

DRAFT: Principles for Equitable Partnerships in Journalism

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Preamble

Great journalism often requires partnerships to be successful. Such partnerships benefit the public when they enable news outlets to report on communities they otherwise could not cover or to distribute information to communities they otherwise could not reach.

Such partnerships are valuable in themselves. Strong partnerships will lead partners to new ventures that neither would have thought of or been able to pursue without the other. In a news system that is ever more fragmented by filter bubbles, the future of a diverse, sustainable news media that tells the stories of all communities may well rely on how well news outlets are able to form and maintain partnerships.

Such partnerships fail the public, however, when they are not conducted fairly. Community trust is violated when outlets parachute into communities, taking advantage of the hard work of indigenous news outlets, journalists, and citizen reporters. The sustainability, diversity and vibrancy of the news economy is put at risk when individual reporters and smaller independent or community-based news outlets are not compensated or credited for their work.

A journalism worthy of public trust will be built on equitable partnerships. The guiding principles below are the foundation of equitable partnerships in journalism and should be used by all who value trust in media.

Guiding Principles

I. Partnerships are built on relationships; the product is an outcome of the relationship, rather than vice versa.

All partnerships should be contractual, but a partnership is more than a contractual relationship. In a simple contractual relationship, one outlet provides an exchange-value to another to perform a specific job. In a partnership, however, the parties aim to work together to achieve a joint outcome.

II. All partnerships in which news organizations engage should be equitable.

Equity is not the same thing as equality. Equality focuses on process: that partners be treated exactly the same. Equity focuses on outcome: that partners achieve a successful outcome no matter what their initial differences.

Partnerships are rarely conducted between equals. The aim of an equitable partnership is to take steps to account for these different starting points so that all partners benefit from the partnership.

III. Inequalities Should be Identified and Named at the Start of a Partnership

In some cases, differences between partners will be obvious from the start, as when one partner has a budget many times greater than another or one partner has unique access to a particular community. However, equitable partnerships must also be built on naming and compensating for structural inequalities that may not be as visible to each partner.

1. **Cultural Inequality.** These inequalities are based on observable phenomenon. The following are some common examples.

1.01. Resources. (e.g. greater budget, larger staff, greater cultural capital)

1.02. Capacity (e.g. more expert staff, more time available)

1.03 Expertise (e.g. in topic of partnership or in methods)

1.04 Access (e.g. special relationship with sources or access to their language)

2. **Systemic or Structural inequality.** These inequalities are built into the institutions of a culture and exist both outside of and within any given partnership. They are built upon and often manifest as unconscious bias. The following are some common examples.

2.01 Structural Racism. “Structural racism is the normalized and legitimized range of policies, practices, and attitudes that routinely produce cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color” [Brown University](#)

2.02 Structural Sexism.

2.03 Structural Genderism.

2.04 Structural Ableism.

2.05 Structural Ageism.

IV. Power Differentials should be Identified and Named at the Start of a Partnership.

Not all “inequalities” are equal. Outlets with large budgets and staffs have more power in the news economy than smaller outlets, even if those outlets have greater access to

sources or greater expertise with a topic. Outlets with largely white male heteronormative staffs have more power in most societies than outlets with staffs that are comprised mainly of women, LGBTQ people, and/or people of color.

Strong equitable partnerships are built on recognizing and compensating for these different power dynamics.

V. Respect the dignity of each person in the partnership.

Partnerships should be conceptualized on an organizational scale. However, partnerships are built on relationships, and relationships occur between people. Just as strong partnerships will recognize power differentials and inequities between organizations, those organizing the partnership must recognize power differentials and inequities between the different people involved in a partnership.

Recognize that the role a person plays in their own organization may be different from the role that person will play in the partnership. Provide that individual with the respect of their most prominent role, whether that is the role they have in their own organization or in the partnership. For example, an intern at a large organization may have a leading role in a partnership; or, conversely, an executive director at a small organization may have what a larger organization might consider to be a minor staff role in a partnership. Treat one as a partnership leader and the other as an executive director.

VI. Partnerships should be liberatory rather than extractive.

The aim of a partnership should be to build a relationship that will benefit the partners and provide a greater public benefit than either partner could on their own. The relationships forged in an equitable partnership will lead partners to expand their own horizons, discover new practices, build new relationships and arrive at new ways of looking at the world and their own communities.

VII. Achieving equitable partnerships is an ongoing process.

Recognizing and accommodating difference is an iterative process. At regular intervals, partners should check in with each other to ensure that they have named all sources of difference and that the partnership is providing a successful and beneficial outcome to each partner.

Guidelines for Equitable Partnerships

I. Build a relationship with your partners

- Recognize differences of capacity; respect differences in expertise
- Recognize different levels of organizational flexibility
- Recognize the different levels of staffing at different outlets; respect the role staff play at their own outlet--so at the beginning you bring the decision makers to the table, even if in execution one decision maker works on the project and one doesn't
- Recognize differences in capacity for reach and outreach. Define commitments around distribution, marketing and PR.

II. Center voices of people of color and historically marginalized people in the partnership.

- You haven't gotten the story unless you have understood and conveyed the perspective of the local point of view.
- [vs. tokenism]

III. Set clear expectations.

- Recognize that time itself is a valuable resource. Outlets must agree on the amount of time they will spend on communication: where, how and how often.
- Recognize differences in the number and type of partner supporters.
- Clarify benefits each of the partners will reap from the partnership, including marketing, rewards, revenue.
- Recognize when the partnership leads to outsize impact and plan in advance to what extent that unexpected attention and revenue will be shared by all the partners.

IV. Define Success

- What is the ultimate goal or outcome desired by each partner? Are these outcomes reasonable? Are they fair for all partners?
- What happens if the partnership is less successful for one partner than for another (based on their pre-determined goals)?
- To what extent is the ongoing partnership itself a benchmark of success for each partner?

V. Step Back

- Larger outlets must assign someone to the partnership who continually checks and ensures the partnership remains equitable.