
KNIGHT COMMUNITIES

Healthy News & Information Ecosystems 2023

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Summary

Healthy news and information ecosystems are critical to healthy communities. Research and experience have shown that communities that have significant amounts of relevant, quality news and information have greater levels of civic engagement, more community cohesion and greater government accountability. In late 2022 and early 2023, Impact Architects applied the Healthy News and Information Ecosystem assessment framework to eight Knight resident communities. For five of these cities—Charlotte, NC; Detroit, MI; Macon-Bibb County, GA; Miami, FL; and Philadelphia, PA—this was the second application of the framework and we are able to observe change over time from 2020 through 2022. For three communities—Akron, OH; San José, CA; and St. Paul, MN—this application serves as a baselining of the ecosystem.

From 2020 through 2022, the main headline in each Knight community was, unsurprisingly, the ways in which COVID-19 impacted everything from education and local government to health care and the media. COVID-19 strained journalism organizations in many of the same ways it did other institutions—to go fully remote, adapt workflows, etc.—but it also forced journalists to reconsider how they could cover or engage with communities at a time when, paradoxically, reporting was more challenging than ever but the local information was more important than ever. COVID-19 reinforced the media's role as a key feature in any community's ecosystem, sometimes making the difference between life and death.

Information needs assessments, which help understand the presence, relevance and access of local media from the perspective of community members, have been conducted in only three of the Knight communities—Detroit, Macon-Bibb and Philadelphia. These assessments serve as a helpful baseline for identifying gaps and opportunities for news organizations, both existing and startups. There is opportunity for Knight and other partners to support information needs assessments in communities where they have not yet been conducted, particularly communities that are large and diverse and thus have many information needs.

The original report was conducted in the midst of the national racial reckoning in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis (which had a particularly significant impact in the adjacent Knight city of St. Paul). At that point in time, news organizations around the country were motivated to launch or revamp diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, both in reporting and in internal processes within organizations. In this 2023 assessment, we found that, in most cases, it's too early to say whether these commitments are having lasting impacts. For example, in 2020, Gannett daily newspapers committed to having staff

that reflected their communities demographically; however, publications’ leaders said in interviews that it’s proven difficult to diversify staff while also conducting layoffs and buyouts. And with ever-lessening resources, recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge for all news organizations.

In many Knight communities, we heard that access to local news outlets does not mean there is necessarily local coverage and reporting. National newspaper chains have contracted and consolidated to such an extent that even when there is still a local daily paper, the staffs have been reduced and are unable to cover the community to the extent they had historically, let alone provide adequate coverage for communities previously neglected. Similarly, national television stations with local affiliates often don’t have resources to fully cover a community, or an institutional legacy of doing so.

We accessed Alliance for Audited Media data in order to better understand newspaper consumption (print, digital replica and digital nonreplica) in each community. While these data are for the major daily newspapers only, meaning they do not include the reach of broadcast TV or radio or digital news and information, they are helpful in understanding the presence of major dailies in each community. Using these circulation rates and the size of the population and number of households in each city, we calculated the penetration rate of newspapers in each. Among the Knight communities, the average penetration rate for the population was 5.8%, while it was 15.2% for households, with Philadelphia and San José standing out with household penetration rates of 28.4% and 34.7%, respectively, and Detroit and Miami with the lowest rates of 1.5% and 4%. Throughout this report, we’ll refer to household penetration rate.¹

We found that community and ethnic media often serve immigrant and diasporic communities with information about countries of origin, but not necessarily about the local community, particularly in those Knight communities that are large, complex,

	Penetration	Newspaper(s)	Population	Household
Akron (MSA)		The Akron Beacon-Journal	6.5%	15.6%
Charlotte (City)		The Charlotte Observer	6.3%	16.1%
Detroit (MSA)		Detroit Free Press, The Detroit News	1.1%	2.7%
Macon-Bibb County		The Telegraph	5.8%	15.5%
Miami-Dade County		The Miami Herald, El Nuevo Herald	1.4%	4.0%
Philadelphia (City)		The Philadelphia Tribune, The Philadelphia Inquirer	11.6%	28.4%
San José (City)		The Mercury News	11.5%	34.7%
St. Paul (MSA)		St. Paul Pioneer Press	2.4%	5.8%
AVERAGE			5.8%	15.4%

