

The Pulitzer Center:

Filling the Gap in International Journalism

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Overview

When it launched in 2006, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting seemed like a journalistic rowboat plying the treacherous seas of global news coverage. Today it's a lifeboat for intrepid journalists determined to navigate those waters.

Operating with modest resources and a relatively small crew, the Center, in the past nine years, has assembled an impressive log of journalistic and educational achievements despite the declining number of news organizations with dedicated foreign news staffs.

A non-profit started with a small grant from the family whose name is synonymous with quality journalism, the Pulitzer Center solicits donations from foundations and generous individuals and converts the money into small grants for journalists working exclusively on international stories across a variety of media platforms.

David Boardman, dean of the School of Media and Communications at Temple University and former editor of the *Seattle Times*, thinks Pulitzer's impact equals that of major foundations such as the John L. and James Knight Foundation, one of the nation's largest funders of journalism projects.

"Pulitzer puts their money where it counts. Knight seems only interested in the bells and whistles, all of the tweets and all that stuff. The Pulitzer Center funds quality journalism and that's what's needed. I think they are fabulous," says Boardman, immediate past president of the American Society of News Editors.

Most of the Center's journalistic and educational partners echo Boardman's praise. The Pulitzer Center not only funds hundreds of international reporting projects, it also sends its journalists to schools and universities across the

world where their work is used in classes, events, speeches, and projects designed to deepen public knowledge of global issues.

Mark Hallett, senior program officer at the McCormick Foundation of Chicago, says the foundation's decision to fund a Pulitzer project promoting news literacy in Chicago high schools speaks volumes about the value McCormick sees in the Pulitzer Center.

"We used to support a lot of work internationally," says Hallett. "But in 2007/2008, the foundation's board changed direction. Our funding, which at one point was over \$1.5 million a year for international projects, now is pretty much at zero. Any international project must be carefully selected and vetted for us to take it to our board. So I think that says a lot about how we feel about Pulitzer. With almost zero international funding . . . our board approved a December 2012 grant for \$150,000 for two years. That's not a huge grant but it's bigger than most. I think that speaks for itself," he says.

Although compliments about the Center's work flow freely from fans and skeptics alike, the praise is not unqualified. Some foreign news hands say the organization lacks visibility and focus, and asks its journalists for too much work for relatively little money. Indeed, journalists mitigate their praise with a key question about the Center's mission to tell the "untold" story—the one often ignored by major news organizations that focus international coverage on wars, crises, and flare-ups that dominate headlines.

"It's great that they go for the *untold* story," says Timothy McNulty, a former foreign editor at the *Chicago Tribune* who now teaches international reporting at Northwestern University. But McNulty and some others say major news organizations ignore such stories for a good reason—they lack reader appeal. "If the *untold* story is also the *unread* story, that doesn't do anybody any good," says McNulty. He also questions the Center's identity: "I go to *Politico* because I know

that's where I will find X story,"[the "X" being the inside political story considered *Politico's* brand]. "When I go to the Pulitzer Center, I don't know what that X is," he says.

Although seasoned foreign news advocates can quibble over the Center's brand, few doubt that it represents a unique, independent journalistic voice honed by a lean staff and budget. Jon Sawyer, the executive director who originally envisioned the Center, oversees a staff of 13 and an annual budget that now stands at \$2.9 million. Yet between 2006 and 2014, Sawyer, a former Washington bureau chief for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, funded over 460 international reporting projects, including over 2,300 placements in more than 50 outlets ranging from *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* magazine to *Foreign Policy* magazine and PBS *NewsHour*.

Pulitzer Center journalists tackled subjects as varied as tuberculosis in Vietnam, the impact of climate change in the Arctic, the emerging threat of Islam in North Africa, and lingerie shops in Riyadh as a window on women's rights in Saudi Arabia. The Center created an intriguing interactive map on the public health challenges of traffic safety around the world, and it underwrote an entire issue of *Poetry* magazine with photography and essays on *landays*, two-line Afghan poems that have become a vehicle for women's rights.

Although journalism represents the Center's core value, Pulitzer's work goes beyond the written word. In 2013, the Center's education arm leveraged its journalism to stage 332 events at schools across the U.S., Europe and Asia, reaching some 16,000 students.

Nearly 20 universities now belong to the Pulitzer Center Campus Consortium, a program that sends journalists to schools for talks, classes, and events involving their stories. The Consortium membership includes major institutions such as the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, and the University of

Southern California as well as smaller colleges such as Elon and Guilford in North Carolina..

The Pulitzer Center also awards international reporting fellowships to students from Consortium schools, making it the only fellowship program that sends students overseas for on-the-job training in foreign correspondence. And, the Center published 13 e-books on an array of subjects ranging from the human cost of gold mining to “Afghanistan by Donkey,” author and journalist Anna Badkhen’s extraordinary account of a year in northern Afghanistan.

Indeed, were it not for the Pulitzer Center, many significant but less-than-sexy stories would not be covered. When the Center conducted a survey for this report and asked journalists if they could have done their stories without a Pulitzer grant, more than 80 percent of the respondents said no.

“It has been a life saver,” says Yochi Dreazen, a *Foreign Policy* magazine writer who has also received Center grants as a freelance journalist. “The last few pieces I’ve done—both full-time and as a freelancer—didn’t have travel budgets. Pulitzer money was the only way I was able to travel to Iraq, Afghanistan, the UAE, Israel, and Mali. The Iraq and Mali pieces are two of the articles I’ve been most proud of in my career, and neither would have happened without the Center. “

Karen Johnson, a teacher at Nerinx Hall High School in St. Louis, praises the Center’s education program that spreads awareness of global issues to the next generation.

“I can’t tell you how many times parents have come to me and told me how much they’ve enjoyed [Pulitzer events]. They [the events] have made their dinner conversations much more interesting and they believe their children are much more aware of the world around them. Pulitzer’s reporting on women, rape and the environment have [led to] fairly big projects at our school.”

The Genesis of this Report

As the Pulitzer Center neared its tenth anniversary, Sawyer decided the time had come to step back and commission an in-depth, independent review of the Center. He hired me to contact its journalists, donors, partners, and readers to determine what they liked and disliked about the Center. The commission also came as funders of non-profit news sites look for ways to measure the impact of their investments. This report is the result of more than 100 of those interviews. Although the Center paid for my time and provided me with a list of sources, Sawyer guaranteed my editorial independence. And he delivered on his pledge. I interviewed many of the sources the Center suggested and others not on its list. At no time did anyone at the Center interfere with my reporting.

I questioned more than 75 journalists who have worked with the Center, 19 news and education partners, seven board members, and numerous experts on foreign correspondence and journalistic impact metrics. I asked questions about the state of foreign reporting, the Center's reputation, its mission, its journalistic and educational roles, the efficiency of the Center and its website, and the organization's impact on the field of journalism.

The State of International Reporting

The Pulitzer Center exists because many American newspapers abandoned or cut back international coverage. A decade ago, newspapers accounted for most working foreign correspondents. That began to change dramatically in 2005. Emily Rauh Pulitzer, chair of the Pulitzer Center board and widow of Joseph Pulitzer III,

recalls a visit that year from Sawyer just after the family sold its interest in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*:

“Jon had taken a buy-out as a result of the sale. He came to me and said newspapers, magazines, and television are all cutting back on their foreign bureaus and the number of journalists they send abroad at a time when it’s more important than ever to know what’s going on in the world,” says Pulitzer.

“When I first approached Emily,” Sawyer says, “we wanted to ensure that organizations like the *Post-Dispatch* and reporters like me would have the opportunity, incentive and resources to travel the world and write about global issues.”

At the time, few envisioned the depth of the crisis that was about to engulf journalism. Newspapers rely heavily on advertising to finance news coverage and the pace at which advertisers abandoned newspapers astonished everyone. Over the past decade, combined digital and print ad revenue at newspapers plunged 55 percent. Even today, the decline continues as advertisers use social media and other digital platforms to reach audiences at far lower costs than the ads they once placed in newspapers.

Although broadcast outlets posted more robust revenues, they also cut back on foreign news. The 2014 Pew Report on the State of the Media said network evening newscasts devoted less than half the airtime to foreign news in 2013 compared to the 1980s.

To offset sagging revenues, the media—particularly newspapers—cut everything, especially staff. The latest figures show the carnage. In 2013, the Pew report said newspapers employed 36,700 journalists, down roughly one-third since 2005 when 56,700 reporters and editors worked at American newspapers. Well-

paid foreign correspondents became a key target in the cutbacks, as did the space editors devoted to foreign news.

Data on the number of foreign correspondents employed by news organizations is scarce. An *American Journalism Review* census reported in late 2010 that American news outlets employed 234 foreign correspondents, down about 25 percent from 2003. But the 2010 figures understated the degree of a foreign news retreat that occurred as international tension and terrorism flourished. The 2003 foreign news staff number would have been far larger and the decline steeper had it counted the large foreign news payrolls of the *Associated Press* and *Bloomberg News*, which were included in the figures for 2010. Only a handful of papers like *The New York Times* maintained a significant commitment to independent international news staffs. Most cut back severely.

Susan Glasser, the editor of *Politico* and a former foreign correspondent and senior editor at the *Washington Post*, says the newspapers she traveled with when covering the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq no longer have international news staffs. Some papers, such as the *Chicago Tribune*, which had more than 10 foreign bureaus as recently as 2005, closed all of them. Other papers like the *Washington Post* cut back but retained some foreign bureaus.

“The *Washington Post* has a somewhat smaller foreign staff than it had at the height, which would have been about 10 years ago,” said Douglas Jehl, the newspaper’s foreign editor. Jehl said the *Post* recently added back to its foreign news staff with some hires and the addition of contract writers who are not full-time *Post* employees.

Some of the decline has been offset at other organizations, such as *GlobalPost*, an online foreign news organization started in Boston in 2009. When it launched less than a decade ago, *GlobalPost* employed a handful of freelancers who were paid \$1,000 a month plus a small equity stake, good pay only to those without

a job. Philip Balboni, *GlobalPost* president and chief executive officer, says its payroll now stands at 13 full-time correspondents who are paid competitive salaries and 50 freelancers. In its 2014 report, Pew voiced optimism about a revival of foreign reporting at non-legacy news outlets.

Pew reports: "*Vice Media* has 35 overseas bureaus," although its correspondents offer a smorgasbord of stories and videos that usually focus as much on the antics of a profane reporter as on the story itself. Pew continues: "*The Huffington Post* "hopes to grow to 15 countries from 11 this year; *BuzzFeed* hired a foreign editor to oversee its expansion into places like Mumbai, Mexico City, Berlin, and Tokyo. The two-year-old business-oriented *Quartz* has reporters in London, Bangkok, and Hong Kong, and its editorial staff speaks a total of 19 languages.

But Glasser and others say the numbers don't tell the whole story. The decline in newspaper international bureaus wasn't completely bad news, she says: "There was a very duplicative American press corps overseas. Journalists were doing their own versions of the day's primary news story. So that was not good." Glasser says newspapers with foreign staffs still duplicate the day's new stories for their readers. "I think the temptation is just too strong to write the same story. That doesn't make sense."

Ben Pauker, executive editor of *Foreign Policy*, a Washington D.C.-based magazine that focuses on international news and is a major outlet for Pulitzer Center stories, says the newspaper declines have been partially offset by the new market entrants: "Sometimes a freelancer who lives in a country and knows so much about what is going on day-to-day can give you a better story than a newspaper correspondent who has many countries to cover."

The numbers don't tell the whole story for new media, either. A cursory review of new media news sites suggests they won't fill the gap created by the newspaper retreat. *Vice Media*, for example, did a solid, insightful report on the

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and an on-the-ground video covering the largest demonstrations against the Pakistani government in 20 years. But those are the same stories being covered quite well by *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Solid, original, independent foreign news reporting seems the exception rather than the rule on new media sites.

