope we could keep her for forever at least as long as I'm there. But I I worry about that like once By creating a an infrastructure for the organization that once when I mentioned when they were there probably will be new leadership will probably be someone new in my position at some point. How much does the bones of this thing still function when you've had those different faces in there? Okay,

## **Fernando Narro**

that's an excellent answer. Thank you. What? You because you've mentioned before, how you've been like a general assignment reporter, and I'm assuming those have also been in public radio, is that right?

**Stephan Bisaha**

Yeah. Like I've actually had a relatively short career so far, I guess, as long as I can get it, like, like I spent a couple years producing in New York City, but this was like, basically glorified board off. And then when that was mind numbing work. So, I went to Columbia. And then from there, just like the croc fellowship and NPR, then the Kansas News Service, then here. So, like, my experience, different newsrooms are pretty limited. It's NPR. It's WB hm is part of that crop rotation. It's the Kansas news service in Wichita, which I guess have died because they also have the sense of the King Amy W's new server or a newsroom, but then here, so it's not like I have an extensive,

**Fernando Narro**

so no, but the reason I was asking I was more leaning. But when you're at that web hm. And now you're using the same like newsroom as the regular, like reporters that just report for the station are using as well. Right.

**Stephan Bisaha**

Yeah. Yeah. Which is, which is which I'd like in the room is like, almost exactly like, it's the same space has been expanded NASA now probably twice the size as it was before. Partially to accommodate things like the Gulf states newsroom. But yeah, it is. There was a girl that yeah, basically the same physical news of that it was in five years ago.

**Fernando Narro**

So I guess the question is, like a two part like sharing the space with them. How do you ever do any sort of work for the station where the news director can go to you if they like are in a crunch for something and that they want to like cover something locally? Can they go to you? Are you exclusive to a Gulf States newsroom?

**Stephan Bisaha**

In an ideal scenario, they should probably be going through Priska for those things, sometimes they go directly to me and it can be very easy when to have a sense of like, alright, like, are getting pulled into the newsroom service. And I happen a lot more in Kansas specifically, because like my job position was listed as like 5050, I was a general assignment reporter for kW and a regional reporter for the state for the Kansas News Service, which became a little weird because it had like, there's multiple masters who like 50/50 signs actually realistic of a split. And then here is very much like, alright, if there's something big, like, we're like, we're something like I'm already covered with the Amazon stuff. It's like, okay, like, it's specifically Alabama story, but like, so much of his national was like, Alright, if there's like this a slight move forward, and the story like, I'm already on top of it, like I might just do a story for us. But there have been stories that I've seen that I passed up on their Alabama stories, it's like, I don't know, do I think

**Fernando Narro**

the phrase that you use is exactly where it was going to like how much of this collaborative being? You not being 5050 splits, and there being an understanding that you're not like balancing that? How much of that allows you to successfully do your job?

**Stephan Bisaha**

Yeah, the WB hm, has been very respectful of that for me. And I think some of that is like, setting patterns early of like, I'm not a web Hm. Like, reporter. I mean, I consider myself part of the newsroom. But I go to the news meetings, the weekly news meetings, but they're not going to send you to city council meetings. And exactly, yeah, and I think that's something that every newsroom has to figure out. And collaborations have to figure out how to protect their reporters. I think Priska has a very good job of that, because we very easy to, for a local station to monopolize your time, especially when they're in that same room, the news director is in the room, and their actual news director is off elsewhere in another state. So that is a challenge. And another thought along those lines, and I'm starting to blink on Oh, well, I will say this like one challenge sometimes becomes when there's a story that doesn't fit like so I've been last coverage of the Alabama coal miner strikes, but I would be doing a lot more for it. If it wasn't the fact that this session Alabama story is an Alabama story that's happening in Alabama it's national story. That's like a big deal. These guys been on strike for a year is not a regional story. Because is there's nothing that says specifically the Mississippi Louisiana, so it's been a thing right? I've kind of pushed To do some coverage of it be like, we're like trying to be like, I want to do a national story on it just because we need to get some coverage of it. So sometimes figuring that out, sometimes you have to pass up on stories that you would otherwise be wanting to cover that's in your region, but doesn't fit the mold of the type of coverage you're doing. Or find would be like, well, it's at that point, it's no, it's national in like, Louisiana, Mississippi will listen to it, because they will listen to any story that that's national about this.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, no, no, I can tell you, at least in my experience, it's like I can remember hearing that many stories coming from Mississippi and Alabama specifically, because I would get to hear sir from New Orleans every now and then. But like, I can't remember hearing as many as I have over the last like year and a half. But like even played like sometimes. It was I think six months ago, or somewhere where I was like riding on my car. And I was hearing about the water crisis in Jackson. And he was like, Okay, this is pretty cool that this is happening because of what they are doing. And that's how I'm like, yeah,

**Stephan Bisaha**

yeah, it's been when I do want to do those who like, memorization pledge drives one year and talk about it. And I was thinking different things to say, to get people to donate. And one thing I was trying to hit on is, this is not just about like, your dollars being spent to, like, bring national news to you and news about yourself to you. It's about telling the story of Birmingham to the rest of the country. It's about telling the story of the south to the rest of the country. That's what you're helping to support as well when people support their member stations. So that's one thing I think is regional newsrooms do is like, not only is helping to tell that had the region better sense of itself, but also like making sure that's getting delivered to a national audience as well, which I think can you talk about measures of success? I think we've done particularly well on

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, and with an added level of difficulty, I think that the other I think the reason I pitched this to my professors as to the one I wanted to examine, even though NPR has other hops, that they're like putting together as well as that. This looks like the most difficult one in the sense of there's one in Texas, but I mean, every story in Texas has the

same governor, like you know, every story in California has the same like, they all they're all operating under the same. Whatever law is passed in Texas affects every single member station of the station that's doing that, whereas it's not the same case here, right? You have three different systems that are working collaboratively, and where it doesn't necessarily apply to all of them when you if something happens in one place.

### **Stephan Bisaha**

And there's like there's one department of transportation that's making policy for this whole state exactly, is like, yeah, there's not one for our region. So that that becomes a challenge. The and it also it affects what topics we cover. Education we've had discussion with, we'd add an education reporter and it's much tougher to do education regionally. Because we doing education in Kansas was really hard. And I didn't realize how hard it was until the job I had being the region, the statewide education reporter. The old the former reporter for the local paper, the Wichita Eagle, Suzanne Perez, she took my job, we were good friends, I when I left you, she stepped into that role, because you love public radio. And she's told me like, where I heard what she's like, it's hard like she would before she was focusing on the city. And then now she had to focus on the state. And but each district is doing things different. And the state board only has so much power, mostly doing recommendations. So like in the new multiply that by three states, because all these different districts like it can be really tricky to figure out how to do coverage of certain topics like that.

### **Fernando Narro**

Yeah, no, definitely. I bet that that's exactly something that Priska touched on as well as to how like this. This is not just any collaboration in the sense that you can't make just

one topic because it's important matter to people outside of one, one state right. So it's that she mentioned that as one of the challenges of making sure that the coverage does appeal to every single person that is involved in this in this collaboration when they're listening.

### **Stephan Bisaha**

While at the same time when we were doing the eligibility for this there is a me like pitcher story, I think I mentioned went about like along the Gulf Coast and how climate change is affecting particularly like Vietnamese fishermen. And someone asked like, well, how you can make the story relevant to people in like, the northern part of Mississippi. I started kind of give me like, a whole long answer like oh, yeah, like, well, because of the markets there and the seafood industry in those places like Ben was it was like, you know, at a certain point. It doesn't have to be, like, directly affecting someone's lives in that way. Like I hear stories about a lot I score all the time. And I bow California and like, I still care about those and like, so you know what if it's, it's interesting, it doesn't have to affect every single person in all three states to be a Gulf States Newsroom. Oftentimes, if I get two out of three states, if I'm missing one of them, like, like, this doesn't have much to do with Louisiana, I'm like, okay, I'm okay with that. And because I know I'm going, then we're going to do a very Louisiana in an honest way, it's going to have a lot of Louisiana, maybe not much Alabama, or when there's a situation like Hurricane Katrina, you talked about helping out with the local newsroom situation like that. us reporters that weren't in Louisiana, we're helping as much as we could. I was doing as much data work and as much like let me cover press conferences because you have to worry about your own roof leaking in dealing with actually talking people on the

ground like we were able to step in and help in those ways. So he I think we hung up on the idea that how we every story row with every person, all three states, I don't think I think that can become a trap really quick.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah. So long as they're interesting. There's an audience for them. Yeah. Yeah. Perfect. Well, that's, that's really all the questions I have. Thank you so much for extending this interview. I really appreciate it.

**Stephan Bisaha**

I'm happy to talk.

**Aubri Juhasz**

**Education Reporter, WWNO**

**Aubri Juhasz**

I think so. I was not here for a very, I don't actually know how many months I was here before the hubs started. The most of my time has been with the hub. But what I can say, kind of like on that transition is that our station and some of the I guess the other stations that are part of this hub, we're not very big, we have very small newsrooms, and even when we have a full bench of reporters, editing resources are always very, very minimal. Our news director is our audio editor for a long time, we didn't have any digital editor. So, we essentially had one person who had to look at everything. And that made it really hard to get, you know, support as you're working on a story. And it also slowed down the timeline by which we would be able to put out stories because, you know, everything had to go through one person. And the hub essentially, while it gives us a lot of things, it does give us increased capacity, because they have, you know, they have editing resources,



they have a news director, who is very experienced and is not just interested in what her reporters are doing. But she's interested in what reporters are doing across the region. And she really makes herself available to provide feedback on stories. So, I think the most immediate thing was just this increased capacity, this increase access to people with a lot of expertise. And that kind of helps increase morale. Because it can be it can be challenging to work at a station that doesn't have a lot of resources. And it can be hard to get more incremental resources at individual stations and the hub was this just kind of very quick injection of a lot of more, a lot more things, all of a sudden, all of these things were at our disposal when they hadn't been before.

**Fernando Narro**

So just for me to quickly understand that if let's say your new director is visit with another edit, you're able to touch base with somebody else with the help to like, give you like an edit on your story is that?

