

**Guns & America:**

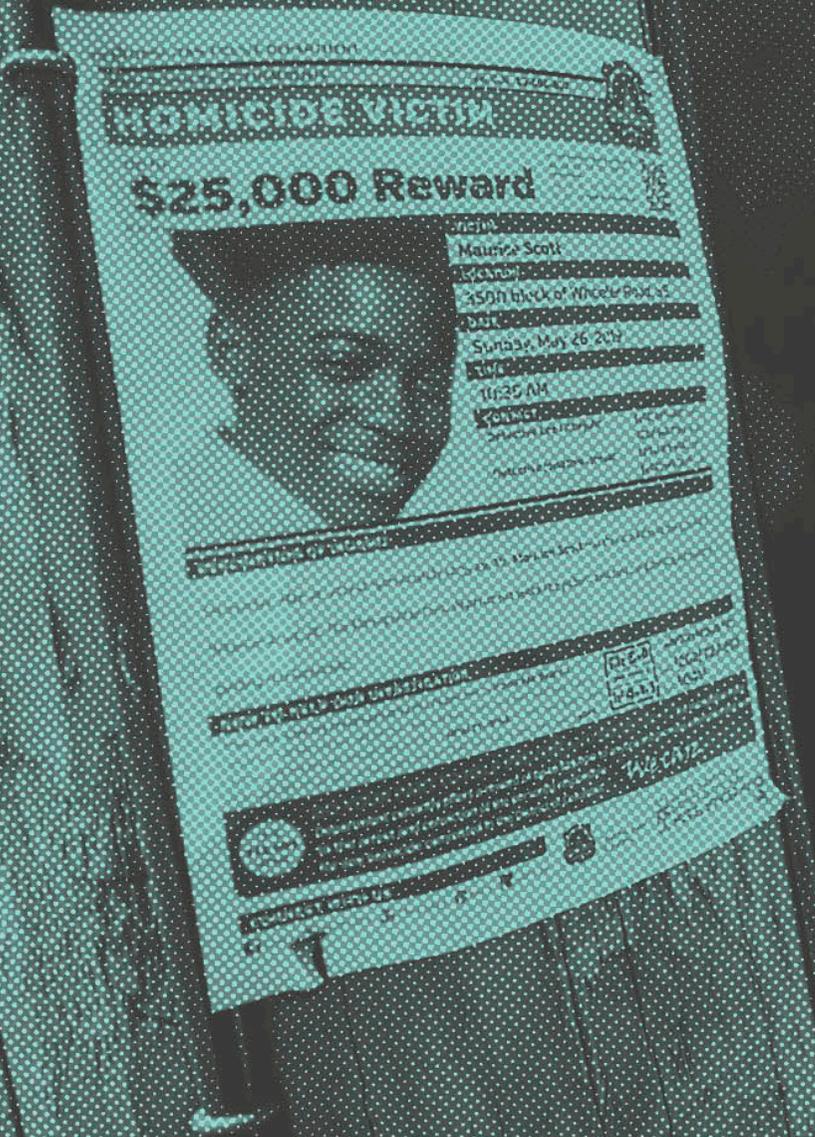
**Lessons learned**

**from the collaborative**

**NOVEMBER 2020**

**WAMU**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**



**Guns & America was supported by a grant from The Kendeda Fund. We are deeply grateful for its support. The Kendeda Fund invests in transformative leaders and ideas. Learn more at [kendedafund.org](https://kendedafund.org).**

**We want to recognize Andi McDaniel and JJ Yore for believing in the importance of this topic and bringing the project to life.**

**Thanks also to the Guns & America lead team, reporting fellows and partner stations, as well as to the team at 8 Bridges Workshop.**



## FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR

Columbine. Sandy Hook. Parkland. Every few months, it seems, the media focuses on the latest horrific mass shooting. Tragedies, certainly. But this single-minded focus distorts the picture of how guns impact the lives of Americans.

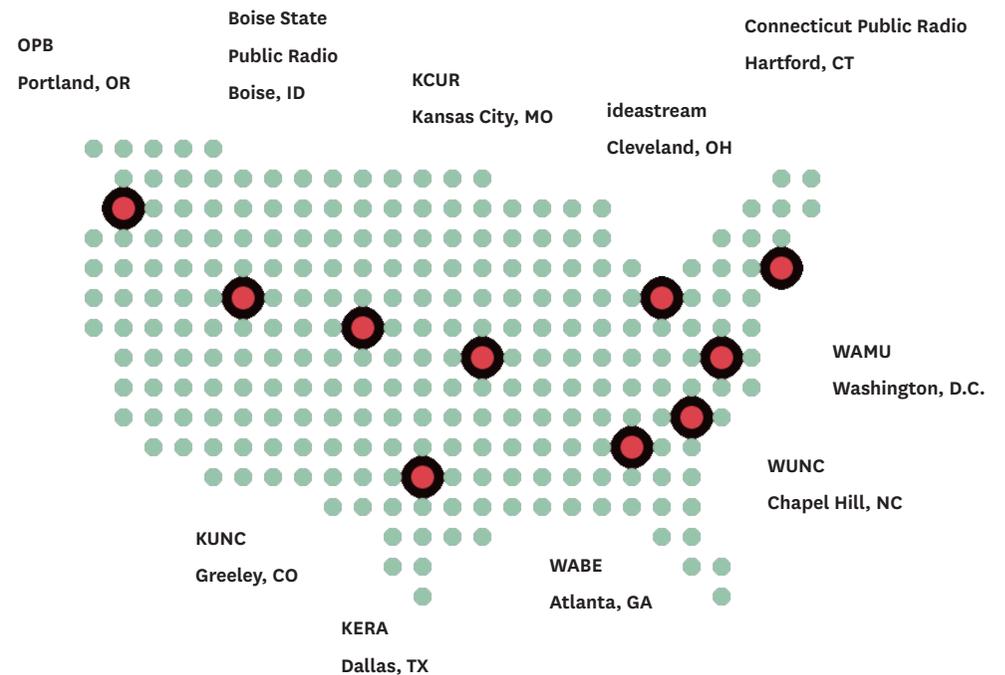
That's why we launched Guns & America, a two-year collaborative reporting project with 10 public media partners. With generous support from The Kendeda Fund, we created Guns & America to tell the full story — to use the power of local reporting to bring context, nuance, and a human face to some of the most complex and divisive topics of our day. We believed that by drawing coverage from multiple stations in diverse geographies, the project would move audiences in ways that go beyond a single perspective or media provider, and that our partner public media stations could serve their communities better through this approach.

