

James Benedict



"Mzungu, you're famous now," the group of boda boda drivers shouted at me laughing and pointing to their radios as I left the Radio Ssesse station house. Mzungu, a Bantu term for foreigner, became my unofficial name the month I spent [reporting on HIV](#) for the 'Daily Monitor', Uganda's largest independent newspaper.

Despite thousands of people in HIV treatment on the Ssesse Islands, the National Medical Store shipped the local clinic medicine weeks away from expiration. I was shocked with the lack of accountability in securing drugs that so many depended on to survive. Later that day, I used photographs of medicine in trash bags outside the clinic to confront the district health official who continued to claim shortages weren't foreseeable

Without being there ourselves we would have never discovered how the reality differed from the official story. The islands make up one of Uganda's poorest and smallest district, allowing bureaucratic mistakes to go under reported. I felt compelled to report on this under served community.

Many of the stories I work on are data driven, and it could be easy to accept the appearance of the truth without putting it through rigorous questioning. Luckily I remember stories aren't always as they appear. The only way to bring about accountability is by doing your due diligence, and having the spine to stand by your findings, even if those in power disagree.

A NPR internship would educate me on how to better tell visual stories in the public interest. Visual journalists have a duty to explore these types of stories since our medium is often more understandable than paragraph after paragraph. Creating clear explanatory journalism has never been more important than today with the amount of misinformation spreading and memory holes forming. I want to help your team tell the news by using Python to scrape, analyze and visualize data. Visuals have the power to make the complicated and abstract tangible. I would love to learn from all the talented journalists already doing this at NPR.

As a programmer, I owe a personal debt to NPR's commitment to open source software and writing clear documentation. I [setup my Mac](#) using your tutorial and have inspected many elements of your projects. I tried to pay this forward by developing an [open source template](#) to train print designer on how to build responsive microsites. Any more, I can't leave my keyboard without finishing my comments and believe that writing documentation is more important than writing software when working on a team. Journalism is about the future and tools are only useful if they're actually understood.

My template has trained more than ten print designers, made its way into the curriculum of the most advanced visual storytelling classes at Indiana University, and has brought down my time designing microsites from three days to less than five hours. I've developed other software to accelerate my work, like a Python [image sorter](#) for the Society for News Design's annual book, which saved our team a week of busy work.

I believe my determination and precision make me well suited for this internship. I'm a quick learner who has told award winning stories with photos, layout, graphics, and words. I like to work with one foot outside my comfort zone because it pushes me to use new approaches and stops me from becoming complacent. I'd love to have more direct experience with a LAMP stack and start using node more often.

The last story I reported was in an investigative series about Taser for Reuters. I'd love to talk more about after our findings publish July 26. It has reaffirmed my commitment to make abusive institutions more accountable to the public through independent review and a hard look at the data. Looking forward, I can think of no place better to help defend the public than public media.

If I had the opportunity to work with you this fall I'd appreciate continuing to report on police use of force or the increasing amount of national and international money in local elections. I'd also love to help explain the staggering amount of news breaking daily in our capital.

I want to better my world by making it a more accountable place, and I earnestly believe this internship would be my best step towards that goal. My education and wide range of experience demonstrates my ability think both analytically and visually, as well as being able to address new challenges quickly.

Thank you for considering my application,
James Benedict