**Aubri Juhasz**

Yeah, it's not it's not always, I think, I think the nice thing about the hub is like there aren't a lot of like defined rules about how they work with the stations. At the end of the day, their responsibility is to their own reporters. But because their reporters are frequently working on long-term features, their day to day schedules are more open than our editors are. So, they're often able to chip in, and they've been especially helpful in breaking news scenarios. So, when we've had natural disasters here, the you know, Priska has really come out and said, okay, the hub is going to shift its focus for the next week or two weeks, and we're going to be are 100% focused on what you're dealing with in your local community, all of our reporters are going to turn and help you as well. So, it just

becomes this, like, really, they're just like this flexible team of folks who like at the end of the day, their focus is on doing their deep dive feature coverage in there, their coverage areas, but they have more flexibility. And when the member stations nice things. They really like, you know, go out of their way to meet those needs. They just, I wonder if they even have that kind of written into their job description, because that's been the most like, useful thing for us is just how adaptable and like ready to assist that they are.

**Fernando Narro**

No, excellent. I actually, you just touched on something that I was going to ask as well. You already mentioned it, so I'll feel free to give as much or as little but Priska had mentioned about the heroes in last year, and how there was like, a deeper collaboration because the Gulf states newsroom just shut whatever they were doing, as you said and help with that coverage. So as a reporter for who you know, how did that how did you feel that In fact, I know you told me a little bit of how we didn't put the whole station we'd like having more people working on one story, right that that was like, Yeah, breaking important, but how did you feel it?

**Aubri Juhasz**

Yeah, I mean, I felt it really personally, because I was really, there was a stretch of several days where I only worked with fresca, I didn't work with my in-house editor. Because he was basically you know, putting out putting out fires, our station was going was falling on and off the air due to the antenna issues. He was concerned about, you know, our hosts safe, he had evacuated, I had stayed behind didn't have, you know, electricity and was trying to file using my cell phone. And Priska basically was like, not

only am I going to be your editor, I'm going to be your producer. So just record your sound using voice memos, track using voice memos, send me all the pieces, and I will put your stories together. Because you know, I didn't have a laptop and I couldn't get an audition. And if we hadn't had an additional bench of folks, you know, I deal with people who didn't live anywhere near the hurricane and weren't going to be personally impacted by it to swoop in and really help carry our reporting over the finish line. But I think I would have been doing a lot of reporting, but I noticed I wouldn't necessarily been putting as much of it out into the world because it just wouldn't have been possible. And it reminds me of just like, you know, NPR works, because you have a whole bunch of producers in DC who are who are getting things from reporters who are on the ground. And in a memorization scenario, we don't usually have that dynamic. And the hub gives us that gives us that power. And I think we had probably, you know, quadruple the amount of coverage coming out than we would have if we didn't have the hub to assist in that process.

### **Fernando Narro**

Now, that makes a lot of sense. I used to be a general assignment reporter, North Country public radio in upstate New York, and there were times where we had four stories ready to file, but only one person able to edit them. And it did. Yeah, it was Yeah, it took a lot of a lot of time to make sure that this content could get out. I guess the last question I would have to you is, you mentioned this additional power of people who are able to edit look at stories, like put more resources in something but what would you consider to be some of the biggest gains that does collaborations bring to your station, other than like the number of people available to work on stories?

## **Aubri Juhasz**

Yeah, I think I think the expertise of the people that work for the hub is really helpful. I think there's a shortage of good editors at member stations, I think there can be even a, you know, a shortage of good editors, you know, when you're at it, I used to work at NPR. And I think there's always like, you know, they're always looking for new people to move into the editor pipeline, just because there's not a ton of editors coming up all the time. So, I think having Priska and having their digital editor Orlando, just having people with a lot of editing experience, who are excited, and they want to be editors, is great to have access to those folks. I think the fact that the hub also keeps us even more connected than and connected to NPR than we are just on our own is helpful, like Priska is this liaison who makes sure that we know when there are training opportunities when there are, you know, funding opportunities when there are partnership opportunities. And because Priska has this I think both like, you know, takes it upon herself and just has room to like, do more than your typical news director who's like bogged down, which is the daily grind. She's the type of person who really creates space for big projects. If I have something that's ambitious, that I can frame as you know, having regional importance, I will frame it regionally so I can go to her and I can work with her. So, I have been working with her and with a memorization reporter on a extensive, you know, wealth and poverty related guaranteed income reporting projects that we hope to one day put out as a podcast series. And if Priska and the hub didn't exist, I don't know what I would have done with that pitch. Because it's just not the type of thing that our newsroom could have taken on and responded to, we would have had to go outside and you know, hired an additional editor for me to work with and we don't have money for that, you

know, so I think the hub just has created a space to do more and to pursue big ideas in a way that member stations don't always have the time or resources to think about even if their reporters have the ideas

**Fernando Narro**

that makes a ton of sense. Is there anything I didn't ask about this that you just like to chime in on or just any comment you would like to add or is with we can also wrap up with that those were the questions I have but I always like if you have anything to add to any of this topic that that I didn't ask please let me know.

**Aubri Juhasz**

Yeah, I don't I don't think I have anything else to add. I would just say like It's probably true of like any collaboration, ultimately, like what comes out of it has to do with how much individual reporters and member stations choose to engage with it. And I think our station because of because of our, our size, and needing help, but also because of our ambition. And because I think a lot of our folks have worked with have worked at other larger member stations or have worked with NPR in the past, we were all really excited about having a hub and having these resources, I think it's important to like, you know, make sure that things like this are appealing to folks and they don't see it as like them losing authority over kind of their region. I think like for some people, it could have been concerning to be like, oh, there's this hub, and there's going to be new hub reporters who are going to be covering stories that we could potentially, you know, be covering as well. And I think the hub has never framed itself in a way where it was, you know, taking stories away from our reporters. It's really collaborative and it kind of feels like the member station reporters get you know, first dibs on anything that's happening in their

backyard or there's an opportunity to partner which is important. So I think that's just something that I've appreciated so that the hub in no way ever felt like you know, it was coming in and taking over something that the member station reporters were already doing.

**Fernando Narro**

Well, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me again. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it.

**Aubri Juhasz**

Yeah, my pleasure.

**Teresa Collier**

**News Director and Interim Executive Director, Mississippi Public Broadcasting**

**Fernando Narro**

I guess the first question I would have been giving somebody who is right now working both on the news side of your station, but also on the managerial side of your station. How would you describe the impact that is the goal state newsroom have had on your station?

**Teresa Collier**

The Gulf States Newsroom has provided us with mainly increased reporting power. As the director of news, I've always had a small staff. And I've always, you know, known that there were a number of issues that needed to be covered. And with the increased reporting power of having three, four additional reporters in the region, it's just allowed us to cover stories that otherwise would have gone uncovered or not covered enough.

**Fernando Narro**

And normally around how many reporters would you have working for you without this?

**Teresa Collier**

Normally, if we were up to full staff, and we've had some movement, because I've moved one of my reporters, at the beginning of the year to become our new Morning Edition host. So that left that slot open, a reporter left towards the end of last year, which left that slot open. And so right now I'm operating with one reporter, but when we typically would have three, maybe four reporters to cover the entire state and that all regions of the state, so that has left a hole in our coverage, especially now. It's just one reporter.

**Fernando Narro**

And I think speaking with one of the reporters that WW and no, they told me that it's not only about the reporting power, but also the editorial power that this brings right like that. Does that have that help your station as well for your reporters to be able to edit with somebody outside of your organization, if there's a time of a lot of news?

**Teresa Collier**

Absolutely. When we were up to full, full reporting power, each of the reporters had had an opportunity to work with our Managing Editor in the middle state's newsroom. And you're exactly right. They normally only edited with myself and the managing editor here. But they gave them an opportunity to edit with someone else to see what it's like to go through the rigors of being edited for someone from someone to take it to look at it from a regional perspective, rather than from a statewide perspective. Absolutely. And the training that's involved, that we've instituted with the Gulf states newsroom has been invaluable. Just training on editing, writing, I think we've had audio training. And so that's certainly helpful, always pre-training and to beef up the skills of the reporters

locally. And that's one of the one of the things we found that when, as we were building the Gulf states newsroom is we found that the level of reporting or the skills of the reporters in the different stations is different. Because some of us do daily news, some of us do only features. So, the skill level based on the hiring and what we had to do was certainly different based on the stations they were

**Fernando Narro**

in. And how has the, with people being all over the place, these three states in which collaboration is part of has communication been difficult, what has been your experience? So far, it hasn't been managed in a way that it has been smooth sailing? How would you describe the communication between the people who make this up?

**Teresa Collier**

Thanks, the communication is going well, certainly, we had to figure it all out in the very beginning. So, the news directors from each of the three stations or the three states belong with the managing editor, we would have weekly meetings, maybe meetings several times a week, as we were beginning the process of creating the Gulf states newsroom. So, we have to how do we want to communicate and of course, we started this in the era of the pandemic. So, it worked out very well that we could do zoom calls. So, we would do weekly zoom calls to talk about our needs to talk about the process for what kinds of stories will we cover as we were building it because we had not hired reporters in the in the very beginning. So, we were using the reporters from the various stations. So what stories had regional crossover, what story that was happening in Mississippi that had certainly an impact in Louisiana or Alabama and vice versa. And so, we were looking at and how we could cover those stories. We also looked at how Do we want to? What's the



formatting for those stories? Will we present them as mp3 or WAV A's? How will we share the story? So, we created a Slack channel with various channels. To post the documents, you know, you need the script, you need the, the audio, you need the digital components, the photo, to go with the story. So, we created the Slack channel. And we decided we will share all of those documents that way. And because we were all three stations that were in desperate need, or just wanting increased reporting power, we were just excited to work through those logistical things. I know I was those were logistics that that logistical things that I was willing to work through. And we did. We were all professionals, we all wanted this to work, we were excited about the opportunity to do this. So, we created the structure by which we could share stories, share ideas, and it's working. It's working. Certainly, there were a lot of bumps and hiccups, and but we didn't let it stop us or let it bother us.

### **Fernando Narro**

And I can imagine, and this is me assuming but like, in a small station, I used to work as a reporter for a really small member station as well. So, I'm imagining if I had access now to the hope, and we have more stories that we can cover, and more stories to bring to our audiences as well. How does the editorial decisions work? How much input does each member station news director have? And what has worked in working with Priska to determine what gets covered and versus what would be better off for like a specific a local reporter with just a local line?