When I reviewed *Vice's* website recently, most of the top stories repeated, rather than reported, the news. *Vice* editors based 11 of their top 20 stories on reports from other news organizations such as *Foreign Policy* magazine and the *Los Angeles Times*, two other stories were wire service round-ups, two were based solely on private or government reports, and only five contained original reporting. Foreign news competed for reader attention on the site with iconoclastic news headlines: ["Stress Makes Me Horny" and "We Talked to Women about their Vaginas."] that win *Vice* a following with an elusive demographic—young men.

The sustainability of these efforts also is questionable. *Vice Media*, which started out as a free magazine in Canada, recently announced it intended to sell 10 percent stakes in the company for \$250 million each. A&E Networks, an entertainment company owned by the Hearst Corporation and Disney, bought one stake and Technology Crossover Ventures, a Silicon Valley venture capital company, bought another. Although *Vice*, which doesn't disclose its finances publicly, says it is profitable; it's been in business for 20 years and its fortunes differ dramatically from the others. *GlobalPost*, founded by Balboni, a New England broadcast executive, and Charles Sennott, a former foreign correspondent for the *Boston Globe*, remains unprofitable just over five years after it started.

"I wish I could say that we had [turned a profit]," Balboni says, "but if anything, the business of journalism has gotten worse every single year—sometimes every single month—to the point that sometimes you wonder how anybody, regardless of size, can survive. If you are not in 'the media' with both feet,

you have no idea of how difficult it is. There simply isn't an economic solution for journalism yet."

The Huffington Post, founded nearly 10 years ago, also hasn't posted a profit. Despite its expansion to more foreign capitals, aggregated content and opinion dominate its pages more than original foreign reporting. Co-founder Arianna Huffington recently announced a partnership with a non-partisan think tank to create the WorldPost, which replaced *The Huffington Post* world news section. Designed to provide readers with comment, analysis, and insight from world leaders, WorldPost is a place for elite writers and readers. Huffington promised it would mix highbrow content with stories that reflect the views and experience of the common man. When I reviewed the WorldPost site recently though, it resembled *Vice's* heavy reliance on wire stories reported by others. Ditto for *BuzzFeed*. *GlobalPost* mixes wire service reports with its own brand of reporting on news stories such as the war in Iraq and civil war in Ukraine in its drive to become a destination news site like the *Washington Post* "I would say conflict reporting, which was not part of our mission in year one, is core to us today," Balboni says.

Focusing solely on the numbers also obscures another key factor plaguing all news organizations: Around-the-clock digital news imposes increased demands on lean staffs. Says the *Washington Post's* Jehl: "We've had to make hard choices about the regions we cover. We've had to flood the zone in the areas that are most consequential and urgent. And that has meant for us, and to some degree even the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, that areas like Africa, Latin America, wide swaths of Eastern Europe are under-covered."

Jehl, who publishes a Pulitzer Center story about once a month, says he looks to the Center to fill some of the gaps in areas of the world the *Post* no longer covers. Glasser, who converted *Foreign Policy* from a wonky publication into an aggressive print and online magazine, thinks the Pulitzer Center could capitalize on a situation where it already is a player: "I am a big believer in doing things that are original.

The heart of what journalists do should be organized around subjects. I did that at *Foreign Policy*. I made it a digital news and ideas publication. I think that model really works. People who are engaged need a platform that takes you to lots of places. What always amazed me is how we had the ability to publish interesting things from all over the world with an overly modest budget—and that was a problem. I was always very frustrated and was lucky that I had Pulitzer as a collaborator,” says Glasser.

The Pulitzer Center’s Roots

Sawyer originally thought the Pulitzer Center would primarily supply smaller regional newspapers with independent international news reports that went beyond wire service stories.

“In 2001 to 2004,” he recalls, “I spent a good chunk of my time in Muslim countries in the Middle East and saw how the media had marched in lockstep over the cliff in response to September 11.” The observation made him acutely sensitive to the importance of diverse points of view and wary of an over-reliance on a handful of big newspapers and the AP.

Over a 30-year career at the *Post-Dispatch*, Sawyer and his St. Louis colleagues routinely traveled the world to bring readers first-hand, independent news accounts: “We could go up against the *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* and the *Washington Post* and come to our own news decisions. You could agree with them or not, but they were our decisions.” Sawyer also benefitted from many small grants he won to offset the costs of foreign travel.

When he approached Emily Pulitzer for funds to sustain the *Post-Dispatch* brand of international reporting, she saw value in Sawyer’s idea. “Jon told me about

a trip he had taken earlier to Iraq,” she says. Sawyer told her his travels made him realize that Saddam Hussein’s influence in Iraq and the region had diminished.

Says Pulitzer: “Jon wasn’t saying Saddam Hussein hadn’t done terrible things. He clearly had. But Hussein was no longer much of a threat. And Jon said, ‘you know if the world had known [that Hussein did not pose a great threat], maybe we wouldn’t have gone in.’ And that to me was an incredible example of the value of having an inside story—the back story—instead of just following the battles.” She gave Sawyer the seed money to start the Center.

The seed grant (which included \$200,000 from Katherine and David Moore, a grandson of the first Joseph Pulitzer) totaled \$1.2 million for four years, or \$300,000 a year. “That’s all I had to start with. We were thinking we would do a half-dozen projects a year and I would do one or two of them,” Sawyer says. He launched the Pulitzer Center in 2006 in donated office space in Washington D.C., his home. “I thought my natural venue would be not *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post* or *Los Angeles Times*, but the next tier down, the 15 or 20 newspapers where we could facilitate independent voices,” he says.

Soon, though, newspaper industry revenues began a continuous descent. “I had no idea, nor did anybody else, how rapid the deterioration would be, not just in the second-tier papers, but the first tier too. So we pretty quickly got into doing projects with larger outlets. Within a couple of years we were in discussions with the *Post* and National Public Radio (NPR),” Sawyer says.

Eventually the Center began funding more projects at larger papers and less at smaller ones. As the newspaper financial crisis deepened at newspapers, the Center expanded its list of partners to include *The New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, *Foreign Policy*, and the *New Republic* and *Time* magazines. “So our outlets got better but we were still playing the same role I had envisioned—finding good projects and

supporting people who had passion for a topic and the expertise to pull it off. We started playing on a much larger stage but the idea was the same,” Sawyer says.

In 2006, the Center exceeded Sawyer’s initial estimates for the first year with 9 projects, including stories, videos, and audio reports on a range of subjects such as an in-depth report on Hugo Chavez’s impact in Venezuela. It also funded a report on the Mushangi area in the Congo, the crossroads of a bloody war where both sides battled to exploit the region’s reserves of coltan, an essential component for cell phones, laptop computers, and video games. The story ran in the *Post-Dispatch* under the headline: “Millions Have Died for Our Cell Phones.”

One significant initial project helped to create the template for the kind of organization the Pulitzer Center would become. It was about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and it grew from something as traditional as journalism itself—the pursuit of a good story. Before Sawyer left the *Post-Dispatch*, he received permission from the Sudanese government to travel to Darfur. By coincidence the office where he set up shop for the Pulitzer Center also housed the producers of *Foreign Exchange*, Fareed Zakaria’s half-hour weekly foreign policy show. “It was mostly Fareed doing two interviews, and the program used short videos on foreign policy subjects as fillers between segments,” Sawyer says. When Steve Sapienza, a broadcast journalist who worked with Zakaria, learned of the Darfur trip, he suggested that Sawyer do videos too, despite his lack of broadcast experience.

“So we hired an Egyptian videographer who was living in Darfur and he and I spent a couple of weeks together doing that project. When I came back I had 20 to 25 hours of video. Steve and I edited that down to a five-minute piece for Fareed’s show. But we also made a 23-minute short documentary on Darfur,” Sawyer explains.

Sawyer’s stories from Sudan provided a riveting look at life on the ground in an area of Africa ravaged by a war that killed 200,000 and left three million

displaced peasants in refugee camps. He embedded for a week with African Union peacekeeping troops to document the strengths and weaknesses of the force. He also reported on the need for international financial assistance, a complicated political dilemma that proved vexing to all parties, including the United States. The documentary, “Our Choice, Too: On The Edge in Darfur,” was his strong first effort at video production and a key element in the Center’s history.

Capitalizing on the documentary, the Center created a panel discussion about Darfur at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. The panel featured journalist Samantha Power (who went on to become U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations).

Sawyer says: “We used our video to frame a discussion. We got a satellite public affairs channel in San Francisco to run an hour-long documentary. We plugged in 25 different university venues so we could stream it live, something not many people were doing. We had two to three dozen sites around the country engaged with us. That was the beginning of our whole campus outreach and broadcast operations.

“I had done a previous piece [on Darfur] for the *Post-Dispatch*. The paper had received maybe five calls from people who said ‘nice story.’ But the broadcast version and campus network generated about 20 different speeches that year. I went to college campuses telling the story of Darfur and people said, ‘we’ve heard about you.’ But [recognition of the Center’s work] was all from the broadcast side. So it was like someone hitting you over the head—broadcast was something we needed to do.”

Overall, Sawyer says the Center probably spent less than \$20,000 on the Darfur project: “That was another learning moment. You could actually do video for remarkably little money if you found partners who had an interest in the topic. “

The Darfur experience was a key factor in Sawyer's decision to hire Nathalie Applewhite, an accomplished video documentarian who went on to become the Center's managing director. Sapienza did multiple broadcast projects for the Center and eventually became its senior producer.

The Pulitzer Mission

The Pulitzer Center website says its mission is to promote "in-depth engagement with global affairs through its sponsorship of quality international journalism across all media platforms and an innovative program of outreach and education." The Center's journalism remains a core element of its mission.

Pulitzer journalism emphasizes the "untold story," or the one ignored by major media outlets due to a lack of budget and staff. The Center usually doesn't "break" news in places like Syria or Iraq. Instead it illuminates issues by shining a light into overlooked corners, documenting the first-hand experiences of both newsmakers and ordinary people. The Center's journalists have tackled subjects such as child brides in Afghanistan, malnutrition in Guatemala, and fracking in Poland. If Pulitzer Center journalists are in hot spots like Syria or Iraq, they are probably there to write a profile of a Syrian refugee family or tell how two Iraqi towns defied Islamic extremists. In other words, they help explain and clarify stories that flash from the headlines.

Northwestern professor Timothy McNulty isn't the only one who questions this approach. Even big fans of the Pulitzer Center such as Marvin Kalb, a highly regarded broadcast journalist affiliated with the Center, wonders about the Center's emphasis on the untold story.

"We are filling in the holes left by the budget cuts of the 1990s and 2000s. If

you didn't have a Pulitzer Center, you would have to invent it," says Kalb, who adds that he marvels at the Center's journalism and its use of technology to promote fresh voices in international news. But he says:

"The stories we [the Center] are doing, while all of them merit attention and are on target, they are not what people are talking about. When you look at what we do, there's not much on Ukraine, Russia, or Israel. Should we change strategy? Maybe. But I don't know what to do."

Other journalists say the Center's emphasis on the untold story is right. "Stories that are not being covered, or at least with any frequency, are exactly the kind of stories they should do," says Jim Simon, deputy managing editor of the *Seattle Times*.

He adds: "Many news organizations no longer have the people in the field. There is a narrow focus to many of the Pulitzer stories I see, but I look at some of them and find value and an audience, like a story they did on the perils of gold mining. In truth, when many newspapers had networks of foreign correspondents, there were some amazing stories like that and they really resonated with readers."

Dorothy Wickenden, managing editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, which publishes stories by Pulitzer Center journalists, sees why some editors question the Pulitzer approach. But she says the Pulitzer Center meets her magazine's needs: "At the *New Yorker*, we look at the news and try to figure out ways we can cover what's going on in the world from a different perspective."

Even Charles Sennott, a cofounder of *GlobalPost*, the closest thing the Pulitzer Center has to a competitor, agrees with Wickenden. "I think it's a good strategy and it's smart. Talented reporters who need resources do projects that set the standard for good work. It's a wise investment," says Sennott, who now heads the GroundTruth project, a non-profit that trains journalists to do in-depth

reporting for outlets such as *GlobalPost*. Sennott says the Pulitzer Center's thoughtful approach has more impact than coverage of a story like [the war in] Gaza, "where the networks all saddle up in Tel Aviv for their live shots from a roof." Pulitzer, he says, "covers stories that need to be covered on the ground."