Three years later, we've learned a lot about how to work together to produce journalism with impact, and we're firm believers in the power of collaboration. Public media in particular can leverage the power of editorial collaboration to do great things and better serve the public.

We have collected some of our most important recommendations, catalogued what worked well and what was challenging, and listed the important questions you'll want to answer before embarking on ambitious plans of your own. We have also included a deep dive on the formation and structure of Guns & America as a case study in collaboration.

We hope you can use this playbook to double-down on some of our successful strategies and avoid some of the roadblocks that inevitably await. And, ultimately, we hope that you use it to multiply the power of your journalism.

Jeremy Bernfeld  
Director, Guns & America  
Director of Collaborative Reporting, WAMU 88.5



## Elements of Guns & America

Reporting focused on guns and gun culture in American life

Ten public media newsrooms across the U.S.

A six-member lead team based at WAMU including four editors, a data journalist, and a fellowship manager

The Audion Fellowship Program, intended to place ten demographically diverse reporting fellows in participating stations and to provide them with intensive professional development opportunities

A developmental evaluation process working in partnership with program implementation

## INTRODUCTION

**G**uns & America was a national journalism collaborative focused on the multi-faceted roles of guns in American life. Each of ten participating public radio stations received funding to hire a reporting fellow to report gun-related stories from their local communities. A six-member editorial and project management team, based at WAMU in Washington, D.C., led the collaborative's coverage, created professional development opportunities for the reporting fellows, and helped stations share stories with each other, with other public radio programs and outlets, and with news partners outside public broadcasting. The Kendeda Fund granted \$5.3 million over two and a half years as the collaborative's sole philanthropic support.

The collaboration was an ambitious undertaking, working over a relatively compressed time period. The project's design meant that leaders were tasked with succeeding across multiple objectives: the project aimed to employ a mid-career, diverse cohort of reporters and to provide them with audio and digital production experience they may not have had previously; local-to-local content sharing systems for both audio and digital content had to be built from scratch; and the project timeline called for rapid scaling-up of distinctive coverage of challenging subject matter.

Despite these challenges, Guns & America was able to build new connections across public media partners, produce compelling content with demonstrated impact, and provide journalism and professional development experience that

advanced the careers of reporting fellows. The project produced more than 500 stories, which reached millions of radio listeners on local and national airwaves, and more than a million internet users.

Collaborative reporting projects like Guns & America have the potential to change how journalism is created and shared. Most practically, in the retrenchment taking place across local journalism outlets, collaborations can be a cost effective tool for deep, single-topic reporting across multiple outlets and geographies. The benefits of collaboration extend to shared tracking systems, training opportunities, and editorial resources.

More importantly, as public media journalism examines the importance of giving greater access to voices not traditionally heard in public discourse, such collaboratives can be structured to give voice to diverse communities, geographies, and neighborhoods, and to lift up these voices to wider audiences. Guns & America was created to accomplish these deeper goals. This playbook shares what was learned with the goal of strengthening future similar efforts.

## WHY COLLABORATION?

As with any complex and ambitious endeavor, the Guns & America collaborative resulted in many positives and encountered multiple challenges. Nonetheless, the value of bringing together different voices, experiences, stations, and geographies in the coverage of one topic resulted in a body of work that was varied and compelling.

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### Benefits of the collaboration

Shared resources among newsrooms for a topic that warranted and benefited from dedicated reporting

Multiple entry points to the subject matter with ten reporters' work

A large geographic footprint, with increased reach

Opportunities for inter-station or multi-reporter collaboration

Ability for the network and its tools and processes to be efficiently re-deployed to cover the pandemic and other large national stories with local implications

The project's good work reached a much larger audience

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE PROJECT DESIGN

- Develop and communicate written goals and requirements for the project among the grantor, the project leadership, the participating reporters, and the participating newsrooms. Make sure partner newsrooms know what they're getting and what they're committing to, so that everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities. Determine and agree on the consequences of failing to comply with project goals and policies.
- Agree on the “deal breakers” for the selection of newsroom partners, and be willing to continue the partner search as long as needed to find the right ones.
- Communicate constantly; find the communication methods that work best for your partners and use them.
- Build the collaboration with a strong lead partner that has the human and financial resources to tackle a challenging project. The lead partner should understand that it is taking on significant responsibility and will often need to sublimate its own interests for the good of the project.
- Hire project leadership that is devoted solely to the collaboration's success and appropriately trained to lead the editorial mission and inclusion goals.
- Design the project with an adequate timeline for recruitment, onboarding, and professional development of reporters and the core leadership team; for developing content-sharing practices and systems; and for learning, reflection, and continuous improvement.
- Focus on quality and depth of reporting rather than quantity of stories produced.
- Allow flexibility for newsrooms and reporters to step away from dedicated topic coverage to respond to breaking news and changed circumstances.



