Brief Synopsis Pocantico Meeting May 14-16, 2015

A three day meeting was held at Pocantico on May 14-16, 2015, organized by Journalism that Matters. The theme of the meeting was: Supporting Independent Journalism to Thrive.

The organizing committee consisted of: Peggy Holman and Stephen Silha from Journalism that Matters; Linda Jue, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Iván Román, Ricardo Sandoval, and Sally Lehrman (who couldn't make the actual event).

We had two ground rules for the meeting:

1) we would not create a new organization or leave with a manifesto. The aim of this meeting was to be a starting point, and not an end point.

2) all conversations would be “on the record.” Notes were taken for every session, and will be compiled into a report. This summary is the start, and not the end, of the reporting that will come from this event.

WHO:

Pocantico only allows 30 individuals to use their facility at one time. Individuals were invited who organizers felt would reflect the concerns and energy of different parts of the independent journalism sector. Attendees included

* Foundation funders: Molly deAguiar, Richard Logan, Jennifer Preston, Barbara Raab, Chancellar Williams;
* Present or former editors/publishers of outlets: Bill Buzenberg, Bill Densmore, Chris Faraone, Jay Harris, Esther Kaplan, Tracie Powell, Martin Reynolds, Robert Rosenthal, Ricardo Sandoval-Palos, Michael Stoll, Richard Tofel, Sarah van Gelder;
* Present or former association heads: Kevin Davis, Linda Jue, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Juana Ponce de Leon, Iván Román;
* Present freelance journalists; Gail Ablow, Valeria Fernandez, Michelle Garcia, Julie Schwietert Collazo, Jeff Yang;
* plus Craig Aaron and the organizers, Peggy Holman and Stephen Silha.

Attendees were evenly split between men and women; approximately 45% identified as people of color; and ages ranged from mid-thirties to mid-seventies.

WHAT:

Our method was open space; instead of seeking a specific outcome like a manifesto or another new organization, we sought to open up thinking at a moment that feels urgent; we sought to begin a process rather than to end one.

GOAL-TMC
My aim going in was to strengthen the infrastructure of the independent journalism field-- both to help outlets find better business models and to increase their impact. Since I run an association, my focus was on pulling together the associations.

What happened, however, was a deep conversation about community--and particularly the fact that our sector has excluded foreign language, black, and other media by and for people of color from our definition of independent media. This conversation came to a head Friday night when some felt compelled to define the sector with the phrase "white supremacy" which led to really meaningful discussion.

OUTCOME

We came out of the meeting with 3 concrete actions.

1) Create a committee to research business development for the sector, including asking political donors to donate to media, putting journalism on community foundations’ radar, and looking for public funding of journalism. Committee will include Craig Aaron, Kevin Davis, Dick Toefel and others. I have asked to be a member.

2) Create an audit of journalists in the independent/community news space. Journalists travel between staff and freelance positions. How much do they make, how protected is their work, what do they need? Led by Jeff Yang.

3) I proposed a joint conference/convening of community and independent outlets--meaning we would try to bring editors and publishers from TMC, INN, AAN, NFCB, ACM and LION together with editors and publishers from foreign language, black, and other outlets serving discrete communities. The aim is to break down silos between independent and community media.

I am working with a group including Juana Ponce de Leon, Chris Faraone and Richard Logan to flesh out the idea, and have reached out already to John Rudolph (fi2w), Sandy Close (NAM) and Michelle Ferrier. This summer I will be attending NNPA and NAHP to get a better sense of the field.

TIMELINE

June 31, 2015: Notes and Report to be published. Followup will be organic based on the different actions. Ivan Roman, Linda Jue and Kevin Davis have formed a committee to monitor followup.