Robert R. McCormick Foundation Funds Community-Based Approaches to News Literacy

"Why News Matters" Grants Encourage Citizen Engagement

CHICAGO, October 4, 2012 — Recognizing the need to help educate the next generation of news consumers, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation announced plans for a three-year, $6 million initiative, called “Why News Matters,” to expand innovative approaches to improving news literacy. The initial $1 million of these grants were announced today by Foundation CEO David Hiller at the City Club of Chicago. In addition, the Foundation is continuing to provide funding for initiatives supporting youth journalism, quality reporting and protection of press freedoms. The Foundation announced nearly $4 million in total journalism grants.

With today’s explosion of media content, news consumers of all ages are often overwhelmed with information. A June 2012 study of American youth (“Participatory Politics: New Media and Youth Political Action," by Cathy Cohen and Joseph Kahne) found that 84% of respondents say they are bombarded with information and “would benefit from learning more about how to gauge what news is trustworthy.” Adults often face a similar dilemma. Why News Matters addresses the strong need for practical skills for evaluating this onslaught of information. The goal is to increase the level of informed civic engagement in the Chicago area.

“What News Matters’ grantees will bring an entrepreneurial and collaborative spirit as we expand the reach and impact of news literacy,” said David Hiller, President and CEO, Robert R. McCormick Foundation. “Together, we can foster a healthy, 21st Century democracy grounded in a free press and informed, active citizenry. By harnessing our community’s ideas and commitment, Chicago can become a model city for civic engagement.”

In the initial round of this three-year, $6 million Why News Matters program, the Foundation awarded more than $1 million in grants to 11 organizations to enhance news literacy skills and programs in Chicago. The grants included $200,000 to City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) to expand news and information literacy into various academic disciplines across all seven CCC campuses. Another $100,000 was granted to the Alternative Schools Network for a two-year news literacy initiative across 10 charter high schools that serve students who dropped out and later returned to school. In addition, the Foundation granted $120,000 to DePaul University’s Latino Media and Communications initiative for the expansion of hands-on news literacy programming to students at 15 Latino-dominant Chicag0-area high schools.

The Foundation also continues to invest in youth media. The Foundation has awarded a two-year $375,000 grant to Columbia College Chicago for the Columbia LINKS youth journalism program. LINKS fills the need for a citywide teen news initiative, bringing students together from a variety of high schools and neighborhoods to partner on reporting projects, for one-on-one mentoring and exposure to adult role models.

In the area of quality news content, the Foundation invests in specialized training for journalists covering communities and military/national security issues. For example, the Foundation awarded a two-year $500,000 grant to the Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism to sustain the Medill Watchdog Initiative, which focuses on government accountability in the Chicago area.
With its focus on press freedoms, the Foundation is supporting efforts to improve government transparency and access to public information. The Foundation granted $200,000 over two years to the Illinois First Amendment Center’s for its education and community outreach efforts in news literacy and the five freedoms of the First Amendment.

“Quality content and press freedoms are essential components in building news literacy,” said Clark Bell, the Foundation’s Journalism program director.

The Journalism Program has an annual grantmaking budget of $5.5 million. The program has invested more than $106 million in journalism since its founding in 1993.

The full list of 2012 approved grants includes:

**Grants Supporting “Why News Matters” Initiative**

1. **Alternative Schools Network**, Chicago, IL  
   $100,000 over two years  
   *For a two-year news literacy initiative in a network of charter high schools*

2. **City Colleges of Chicago**, Chicago, IL  
   $200,000 over two years  
   *For support of an intergenerational news and information literacy curriculum*

3. **DePaul University**, Chicago, IL  
   $120,000 over two years  
   *For news literacy programming designed for high schools in the Latino community*

4. **Erie Neighborhood House**, Chicago, IL  
   $60,000 over two years  
   *To develop an after-school news literacy program for the Latino community*

5. **The Futuro Media Group**, New York, NY  
   $60,000  
   *For a local public forum and programs on news literacy targeting Latino audiences*

6. **Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana**, Chicago, IL  
   $100,000  
   *To support experiential, hands-on news literacy workshops for Chicago youth ages 9-13*

