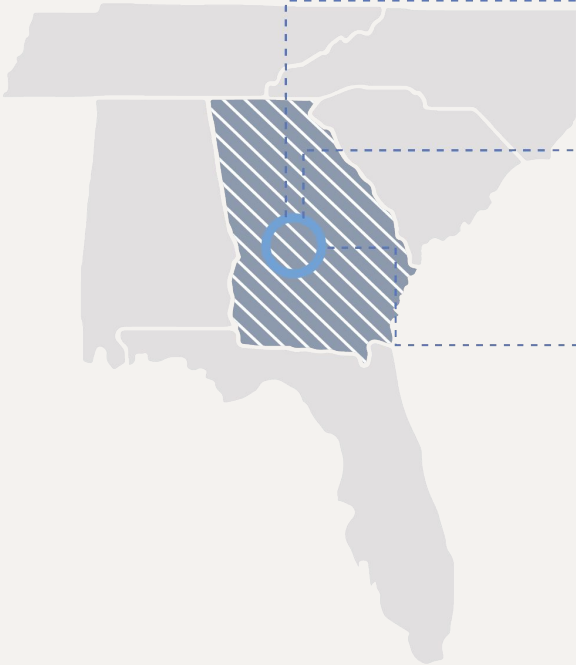


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# Macon - Bibb County, Georgia

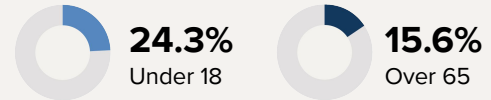
# Macon-Bibb County, GA

## Macon-Bibb County, GA

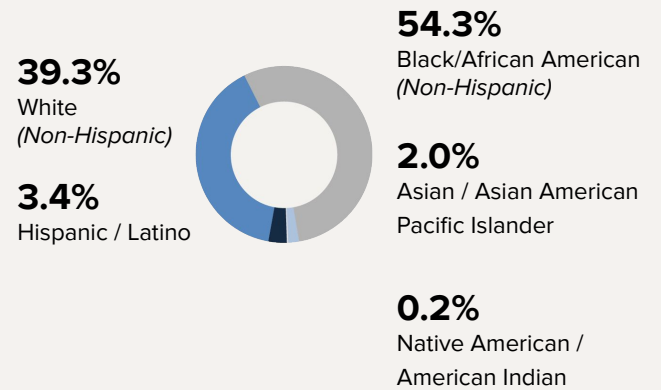


**156,762** (2021 ACS)

### Age



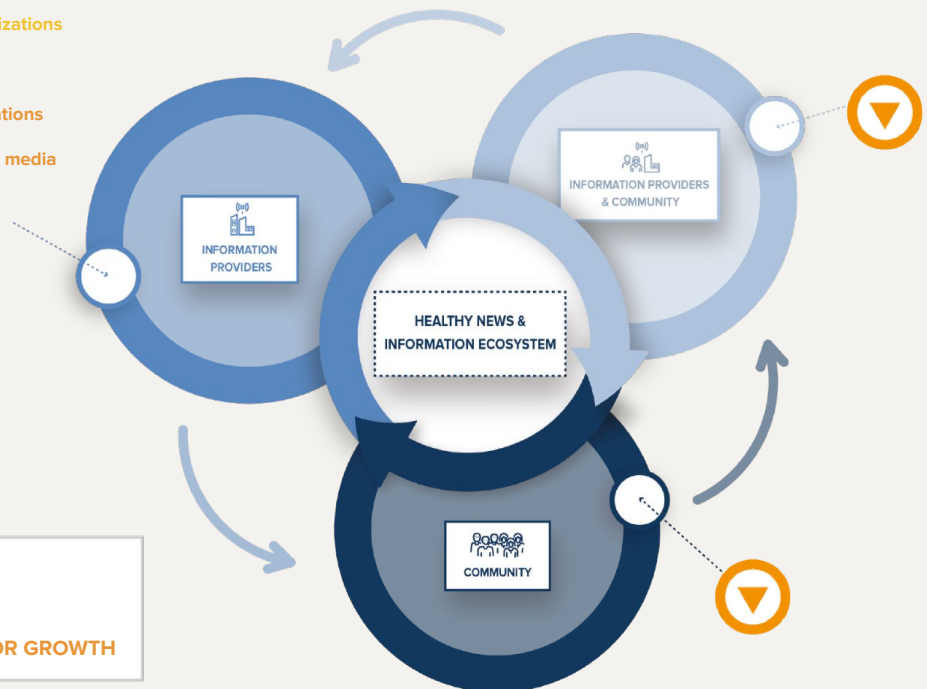
### Race



## News & Information Ecosystem 2022

- Number of journalism organizations
- Types of media
- Business models of organizations
- Diversity and BIPOC-serving media
- Collaboration
- Journalism funding

	<b>STRONG</b>
	<b>AVERAGE</b>
	<b>OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH</b>



# Key Elements



Macon-Bibb has an average number of information providers given its population, but they are not diverse in the media types.