### Gunshots And Lockdowns: When Nearby Gun Violence Interrupts The School Day

by Luis Melgar, Alana Wise, and  
Tyrone Turner

Dozens of schools in Washington, D.C., experienced gunshots within 1000 feet of campus during the school day in the 2016–2017 school year. (Photo: Tyrone Turner / WAMU)

At its best, the Guns & America collaboration amplified voices that are not often heard in reporting on guns and gun culture, and lifted up these stories to offer new perspectives on the role of guns in American life. Guns & America brought the broadly defined topic of guns to the community level, with stories that explored the ways guns affect daily life—far beyond national headlines.

Some of the project’s top stories are highlighted in this report. They point to the value of such journalism collaboratives—bringing together a wider range of voices, geographies, and audiences; encouraging understanding among politically and demographically diverse publics; and seeking solutions to the challenges affecting communities today.

## WHAT WENT WELL?

- 1 Reporting resources—in dollars and in editorial support—were significant for both the participating stations and for the reporting fellows.

Partner stations appreciated the significant resources that the Guns & America collaboration provided to their newsrooms. The project provided for 100 percent of salary and benefits for each reporter, and paid for training, group professional development activities, mentorship, travel, and mini-grants to support reporters’ enrollment in individual training opportunities. The WAMU-based lead team provided editorial direction and worked to deepen reporters’ research capabilities and data skills.

Reporting fellows appreciated professional development opportunities that helped bolster their journalism and sto-

rytelling abilities, not only in audio but for social and digital platforms. The mentorship program allowed fellows to seek advice from experienced journalists on topics from framing of stories to editorial focus and recording techniques and tools. Fellows also reported that they gained insight from mentors on newsroom dynamics, professional career development, self advocacy, and balancing work and personal life.

2

**The grantor supported the expenses related to planning and research—for both the topic and the project structure—before implementation.**

An R&D team conducted research into the topic of guns and gun culture in America and an initial environmental scan of potential partners and their previous coverage of the topic in anticipation of the final project design. Pre-project activities showed that local public media newsrooms were not reporting on guns and gun culture often or deeply. This work helped document the potential value of the collaboration, its most promising areas of editorial focus, and the gaps between newsrooms' diversity aspirations and the current demographics of their editorial teams. This depth of planning set the project up to fill unique needs.

3

**The subject matter was sufficiently broad and rich to warrant the project's ambition, and lent itself to inclusion of a breadth of viewpoints, lived experiences, and "ways in" to challenging subject matter.**

Because the topic of guns and gun culture in America is complex and divisive, it provided particularly rich and varied entry points for both reporters and for audiences. From Second Amendment rights to guns and suicide; from the joy of hunting



### **Shattered: A First-hand Look At Life After Being Shot**

by Alana Wise and Tyrone Turner

Of the estimated 300 people in the United States who are shot on an average day, about 200 survive. But many of them do so with devastating physical and emotional scars that last a lifetime. (Photo: Tyrone Turner / WAMU)



FLICKR / M&R GLASGOW

to the politics of concealed carry; from domestic violence to gun ownership, the topic of guns and gun culture offered many “ways in” that provided a wide range of reporter and listener experiences, debates, interests, and approaches.

**4** As participants in local newsrooms, Guns & America reporting fellows brought new ideas and perspectives into play across all news stories, multiplying impact.

The Audion Fellowships were intended, in part, to hire, train and offer support to journalists of color. Among stations that hired reporters of color, some reported reaping significant benefits from having these fellows within their newsrooms. They noted the importance of fellows questioning entrenched newsroom practices; adding new perspectives to editorial meetings; and changing the personnel dynamics of the newsroom for the better. Because fellows had significant diversity, experience and interests among their ranks, the lead editors and local newsrooms were able to benefit from widely different insights and lived experiences, resulting in richer, more nuanced coverage of the topic.

Many fellows, however, reported a lack of support in their newsrooms, which were often not diverse or inclusive spaces. As detailed later, the project—and all of public media—need to do much more.

**5** Local-to-local content sharing worked: many stations aired nearly all of the ten reporters’ coverage, no matter its originating newsroom.

Stations appreciated the flexibility to choose how best to use Guns & America stories and features: sharing was not a requirement of the project. However, the majority of the ten

partner stations aired nearly all of the stories produced by the collaboration. Some stations aired stories consistently on specific days and times, or regularly within morning or afternoon news magazines. Many stations posted Guns & America stories on their social media channels and websites. The various entry points of the guns and gun violence coverage resulted in stations adapting and airing stories to best suit their schedules, audiences, social media capabilities, and editorial approaches.

**6** Communication between the lead team in D.C. and participating stations was noted as strong, which is an important requirement for a successful collaboration.

