REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)

EVALUATION OF THE MEDIA AND NARRATIVE COMPONENT OF THE BUILDING AND BRIDGING POWER STRATEGY

Release Date: June 24, 2021

DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:

To respond to this RFI, please submit a letter of interest and qualifications (of no more than six pages) addressing the components listed in Section IX of this RFI by 5 p.m. MST on July 19, 2021.

Submissions should be sent electronically to Evaluation & Learning Manager Felisa Gonzales, PhD, MPH, in Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) or Microsoft Word (.doc) format.

For questions prior to submission, please contact Felisa Gonzales via email or (303) 539-3110.
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I. Introduction

Purpose
The Colorado Trust’s Building and Bridging Power to Advance Health Equity through Policy & Advocacy strategy, referred to as the Building and Bridging Power (BBP) strategy, aims to create an advocacy environment that will facilitate community members’ ability to advance policy solutions addressing their most pressing issues.

The BBP strategy has three components:

1. **Organizing people and resources** for direct involvement in issues and in decision-making arenas.
2. Building durable, long-term **policy infrastructure**, including networks of organizations that are aligned around shared goals that can shape advocacy agendas.
3. Making meaning of and shifting **popular narratives** about why inequities exist and how people understand and think about race, income, the economy and government.

The purpose of this request for information (RFI) is to invite interest in working with The Colorado Trust to design and implement an evaluation approach for the third component on **popular narratives**, defined for our purposes as the societal stories that are rooted in shared values and common themes and that influence how people process information and make decisions. Journalism is one way that narratives are formed and maintained. The overall goals of this component are to support accountability journalism that holds powerful entities accountable for policies and practices that contribute to systemic inequities and to promote the centering of the perspectives of the people most impacted by these inequities. Through the evaluation, we seek to understand the extent to which our funding contributed to the achievement of these two goals.

**The Colorado Trust**
The Colorado Trust (The Trust) is a private, statewide health foundation that was created in 1985 with the proceeds from the sale of the PSL Healthcare Corporation. The Trust believes that all Coloradans should have fair and equal opportunities to lead healthy, productive lives regardless of race, ethnicity, income or where we live. We partner with people and organizations across Colorado that are working to make positive changes in their communities. We provide funding and other resources so that all people have the ability to make decisions that improve their lives and the lives of their neighbors. We work side by side with grantees and community members to ensure grants are solution-based and effective. The Trust is committed to funding policy and advocacy work because we believe that local, regional and statewide policies should have a positive impact on people’s well-being. Through our advocacy grantmaking, we aim to shift power dynamics and create policy change that achieves better health for all Coloradans.
II. Strategy Overview

As described in the Purpose section above, the BBP strategy supports organizing among people in communities experiencing the most inequities, building policy infrastructure with grassroots and grasstops organizations that is inclusive of community voice, and changing the narrative around health equity in Colorado. This three-component approach recognizes that building power in community to create change happens in varied ways.

In 2019, The Colorado Trust Board of Trustees approved a $14.5 million, four-and-a-half-year investment to support the first two strategic components (organizing people and resources; policy infrastructure). Sixteen community organizing organizations and groups (referred to as “grassroots”) were funded to build their capacity and that of their communities to advocate for health equity across the state. Seven organizations with a focus on policy change at the local, regional and/or state levels (referred to as “grasstops”) were funded to meaningfully engage with communities and to share their expertise around the policy process with grassroots organizations. These two components are being evaluated under a separate, previously awarded contract.

In May 2021, the board approved an additional $3 million, three-and-a-half year investment to address the third strategic component, which aims to change popular narratives about why health inequities exist. A dominant and pervasive narrative has long been that a person’s health is the result of their personal choices—not the wide range of social determinants of health, systemic factors and a sense of belonging we now know have a greater impact.

Journalism, specifically accountability journalism, has the potential to put the focus on power holders and policies that affect the health and well-being of Coloradans. **Accountability journalism** is a form of journalism that holds powers accountable and influences public policy; informs the public on critical information needs; serves as a community-based conduit to help understand local communities and their priorities; highlights underlying systemic issues; and identifies the need for solutions at the societal level.

High-quality journalism can reveal new information. It can make crucial connections between what people are experiencing and the policies and practices that are driving these experiences. It can provide an important tool for communities and organizations seeking to increase the accountability of public officials and corporate entities. Responsible, truthful and thorough journalism that accurately reflects community concerns can build support for policy advocacy efforts.

Through this component of the BBP strategy, The Trust aims to support media outlets that can draw attention to inequities and highlight the systems and power dynamics that contribute to them. There are four key activities within this component of the BBP strategy:
Targeted support for accountability journalism
First, this component will provide funding for up to two Colorado-focused national outlets and up to three Colorado-based regional and statewide outlets to expand their accountability reporting on policies and practices that contribute to racial and economic inequities in the state. This approach will support narratives that put the focus on power holders, rather than individuals. More than half of the funds available through this component of the BBP strategy will be dedicated to supporting accountability journalism.