7. **Illinois Humanities Council**, Chicago, IL  
   $25,000  
   *For neighborhood discussions on current affairs/news literacy*

8. **Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Chicago**, Chicago, IL  
   $100,000  
   *To develop and implement news literacy training in Chicago neighborhoods*

9. **Newspaper in Education Foundation (Chicago Tribune’s “Mash”),** Chicago, IL  
   $150,000 over two years  
   *To include news literacy activities in youth journalism programming*

10. **Northwestern University – Medill School of Journalism**, Evanston, IL  
    $30,000  
    *For research on news habits*
11. **Project Exploration**, Chicago, IL  
    $70,000 over two years  
    *For after-school program building news literacy into science instruction*

**TOTAL - $ 1,015,000**

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### Grants Supporting Youth Journalism

12. **Columbia College**, Chicago, IL  
    $375,000 over two years  
    *For the Columbia LINKS youth journalism program and town halls on news literacy*

13. **Community Television Network (CTVN)**, Chicago, Illinois  
    $120,000 over two years  
    *For enhancing youth journalism training with news literacy curriculum*

14. **Free Spirit Media NFP**, Chicago, IL  
    $225,000 over two years  
    *To expand broadcast journalism programs and youth media field building*

15. **Loyola University**, Chicago IL  
    $50,000  
    *For the Journalism/News Literacy program at Senn High School*

16. **National Museum of Mexican Art (Radio Arte)**, Chicago IL  
    $45,000  
    *For “Difusion Media” youth journalism programming*

17. **Street-Level Youth Media**, Chicago, IL  
    $150,000 over two years  
    *For support of a multimedia journalism program and online news literacy hub*

18. **True Star Foundation Inc.**, Chicago, IL  
    $150,000 over two years  
    *For youth journalism and news literacy training and marketing campaign*

19. **We the People Media**, Chicago, IL  
    $120,000 over two years  
    *For support of a Chicago youth journalism training program*

20. **Young Chicago Authors**, Chicago, IL  
    $65,000  
    *For support of news literacy training and the launch of a new journalism project*

**TOTAL - $ 1,300,000**

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### Grants Supporting Press Freedoms

21. **Illinois First Amendment Center (Illinois Press Foundation)**, Springfield, IL  
    $200,000 over two years
For a First Amendment educational program, student journalism camps and a community news literacy outreach initiative

22. **Society of Environmental Journalists**, Jenkintown, PA
   $100,000 over two years
   *For support of FOIA training for environmental journalists*

**TOTAL - $300,000**

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**Grants Supporting Quality Journalism**

23. **Aspen Institute**, Aspen, CO
   $100,000
   *For continued support of the Aspen Security Forum*

24. **Community Media Workshop**, Chicago, IL
   $220,000 over two years
   *For news literacy workshops, ethnic media training and mini-grants*

25. **Community Renewal Society**, Chicago, IL
   $200,000 over two years
   *For general support of The Chicago Reporter’s work in investigative news and community engagement*

26. **Kansas University Endowment**, Lawrence, KS
   $45,000
   *For military-media education training program*

27. **The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education**, Oakland, CA
   $35,000
   *For audience research and Richard Prince’s column on diversity in journalism*

28. **New America Media** *(Pacific News Service)*, San Francisco, CA
   $150,000 over two years
   *For community and ethnic media work nationally*

29. **Northwestern University – Medill School of Journalism**, Evanston, IL
   $500,000 over two years
   *For continued support of the Medill Watchdog Initiative*

**TOTAL - $1,250,000**

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**GRAND TOTAL - $3,865,000**

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**About the Robert R. McCormick Foundation**
The Robert R. McCormick Foundation is committed to fostering communities of educated, informed and engaged citizens. Through philanthropic programs, Cantigny Park and museums, the Foundation helps develop citizen leaders and works to make life better in our communities. The Foundation was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. The
Robert R. McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest foundations, with more than $1 billion in assets. To learn more, visit McCormickFoundation.org, follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/McCormick_Fdn, or like us on Facebook at facebook.com/McCormickFoundation.