Sawyer says critics of the Pulitzer Center mission should look beyond the story itself: "I grant you that we do stories that are less read or that are harder to get people to read. That's why we do data visualizations, look for multi-media opportunities or pair journalists up with great photographers; [it's] to draw [people] in and make topics more appealing.

"We also get them [stories] placed with large outlets. It one's thing to say we're going to do a story on reproductive health and abortion in the Philippines and we're just going put it up on the Pulitzer Center site, which has a basic audience or 100,000 a month, (or 3,000 to 4,000 a day.)" Probably [only] several hundred people engage more than a minute or so on the site. If you have something on your site and nowhere else, that's kind of a vanity operation. But if you get *NewsHour* to give you eight minutes on child stunting and malnutrition in Guatemala, then you have about a million people, and they stay with the show for the entire hour. We've done that 45 or 50 times now—that's a lot of engagement. That is getting an untold story before a large audience."

Helping journalists line up placements in publications like the *Atlantic* or on shows like the *NewsHour* is just one aspect of the Pulitzer Center's journalistic goal. Says Sawyer, "We are not just about helping the journalist; we also get universities and schools to give us a venue to talk about the stories. In some ways our goal is to get the American public more engaged in global issues generally. Journalism is a means to that end. Our ultimate goal is more about helping citizens understand what is going on in the world—how what we do affects the world and how what's going on elsewhere affects us."

The Pulitzer Model

At the outset, Sawyer decided that the Pulitzer Center would limit its grants to a journalist's expenses, mainly because of his initial lean budgets. But he also wanted to build some entrepreneurship into his model. He says he didn't want the Center to be an organization that simply writes checks so journalists can do stories. Systems like that don't create any entrepreneurial incentives to find publishers that will pay for a story. At the time he adopted that policy, the Center assumed that placements in good, solid publications would generate reasonable pay for journalists. "You want people to hustle. If they got two or three good placements and we picked up the hard costs, we assumed they would come out ahead," he says, adding that he now questions whether that assumption remains true given the industry's financial troubles.

Sawyer also figured a publication would take a Pulitzer Center story more seriously if it paid a journalist for the work. "We wanted the publications to have some stake in the story even if they were paying a dime to our dollar in terms of the overall costs. We thought they would be more serious about the editing of the project and think more of it if they had some skin in the game. That was important. We wanted them to be treating it as the valuable reporting that it was, and not just as a free good," he says.

Forcing the journalist to get pay commitments for his or her work frustrates some Pulitzer Center grantees. Although Pulitzer Center journalists praise the Center for funding travel and foreign reporting hard costs, some also say the demands imposed by the Center outweigh the dollar amounts of his grants.

A typical Pulitzer Center contract calls for the journalist to:

- Write and place in a major publication an in-depth story or series of stories on a global issue.
- Produce a meet-the-journalist video.
- Use photos to illustrate two of the stories.
- Produce two “Untold Story” dispatches, or blog posts for the Pulitzer website or other outlet, as well as Field Notes (short posts for the Tumblr platform that tell how the journalist reported the story.)

In the application, a potential grantee submits a detailed expense budget that is scrutinized by Sawyer, Pulitzer senior editor Tom Hundley, and Nathalie Applewhite, the Center’s managing director. Most journalists interviewed appreciated the Center’s flexible review process.

“They don’t have a specific time like once a year or once a quarter to apply,” says David Baron, former science editor at *Public Radio International’s* “The World” program. Baron said Pulitzer Center grants covered the travel costs for a story about cancer in the developing world. “They have a rolling deadline. That’s good. They also make quick decisions [so] we can get going relatively fast,” he says.

A journalist usually gets half of the money with approval of a grant and half when the Center gets its stories and posts. Most Pulitzer grants are relatively small. They usually range between \$2,000 for students to as much as \$20,000 for professional journalists (and occasionally much more, as in the case of \$160,000 in support over several years for a documentary on homophobia in Jamaica). The average grant is \$12,000. (As seasoned foreign correspondents, Sawyer and Hundley can easily spot inflated or inadequate budgets.) On the cancer series the grant proposal came from Joanne Silberner, a freelance radio reporter and former health reporter for NPR. She submitted an application to the Pulitzer Center for a grant to travel to Uganda, India, and Haiti—all countries that were facing the consequences of inadequate preparation for a surge in cancer.

“You need to do a budget,” Silberner says. “It’s a simple one-page budget, how much for travel, how much for things like fixers, hotels, food. So I sent it in and they sent me a note back saying you didn’t ask for enough money; you couldn’t possibly do the story for that. So they gave me \$2,000 more.” The series won numerous awards including a 2013 European School of Oncology Best Cancer Reporting Award. Silberner’s series ran on *The World*, got picked up by the BBC, and became an e-book and the subject of numerous lectures and events. “The Pulitzer Center made that project work,” says Baron. “I had a really good reporter. But I couldn’t afford to pay her what she deserved or cover her travel. Yet I needed that kind of quality content on a show that covered the world. We simply could not have done the project without the Pulitzer help. I’ve sent other people their way.”

Journalists who think the Center’s grants are too small usually prefer to remain anonymous, fearing they will alienate one of the few organizations that finances international reporting. “I’ve heard from some reporters who have applied to Pulitzer complain about all that’s demanded – the photos, blog posts, videos—for not much money,” says Baron. One of those reporters is Jessie Deeter, a freelance journalist in Tunisia, who says the Center should double the size of its grants.

Pay, of course, is a touchy subject for everyone. But it’s particularly sensitive in journalistic circles these days. The collapse of the news industry’s business model and its financial problems obviously impact pay levels. This crisis gives freelancers more opportunities, but usually for less pay. And the work can be risky, particularly for some eager but inexperienced writers who work on contract for news organizations.

“If you are a talented young person,” says Jeff Bartholet, a veteran freelance writer and Pulitzer grantee (formerly the foreign editor at *Newsweek*), “you can go out into the world and make your mark more easily than I did in the dark ages. On the other hand, I think [media] organizations also take advantage of

people. You are using people to cover Syria or Iraq who lack insurance and proper security networks. You can take advantage of young freelancers who want to make a name for themselves and are willing to put themselves in harm's way without proper protection." The beheading of freelance journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff by the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq reinforces Bartholet's point.

Balboni says journalistic organizations usually don't "send" reporters to trouble spots like the war in Iraq or Syria. "Here's the way it works: People gravitate to a story like that. You get an email or a Skype message from someone who is in one of those places and [the person will] say, 'Hey, I've got a story for you.' Then the question becomes: Will you use the story, knowing little about the person or whether [he or she] should even be in a war zone? If you take that story, then you are complicit. The temptation is to take it, that's just human nature. We wouldn't do that but many [news organizations] do; and once they do, they have a moral responsibility they just can't escape."

Foley, one of the journalists beheaded by Islamic extremists, was working in Syria for *GlobalPost and Agence France-Presse* when he was captured. "I discouraged him from going there," Balboni says. When Foley was seized, millions of dollars were spent trying to free him, says Balboni, who also spent much of his time on Foley's tragic plight. "We've always been very careful. Now I'm looking at ways to further boost our support to our team, particularly our senior correspondents," he says.

Sawyer says, "If [the Center] is giving a grant to someone and it's in a war zone or in an area that we perceive is risky, we want a large media organization to have a stake in that story and a commitment to that journalist. There have been journalists whom we've not funded because they haven't been able to secure that kind of commitment. With Foley and Sotloff being killed, I think people have sobered up. We've always discouraged inexperienced young journalists and counseled them to be very careful about lining up support. We tell them there are limits to what we

can do. That said, if and when journalists get into trouble, we do everything we can to help them.”

Bad things can happen even to veteran freelancers. Michael Scott Moore, an experienced freelancer writer from Manhattan Beach, California, received a commission for a piece on piracy from the *Atlantic* magazine and traveled to Somalia on a Pulitzer Center grant. Commercial pirates abducted him in January 2012 and demanded millions of dollars in ransom. He was released in September 2014. The Center worked with his family, other media organizations and government officials in the effort to secure Moore’s release but Sawyer acknowledged that in situations like this there are no clear rules—and no easy answers. “We don’t have the resources of any of the large media organizations,” he said. “If we tried to take on that role, we would pretty quickly run ourselves out of business.”

The financial pressures that face freelancers transcend war zones. Roger Thurow, a long-time *Wall Street Journal* reporter and author, now a freelance journalist, writes often on global food issues. He says many non-profits have unrealistic views about the needs of journalists. He praises the Pulitzer Center as a “torchbearer for the grand tradition” of foreign correspondence.

“But you have all of these other organizations out there,” Thurow says, “and everyone of them, the Gates Foundation to the smaller organizations, all talk about the importance of story telling. [They say] we need to tell our stories. It’s vital, so people know about the work we do. It’s vital so we can raise funds.’ But there’s this huge disconnect: They want the stories told but that’s not one of the things they fund. So I got to the point of saying, ‘Do you think that journalists live under bridges and eat dog food? How are we supposed to do these stories?’ Someone has to invest in the journalism. Otherwise it’s like the proverbial tree falling in the forest – no one hears about it.”

Not all Pulitzer-supported journalists experience the pay issue in the same way. Newspaper journalists usually continue to draw paychecks while using Pulitzer money for travel and expenses. Marty Kaiser, the editor who made the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* arguably the best paper in the Midwest and one of the best in the country, says, “The Pulitzer Center allows us to do foreign travel on stories that affect Wisconsin. We could not afford these things without them. It’s a big thing for us.” A recipient of several Pulitzer grants, Kaiser’s paper went to the Center in 2012 with an idea for a series of stories about the impact of Chinese competition on Wisconsin’s paper industry.

The Center approved a \$10,000 grant so two of Kaiser’s journalists, reporter John Schmid and photojournalist Mike DeSisti, could travel and document how China had tripled its production of paper, nearly destroying one of Wisconsin’s important industries. The Pulitzer grant helped finance reporting by Schmid and De Sisti on shuttered mill towns in rural Wisconsin and the humming mega-factories in Kushan, China. The Pulitzer Center expressed delight with the print and online series “Paper Cuts.” “With deeply researched reporting, superb storytelling, and a sharp eye for the revealing detail, they [went] beyond the familiar stereotypes and conventional wisdom to give readers real insight into Wisconsin’s losing battle with China’s innovation-driven economy,” Hundley wrote in a Pulitzer Center newsletter item on the project.

The series won a 2013 Associated Press Media Editor Journalism Excellence award; first place for integrated story telling from the Society for Features Journalism, first place for explanatory reporting in the 2013 Society of American Business Editors and Writers, and was a finalist in two categories for the 2013 Gerald Loeb awards. A *Journal Sentinel*-produced video based on the series also received two regional Emmy nominations.

The Pulitzer Center grant covered only travel costs and expenses but it enabled the paper to do the project. “Without the grant, we would not have been

able to go to China and instead would have been left trying to report the story from here. Our story was of enormous interest to Wisconsin readers and many others around the country,” says Greg Borowski, the paper’s projects editor.

But the story is far different for the growing number of freelance writers who now fill the gaps in foreign reporting. As newspaper troubles deepen, media organizations rely more on freelancers for foreign stories. The majority of Pulitzer Center grantees are now freelancers. Sometimes outlets such as the *New Yorker* magazine come to the Pulitzer Center with a writer and a project they like but hesitate to commission because of tight budgets. “We had a young reporter [Katherine Zoepf] who had never done anything for us before,” says the *New Yorker’s* Wickenden. “She is writing a book about women in the Middle East and had spent quite a bit of time in Saudi Arabia. She wanted to write a piece on Saudi women.” Wickenden says one of her staff writers had explored the subject but couldn’t get a Saudi visa. So the staff writer recommended Zoepf, whom Wickenden vetted.

