Economy + Democracy

Sourcing Solutions Stories about Community Ownership, Wealth, and Labor

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Today's Speakers

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What is Economic Democracy and Why Should Solutions Journalists Care?
The Problem

Narrow Definitions = Narrow Possibilities
Groups settle Arizona lawsuit over voter intimidation at ballot boxes

The lawsuit alleged that activists, sometimes while armed, illegally intimidated voters by filming them at ballot drop boxes.

By Daniel Gilbert
Everything else we do to meet our material/social/spiritual needs as a society
An economy is...
a socially constructed system that manages how we as a society generate, distribute, and exchange resources

Or, put another way...
“the way humankind copes with the problem of provisioning for itself.”

Creation (Ecological & Cultural)

Production

Surplus Allocation & Waste Management

Food & Water
Shelter
Energy

Health
Education
Community

Economy

Exchange & Transfer

Consumption & Use
Economic Democracy is...

a framework for (re)organizing economic and social life to better meet our collective needs through processes of shared decision-making, shared ownership and shared management of resources.
What Economic Democracy Solutions Have in Common

1. Shift decision-making power and (financial) benefit **from a small group of stakeholders to a larger group of stakeholders**
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2. Designed to address patterns of exploitation, extraction, and displacement by prioritizing dignity, self-determination, accessibility, and sustainability for both those directly involved and the wider community.
What Economic Democracy Solutions Have in Common

1. Shift decision-making power and (financial) benefit **from a small group of stakeholders to a larger group of stakeholders**

2. Designed to address patterns of **exploitation, extraction, and displacement** by prioritizing **dignity, self-determination, accessibility, and sustainability** for both those directly involved and the wider community

3. Emphasize redistributing decision-making power and (financial) benefit for **those who have been (and continue to be) denied access**
Economic Democracy + Solutions Journalism both believe those closest to a problem or decision are best equipped to define solutions.
## Reporting on Economic Democracy Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Status Quo</th>
<th>Economic Democracy Framing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor, Economy, and Democracy are all separate beats</td>
<td>Stories look at where labor, economy, and democracy intersect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stories (unintentionally) limit understanding of where the public should “look for” information or opportunities to engage &amp; transform</td>
<td>Stories expand the public’s understanding of where labor, the economy, and democracy can and do happen</td>
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<td>Stories take for granted the systems that govern each sphere</td>
<td>Stories highlight projects that are attempting to transform systems</td>
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CAUTION

Collectively-owned ≠ Social or Economic Justice
Next City’s
Oscar Perry Abello
Oscar Perry Abello

He/him


B.A. in Economics from Villanova University

Freelancer -> Next City Fellow -> Next City Editor -> Next City Correspondent

Based in NYC (Washington Heights)
Next City

Established by urban planning students in 2003 as an all-volunteer publication, print and online

National coverage, headquartered in Philadelphia

All-virtual, currently all POC newsroom led by two WOC

Current reporting focus on solutions to advance social, racial and environmental justice in cities
How does economic democracy show up for me at Next City?

On the economic justice beat at a solutions-oriented publication

“What are communities of color, immigrant communities, LGBTQ+ communities, other systemically marginalized groups doing about economic injustice?”

It’s a lot of what they’re doing

Colored by my own personal interests and proclivities
The Seeds Of Economic Recovery Are Already Sprouting Roots In The Bronx

A tiny credit union in the South Bronx is punching above its weight as an active small business lender, even as banks nationwide brace for a credit crunch. Here’s how.

It’s not common for bank CEOs to walk around a neighborhood in the South Bronx, knocking on doors of local businesses to say hello and start getting to know them and their owners or employees. But what if it was?

That’s what Rachel Macarthy is looking forward to doing later this spring and over the summer. Born and raised in the South Bronx, with a business degree in finance from Howard University, she’s the CEO of New Covenant Dominion Credit Union. At 1185 Boston Road, the Black and Hispanic-serving credit union sits at a busy crossroads in the heart of the borough.

As a credit union, it’s not just any bank, but a financial cooperative owned and

East Bay Activists Unveil New Blueprint for a Regional Public Bank
The bank would make loans to support more affordable housing, small businesses owned by Black, indigenous and other people of color, and potentially do infrastructure lending for municipalities.

Philadelphia Bill Would Establish First Ever Municipal Public Bank Entity
The stated mission of the proposed Philadelphia Public Financial Authority is to support Black-owned businesses and other businesses in neighborhoods that have historically lacked access to credit.

This Black Barber Opened The First Credit Union In Arkansas Since 1996
After years of making loans from his little black barbershop, Artis Washington has chartered the state’s newest credit union — offering a blueprint for communities to create their own financial institutions.