1. The penetration rate for the population and households was calculated by dividing the average daily circulation of print, print replica and nonprint replica, as reported by the Alliance for Audited Media, by the total population and the total number of households in each location, according to the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

and diverse ecosystems like San José, Philadelphia and Miami. Furthermore, these media are often not connected to other networks and collaborative efforts that would enable them to share content and sources and report collaboratively. There is opportunity for Knight and other local partners to support these community and ethnic media directly, as well as through collaborative efforts, in order to build stronger relationships across the ecosystem and facilitate more local reporting across diverse sectors of the community.

While some cities have strong collaborative networks throughout the media ecosystem, in others there is little to no collaboration happening. In this ecosystem assessment, as well as in other research, we found the strongest collaboration to be where there are (or were) backbone institutions specifically tasked with maintaining and coordinating the collaborative, such as Macon’s Mercer University’s Center for Collaborative Journalism and the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative or the previous Broke in Philly and Detroit Journalism Collaborative initiatives. There is opportunity for Knight and others to fund backbone institutions that support the whole ecosystem through things like coordination, project management, pooled funding and other resources, and collaborative initiatives in those communities where they have not yet developed.

For each city, we have made a top-line assessment about the strength of the ecosystem with respect to information providers, community, and information providers and community. For the five cities where we observed change over time, we have identified if they remain steady, are improving or are declining for each of the three categories. And for new cities where we set baselines, we have indicated if they are strong, average or have opportunity for growth in each of the three categories. This information is presented in the following table.

- ▲ **STRONG / IMPROVING**
- ▶ **AVERAGE / STEADY**
- ▼ **DECLINING**

	Information Providers		Community		Information Providers and Community	
	Current	Change	Current	Change	Current	Change
Akron	▼	–	▶	–	▶	–
Charlotte	▶	▶	▶	▶	▼	▶
Detroit	▶	▶	▼	▲	▶	▶
Macon-Bibb County	▼	▶	▼	▲	▼	▶
Miami-Dade County	▼	▶	▶	▲	▼	▶
Philadelphia	▲	▶	▶	▲	▶	▶
San José	▼	–	▲	–	▼	–
St. Paul	▶	–	▶	–	▲	–

Overall, the eight Knight communities' news ecosystems are trending in the right direction. For all five that were baselined in 2020, the information providers have remained steady, with some contraction in the commercial sector and some growth in the nonprofit sector. For those communities that were baselined, both the Akron and San José information providers have significant opportunity to grow to better serve these diverse communities—and Knight's investment in the expansion of Signal Ohio to Akron is a step in the right direction. And even while St. Paul has a robust sector of information providers, there is still opportunity to increase collaboration in the ecosystem.

In four of the five original communities, community indicators have improved since 2020, meaning poverty levels have declined and income is on the rise, and the fifth (Charlotte) has remained steady. And for those new communities, their community indicators are on par with the average of the eight Knight resident communities.

Methodology

The Healthy News and Information framework² was developed in 2020, building on research across the social sciences and the journalism industry. This framework centers community news and information needs, as research finds that when these needs are met, there are positive individual, social and political outcomes, including everything from individual physical health to greater community cohesion and less local government corruption. We know that for community members there is often not a hard line between traditional journalism (e.g., newspapers, broadcast television and public radio) and other sources of information, including informal networks. However, because there are not consistent databases or datasets for identifying non-journalistic sources of news and information across communities, we focus on journalistic information providers.

In addition to most of the original indicators, we added two new indicators about information providers: daily average circulation of metro daily newspapers and the penetration rate of metro dailies. Daily average circulation was calculated with Alliance for Audited Media (AAM) data for each of the eight communities. We calculated penetration rates by dividing the average circulation by the total population. The tables do not include information about literacy rate, as the data is inconsistently available

2. "Healthy Local News & Information Ecosystems: A Diagnostic Framework," Impact Architects (March 2021), https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/files.theimpactarchitects.com/ecosystems/full_report.pdf.

city-to-city, and different definitions of literacy prevent apples-to-apples comparisons. Educational attainment (the percentage of the population 25 years of age or older with a high school diploma or equivalent) stands in as a proxy.