Targeted support for community-based and focused outlets
Second, general operating support will be awarded to four to five smaller news outlets that provide important information and local perspectives to the communities they serve. General operating funds would provide flexible resources for these outlets to grow in ways that support their community's critical information needs. Awards to community-based and focused outlets will account for approximately a quarter of the funds available.

Increase newsroom diversity, equity and inclusion efforts
Third, The Trust will support a fund whereby outlets and newsrooms can access resources to cover costs related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) capacity building. Simply hiring more people of color into an organization (in this case, newsrooms) will not, by itself, necessarily impact the type of reporting conducted or culture of newsrooms. Newsrooms must undertake internal equity efforts to create inclusive work cultures so that they can successfully recruit, retain and promote journalists that represent the communities they serve.

Build capacity for impactful reporting on inequities
Lastly, this component of the BBP strategy will build the capacity of journalists to respond to their communities and hold powerful entities accountable through such activities as trainings, conference scholarships or supporting records requests, as well as other strategies. We also anticipate funding a statewide conference on reporting on inequities, which will build journalists' capacity to respond to their communities, access critical records, identify story ideas and tell them impactfully.
III. Evaluation Opportunity

As noted above, the overall goal of the third component of the BBP strategy is two-fold: to support journalism that 1) holds powerful entities accountable for policies and practices that contribute to systemic inequities; and 2) centers the perspectives and needs of the people most impacted by these inequities. We envision a summative, mixed-method evaluation that tells the story of how the four activities funded through this component of the BBP strategy advanced these goals.

Guiding evaluation questions for the four activities, in order of importance, include:

1. What types of stories are produced as a result of the investment in accountability journalism, and what is the impact of those stories?
2. How do community-based and focused outlets meet the critical information needs of their communities? What efforts are taken by outlets to center community voice(s)?
3. How are the resources for capacity building and diversity, equity and inclusion efforts utilized?

This is a novel grantmaking area for The Trust, and we welcome new and creative ideas for evaluating the impact of accountability journalism, assessing the contributions of news outlets and tracking use of capacity-building funds. Collection of new data will be necessary, but there are also several existing data sources that can be tapped into, including:

Existing documents and data sources:

- Applications or project descriptions for grants to news outlets, which will provide background information on each outlet, proposed activities and definitions of success
- News stories that are published by outlets funded through this component of the BBP strategy
- Grant reports from national, regional, statewide and community-based and focused outlets, which the evaluator can help develop
- Applications for capacity-building support, which can be reviewed to determine the number and types of requests received for capacity-building funds
- Surveys of attendees of the reporting on inequities conference, which the evaluator will develop.

Possible methodologies include:

- Analysis of impact of accountability journalism stories (e.g., policies changed, staffing changes, changes in audience engagement or public debate, etc.)
- Interviews with journalists supported to conduct accountability journalism through this BBP strategy component
- Content analyses of stories published by outlets receiving funding through the BBP strategy and comparisons to outlets that are not funded, or to previous publications of the funded outlets, to understand how the framing and substance of stories that examine powers at play in issues of importance in Colorado or specific communities evolve
- Qualitative analysis of applications and grant reports
- Interviews with recipients of capacity-building funds
- Case studies.

These are only potential options to be considered. We welcome non-traditional approaches and methodologies that can capture how this component of the BBP strategy contributed to the capacity
of the media organizations focused on or located in Colorado to highlight inequities and the perspectives of those experiencing them and hold the powerful to account.

Ideally, one evaluation or communications firm could complete all of the proposed evaluation tasks and produce one report summarizing findings and conclusions. If no one firm with all desired areas of expertise can be found, we reserve the right to award up to two separate contracts—one for the evaluation of Colorado-focused national outlets and Colorado-based regional and statewide outlets engaging in accountability journalism (activity 1, which accounts for more than half of the total funding), and one for the evaluation of the general operating grants to community-based and focused outlets and the capacity-building funds (activities 2-4).

IV. Desired Qualifications and Selection Criteria

Who can apply
We encourage evaluation and communication firms or teams to apply. We welcome responses to this RFP from firms and teams inside and outside of Colorado.

Qualifications
We are seeking evaluation or communications firms and teams that have demonstrated expertise in:

- **Assessing the impact of accountability journalism**: Through this evaluation, we’d like to understand the impact of accountability journalism on shifting narratives that place responsibility on individuals for their own health, toward an understanding of the systems and policies at play in creating and sustaining health inequities. We are interested in exploring reactions to, and consequences of, accountability journalism stories.