How Chinatown’s Community Bank Has Survived Crisis After Crisis
Banks founded by marginalized communities aren’t a panacea, but they do offer an important refuge from exploitation.

First New Black Bank In 20 Years Breaks The Mold For Raising Startup Capital
Aspex Bank in Columbus, which raised $24 million in startup capital, marks the country’s first new Black bank since 2003.

The First Democratically Managed Investment Fund Launches In Boston
Investment approvals will be made collectively by Boston residents who identify as working class and/or as a person of color.
A New Kind of Cooperative in Oakland Fights Against Speculative Development

Californians can now invest in a new co-op that goes against prevailing racial and social hierarchies.

This Real Estate Co-Op is Looking for Investors Who Want to Put Community First

The East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative is reviving a legendary jazz club as a culture hub.

This Community-Controlled Real Estate Co-Op Is Proving Its Value

Investors who took a chance on a unique Bay Area real estate cooperative are now receiving their first dividend checks. They may be small, but they carry an important message.
Worker-Owned Industrial Conglomerate Makes First Acquisition
The group has a big, bold vision.

The Co-op With Forty Years of Making Loans to Co-ops
Most banks and financial institutions are built for conventional businesses, not cooperatives, which means co-ops have a hard time accessing the money they need to grow.

Closing the Funding Gap for Worker Cooperatives
New ecosystem puts capital under local worker control.

Worker-Owned Cooperatives are Building Their Own Investment Network
Very quietly below the radar, workers have been building a new kind of investment network for themselves.

Can a Private Equity Model Build Wealth for Workers of Color?
An El Paso landscaping company is one of the first employee-ownership conversions facilitated by a new Black-led private equity fund.

A Worker Cooperative and a Community Land Trust Bought a Building Together
Through a raft of clever tactics, the worker-owners of Hasta Muerte were able to acquire the building in partnership with the Oakland Community Land Trust.
Four pillars of solutions journalism + economic democracy

Economic democracy stories are often responses to the little problems that comprise the big problems — racial inequality, climate change, etc.

Economic democracy sources or characters have insights into how their response to the little problem fits into the big picture.

Evidence in support of economic democracy solutions can be scarce. Evidence that current economic structures are killing people and the planet is not scarce.

Limitations are often obvious. But don’t let that take anything away from your platform to uplift the agency and vision of the people or communities behind these solutions.
Sourcing

Network, network, network. Find national, regional, local convenings around various components of economic democracy (money, land, labor). Virtual is okay, too. National groups (USFWC, DAWI, NCBA, Inclusiv etc.) useful to follow, can be helpful for background, willing to make introductions to members.

No business or project is an island. Every step of the way requires conversations, relationship building, characters in a story overcoming shared obstacles. Especially true when it comes to economic democracy stories.

The moment you meet someone may or may not be a good moment for a story. If it’s not your beat make it part of your beat.
Prism’s
Ashton Lattimore
Case Study - How Prism’s Reporting Led to Internal Change

The push toward a four-day workweek is gaining momentum
by Montse Reyes   May 18th, 2022

Prism adopts a four-day workweek
by Ashton Lattimore   September 15th, 2022

After a successful summer pilot, Prism staff members reported transformative results in their mental health, work-life balance, and productivity, and unanimously recommended to continue the schedule long term.
Foundation and Backstory

- Summer 2020: Experimented with four-day workweek, using staggered schedules
- 2020-22: Half-day Fridays as status-quo (36 hour workweek)
- Prism has been reporting on workers’ rights since 2020, including the workplace experiences of journalists
  - Freelance journalists are hanging on by a thread. Could organizing help? (Dec. 14, 2020)
  - Coronavirus has upended many lives, but immigrant journalists on visas face a grim reality (June 23, 2020)
  - Harassment and threats are ‘part of the job’ for women in media (Apr. 26, 2021)
- Organizational Culture: From the beginning, focused on work-life balance, mental health, and supporting staff as whole people
The Catalyst: Solutions Reporting by Montse Reyes

The story: The push toward a four-day workweek is gaining momentum, published May 18, 2022, at the height of “Great Resignation” discourse

- **Problem & RESPONSE**: “With time to reevaluate their careers, working conditions, and quality of life, nearly 48 million Americans quit their jobs in 2021. ... Some people believe a four-day workweek could be the answer in the quest for a better work-life balance.”
- **EVIDENCE**: study found 20% increase in productivity; time and money saved on commute, mental health improvements; reduced barriers for employees with caregiving responsibilities (primarily women and BIPOC)
- **LIMITATIONS**: Most of the companies trying it are in “tech, finance, or other traditionally white-collar industries”; risk of impact to benefits
- **INSIGHT**: “ByteChek made its way to the shortened workweek policy gradually. First the company consulted with their team and analyzed their Friday workloads to maintain output with fewer hours. That started with “Quiet Fridays,” where employees didn’t schedule internal or external meetings, which gave way to half-day Fridays and now, a four-day workweek.”
The push toward a four-day workweek is gaining momentum

A federal bill that would reduce the standard workweek to 32 hours is headed to Congress.