### **Teresa Collier**

That's part of those meetings. And that's exactly what we discussed. Does this story particular, we were bringing issues and brings stories to the table that we were covering

in our local stations. And we would discuss does that story have regional potential? And certainly, that's what Priska is listening out for? Because she has been communicating with the with the individual stations, and so she could kind of determine, with the lift all of us does this have? If this is happening in Mississippi, is it happening in Louisiana? Is it happening in Alabama, with people across those state lines that most states care about that issue? And so once we made that decision that it was wanted to cover? Is it a story that the one of the reporters with the Gulf states newsroom would cover? Or would it be a story that one of the station reporters would cover? And then we would figure out how to share the audio if there was a soundbite or conversation that that was needed from our different stations we will share. And Priska being the managing editor, she would have the she would certainly edit the story. But she would allow the news directors from the various states to look over the script just to make sure their names, people, places, dates and little nuances that she would know about that we wouldn't know about. We're making sure that that was crystal clear in the stories.

### **Fernando Narro**

And have there been any things that you can see that improved from the beginning or things that needed adjustment. But that have been told, I remember Priska telling me that part of her. Her job was she learned pretty quickly that she couldn't keep up with all the local news on each member state member station because they all have different governments, they all have different state houses to cover at the same time. So it was very next to impossible for her to keep up with every single local news aspect of it and rely on people like you who are actually paying attention to what's happening in your community. Are there stories like that for you where you realize him at the beginning,

this maybe didn't work that well. But we I learned that this wasn't my role to play in this part, or anything that needed fixing anything that you can think of off the top of your head,

**Teresa Collier**

or I just say we learned pretty quickly. You know, initially we were just throwing out ideas. This is a great story. This is a great story. But then we learned quickly that does this story is this story only pertains to our particular state, or does the state can or does this story have meaning across state lines? And fortunately, or unfortunately, a lot of the stories that each of us recovering had crossover potential. I think all of our legislatures may have been in session at the same time and they were looking at various bills and different things and they certainly had crossover appeal when we fought I started of course, we were in the middle of a pandemic. So, our region. So, some of the stories we covered definitely crossed state lines. Our region had the lowest vaccination rate in the in the country in the nation had the lowest at the highest number of people of color or minorities dying from the Coronavirus. So we quickly realized that that's a story that we should cover across state lines.

**Fernando Narro**

And for stories that were more local, can you describe a little bit of how to help that remember also Priska mentioning? I think, I started I actually listened to in my car when it when he was airing, which was the Jackson water crisis that needed more resources and your station had at the time. But can you explain a little bit of how that collaboration happens when it's actually a local authority. But it's also helpful to have these editorial resources from the hub?

## **Teresa Collier**

Yes, in 2021, when the ice storm hit, actually hit the region spread from Texas, to Louisiana and Mississippi. This the capital city of Jackson was like a frozen tundra, we were frozen over. And the water supply in the city was frozen. People in the city went days, maybe even weeks without water. In our reporters, many of us we were sort of stranded or stuck in our homes because the roads were impassable. They were frozen. And they were asking people to stay off the roads at some point, but once they opened up, the story just became so big and so large that my small staff just couldn't cover it all needed. We needed resources. So, the Gulf states newsroom reporters would come in. And because we had to cover it from various angles, I remember we certainly covered it from the perspective of homes and people were without water for days, there were sites that they had set up for people to come to pick up water. So, we covered those stories. It was a daily story of people coming to get water just for bathing, for cooking. Those stories of people having children at home, elderly people at home in need of water. So, we told a lot of those stories, we also had to cover it from the perspective of city workers trying to get the water lines repaired. The mayor of state leaders talking about what are you doing to help the capital city that's without water, the capital city of the state of Mississippi, that's without water for days and days and weeks. It was just an overwhelming story that needed lots of resources and lots of reporting power. And, and for all of us to come together, we provided I think stories from various angles, from the real people perspective, hearing from Jacksonians, just expressing their disdain and disgust and how they felt about not having the basic of supply of water. And so certainly the racial and racial component of it. Jackson is a city that's at about 80% minority, African

American, and it's the capital city. And people were just felt just left out in that no one cared in. And we certainly covered that perspective as well. And having all of those reporters to join in to help my reporters. It was it was truly an amazing collaboration, that we really appreciate it.

**Fernando Narro**

Yeah, I actually I was in misery when I was listening to our story in my car. So, it just speaks to reality to produce this type of journalism that will be heard all over the country, right? Yeah.

**Teresa Collier**

One anecdotal one, one of my reporters, I think he did a two way for all things considered one to one during one of the timeframes and I got an email from someone who heard it and from KPCC and I think that's is that Los Angeles? Remember, who sent me an email asking? I just heard the story out of Jackson, Mississippi of how people don't have running water and I want to donate some bottles of water. What can I do? I thought that was just the power of radio, the power of what that did to have people across the country. Hear that and just want to help us relation here.

**Fernando Narro**

Definitely. A question that would be doesn't have to have an answer if you don't agree. really think there is one? But is are there any changes that you think could be made to the way this is structured? That would make it better on the stations that make it up? Or do you think that the structure it currently has for how stories get put out and distributed is working? Well?

**Teresa Collier**

Well, I'd say I think that the process we have in place is working well, I think we've worked through some of the details over the past year and a half to get it where it is. And certainly, I guess, if you, you take a step back, there's always room for improvement. But at this point, I don't have any specifics as to what that could be because we're getting the stories, we're airing them. And it's working. Well. The big thing that we're focusing on, certainly from the news director perspective, and from my position as Interim Executive Director is we want this to stick around. We don't want it to go away. And so, we're in the process of trying to hire a development director so that we can continue the process of raising money so that we can continue doing this extraordinary storytelling beyond the grant period. I think it is necessary is needed. stories being told, from our perspective, not someone coming in, and telling our stories from stories from people who are on the ground who live and work in this region, telling our stories. I think that's the best way to do it. And we want this to continue for a long, long time. I certainly do. I look at it as just one big newsroom as from a news directors' perspective, this is look at all of the resources that I have right now that I didn't have a year and a half ago. This is extraordinary. It is just this is the kind of journalism I think public radio shouldn't be doing. And I'm glad that we have the opportunity to do it from a regional perspective

**Fernando Narro**

that you jumped a little bit into what was going to be my next question. So I appreciate that. Which was the speaking as the interim general manager now. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Like what we know that this comes from big grant that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and PR provided to NPR in the stations to make this happen over the first few years of the collaboration? But what do you hope to get from that person that

you guys are trying to hire? I know, Kathy, Goldgeier also told me about this. But what do you think is the key in making sure that this collaboration can exist past the initial funding phase?

**Teresa Collier**

Think when the kinds of stories that we're telling what we now have is a track record, we have a track record of telling stories, not only in our state, the stories in the region, and getting national exposure from our region for the stories that we're telling, that makes a great story to tell to funders, they want to hear what you're doing, how are you doing it and how well it's working? And I think it's working well. And that's a story that whomever we hire, can tell any fundraiser out here that see this is working, do you want to see this kind of journalism continue this kind of storytelling continue in the region. And hopefully, that's a message that will resonate a message that will work. And that will bring in more dollars to continue this collaborative.

**Fernando Narro**

And I ask this question to every single person I've interviewed for this, and there's no right or wrong answer, but more what you feel. So how do you think that success should be measured for a collaboration like this one, is it the impact of the work is generation generating the engagement it gets from the listeners, if it lasts more than this initial funding phase and becomes a permanent staple of what it was trying to address, which was the news desert. So how should success be measured?

**Teresa Collier**

That would be the biggest success story. It's this collaborative lives beyond the initial seed grant money, because why create something this extraordinary and then it goes

away? Certainly, we want to engage with our audience. We want to uncover and tell stories that were that weren't being told stories that weren't being told well enough. If we can continue to do that, to have the stories hold in region and to continue, certainly to have them told from a national perspective, have our state stories, told nationally have our reporters featured nationally have our stations featured nationally and just have this live beyond? That's the biggest success stories? If this lives beyond the initial brand, period, we can continue to do what we have already gone. But bizarrely

**Fernando Narro**

i That's all the questions that I have for you, I don't know if there's any anything else about this project that you would like to bring up that I did not ask about?

**Teresa Collier**

No, I'm just I'm just truly excited and grateful for this. I think I along with the GMs, from New Orleans and Birmingham, we're in conversation about creating this collaborative for at least several months, perhaps even a year. And for it to finally come to fruition, it's just extraordinary. We've talked about how the South in our region, our stations, just did not have the capacity to talk about the issues that are so deeply rooted in the south, the criminal justice system that you know, its fate. And that's why and how we created the three, the three or four beats that we have criminal justice, healthcare, wealth, and poverty, and race and equity issues that are just so systemic endemic to the south, if you will, and they just needed need someone to dive in and take a deeper look at these issues that continue to plague our region. And I'm just happy we have the opportunity to lease it begin the process of scratching the surface, because we haven't we haven't we've just



we've as they say we've only just begun, we've only just begun. And if this collaboration continues, knows what kinds of great journalism will continue.

**Fernando Narro**

If I can do just one quick follow up in those conversations that you have with the other people at the different member stations that make up this collaboration. What were some of the biggest obstacles that needed to be overcome to, like you say, finally make this happen.

**Teresa Collier**

was always about funding. We did not have the resources to hire additional reporters. And we needed the money to increase capacity. That's what this allowed us to do. With funding a lot can be done. And that's what that's what was needed in it. We're thankful that CPB and in ER heard, heard our cry, if you will, and saw the need, if you will, because as you look across the country, certainly the two coasts are heavily, heavily covered with or have a lot of stations that cover a lot of stories. The middle of the country has a lot of public radio stations, but the south there was a hole and a vehicle that needed to be filled. And this certainly helps to fill that hole and that need.

**Fernando Narro**

Well, thank you very much for giving me your time. I really appreciate it.

**Teresa Collier**

Thank you.

## **Weekly Field Notes**

Week 1:

This was my first Washington seminar, and it was mainly focused on how the academic portion of this program works. I was glad to get a detailed explanation from Prof.

