

New Jersey **Sustainability** Reporting Hub

mainstreaming sustainability news

Project Summary

The New Jersey Sustainability Reporting Hub - a project of **CivicStory** - meets a growing need for reliable news that clarifies the local actions and practices needed to resolve our climate crises. By generating a critical volume of sustainability news, the NJSR Hub shifts news conversations to include present *and future* generations. Over 100 sustainability news stories are viewable on [NJSR Hub](#) -- stories that amplify citizen action to restore healthy ecosystems and help slow and ultimately reverse global atmospheric warming.

Double News Deficit

Current news coverage of sustainability does not match the scale of our global ecological crises. At the same time, New Jersey's highly distributed local governance structure comprising 565 cities and towns presents a challenge for gathering and disseminating local news and information.

Triple Social Benefit

The NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub provides 1) revenue incentives for local news organizations to cover the complex topic of sustainability; 2) career advancement and training for reporting fellows; and 3) essential public information that equips people for contributing to - rather than compromising - the life support systems upon which we all depend. The project leverages existing assets and helps steer existing news resources toward an under-represented but essential area of news reporting.

What We Do

- provide 6-month sustainability reporting fellowships for early to mid-career reporters, hosted by diverse news organizations in New Jersey
- pay reporting stipends of \$4,000 directly to newsrooms, to be allocated as needed
- select fellows through a competitive application and interview process with advice from journalists, science educators, and academic leaders;
- republish multi-media stories, first published by newsrooms, on www.SRHub.org

Reporting Topics

Stories cover key aspects of sustainability: food choice and waste reduction; storm water management; water, soil, and air quality remediation; renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions; transportation and purchasing choice; urban agriculture; green cleaning and natural lawn care; and other factors pertaining to just, thriving communities for future generations.

Press Citations and Reputation

The NJSR Hub project was cited as one of "[9 Great Business Ideas for Local News in 2019](#)" in a summary published by the Knight Foundation. The project received an [Excellence in Local Journalism - Collaboration award](#) from the Center for Cooperative Media (judged by an independent panel).

Orientation and Training - NJ Presidents Council Resolution

Fellowship orientation sessions have occurred at Montclair State University, Stockton University, and at Rutgers University-Newark. On October 21, 2019, the New Jersey Presidents Council - of higher education leaders - voted unanimously to endorse the NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub project. [Resolution – NJ Presidents Council](#)

Response from NJSR Hub Fellows and Editors

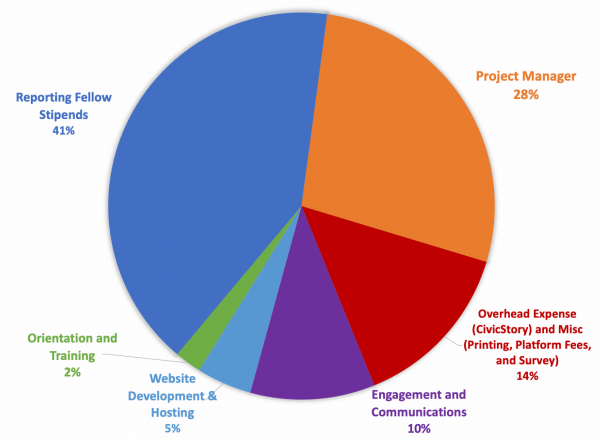
Survey responses from editors indicated a high perceived value of the fellowship, with 100% indicating interest in a future NJSR Fellowship. 75% 'strongly' agreed and 25% 'somewhat' agreed that the NJSR Hub Fellowship was beneficial to their newsroom. Editors saw the NJSR fellowship as an opportunity to increase coverage of sustainability and climate change, gain understanding of sustainability action in New Jersey, and increase overall reporting capacity on a cost recovery basis.

Expenditure and Support

Phase 1 of the NJSR Hub project was partially funded by a diverse group of donors, ranging from foundation sponsorship of \$10,000 to small individual donations. CivicStory has received project support from four NJ foundations: New Jersey Health Initiatives (NJHI); Victoria Foundation; Rita Allen Foundation; and The Leavens Foundation. Both the Center for Cooperative Media and Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education organizations contributed seed funding, and New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability assisted with a crowd-sourcing effort.

Summary of NJSR Hub Phase 1 Expense		
Reporting Fellow Stipends	24,000	41%
Project Manager	16,100	28%
Overhead Expense (CivicStory) and Misc (Printing, Platform Fees, and Survey)	8,300	14%
Engagement and Communications	6,100	10%
Website Development & Hosting	2,700	5%
Orientation and Training	1,300	2%
TOTAL	58,500	100%

NJSR HUB PHASE 1: EXPENSES



Career Advancement

NJSR Fellow Brianna Baker, currently reporting for Next City and formerly with Green Philly in Phase 1, begins full-time work in August 2020 as a Climate Solutions Report for **Grist**. She specifically cited her work as a NJ Sustainability Reporting Fellow as having led to this exciting professional opportunity.

TCNJ Partnership - Website Upgrades

Over the 2020 winter-spring semester, 10 combined teams of computer science and journalism students at The College of New Jersey analyzed the SRHub.org and CivicStory websites, and proposed key user enhancements and functionality upgrades. Several proposals are being implemented as part of a revenue and sponsorship strategy.

