



FROM A SPACE OF LOVE:

Looking Back at the Impact of Leadership
and Liberation Building

A collaborative effort driven by GJ
and supported by UNM Researchers.

GENERATION
JUSTICE

ABOUT US

Generation Justice

Founded in 2005, GJ is the premiere, award-winning youth media project of New Mexico.

GJ trains 13-25 year olds to harness the power of media and give rise to stories anchored in hope, truth, and analysis.

GJ's mission is to inspire youth to become media makers committed to social transformation.

Roberta Rael

Roberta is a proud Nuevo Mexicana Chicana. She is the Founder and Director of GJ. Previously, Roberta directed the University of New Mexico's Multi-Cultural Minority Recruitment and Retention Program, SAFETEEN New Mexico, Youth Link, and Vida Manos Y Salud. Roberta has 20 years of radio production experience. Beyond radio broadcast training for GJ, she hosted, produced and trained radio volunteers on a public radio cultural affairs program - Espejos de Aztlan - on KUNM-FM. Roberta published an article in the Youth Media Reporter on Youth Radio and Social Justice. She has been the recipient of local and national recognition for her work with youth.

Dr. Ilia Rodríguez

Professor Rodríguez obtained a Ph.D. in journalism and mass communication from the University of Minnesota, where she specialized in history of journalism, with a focus on ethnic minorities and media, and in international communication with emphasis on Latin America. Her undergraduate teaching assignments in C&J include news writing and reporting for the print media, introduction to mass communication, international media systems, and multiculturalism, gender and media. In the graduate program, she has taught the courses Foundations of Communication Research and Qualitative Research Methods.

Kris Maltrud

Kris is a researcher and consultant in the fields of leadership development and public health. Her areas of expertise include American Indian/Alaska Native health; participatory evaluation; local, regional and national health planning and health care reform; maternal and child health; children with special health care needs; and school-based health care services.

Cecilia Brooke Cholka

Brooke is a Ph.D. student in the University of New Mexico's Department of Communication and Journalism. Her research focuses on health communication, health disparities, particularly in Latin@s, and community engaged research approaches.

George Luna-Peña

George is the Special Projects Coordinator at GJ. He is originally from East Los Angeles. He holds a B.A. in History from University of California at Riverside and an M.A. in American Studies from the University of New Mexico. His research interests include Philosophy of Race, Comparative Racialization, and Visual Culture.

The research team would also like to acknowledge the students in Dr. Ilia Rodríguez's C&J 605 Qualitative Methods II class who assisted with coding and transcription.

This report documents and analyzes the long-term impact of Generation Justice (GJ) on its youth members and journalism fellows over the past decade. This study went through the rigor of the University of New Mexico's Institutional Review Board process.

Throughout the report, we highlight how GJ's mission, values, and culture have guided members in their commitment to racial equity and social justice.

We approach GJ as a unique model that brings together a positive youth development approach, a commitment to advancing racial equity and media justice, and a proven track record of building career and educational pipelines for young New Mexicans

The research summarized in this report is part of a much larger study. The longer study outlines the impact of GJ membership on:

- Skill Sets
- Education and career opportunities
- Self and community empowerment
- Community Engagement

This study was a collaborative effort led by five co-researchers: Roberta Rael, Dr. Ilia Rodríguez, Kristine Maltrud, Cecilia Brooke Cholka, and George Luna-Peña.

For access to the full report, please e-mail GJ at admin@generationjustice.org.



“You know, Generation Justice has changed the way that I tell stories. It comes from more of a space of love and as a gift, as opposed to how media is taught now.”
- L.O.G., GJ Member since 2009



INTRODUCTION:

HARNESSING THE POWER OF MEDIA, BUILDING PATHWAYS TO EQUITY AND LEADERSHIP

By: Roberta Rael
Founder and Director of Generation Justice

New Mexico’s history of colonization, genocide and inequity is tied to today’s resistance, resilience, and liberation. We, as New Mexicans, know our future depends on how we honor and navigate past and present conditions. Since 2005, this truth has driven our vision at Generation Justice (GJ). We are committed to raising underrepresented voices while building pathways to equity and leadership.

We designed our work through a series of focus areas: racial equity, civic engagement, media literacy, activism, and reform, academic achievement, and career pipelines. Focus on these areas helps youth participants and journalism fellows build the skills to speak against issues of systemic and internalized oppression while shifting the future of media.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is at the core of our approach. Our PYD model values members as assets, establishes positive youth-adult partnerships, provides a safe space for members to learn, and engages outside

systems/structures in providing a supportive and successful environment for our members. We allow youth members to find their unique leadership attributes and contribute them to the larger group and the evolution of GJ. Our practice includes honoring the stories of our youth members; they, in turn, learn to honor the stories of our community.