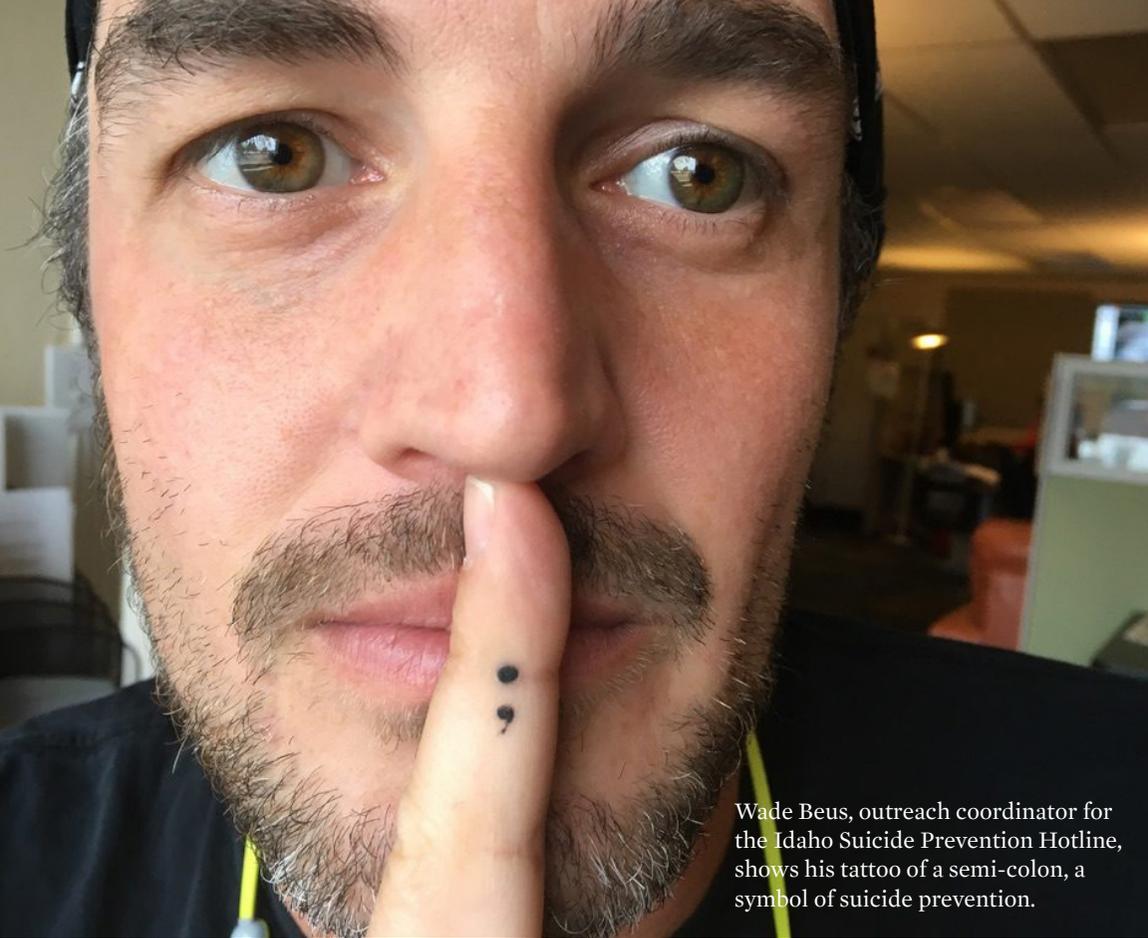
Despite the complexity of managing a journalism collaboration spanning ten newsrooms across multiple time zones, communication between the lead team and partner stations was noted as strong. Station editors and the lead editor touched base monthly; fellows communicated with the lead team via email, in person, and via telephone as necessary; and in-person meetings (before the dawn of COVID-19) provided open and frequent access among fellows and the collaboration lead team. The project's lead editor communicated weekly with all collaboration personnel in a detailed email that highlighted new stories and works-in-progress. This missive also included updates on fellows' news and detailed any items that could affect ongoing production. An active Slack channel also helped with day-to-day communications among participants.

That said, managing a distributed project is extremely difficult. Guns & America sought to manage reporting fellows' time by allowing partner stations to use 20 percent of their time for non-G&A work. That worked in some cases and muddied the water in others. Make clear ahead of time who is manag-



**For One Colorado Rancher, An AR-15 Is A Tool To Protect His Herd**  
by Leigh Paterson

Of the dozens of firearms Scott Shepherd owns, his favorite is his AR-15. He also believes that there should be some restrictions on guns to reduce gun violence. (Photo: Leigh Paterson / KUNC)



Wade Beus, outreach coordinator for the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline, shows his tattoo of a semi-colon, a symbol of suicide prevention.

### **The Majority Of U.S. Deaths Are Suicides, But A New Poll Suggests Few Americans Know It**

by Heath Druzin

Mass shootings may grab the headlines, but suicides are by far the leading category of gun death in America. However, most Americans don't know this, according to a [national poll](#) from APM Research Lab, Call To Mind, and Guns & America. (Photo: Heath Druzin / Boise State Public Radio)

ing your reporter's time, who is editing their work, and who is assigning them stories. Agree with partners and reporters what each reporter's responsibilities are — what they owe the project and what they owe their partner station. Be flexible in times of breaking news, but also be clear about the guidelines.

**7** Coverage resulted in memorable storytelling that partner stations could share with wider audiences nationwide, and that earned recognition through awards from major media organizations.

Guns & America reporting won several awards and received recognition for its multimedia work. For example, *Shattered*, a series exploring life after being shot, won second place national awards from the Public Media Journalists' Association and the Reynolds Journalism Institute Picture of the Year competition. Reporting fellows and lead team members appeared on various national media outlets to discuss their work, including *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *1A*, *The Takeaway*, *Slate's Trumpcast* and *What Next*, and the *NPR Politics* podcast. MSNBC, PBS Newshour, and CNN interviewed reporting fellow Jonathan Levinson on his breaking news reporting on the unrest in Portland, Oregon. Partner stations also invited reporting fellows from other partner stations and members of the lead team to participate in their talk shows.

**8** The structure of the G&A program allowed flexibility in deploying reporters once the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the U.S., adding editorial resources at a crucial time.

As the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic began to unfold in the United States, the Guns & America collaboration's reach and

structure provided a flexible infrastructure when public media stations needed to pivot to pandemic coverage. In consultation with the project's funder, the collaboration was able to redirect its established editorial resources toward bolstering local newsrooms' coverage of the pandemic.

Some reporters put aside their guns focus and remained completely redeployed for months to cover the local impact of the coronavirus, while Guns & America's network as a whole continued to produce and share content on stories at the intersection of the pandemic and guns. The rapid deployment of the project's personnel was made easier by established content-sharing mechanisms. Other factors that helped in this emergency included: established remote communications tools, reporters already embedded in local newsrooms, the team's experience in tackling a difficult topic, and an active relationship with an engaged funder.