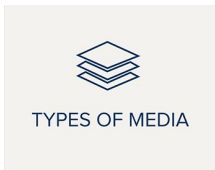
The Center for Collaborative Journalism is an ongoing partnership among Mercer University’s Journalism and Media Studies program, the (Macon) *Telegraph*, Georgia Public Broadcasting, and 13WMAZ.



There are no public reports about staff diversity at the largest news organizations, nor are there reports of source diversity audits.



Macon-Bibb has a definite lack of diverse media outlets, particularly considering the large number of Black residents (54.3%).



There’s a relatively even distribution among independent for-profit, broadcast chains and nonprofits, with the entirety of non-public media nonprofit news associated with Mercer University.



While the total dollar amount invested in the Macon-Bibb information ecosystem is low and has been concentrated in Mercer University’s Center for Collaborative Journalism, on a per capita basis it has received more investment than all but three other cities in this analysis.



We do not have specific information on perceptions of and trust in the media in Macon-Bibb County. Based on data including Macon-Bibb County and other similar counties and on stakeholder interviews, we can estimate average to low perceptions of information providers.

## Summary

Located in central Georgia, Macon-Bibb County is a consolidated government, following a referendum in 2012 consolidating the City of Macon and Bibb County under one municipal government, making it the fourth-largest city in Georgia. Macon-Bibb’s population as of 2021 was 156,172, and it is a diverse city, with 54% percent of the population identifying as Black, while 41% identify as white. Economically, Macon-Bibb has a lower median household income compared to the nation as a whole, and its poverty rate of 25% is more than twice the rate for the United States as a whole.

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	Macon-Bibb Baseline, 2020	Macon-Bibb, 2021	Trending
<b>Economics</b>				
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$39,931	\$41,317	Steady
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$24,409	\$25,519	Improving
Poverty Rate	11.6%	25.7%	25.0%	Steady
<b>Education</b>				
High School Degree	88.9%	85.7%	86.4%	Steady
Bachelor’s Degree	33.7%	25.7%	25.3%	Steady
<b>Resources &amp; Infrastructure</b>				
Households with Computer	93.1%	83.5%	88.0%	Steady
Broadband Access	87.0%	72.0%	79.5%	Improving
Universities	20	7	7	Steady
Population per University	32,690	21,880	22,395	Steady
Libraries	27	14	14	Steady
Population per Library	23,693	10,940	11,197	Steady
Community Satisfaction <sup>1</sup>	60.9		58	
Voter Turnout of most recent election <sup>2</sup>	66%	59.3%	51.6%	Declining <sup>2</sup>
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	

Macon-Bibb County’s news and information ecosystem is defined by the backbone of Mercer University and its Center for Collaborative Journalism. This program not only educates and supports future journalists through a teaching hospital model, placing students in the major news outlets in Macon-Bibb, but also acts as the nexus for both collaboration and innovation in the broader information ecosystem.

## Information Needs

While there may be a general impression that local media is meeting the community’s information needs, there is a disconnect between what’s available and what organizations are covering, versus where people go to get that information, said Debbie Blankenship, director of the Center for Collaborative Journalism at Mercer University.

1. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=GA>.  
 2. 2020 was an election year, which typically yields higher voter turnout.



In addition, the pandemic exposed “how much we take news literacy for granted, and it’s not just a skill that people have and know,” said Blankenship. “Between COVID and January 6<sup>th</sup> and the 2020 election, it exposed how lacking news literacy and access to news is changing things in a negative way that is really worrisome.” With respect to the newspaper, the penetration rate of circulation in Macon-Bibb is 15.5%, average among Knight cities.<sup>3</sup>

Outlier Media, an organization based in Detroit, conducted a community SMS information needs assessment of Macon-Bibb in 2020. The assessment was conducted for the Center for Collaborative Journalism (CCJ) at Mercer University, to inform both their coverage and journalism education. Using the 211 taxonomy system to code responses, Outlier found 25% of respondents had information needs pertaining to public health or safety (survey conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic), 20% information relating to income support or employment need and 12% relating to a basic need of transportation, food, or supplies. Of the information needs communicated, 34% said they “really needed help” with this information, while 28% “needed help” and 46% percent said help in the information would be “nice to have.”

## Information Providers

In 2019, the Center for Collaborative Journalism launched the Macon Newsroom,<sup>4</sup> a source for digital news for Macon-Bibb. Macon Newsroom publishes Mercer University student reporting and Civic Fellow work, as well as collaborative reporting from larger projects, including with the *Telegraph*, Macon-Bibb’s major daily newspaper; Georgia Public Broadcasting; 13WMAZ, the major television news presence; and WMUB, a Mercer-affiliated broadcast television station. In addition to original reporting from its partners, the Macon Newsroom also publishes original reporting from Civic Journalism fellows.