The tables in each chapter contain either two or three data columns and a comparison column. The five cities included in the 2020 baseline assessment and updated here contain three columns: A comparison column (either a national average or the average of the 8 Knight cities), a column with baseline data and a column with most recent data. The trend column for these cities measures change from the baseline. It's also important to note that for these communities, not all baseline data corresponds directly to the previous assessment, especially for the count of news organizations, as in some cases we identified additional publications not captured in the previous assessment. The tables for the new cities contain two data columns: A comparison column (either a national or the average of the 9 Knight cities) and a column with baseline data. The trend column is in reference to national or average data. Regardless of the comparison metric, we identify change as either more or less than three percentage points (in the case of percentage metrics, such as percentage of people with a high school education) or more or less than three percent difference (in the case of raw numbers, such as median household income). If a number is +/- three percent or three percentage points, it is represented either as "No change" (in the case of updated cities) or "Average" (in the case of baselined cities).

We conducted interviews with 34 stakeholders in the eight communities, all of whom were recommended by Knight's journalism team and local program directors. Community indicators are mostly pulled from 2021 census data.

We have relied on primary research conducted by others, including Outlier Media and the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin.

The 2022 media landscape scan was done manually, and we consulted a number of databases, including INN's member index, LION's member index, and the New York Times local news database. We also conducted searches for community and ethnic media in languages where we knew there were sizable immigrant and diasporic communities. However, we know that media landscapes are fluid and often changing, thus the scan is best thought of as a snapshot in time.

The 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey has not been updated, so we continue to rely on the 2019 data to understand the relationship between information provider and community in the eight communities. For the five communities included in the original analysis, we have noted any perceived shifts in these relationships based on stakeholder interviews.

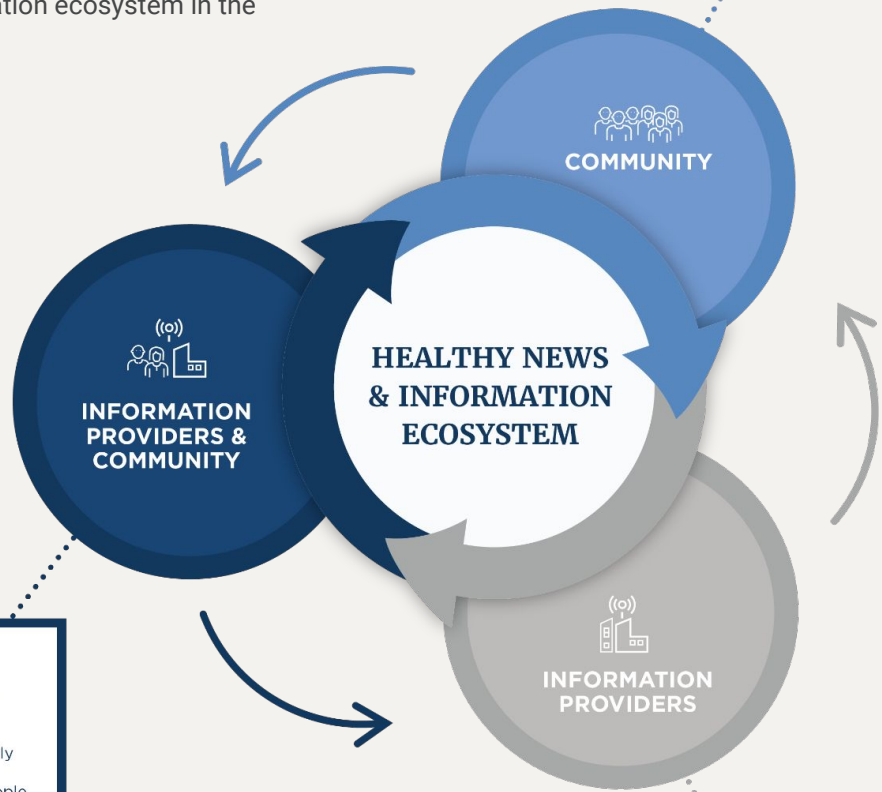
We have included results from the Gallup/Knight survey American Views 2022: Part 2, Trust, Media and Democracy for Charlotte, Detroit, Miami, Philadelphia and St. Paul, although none had enough respondents to be statistically significant and are best considered to be points of information in these communities. We did not include results from Akron, Macon-Bibb or San José because there were insufficient responses from these communities.