“I had pitched the story to the *New Yorker*,” Zoepf says. “I was told they wanted to assign the piece but felt it was too expensive. A couple of months later, I mentioned my disappointment to a friend who recommended the Pulitzer Center.” With interest from the magazine in hand, she applied for a grant that would cover expenses and make the piece feasible. “Not only did they say ‘yes’ which thrilled her and us,” says Wickenden, “they also said they would love to send a photographer along with her.”

Not all freelancers are so fortunate. Most writers and reporters who come to the Center must first line up a publication and pay, something that’s more difficult now than ever before. “The financial issue is huge,” said Christiane Badgley, who won Pulitzer Center grants for stories involving the oil industry in Chad, Cameroon, and Ghana. “All of the [Pulitzer] reporting grants I’m aware of only support travel,” she says, adding that she struggles financially as freelance reporter/producer.

“I just finished a story for *Foreign Policy* that took months of research, reporting and writing,” Badgley says. While working on the piece, she had to earn income from other sources to make ends meet. “Cross-platform work that’s good takes a lot of effort. Print-oriented publishers still don’t get this and the fees offered make good work extremely difficult. I haven’t found a way to make it work,” she says.

Even seasoned freelancers like Jeff Bartholet feel the pressures. He went to the Pulitzer Center after the *New Yorker* expressed interest in a piece about the self-immolation of Tibetan monks. “The *New Yorker* used to have gobs of money, and even it no longer has gobs of money,” he said. “So it was very helpful to have [the Pulitzer Center] willing to pay expenses to support that effort and it worked out very well.”

But Bartholet also expressed some frustration at what he had to do to get the Pulitzer money. “On the downside, from my perspective (and this is a minor thing—I’m very grateful to the Pulitzer Center)—but they want you to jump through a lot of little hoops. I’m doing a *New Yorker* piece, a long piece, and they wanted me to do a video, arrange for photographs to run with sound, do a separate photo essay, and two other shorter written pieces.

Bartholet said it’s hard to do a 10,000-word piece plus the other things and do them well: “I’m not a photographer, I’m not a videographer, I’m not a sound guy. So it felt like I was just doing things for the sake of doing them and they would run on the Pulitzer website and four people were going to look at it. I would have preferred if I could have used the money and time to focus on what I was there for—for what I’m good at.”

Bartholet acknowledged that the Pulitzer Center helped him learn new multi-media skills: “I’m not griping about it. I got something out of it. But it seemed like make-work. Even if they had given me \$1,000 less, that would have been better for me than having to try to figure out all of these other little elements.”

Grants that don't cover pay represent a huge gamble on long-range projects like an unusual one that Micah Fink, a broadcast journalist and documentarian, did with Pulitzer Center help. The grant totaled \$160,000 over several years for a project about homophobia in Jamaica. It started off as a shorter commission – several segments for a WNET broadcast—but the piece evolved into a documentary, then a new journalistic avenue for the Center. Pulitzer covered the expenses for the documentary but the grant contract mandated that Fink find a broadcast outlet to feature the film before he could be paid for his time.

Fink says: “I had maybe the biggest grant that they’ve ever done and it was a learning experience for all of us. None of us realized how expensive it would be from start to finish. We all had high hopes that this film would produce some economic benefits for me. Unfortunately, our aspirations didn’t work out. While I was happy to have made the film and get it finished, economically it has not been a great success.”

Fink said he understood Sawyer’s motivation to encourage journalists to “get out there and market their work.” But he said longer-term projects like “Jamaica: An Abominable Crime,” pose different problems. “It [the grant] didn’t cover four or five months of my time over several years. My fantasy—or *our* fantasy—was that a film about homophobia in Jamaica would turn into a commercial success,” says Fink. Although the film won awards and was screened all over the world, public television was initially not interested.

“Maybe this was me not negotiating strongly enough,” he says. “I was just happy to get the grant approved.” Fink says he can’t work on public service journalism projects for free and his experience poses an economic viability question for other writers and producers. “Is this a hobby or a way to support a family? Unfortunately I don’t have a trust fund and I have a family. There has to be an incentive for the journalist beyond just getting your work out there,” he says.

Sawyer recognizes that the media's financial problems make life harder for freelance journalists. He notes the Center's support for Fink extended over five-plus years and allowed Fink to continue and complete an important project that had no other support. He also noted that in this case the long wait for income looks to have a positive outcome after all, thanks to the recent offer of a commission from the PBS *World* strand to run a 52-minute version of the documentary in early 2015. If the commission is completed Fink will be paid by the outlet and will receive additional income from the Pulitzer Center.

"I'm happy," says Fink, who reports that he's currently in contract talks regarding the documentary. "It means the process worked in the long term. It's been a year since we finished the film and deferred compensation is still compensation. But to put a frame around this: I do have a mortgage and two little kids. It's hard to work for a year and not get paid until a year later," says Fink, who adds that the finances involving public service journalism projects are "complicated."

Sawyer explains that the Center wants to help but must remain vigilant about its finances. "Our grants are getting bigger. Everything evolves organically over time to deal with the exigencies of what it's like to be a freelancer now and we're trying to find ways of getting adequate income to the journalist," Sawyer says. But the "default mode" remains: Pulitzer will cover hard costs and the journalist must line up pay and a publisher.

"We now have sufficient volume that Tom Hundley and I are in conversations pretty regularly to help push things and get additional payments and placements for journalists. Even though we say in our grant applications that it's up to journalists to seek placements, we give some help on that end. Anyone who demonstrates that he or she can do this work and can write about these issues in a way that finds a placement, we are more inclined to come back and do another

grant. In some cases we have become a routine source of financial support. We've also raised the amount of the grant so it's actual income as well as hard costs. We're only doing that when we have a journalist with a proven track record, we are in synch on the quality of the work and we know that will get a good value for our investment."

The Center's Finances

Although he's become more flexible about pay issues in recent years, Sawyer maintains a financial discipline to ensure generosity doesn't exceed resources. Not everyone anticipated Sawyer's prowess at fund raising and expanding the Center's reach. "Jon has taken this so much further than he dreamed and certainly than I did," says Emily Pulitzer. "I knew he was a good reporter, but I had no idea he was such an entrepreneur," she adds.

Sawyer has raised \$16.5 million since founding the Center in 2006. From his initial \$1.2 million donation from the Pulitzer family, Sawyer assembled an impressive group of donors that now includes:

- Numerous individuals.
- The Kendeda Fund, a private foundation that focuses on sustainability issues.
- Huge foundations such as the Gates, Henry Luce Foundation, and MacArthur Foundations.

Indeed, within five years of opening its doors, Sawyer increased the Center's annual revenues from the Pulitzer's \$300,000 yearly seed money to \$1.9 million. By 2010, the Center had increased its spending to \$1,456,000, including

nearly \$600,000 in grants to journalists and nearly \$500,000 for educational and outreach programs.

In 2013, the Center saw the biggest jump in resources in its history. That year, Sawyer and his team took the Center's revenues to \$5,865,200 – a total that includes some multi-year donations and puts it on a level with the *Texas Tribune*, a non-profit that focuses on Texas political news.

With the increased resources, Sawyer stepped up spending in 2013 to \$2,670,000, including \$1.1 million on grants to journalists and nearly \$1 million on education and outreach. The Center's staff of 13 full-time employees supplemented by interns remains relatively small compared to other non-profit news organizations. Sawyer's expenses stack up favorably too, including his salary. In 2013, the Center paid Sawyer \$213,400 in salary and benefits, compared to the \$311,773 earned by Evan Smith, the *Texas Tribune* editor and CEO. [Smith, a gifted journalist and fundraiser, has a larger staff since he relies less on copy from freelancers.] The Center also employs Sawyer's wife, Kem, to mentor student grantees and to edit stories, e-books and blogs. In 2013 her income as a Pulitzer Center consultant was \$46,958. Sawyer's son-in-law was paid \$80,886 in 2013 for web design and data-visualization projects.

Emily Pulitzer and Katherine Moore still account for roughly a fifth of the Pulitzer Center's operating support but the Center's funding base today is diverse. The largest single donor, the Kendeda Fund, has approved several grants including a matching grant to create a reserve fund that would keep the Center flush in hard times. The Center's net assets, which totaled \$967,683 in 2012, rose to \$4.1 million by year-end 2013.

"Board members have committed and/or pledged to raise the target for the reserve fund," Sawyer says, "We are fully funded through calendar 2014 and assured of nearly half the funds we require for several more years. Our continued

success depends on sustaining our current support, persuading new donors that, for the work we do—engaging the broadest possible public on the big global issues that affect us all—there is no better investment than the Pulitzer Center,” he says.

About half of the donations carry no restrictions, meaning the Center can use the money for general operating purposes. Another half involve restrictive grants that require funds be spent covering specific subjects. The six-figure sums that Betsy Dietel has raised from a variety of anonymous donors represented by Dietel Partners, a philanthropic advisory firm, support coverage of water and sanitation, commodity extraction, and issues concerning women and children.

Donations that target news coverage trouble some Pulitzer Center partners and editors. The *Washington Post*'s Douglas Jehl thinks the Pulitzer Center fills an important niche in the role of international reporting, but qualifies his remarks: “For us it has been a good and credible partner. [But] we want to be sure that the subject [of a Pulitzer story] isn't being narrowly focused in a way that might be aimed at pleasing sponsors rather than serving readers.”

Jehl says the *Post* has not had any problems with a Pulitzer project per se, but that one of his editors became concerned about an overall increase in the coverage of health care in Africa, a high priority for the Gates Foundation, a Pulitzer donor. “My concern going forward,” the editor wrote in a note to Jehl, “is that more Gates money is funding important health-related reporting in Africa.” The editor worried that freelancers seemed to be writing only about successful health stories in Africa, ones that would please funders like Gates. “I see this as a challenge at a time when we need good freelancers in Africa,” the editor told Jehl.

Nathalie Applewhite says the Pulitzer Center's interests—and not its funders'—drive the Center's editorial direction. “In those cases where we have attracted support from donors with an interest in raising awareness of specific issues, the support came after we had already commissioned substantial work in

that issue area. In the cases of water and food security, we commissioned multiple projects before we ever raised a dime,” she says. “And when we did raise money it was with explicit guarantees that we would have full editorial control over the choice of stories, journalists and approach.”

Journalists questioned for this report suggest the Pulitzer Center fulfills its role as a needed buffer between the donor and the journalist. “This is vital,” says freelancer Roger Thurow.

“Donors appreciate that their funding of coverage of global issues is only enhanced by the independence of the journalism. The Pulitzer Center provides an invaluable buffer between the donors and the journalists. The journalists can be confident that they are receiving support without any strings attached to their coverage. It is essential that this coverage receives financial support (it can’t be done without it), and it is essential that this coverage is independent. The Pulitzer Center makes both of these essential things happen,” says Thurow.

“I have no idea where the money that the Pulitzer Center granted to the *Seattle Times* came from, and I don’t care,” adds Craig Welch, a reporter and member of a team that used Pulitzer money for “Sea Change,” a *Seattle Times* multi-media project. The *Times* report, which won six national journalism awards and a national Emmy nomination, detailed the economic, cultural and political implications of high ocean acidification levels, a major global environmental challenge. Reporting that scientists had found nearly one third of the waters off the west coast of the United States to be so acidic as to be corrosive, Welch and team members traveled the globe reporting about the impact on areas such as oyster farms in Puget Sound and the coral reef off Papua New Guinea. The project documented the chilling impact that changes in ocean chemistry portend for the world’s food chain.

Welch says, “There was never even the slightest, tiniest hint of any push from the Pulitzer Center team on what direction stories should take. In terms of

firewalls protecting journalists from outside interests, I see the Pulitzer Center as a model. Frankly, there's less conflict than in a traditional newsroom. In a newsroom, you can open the paper and see who's advertising. I don't even know who ultimately funded my reporting."

Other journalists share Welch's sentiments. The Pulitzer Center routinely gets high marks for its ethical standards. In fact, of the more than 75 journalists responding to the survey conducted for this report, not one complained of pressure to shape a story to a donor's wishes.