Hamilton on the assignments we will need to complete, as well as deadlines and expectations. I loved our guest speaker, Wally Dean, and thought his most valuable point was reinforcing in us that the ultimate metric that determines if our journalism will be successful or not, in terms of attracting an audience, is quality. It was also great to hear from a former student in the program, Shoshana Dubnow, that now has a great job. She works for the PBS Newshour, which I really like. Her presentation helped me get a better idea of the expectations that employers have and how we can make a positive impression on them.

This first week, the biggest professional challenge I faced was making sure I had enough time to get settled in my new place while also meeting all the demands from work and school. My schedule at NPR is unusual from the rest of the students (Wednesday – Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Friday (2:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.) Saturday – Sunday 6:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.) which gave me very little time to get my personal life together as I move into a new city. But overall, I managed to do just fine. Depending on how the rest of the semester goes, I might need some help in different areas, but nothing I can think of yet. On the positive side, I did walk the national mall several times when I needed to get fresh air and some exercise. I have been to Washington DC several times before, but walking the mall never gets old... at least not yet.

This week at work, I was the editor for this piece:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/22/1075049532/president-biden-is-replacing-federal-judges-at-a-record-breaking-pace>[Links to an external site.](#)

I did not advance on my professional project this week.

Week 2:

This week's seminar was very useful and fun. It was great to finally meet Prof. Young. She gave a presentation of the different "buckets" we should monitor and use as resources in our reporting and that was very helpful. I knew a little more than half of the ones she mentioned, but some of them were new to me and will enhance any reporting I need to do, especially when covering federal policy. My favorite tip from Prof. Young was to look for local-to-federal organizations. These agencies and interest groups seem particularly useful this semester, as many of them are located just blocks away from where we are living.

Joe Morton's presentation was very helpful in understanding what life for a reporter in Capitol Hill looks like. I enjoyed listening to his career story and was especially interested in the part where he described the differences between reporting on federal officials for a local midwestern market vs doing it for an "insider" publication like CQ. One takeaway from his presentation that will stay with me is the importance of building long relationships with sources. His anecdote about former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel putting him on the list for his foreign trips was very fun and informative.

This was a very productive week at work. I got a pitch approved on Wednesday for a segment on our show about the recent murders in Mexico targeting journalists. It's only the first month of the year and three journalists have been murdered in Mexico. I was assigned the editor for the piece, but because of my background, they also asked me to

find someone in Mexico who could be our guest. On Saturday afternoon I was assigned producer and editor for Sunday's segment on the Australian Open final. The match was chaotic and thrilling. Our plan to pre-tape the interview was thrown out because the final was not over by the time we were broadcasting live. I had to write three different scripts for three different scenarios and coordinate with our guest, so he'd know we needed to do the segment live. I don't think I've ever had so much fun on a Sunday at 6:00 a.m. Both stories can be found here:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/29/1076663934/a-mexican-journalist-remembers-her-2-colleagues-murdered-in-tijuana-this-month>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/01/30/1076798471/legend-rafael-nadal-faces-youngster-daniil-medvedev-in-australian-open-final>

I am still getting settled into DC, and I did not have time to advance on my professional project this week.

Week 3:

This week's seminar did a very good job in helping me understand the challenges that some professional journalists face when interacting in public and virtual spaces. Liz Szabo, reporter for Kaiser Health News, was an excellent guest speaker and made me consider aspects of social media I had not before. My main two takeaways from her presentation were to be careful about what we share in terms of personal information, trolls are clever and willing to get very personal in their attack and to look out for and try to find super connectors.

For the first point, I was struck by how cautious Liz is about sharing any personal information regarding being a mom. It made sense after she shared some of the

comments, she has received why she would be that reluctant. I think my generation still overlooks that aspect of sharing in social media because we have not yet come to the point of forming families or being responsible for other significant relatives, but it was refreshing to hear tips and warnings from someone with a larger online following and experience. To the second point, I constantly use Facebook groups and other social media groups on different platforms to reach out to people who might be impacted by whatever I am covering, but I had not thought about building relationships with what Liz called “super connectors”. These would be individuals who are well connected in their own communities and who can help you get in touch with others because they already build the trust necessary to convince them that they can speak with you. I’ll try to identify potential super connectors going forward.

This week at NPR I worked on three segments. I was editor for all three and only one of them was my original pitch. The other two I was just assigned. I also pitched another segment that received the go-ahead and will air next Sunday. The biggest challenge was editing the conversation with Martin Goldsmith, as it went on for over 30 minutes and I was only given 8 minutes for the final product. Normally that would be a lot of time, but because of the conversation's topic, it was tough to cut very personal and poignant anecdotes from it. All in all, it went well. These are the segments I edited this week:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/05/1078478588/adding-green-led-lights-to-fishing-nets-could-help-marine-mammals-avoid-being-ca>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/05/1078478667/in-winter-journey-a-son-pushes-his-father-to-reflect-on-his-past-in-nazi-germany>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/06/1078634085/e-u-official-discusses-diplomatic-de-escalation-tactics-in-russia-ukraine-tensio>

While I planned on finally getting started on my professional project, I had personal matters to attend that kept me from progressing on this front.

Week 4:

This was my favorite Friday seminar yet. Both guests were outstanding and had a lot to share about their experiences covering the White House. Learning about the processes and protocols that go into reporting as part of a press pool was fascinating. I had no idea that there was a designated reporter every time to take the notes that all reporters will ultimately rely on. I was also very grateful for Ayesha Rascoe being willing to share personal details about how it felt to report on the Trump administration as a Black woman. I think we were all familiar with some of the public attacks that the former president leveled against several reporters, but it was surprising to hear her say that listeners also became more critical online and in other forums where they provide comments. I think I came away with three takeaways from this seminar: reporting from The White House is never boring or slow, nothing compares to being close to the action in a place that shapes the world, it can take a very heavy toll on your personal life to cover The White House, as it is extremely demanding. I think these lessons are applicable to other areas of journalism, but it is hard to think of another job that has both as many perks and as many demands.

I had a lot of work at NPR this week. I was in charge of editing three segments for our show. One of them, on the explosion in legal sports gambling, was my own pitch. One of the other two segments ran into a lot of logistical and engineering problems which forced

us to retape it a day later. I am counting the days until they open the building back for all employees so we can use studios and not have to tape through Zoom. As far as my experiences in DC, I went to Navy Yard for the first time and had good Korean food there. I took a long walk to get to Navy Yard which was nice because I had to walk right next to the Capitol to get there.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/13/1080464155/31-4-million-americans-are-expected-to-bet-7-6-billion-dollars-on-the-super-bowl>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/13/1080464162/lack-of-diversity-in-ai-development-causes-serious-real-life-harm-for-people-of->Links to an external site.

For my professional project, this week I created an email template that I will begin sending soon to my interview subjects.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/12/1080354238/saturday-sports-olympics-viewing-is-down-rams-and-bengals-head-to-super-bowl>Links to an external site.

Week 5:

This week's seminar was unlike any of the others we have had so far, and it was excellent. I say this because Sarah Wire's presentation on how Congress works and how she prepares to do her reporting was eye-opening. Contacting 20 to 30 new people each week just to be on top of her game is an incredible display of commitment. I really enjoyed getting to hear from someone who covers the largest delegation in Congress. Having said that, the most memorable aspect of the seminar was her willingness to open up and share what she experienced on January 6. I will never forget her story and I appreciate her for telling it to us with such candor. The second part of the seminar was very informative. We had the staff of Sen. Roy Blunt's communications team talk with

us. We naturally want to hear from other journalists doing the work we aspire to do one day but listening to the other side of the Washington equation was helpful. I came away with a better understanding of how much work and coordination must happen among the staffers of the senator's office to make sure it operates successfully.

This week at work was much like previous ones. I was happy they went with one of my pitches. I pitched a conversation with Emily Green, Mexico City correspondent for Vice News about the role that drug cartels in Mexico are having on agricultural trade. That meant I got to book and pre-interview her to take notes for when Scott Simon talked with her the following day. Emily won the first-ever Pulitzer Prize for audio reporting two years ago for a story from Mexico that aired on This American Life... a show that I consider to be the gold standard in radio. Most of my problems at work had to do with logistics as I was assigned to edit the script and taping of the closing ceremony of the Winter Olympics. Because they were held in Beijing, most of the apps we normally use to tape and communicate with our journalists (Zoom, Slack, Whatasapp) are banned. But everything worked out well. The following are the stories I worked on as editor this week:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/19/1081948884/mexican-drug-cartels-are-getting-into-the-avocado-and-lime-business>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/19/1081948870/saturday-sports-standouts-and-scandals-at-the-winter-olympics>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/20/1082012413/hood-century-spotlights-midcentury-modern-design-with-black-influence>



<https://www.npr.org/2022/02/20/1082012455/the-beijing-winter-olympics-have-come-to-a-close>

This week I sent my first emails to my interview subjects. I am still waiting to hear back from them to begin with the interviews and progress on my professional project.

Week 6:

This week's seminar had a great blend of speakers. All of them were excellent journalists with a lot of wisdom to impart, but they all had different areas of strength. Kimberly Robinson, Supreme Court reporter for Bloomberg, was fantastic. She has been one of my favorite speakers so far because of the way in which she explained her journey into journalism. It was great to hear from someone who decided to make a sacrifice in the form of a massive pay cut to pursue a career that would make her a happier person. That is something that we should all remember. At the end of the day, we are not just our jobs. It was also very interesting to hear her speak of the behind-the-scenes action at the Supreme Court. It is one of the most exclusive "clubs" on earth and she had great insight into it. I really liked when she explained how rare it is for the reporters of the court to ever be surprised by a ruling. As for Dean Scott and Stephen Lee, reporters covering the environment for Bloomberg, I thoroughly enjoyed hearing from two veteran reporters that embody the classic spirit of watchdog reporting. Their tips for sourcing inside federal agencies were excellent. It was also very helpful to hear them lay out the steps we can take as young journalists to make sure we get noticed in our respective newsrooms. I have a lot of respect for both and how hard they keep working after so many years in the business. You can tell how passionate they are.