For the three new communities, we used the same baselining rubric to determine if information providers, community, and information providers and community display an opportunity for growth, are average or are high when compared with national averages or with the Knight communities' averages. For the five communities where we were attempting to understand change over time, we determined whether each arena was declining, steady or improving by comparing 2020 and 2022 data.

Framework & Analysis

This framework was created based on initial research in 2020 and revised through the reapplication of the framework in eight Knight Communities in 2023. The framework includes 35 indicators across three categories, which together encompass the major generalizable elements of a health news and information ecosystem in the United States.

<p>ECONOMIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Median Household Income • Per Capita Income • Poverty Rate <p>EDUCATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Degree • Bachelor's Degree • Literacy Rate 	<p>RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Households with Computer • Broadband Access • Universities • Population per University • Libraries • Population per Library • Community Satisfaction • Voter Turnout 2018 • Prior Information Needs Study • Prior Ecosystem Study
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<p>REPRESENTATION & PROXIMITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Who say local journalists are in touch with the community • % Who have spoken with a journalist • % Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live • % Who say their local news includes people like you in their stories <p>FINANCIAL SUPPORT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Who pay for local news in the past year <p>PERCEPTIONS OF INFORMATION PROVIDERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Who say their local news: Reports news accurately • % Who say their local news: Keeps an eye on local political leaders • % Who say their local news: Provides news that they use daily • % Who say their local news: Covers news stories thoroughly • % Who say their local news: Are transparent about their reporting • % Who say their local news: Deals fairly with all sides
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<p>NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS</p> <p>POPULATION PER ORGANIZATION</p> <p>MEDIUMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspapers • Television Stations • Radio Stations • Digital <p>BUSINESS MODELS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit • Public Media • National Broadcast Chain • National Newspaper Chain • Independent For-profit 	<p>BIPOC MEDIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American / Black • Hispanic / Latino • Asian/Asian American <p>DIVERSITY & COLLABORATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalist Diversity • Source Diversity • Collaboration <p>JOURNALISM FUNDING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philanthropic Dollars since 2009 • Funders • Recipients • Invested Per Capita
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Charles Thomas, Knight Foundation