## WHAT TOOK LONGER THAN EXPECTED AND MERITS NEW APPROACHES?

1

**Align goals with program structure and agree on a tight focus for the collaboration: the project's multiple goals, to recruit and train diverse new reporters for the public radio system, while simultaneously seeking to cover a complex and divisive subject and meeting quantitative goals for numbers of stories produced, proved challenging.**

The Guns & America collaboration was ambitious. It encompassed several objectives:

### Factors that contributed to Guns & America's successes

The topic was of existing mutual interest to the lead station, potential partner stations, and the funding partner.

A period of planning and research documented public radio's relatively meager coverage of the topic at the local level.

Research identified promising sub-themes within the more general topic of guns and gun culture that helped guide editorial planning.

Station research identified strong local candidates for newsroom collaboration.

Diversity achieved in hiring benefitted from outside consulting support and the funds provided for unusually robust outreach efforts.

The project established metrics for tracking success and impact.

The grantor provided sufficient funding to engage external learning and evaluation partners.



Federal officers confront people protesting racism and police violence.

### **Federal Law Enforcement Use Unmarked Vehicles To Grab Protesters Off Portland Streets**

by Jonathan Levinson

Federal law enforcement officers have been using unmarked vehicles to drive around downtown Portland and detain protesters since July. Personal accounts and multiple videos posted online show the officers driving up to people, detaining individuals with no explanation of why they are being arrested, and driving off.

(Photo: Jonathan Levinson / OPB)

- Recruitment and training of a diverse cohort of early- to mid-career career journalists;
- Development of nuanced coverage of a divisive and politically fraught topic;
- Quantitative production goals that included the target for the number of stories the collaborative would produce;
- Expectation for multimedia content;
- Deep involvement from ten public media partners; and
- Engagement with the public that could also influence public policy.

The project struggled to focus successfully on all of these multiple and often competing goals. Further, it was challenging to measure impact and success, with so many targets for outcomes. Collaboratives should set realistic goals from the start, and be willing to be forthright in conversations with grantors, partners, and project colleagues to ensure that realistic expectations are established.

2

**Walk the walk: diversity goals need focused attention and the entire collaborative's commitment to be successful.**

The Audion Fellowships were intended to bring a diverse new cohort of talented reporters, including journalists of color, into public radio newsrooms, historically a white, privileged, and inequitable space. While this is without question a worthy goal, the day-to-day work of setting an example of greater equity, diversity, and inclusion proved to be a difficult mission to take on successfully among the project's many other requirements and priorities: it needed explicit focus. These are some of the lessons we learned: If you're serious about using your collaboration to build a better, more inclusive, more equitable public media, dedicate focus and

resources to a multi-pronged approach that provides support for everyone involved in the project, not just in the selection and hiring of the participants, but throughout the process. Project leadership needs to be trained specifically to support reporters of color working in largely not-inclusive spaces and to promote a nuanced understanding of race and a focus on inequality a hallmark of editorial work. Ensure project leadership is reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of the public you want to recruit and serve. Build diverse, inclusive support networks for the reporters involved and provide professional development opportunities focused specifically on connecting with other journalists of color. Be prepared for and encourage difficult conversations around race – not only in issues pertaining to coverage, but also about newsroom culture and representation in editorial decision-making.

Partner stations should be required to provide inclusion training in their newsrooms and to have HR structures in place to address issues quickly and forcefully as they arise. They should be required to invest in onboarding that ensures all new hires have the foundational skills they need to succeed and that they understand the newsroom protocols and resources available to them.

Making public media a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive space is the responsibility of every leader. Use your collaboration to support that mission by hiring leaders who make this work a priority and have the experience to lead change.

**3** **One size does not fit all: fellows of varying backgrounds and experiences require tailored approaches to development and training.**

The cohort of reporting fellows came to the project from different backgrounds and with different levels of professional

## Recommendations for collaboration planning

Develop and communicate expectations of partners and reporters early on

Gather and deploy appropriate resources and people to facilitate team conversations about race, class, and other difference so that reporting is broadened and enriched, and so that all team members are able to contribute to their fullest

If you're tackling difficult subject matter, make provisions for the mental health and well-being of your staff

Establish the pathways for content-sharing and provide station and reporter training

Develop and share project goals around quantitative and qualitative metrics you will track, how you will do so, and how partners are expected to help

Make transparent efforts to retain fellows and editors, but plan for their possible early departure into great new positions elsewhere

If possible, add a managing producer or equivalent to the collaboration who has journalism experience and can lead administrative and human resources aspects of the collaboration including station relations, intra-project communication, funder liaison, conflict resolution, and attentiveness to diversity and inclusion mandates



### **Three Types of Loss**

by Ryan Lindsay

The Three Types of Loss series examines the different types of loss three families experienced following the death of Karlonzo Taylor and wounding of James Harris in a December 2018 shooting in Hartford, Connecticut. The alleged shooter, Bill Moore, is incarcerated. (Photo: Ryan Lindsay / Connecticut Public Radio)

experience. For example, some had significant journalism experience, while others came directly from college programs. Some were more open to trainings than others, as well. This wide variation in experiences resulted in fellows emerging from cohort trainings and seminars with different reactions to their usefulness to their daily reporting work. Some fellows found the mentorship relationships most helpful, while others did not. It is challenging to tailor cohort training and professional development at the level of an individual. Nonetheless, the project's leaders learned that this kind of tailoring is necessary. One size will not fit all.

- 4** In a multi-newsroom collaborative, make sure you clearly establish to whom project reporters are accountable and who is responsible for personnel management.

For Guns & America, reporters were hired, supervised, and paid by local newsroom partners, using grant funds provided by the project. Supervisors were lead editors in these local newsrooms. These local supervisors managed aspects of employment such as Personal Time Off and vacation scheduling, deployment of the reporter within the project's local/national time split, and expectations around reporters' productivity. However, reporters' story-pitching, research, and editing were directed by the central editorial team at WAMU.