This week at work was very exciting but also very challenging on many fronts. It was the first week since I started in January that no plan could be made with confidence for our coverage. The Russian invasion of Ukraine dominated the headlines, and it seemed to move at lightning speed, rendering many of our work outdated by the time we had to go to air. There were a lot of live segments in our shows, something that made a lot of sense. We are fortunate at NPR to have such a vast network of foreign correspondents working in our organization. We had close 10 journalists on the ground in Ukraine reporting to us. On an unrelated note to the coverage, Ayesha Rascoe was announced as the new permanent host for Weekend Edition Sunday! I am super excited to work with Ayesha going forward. This means I will work very closely with her every week. Apart from multiple logistics and coverage coordinating, I worked as editor for the following pieces: <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083283237/bears-have-become-bandits-and-burglars-in-the-lake-tahoe-region>Links to an external site. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/26/1083283308/saturday-sports-big-games-and-sponsors-break-russian-ties>Links to an external site. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/27/1083361129/analyzing-the-state-of-russias-military>Links to an external site.

I will interview Kenya Young and Kathy Goldgeier later this week. Both of them hold management positions at NPR and work directly with the Gulf States Newsrooms. This will set me on a good path for my professional project.

Week 7:

It was good to hear from people outside of journalism and government that still work very closely with both professions. Hearing from Jordan Libowitz, communications

director at CREW, helped me understand how much journalism practices still apply for people who work at nonprofit organizations that are actively trying to make sure our government is accountable for its actions. I have been following the reporting that Jordan mentioned, especially that of David Fahrenthold, and his explanation for how he goes about contacting journalists with information that deserves attention was very good. Dr. Craig Holman was an excellent guest. He reminded me of some of the professors I have had, and you can tell he is an academic that enjoys giving lectures. What I liked the most from him was the explanation of how nonprofits like his, Public Citizen, manage relationships with members of Congress and how they leverage those to advance certain pieces of legislation that are priorities for both. I was surprised by how confident he is on the new stock act passing in both chambers. Overall, it was a very useful seminar to understand the role of nonprofits and how we might be able to approach them in our future reporting.

This was the first week I got to work inside the NPR building! That made me really happy. This was probably the busiest week I have had at work. It was not as chaotic as last week, but it was the one I have had the greatest number of assignments on my plate. It felt good to be able to deliver all of them on time, even when the seminar overlaps with the busiest day of the week for my job. This next week will also be the first week my schedule shifts to Tuesday – Saturday. It's still unclear until when that will be the case.

This week, I was assigned as the editor for the following segments:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/05/1084729530/rich-russians-have-been-squirreling-money-away-in-the-u-k-and-u-s>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/05/1084729607/saturday-sports-russia-and-belarus-banned-from-paralympics-coach-ks-last-game>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/06/1084800693/floridas-republican-controlled-legislature-is-moving-further-right-ahead-of-mid>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/06/1084800735/ukrainian-president-asks-congress-members-to-back-no-fly-zone-sanction-russian-o>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/06/1084800756/gabriel-boric-will-be-chiles-youngest-president-and-the-most-left-in-decades>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/06/1084800777/miami-based-musician-rielas-new-ep-llorar-y-perrear-is-a-big-2022-mood>Links to an external site.

I conducted two interviews for my professional project last week. This week, I scheduled another interview with the managing editor of the Gulf States Newsroom. I should be sookaing with her in the next couple of weeks.

Week 8:

I would call this week's seminar a very practical one. It's always encouraging to hear from investigative reporters, as I consider that to be the toughest job in journalism. Mark Greenblatt is probably the most passionate speaker we have had so far, and I loved hearing from him not only the ways in which he works, but also what drives him. The sheer amount of work required to put together a story like the one for Case Cleared was astounding. But Mark provided us with a fresh reminder of why journalism is so important and necessary. The main lesson I will take away this week is that hard work, emphasis on HARD, pays off. Hearing Mark talk about how his reporting managed to change federal law was incredible.

The first section of the seminar was very useful. I took notes about the many ways in which FOIA requests can help us not only obtain facts and information from agencies, but how they can also help come up with story ideas. I had never heard about the FOIA logs and now I plan on incorporating that knowledge in my future reporting and development as a journalist.

This week at work was surprisingly slow for me. I was only assigned to two segments. One of them was my own pitch, the other a weekly segment. It was nice to take a little break from the craziness of last week.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/12/1086274368/saturday-sports-03-12-22>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/13/1086329984/the-u-s-renews-talks-with-oil-rich-venezuela-after-banning-russian-oil-imports>

This week I interviewed Priska Neely and Shalina Chatlani for my professional project. Both of them work at the Gulf States Newsrooms and provided me with great insight about how the collaborative operates.

Week 9:

This week's seminar helped me understand that there are many layers to the federal government that we tend to overlook but are vital for its functioning. The federal government has a massive bureaucracy and without the work of watchdog agencies, the opportunities for fraud, waste, mismanagement, and other problems along those lines would be exponential. It was nice to hear from speaker that dedicate themselves to fighting these problems and serving as a check on federal agencies and departments. As a journalist, it was very helpful to hear the people at the Government Accountability Office describe the many ways in which their reports can inform our reporting. I think the best

resource I learned about this week was [www.oversight.gov](http://www.oversight.gov) because it has a central portal that links to all reports available on the functioning of different departments. As far as hearing from the Inspector General, what I will remember most is her advice about believing in yourself when you think you are not good enough for a position or job.

This week was another slow week at work. There are weeks where the show gets a lot of segments approved from either member stations reporting all over the country or our own reporters have many stories coming out and there is not that much room for our pitches in the show. This was one of those weeks. I edited the following segments:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/19/1087712581/biden-warns-xi-jinping-of-consequences-toward-china-if-it-continues-russian-supply>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/19/1087712567/if-you-cant-beat-an-infestation-of-purple-sea-urchins-might-as-well-eat-them>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/19/1087712595/saturday-sports-march-madness-begins-browns-acquire-watson-despite-harassment-su>Links to an external site.

I did not advance on my professional project this week.

Week 10:

This week's seminar was unique. Even when I don't really share the interests or career path of the guest, I really appreciate speakers who are willing to share really intimate details of their work to help us understand better how power dynamics work. Derede McAlpin was phenomenal at that. She really spoke with incredible honesty, and she seemed genuinely happy to be there guiding us through the world of crisis management. It was also very fun to play the role of crisis manager at the end of her presentation. What will stick with me most about this seminar is the amount of work that people like her

must put on just in researching the potential avenues for attacks that some of her clients can take. It was fascinating to hear her describe the ways in which she can sweep through internet sites to determine if any criticism of a product or person is being generated by real users or bots. As a journalist, it also helped me affirm something I suspected already, that it will be close to impossible to get a comment from people who are undergoing a reputational crisis. However, we must persist in doing so.

For the third week in a row, this week was a slow one for me. I started to get a little worried that I was not being assigned as many segments as I had in the past weeks, but then I realized almost no editors on our show had taken vacations over the past month and that just means there are fewer stories to divide among us. I edited the following segments:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/26/1088991092/saturday-sports-elite-eight-begins-top-player-retires-from-womens-tennis>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/27/1089047787/russian-intellectual-aleksandr-dugin-is-also-commonly-known-as-putins-brain>

This week, I secured another interview for my professional project. I will be speaking with Stephan Bisaha, the wealth and poverty reporter for the Gulf States Newsroom next week. I also transcribed all interviews I have done so far. I also met with my committee chair to hammer out the details of my project. I will be interviewing the last two subjects of my project next week and then begin writing the report on the outline we agreed on.

Week 12:

This week's seminar was really entertaining even though I was remote. Barbara Cochran was engaging and enlightening. Her resume speaks for itself, and I was happy she asked

us questions about the Sunday shows and what we saw in them before proceeding to explain why they work the way they do. I was surprised to learn that the goal of the shows is to create news, rather than recount them. That made a lot of sense when thinking about why important lawmakers are always eager to appear in them. I had a sense of what the audience for these shows looks like, but the detail with which Barbara explained it made it clear. I was also very grateful for her advice as to how I can better prepare as an editor/producer so that my hosts can have the level of detail they require when conducting these high-profile interviews. And as a side note, I really enjoyed listening to her personal stories including having President Nixon on her show.

This week at NPR was a busy one, but I had a lot of fun. I was assigned to edit four pieces, including a nine-minute interview with skateboarding legend Tony Hawk. This is by far the coolest interview I have ever been involved in. Two of my pitches also made it to air, but I was not involved in them as one ended up being assigned to a international correspondent for a reported piece rather than a chat with our host (that process goes through international desk editors) and the other was given to a different editor because I already had a lot on my plate.

Links to pieces I edited:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090448749/chicago-sneakerhead-store-flee-club-has-been-robbed-4-times-in-2-years>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090448792/saturday-sports-uconn-and-s-c-in-womens-ncaa-final-mens-final-four-tonight>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/03/1090498770/tony-hawk-plans-to-keep-skateboarding-until-the-wheels-fall-off>Links to an external site.



<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/03/1090498777/how-releasing-federal-oil-reserves-affects-the-price-at-the-pump>Links to an external site.

Links to my pitches that made it on the show, but I did not edit:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090448733/nicaraguan-president-daniel-ortega-is-facing-backlash-inside-and-outside-the-cou>Links to an external site.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/03/1090498735/new-york-is-debating-bringing-back-cash-bail>Links to an external site.

I interviewed Aubri Juhasz, reporter for WWNO about her experience being part of a newsroom that is part of the collaboration I am researching. I also spoke with Teresa Collier, news director and interim director of Mississippi Public Broadcasting. Both interviews were great and very revealing. I will begin writing the final report of my project next week.

Week 13:

We have had many incredible guests and lessons in our weekly seminar, but this was the most enjoyable week. Prof. Hamilton secured us a tour of the Capitol, including the Senate's Radio-TV Gallery. It was amazing. Our guest speaker, John Fansmith, was very adept at explaining the changes that he's seen in Washington over the last 20 years as a lobbyist for education policy. He helped us understand the relationship that lobbyists have with members of Congress and the press, and the ways in which they can impact policy and flex their muscles in the legislative process. The tour of the Senate's TV and Radio gallery was phenomenal. I learned a lot from our host and was thrilled to see the working spaces that many of the top journalists in Congress use to file their stories to the nation. I had been on a Capitol tour before, but this was the first guided one. It made all

the difference in the world. I left with a much better understanding of the history of the building. It was a phenomenal experience. I loved seeing the office of Sen. Blunt and walking the same route a senator would from the Russell building to the Senate chamber. I would describe this week at work as a very average one. I started working on a longer-term project for a longer story we plan on launching in June about the 10-year anniversary of the DACA executive order. As for my regular assignments, I was the editor for the following segments:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/16/1093189775/saturday-sports-baseball-history-then-and-now-pitchers-perfect-game-cut-short>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/17/1093240526/new-cdc-survey-warns-of-growing-mental-health-crisis-among-teens>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/17/1093240568/25-years-ago-the-red-river-crested-at-over-54-feet-devastating-grand-forks-n-d>

This week I began writing the final part of my professional project. I will be sending my report to my committee next week.