Macon-Bibb’s news coverage is often coming from other areas outside of Macon-Bibb, including wire stories, from Atlanta-based media companies and other national news outlets. DuBose Porter, chairman of the board of the Dublin Courier Herald Publishing Company, said that the lack of local news coverage can have lasting impact depending on the medium and depth of coverage they provide.

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3. Daily average circulation is a composite average based on data from Alliance for Audited Media, which includes the daily average of print, print replica and print nonreplica editions of newspapers, four reporting dates for 2019 and two for 2021. Household penetration rate is the average daily circulation divided by the number of households in Macon-Bibb, according to the Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

4. <https://macon-newsroom.com/>

## BIPOC-Serving Media

*Middle Georgia Informer* continues to be the sole news outlet serving the Black community in Macon-Bibb County. It’s an independent for-profit organization that is primarily accessible in print. We do not have circulation data for the *Middle Georgia Informer* and stakeholders were unable to say the extent to which it serves the Black community of Macon. *Middle Georgia Black Pages* is a print and digital publication that promotes and showcases African American businesses in the Middle Georgia area, however, it does not provide general news coverage. *Qué Pasa* is a Spanish-language outlet owned and edited by Moises Velez, and run mostly on a Facebook page, with its weekly news show *Estas Son las Noticias* also running on local television outlet WMUB.

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	Macon-Bibb Baseline, 2020	Macon-Bibb, 2022	Trending
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	13	13	Steady
Population per Organization	27,162	11,781	12,059	Steady
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	16,480	9,105	Declining
Household Penetration Rate	15.2%	-	15.5%	Steady
<b>Platform Breakdown<sup>5</sup></b>				
Newspapers	36.8%	46.2%	46.2%	Steady
Television Stations	31.3%	30.8%	30.8%	Steady
Radio Stations	10.9%	15.4%	15.4%	Steady
Digital only	18.5%	7.7%	7.7%	Steady
<b>Business Models Breakdown<sup>6</sup></b>				
Nonprofit	11.2%	23.0%	23.0%	Steady
Public Media	11.5%	8.0%	8.0%	Steady
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	31.0%	31.0%	Steady
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	8.0%	8.0%	Steady
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	31.0%	31.0%	Steady
<b>BIPOC-Serving Media</b>				
African American / Black		2	2	Steady
Hispanic / Latino		1	1	Steady
Asian / Asian American		0	0	
<b>Diversity</b>				
Staff Diversity Transparency		0 Reports	0 Reports	
Source Diversity Audits		0 Audits	0 Audits	
Collaboration		Developed and Institutionalized	Developed and Institutionalized	
<b>Journalism Funding</b>				
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years <sup>7</sup>	\$3,837,794	\$3,600,000	\$552,689 <sup>8</sup>	Declining
Funders	13	4	1	
Recipients	8	4	1	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$23.50	\$3.53	Declining

5. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in Macon-Bibb County.

6. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in Macon-Bibb County.

7. Philanthropic investment is based on the Media Impact Funders and Candid database, which pulls data from organizational 990s. These data include only institutional funders, not individual donors. There is also a lag in the data as a result of both the timing of organizations’ tax filings and the process of tagging grants. While this data is far from perfect, it is the only current data source with respect to philanthropic funding for media.

8. At the time of writing, the Media Impact Funders and Candid database has no records of grants in Macon in 2020 or 2021. This is likely due to the lag in the updating of this database, which is based on 990s, thus this number is likely to grow larger as more data are compiled.

## News Outlets Based in Macon-Bibb

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only			The Macon Newsroom	
Print and digital	Macon Magazine Middle Georgia Black Pages Middle Georgia Informer Que Pasa	Telegraph	The Cluster	
Radio		WMAC		WMUM
Television		WGXA WMAZ WMGT	WMUB	

## Diversity

While staff demographic information is not published by local news organizations, stakeholders all agree that newsrooms in Macon-Bibb struggle to reflect the community. While the city is majority Black, they say that most newsrooms do not reflect that. However, Blankenship cites that while all the newsrooms she works with would prefer to have newsrooms that are a reflection of the community, it's often hard to get people to work in legacy news organizations, which may be caused by barriers to entry including low pay or historic relationships and perceptions of these institutions.

## Collaborations

Mercer University sits at the heart of the Macon-Bibb County news and information ecosystem, holding a particularly important role given its place in the local economy, as well as in shaping the identity and community in Macon-Bibb. It is a convening force for news and information collaboration. The Center is funded by Mercer University, which has received funding from Knight Foundation and the Peyton Anderson Foundation to support initiatives at CCJ.