In instances where things proceeded smoothly, the parties communicated effectively and made this arrangement work well. However, when conflict arose, challenges multiplied. In some cases, personnel conflicts were unnecessarily amplified because of the question of "who is in charge" and the difficulty of coming to agreement around consequences.

All parties involved should know that working in a collaborative is different from working in a solo newsroom. It requires communication. Ensuring that reporters, editors, and partners all understand plans and deadlines is everyone's responsibility. Lead staff should work tirelessly to ensure that reporters don't feel torn between bosses. Underlying grant agreements should spell out who is responsible and include a plan to mediate when boundaries are unclear.

**5** **Tackle content sharing early: content-sharing mechanisms were more challenging to establish than expected, even among those who signed on for doing so.**

Stations use many different content management systems and have unique editorial content flows. Anticipating the best systems and mechanisms for content sharing is a critical aspect of a smooth-running collaboration. The lead team needed to build a detailed content flow that worked for all of the participating stations and was not overly cumbersome for any. This took longer and needed more daily attention than first expected. Until public radio moves to shared or agreed-on systems, content-sharing will continue to be more time-consuming than might be expected. An early look at roadblocks between content-sharing systems should be an important part of partner vetting and selection.

**6** **Agree on what and how to count: Stations track digital metrics in varying ways, or don't track them regularly, making aggregated data about digital reach a challenge to track. Most stations have no mechanism for tracking impact.**

The challenges of a highly complex collaboration such as the Guns & America project extended to differences in how each





JONATHAN LEVINSON / OPB

station tracked its digital engagement and reach. New collaborations should define the metrics that should be measured, how they will be measured, and who is responsible for doing the measuring. Having clear, upfront digital tracking processes and procedures outlined early in the collaboration will make tracking impact more effective and efficient. Tracking digital reach was not only a grant requirement, but also an important practice for newsrooms to develop.

Impact beyond quantitative measures was even more challenging to track, because most stations lack both the mindset and the tools to do so. The lead team created a tracking method based on the Center for Investigative Reporting's framework and built their own tracking systems within an Excel file. While this was informative for the lead editorial team, the project's learning and evaluation consultants, and the grantor, individual stations seemed less committed to or willing to invest in impact tracking.

**7** **Take care of yourself: coverage of emotionally draining subject matter required the entire Guns & America team to develop and focus its efforts around self-care and trauma care.**

Guns and gun culture in America is a topic fraught with violence and long-term consequences of trauma for individuals and communities. Attitudes about guns, gun ownership, and gun rights vary widely depending on geography and other social, economic, and demographic factors, such as politics, religion, race, and culture. This complexity was emotionally draining for all involved. Trauma reporting training was offered to the Guns & America fellows; however, ongoing training may be useful since sub-coverage topics, such as sui-

cide and domestic violence, proved to be difficult throughout the collaboration. Emotional well-being of the collaboration lead team and reporting fellows was critical to acknowledge, and self-care tools and techniques were developed and implemented throughout the project period. If covering similarly complex and emotional topics, consider including experts in trauma-informed care and secondary trauma as part of collaboration activities and seminars. The project may have benefitted from retaining counseling services as not all stations provide access to them.

**8** Expect the departure of reporters throughout the project time period and build in plans for transition: talented reporters in a grant-funded program will begin to consider their next job almost immediately.

When faced with a definitive project end-date and a lack of commitment from stations to hire them after the project, reporters and other project staff will begin the process of looking for new positions midway through the project, or earlier. The first reporting fellow left after one year with the project, responding to a new job opportunity. Two additional fellows followed.

Lead teams should expect that reporters and project staff with short-term job commitments will leave. Leaders can put processes in place to proactively recruit and quickly onboard new fellows, or otherwise plan for job transitions. Leaders can also begin early to help local newsrooms discuss fellows' needs and aspirations—and newsroom resources and capacity—to plan for the possibilities of fellows remaining in local newsrooms after the project collaboration ends. Consider implementing retention agreements that encourage reporters and project staff to remain in place.



### **What Is A Red Flag Law?**

by Lisa Dunn and Jonathan Levinson

Among the popular gun policy proposals raised in the aftermath of shootings like those in Sandy Hook, Parkland and now El Paso and Dayton, the call for “red flag” laws has become a common refrain. But like universal background checks and closing the “gun show loophole.” “red flag” laws aren’t self-explanatory. (Photo: Ryan Caron King / Connecticut Public)

## PLANNING QUESTIONS FOR NEWSROOM PARTNERS

*For news organizations considering collaboration opportunities, what questions should you ask?*

- For single-subject projects, is the topic already of high interest and importance to your local community and to your newsroom?
- What amount of time can you commit to the collaborative process? Are you already booked solid? How will you fit in the extra work it takes to work with others?
- How, when, and where will you be able to share other stations' content with your audiences?
- What time can you commit to your reporter's onboarding, orientation, and integration into your station's newsroom culture? How will you do that?
- Have you set clear expectations for everyone on the team as to their roles and the deliverables expected?
- What obstacles will you face in sharing content with other newsrooms? Whose help will you need to support this?
- What metrics do you track now and whose job is it to track them? Is the collaboration asking you to collect information that you haven't considered collecting in the past? How will you do that?
- How explicit can you be with your new reporter in terms of whether they'll have a job at the end of the grant period? Who will be in a position to share that information and when will you be ready to share it?

