**Introduction: What We Achieved at Pocantico**

What is the future of independent journalism? That was the issue on our minds as Journalism that Matters called for a Pocantico convening on May 14-16 titled, “Supporting Independent Journalism to Thrive.”

We knew the answer would have to involve a rethinking of revenue—the initial impetus for this convening was Bill Moyers’ suggestion that large foundations set up a trust fund for independent news. Yet the organizing committee quickly realized that finding the money had to be secondary to finding our identity. With mainstream media undergoing a violent reshaping, we first had to ask what role independent journalism should and could play in the new journalism ecosystem.

Instead of a narrowly focused convening on revenue then, we needed a broad-based convening that would open up questions rather than answer them. To that end, we invited a diverse gathering of individuals who identified with the independent news sector: diverse not only in the type of organizations they represented, from foundations to associations to small news outlets, but also diverse by race, gender, and role within media.

We also chose to adopt Journalism that Matters’ preferred convening methodology, an interactive process based on Open Space Technology and Appreciative Inquiry. That meant we started with no agenda—the convening agenda was created by participants at Pocantico. This process is designed explicitly to force participants out of their usual thought habits and encourage innovative, collaborative thinking that inspires new ideas.

Because of our choice of process, the report that follows this introduction is an account of what occurred, rather than an announcement of an initiative or direction for the field. Participants were not asked to, and did not come to, a consensus or declaration about the sector. However, as an organizing committee, we felt there was an unexpected but very specific outcome from the Pocantico meeting that we want to highlight here:

**To thrive, independent journalism must put community at its center**

The terms “community” and “independent” are not often used together. “Independent journalism” is used most often to refer to journalism that is an alternative to corporate mainstream media. Independents can include non-profit investigative centers; for-profit “alternative” newsmedia; hyperlocal digital news sites; and outlets organized around issues, region, or point-of-view. What brings these outlets together is an agreement that unlike mainstream media they are mission-driven, answering to stakeholders rather than shareholders.

“Community media” is an omnibus term often used interchangeably with “ethnic media” to describe Black, Latino and foreign language media. These news outlets are for-profit and advertising driven, providing “news to use” for very specific demographic groups. For example, the Korea Daily in Atlanta might cover the opening of a new Korean grocery store while the Omaha Star might feature local Black high school students who won college scholarships. Editors see themselves as advocates for their community; audiences see themselves and their issues reflected in the news they read.

Univision [anchor Jorge Ramos summed up the role of community media](http://newsbusters.org/blogs/tim-graham/2014/11/29/univision-anchor-jorge-ramos-speaks-out-advocacy-journalism-neutrality) when he spoke after receiving an award from the Committee to Protect Journalists:

"The best of journalism happens when we take a stand: when we question those who are in power, when we confront the politicians who abuse their authority, when we denounce an injustice.…"

"The best of journalism happens when we side with the victims, with the most vulnerable, with those who have no rights. The best of journalism happens when we, purposely, stop pretending that we are neutral and recognize that we have a moral obligation to tell truth to power."

How is Ramos’ community-based account of the role of news different from the mission-driven stakeholder-centric vision held by those in independent news? It isn’t. All of these outlets want to speak truth to power. All of these outlets want to side with those who have no rights. All of them are willing to take a stand against injustice.

Why, then have community and independent news not converged before now? For the group at Pocantico, the answer became two words on a poster: white supremacy.

By seeing ourselves as the feisty opponent of “mainstream media,” independent journalists have restricted our area of operations to what we believe the “mainstream” should cover. We have in essence placed ourselves within the mainstream orbit. And that too often has meant that we have blinded ourselves to the communities the mainstream media never sees—the Black, Latino and foreign language communities in our midst.

What would it mean to reimagine independent news as community news?

Perhaps we might look first at where our different communities overlap. Some outlets do that now—for example, the very small and barely surviving Race, Poverty and the Environment was founded on the belief that racial and economic justice could not be separated from environmental justice. Colorlines has been a leader in applying a racial justice lens to a wide range of issues. New America Media is the grandparent of this movement, providing a staff of translators to bring issues from foreign language media into the mainstream and vice versa.

We also should look at working together. Pocantico participants noted again and again how Black media, Latino media, various foreign language media, and “independent” media operate in separate silos. What if we could break those silos down?

What if we in the largely white independent media didn’t have to wait for a #Ferguson to happen to know what our colleagues in Black media long knew—the prevalence of police violence against young black men and women? What if we didn’t have to wait five years before the story of Korean nail-salon workers, a staple of Korean newspapers, hit a white audience? What if outlets like ProPublica could deliver muckraking stories tracing money in politics to a Black audience, to a Latino audience, to a Filipino audience?

What if outlets could work together to share their resources so that we could finally offer the public rich local, regional and national news that reflects the experiences of all those living in this country?

This vision of a new independent community news is the one that came out of Pocantico. Would such a reimagined independent community news be better able to find the support it needs to thrive?

We don’t know. What we do know is that the most stable source of funding for independent and for community media has always been from their audiences, whether via subscriptions, donations, or small-business ads. Strengthening those bonds to audience, and bringing that audience higher quality news they can use, can only, in our opinion, open up new avenues for revenue.

Pocantico participants will continue down a number of different paths. Some will work on new revenue models. Some will work to build stronger support for freelance journalists. Some may merge old organizations or build new ones.

We hope, however, that the main work to come out of Pocantico will be a new effort to build a vibrant news ecosystem that embraces investigative, issue-based, local, Black, Latino and foreign-language news outlets working together to provide the U.S. public with the richness and diversity of information they need and deserve.

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