

The Pocantico Declaration:
Creating a Nonprofit Investigative News Network

July 1, 2009

Pocantico Conference Center, NY*

Resolved, that we, representatives of nonprofit news organizations, gather at a time when investigative reporting, so crucial to a functioning democracy, is under threat. There is an urgent need to nourish and sustain the emerging investigative journalism ecosystem to better serve the public.

Recognizing, that there are many forms of potential collaboration: Editorial, which at the least could be doing joint accountability journalism projects, publishing on the same day on multiple websites with other, multimedia partners, which would entail efficient, shared information, reporting and synchronous editing; Administrative, exchanging information about necessary organizational “back office” functions such as employee benefits, health care and general liability insurance, libel review and insurance, directors and officers insurance, etc., and perhaps even centralizing some of these functions to increase efficiencies; and Financial, at a minimum, exchanging development-related information and even jointly fundraising, at the most, pioneering new economic models to help to monetize the shared, combined content of the member organizations, in order to achieve a more sustainable journalism;

Realizing, that there are gradations of editorial, administrative and financial collaboration, and more broadly, that the current journalistic and economic milieu could hardly be more complex; and that, as this new, dynamic nonprofit investigative journalism continues to evolve in unprecedented ways, so, too, will its collective sensibilities become more clear. Thus, the number of interested investigative news publishers will very likely increase, which means that basic shared goals and news values must be established.

Therefore, with a full appreciation of both the complexities and the opportunities to be achieved by more formalized collaboration, the nonprofit news publishers at Pocantico hereby declare that preparations should be immediately made to form a collaboration, the Investigative News Network (working title). Its mission is very simple: **to aid and abet, in every conceivable way, individually and collectively, the work and public reach of its member news organizations, including, to the fullest extent possible, their administrative, editorial and financial wellbeing. And, more broadly, to foster the highest quality investigative journalism, and to hold those in power accountable, at the local, national and international levels.**

A Steering Committee is hereby formed to oversee this new venture, and it will be comprised of: Bill Buzenberg, executive director of the Center for Public Integrity; Sandy Close, executive director of the Pacific News Service; Sheila Coronel, director of the Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at Columbia University; Margaret Engel, executive director of the Alicia Patterson Journalism Foundation; Laura Frank, co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Investigative News Network; Margaret Wolf Freivogel, founding editor of the St. Louis Beacon; Brant Houston, Knight Chair professor in Investigative and Enterprise Reporting at the University of Illinois; Joel Kramer, CEO and Editor of MinnPost; Charles Lewis, founding executive editor of the Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University; Scott Lewis, CEO of voiceofsandiego.org; and Robert Rosenthal, executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting. The Committee may decide to add one or two additional members, as needed. Initially, it will seek and obtain sufficient grant funding to develop a plan for sustaining and strengthening nonprofit investigative journalism.

The Committee will begin immediately to spearhead the fundraising work for a planning grant and a possible grant for continued editorial project collaboration, including doing major investigative projects, and foster greater administrative and related, “back office” organizational efficiencies. In addition, the Committee will design and construct an Investigative News Network website, and will take full advantage of other emerging technologies to coordinate, curate and showcase the best content of the Network member publishers and its growing, searchable “long tail” archive. The committee is also expected to put forward recommendations about the Network’s news standards and practices to be followed by all members, and will define such difficult issues as the criteria for Network membership and whether they have been met. The initial fiscal agent for any Network funding and disbursements will be the Center for Public Integrity, the fiscal agent for the Pocantico conference, until such time as the network is able to be its own fiscal agent.

Overall, the Steering Committee will, in general, implement the declaration, oversee deliverables, and do whatever is necessary to ensure greater investigative reporting and non-editorial, operational collaboration between Network member organizations. At this juncture, the Steering Committee will be the interim governing body for the network, until such time as a new nonprofit corporation may be formed with its own Board of Directors.

What is clear in this Pocantico Declaration is that we have hereby established, for the first time ever, an Investigative News Network of nonprofit news publishers throughout the United States of America.

**This report is based on materials prepared for these meetings at Pocantico and the discussions that took place there and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, its trustees, or its staff.*

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() Nonprofit news publishers in attendance, in alphabetical order, include:**

Joe Bergantino, New England Center for Investigative Reporting
Bill Buzenberg, Center for Public Integrity
Sandy Close, Pacific News Service
Sheila Coronel, Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism
Brian Duffy, National Public Radio
Margaret Engel, Alicia Patterson Journalism Foundation
Laura Frank, Rocky Mountain Investigative News Network
Louis Freedberg, Center for Investigative Reporting
Margaret Freivogel, St. Louis Beacon
Florence Graves, Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism
Andy Hall, Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism
Lorie Hearn, Watchdog Institute
Mark Horvit, National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting (IRE)
Brant Houston, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Joel Kramer, MinnPost
Daniel Lathrop, Investigate West
Charles Lewis, Investigative Reporting Workshop
Scott Lewis, voiceofsandiego.org
Bob Moser, The Texas Observer
Cherilyn Parsons, Center for Investigative Reporting
Robert Rosenthal, Center for Investigative Reporting
Jon Sawyer, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting
Stephen Segaller, WNET.ORG
Trent Seibert, Texas Watchdog
Stephen Smith, American RadioWorks
Gordon Witkin, Center for Public Integrity
Melinda Wittstock, Capitol News Connection

Also attending:

Marcus Baram, Huffington Post
Gene Gibbons, Stateline.org
Sarah Laskow, Center for Public Integrity
Dunstan McNichol, NJSpotlight.com
Ellen McPeake, Center for Public Integrity
Rick Rodriguez, Arizona State University
Ricardo Sandoval, Sacramento Bee

Observers:

Leonard Downie, Jr., Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Naomi Jackson, Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Ben Shute, Rockefeller Brothers Fund
David Westfall, USC Annenberg