Applewhite says Pulitzer's grant-approval process reinforces editorial independence. "Journalists frequently come to us and ask what we're interested in," she says. But she says the Center always stresses that it has no editorial agenda other than to raise awareness of under-reported global issues. "We want journalists to come to us with what they are most passionate about. The journalists should pitch a story to an editor and decide on the direction he or she wants to take before coming to us. We strongly believe editorial control lies firmly between the journalist and his or her editor."

Even some Pulitzer donors say they value the Center's role as an intermediary because of the delicate nature of the issue. "I go out of my way not to contact the Pulitzer Center or other grantees because I don't want them to think that I am trying to influence what they cover," says Diane Ives of the Kendeda Fund. The money Kendeda donates to Pulitzer is unrestricted, and Ives says her experience suggests a hands-off approach to journalists is best.

Betsy Dietel, a Pulitzer board member and partner at Dietel Partners, says the anonymous donors she represents are interested in broad areas of coverage even if individual stories don't completely reflect their personal views: "I know there is ongoing debate [in journalistic circles] about whether there needs to be less emphasis on [objective reporting]. But for the donors we work for, objectivity is

really important. With the Pulitzer Center,” she says, “I’d say most of the stories are spot on.”

Pulitzer’s Brand of Non-profit Journalism

Concerns over the influence of funders reflect the rise of non-profit journalism. Innovative media efforts such as *Vice* raise hopes that better days are ahead. But the media’s financial problems persist and few innovators grapple with a thorny problem addressed by the Pulitzer Center and other non-profits: Who will champion the kind of journalism that never attracts advertising—the investigative report, the statehouse story about untoward influence of investment banks, the foreign report on environmental degradation of Lake Tonle Sap in Cambodia or human rights violations in the Thai shrimp industry?

Newspapers continue to do much of that work. As their financial problems continue, staff cuts erode the quantity and quality of such journalism. The impact of the degradation goes beyond the obvious. All manner of media—from broadcasters to blogs, news aggregators to social media sites—rely on newspapers for content that they pick up and repeat or analyze. The 24-hour news cycle’s hunger for fresh streams of news and information accentuates the demands. Meanwhile, resistance to paying more for news remains high, partially because media companies, over the past 180 years, conditioned the public to pay low prices for news subsidized by advertisers. But advertising revenue, particularly at newspapers, continues to dry up, sending news organizations on a desperate scramble for new revenue streams. But the public remains addicted to historical prices and displays a remarkable resistance to paying more, particularly younger readers who think information should be free and don’t even read newspapers.

As the industry’s revenue crisis deepens, journalists turn to non-profits like

the Pulitzer Center to underwrite the stories they want to pursue. The Pulitzer Center is not alone. Numerous other non-profits are rising to the challenge. In New York, Pro Publica focuses on investigative reporting. The Center for Public Integrity in Washington, the Center for Investigative Reporting in California, and the Nation Institute's Investigative Fund in New York do much the same. In Austin, Texas, John Thornton, a wealthy private equity investor considered investing in the *Dallas Morning News*. After scrutinizing the industry trends, he began questioning whether newspapers, over the long haul, were a viable business. Since Thornton believes that news coverage to be vital in a democracy, he helped launch the *Texas Tribune*, a non-profit now a fixture on the Texas political scene.

Most of these non-profits run at a loss. Whether they are sustainable remains an open question and puts a premium on a non-profit's ability to distinguish itself from the others. "Maybe I'm naïve," says Emily Pulitzer, "but I think at some point, somebody's going to learn how to do good journalism and make money. Nobody has yet. But because nobody knows how to make money and do good journalism, the not-for-profit is crucial."

The Pulitzer Center's Applewhite says the organizations that occupy the non-profit space all do good work. But she says the Pulitzer Center brings something unique to the table: "We're very conscious of not wanting to reinvent the wheel. If someone is already doing it well, we'd rather see them succeed than compete with them. This has been our approach with local journalist training sessions that we've been invited to do but have [avoided]. Our mission is to make sure critical under-reported stories reach U.S. and European audiences. We seek collaborations with local journalists and have been able to turn those collaborations into major career breaks for the local journalists. At the same time, we believe there is still a role for the foreign correspondent in reaching our target audiences on the kinds of issues we cover."

Sawyer retains the Center's original goal of providing independent

reporting for newspapers. But he's expanded the Center's focus with more freelance writers. He has also embraced under-reported stories told through multi-media—stories that wouldn't necessarily find a home in major news organizations such as the *Washington Post*. Pulitzer content routinely runs in newspapers, magazines, websites, e-books, blogs, broadcast reports, and combinations of the above.

"I see them [Pulitzer Center] as a catalyst and an enabler in the best sense of the word," says the *Seattle Times*' Jim Simon. He worked closely with Pulitzer on the "Sea Change" project.

"For us, Pulitzer makes possible global reporting of stories that have some relationship to the Northwest. There's a reason the *Seattle Times* did "Sea Change." *The New York Times* or others wouldn't do this story or focus it on the Northwest. Pulitzer makes possible international reporting with a really local relevance," says Simon.

In "Sea Change," for instance, a Seattle reporter and photographer traveled to Hawaii to report on a West Coast American family that built a 20,000-square-foot shellfish hatchery near Hilo, Hawaii, instead of off the coast of Washington state. "Carbon dioxide from fossil fuels emissions had turned seawater in Willapa Bay along Washington's coast lethal. Slippery young Pacific oysters stopped growing," the paper reported. "The same corrosive waters got sucked into an Oregon hatchery and killed the larvae the family used for oyster seed."

But Simon explains how Pulitzer's help went beyond financing the journalism: "I think [the Pulitzer Center] has a lot of expertise. They encourage video and multi-media approaches. ["Sea Change"] ended up being the most ambitious multi-media project we've ever done. And they [Pulitzer] were the catalyst. If we didn't have their money, we probably wouldn't have dug as deeply into this. We probably spent more than the \$17,000 we got from them, but we would never have started out with such ambition had we not had the money."

Simon says the Pulitzer Center also performed a service vital to the new media ecosystem: “They opened doors of distribution for our content. They were really good about getting our stories in different hands. We ended up using our video as the basis for a PBS *NewsHour* piece. So they opened us a lot of contacts for us.”

The Center’s embrace of photojournalism for reporting projects and e-books is also impressive. Sean Gallagher, a freelance photojournalist based in Asia, produces stunning photo reports thanks to grants from the Pulitzer Center. In one report that Pulitzer helped place in the *Wall Street Journal*, Gallagher produced a shocking but artfully done photo essay called “Meltdown: Climate Change and the Environmental Degradation of the Tibetan Plateau.” The essay focused on a region that covers 25 percent of China’s land mass and has temperatures rising faster than anywhere in Asia. The Center also published an e-book based on Gallagher’s piece. Another Pulitzer-financed Gallagher photojournalism project portrayed the health risks India’s poor population faces from the mining of electronic e-waste. It ran in *National Geographic* magazine.

The Center’s capitalizes on its broadcast expertise to do original reporting and to broaden the reach of its journalism. The Center’s partnership with PBS gives national and international exposure on *NewsHour* for many stories that would otherwise remain obscure. “I am on the [Pulitzer] board but I was a consumer and user of their journalism before I went on the board,” says Linda Winslow, who just retired as the *NewsHour*’s executive producer.

“They subscribe to the same principles of good journalism as the *NewsHour* does. It’s rare to have partners who pay the same careful attention to detail that we do. Also, they do the stories that no one else is doing and that’s important.” Winslow says. She added that the Center’s stories may sometimes lack the appeal of war and mayhem, but that audiences cherish a story well told.

“We track our online traffic and we know that some of these stories are actually some of our most-watched. So it depends on the story and how effectively it’s told. There is, especially among young people these days, a lot of interest—more than I would have thought—in issues like food security and climate change, and not all that much in war and pestilence. Everybody races out to cover wars but nobody covers the stories that lead to war,” Winslow says.

Mali is a West African country that, until a few years ago, was not even on the radar of most Americans. Best known for its most fabled city, Timbuktu, the country has a population less than metropolitan New York’s and counts fishing and farming as major industries. Most of its residents live in poverty. In the summer of 2012 though, the small nation burst into the headlines when Islamic militants affiliated with al-Qaeda drove the Malian army out of northern part of the country and made its largest city, Gao, the capital of a rump state dedicated to terrorizing innocent citizens and training jihadists. Eventually France would send troops to the country to drive out the militants. Although Mali’s troubles didn’t involve American troops, Yochi Dreazen, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter turned freelance writer, decided the story had implications for the U.S. because America remains a target for terrorists. He wanted to travel to Mali and write the most detailed piece yet about the spread of violent Islam in Africa.

The recipient of several previous Pulitzer Center grants, Dreazen won another grant to finance his African travel. When he got there, U.S. officials told him that foreign fighters from across Africa had flocked to Mali to earn their jihadist bona fides and gain tactical experience battling a well-armed Western military.

He reported that U.S. officials told him that AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) had already accomplished something no other al-Qaeda affiliate had ever been able to pull off: Conquering and governing a broad swath of a sovereign country, then using it as a base to plot sophisticated attacks outside its border. His

report added that Libyan fighters trained by AQIM took part in the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya that killed American Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Dreazen says the piece that ran in the *Atlantic* magazine was among the magazine's most read pieces of the year and was named to several end-of-year collections of the best magazine writing of 2013. It would not have been done, he says, without the Pulitzer grant.

The Pulitzer Center gives equal consideration to stories that don't involve threats to America but illuminate a significant issue. Chris Berdik, a former staff editor at the *Atlantic* and *Mother Jones* magazines, wanted to do a piece on Lake Tonle Sap, known as "the beating heart of Cambodia" because it's a major food source. The story would have been a hard sell at almost any publication, particularly since Berdik had no international reporting experience. But overfishing, climate change, and plans to build numerous hydroelectric dams threatened the lives of animals that made their homes in the freshwater ecosystem and the livelihoods of millions who depend on the Tonle Sap's resources.

Hundley says editors at *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, an award-winning literary magazine at the University of Virginia with a limited but elite circulation, brought Berdik and his story to the Center's attention with a commitment to publish a long-form piece on the lake. Pulitzer editors liked the idea and approved a grant, setting in motion a process in which the Center displayed its ability to dramatically increase the story's audience and reach.

Berdik says, "I had two goals: To write an open and engaging account of the threats to Lake Tonle Sap, and show the complexity of this problem." He also wanted to outline the ambition and limits of the efforts underway to address the threat by a group of scientists, including some in the U.S.

The Pulitzer Center not only covered some significant travel costs, it also suggested Berdik increase the days of travel for the story and paired him with Steve

Sapienza, the Pulitzer Center's broadcast journalist, to produce a video. "I appreciated the guidance," Berdik says. "Some hand-holding and logistics help was reassuring."

When Berdik finished his reporting, the Center helped get the video piece on the *NewsHour* and an online report on the PBS website. Pulitzer's funding also helped Berdik when he successfully pitched the story to *The New York Times* Science Times section. "In an ideal world, we wouldn't accept a piece funded by anyone but the *Times*," says David Corcoran, science editor at the newspaper. "But in this day and age, there's no way we could pay Chris Berdik, a first-time freelancer for us, a lot of money to go to Cambodia and write about a lake," he added.

The *Times* prides itself on its high editorial standards and strict ethics policies. Before Corcoran would even think about running a story from an organization such as Pulitzer, it has to pass muster with Philip Corbett, the *Times* standards editor who scrutinizes organizations that offer independent stories to the *Times*.

"We have done a lot of these kind of stories from partners and freelancers and we've done a handful with the Pulitzer Center. We don't do them regularly. We are open to all of them, but we want to look at each one individually," says Corbett, who adds that he makes sure *Times* editors handle all copy. Corbett says he looks at the transparency of the organization behind the story, its funding sources, its journalistic track record, its impartiality, and its reputation. Any organization that focuses narrowly on one area of coverage troubles him more than one that covers a wide range of issues such as Pulitzer. "I would say on all those scores, we clearly are comfortable with the Pulitzer Center . . . We've been happy with how these [stories] have turned out," he says.

