

Q and A with Mark Trahant on Indian Country Today launching a national TV news program with Arizona State University

Q: When will it officially launch?

A: The newsroom will open July 1. Indian Country Today is recruiting an executive producer and that hire could happen in May. The other hires will happen during the summer.

Q: What is the vision?

A: This really came out of election night. It was such a success that we wanted to find a way to do more. My thought was, "Could we do a daily news show?" I knew we needed a partner. I was thinking Maryland University or Howard University since we're in DC. But my first call was to ASU, which said yes just like that. They suggested we rethink the daily — a weekly would be more likely funding-wise.

Q: Is the commitment from ASU or PBS long term?

A: We have a five-year commitment.

Q: How will it be funded?

A: Our model is public media, and we are raising money now – about 10 percent of our funding will come from individual donors (We are doing a spring drive now!), and about 30 percent from advertising. The rest of the funding will be from public broadcasting funds and foundation. Our budget is \$2.5 million per year.

Q: What are the long-term gains for Indian Country?

A: I think national exposure by doing news changes the story. We aren't advocates but reporters. We will put out a news product that people can rely on. I also think the benefit will be creating a career path for a lot of journalists. We are starting with two interns when we open the newsroom, but by fall I expect about 14 full time staff members.

So much of my career has been about trying to get more Native Americans into mainstream media. I don't want to sound harsh, but I have moved on. We should build our own network, using our own talent, resources, and storytelling. We don't need to wait any longer.

Q: Will the partnership feed content into other Native Television stations?

A: Yes. Any public station can take the feed. We will work closely with Vision Maker Media on station promotion and be at the PBS development and promotion conferences. We are working closely with FNX. On election night we also offered the entire feed to tribal radio stations. We will do that again.

Q: Are there job opportunities?

A: Absolutely. We are going to have a core reporting/producing staff in Phoenix and Washington. We will also have regional correspondents across the country.

Q: What will be your role?

A: Last month we officially became Indian Country Today, LLC, as a nonprofit media company. My role as the editor is the chief executive. I will probably appoint a board at some point, but I wanted to get the framework in place first. We are going to try and be different. On election night we used iPhones for the live broadcast, and learned a lot from that. We are working with a tech company on a donation of phones to build on that night and expand the capability.

Links

2018 Election Night Summary by Indian Country Today - <https://vimeo.com/320332560>

Mark Trahant Reflects on Live Election Broadcast - <https://vimeo.com/330864914/75a307b6c8>

Indian Country Today Official Statement - <https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/news/indian-country-today-to-open-newsroom-at-arizona-state-goal-is-to-create-national-tv-news-program-6ZwULKc8DEuDNrL97qw0ow/>