Shifting the future of media is important for our collective liberation, (collective as in the largest ideals of multi-racial equity). As Indigenous and people of color (POC), we know the mainstream media system has perpetuated stereotypes and falsehoods about our community. This bolsters internal and structural racism based on false constructs and narratives. The result binds all of us—Indigenous, POC, White, rich, poor, immigrant, and citizen—in a paradigm where we lose bits of our humanity. GJ combats this paradigm through intentional training sessions and intra-personal processes. The goal of GJ is to build relationships, bridges, and community through strong leaders who know they can work and play with anyone, anywhere.

GJ trains youth and fellows between the ages of 13-25 to harness the power of media so that they will not become the victims of media. GJ gives rise to stories anchored in hope, analysis, fairness and accuracy. Premium hands-on journalism training through weekly radio broadcasting classes, video production and blogging is combined with deep intra-personal development and coaching. Youth are encouraged to explore what love of self means and what it means to both love and serve community.

GJ’s members develop connections with journalists and activists who are Indigenous and POC, as well as multi-racial leaders and professionals. GJ’s training program provides critical analysis of mainstream media through a media literacy/justice frame. Dominant narratives are evaluated and analysed. GJ youth then learn to shift the narratives and bring to light authentic stories birthed from curiosity and respect. Our work deepens the intersections between media, youth leadership, racial equity, and social justice.

In the past ten years, GJ has trained over 110 New Mexican youth. These youth—80% of which are youth of color—now represent a nationwide network and community anchored in six core values: [Youth Leadership and Empowerment](#), [Community](#), [Action](#), [Equity](#), [Multiculturalism](#), and [Love](#).

This report, *From a Space of Love*, reflects on our first decade of impact through the words and personal stories of youth involved. The title comes from a young, queer Afro-Latina and long-time GJ member. During a focus group session, she stated that what makes our work unique is we approach it from a space of love. Everyday and with every production, we affirm the beauty and value of our state and community. We invest in a long-term vision for positive change, because we love New Mexico.

“Being a part of GJ is so much bigger than myself, and our cohort, and even Albuquerque. It’s just the work that we do connects us to so many different people across the world and across the nation who are doing similar work and who are really involved in media justice and social justice issues.”
- J.H., GJ Member since 2006



Purpose of Research

The research summarized in this report documents and analyzes the long-term impact of GJ on its membership. The research identified the impact of GJ membership on: relevant skill sets; educational and career opportunities and choices afforded to members; self and community empowerment; and community engagement.

We placed emphasis on how our mission, values, and organizational practices have influenced members’ growth and commitment to racial equity and social justice beyond our sphere. In other words, how GJ helped its members have larger impact on our world.

Participants and Research Design

To elicit members’ testimonies about the impact of GJ, we conducted five focus group sessions with 28 participants ages 18 to 28. Participants represented 40% of all eligible GJ members since 2006.

They were representative of the diversity of our community with regard to gender, economics, and race. Sixteen females and twelve males participated. Youth and young adults who identified as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Chicanx, South Asian, Boricua, Palestinian American, and multiracial participated.

At the time of the interviews, they identified their status as undergraduate college students, graduate students, journalism professionals, small business owners, and professionals in healthcare, education and the nonprofit sector.

We selected focus groups as an appropriate tool for data generation because of its ability to foster interaction, collaborative reflection, dialogue, and storytelling among participants.

The sessions lasted about 1.5 hours each and were audio recorded. For participants residing outside Albuquerque, we conducted focus groups via Google Hangout.

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Total Focus Group Sessions

Focus groups were held in person and via Google Hangout.

28

Focus Group Participants

This represented 40% of all eligible GJ members since 2006. Youth under the age of 18 were not eligible to participate in this IRB study.

Gender Diversity

Gender equity and diversity is embodied through our intentional recruitment strategies. For the focus groups, 16 females and 12 males participated.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

- Demographic Breakdown of Focus Group Participants:
- Latinx/Chicanx - 37%
 - Black - 22%
 - Indigenous - 16%
 - Asian - 7%
 - Middle Eastern - 7%
 - White - 11%



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

By: Dr. Ilia Rodríguez
Associate Professor of Journalism and
Communication, University of New Mexico

Without exception, the participants’ individual testimonies and narratives reiterated that membership in GJ made an indelible, positive difference in their personal growth, educational opportunities, professional development, awareness of social justice and race equity issues, and community and civic engagement across time. The results provide evidence of the effectiveness and meaningful impact of GJ on:

1. Providing a collaborative teaching/learning experience in multimedia production within the frameworks of social justice and race equity that create a pipeline leading to success in school, college, and professional areas of their lives.

2. Empowering youth of color through multimedia training, leadership development, and networking skills.
3. Fostering sustained community activism and civic engagement within the framework of racial and gender equity.

