

DIVERSIFYING TALENT IN MEDIA

HEINZ ENDOWMENTS SUPPORT OF LOCAL JOURNALISM INCLUDES FUNDING PROJECTS THAT PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN MEDIA. BY CHRISTIANA DILLARD

Last year, Pittsburgh was the focus of national attention when then-Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reporter Alexis Johnson and photojournalist Michael Santiago, both Black, were barred by the newspaper from covering the city's anti-police brutality protests. Ms. Johnson had posted a tweet that jokingly connected the upheaval created by Kenny Chesney fans after a concert to complaints of looting during some of the demonstrations against police killings of unarmed Black people. Mr. Santiago had tweeted support of his colleague's perspective.

Although the Post-Gazette received backlash for its discipline decision and eventually made leadership changes, it also lost the two staff members. Mr. Santiago now works as a photojournalist with Getty Images in New York City, and Ms. Johnson moved on to Vice News as a Washington, D.C.-based correspondent.

Such treatment of Black journalists and Black perspectives in Pittsburgh is not new. In 2019, Letrell Crittenden, a Tow Center for Digital Journalism fellow, published a report on Pittsburgh media's challenges with diversity and inclusion, "The Pittsburgh Problem: Race, Media and Everyday Life in the Steel City."

After interviewing 20 journalists who worked in Pittsburgh newsrooms, 16 of whom were of color, he found that although Pittsburgh is often cited as one of the country's most livable cities, most of its Black journalists felt they lacked opportunities for mentorship and acceptance inside and outside their newsrooms.

"When we're talking about building up diversity and inclusion inside of newsrooms or any other industry, that should also factor in the overall livability of the community where people are residing," Dr. Crittenden said.

Heinz Endowments-funded research published in 2011 and 2020 examined local news coverage of Black people in Pittsburgh. The studies found that the majority of the depictions of Black boys and men were related to sports and crime, and the overall

coverage of Black men, women and children remains low when compared to their white counterparts. The 2020 report "Portrayal and Perception II: Content Analysis of Pittsburgh Media Coverage of African Americans" also recommended that local media organizations learn from African American media outlets, such as the weekly New Pittsburgh Courier newspaper, about the different types of narratives that could be told about Black people.

"The fact that that representation doesn't exist means there are communities that are not going to have their stories told and certainly not with the kind of objectivity and, I think, with the same kind of voice that otherwise may be the case," said Stanley Thompson, the Endowments' senior program director for Education, one of the foundation's grantmaking areas that has supported efforts to expand such inclusion in media.

Among the initiatives that have received Endowments funding are various media projects for Black youth sponsored by the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation (PBMF), the primary professional support organization for journalists of color in the region. One of PBMF's most impactful efforts is the long-running Frank Bolden Urban Multimedia Workshop, a free, seven-day intensive program for high school students interested in news writing, broadcast journalism, photojournalism and digital media.

The Endowments' relationship with the federation over the years has been an example of philanthropic investment in journalism diversity and inclusion that is appreciated by Olga George and Chris Moore, co-directors of the workshop. Ms. George noted that the financial and in-kind support was a way of recognizing that Black youth need opportunities to make mistakes and grow, a privilege that is not often afforded to them.

"The foundation [support] gives us an opportunity to change that picture, not just in the kids' minds but also in the community's mind," Ms. George said. "And not just the Black community but the community at large."

Mr. Moore agreed.

"The funding has been wide and varied but all with that goal of increasing diversity," he said. "I think [our program] works because I can point to students all over the nation who are making the places where they work a little bit more diverse."

Alumni of the workshop have gone on to successful careers in Pittsburgh, such as WPXI-TV reporter Sarafina James, and across the country, such as Washington Post reporter Keith L. Alexander, who was part of the Post team that was awarded a 2016 Pulitzer Prize for documenting fatal police shootings of civilians across the nation.

"If you want communities, especially communities of color, to have the kind of asset-framing in the things that are being done, and you want to make sure that that story is told in a way that can be empowering and in a way that can also provide a different kind of narrative, then you'd want to create your own pipeline to that profession," Dr. Thompson said.

Endowments-funded research and other studies showing underrepresentation of Black journalists in newsrooms across the country also led the foundation to recently award \$320,000 to the social justice artist and activist collective IHood Media to launch BlackPittsburgh.com this year. The online media platform will focus on providing in-depth journalistic coverage of issues affecting Black communities in the Pittsburgh region.

BlackPittsburgh.com joins the ranks of Black-run media that have historically championed the issues of Black people across the country. Among them is the New Pittsburgh Courier, which traces its roots back to 1910 and was cited several times in the "Portrayal and Perception II" study for the breadth of issues it covered in the region's Black community.

Rob Taylor Jr., the Courier's managing editor, contends that having a Black-led publication with Black staff has enabled the newspaper to publish work that is "powerful, impactful, and really pushes the envelope." But he asserted that making any impact possible starts with supporting Black journalists.

"I always say that a real true sign of diversity is hiring more African Americans and creating more wealth for them and their families," Mr. Taylor said. "That's how you really create diversity. Because once you hire them, they can have their voices heard and they can help you make decisions that truly increase diversity. It just can't be an entirely white staff trying to cover African American issues."

Christiana Dillard is a freelance writer. Her last story for *h* was published in Issue 1, 2019, and looked at the #MeTooPA initiative that provides a hotline for survivors of sexual assault and harassment who need legal and counseling advice.



Photos courtesy of Pittsburgh Black Media Federation

One way that foundations like The Heinz Endowments have supported journalism has been by funding initiatives to help increase diversity and inclusion in the field. Among such programs is the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation's Frank Bolden Urban Multimedia Workshop, which has provided journalism training to Black high school students, like those in the top photo, for nearly four decades. Television and radio talk show host Chris Moore, center, is a co-founder and co-director of the workshop. Workshop volunteer instructors include career professionals like KDKA-TV photojournalist Aaron Sledge, bottom left.