

Kennedy School Review

Sample Pitches

This document contains abstracts and working titles from successful pieces published in past editions of the Kennedy School Review. We offer this as a guide to help you think through various ways to approach a pitch, but we want to emphasize: There is no perfect way to craft a pitch. Our editors are looking for a smart, well thought-out idea and a clear argument.

Tiny Houses for Affordable Housing: Using Accessory Dwelling Units to Increase Housing Density

Several cities are turning to accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as one policy lever to increase housing density in a city. ADUs are additional living quarters on single-family lots that are independent of the primary dwelling unit and often look like tiny houses. Although these additional units are small, they have the potential to double the amount of residences on a given lot if built. ADUs also appeal to NIMBY-minded residents opposed to adding housing density through traditional multifamily units because they allow the creation of more units on each lot without changing the look or feel of the street, essentially “preserving” the character of the neighborhood.

This piece will examine the potential of ADUs to create more affordable housing, weigh the drawbacks to ADU-centric affordable housing approaches and the many regulatory challenges that ADUs face (including tax policy and zoning codes), explore the ways that cities have encouraged the building of ADUs, and highlight non-profits working in the ADU space.

Charting an Integrated Approach for Organizing in the Digital Age

The explosion of digital technologies and tools and the ubiquity of digital social networks across the globe brought hope to activists in the early years of the 21st century, as new lines of communication, transparency into government operations, and simplified logistics in protest movements helped bring down seemingly indestructible authoritarian regimes. However, the last decade – and the 2016 election cycle in particular – have showed us just how shallow digitally networked movements can be (as regimes and platforms have effectively shut the door on further reform) and how digital tools are being effectively weaponized to serve the same kinds of authoritarian governments they once helped topple. In ‘Twitter and Tear Gas’, Zeynep Tufekci explored how the rapid scale and increased horizontalism of modern networked movements has allowed them to jump over some of the logistical and organizing hurdles that slowed down past action, but at the same time prevented them from developing the kinds of deep interpersonal networks and institutional capacities that made long-term, sustainable, and effective action possible. I am interested in framing how these same challenges for general social movements also apply to political campaigns – and what current practitioners see as the best path forward to leverage the benefits of digital technology while avoiding these pitfalls.

I will begin with a summary of the of challenges facing digitally networked movements by interviewing

Tufekci and others in the traditional (i.e., face-to-face) organizing space and veterans of recent networked movements (e.g., Occupy, Tahrir Square), to clarify why some of the benefits of digital organizing also tend to be its greatest weaknesses. I will then reach out to digital staff from recent political campaigns in the United States (as well as general campaign leadership) for interviews about how they see digital organizing fitting into a modern campaign, how digital and traditional organizing models differ in management, culture, and performance, and what barriers remain to taking an integrated approach toward traditional and digital organizing. I will conclude with thoughts about how future campaigns might approach these issues, and outline promising approaches from nascent political movements and organizations (e.g., Indivisible).

Innovative Anti-Terrorism Prosecution in Spain: Adaptive Efforts to Bring Terrorists to Justice

In August, a terrorist drove a van into pedestrians along Las Ramblas — the main tourist drag in Barcelona. In the days and weeks that followed, the Spanish government didn't curtail its citizens' civil and human rights in an effort to investigate the attack and its perpetrators. Unlike what we've seen in its neighboring countries when they have suffered similar attacks, Spain did not declare a national state of emergency, nor was the attack followed by racist and/or Islamophobic cries for burqa bans and restricted immigration. So what is it that makes Spain so different from its neighbors? In simplest terms, its unique combination of a human-right focused constitution, a frequently adapted penal code, and an innovative justice system.

This piece will explore all three, explaining how the unusual, innovative, and experimental structure of the Spanish justice system has empowered the country to be among the foremost in investigating and prosecuting terrorists without curtailing civil and human rights — and without sparking the nationalist and xenophobic waves that have followed attacks in other European countries in recent years.

The piece will rely on extensive research carried out during the summer of 2017, including numerous interviews with prosecutors, judges, diplomats, and members of the Spanish intelligence community. The case will, in particular, explore how the three factors noted above came into play in a particular case that went to trial in July of 2017.

Reckoning with Reparations: Kush Economy is our Forty Acres and a Mule

It is now held as a pretty common belief that the failed 'war on drugs' policies of the eighties targeted minority communities specifically African Americans. The results were devastating: over incarceration, stripped political/civic engagement, dismantled economic stability and increased the rate of poverty to prison back to poverty pipeline. The ACLU recently released a report that states some 80% of all drug related arrests are of black and brown people while percentages of drug use and possession among white and black people are relatively equal. The loss of economic power is estimated to be in the billions of dollars. To date there has been no restitution to African Americans for the atrocity of slavery, Jim Crow nor war on drugs. Now is the time, the cannabis industry is estimated to generate revenue in the tens of billions of

dollars by 2025, yet today African Americans make up less than 1% of ownership. The irony of the cannabis legalization movement is that it presents a great economic opportunity for criminally involved African Americans to have priority status in cannabis licensing as well as priority access to utilize tax revenues collected by state and local governments for community benefit programs.

