Roadblocks to Immigrant Voter Participation—Chicago

The 2016 election cycle has been driven by an intense fear of immigrants. This fear has materialized in calls to build a wall on the US-Mexican border; in campaign commitments to disallow Muslims from immigrating; and via executive actions targeted at deporting undocumented immigrants. While these sentiments are not at all new in American culture, we have not seen them expressed in such an overt way since the red scare of the 1950s.

To make a real difference in how immigrants are perceived, the Media Consortium proposes a set of news stories focused on immigrant voter and citizen suppression. Against the prevailing narrative that immigrants are parasites on US society, our journalists will foreground the attempts by immigrants to become citizens and to vote—to participate fully in our society. Centering on Chicago, a city that is known to be immigrant-friendly, we will investigate the manifold barriers immigrants find to citizenship and voting, from federal laws designed to exclude immigrants to local practices that set up de facto barriers.

To produce these stories our national members based in and near Chicago—The Chicago Reporter, Truthout, In These Times, The Progressive, Belt Magazine and Center for Media and Democracy—will work closely with Chicago-based immigrant news organizations including xx, xx, and xx to publish the personal stories of naturalized citizens who faced barriers to voting or DREAMers and others who face barriers to citizenship. We will also partner with nonprofits like the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights to get raw data on immigrant naturalization and voting.

The Media Consortium itself is a national network of 80 independent news outlets. Our mission is to strengthen and grow the impact of our outlets. Our method is to build trust based on opportunity, connecting news organizations and reporters together as equal partners in storytelling. These partnerships are built to outlast the particular collaborative ocassion. For example, news outlets that we brought together to work on fracking in 2012 continue to work together today on a range of environmental stories. Our goal is to do the same in Chicago.

Our director for this project is Manolia Charlotin, herself the child of Haitian immigrants. With additional funding we would be able to create briefings for our journalists, and assist them in developing rich data visualizations and other content to help them tell their stories.

The goals of this project are twofold: first, to change how Americans think about immigrants. Second, to bring together community and national media within Chicago.

We’d be delighted to talk with you further about how you can support this project.