

**RUIDO STUDIOS**

**2023  
ANNUAL  
IMPACT  
REPORT**



# RUIDO:

*conmoción,  
escándalo*

commotion **n**,  
uproar **n**

*Locución verbal -  
hacer ruido, causar  
polémica (figurado)*

Make noise, cause  
a stir (**verbal  
expression**)

Ejemplo: ¡Hay que hacer ruido contra el muro fronterizo!

Example: We need to make ruido against the border wall!

# MISSION

Ruido Studios is a hub for innovative communications and digital strategies in South Texas. We do this by cultivating emerging digital media creators and organizations to shape the narrative of the Texas-Mexico border. We want to reclaim our power to own the popular story about the border and the people who live in South Texas. We believe that the antidote to right-wing disinformation is to invest in the progressive communications infrastructure in the region, and that starts by supporting local creators and organizations to access the tools they need to create and disseminate their work.

# OUR APPROACH

- Create a pipeline of strategic communicators and storytellers to support progressive causes in South Texas
- Accelerate the development of emerging communicators through the Ruidosos Fellowship
- Support the creation of bilingual media and digital projects to shift public opinion on critical social issues
- Measure digital performance and narrative impact of the progressive movement in South Texas to identify best communications practices

Friends and supporters,

As we look back at 2023, we would like to share our gratitude with you as well as some significant moments we experienced at Ruido Studios. Our launch year as a new organization was a success! In less than a year, we launched as an organization, we grew as a team, launched our Ruidosos Fellowship program, held a two-week Academy, and collaborated with over 30 local communications leaders and organizations. This was all possible through the collective efforts of our supporters and collaborators.

At Ruido Studios we share a love for our home, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). One of the most gratifying aspects of our year was getting to collaborate with people that feel just like we do. From the early brainstorming stages of the organization to our most recent endeavor: the very first Ruido Studios Academy where dozens of emerging and experienced communicators, storytellers, community leaders, and organizers came together to share knowledge, tools, and envision how strategic communications and digital organizing can change our home for the better.

We feel grateful for a year full of growth and fortunate to have spent it forging connections, having important conversations, and doing the work to shape the narrative of the RGV along with a group of amazing people. As a new organization, this does not only fuel us but helps us create a strong foundation – one that will support us in carrying our mission of cultivating and uplifting communicators and storytellers in the Rio Grande Valley for years to come. As the new year starts, we are excited about upcoming events, projects, and new connections the year will bring. This is all possible because of you – join us in making Ruido this upcoming year!

Con cariño,  
Fátima y Dani





## **Fátima Garza, Projects Manager**

Fátima Garza was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) where they currently live. They have a BA in Anthropology and minors in Philosophy and Spanish from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). The RGV is very influential in the work that they do. Through various creative outlets such as writing they understand themselves and their home. Fátima helped organize various community-based initiatives and advocates for social justice in the RGV with a focus on border issues, conservation, and food sovereignty and other issues that intersect. From farming to writing, Fátima wishes to cultivate community and paint a narrative that is representative of the RGV. When they are not working, Fátima enjoys birding, gardening, cooking, and traveling.



## **Dani Marrero Hi, Founder & Director**

Dani Marrero Hi was born in Reynosa, México, and raised in Mission, Texas, two neighboring cities on opposite sides of the Río Bravo along the Texas-Mexico border. Since 2015, Dani has committed their work to using design, digital communications, and storytelling to advance social justice movements with a focus on immigrant and LGBTQ communities in and near the Rio Grande Valley. Dani is driven by a vision to disrupt corporate and mainstream flows of information that serve the status-quo and keep us from imagining and winning a new world for all of us. The more power we have to create information on print, online, TV, movies, radio, etc. to tell our own stories and values, the more power we have to shape our present and future. Visit their website at [danimarrerohi.com](http://danimarrerohi.com).

# PILOT ACADEMY



During the month of November, we launched the first Ruido Studios Academy. This was a significant success and milestone for us, as we were able to meet each of our expected outcomes and more. The Ruido Studios Academy is a two-week program for emerging and experienced communicators in the Rio Grande Valley to learn about the fundamentals of narrative, strategic communications, digital campaign planning, and understanding the regional landscape. We had a total of 12 emerging communicators, digital creators, and organizers participate in the Academy. The sessions were led by 20 local communications experts, giving participants a one-of-a-kind opportunity to develop their skills and understand how to apply them successfully in the local context.