Growth Phase

Over the past 18 months, CivicStory, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) news site and the parent company, has focused on building and launching www.SRHub.org. The pilot and second phase fellowships have yielded over 100 news stories - financed by gifts from 113 individuals and small grants from foundations.

The NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub is poised for growth, as follows:

- Increase reporting stipends to \$4,500 to incentivize higher volume and pace of reporting
- Increase participating newsrooms to 8; involve Philadelphia or NYC news entities
- Invest in marketing and communications to increase reach and impact of SR Hub.
- Establish national sustainability news network with Orb Media, Ensia, YaleE360, and other INN members to share networks and content, and to position sustainability news as a matter of broad public interest.

Scaling Sustainability News

The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) - a robust umbrella organization serving 250 member nonprofit news sites in the US - notes growing interest in sustainability news among funders. Given the newly understood connections between health, sustainability, and racial and social justice due to COVID-19 and the shattering death of George Floyd; the presence "at home" of so many environmentally informed high school and college students in NJ communities; and the urgency of relating human needs to earth's resources, the impacts of sustainability news scaled out from New Jersey will be profound.

2-Year Plan

By July 2022, we project:

- 300+ sustainability news stories on www.SRHub.org - searchable by topic and locale
- 16 sustainability news hubs in other states, representing a tipping point of 30% of states
- increased output of sustainability news stories by mainstream news outlets that clarify citizens' key role as earth stewards, choice makers, and change makers
- A Sustainability News Network that shares content and metrics, and optimizes social impact of sustainability news stories locally, regionally, nationally and globally

NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub Advisory Board

Daniel Day - Co-chair - VP Operations; Princeton University Office of Communications

Kevin Englert - Co-chair - Marketing Analyst for Condé Nast

Jon Gertner - author, journalist; taught Princeton's Journalism course Spring 2020

Susan Haig - CivicStory Founder & Creative Director; Conductor, South Orange Symphony

Dr. Maurice Hall - Dean, School of the Arts & Communication, The College of NJ

Daniela Shebitz - PhD, College of Natural, Applied, and Health Sciences, School of Environmental and Sustainability Sciences, Kean University

Kimberley Tran, Princeton University ('23); CivicStory Development Intern



and New Jersey Sustainability Reporting Hub Team

THOMAS DALLESSIO, NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub Project Director, served as President, CEO, and Publisher of Next City.org (2015-18) and Executive Director of Leadership NJ (2007-11). A licensed professional planner with over three decades of experience in the fields of planning and public policy, and environmental sustainability, Tom founded the Center for Resilient Design at NJIT, where he also taught policy and planning. Tom received Masters degrees in City and Regional Planning and Political Science, and a BA in Political Science from Rutgers University. He recently taught a Land Use and Design course for graduate students at Rutgers University's Bloustein School (Spring 2020)

CASSANDRA ETIENNE, CivicStory Interim Editor, is a freelance reporter and video journalist based in New Jersey. Her multimedia and documentary projects reflect an interest in cultural reporting, and in covering social issues such as civil rights and community activism, as well as education and healthcare reforms. She received her MS from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

SUSAN HAIG, Initiator of the NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub, is Founder and Creative Director of CivicStory, and Conductor of the South Orange (NJ) Symphony Orchestra. During 25 years as a cultural activist connecting diverse audiences to arts and humanities, she served as music director of the Windsor (Canada) and South Dakota symphony orchestras, associate conductor of the Florida Orchestra, and assistant conductor of the New York City Opera. A Princeton University graduate in Music ('76), Haig received MM and DMA degrees in Conducting from Stony Brook University, and an honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities from the University of Windsor.

ANDY KRICUN, Science Advisor, is Senior Fellow at the US Water Alliance, and Managing Director of Moonshot Missions. He recently retired as CEO and Chief Engineer of the Camden County Municipal Utility Authority, where he managed an 80 million gallon/day water treatment plant. He graduated with honors from Princeton University with a degree in chemical engineering, holds a professional engineer's license in civil engineering and is a board-certified environmental engineer.

AMANDA MCCONNON, NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub Engagement Editor (PT), is a freelance writer and content strategist who specializes in helping sustainability and conservation organizations amplify their messages and reach key audiences. A graduate of Stockton University (Literature, summa cum laude) and the MFA program at New York University, she lives and works near the Jersey Shore.

LYNNE ROGERSON, Accountant (PT), served as Director of the IT Budget Office at Seton Hall University and recently retired after 26 years. Prior to Seton Hall, Lynne worked as an investment performance measurement specialist at PNC and as a consultant. Lynne received a BS from Bucknell University, an MBA from the University of Rochester, and an MS in Computer Science from Stevens Institute of Technology.

KIMBERLEY TRAN, CivicStory Development Intern, is a rising sophomore at Princeton University (Class of '23), originally from St. Louis, MO. Kim plans to major in molecular biology and is also passionate about environmental justice and fostering energy efficiency in all types of communities. Kim is a team leader for New Jersey Student Climate Advocates and Princeton Student Climate Initiative.

Advisory Board Co-Chair

DANIEL DAY, NJ Sustainability Reporting project Advisory Co-Chair, is director of operations for communications and public affairs at Princeton University. He joined the university as director of news and editorial services in 2012 from The Modesto Bee, where he was director of interactive media and managing editor. Day spent 23 years with The Associated Press, where he worked as a bureau chief in five cities. He has an M.A. degree in journalism from Marquette University and an A.B. degree in the classics from the College of the Holy Cross.