Week 14:

This was the final week of the Washington program seminar. We had no guest speakers this time. The seminar consisted on completing a times essay that will serve as our final exam. After completing this assignment, Prof. Hamilton invited us for lunch in downtown D.C. after lunch, we all said our goodbyes and that wrapped up our time in the program.

At work, I was assigned to edit three segments this week:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/23/1094470474/saturday-sports-04-23-22>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/24/1094538340/what-is-russias-place-on-the-u-n-security-council>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/24/1094538889/why-documentaries-and-tv-shows-about-scammers-are-so-popular>

I submitted my professional project to my committee this week.

## **Key Words**

Collaboration

Hub

Newsroom

Regional

Partner

Sustainability

Stations

Funding

Resources

Shared

Editorial

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation to come at the end of the semester.

## **Self-evaluation**

This semester, I had the opportunity to work for Weekend Edition at National Public Radio in Washington D.C. I interned there last summer, and this marked my return to the organization. It was a challenging and fulfilling experience. As an intern, I was a produce, but this time around I was hired as an editor.

Working in public radio has long been my professional dream and I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to realize that professional dream at a place that I have admired for a long time. It was not easy to get the hang of things at my job. All my previous experience in journalism were either reporting or producing. I had only edited a handful of stories before coming here and never for such a large audience.

I rapidly settled into my new job and relied on guidance from the show's editors to understand how they edit segments. It was fun to see that there is no consensus among them as to how a segment should be edited. I was able to observe and take away different lessons from all of them and keep what seemed to work best for my own skills. As time went by, I started to rely less and less on the other editors and found a rhythm that worked for me.

One of the biggest challenges that I constantly faced this semester was editing segments I had not pitched. There is a certain kind of familiarity we have with our own pitches and bringing a smart and engaging way to write a script and come up with relevant questions for a topic I was not that familiar with certainly challenged me. But, as time went by, I got better and better at it.

By the end of the semester, I had settled well into my new role. I am already being assigned all kinds of segments, including books, music, and movies. I am excited to

continue working at NPR and eager to see how I keep developing my skills after graduating.

## Project Proposal

### **Introduction**

I came to the United States in 2013 to pursue a journalism degree in hopes of becoming a sports journalist. With time, my interests shifted away from sports journalism and more toward human interest reporting as well as government and public policy.

Public radio is the main reason why my interests shifted. I became familiar with National Public Radio during my 45-minute commute to the University of Central Florida, and it opened a new world for me. Listening to my local public radio station, WMFE, provided me with engaging and thoughtful coverage from across the United States. Policy debates were slowed down and contextualized. Issues that affect Americans were localized and presented in the form of feature stories from member stations. These stories had an engaging narrative, captivating sound, and most importantly, they included the voices of the people at the heart of the issues.

It was around that time, in 2016, that I knew I wanted to be part of that form of journalism. I completed an internship with WMFE in 2017. Upon graduating in 2018, I accepted a position as a general assignment reporter at North Country Public Radio in Canton, New York.

My job at NCPR helped me understand just how important public radio is for the communities in which it operates, especially those without major papers. Canton is a very small college town less than 20 miles from the border with Canada. The station's area of coverage is the whole North Country of New York, a mostly rural area made up of eight counties and over 500,000 residents. Being a reporter at NCPR often meant having two reporting trips in a week which required a total five hours of driving just to speak with



the people who would feature in our stories. For many of these people, NCPR was the only available news outlet to access local reporting.

That's the beauty of public radio; its reach as a system is unmatched. As NPR (2021) notes in its website, "No other news organization has the same on-the-ground reach as public radio. More than 95 percent of Americans live within range of a public radio signal."

In many ways, NCPR is a microcosm of the public radio system. It was good at many of the things that make public radio special. It provides local coverage with a daily 30-minute news show. Our reporting emphasized the voices in our community and kept them informed of the most important issues in our region. But NCPR also faced many challenges familiar to medium and small stations. It lacked the resources to truly cover their area. Our newsroom was made up of only six people, two of whom also doubled as editors. There were many stories to tell and places to be that we simply did not have enough people to cover.

Recently, NPR announced a new collaborative initiative with member stations that will try to counter this issue. Member stations and NPR will pool together resources from regional and statewide stations that will ideally "allow for less duplication of effort, freeing up reporters and editors to do more original reporting in their communities. (2021)"

I believe collaborative journalism is the way of the future. For public radio, this emerging initiative offers an exciting opportunity to develop networks of collaboration that could help alleviate gaps in coverage for the communities that these member stations serve.

For my professional project, I want to examine how this collaborative initiative at NPR is being built, focusing specifically on the Gulf State Newsroom. For the Gulf States Newsroom, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting “is providing a 44-month grant totaling \$1,276,299 to launch the effort, which together with NPR's support enables the creation of six new beat reporting positions and two editing positions dedicated to regional coverage that will be based in each state. In addition, the Gulf States newsroom will hire a full-time managing editor, based at WBHM in Birmingham, who will direct news coverage and content collaboration among the regional partners and national news outlets (CPB, 2020)”. Even though the Gulf State Newsrooms is not the only hub NPR is launching as part of its ‘news hubs’ initiative, I believe it provides the best option for study and examination. The initiative is already up and running and it is not concerned with only one kind of coverage, like investigative reporting, as is the case with the Midwest hub. Its structure is such that a study of it is more likely to produce lessons that would be more widely applicable for other newsrooms. I want to understand what the biggest challenges are when setting up a decentralized operation that involves multiple organizations and has not been tried before within the public radio system. I also want to analyze how the people involved in this project plan to make this initiative sustainable. I believe this initiative could have major implications for the future of collaboration within the public radio system. Understanding how such a collaboration works would help me add another skill to my resume. From firsthand experience, I can tell that public radio reporters and editors are not only valued for the journalism they produce, but also for the ideas that they each bring to the stations about how to expand the reach of their

journalism and the communities they serve. These ideas include collaborations like the one I plan on focusing for this project.

### **Professional Skills Component**

For the upcoming spring semester, I have secured a position at NPR's Weekend Edition. Weekend Edition is NPR's flagship weekend news magazine show. There, I will undergo focused editor training starting on January 17<sup>th</sup> and going through the end of May. Working at Weekend Edition will provide me with the opportunity to have a hand in shaping what the network's national news coverage should be. In addition to the editor training I will undergo, my responsibilities will also include booking guests, conducting research, mixing audio, and writing scripts for segments that will air in stations across the country.

This work closely relates to the coursework I have enrolled in at the Missouri School of Journalism as well as my career goals. I made the decision to pursue a graduate degree at the University of Missouri in no small part because it offers the opportunity to work in a real public radio station that is part of the NPR system. The Washington D.C. program will allow me to build long-lasting connections to the people at the center of news creation in this country. The city offers direct contact with the most important news organizations and sources. As an audio journalist striving to work in public media, there is no better place to be.

Finally, this professional opportunity will also place in direct contact with the people at the center of my professional project. The news hubs initiative was created by NPR and the organization will play a pivotal role in the creation and operation of these collaborative networks. Being inside the same building as the people who are working

directly with the member stations on this initiative should provide me with an advantage to establish the necessary connections to successfully complete my professional project.

### **Literature Review**

Journalism as an industry has been in steady decline, particularly over the past decade. The PEW Research Center (2020) estimates more than half of newspapers in the United States have cut their newsrooms in half. Scholars have noted the importance of a thriving news sector for democracy and the emergence of nonprofit news actors is especially important in this context. Nonprofit outlets, especially over the past 15 years, have emerged as important actors in filling the gap in local coverage for communities across the United States. Their goals are largely aligned with democratic values of holding the powerful accountable and functioning as watchdogs (Zelizer, 2012; Konieczna & Powers, 2017; Benson, 2017). Given this context, it is important to study nonprofit news outlets. One of the main challenges for nonprofit news organizations is finding strategies to help them not only become sustainable in the long term, but also serve the communities they cover with quality reporting of local importance (Benson, 2017). There are many examples of successful independent non-profit news outlets, and they come in different forms. This project will focus on one initiative undertaken by several non-profit organizations and will focus on their efforts to manage a collaborative network between to expand local coverage and fight ‘news deserts’. National Public Radio is one of the largest nonprofit news organizations in the United States. Over 50 years, NPR has created a successful network that includes 1,800 journalists at more than 200 member stations across the country, plus another 400 reporters and editors that work directly for NPR. Collaborations have emerged as a method for nonprofit news outlets to

accomplish their goals of serving their communities through their reporting while also helping them become more sustainable (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014). That is why, in this context, it's important to give a closer look at how one of the largest systems in the country, the public radio system, is implementing strategies to increase collaborations that extend their public service role. Considering that NPR and its member stations are non-profit entities, this literature review will focus on these kinds of organizations. It will explore the relationship between non-profit news outlets and democratic values, the current journalism crisis, the growth of collaborative journalism and its challenges, and the factors that contribute to its financial sustainability. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (2020) projects an 11 percent decline in reporting jobs over the next decade. Because of this and other factors threatening the vitality of the journalism industry, we should research and ask what can be done to counter the decline.

### **Journalism and democracy**

Journalism and democracy are constantly talked as two partners that go hand in hand. Scholars have referred to both being inseparably linked (Konieczna & Powers, 2017). Situated in the American context, the practice of journalism has been thought as central and necessary to democracy, providing conditions for it to thrive, with scholars calling the trade 'the lifeblood of informed communities and functioning democracy' (Zelizer, 2012; Nesbit et al., 2018, p. 4). This necessity comes from the understanding that in a democracy, citizens are responsible to make their own choices. Hence, the work of journalists can be understood as one that advances democracy by providing a public service with their work. Journalists act under the assumption that providing truthful information to the public will create a more active citizenry (Gans, 1998). Journalists

aspire to create reporting that informs about issues of public concern, function as a watchdog of those in power, and represent the public in political matters (Deuze, 2005; Peters & Witschge, 2015).