## QUESTIONS FOR GRANTMAKERS

- For philanthropy organizations and individuals, what considerations should inform your journalism funding?
- What appetite/bandwidth does your foundation have for helping shine light and attention on the journalism that you are funding? Will you be willing to promote the work with other funders, and lift up the stories being covered?
- Are you willing to invest for the long haul — or at least long enough for the project to establish itself and build the credibility necessary for success and deep impact?
- Does your foundation expect to lift up its own brand identity and reputation through this investment? If so, what expectations are you bringing to the project, and do those square with what the media outlet you're funding is actually able to guarantee?
- Do you have experience with funding journalism, and are you familiar with the limits of the influence you can exert when supporting coverage of topics that you care about?
  - a. How uncomfortable will your foundation's senior leadership and board of directors be in relinquishing influence and control around how a topic will be covered, the experts consulted, and the policy positions investigated?
  - b. Have you discussed the best ways to provide input and feedback to the journalism effort without alienating journalists?
  - c. What are your success metrics beyond the number of stories created?
  - d. What flexibility will you allow if world events require that journalists focus on a different topic? How will you decide when and how to allow this?
  - e. Have you given your prospective grantee ample opportunity to discuss the scope and deliverables of your potential grant? Are deliverables realistic given the time, funds, and human resources available?

## BACKGROUND: THE GUNS & AMERICA COLLABORATIVE

This section provides detailed information on the planning and implementation of the Guns & America collaborative. We provide this information in the interest of sharing the ideas, processes, and timelines that went into the project, and to show the ways that the work proceeded.

### Research and planning

The genesis of the Guns & America public media collaboration was shared interests among leaders at WAMU and at The Kendeda Fund in increasing coverage of the topic of gun culture in America, further diversifying public media newsrooms, and developing a journalism project that had the potential for wide and deep impact.

Initial research posed these questions.

- How could a group of public media stations across the U.S. collaboratively cover guns and gun culture in America?
- How might such a collaborative contribute distinctive, nuanced coverage of a divisive topic?
- How could the collaborative help to diversify public media newsrooms by placing demographically diverse fellowship reporters within partner newsrooms?

- How can a diverse cohort contribute particularly strong gun coverage from their breadth of perspectives and lived experiences?
- Can new reporters coming into the public media system accelerate local stations' digital storytelling capabilities?

### Research and planning: reporting focus

A rigorous, six-month research and development process analyzed public media coverage of the topic and also examined ideas, trends, and data about guns in American life. Topic research documented several promising sub-themes.

Those that came to the forefront were:

- Suicides as the majority of gun deaths;
- Link between gun ownership and domestic violence;
- Prevalence of accidental gun deaths and innovative programs addressing this;
- Role of gun thefts in the spread of gun violence;
- Underlying causes of urban homicides;
- Dispelling myths about mass shootings;
- Controversy over passage and implementation of "concealed carry" legislation in local communities.

### Research and planning: identifying station partners

Early research also included an assessment of potential public media station partners, their

potential strengths and contributions, and their diversity in terms of geography, political leanings, and gun ownership rates, among other data.

Specifically, the assessment took into consideration:

- Statistical significance of the local region with respect to gun ownership, gun violence, and other such factors;
- Geographical distribution among potential partners;
- Experience of newsrooms in contributing to collaborative coverage;
- Evidence of journalistic integrity and adherence to written journalism ethics policies;
- Political climate in the region to ensure that both "red" and "blue" states were included.

This scan of potential stations' coverage of guns and gun culture discovered particular stations that had not produced more than five stories on the topic, which planners thought might make them particularly ready for the benefits of collaboration. Potential stations were eventually narrowed to a much smaller group. Conversations ensued with each to gauge interest in the topic and to assess their willingness to commit to a collaborative reporting model. Prospective partner stations were invited to complete a competitive application process.

### Research and Planning: lead team structure

Conversations with individuals in the public media system who had participated in other collaborative projects or were media partnership veterans helped to inform the development of Guns & America's lead team structure. Planners asked questions such as:

- What difficulties have you had with prior partnerships that we could avoid if we approach this one differently?
- What is the ideal organizational chart for a project like this?
- How should the finances work?

Four takeaways surfaced during these conversations, which were critical to the creation of the Guns & America project structure:

- The project should have a central lead team, headed by a strong project editor;
- The lead team should include a digital editor and a data journalist;
- A ratio of one editor for every five partner stations would be ideal;
- Grant management should be centralized so that only one organization is responsible for the relationship with the grantor.

Based on this advice, WAMU became the primary grant applicant and recipient, regranteeing entity, and grants and project administrator for Guns & America.

### Research and planning: the Audion Fellowship

The Audion Fellowship Program was established as a key component of Guns & America, to further extend the impact of the project. Audion Fellowships were meant to bring a greater range of lived experiences to coverage by seeking racially and demographically diverse candidates and to support the diversity goals of public media newsrooms. Through training and on-the-ground experience, the fellowship program sought to empower a talented and diverse corps of public media reporters uniquely equipped to cover difficult topics. (An “audion” is an electrical device invented in the early 20th Century that allowed for the amplification of sound.)

The program was initially designed to allow reporting fellows to divide their time between guns reporting (80 percent) and station reporting (20 percent). Local stations determined the assignments that fellows were responsible for in their 20 percent station reporting time. Urgent coverage needs resulting from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required revisiting of this arrangement, which was changed—with the grantor's agreement—to allow reporters to shift 100 percent to COVID coverage for several months in 2020.

In addition to being full-time members of their newsrooms, fellows participated in:

- In-person seminars that allowed time for training activities, shared editorial planning, and social activities;
- Weekly virtual meetings to discuss emerging story ideas;
- Training in person and via webinars on the topic area, specific skill development, and personal development topics;
- The opportunity to work with an experienced journalist as a mentor;
- Mini-grant opportunities for supplemental professional development activities;
- Travel reimbursement to attend key industry conferences.

A member of the lead team administered fellowship components, including coordinating training, seminars, mentorships, mini-grants, and other professional development elements.