GJ training is an effective teaching/learning experience that leads to academic and professional success. GJ affords youth practical multimedia and communication skills, critical thinking, and ethical and professional values that members have applied to succeed in school, college, professional settings, and community activism and engagements beyond the GJ sphere.

Evidence of the effectiveness of GJ in training youth of color for success and creating a pipeline to professional jobs in news media and other organizations was offered by members’ accounts of:

- educational and professional opportunities in mainstream commercial media outlets and community media;
- college and graduate school admissions
- employment opportunities in non-profit, governmental, and private sectors.

In addition, participants discussed practices and values that are part of GJ’s unique culture and continue to frame their approaches to journalism, leadership, activism, community building, and professional life.

Empowerment. Empowering youth of color emerges across members’ narratives as one of the most powerful impacts. The responses highlight how participants interrelate their sense of self-confidence and personal and group empowerment with acquiring understanding of racial equity and community empowerment, having the GJ community as a source of support, and gaining competencies in communication and multimedia production. The narratives also underscore ways in which GJ empowered them to:

- find their voice and become aware of the power of the voices of young Indigenous and POC to transform themselves, and engage in action for social justice;
- use their voice to speak out as members of racial and ethnic minority groups and as women to overcome internalized oppression and legacies of colonization; gain awareness of racial inequity and social justice issues; engage in activism to empower other young Indigenous and POC;
- use their personal power to overcome fears, insecurities, and to find passion and focus for what they want to do in life; and to feel they could maximize their potential and their skills.

“One thing that I have definitely taken from GJ was critical thinking skills...Whether it’s media analysis, whether it’s actually thinking about social justice and what that means . . . that definitely still helps me to this day as I do a lot of media on what’s going on in the Middle East. It’s a skill set that I still carry on.”
- I.M., GJ Member since 2009

Community engagement and activism. Participants offered narratives of how membership in GJ changed their views of community and fostered a political awareness that leads to sustained community and civic engagement. They highlight how participation in GJ changed their views by:

- transforming individualistic notions of community service as volunteerism into deep understanding, collectivism, and reciprocity as the key to community engagement;
- teaching solidarity and learning to love the local community wherever community is built by developing a sense of belonging and appreciation and commitment to diversity—stories shared highlighted connections with community at the local, national, and international levels;
- creating awareness of common problems and interests of Indigenous and POC across ethnic and racial lines and fostering multiracial unity and understanding.

In sum, the overall positive tone in the statements of all members interviewed underscores how, in the past ten years, GJ has built a model of effective multimedia training and PYD with proven sustainability. The results of this research point toward an emerging model that calls for further theorization and research for its high potential of replicability in similar contexts.



NARRATIVE SHIFTS

Through the avenues of multimedia journalism education and tech training, empowerment, and community engagement, GJ enables members to shift dominant narratives that perpetuate negative stereotypes about youth of color and journalists of color.

Shifting the race equity narrative from one of separation based on group identity politics to one of love of community and solidarity across racial divides.

Participants noted how GJ's emphasis on love as a core value taught them unique lessons they continue to apply: speak from the heart, love what they do, love the people they work with, organize out of love for others, loving the community they live in, orient love toward social change, and practice respect, support, and nurturing relations.

Participants shared that they enacted this value through their interpersonal relations within and outside of GJ; decision making in media production, community

building; and commitment to social justice and equity. With regards to racial equity, participants expressed how their views of their community before participating in GJ were fractured along lines of racial divides or marked by sense of alienation from their own communities. They spoke of how GJ transformed their views of community.

“When you’re all as one, you’re able to repel certain things that could damage your community, and often what we see is that when we fragment, it’s easier for our communities to fall victim to something. When you actually have one another’s back, you’re definitely going to see everyone rise up.”
- J.F., GJ Member since 2013

The narratives of GJ members convey their critical thinking and awareness of inequities at the same time that they assert a sense of common cause and unity across racial differences. Participants also recalled how they learned to work with people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds as a norm rather than a goal or exception to the status quo; how they gain awareness of racism and developed leadership committed to diversification wherever they are in their careers or lives; how they value and/or practice activism; and how they practice and/or appreciate media production through the race equity lens.

From GJ, they learn how an organization can maintain:

- inclusiveness of racial and cultural diversity in recruitment of membership
- commitment to race equity and social justice through routine organizational practices and activities
- training in leadership and activism with a race equity lens, and focus on equity in media production routines.

Shifting the narrative that places Indigenous and youth of color as silent and politically disengaged to one that underscores voice, leadership, and networking. Two

indicators of youth empowerment, leadership and networking skills, were particularly relevant in the assessment of the impact of GJ in shifting stereotypical views of young Indigenous and POC. Participants spoke about how skills and values learned through GJ have led to personal transformation, with a focus on gaining self-confidence; developing leadership style; and the motivation to be leaders.