### **Journalism newsroom crisis**

The landscape for journalism today is a challenging one. The industry is facing an economic crisis driven in part by significant declines in advertising revenue and circulations (Scott et al., 2019). Local journalism used to be a small business affair. Ferruci and Alaimo (2020) point to the 1980s as the decade when ownership of news organization in the United States began changing rapidly. Local families used to control a majority of the newspapers in the country, but a major shift happened as large companies began buying news organizations and developing them into regional chains. These chains then in turn were purchased by corporations to be turned into news conglomerates. Once profit margins of these conglomerates began shrinking, ownership slashed newsrooms to cut costs and maintain profitability, Since the economic crisis of 2008, newsroom employment in the US has dropped by 23 percent from 114,000 to 88,000 employees. 1 in every 5 newspapers in the United States closed in the last 15 years, with most coming in small towns that heavily depend on these outlets for important information. (Abernathy, 2018; Ferruci and Alaimo, 2020; PEW Research Center, 2020). Even those successful newspapers that remained in control of a family continue to provide quality journalism but profits remain top priority, as “what has been laid bare is what was only implicit before: that profits come first, and journalism second, that journalism can be served only to the extent that profits are already assured, that in any actual choice between the first dollar of profit and the next increment of journalistic quality the need

for profit will prevail (Tofel, 2013, p. 9).” These challenging economic conditions laid out before have led in a new type of journalism that seeks to fill the void left behind by layoffs and ever shrinking newsrooms: nonprofit journalism (Koniczna & Robinson, 2014).

### **Funding the nonprofit model**

Non-profit news organizations operate under a different system as for-profit entities. Their organizations are not managed to create wealth for shareholders and investors, but rather to maintain a running operation and invest in areas that would create better content. Nonprofits, however, are not immune to the challenges of a declining news industry. They still have to generate revenue as a means to continuing their work, and ultimately achieving their ultimate goal: sustainability (Kim et al., 2016). News nonprofits are heavily dependent on foundation support. This revenue stream provides an invaluable lifeline for them, as more than 60 percent of these actors receive half or more of their budget from foundations. Even those organizations that have diversified their revenue streams continue receiving substantial support from foundations. Driven by economic uncertainty in the journalism industry, nonprofit organizations are welcoming funds from foundations that also seek to create impact through journalism. (Ferruci & Alaimo, 2020; Nisbet et al, 2018; Scott et al., 2019). A study conducted by Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and Northeastern University’s School of Journalism in 2016 found examined foundation funding in nonprofit media. The study analyzed over \$1.8 billion in grant money. Among the most substantial findings, researchers noted “many innovative projects and experiments have and continue to take place, but grantmaking remains far below what is needed,” and “a heavy

concentration of resources in a few dozen successful news nonprofits and on behalf of a few issues (Nisbet et. al, 2018, p. 6).” The study also found that over a six-year period, approximately 70 percent of all funds went to just 25 organizations. This creates a concentration problem in which nonprofit news organizations across the country lack the funding needed to become major players in covering local and state news to fill the gap left behind by the newspaper industry collapse (Nisbet et al., 2018). Scholars also debate how much and what kind of influence, if any, foundations that support nonprofit news have over the editorial workings of the organizations they support. Some argue that the main change driven by these partnerships is not necessarily foundations overseeing the content creation of news organizations, rather the reshaping of journalism’s boundaries (Scott et al., 2019). This boundary changing concept means journalists at nonprofit news outlets are not being told what to what to cover and how, but are instead influenced to pursue and measure impact in their work. As Scott et al. note (2019), foundations are changing the role of journalists, both intentionally and unintentionally, by focusing the money they give toward outcome-oriented reporting, sometimes in niche categories. Konieczna & Powers (2016) would agree with that assessment. Their 2016 research on the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), found that the organization has embraced an impact-oriented view of its journalism, encouraging its reporters to conceptualize differently what they do for democracy and why. This mindset, they argue, is driven in part by the organization’s funders. This new approach could lead organizations to cross the line that has traditionally been drawn between journalism and advocacy (Konieczna & Powers, 2016). These, however, are newer examples and not indicative of the field as a whole. Even with concerns about changing journalism’s



boundaries, studies have also shown a desire from funders to not overstep their roles as supports and turn into editors. There are high levels of public transparency in nonprofit media and relatively low examples of editorial review by funders (Rosensteil et al., 2016). Funders rarely ever ask to see content pre-publication and journalists are aware of the level of separation that must exist between both camps, with journalists being wary of influence outside their newsroom (Ferruci & Alaimo, 2020; Rosensteil et al., 2016).

### **Collaborations**

Production of content is an expensive affair. The Columbia Journalism Review Editors (2009) argued collaborations might offer a solution to the journalism crisis: “Collaboration needs to become central to journalism’s mission—and the mainstream press needs to get on board. From foreign capitals to U.S. statehouses, it is a way to extend our shrinking newsrooms, begin to rebuild public trust, and ensure that the standards of the professional press help shape the development of new journalistic endeavors (The Editors, 2009)”.

For nonprofit news organizations, partnerships and collaborations can sometimes prove the solution to a budgeting problem. For local nonprofits, allocating resources into building networks of cooperation can be the key to sustainability. For funders this can be true too, as funding may achieve better results by funding collaborative projects rather than individual ones (Kim et al., 2016). Starting in the 2000s, collaborations began to gain momentum with Initiatives funded by The Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Recent examples include Electionland, which focused on voting issues across the country. It was a collaborative effort between ProPublica and several organizations, including the USA Today News Network. Perhaps

the most consequential and biggest collaborative efforts have been led by The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists', which published analysis of a major leak in financial documents – multiple times. These projects were known as the Panama Papers and the Pandora Papers, efforts involving over 100 news outlets in 25 languages (Graves & Jenkins, 2019; Quackenbush 2020; Buzbee, 2021). Moura Santos (2020) points out that even as news outlets and newsrooms continue to shrink, the expectations for journalists has remained the same. That translates into doing more work with less resources. That's why collaboration between newsrooms offers the possibility of better coverage of complex projects. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, these challenges facing newsrooms have become especially clear over the past year and a half, and collaboration offers a path to solve them. The coronavirus pandemic "highlighted the media's own weaknesses — scarcity of resources, inability to do in-person reporting, shrinking budgets, especially for local media. While this is still a time of a high-stakes competition among news outlets, it's also a time of high-reward collaboration. To meet the mounting challenges from mounting crises a historically competitive media culture is giving way to an accelerating trend of collaboration" (Quackenbush, 2020). In recent years, cooperation has also risen even between nonprofits and commercial outlets. Rosensteil et al., (2016, p. 6) found "The majority of commercial media who have partnered with or accepted money from nonprofits report they are doing more of it than they used to. Fifty-four percent said the number of partnerships with nonprofit of any kind have increased in the last five years." These collaborations are not limited to working on projects together, but also having commercial media serve as platforms to distribute content produced by nonprofit media to enhance viewership (Rosensteil et al.,

2016). The *Sopris Sun*, a weekly nonprofit newspaper in Carbondale, Colorado, embraced collaboration by hosting a show with their local radio competitors. In it, the *Sun*'s editor talks with a radio host about what's new on the paper and their reporting. The *Sun*, instead of shunning the competition, embraced it to amplify its message and engage their audience (Ferruci & Alaimo, 2020). The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, another nonprofit outlet, commonly uses a strategy of applying for foundation grants with other news organizations and declares collaboration as being key to its sustainability. The center also applies its collaboration ethos by partnering with the University of Wisconsin – Madison to produce stories with student-journalists. (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014). The importance of collaboration has not gone unnoticed among major players in the nonprofit news media. The ProPublica Local Reporting Network funds investigative journalism in six small market news organizations every year in cities across the country (Nisbet et al., 2016).

### **Challenges in collaborations**

Collaborations in journalism pose different challenges for newsrooms and organizations. As The Editors of the Columbia Journalism Review (2009) pointed out, these challenges are not only of an editorial nature, but also operational and ethical. Organizations that engage in collaborations have to address challenges like conflicts of interests, whether perceived or real. They also must address how much, or little, of professional competition should be kept in a collaboration.

In a study for the PEW Research Center, Edmonds and Mitchell (2014) argue that collaborations are driven mainly to address economic challenges. To minimize the risk of failure in collaborations, organizations typically arrange their partnerships in simple and

non-bureaucratic terms, but for many collaborations, that was not enough to ensure operational success. Issues arose in cases where newsrooms had different workflows or used different tools, like content management systems. Working on the

se challenges will be fundamental for collaborations going forward.

Literature addressing collaborations in public and non-profit media is lacking, but a few examples highlighting challenges exist. Falk (2021) notes that collaborations between public media outlets (typically affiliated to state governments or universities) usually involves managerial obstacles. That means that partners must navigate different governance structures, procedures for billing, travel requirements, and more.

Ferrucci et. al (2015) conducted a case study looking into a collaboration between St. Louis Public Radio and the St. Louis Beacon. Both non-profit organizations shared similar missions and financial supporters. After merging their newsrooms, several challenges arose. One of these challenges was the internal communications: “As for disadvantages, journalists said a more hierarchical structure existed in the combined newsroom, reflecting in part a need for more formal communication within a larger organization (Ferruci et. al, 2015, p. 258).” Journalists from the Beacon struggled to adapt to their new organizational structure within St. Louis Public Radio. Operational challenges were also prevalent, as “former Beacon journalists also needed to learn the intricacies of the St. Louis Public Radio content management system. Although journalists received training in technical-related skills, the level of progress among the combined news staff varied (Ferruci et. al, 2015, p. 258).” In their conclusion, Ferruci et. al (2015) note that the routines journalists were used to working in were altered in three fundamental ways: though roles, technical changes, and a shift in news judgement. “This

meant Beaconites and St. Louis Public Radio journalists had to adapt to a more formalized beat structure and more specialized work roles. This forced journalists to learn new beats and build connections with new information sources, all while dealing with the other two main types of change (Ferruci et. al, 2015, p. 260).”

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** What are the challenges of setting up a collaborative newsroom involving multiple organizations?