The Pulitzer Center's journalism occupies a huge presence on its website, which is a blessing and a blemish. Scrolling over the stories impresses almost

anyone who views the site. “I think of it as somewhere to go for timely international information, really good graphics, beautiful photos, and great videos. It’s one of those websites that you go to and you keep going deeper and deeper,” says the Kendeda Fund’s Diane Ives. Pulitzer student fellow Kate Mathieson sees the site as an “incredible resource” for public education. “Every time I go to the website,” she says, “I find myself engaged in article after article.”

But most of the praise reflects the content on the site. The website itself draws mixed reviews from Ives and many other journalists in the survey. Some journalists find the site hard to navigate. In a way, the Center’s journalistic success and huge inventory of stories overwhelms the utility of the site. One journalist says: “There are too many buttons. It lacks focus. You look at it and you don’t know where to go. There’s just too much to look at, and it doesn’t convey what the Pulitzer Center is really about. The website should define your audience and what you want to tell it. It needs to be more simple and streamlined.”

Christine Spolar, the investigations editor at the *Financial Times*, says the website could help itself with more integrated display of stories. “I have at times found it hard to locate related stories. A website should be easy and elegant to navigate and signal when there is something new,” she says.

Micah Albert, a photojournalist and Pulitzer grantee, is more sharp is his critique: “It doesn’t show media/photos in large format. It’s definitely not keeping up with site trends—putting the whole story, photos, and multimedia on the same page that scrolls. I can name 30 non-profit websites that are light years more impressive.” A typical response from Pulitzer grantee Marco Vernaschi in Argentina mixed praise and criticism: “The content is great and very well organized. However, the website seems to be shaped for professionals only [journalists, photographers, etc.] who are familiar with the news industry. It should develop further to attract a general audience worldwide.” Even Ives adds this remark to temper her praise: “As much as I like [it], I would do an overhaul.”

A redesign of the Center’s website currently is underway. In its initial stages, the project features a cleaner, simpler and more dramatic Pulitzer site that focuses strongly on its journalists and journalism.

Pulitzer’s Education Arm

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the Pulitzer Center is its education arm. Capitalizing on its journalism in creative and unique ways, the Center crafts classes, lectures, and events, and arranges classroom visits for students and teachers in schools and universities throughout the U.S. and abroad.

“The impact on our school is immeasurable,” says Peg Monahan, a teacher at the Robert Morris School in Philadelphia. “The Center brought the world into our inner-city, socially isolated school. It is rare that our students have access to newspapers, news magazines, or even watch local/national news. Two years ago, a journalist [from the Pulitzer Center] spoke to them on their level about [human rights abuses in] the shrimp industry in Thailand. Several students organized an unofficial boycott on shrimp. Last year, a journalist spoke on the Prisoner Camp 14 [in North Korea], a subject heretofore unheard of, and many students went to the library to get books on the subject,” she adds.

The Center’s drive to inject journalism into the classroom impresses many educators. Not many other non-profits dedicate so many resources to education. For decades, the American newspaper industry had Newspaper in Education (NIE) programs. Papers were delivered to schools for classroom work. Ostensibly, publishers devised the programs to make newspaper readers out of students.

Actually, the NIE programs were often used as gimmicks to prop up declining newspaper circulations, just like the programs that plop newspapers outside of hotel room doors across the country. Had the industry investment in education been as dedicated as the Pulitzer Center's, perhaps today's young adults might have more of an interest in—and respect for—journalists and newspapers.

Katie Mathieson won a student reporting fellowship from the Pulitzer Center while attending Davidson College in North Carolina “I was so fortunate to have five weeks to work on a story. I now have the utmost respect for journalists who write stories in a matter of hours. Thinking like a journalist has changed my outlook on the world. What we know about global issues depends on those brave enough to [travel] and share what they learn,” she said.

Pulitzer journalist/educators reach into middle school, high school, and university classrooms through its Global Gateway program, which is designed to sharpen critical thinking skills and encourage student consumption and production of news. The Center organizes its stories around Gateways, or broad categories of its journalism united by a common subject. For instance, one Global Gateway includes all Pulitzer stories on “Ocean Health,” another includes stories on population issues. Pulitzer calls one Gateway “Fragile States,” a category for Pulitzer stories on places that are magnets for terrorism, trafficking, piracy, and nuclear proliferation. The Center then builds classes, curriculums, and educational programs around the Gateways.

Mark Schulte, a former journalist and teacher who is now the Center's Education Director, says Pulitzer wants to help students link global and local issues. “Let's say you bring in four journalists who have done four stories that relate to a certain subject that is a Gateway. Each of them talk about their stories and then sit down with students see how the story connects back to local issues in their backyards,” he explains.

When Jeanne Deslich, a science teacher at Maret School in Washington D.C., wanted to teach her students about environmental problems that Washington shared with other areas of the world, the Pulitzer Center turned to its “Downstream” Gateway, a collection of 80 stories, speeches, and events organized around the subject of water. The issues ranged from reports on women who spend hours fetching water for their families, to melting icepacks and rising sea levels. The Center sent Steve Sapienza, now the staff’s senior producer, to Maret to tell Deslich’s students about a Pulitzer project on the relentless threat rising waters pose to Bangladesh.

“[Sapienza] focused on the consequences of what’s going to happen with global warming and populations needing to move as waters rise and [he discussed] sanitation issues. We’re actually interested in a sewage overflow issue here because of old sewage lines in Washington. When it rains, raw sewage overflows the system and is pumped into Rock Creek, (which runs through the city) and that relates to what’s going on in [Bangladesh]. The students could relate to what’s going on in their backyards and something global. They’ve really liked having outside speakers come and [provide] a different perspective instead of just listening to my voice every day. It’s brought a lot of interest to the class. It’s just really helped them understand the material,” says Deslich.

The Center’s programs transcend help for a single classroom. It designs entire curriculums around stories or Pulitzer Center projects such as Paul Salopek’s “Out of Eden” walk. A former foreign correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* and a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Salopek embarked on an unusual project in 2013: He decided to walk around the world, tracing mankind’s trek from the Rift Valley in Ethiopia [believed to be the site of the Garden of Eden,] to Tierra del Fuego, the archipelago off the tip of South America. Salopek’s non-profit venture depends on grants and contributions for funding.

Over seven years, Salopek intends to walk 21,000 miles, filing stories,

photo essays, and blogs. His project is geared to highlight the value of “slow journalism,” reporting designed to capture what’s missed in a world geared to warp-speed information flows. A Pulitzer Center education grant and a partnership with Project Zero at the Harvard University School of Education plugs Salopek into classrooms across the globe where he discusses his trip and experiences with students.

“Education is sort of a second-tier mission for [the Center],” Salopek says, “the primary one being getting people out there reporting. We discussed that for me but the fit just wasn’t right. So we discussed education, an arena where we can collaborate because Jon [Sawyer] really liked the idea of the walk. Mark Schulte is my primary contact there.”

When school is in session, Salopek has digital interactions or Skype conversations with students who use a Pulitzer Center curriculum. The Walk has many fans, including Tomas van Houtryve, a Belgian journalist and Pulitzer grantee. “I’m hooked on following Out of Eden,” he says.

But Salopek’s walk has even more fans among teachers using it in their classes. “We had 2,000 students involved in a project across six schools, as well as 40 teachers,” says Tracy Crowley, an educator at the Community Consolidated School District 21 in suburban Chicago. “We used the [Out of Eden] project to deliver our curriculum in a way that was purposeful, exciting and deeply engaging to students and teachers. Teachers reported increased writing skills, literacy, social science knowledge, and engagement in school. The project also has connected school families [excited about] the learning that took place. Middle school students would run out into the hallway when they saw us coming and ask and if we were going to learn about The Walk today. I also noticed teacher growth. Teachers who were formerly ‘tech phobic’ were motivated to Tweet, video chat, blog, and create wikis sharing student learning. We saw a shift from teacher-directed learning to more student-directed learning, which is one of our district-level professional goals.

The project connected our kids to other kids, domestically and internationally,” says Crowley.

The Center’s education program fits seamlessly with its outreach efforts led by Ann Peters, an attorney and former UPI foreign correspondent who is the Center’s director of development and outreach. Peters spearheads the Center’s Campus Consortium, a collaboration that brings journalists to schools and universities for talks, events or workshops and a fellowship that offers the rare opportunity for college students to travel overseas and write a story, one that the Center helps get published. “We’ve been a Campus Consortium member almost since the beginning,” says William Freivogel, who ran the journalism program at Southern Illinois University until this year and worked with Sawyer at the *Post-Dispatch*. “It’s been terrific for us. I do it because the Pulitzer Center performs an important service—it gives our students an idea of the possibilities out there. It opens a window for them,” he adds.

Peters says universities typically pay the Center an annual \$10,000 fee for a consortium membership. For the money, the Center sends its journalists to campus twice a year to work with students and professors. Currently 19 colleges and universities are consortium members. Consortium members also select one student for a Pulitzer Center reporting fellowship. In most cases the fellowship covers expenses up to \$2,000; some universities have made available as much as \$5,000 each. The Center helps the school select fellowship recipients and mentors them as they travel overseas to report and write a story to be published on the Pulitzer Center website and in various publications.

“We have had only positive feedback from students who have participated in the reporting trips and the events on campus. It has been a life-changing experience for many of them,” says Anne Donohue of Boston University. “The [Center] is a fabulous partner. A class act!”

Some of the universities in the program are not journalism schools. For instance, the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore belongs to the Consortium. “This is kind of a new thing for us and it’s worked out just great,” says Brian Simpson, dean of the Bloomberg School. Through the consortium the school has established a Hopkins/Pulitzer Global Health Reporting Fellowship. “We sponsor one student per year to report on a particular global public health issue,” says Simpson. The student first goes to Washington, D.C. to spend a few weeks with the Pulitzer Center journalists to get training – kind of “a journalism boot camp,” says Simpson. He adds, “We are school of public health so we’re not expecting our students to be journalists. So it’s terrific for us to be able to offer one more very different kind of fellowship for our students. We are a graduate school; we don’t have any undergraduates. But any degree-seeking student can apply.”

Varsha Ramakrishnan, the first Pulitzer fellow from Hopkins and a physician seeking a masters degree in public health, experienced a huge success. Simpson explains, “She [Ramakrishnan] reported on dowry violence in India. She is an Indian physician and knew about this issue—the husband’s family will go back to the bride’s family and say ‘you didn’t pay us enough for a dowry.’ Basically they take it out on the bride, which can include setting her on fire.”

Ramakrishnan says her experience gave her new respect for journalists: “I now understand how much hard work goes into getting out one story. Leads would suddenly go missing when I tried to call them. Survivors would not want to talk when I met them a second time. It was surprising how many new incidents began cropping up once I got into the field. I now understand how important it is to remain objective while covering a story and how stressful deadlines can be.”

Ramakrishnan’s story, published on the Pulitzer website and in the Bloomberg School’s magazine, won a prestigious Robert F. Kennedy national collegiate journalism award from the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights.

Simpson says another element of the Pulitzer-Hopkins collaboration is an annual symposium that brings together Pulitzer journalists and some of the school's experts on public health issues.

“It helps us connect with working journalists interested in these issues and it helps the journalists because they meet some of the world's top experts. To have that exposure is really a great benefit to them and to us, too. We put a ton of effort into the symposium we did last year on non-communicable diseases. Actually it was very well attended. It is very difficult to get people here to attend a two-hour talk because we have hundreds [of lectures] every year. But this one was well attended. It is so important for [students] to hear how stories get made, what motivates journalists, and what captures [journalists'] attention. All of that is so critical. I've found them [Pulitzer] to be just terrific to work with. I'd love to see if there are other opportunities to work with them.”

Universities without formal journalism schools also value the consortium program. “Wake Forest's connection to the Pulitzer Center continues to pay dividends through campus visits and the fellowship,” says Justin Catanoso, director of the journalism program at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, a consortium member.

