

TORTOISE MEDIA: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

BUILDING A COMMUNITY NETWORK IN THE NEWSROOM

BY EMILY PARK

The Cause

Tortoise Media is a news media startup founded in 2018 by the former heads of BBC News and The Wall Street Journal. It is currently working to identify charities that work with disadvantaged communities in order to provide those charities with membership access and to tell stories that might not otherwise be told. This summer, I had the privilege of joining their team. We arranged phone calls and meetings to secure community network partners, built charity partnership relations, and organized their network database.

The Goal

This project is a response to the problems of “daily noise” and “the power gap.” Its goal is twofold: to support Tortoise’s mission of providing quality stories to everyone in the community, and also to represent community members who don’t have enough of a voice in the newsroom.

The Community Network

Tortoise’s community partners include over 100 community service organizations, spanning from homeless shelters and food kitchens to career support for young women in STEM. As we worked more closely with the partners, we established better connections that will allow Tortoise to serve them in more effective ways. For instance, if a community partner shared a unique and important story that might have never made it into mainstream news, we made it a priority to create a podcast episode or article that includes that story. One early sign of success in this Community-Audience-Building project was increased communication between Tortoise and its partners.



Reflections on the Experience

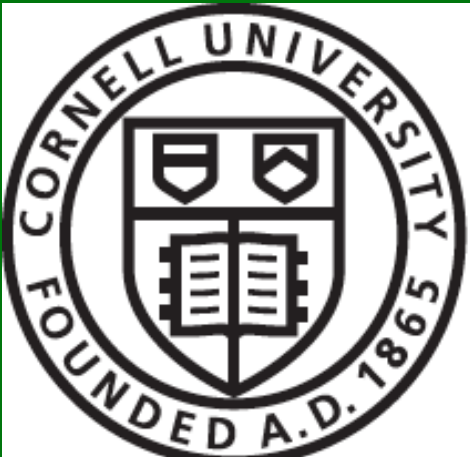
I feel very lucky to have had this opportunity. The small things—like booking my first international plane ticket—as well as the big things, like helping build a community network at a media organization like Tortoise, have changed me in ways that I will continue to notice throughout the next few years. This experience has made me more patient. It has also made me realize the importance of executing a general vision in a very specific manner. Tortoise’s relationship with its community partners is good as it stands, but its goal is to continue expanding to include a more diverse range of voices. And in order to do this, we interns helped organize outreach to organizations, trusts, charities, and universities. Our project is coming to a close, but by no means will the community network growth stop here. The team at Tortoise will continue to strive to create a more inclusive newsroom.

The main lesson that I learned was about communication. Everyone has a different communication style, and it’s important to remember and implement the right one at the right time. For instance, when communicating with people in the office, we were expected to be efficient and somewhat casual. When emailing old community partners, we took a friendly and familiar tone. When cold-calling potential community partners, we were expected to be formal and thorough. This lesson will be useful in other service projects and leadership roles.

The next chapter of my Laidlaw journey will probably be reflective. I tend to mull things over for a long time before coming to the sort of conclusions inspired by assignments – which are still very valuable, as they capture of-the-moment honesty. The next chapter of my life will definitely reflect what I learned here.

Acknowledgements

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Cornell University