**RQ2:** What strategies are being implemented to achieve its sustainability?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will be guided by the Hierarchy of Influences theory. This theory, proposed by Reese & Shoemaker, is used to study news practices by separating the world of journalism into different levels of analysis. It considers the forces that shape media and separates them through five levels. These levels help classify influences operating both separately and in conjunction with each other. In brief, “these levels range from the most micro to the most macro: individual, routines, organizational, extra-media, and ideological, with each successive level viewed as subsuming the one(s) prior (Reese, 2001).”

Ferruci et. al (2015, p. 249) defines the five levels of analysis in simple terms, as follows:

- Individual: the personal characteristics of the individuals involved in the news work.
- Routine: practices and procedures across all organizations in the industry that guide individual communication workers.
- Organizational: factors that originate from the organization, such as newsroom

policies and priorities.

- Social Institutional: forces from organizations outside the organization, such as governments, audiences, and advertisers.
- Social System: cultural, ideological, and national systems where journalists and organizations operate.

This theory recognizes that there are several different levels of influences in how news is produced, and to study news production, it is important for researchers to divide the world into the previously mentioned levels of analysis. As information is gathered through interviews, the theory allows researchers to examine the data through the five levels of influence and draw more contextualized conclusions. For a case study like this one, which focuses on a collaborative newsroom initiative between several independent partners, the hierarchy of influences theory will provide a holistic analysis of the collaboration. There will be no single factor that determines the challenges – and solutions – of setting up a collaborative newsroom, but a collection of interconnected forces that range from the individual to the social system.

### **Method**

This will be a case study that will use semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Stake (1995) defines the case study an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study. NPR member stations enjoy several structural advantages from other non-profit news organizations. Most of them have been in operation for decades. They are also recipients of federal grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. That is why I am proposing a case study. I recognize that not every conclusion of this study be applicable to many non-profit news

organizations, but I also believe there will be many useful lessons and conclusions for outlets outside the ones being studied as consider their own collaboration ventures.

I plan on conducting interviews with the reporters, editors, managers, and leaders at the five organizations that make up the Gulf States Newsroom: WWNO and WRKF in Louisiana, WBHM in Alabama, Mississippi Public Broadcasting, and NPR in Washington D.C.

To ensure accuracy, all interviews will be recorded. I recognize that for many of the people I plan to interview, time is scarce. That is why I will craft an interview guide that will help get the answers I seek in 45 minutes or under. If participants are willing to go longer, I will continue.

The following is a partial list of potential interview subjects for my study:

### **Interview Subjects**

#### **Kenya Young: Managing Editor for Collaborative Journalism at NPR**

In this role, she grows and supports NPR's collaborative journalism by fostering member station relationships and helps run NPR's day-to-day news operations. Previously, she was the executive producer of *Morning Edition*. In that role, she was responsible for the day-to-day running of the show and leading *Morning Edition* through one of the most demanding news cycles in history. She will be responsible for helping me with our outreach to station newsrooms, growing and supporting our collaborative journalism efforts in myriad ways, and partnering with development and Member relationships.

#### **Nancy Barnes: Senior Vice President of News and Editorial Director at NPR**

Barnes oversees NPR's journalism and journalists around the world and across platforms. She leads an award-winning team of journalists and newsroom executives who are

committed to excellence, innovation and the highest quality reporting and storytelling. Barnes has spent nearly 30 years leading high-performing teams in delivering award-winning journalism to the public. She joined NPR in November 2018, after serving as executive editor for Hearst Texas Newspapers and the *Houston Chronicle*. She developed the *Houston Chronicle* into a metro paper known for national caliber journalism with deep local roots. Previously, she served as executive editor at the Minneapolis Star Tribune Media Company from 2007 to 2013, leading the newsroom to a Pulitzer Prize in local reporting, as well as other national awards.

**Bruce Auster: Director, Collaborative Investigations at NPR**

In this role, he oversees investigative journalism projects that involve working across teams at NPR or with any of the approximately 200 Member station newsrooms in the network. Before taking on this effort, Bruce led NPR's National Security unit from 2008 to 2015. In that role, he directed NPR's coverage of international security issues from Washington—including stories involving the U.S. military and the intelligence community. Before that, Bruce was the Senior Supervising Editor of NPR's *Morning Edition* for five years, where he worked with *Morning Edition* hosts Steve Inskeep and Renee Montagne to bring listeners interviews with leading political, international, and cultural figures.

**Kathy Merritt: Vice President, Radio, Journalism, and CSG Services at CPB**

She is responsible for leading CPB's efforts to distribute more than \$300 million annually in Community Service Grants to qualified public radio and television stations and for advancing public media's journalism efforts, locally, regionally, and nationally. Prior to



her current position, Ms. Merritt was Vice President for Content Strategy and Development at Public Radio International. Before that, she was CPB's Senior Director of Program Investments in Radio, where she was one of the architects of numerous ground-breaking public media projects including the creation of seven Local Journalism Collaborations, which laid a foundation for other public media journalism collaborations; the Public Radio Talent Quest, which launched "Snap Judgment" host Glynn Washington and "Reveal" host Al Letson; and Localore, a project with the Association of Independents in Radio (AIR) that explored new ways of storytelling. **Priska**

**Neely: Managing Editor, Gulf States Newsroom**

She leads the Gulf States Newsroom, a joint regional news collaboration between NPR and member stations in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. She leads a team of regional beat reporters who cover health care, criminal justice, economic justice and more. Most recently, she reported and produced long-form narrative stories with Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting. Before that, Neely was a senior reporter at member station KPCC in Pasadena, California.

**Shalina Chatlani: health care reporter for the Gulf States Newsroom.**

Shalina is based out of WWNO in New Orleans and covers health care access and inequity. Before that she was a science reporter for KPBS in San Diego and the Emerging Voices Fellow at WPLN in Nashville. Some of her reporting has looked at racial disparities in the coronavirus vaccine rollout and how the financial stress of the coronavirus pandemic is affecting communities of color in San Diego.

**Brittany Brown: Criminal Justice Reporter for the Gulf States Newsroom**

Brittany is based out of MPB in Jackson and reports on the criminal justice systems across the region. Before joining the team, Brittany worked at Mississippi Today as their justice reporter, covering the state's justice system with an eye for racial justice and inequity. She was also the non-profit newsroom's inaugural emerging reporters fellow.

**Stephan Bisaha: wealth and poverty reporter for the Gulf States Newsroom**

He reports on the systemic drivers of poverty in the region and economic development. Before joining the team, Stephan spent three years as an education reporter for the Kansas News Service, a network of member stations in Kansas. He also spent a year as a Kroc Fellow for NPR, where he did the data analysis for an investigation into the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, produced Weekend Edition and reported in Birmingham.

**Bobbi-Jeanne Misick: justice, race and equity reporter for the Gulf States Newsroom.**

She is also an Ida B. Wells Fellow with Type Investigations at Type Media Center. Previously, Bobbi-Jeanne worked as a reporter for WWNO and WRKF reporting on health, criminal and social justice issues. She has also worked as a reporter and producer in the Caribbean, covering a range of topics from different LGBTQ issues in the region to extrajudicial killings in Jamaica and the rise of extremism in Trinidad and Tobago. Bobbi-Jeanne is a graduate of the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at

CUNY. Before that, she worked as an assistant editor and pop culture writer for Essence.com.

**Orlando Flores Jr: Digital Editor for the Gulf States Newsroom**

He is based out of WWNO. Prior to joining the Gulf States Newsroom, Orlando spent four years as a digital content editor with the Times-Picayune | The Advocate in New Orleans where he worked on a number of award-winning projects, including The Advocate's 2019 Pulitzer Prize-winning series, "Tilting the Scales." He also spent time working as a digital content producer, multimedia journalist and sports reporter at the Wichita Falls Times Record News — his hometown daily newspaper.

**Teresa Collier: Director of News and Public Affairs at Mississippi Public Broadcasting.**

She is responsible for the management, development and execution of news content through our television and radio networks. Collier joined MPB in 1994 as a public affairs producer, where she was co-creator and producer of Statewide Live, a live weekly public affairs program. She also produced MPB's hour-long legislative program, Quorum. In 2002, Collier was promoted to Senior Producer with the additional responsibilities of developing program content, as well as planning, organizing and producing live election/candidate forums on radio and television. Collier was named Director of News and Public Affairs in 2005 where she managed the day-to-day operations of statewide

news coverage. In August 2005, Collier played a key role in MPB's round-the-clock coverage during Hurricane Katrina.

### **Patrick Madden: Regional News Director at WWNO**

Patrick Madden joined WWNO in 2019 as its first-ever Regional News Director, overseeing news reporting at WWNO, as well as our partner station WRKF Baton Rouge. Madden also serves as one of the hosts of Louisiana Considered, and co-hosts Friday's Politics Roundtable on Louisiana Considered with Stephanie Grace, columnist for The Times-Picayune | The Advocate. Before WWNO, Madden was a longtime investigative reporter for the public radio station in Washington D.C., WAMU 88.5. Madden's work covered such subjects as political corruption, abusive police tactics, environmental issues, and illegal guns. His work has led to legislative reforms and has received national recognition, including two national Edward R. Murrow awards and the 2016 Daniel Schorr Prize.

### **Interview Questions**

This is a preliminary list and questions will inevitably come to mind as the interviews happen.

- What were some the most glaring and/or obvious obstacles to solve for this collaboration to take off?
- How is communication between different newsrooms in different places

managed?

- What tools or technology is the collaboration using to communicate between its members? How does it work? What are the difficulties of communicating through them?
- How much input do editors and news staff at the different member stations have?
- What structural challenges exist for reporters in the collaborate newsroom while also reporting for their own member station newsrooms?
- What adjustments were required from each organization to make this collaboration work?
- How are executive decisions made in the collaboration? Is there a hierarchy followed, and does it apply for smaller decisions?
- How often do the different member stations communicate about this particular collaboration?
- What changes would you make or like to see to the current structure, if any?
- What has worked so far in integrating the processes of all partners? What has not?
- What has worked so far in making editorial choices? What has not?

- How is success measured for this collaboration? (Impact of work, engagement, sustainability, etc.)
- What strategies are being implemented for this collaboration to exist past its initial funding phase?
- What's most likely to maintain this collaboration afloat? (future grant money or another fundraising strategy)

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