“We are a small program, and our association with the center sends a message to students and administration that we are serious about high-quality journalism education,” says Catanoso. He says he saw the value of the school's Pulitzer affiliation when Cynthia Gorney, a former *Washington Post* reporter and currently a journalism professor at the University of California at Berkeley, visited Wake Forest to talk about a Pulitzer Center project on child marriage. Catanoso said the visit made him realize the complexity and nuance of the issue: “Gorney remains the gold standard for these kinds of events. Her impact in classrooms and a large public forum still resonates.” He also praised the Center's fellowships: “While students have plenty of overseas options, the Pulitzer fellowship is the only one

focused on independent overseas reporting on an important issue of the student's choosing."

The student fellows, who are mentored by Kem Sawyer, report on a range of projects including maternal and pediatric health issues in Guinea, human trafficking in Cambodia, Scottish independence, and the struggles of Palestinian farmers. "The support of Kem Sawyer and the rest of the office has been unbelievable," says Katie Mathieson, the student fellow at Davidson College.

The Center not only relies on its staff to give advice to students on everything from travel arrangements to tips on reporting in perilous places, it also taps into seasoned veteran journalists who have received Pulitzer grants. "The Pulitzer Center advisors have been incredible," says Mathieson, "I can't believe how kind and welcoming the community of journalists has been. "

Benjamin Waltzer, program director of careers in journalism, arts and the media at the University of Chicago, says the Pulitzer Center is a natural partner for his department at the university, which is a consortium member. He says the Pulitzer Center provides the most dynamic undergraduate fellowship offered at the university: "One thing that's really great about Pulitzer is it's not just an entity, it's a network that you can tap into. I've only had great experiences working with them."

Although some of the journalists questioned felt overwhelmed by the Center's push for campus speaking and outreach, more than 90 percent of those responding to the survey saw the value in the Center's outreach program. "Outreach, outreach, outreach," says the *Seattle Times'* Welch in a typical response: "That's an incredibly tough job and it requires a skill that many journalists simply don't have. Speaking is rarely the fun part of any journalist's work. But the more I did it, the more important I realized it was. I think it's an incredibly important component of the Center's work. I think Pulitzer needs to build on that." Adds Silberner, the freelance radio journalist who reported on cancer in the developing world, "There

are times I would rather skip it [speaking]. Too busy; audience not interested. But looking back, I'm glad I did every trip, even South Dakota."

Sawyer says there's an entrepreneurial element to the educational outreach programs. Journalists who embrace the outreach efforts get significant income and lots of contacts. Pulitzer typically pays \$500 a day plus expenses. "The ones who get that realize this is not just a foundation that is going to write a check and that's it. This is a journalism organization that wants to work to try to get the most mileage possible out of the work we do together. The cream rises to the top," he says.

The Pulitzer Center's Impact

There's no question that the Pulitzer Center wields substantial influence in journalism and education.. Although most respondents to the survey hesitated to call the Center a major force in journalism, quite a few said it was evolving into one. The hesitancy may be related more to the measures used to quantify the impact of non-profit news organizations. They are a work in progress. "I know it's a journalistic lifeline," says Emily Pulitzer, "but what I want to know is: How impactful is it on the community?"

Others share her concern. Between 2005 and 2009, the Institute for Interactive Journalism at American University in Washington DC says 180 foundations contributed \$145 million to non-profit news organizations such as Pulitzer. And the demand grows. The Pew Center for Excellence in Journalism says America in 2012 had 172 non-profit news outlets in 41 states, all trying to tap a common donor pool.

“Non-profits face increasing pressure for quantifiable results from numerous stakeholders,” says Richard Tofel, president and a founding general manager of ProPublica, the large investigative reporting non-profit based in New York. He adds, “Funders are attracted by the potential of journalism to spur change. Some have imported or adapted business methods into their work, talking of ‘investments’ and ‘returns.’ Increasingly executives at these non-profits come from business backgrounds and are comfortable seeing results in numbers rather than words.” Tofel’s remarks, in a white paper on impact measures funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, come as Gates, a Pulitzer donor, leads a drive demanding improved journalistic impact measures.

With the rise of digital journalism and the volume of data and metrics it engenders, one would think that measuring impact would be easy. After all, news websites churn out data such as page views, unique visitors, and other metrics that news organizations never produced when the main yardsticks were circulation totals compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), the newspaper-funded company now known as the Alliance for Audited Media, or broadcast ratings compiled by the Nielsen Company.

Actually the opposite is true. “A review of recent relevant literature and our informal conversations with experts in the field reveal growing ambitions toward the goal of developing a common framework for assessing journalism’s impact, yet few definitive conclusions about how exactly to do it,” say Charles Lewis and Hilary Niles in a paper on journalistic impact in non-profit newsrooms written for the Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University in Washington. Lewis is the workshop’s founding executive editor and Niles worked as a researcher there.

Like all websites, the Pulitzer Center’s captures all manner of data compiled by Google Analytics, a data service of the giant internet company. But Dana Chinn, a media analytics strategist and director of the Norman Lear Media Impact project at the University of Southern California Annenberg School of

Communications and Journalism, says the value of Google Analytics data is extremely limited for non-profits like the Pulitzer Center.

“Metrics are tools, not the be-all-to-end-all,” says Chinn, who is also a professor at USC. “They are never going to capture this comprehensive view of impact. And there is a huge difference between non-profit news and for-profit when it comes to metrics. You cannot really talk about audience metrics with a for-profit news organization because advertiser metrics are completely different than audience metrics. It is a different definition of success. I focus on the longer-term strategic metrics and strategic planning used to build and engage audiences. That has the most cursory connection to how advertisers are buying media. It’s a distraction and really is why newsroom [are skeptical of] audience metrics. They are equating them with the stupid metrics that they have to produce for advertising, like page views. So someone who writes about entertainment is being judged by the same metrics as someone who writes about local government, which is ridiculous. And that’s all because of the advertising metrics,” Chinn says.

Most journalists instinctively distrust attempts to create numerical measures of their work. “Veteran reporters and editors,” Lewis and Niles wrote in their paper at American University, “have an inherent, almost visceral dislike of audience measurement and other metrics-producing data. They perceive themselves as intrepid hunter-gatherers of information, hearty truth tellers treading through the often extremely difficult, well-nigh impossible terrain of disingenuous politicians, opaque institutions, and potentially litigious corporations with public relations departments. Original reporting cannot be reduced to mere data, an inhospitable milieu.”

To measure impact, someone also has to determine a desired outcome, or a goal to be achieved with a story, a practice that stirs journalistic fear of crossing the line into advocacy. “Journalism begins with questions and progresses, as facts are determined, to answers. Advocacy begins with answers with the facts already

assumed to be established,” says Richard Tofel of ProPublica.

Historically, journalists discussed impact in private when nominating their work for awards such as the Pulitzer Prize, coveted by journalists and news organizations across the country. Tofel notes that seven of 30 citations for Pulitzer prizes won over the past three years cited the impact of the work being honored. Often the journalists spotlight official investigations sparked by their work, laws passed, or official actions—in other words, things easily measured. But Tofel notes, the impact of explanatory journalism and investigative reporting is notoriously difficult to measure. Sometimes officials finally take action months or years after a story appears. “Unfortunately,” he says, “much of the most successful journalism, in terms of impact, presents the classic economic problem of positive externalities. Great communal benefit may result, but little or none of its value may be recoverable by the party, in this case the journalists and employers.”

For the Pulitzer Center, measuring impact is even harder because of the stories it champions and venues in which they appear. If the Center raises the profile of one its stories by placing it in a well known magazine like the *New Yorker*, readers are more likely to think it was the magazine’s story and not one from Pulitzer. In return for picking up travel costs, the Pulitzer Center usually demands that a news organization disclose that the story was done in conjunction with the Pulitzer Center or it was partially financed with one of its grants. But anyone reading a piece on Middle East women in the *New Yorker* is far more likely to remember it as the magazine’s story and not a Pulitzer project. A Pulitzer asset—the connections it has forged to get its journalism into publications with excellent reputations—is also a big liability. The prominence of the organizations publishing the piece often overshadows the Pulitzer Center’s role.

Donors such as Diane Ives say they don’t seek a “measuring stick” to assess the value of the work Kendeda funds. In fact, she says she uses fairly subjective measures, like the sophistication of the coverage and the recognition of the

organization in the media where the stories are published. She explains, “I wish I had measures but sometimes it’s pretty subjective. Sometimes it’s not so hard to go back and say what did the coverage of this issue look like five years ago—what felt at the time like it was important coverage but now feels somewhat gratuitous. “

She cited some Pulitzer coverage about the environmental impact of palm oil production, an area of interest to her and the fund: “There is a level in which you can be very sensational about this and then there’s this level where you can get really deep. Some of Steve Sapienza’s reporting on this was really telling.” Ives says. Sapienza, the Pulitzer broadcast journalist, produced a story that balanced the problems of palm oil production against the economic benefits. “For the people working on these plantations, this is their livelihood. You can’t just say this is all bad. And to me that is a level of sophistication that the reporting wouldn’t have had five years ago when we were a little more reactionary about palm oil. So those are the kind of things that I would look at,” she says. With the Pulitzer Center, she adds, “we feel like we get a lot of bang for our buck.”

Sometimes, the impact of a story is clear. Sapienza and Jason Motlagh, a freelance video journalist and Pulitzer grantee, traveled to Thailand to report on Burmese migrants who work in the Thai shrimp industry. Motivated by the appetite for cheap shrimp in America, the Thai industry built an invisible underclass of Burmese migrants who worked in conditions a cut above slavery to stock the freezers of companies like Walmart, Costco, and Red Lobster. America buys about a third of Thai shrimp exports. The journalists used undercover cameras planted on a migrant worker to reveal working conditions epitomized by a 14-year-old Burmese girl who worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week for less than \$3 a day. After the piece ran on the Center’s site, on PBS *NewsHour*, and in the *Washington Post*, Sapienza says the U.S. State Department lowered the industry’s rating in one of its diplomatic reports to the lowest possible grade. “I think the industry was downgraded because of our report but I can’t prove that,” he says.

Not all Pulitzer donors share the Gates Foundation desire for metrics. Betsy Dietel says Dietel Partners donors don't demand metrics to assess their investment in Pulitzer or any of the 80 other projects she manages. "We're not typical of funders," she says. "We don't believe that a lot of this work can have a hard, quantifiable measure. Certainly the number of projects and media connections Pulitzer makes when they give a journalist a grant is one way to do it. Maybe a better measure is the way the organization has evolved in terms of leadership and also who is involved—the entities that have stepped forward and believe in their work. We just don't sit down when we look at most of our grantees and say, 'okay, let's measure this now' or 'what measurement can we use with this one.' It is more about a nuanced sense that they are making a difference . . . We felt very strongly that no one was telling a story about what was happening in the extractive industries. It is a very complicated, fast moving area that has huge environmental and human rights consequences globally. And one of the few groups that's really doing in-depth coverage of that is Pulitzer."

Dietel says no news organizations in Canada covered the environmental and human rights implications of Canadian mining operations in Panama until the Pulitzer Center teamed up with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The team did a story about controversies generated by the extraction practices of Canadian companies mining precious metals.

Dietel says, "By getting the story on Canadian television, the partnership really ramped up coverage of the issues in Canada and got the government to look at what was happening." She says her donors prize the kind of objectivity practiced by Pulitzer journalists. Even if the journalist spawns change, she says, it is hard to make any correlation between a story and any changes that occur after it has run.

"Part of the dilemma is the nature of philanthropy. Having to argue that something is good because it makes changes or has impact, well, there are a lot of

reasons things happen, and philanthropy has a role to play. But I think the philanthropy is fooling itself if it thinks it is the only influential body and that's what makes the difference," Dietel adds. She says no donor has ever called her to complain about a specific story. "That's just antithetical to how we operate," she says. She thinks Pulitzer coverage of the issues in which she's interested is "spot on." She says, "Pulitzer is one of the core grantees for the portfolios I manage. We are very, very positive on it. It gets an A-Plus."