The push toward a four-day workweek is gaining momentum is a story from Prism, a BIPOC-led nonprofit news outlet that centers the people, places, and issues currently underreported by national media. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to support us. (edited)

Written by

Est. reading time

1 minute
The Four Day Workweek Pilot

Rather than jumping right into a permanent change, we designed a pilot to test it out and make a more informed decision once we had more data.

- **Finite Length of Time:** 12 weeks
- **How would we measure success?**
  - **Hard Metrics:** Story output, audience numbers/traffic (social engagement, pageviews, visitors)
  - **Soft Metrics:** Work life balance impact, mental health
- **Measurement and evaluation**
  - **Audience metrics tools** (Parse.ly, etc.), publishing stats on Wordpress, social media engagement metrics
  - **Qualitative staff survey** asking about mental health, productivity, work-life balance, with space for narrative answers on challenges, benefits, a yes/no question on whether they recommended a permanent shift; anything else leadership could do to support adjustment
Results and Reporting Out

The story: **Prism adopts a four-day workweek**

- Pilot was a resounding success, team unanimously recommended following through - but final decision rested with the leadership team
- Had to work through resistance, sometimes from surprising places
- Reporting out is part of being accountable to staff, board, funders, audience
- Needed to consider the function of reporting out - were we asking for permission or informing people after decision was made?
How Solutions Journalism Shaped the Report-Out (1)

**Response** to well-documented problem of journalist burnout

- “As corrosive as the 24-hour news cycle has been to our collective attention spans and the quality of news in our country, it’s been just as damaging to the journalists living and reporting on the day-to-day churn of news, much of it complex, difficult, and sometimes even traumatizing. At Prism, we couldn’t imagine a better time for our newsroom to explore different ways of showing up in this moment.”

**Insight** that other newsrooms could consider in trying this out

- “Prism decided to pilot a 32-hour, four-day workweek for our full-time staff this summer. For 12 weeks, our staff kept a regular work schedule of Monday through Thursday. ... During the pilot, we adapted workflows to allow for rapid-response coverage of news that broke late in the week, followed by alternative times for our team to step away from work. In accordance with our ethics, we also ensured that editors remained reachable to swiftly address any necessary corrections or other urgent matters that arose on Fridays.”
How Solutions Journalism Shaped the Report-Out (2)

**EVIDENCE** in terms of audience metrics, survey results, editorial workflow, all documented and measured during the pilot period

- “In a survey ... team members reported improved work-life balance, mental health, and productivity. Staff have reported saving money on child care, finding additional time to attend medical appointments, starting therapy, working on creative projects, returning to hobbies, and spending more time with family.”

- “Even as we shifted into a four-day workweek, during the pilot, we hit our editorial production goals, publishing an average of eight stories per week. We also met and exceeded our audience growth goals, with traffic to Prism’s website exceeding projected targets (nearly doubling them in June, thanks to our coverage of the Dobbs decision), and our social media channels continued their upward trajectory, with our Twitter and Instagram growing 20% and nearly 7%, respectively, compared with Q2 of 2022.”

**LIMITATIONS**, i.e. naming some of the challenges and potential pitfalls, and noting why our newsroom was well-situated for this shift

- “While the shortened workweek did pose a few challenges—including smoothing out cross-team collaboration for stories published later in the week, coordinating meeting schedules with external partners, and occasionally feeling the need to work late—all staff felt the benefits far outweighed any concerns, which could be adapted to over time.”
Q&A
Solutions for Economic Equity partnership

Next City and Prism have joined together to report stories that highlight how low-income and marginalized BIPOC communities are cultivating, building, and seizing economic justice in cities across the U.S. through labor organizing, worker co-ops or food sovereignty initiatives.

An Appalachian Model For Regenerating Place-Based, Community Wealth

This Bay Area Marketplace Led By Immigrant Moms Offers A Global Model For Incubating Food Businesses

'This is not charity': A congregation attempts reparations
Interested in Learning More?

Let’s Connect!

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