### Planning: fellows' recruitment

The lead team developed guidelines for hiring fellows and worked with local stations to recruit and vet candidates. Project leaders developed the fellowship job description; terms of employment; recommended methods for screening and interviewing candidates; and a timeline for hiring that aligned with the grant period. Each partner station reviewed and adjusted guidelines and collaborated on the search process.

Consultant Doug Mitchell supported fellows' recruitment and helped identify avenues that

could lead to a diverse applicant pool. These included reaching out to Facebook groups for people of color in journalism, making personal contacts at HBCUs' career centers, and contacting organizations such as the National Association of Black Journalists, Native American Journalists' Association, and other groups, to post the positions and to help to widen the search. Mitchell also led two recruitment webinars, introducing the project's mission and answering questions of prospective applicants.

The search generated more than 600 applicants, including some who applied to more than one local station among the Audion Fellowship openings. In the end, the collaborative chose ten reporting fellows who represented a cross section of races and ethnicities and professional experiences.

The original fellowship cohort included five men and five women; five people who identified as Black or Asian; and two veterans. Reporting experience of the original cohort ranged from less than one year to about 15 years.

### **Planning: learning and evaluation**

Hiring a third-party learning and development team to support developmental evaluation and continuous learning for Guns & America was a grant requirement. The lead team developed and issued a Request for Proposals for such con-

sultants and selected 8 Bridges Workshop, a St. Paul, Minnesota based consulting firm, for this work. 8 Bridges worked with the Guns & America lead team to establish a rubric for the entire project and to identify ways to track the project's goals and the specific outcomes required by the grantor. The Kendeda Fund grant included expectations for the number of stories produced; the reach of Guns & America content beyond broadcasting, to include digital reach; the range and depth of stories produced; and the expansion of the pipeline for demographically diverse journalists in public radio.

### **Project implementation**

Guns & America officially launched in August 2018. During the two-year reporting period, the collaborative created more than 500 stories and developed national content partnerships across news organizations and programs including the national program *1A* and newsrooms at NPR and Univision, which translated Guns & America stories into Spanish for digital audiences. Local stations also developed partnerships within their own local news ecosystems. Guns & America work also appeared on *The Takeaway*, *Marketplace*, and in *The Texas Tribune* and was distributed by the Mountain West News Bureau and the Texas Newsroom, among others.

Among the most noteworthy and high-profile Guns & America stories were: series on [gunshot](#)

[survivors](#) and [gun owners fighting to reduce suicide](#); [a national poll](#) that revealed Americans woefully misunderstood the shape of gun violence in America; coverage of the mass shootings in Dayton and [El Paso](#); the Gun Play podcast produced in partnership with KERA; and a podcast reported by two Guns & America reporting fellows that was [produced and distributed](#) by NPR.

With the unfolding of the COVID-19 pandemic, Guns & America leaders worked with the project's grantor to divert reporting resources toward pandemic coverage. Reporting fellows set aside their guns mission and dove headfirst into vital local reporting on the impact of the pandemic.

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## CREDITS

### Lead team

#### Jeremy Bernfeld

Lead Editor and Director

#### A.C. Valdez

Senior Editor

#### Lisa Dunn

Research Editor

#### Francesca Piemonte Slesinger

Fellowship Manager

#### Dawnthea Price Lisco

Digital News Producer  
April 2020 - Project End

#### Emily Alfin Johnson

Digital Editor  
July 2018 – April 2020

#### Luis Melgar

Data Journalist  
September 2018 – January 2020

### Audion Fellows

#### Chris Haxel

Reporting Fellow, KCUR, Kansas City, MO

#### Hady Mawajdeh

Reporting Fellow, KERA, Dallas, TX

#### Heath Druzyn

Reporting Fellow, Boise State Public Radio

#### Jason deBruyn

Reporting Fellow, WUNC Chapel Hill, NC

#### Jonathan Levinson

Reporting Fellow, Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB)

#### Leigh Paterson

Reporting Fellow, KUNC, Northern Colorado

#### Lisa Hagen

Reporting Fellow, WABE, Atlanta, GA

#### Matthew Richmond

Reporting Fellow, ideastream, Cleveland, OH

#### Ryan Lindsay

Reporting Fellow, Connecticut Public Radio

#### Victoria Chamberlin

Reporting Fellow, WAMU, Washington, DC

#### Anthony Cave

Reporting Fellow, KERA, Dallas, TX  
August 2018 – July 2019

#### Adhiti Bandlamudi

Reporting Fellow, WUNC, Raleigh/Durham, NC  
September 2018 – January 2020

#### Alana Wise

Reporting Fellow, WAMU, Washington, DC  
September 2018 – March 2020

### Participating stations

Boise State Public Radio, Boise, ID

Connecticut Public Radio, Hartford, CT

ideastream, Cleveland, OH

KCUR, Kansas City, MO

KERA, Dallas, TX

KUNC, Greeley, CO

WUNC, Chapel Hill, NC

Oregon Public Broadcasting, Portland, OR

WABE, Atlanta, GA

WAMU, Washington, DC

### WAMU LEADERSHIP

Seth Grossman, Interim General Manager, Vice President, People and External Affairs & Chief of Staff and Counselor to the President, American University

JJ Yore, General Manager, 2014 – August 2020

Andi McDaniel, Chief Content Officer until September 2020

Monna Kashfi, Chief Content Officer, beginning August 2020

### Learning and Evaluation team

8 Bridges Workshop, St. Paul, Minnesota

Sarah Lutman, Principal

Enrique Olivarez, Senior Associate

Tracie Powell, AllDigitocracy, Consulting Partner

### Grantor

The Kendeda Fund

David Brotherton, Fund Advisor for Gun

Violence Prevention and Communications

Diane Ives, Fund Advisor for People, Place, and Planet

Dena Kimball, Executive Director