Nevertheless, the Pulitzer Center lives in a digital-obsessed world where some funders worship data and want better measures. The Gates Foundation gave USC's Chinn a grant to develop metrics designed to measure the impact of journalism it funds. "There's no silver bullet to this—no Nielsen ratings or ABC circulation figures. There is no one universal measure of success. Metrics now are being used for priorities and decision-making. And each organization for each project has different decisions and different measure of success," she says.

Chinn says journalists already gather "off-line data" such as comments at town hall meetings spawned by stories, or comments on Facebook pages. But journalists often withhold such data. "They are afraid of the numbers. They are afraid if they say we had [just] one person stand up at a town hall. But what if that one person was the mayor? Don't just say it's too hard to gather or too time-consuming to gather. I mean, c'mon! No it's not too hard," Chinn says.

Chinn is trying to build tools that journalists can use to secure even more funding from foundations such as Gates, and she says she's not just measuring things because they can be measured: "We are thinking about what is the data and what is it going to take to get that data. Frankly, if the data gathering is too much for the investment, then we don't do it. Twitter is a great example. I don't believe in measuring anything about Twitter because measuring Twitter doesn't chart value. Twitter is just us talking to each other, an echo chamber. You just hear a lot about Twitter measures because they are so available. But don't spend any time measuring

it because it doesn't make any difference. Just because you can measure it doesn't mean you should. Just because it seems to be the only data you have, that doesn't mean it is the most important data. In fact it's not important at all. I'd rather see someone really focus in on one distribution partner. That is how you really understand impact." Chinn says all of the data in the world won't tell anyone anything unless it is part of a good narrative. "It's like journalism, it has to be part of a good story," she says.

Pulitzer's Lake Tonle Sap project generates the kind of good story that Chinn champions. You start with a little-known lake in a faraway country. It has big problems no one knows about. A Pulitzer Center journalist travels there, does a story and video, and the Center gets the story on PBS *NewsHour*. NPR editor Linda Winslow says *NewsHour* has one million dedicated viewers. The story also runs on the PBS site, which puts it in front of another one million readers. The Pulitzer Center then gets the story in the *New York Times*, which has a combined daily print and digital readership of 2.1 million readers. But the numbers don't tell the whole story. The *Times* readership is an influential elite readership that includes many policy makers, government officials, academics, and business leaders. The same can be said for PBS. Under Chinn's yardstick, that's a narrative with impact.

Conclusions

Filling a Gap – From its modest roots, the Pulitzer Center grew into a major journalistic force that fills a gap in the nation's media. Although most journalists interviewed for this report didn't see the Center as a major player in international news, that view ignores the Center's profound influence on global reporting. Indeed, Pulitzer, with a relatively small staff and budget, now exclusively occupies a space once the domain of more than a dozen big regional papers—organizations that spent millions of dollars on foreign news reporting. The Center is a fixture on the international news landscape and helps dispatch journalists to vast

areas of the globe, fulfilling one of journalism's loftiest goals: Providing a voice to those without one. The Center is a lifeline for freelance journalists determined to report international news at a time when it's needed more than ever. And as David Hoffman, a Pulitzer Center grantee and experienced foreign news hand, says, Pulitzer provides something crucially needed: Observational journalism, original fact-finding, and fresh enterprise that no one else is doing.

Education Innovator – The Pulitzer Center's education arm is muscular and is growing stronger. The Center's use of education and outreach to spread word of its journalism draws widespread praise from high school and college teachers. Interviews for this report document that the Center is seen as an educational innovator providing tangible benefits to students and teachers. The Campus Consortium program is a bargain. Expansion should be a high priority. Educators and their students prize campus visits by journalists. The use of e-Books as texts also holds promise and could become a secondary source of revenue for the Center. Criticism of the Center's educational initiatives is rare. The McCormick Foundation's Mark Hallett says the only critique he could offer would be to have more input from teachers when designing classes.

Visibility – Even though The Pulitzer Center enjoys a sterling reputation, its visibility remains an issue. Outside of the Center's narrow constituency of journalists and educators, it remains virtually unknown, a problem mentioned by numerous survey respondents. Many suggested investing in a marketing program designed to spread the word about the Center. Any marketing effort should highlight the truly impressive connections the Center has forged with major media partners that use Pulitzer journalism. As Jim Simon of the *Seattle Times* said, the Center is an "enabler" in the best sense of the word. The Center should continue its emphasis on high-quality placements such as the *New Yorker* magazine. The Center and the outlets jointly benefit from such partnerships. It should consider an ad highlighting where its journalism appears and a more striking logo. The Center

could also use its newsletter, which got fairly positive responses from survey respondents, to play up its mission and expand it to promote stories in the pipeline.

Website – Survey respondents gave a mixed reaction to the Center’s website. When I first encountered the website, I had trouble finding Pulitzer stories I wanted to read. Subject matter searches produced a mixed bag of content that I found overwhelming. I didn’t know where to go. (The more I used the website, the easier it became to find things.) As the nation’s news organizations embrace more mobile platforms, the stampede to make cell phones news platforms raises questions about the utility of all websites. For Pulitzer though, the website probably remains the single most useful asset it has to build visibility. The website overhaul now underway should concentrate on projecting a striking image of the Center as the enabler and educator, the organization that shines a light into corners of the world that would otherwise remain dark. One survey respondent suggested a website redesign should be tied to a marketing effort to reinforce the public identity the Pulitzer Center strives to achieve.

Efficiency – The Pulitzer Center is a well-run organization with a highly professional staff. Jon Sawyer is a bargain as is his wife Kem. Journalists responding to the survey found it easy to work with the staff. It is unfair to single out any individual staff member because of the universally positive reaction of those with whom the Center does business. However, many of the journalists surveyed praised Sawyer, Tom Hundley and Nathalie Applewhite as consummate, seasoned, international news professionals capable of recognizing and editing a good story. The output of the entire staff is amazing. The Center should consider capitalizing on some of the services it provides journalists to create revenue streams. One survey respondent said the Center’s graphics and data visualizations represent such an opportunity.

Sustainability – Although the Center’s finances benefitted from a recent increase in foundation funding, its long-term sustainability is vulnerable to donor

fatigue. “Over the years, there have been lots of experiments trying to find ways to provide foreign news through special mechanisms like the Pulitzer Center. This is not a new idea, and all of them have failed,” says John Maxwell Hamilton, a Louisiana State University professor of journalism and author of “Journalism’s Roving Eye, A History of American Foreign Reporting.” Maxwell says donors stop giving because they change priorities. “Philanthropists get all excited about something like foreign news, but then they change their minds,” he says. The Pulitzer Center has a strong pool of donors like Emily Pulitzer who display a commitment to sound, quality journalism. An endowment is a way to secure a commitment that survives the hard times that inevitably occur, but that’s a major undertaking. The Pulitzer board should discuss options as it moves forward and develop a succession plan.

News Industry Troubles – Sustainability issues that face the Pulitzer Center and other non-profit news organizations will become increasingly important as the financial problems plaguing the for-profit-news industry worsen. The finances at for-profits will probably deteriorate further as advertisers accelerate their retreat from traditional media. At this juncture, revenue from digital advertising falls far short of plugging the gap created by the news industry’s declining fortunes. The situation is not likely to change soon, either. “Who knows what we will be facing in the next decade,” says Pulitzer Center board member William Bush, a lawyer and financial adviser to the Pulitzer family. Now a partner and general counsel at BDT Capital Partners, a private equity firm led by legendary Chicago investor Byron D. Trott, Bush asks, “How is the for-profit model going to do anything near what the Pulitzer Center is doing? There are brighter minds than mine trying to figure out how to do journalism and make money. Everybody has tried everything but nobody’s got it right. Does Google have it right? Perhaps Google has some aspects of it right. But Google is not in this for journalism, and that’s critical.” The Pulitzer Center and non-profit news operations now are crucial sources of solid journalism, the kind that is vital to a democracy. The importance of these organizations will only increase. Although many industry observers don’t see non-profit news organizations as the future of journalism, they can no longer dismiss the possibility

that journalism, particularly journalism as a public service, will rely much more heavily on non-profits. The sustainability of organization such as the Pulitzer Center is a core issue for anyone concerned about how American citizens will be adequately informed.

Impact – There’s no question the Pulitzer Center has impact, but there’s plenty of uncertainty about how to measure it. Solid, accurate metrics on journalistic impact are a work in progress. Charles Lewis and Hilary Niles wrote in “Measuring Impact,” a study done by the Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University, “At this early juncture, non-profit news organizations trying to establish themselves in a recession-recovering economy should be judged by their original news content, the character of who they are and the public void they are filling and not by the ability to achieve, measure, and convey impact.” Under the Lewis and Niles yardstick, Pulitzer definitely has impact: It produces original content, has a sound, professional reputation and unquestionably fills a void. More than 80 percent of survey respondents said their stories would not have been done without Pulitzer grants. The Pulitzer Center should monitor the metrics work of Dana Chinn at USC. She is developing a way to measure impact for the Gates Foundation. The Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) in California employs Lindsay Green-Barber as a full-time media impact analyst. She does case studies demonstrating the impact of specific CIR investigations, a good idea that the Center should emulate. She is also building tools to measure impact that go beyond conventional measures such as page views. All of CIR’s work is made public. The Center’s recent hiring of Sung Lee as its digital outreach manager is a step in the right direction.

The Untold Story – The Pulitzer Center’s strategy of telling stories that would not otherwise be covered by major media outlets is sound. In fact, some survey respondents suggested the Center should revise its name and place less emphasis on “crisis” reporting. Many of the stories the Center tackles are deep, nuanced reports that expose crises-in-waiting rather than full-blown crises. The

illuminating stories that are the Center's specialty fill a need and should become more closely identified with the Center's public image.

Pay – Pay for Pulitzer Center journalist grantees is an issue. Making a journalist responsible for lining up news organizations willing to pay for his or her work has value. Sawyer's idea of injecting enterprise into the system has value and gives news organizations a stake in the story and the journalist. However, times are tough for journalists, particularly freelancers. They are asked to take huge risks for relatively little pay. The Center's move towards a tiered pay system for journalists is good. Board member David Rohde says he thinks the Center should consider funding a few high-quality marquee projects each year. Perhaps the Center should consider some matching pay grants where it replicates the pay that a journalist can get from a news organization. Using pay to incentivize journalists to become more involved in the Center's education mission works, too. The Center should work more on developing a tiered pay system.

Risk Assessment: The Center should require journalists seeking grants to include in their proposals an assessment of the risks involved in the proposed project. The Center should also put in each contract its policies regarding those risks. These disclosures are not merely ways for the Center to limit its legal liability. They also would benefit the journalist, underscoring the possibility of serious risks before he or she embarks on the venture.

Anniversary – The Pulitzer Center and its board should use its upcoming tenth anniversary to launch a major fund-raising campaign that could also increase its visibility. It should use its partners, its journalism, and journalism grantees to promote the important role it plays in keeping the world informed at a time when other news organizations are in retreat. As Ken Weiss, a former Pulitzer Prize winner at *the Los Angeles Times* and now a Pulitzer grantee and freelancer put it,

“I really believe that we need to pay attention to the world. We need to have the philosophy of the Brits who have legacy and business interests around the world. We tend to ignore this. I don’t know if it’s out of our false sense of American exceptionalism or our geographic isolation. But it is really important for the news industry to keep reminding people that we are part of a bigger world. The Pulitzer Center is doing a great thing.”

About the Author

James O’Shea is a veteran journalist, author and editor with broad and deep experience in journalism. He was editor and executive vice president of the Los Angeles Times and managing editor of the Chicago Tribune, where he spent many years overseeing the Tribune’s foreign news staff. He is the author of three books including The Deal From Hell, a narrative about the fatal merger of Times Mirror and the Tribune companies. In detailing how the combined company fell into the hands of Sam Zell, a Chicago real estate mogul, and then into bankruptcy, the book covered the forces that derailed the newspaper industry. O’Shea also co-founded the Chicago News Cooperative, a digital news start-up that produced Chicago news pages twice a week for The New York Times. He was the Howard R. March Visiting Professor of Journalism at the University of Michigan for the 2013/2014 academic year. He lives in Chicago and works as an independent author, journalist and media consultant.