Praxis Project

Don Rojas, Communications Director

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Don Rojas has had a long career in communications. He worked as communications director at the NAACP, and was the executive director of Free Speech TV, a member of the Media Consortium. He has just become the communications director for the Praxis Project.

The Praxis Project is a social justice “movement” organization that supports a number of grassroots groups. They mostly focus on empowering marginalized communities around gender, health and food justice. The Project provides media training for these groups, as well as assisting them in organizing and getting funding.

Don believes there is a need for our project. He says:

**There has not been enough attention devoted to developing a media capacity among activists of color**.

In particular, he noted that many groups offer media training, and technical training is also available, but “**very few organizations combine technical training on digital equipment with training on framing and messaging**.” He feels this is what’s needed.

Don points out that small grassroots organizations, including Praxis Project, would not have funds to pay for such trainings, but he believes that such funds could be raised from philanthropists and foundations.

We asked him to think back to NAACP and to consider whether that kind of organization would use citizen journalism trainers. Don thought not. He said, I don’t think [NAACP or La Rasa] would put their dollars into paying for consultants—they would pay for their own infrastructure, or maybe would pay for training for their staff.

In sum, Don is very enthusiastic about partnering with CJTI to go out for funding to bring in person media training to activists at small grassroots organizations that work with marginalized communities.

Justin’s notes:

Describe your job. Social justice organization been around about a decade- a presence in Washington DC and in the Bay Area.  Small organization but it has one some interesting things- focuses on health and food justice issues, but also works in the area of gender equality, gener justice. It seeks to empower communities of color across the country.  Just had a great gathering of 200 community organizers called “Roots and Remedies” gathering- second of its kind, the first one was in New Orleans, this was in San Antonio.  Very successful meeting.  Just editing a short 8 minute video on the outcomes.

Describe your organization’s goals.  The theme of the conference was about coming together to hold a space where activists can plot, plan and build together.

What are your near term projects, what’s on your plate?

Question- activists, volunteers, staffers- where is the best place to intervene.  What is your experience?

Response to $600 quote for workshop..... $25-$30 per person, the overhead of the program might take it up to $40.... expensive.

There might be some funders that might be willing to help, to put money towards it.

Is there technical training? A combination of technical training on how to use digital equipment to record what is happening in the local communities, and how to take that raw material and shape it and craft it into a compelling story, the combination of those two would be what you’d need.

Praxis has a history of doing messaging and framing training- no technical training- but how to message and how to frame a particular struggles or particular issues in the community, how to tell the story in the community, but not the technical training work.  I don’t know of any grassroots organizations that combine the two things.  If you find something that would balance the two that would be appealing for these organizations.

Telling a story in the written word is not the same as telling the story in the multimedia format.

What about social media?

You mean like training webinars?

Everybody can learn how to use Facebook, etc. A lot of courses that teach you how to do things for free.  There are a lot of available information on how to do it technically.  People won’t necessarily pay for that information.  But using social media to tell your story in a compelling fashion, how you should spin it and what you should highlight, you don’t get that in free training tutorials.  If you’re thinking of doing it strictly online and added value, it should have a component that creates short video and photographs.  Basically how to set up a story line.

How to message using social media, how to message your stories in the progressive media, that’s the thing.

Command and control question:

A challenge and an opportunity.  There is a healthy skepticism towards the mainstream media. Lots of people don’t put a lot of faith in it. But they do want their stories and victories to be known outside their communities.  But their would be a lot of local interest, and not sure.... there would be push back.

Would not be a problem for Praxis, if Praxis embraced this initiative and proposed it to its allies and partners, those who would respond seriously would recognize they would have to choose volunteers very well, so that whatever they produce would reflect them and their brand.  You have more control over that with smaller organizations- but big things like NAACP with 2,000 chapters, you have more difficulty controlling the branding of the story. My recommendation would be to test it out with smaller, grassroots organization that have more control.

NAACP, you’re talking about hundreds of thousands of volunteers.  It’s an idea that is necessary and will be well received by grassroots community organizers.

Praxis has done messaging and framing work.

To him it’s the technical training that is what’s missing....

I imagine they would want to put their dollars towards their own communications efforts, and websites, etc.  And they would want to do training for their staff, on staff communications and public relations folks, and their emphasis would be how to crack into the main stream media, how to get those messages picked up.

But maybe that’s not the way to start, start with smaller organizations, build a track record of success.