Participation in GJ allowed them to overcome emotional or psychological blocks that kept them on the sidelines and thus enabled them to use their “voice” and see themselves as leaders. Most participants mentioned gaining self-confidence as a crucial transformation that enabled them to assert leadership roles. They also spoke about developing a leadership style based on the GJ experience. This style was collectively described as one that de-emphasizes self-centered behavior and top-down relations to cultivate horizontal, reciprocal, and collaborative relations.

The values and behaviors mentioned by participants as qualities of good leadership they seek to practice were:

- Racial and gender inclusiveness
- Listening
- Collaboration
- Trust
- Recognize and encourage others
- Commitment to racial diversification
- “Horizontal” relations with others
- Service to others

Furthermore, participants also spoke about their current positions of leadership on campus and in the community. Some related their experiences of leadership in campus and off-campus organizations such as the Black Graduate Students Association, National Society of Black Engineers, GJ Student Chapter at UNM, sports, editor of campus magazine, organizers of events in the community and elementary schools, UNM student government leadership, STEM outreach, organization, activism in community protests, adviser/mentor to other students.

In addition to leadership skills, participants elaborated on how GJ taught them to develop networking skills that have influenced their personal and professional growth and enriched their lives. They referred to:

- Social networks, with GJ as an extension of the “family” network
- Professional networks
- Community networks

They related how professional contacts made through GJ networks have enabled them to (a) secure professional positions after college, (b) obtain internships, (c) access support in the process of applying for jobs, (d) connect to professionals in other cities, (e) develop and maintain contact with other media professionals.

A different type of networking activity was the establishment of relations with activists and community groups through their work for GJ. These enabled them to: (a) learn about activism, organizing, and social issues in the community and the world that they would not have learned about otherwise, (b) meet community organizers and keep in contact with them, (c) feel a stronger sense of community belonging and empowerment, (d) feel satisfaction and self-validation upon recognizing or being recognized by experienced community activists on the street or at rallies, (e) have access to organizers who become mentors and role models they are inspired by, (f) maintain relations with community leaders.

Participants addressed the fact that through GJ they acquired the skills to build their own networks. They referred primarily to gaining the confidence and communication skills, “people skills,” to approach people outside their zone of comfort and establish communication and relationships. They perceived this as an “asset” that empowered them.

Shifting the narrative about training young journalists of color through the social justice lens as an isolated venture that does not prepare journalists for mainstream “professional” jobs to one of young journalists’ awareness, flexibility, and agency. Participants reported that at GJ they gained awareness of how histories of colonization, historical trauma, and marginalization had silenced their voices and perspectives, and how they learned to harness the power of media—and of communication skills in general—to make an impact on the world through ability to report fairly and accurately, create dialogue, engage in community organizing, and gain media literacy and critical thinking skills.

They also discussed how media production skills and GJ coverage have led to empowerment in the forms of:

- self-empowerment and personal growth
- empowerment of community
- mutual empowerment as youth

By learning about the power of journalism to build community, participants said they learned to appreciate their fellow

community as owning diverse and unique “stories” that needed to be told, and assumed their role as journalists of color as a social responsibility and commitment to give voice the diverse community actors.

They spoke about feeling empowered to contribute to changing or improving social conditions through their reporting and their voice. They also underlined how ethical practices in communication and journalism such as balance and fairness to sources orient their work.

GJ members also spoke about being leaders for newsroom diversification and exercising criticism of mainstream media practices through the social justice lens.

The narratives of GJ members who have used GJ networks to find internships, fellowships, and job opportunities in media outlets provides further evidence that GJ has created a pipeline for young journalists of color who are ready to occupy positions in both independent and commercial media.

In this sense, the experience of GJ participants and their success in gaining educational and career opportunities signal the effectiveness of GJ in training journalists of color who possess technical competencies, ethics, multicultural awareness, and commitment to diversification of coverage and newsroom staff. These are young journalists who are aware of the different production values guiding mainstream commercial organizations and independent community media. At the same time, they learn to produce quality reporting that does not eschew commitment to advancing social justice and service to community as central components of excellent journalism.

This flexibility, awareness, agency, and preparedness offer a counter-narrative to the dominant view of minority journalists trained in community media as lacking the professional standards associated with mainstream, commercial media. At GJ, students are learning the skills and values that allow them to become competent journalists of color, with the critical thinking skills and commitment to community that make them assets to commercial and/or independent media, whichever field they choose.

“For me, it really taught me a lot about how to voice my opinions about race, gender, and inequality. I learned how to be able to speak about those topics well, and in situations where people don’t typically talk about them.”
- J.G., GJ Member since 2005

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