



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

March 11, 2022

José Bayona
Executive Director
Mayor's Office of Ethnic & Community Media
1 Centre Street
New York NY, 10007

Re: Strengthening our Commitment to Community and Ethnic Media

Dear Executive Director Bayona,

At its February 7, 2022 meeting, the Arts, Culture, Education & Street Life (ACES) Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) held a discussion on supporting hyperlocal media. The Committee heard from Darlie Gervais of the Center for Community Media, as well as the publishers of three highly-regarded local publications: Lincoln Anderson of the Village Sun, Phil O'Brien of W42St, and Scott Stiffler of Chelsea Community News. The Committee also appreciated the valuable participation of Sam Vasquez, Policy Advisor for Senator Brad Hoylman.

The following comments were approved at the March 2, 2022 MCB4 Full Board meeting with 40 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining and 0 present but not eligible to vote.

Background

Local journalism is critical for maintaining the vibrant social fabric of our neighborhoods and keeping our community informed about local issues. In many cases, hyperlocal publications are the first to identify and investigate neighborhood issues that are later picked up by larger publications. As a Community Board, we have witnessed firsthand the importance of hyperlocal media in spreading the word about issues relevant to our Board and neighbors. Local journalism also creates jobs in our community; the Bureau of

Labor Statistics estimates nearly six thousand New Yorkers are employed as journalists, reporters, and news analysts.¹

Hyperlocal media has been facing significant challenges in recent years, resulting in 1,800 newspapers closing in the United States since 2004², including 40% of newspapers in New York State.³ Local publishers have experienced challenges in securing ad revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic, high costs associated with digitization, and competitive pressures from the increasing consolidation of media conglomerates.

We applaud the City for recently creating the NYC Mayor's Office of Ethnic and Community Media, making it the first mayor's office in the country dedicated to strengthening and supporting the relationship between city government and hyperlocal media outlets.

Board Comments

MCB4 supports the City's commitment to direct at least 50% of their annual print and digital advertising budgets toward what the city defines as "community and ethnic" media. In fiscal year 2021, this media sector received a record \$15.6 million in city agency advertising dollars, an increase of more than \$5 million from the previous year. We are heartened the City recognizes the valuable role of our community press, many of which are our neighborhoods' most trusted sources of local information. Unfortunately, our district has not benefited from this initiative.

We understand to receive these advertising funds a publication must be accepted onto a list of qualifying print and digital community and ethnic media outlets developed and maintained by the Office of Community and Ethnic Media. We would like to know the criteria of acceptance to the list and the process with how that is done.

Three of our trusted community publications, Chelsea Community News, The Village Sun and W42ST, are well respected and heavily relied upon by community members for neighborhood news. They operate on shoestring budgets and sacrifice coverage due to lack of funds, many times working with deficits. Even so, they have continuously demonstrated a commitment to reporting on important neighborhood matters, notably LGTBQ issues, which are especially important to us given our district's history of involvement in LGBTQ issues and the fact that many of our neighbors identify as LGTBQ.

Two of our three neighborhood publications (Chelsea Community News and The Village Sun) are on the list, but our Hell's Kitchen publication, W42ST, is not. We encourage your office to consider their participation in the program.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes273023.htm>

² <https://www.poynter.org/locally/2021/the-coronavirus-has-closed-more-than-100-local-newsrooms-across-america-and-counting/>

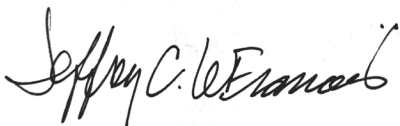
³ <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/states/new-york/#1536357280470-403f9cb7-ca48>

The Committee was dismayed to hear that though two local publications are on the list of qualified participants (Chelsea Community News & The Village Sun), both have received **zero** advertising from City agencies to date. Local and ethnic media outlets are heavily relied upon by the City in communicating important news to New Yorkers. We request that our district's journalists have meaningful access to the city's funds and initiatives for hyperlocal news.

The Committee would also like to recognize and thank CUNY's Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, Center for Community Media for their efforts to serve local news publications generally underrepresented in mainstream media.

We again thank you for your work to support local journalism. We extend an invitation to further the conversation and are happy to collaborate in making progress on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Jeffery LeFranois
Chair
Community Board 4



Allen Oster
Co-Chair
ACES Committee



Kit Tollerson
Co-Chair
ACES Committee

cc: Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council
Hon. Mark Levin, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Brad Hoylman, State Senate
Fred Kreizman, Commissioner, Mayor's Community Affairs Unit
Graciela Mochkofsky, Executive Director for Community Media, CUNY
Darlie Gervais, Advertising Boost Initiative Manager, Center for Community Media, CUNY