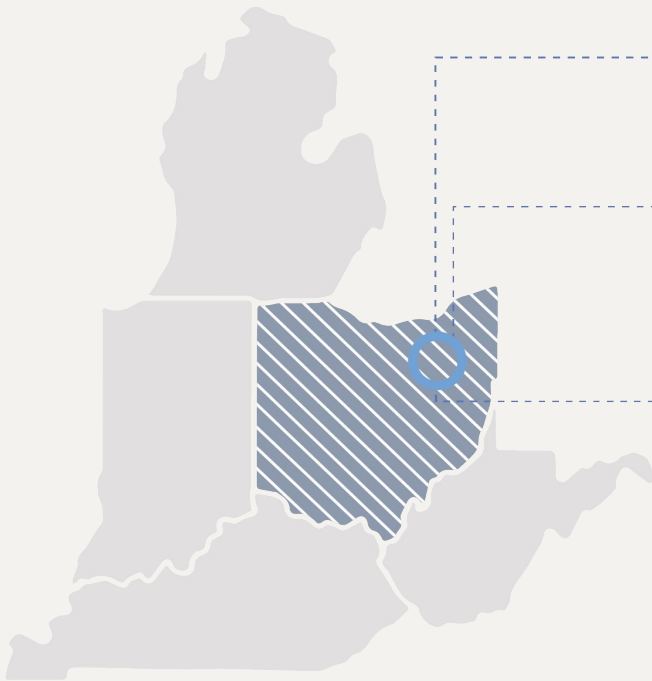
Bronlynn Thurman, GAR Foundation

Floco Torres, Musician, former Akron Devil Strip

Michael Tortorello, The Sahan Journal

Akron, Ohio

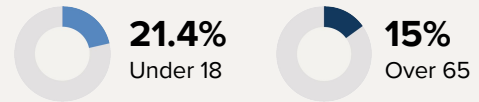
Akron, OH



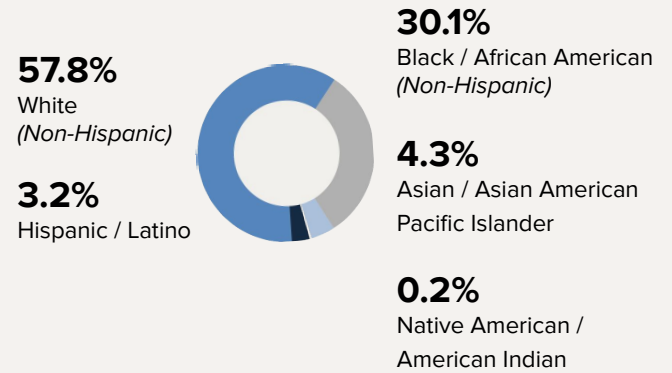
Akron, OH

189,347 (2021 ACS)

Age

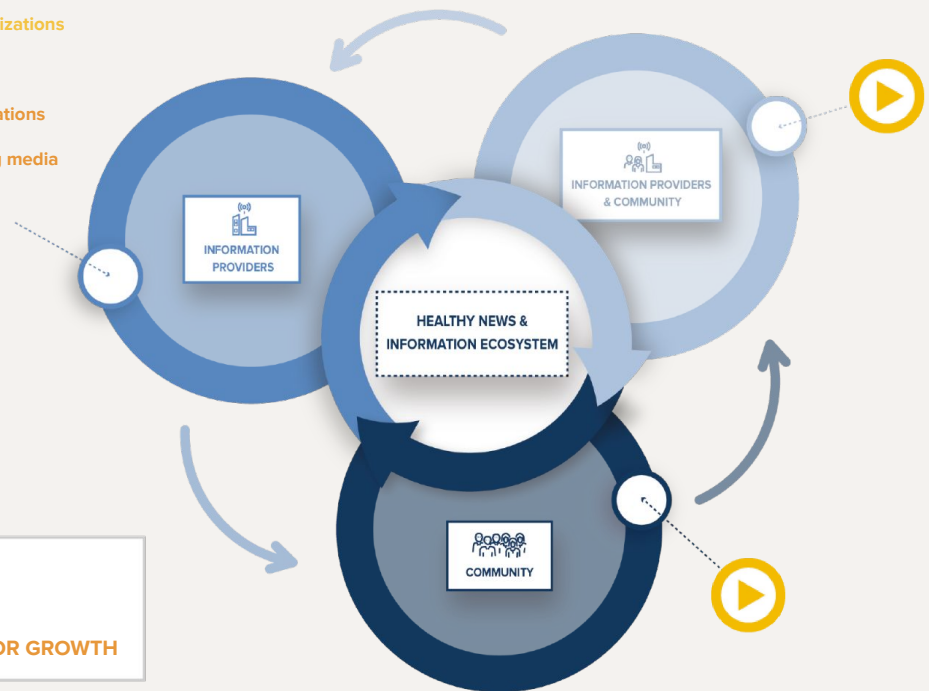
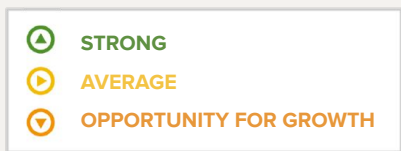


Race



News & Information Ecosystem 2022

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



Key Elements



Akron has an average number of news organizations per capita, but the majority of providers are based in surrounding areas (especially Cleveland, but also Kent) and are not exclusively focused on Akron itself, resulting in a lack of truly local news coverage.