- **Conducting qualitative analysis**: We anticipate that much of the data collected for the evaluation of this component of the BBP strategy will be qualitative in nature (e.g., news articles, grant reports, interview responses). We seek an evaluator who is skilled in the collection, analysis and synthesis of qualitative data from traditional (e.g., interviews, written grant reports) and non-traditional (e.g., social media) sources.

V. Scope of Work and Expectations

Scope of Work
While we do not expect applicants to present a full evaluation plan in their response, we would like to understand how you would approach an evaluation of the four key activities that will be conducted under the third component of the BBP strategy (see Figure 1). Please include the following in your response:

1. **Summary of potential methodologies for each of the four activities.** Please note that most of the funds available through this component of the BBP strategy will be dedicated to supporting accountability journalism and community-based and focused media outlets, which should be the primary focus of the evaluation effort.

2. **Proposed budget** (total and for each of the four activities). As noted above, we reserve the right to award up to two separate contracts for the evaluation of the accountability journalism investment and another for the evaluation of the general operating grants to community-based and focused outlets and the capacity-building funds. A total of $240,000 is available for the evaluation of the four activities across the three-and-a-half year grant period.
The scope of work for the selected evaluation consultant will be finalized in a collaborative process that includes input from Trust staff and submitted as part of the contract agreement.

**Expectations of the Evaluation Consultants**

In addition to the expertise described above, we are seeking evaluators who:

- Have a deep understanding of how journalism can interrogate power structures.
- Employ established and innovative evaluation approaches.
- Are willing to work closely with the funding intermediary to ensure that data are collected through applications and grant reports in a clear and timely manner.
- Can commit to a regular meeting schedule with Trust staff (via telephone, Zoom and/or in person) to provide updates, highlight challenges, brainstorm, or share new ideas and information.
- Comprise a diverse team capable of reviewing and evaluating English and Spanish language news media.
- Have the ability to complete the evaluation within the time frame and budget.
- Are open to meeting with the evaluation contractors conducting the evaluation of the first two strategic components.

**Expectations of The Trust**

The Trust commits to:

- Upholding the contract terms and payment schedule.
- Growing alongside the evaluation contractor as we experiment with novel ways of evaluating journalism and narrative change efforts.
- Making ourselves available to meet regularly and as needed.
- Dedicating sufficient time to work with the evaluators on designing plans, processes and products that meet our needs and acknowledge our evolving thinking.
- Identifying opportunities to present findings and learnings at conferences, and partnering in abstract/proposal submissions.
- Acknowledging power dynamics when they arise, and engaging in difficult conversations with openness and honesty.
- Welcoming constructive and critical feedback.
- Considering tradeoffs that may be necessary as the work evolves.

**VI. Deliverables**

The Trust and selected evaluator will agree upon a final set of deliverables. However, anticipated deliverables include:

- A finalized scope of work that describes an evaluation plan for all four key activities
- Data collection tools
- Annual progress reports
- Submission of a final report to The Trust that compiles findings, lessons and recommendations
- Up to two public-facing briefs summarizing key activities or outcomes.

**VII. Budget**

The overall budget for the evaluation of the three-and-a-half year media and narrative component of the BBP strategy is $240,000. This amount is inclusive of all expenses related to carrying out the scope of work (e.g., supplies; editing; translation etc.).
VIII. Timeline and Key Events

Timeline
June 24, 2021 Request for information released
July 19, 2021 Letters of interest and qualifications due
July 20-23, 2021 Review of letters
July 28-30, 2021 Virtual interviews with finalists
July 30, 2021 Selection of evaluation firm
August 2021 Finalization of scope of work
September-October 2021 Contract submission and negotiation
November 2021 Contract execution; kickoff meeting with Trust staff

Interviews
Finalists will be invited to participate in virtual interviews via Zoom with Trust staff. Finalists are invited to bring lead evaluators and other key staff who will be directly involved in the work. Interviews will be scheduled on July 27. We request that applicants hold the afternoons of July 28-30 open to facilitate scheduling of finalist interviews.

IX. Requirements for Responses

To respond to this RFI, please submit a letter of no more than six pages answering the following questions.

1. **Content and methodological expertise** (~1 page): What are your team members’ experiences and expertise in the evaluation of accountability journalism? What expertise in qualitative analysis does your team have?

2. **Composition of evaluation team** (~1 page): Please describe your evaluation team. Who is the team lead, who will be involved in this work, and what skills do each of these team members bring to the work? How does this team reflect the diversity of Colorado?

3. **Scope of work** (~3 pages): How would you evaluate the four activities of this component of the BBP strategy? How much do you anticipate would be required to evaluate each of the four activities?

4. **References** (<1 page): Please provide names and contact information for two references from previous clients, one of whom can speak directly to your experience evaluating investments in journalism or narrative change efforts.