How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Draft

The draft is an idea that fell out of favor for bipartisan reasons. In the wake of Vietnam, liberals soured on the whole concept of foreign interventions while conservatives wanted the political flexibility to intervene without igniting mass protest. Unfortunately, the draft produces a whole host of positive societal effects on some of the most pressing political and social issues that exist in the country today. I'd like to write an op-ed arguing that a peacetime draft is a way to bridge the gap on several seemingly insoluble problems. The draft is redistributive, military service is one of the few occupations in the country that provides a living wage for the non-college educated. The military provides valuable technical training and gives every veteran access to affordable higher education following their term of service through the GI Bill. A draft also creates civic buy-in to the foreign policy of the United States. The all-volunteer force lowers the political costs and risks of foreign intervention, to the degree that the US is currently engaged in combat operations in at least 8 countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Mali, and Niger) and yet this fact barely matters in national elections. Finally, military service addresses the urban-rural divide, which is a main driver of the lack of political unity. City people and country people don't talk to each other in this country, except in the military. My best friends from the Air Force are from Chicago IL, Albuquerque NM, Cheyenne WY, San Diego CA, and Houston TX for example. Military service is also the only politically palatable path, that I can see, to implementing redistributive social policies. In the same way that Social Security and Medicare are unassailable, universal military service would provide an unchangeable channel through which the government could promote higher wages, as well as health and educational benefits.

The Institutionalized Abuse of Incarcerated Girls

I propose a long form feature that looks at the abuse to prison pipeline that exists for girls in the United States, as well as how juvenile detention in the United States re-abuses and re-traumatizes female survivors of child abuse and trauma. I propose to structure the feature looking at 1) how girls enter the system, 2) how girls experience incarceration, and 3) what opportunities there are for reform.

1) Entering the system: 73 per cent of all justice-involved girls in the United States have histories of physical and sexual abuse. While girls account for 16 per cent of the juvenile detention population, they represent nearly 40 per cent of youth in detention for status offenses, like running away from home and absconding from school. In other words, girls are disproportionately detained for non-violent offenses that are a common response to trauma. These girls have had multiple child-serving institutions fail them (for example, schools, welfare agencies, police and courts).

2) Incarcerated in the system: Youth correctional facilities are ill-equipped to address and manage the prior victimization, violence and trauma experienced by girls. Because the stereotypical juvenile offender is a violent, young male, theories about delinquent behaviour are often based on males and programming within the juvenile justice system has been similarly developed to meet the needs of boys. The disciplinary practices employed in youth correctional facilities are particularly harmful to victims of trauma and can trigger traumatic stress symptoms. What are currently considered routine practices can be drastically detrimental to already traumatized youth, including use of restraints, solitary confinement, isolation, and strip searches.

3) Reform efforts that provide some hope for change: I propose looking at programs and policies that have successfully reduced the incarceration of girls:

- The Delaware Girls Initiative distributes training videos titled “You Can’t Just Paint It Pink” to social workers, judges and lawyers to demonstrate the need for services to meet girls’ physical, sexual, intellectual, relational, emotional and spiritual needs while interacting with the criminal justice system.
- Former Senior Research Fellow at the HKS Program in Criminal Justice, Vincent Schiraldi, was previously the Director of Youth Corrections in Washington D.C., and was able to get the population of incarcerated girls in D.C. down to zero. I hope to include some quotes from Vinny as to what worked.
- The Girl’s Court in Florida is a specialized juvenile court that links “at risk” girls to community resources.

Combating Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking in the Child Welfare System

In the United States, we have a crisis of domestic minor trafficking. Last year, a study from the University of Texas found that, in just the state of Texas, there were nearly 79,000 minors currently being trafficked within the state for sex. It is widely known in anti-trafficking communities that children in the child welfare system are at exceedingly high risk for being trafficked. Sex traffickers target children in the child welfare system because the combination of unfulfilled basic needs of love and support, the effects of trauma, and the structure of the child welfare system being particularly conducive to children falling through the cracks means that they are especially vulnerable. Effectively addressing trauma, emotional needs, and the structural failures of the child welfare system will lead to more resilient children who are less vulnerable to predators and traffickers. In this piece, I would like to conduct research into what interventions are most effective to correct these concerns and protect children from trafficking. I’ll conduct research and interview experts in the field.