**RUIDO STUDIOS**

The Academy ran from Nov. 27 to Dec. 7. During the Academy, participants worked on mock campaign plans – others worked on campaign plans with the intention of executing them with an organization or independently. At the end of the Academy, we hosted a Networking Mixer to celebrate those who participated. People forged new friendships and created professional connections.

Through daily surveys, participants gave the Academy an overall rating of 9.9/10. Here is what participants had to say about their experience:

“[The Academy] was a fun, challenging experience and I gained a lot of useful knowledge and met so many talented local creatives and storytellers.”

“We are building a communications hub around community that is healing and reconnecting. How we interact through media going forward is important and to give more people understanding of those tools will aid the change we wish to see. More people should have the power to share their story.”

“I would recommend the Academy because it's a safe space where people with different experiences and ideas can come together and share their opinions on how to make the RGV better!”

For us this experience was of great significance. We learned about our capacity and potential as an organization, where our strengths lie and how we can improve our next Academy. We also got to understand and form community as Ruido Studios, for which we are incredibly grateful.









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# RUIDOSOS FELLOWSHIP

The Ruidosos Fellowship is designed to train emerging communicators who want to use creative communications and digital strategies to build people power and win the change the Rio Grande Valley needs.

Applications for the fellowship opened during the month of August 2023. We had a total of 20 people apply to the fellowship, and we selected two fellows: Ruby Fuentes and Valerie Hernandez. In this focused 30-week program, our fellows were paired with local host organizations Frontera Fund and The Sidewalk School to work on a digital project that supports their missions.

Fellows will have the opportunity to learn from experienced trainers and receive mentorship to complete their campaigns. The aim of this program is to invest in local talent and accelerate their learning to fill gaps in local organizations.

The Ruidosos Fellows kickstarted their program by joining our two-week Academy where they prepared for and worked on crafting digital campaign plans to implement throughout their fellowship.

For the pilot cohort, we partnered with Frontera Fund RGV and The Sidewalk School.

Frontera Fund fosters reproductive justice and rights by supporting community advocacy and direct services for all people of the Rio Grande Valley regardless of gender identity, ability, sexual orientation, race, class, immigration status, age, or religious affiliation.

They envision a culture in the RGV that supports people of all faiths and political leanings to make reproductive decisions without shame or stigma. They see a region that has overcome the trauma of a militarized border and has gained reproductive liberation.



The Sidewalk School exists to provide quality education, medical care, COVID-19 testing, employment, housing, and food assistance to those who would go without as they experience displacement on the Mexico border. The Sidewalk School has been in 9 cities across Mexico to serve Children Asylum Seekers as they await their U.S trials or their turn to file for U.S. asylum. In doing so, they employ experienced professionals who are currently facing displacement in the refugee camps and shelters to create lesson plans, teach classes, and provide support to students who are in need.





## **Valerie Hernandez, Frontera Fund Fellow**

The summer of 2023, Valerie Hernandez returned to her grandfather's ranch in Sullivan City, Texas, to become a vaquera. This major shift from ice cream shop management in Denver reminded her that family can be an integral component in finding community. After earning her bachelor's in psychology from Baylor in 2018, she entered the retail world to explore the fleeting joys of bureaucratic and transactional management. While many lessons were learned, it was her work as social media manager in organizations that created her curiosity for engaging community. It was her renewed interest in creating Instagram reels as an open diary for personal healing that led to discovering the Ruido Studio's fellowship. As a fellow, she wishes to spotlight the abundant knowledge of folx in the RGV and foster the growth of our community's organizations.



## **Ruby Fuentes, The Sidewalk School Fellow**

Ruby Fuentes is a digital communications organizer dedicated to advocating for asylum seekers. With a profound commitment to social justice and the guidance from her fellowship with Ruido Studios, Ruby applies her digital expertise to amplify the voices of the displaced. Guided by her Catholic values, Ruby extends a compassionate hand to those in need, utilizing online platforms to share impactful stories and mobilize support that goes beyond borders. Her work is a testament to the intersection of faith and activism, as she strives to create awareness, empathy, and positive change for asylum seekers with her partnership with The Sidewalk School.



# OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

9

Partnered with 9 local organizations to join our programs

20

Worked with 20 local comms and digital leaders to train our Academy participants

2

We grew our team to two staff members based in the Rio Grande Valley

12

We trained a dozen emerging communicators & digital creators in our pilot Academy

18

Hosted 18 workshops, panels, and events

9.9/10

Average overall rating for our two-week intensive academy based on daily surveys

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