Macon-Bibb's information ecosystem's strongest feature is its collaborative backbone, provided by Mercer University's Center for Collaborative Journalism (CCJ). CCJ houses both the Telegraph and Georgia Public Broadcasting, with which it works in partnership alongside 13WMAZ, as well as the Macon Newsroom. CCJ explains on its site: "Our groundbreaking collaboration has students, faculty, and veteran journalists working together in a joint newsroom." Learning in a "teaching hospital" model, "students engage the community using the latest digital tools and leave with a portfolio of published work that gives them an edge in a rapidly changing, but never more important, field." CCJ's collaboration allows the participating outlets not only to train journalism students collectively, but also to share resources and reporting across outlets and mediums. While its journalism program is incredibly diverse, many students graduating recently do not have an interest in joining legacy newsrooms, according to Debbie Blankenship, assistant professor of journalism and director of CCJ at Mercer University.



## Case Study: Macon Newsroom

In 2019, upon noticing the cuts to government accountability reporting happening within the ecosystem, CCJ launched the [Macon Newsroom](#) to help fill that information gap. It launched with one reporter in 2019 with a reallocation of existing Knight Foundation grant funds and added a second reporter in October 2021 with funding from the Peyton Anderson Foundation. Reporters cover accountability issues and provide that content to newsrooms for free. This helps ensure that local media outlets can focus their resources and not duplicate efforts, said Debbie Blankenship, assistant professor of journalism and director of CCJ at Mercer University. The Macon Newsroom potentially fills a digital void that was noted in our 2020 ecosystem assessment.

Macon Newsroom piloted a Civic Ambassadors program, which was an effort for volunteer citizens to attend, observe and report on public officials and increase government accountability, for about ten months. The program resembled the Documenters program, which started in Chicago's City Bureau and has since spread to other cities; however, Civic Ambassadors were unpaid volunteers while City Bureau's Documenters receive payment. Though the program was put on hold in 2021 due to staff capacity issues and it's unclear when it will resume, the Macon Newsroom hopes to re-start the Civic Ambassadors program in the future.

## Local Journalism Support Organizations

Philanthropic investment for CCJ largely comes from Knight Foundation and the Peyton Anderson Foundation. The Peyton Anderson Foundation is a place-based foundation based in Macon-Bibb born of the estate of Peyton Anderson, the owner in the 1950s and 1960s of the Macon Telegraph and the Macon News. The Community Foundation of Central Georgia has also supported journalism in the region.<sup>9</sup> According to the Media Impact Funders and Candid database, there are no additional local funders of journalism, news and information in Macon-Bibb County. In September of 2023, the Knight Foundation announced a \$5 million commitment to the National Trust for Local News to create a new nonprofit newsroom in Macon.<sup>10</sup>

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9. The Community Foundation of Central Georgia does not appear in the Media Impact Funders Database with grants in Macon-Bibb County.

10. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://knightfoundation.org/press/releases/on-macons-bicentennial-knight-foundati-on-extends-its-commitment-to-macons-news-music-culture-and-downtown-amenities/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1694716014308140&usq=AOvVaw3kzsl7WohRSEpGL2DJoJj>

## Information Providers and Community

There are insufficient survey data to determine the strength of relationships between information providers and community directly. However, based on a 2019 survey from the Pew Research Center, matched communities that mirror Macon-Bibb in terms of demographics, median household income and poverty rate generally have positive views of the media.<sup>10</sup> However, only half say that local journalists are in touch with their communities. This result is 13 percentage points below the United States as a whole, and it reflects a potential problem specific to places with relatively small populations that have a high poverty rate and whose population is less than 50% white.

Alex Habersham, publisher of Macon Middle Georgia Black Pages, highlighted how news outlets play a role in community cohesion by reflecting broad perspectives and views. In the Macon-Bibb ecosystem, as in many communities, he sees an overemphasis on stories that have click value, like crime, which don't capture the breadth of Macon-Bibb's community and put a dent in civic pride.

## Opportunities

- **Diverse perspectives and initiatives:** Given the size of the Black community in Macon-Bibb County, there is significant need and opportunity for publications that center and serve this community. And there is a need within publications to not only recruit journalists with diverse backgrounds, but also to focus on retention as these reporters tend to be drawn to larger media markets.
- **Startups and innovative newsrooms:** The Center for Collaborative Journalism at Mercer University serves a critical role as a backbone institution in Macon-Bibb, but there is opportunity to look outside of this institution for innovative approaches to meeting community information needs, especially for the Black community; to support these initiatives; and to connect them to the work of CCJ.
- **Collaborative visioning:** There is an opportunity for local newsrooms to go beyond content sharing to develop a shared vision for Macon-Bibb that could contribute to community cohesion and civic pride.

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10. In its 2019 Local News Survey, the Pew Research Center created matched communities to be able to make estimates about relationships between community members and information providers. These results are thus not specific to Macon-Bibb County.