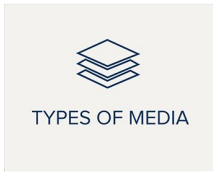
There are no community collaborations in Akron, but its proximity to Cleveland could present opportunities.



Akron Beacon Journal records and reports on the racial demographics of its staff.



Akron is notably lacking in BIPOC-serving media, particularly given its large Black population (30%).



Akron's ecosystem is dominated by television, and almost half of its print publications are former community newspapers that have been absorbed by the Gannett-owned *Akron Beacon Journal* and only exist as community sections of the city's major daily.



Because television and subsidiaries of *Akron Beacon Journal* dominate the landscape, most media are affiliated with a national chain.



There has been low philanthropic investment in the Akron ecosystem on a per capita basis, although this is set to change with the announcement of the launch of the nonprofit Signal Akron.



According to a 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center, residents of the Akron metro area express a relatively high degree of trust in its local media, although interviews with local stakeholders suggest there is opportunity for more robust relationships between local media and community members.

Summary

The Akron metropolitan statistical area is the 85th largest in the United States and is the second smallest among the areas considered in this report.¹ The area consists of Summit and Portage Counties and counts around 700,000 residents. A little more than a quarter of those residents, 189,347 according to 2021 population estimates, live in the city of Akron itself.

Akron is a diverse community, with 58% of residents identifying as white and 30% as Black or African American. Based on data from the 2021 American Communities Survey, the median household income in Akron is \$42,129, about 48% below the national average. The per capita income is similarly lower than the national average, and the poverty rate in Akron (23%) is more than twice the national rate (11.6%). The percentage of Akron’s population with a high school degree roughly matches the national average; however, the percentage of the population with a bachelor’s degree is about 11 percentage points lower. And while the percentage of households with a computer and access to broadband internet is below the national average, the difference is only about three percentage points.

There are opportunities to strengthen Akron’s information ecosystem. *Akron Beacon Journal*, a Gannett-owned newspaper, has suffered from reduced budgets and requisite downsizing since being acquired by Gannett, according to interviews. *Devil Strip*, a community-owned nonprofit, had been filling information gaps, but shut down in 2021 due to financial problems and challenges with the co-op ownership structure. And while there are public media outlets accessible in Akron, they are regional stations. And finally, there is little investment in the ecosystem, as evidenced by the lack of a backbone

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	Akron, 2021	Comparison
Economics			
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$42,129	Low
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$26,064	Low
Poverty Rate	11.6%	23.0%	High
Education			
High School Degree	88.9%	88.0%	Average
Bachelor's Degree	33.7%	22.0%	Low
Resources & Infrastructure			
Households with Computer	93.1%	90.4%	Average
Broadband Access	87.0%	84.8%	Average
Universities	20	3	
Population per University	32,690	63,116	Weak
Libraries	27	22	
Population per Library	23,693 (cities avg)	8,607	Strong
Community Satisfaction ²	60.9%	56.0%	High
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66%	54.6%	Low
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	No	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	No	

1. Census Reporter, Akron OH Metro Area, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US10420-akron-oh-metro-area/>.
 2. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=OH>.

institution to support media outlets in efforts like community engagement or collaboration.

In February 2023, Knight Foundation announced a \$5 million investment in a new nonprofit newsroom, Signal Akron.³ The American Journalism Project will also support this initiative, as will local partners, including Akron Community Foundation, GAR Foundation, Goodyear, the Greater Akron Chamber, Huntington Foundation, United Way of Summit & Medina, the University of Akron Foundation, and Welty Building Construction, bringing the total investment to \$9.5 million. Signal Akron will be part of the Signal Ohio, which launched its first newsroom in Cleveland.

Information Needs

There has not been a comprehensive community information needs assessment conducted in Akron. However, many stakeholders agree that as the number of journalists and outlets dwindles in Akron, there is not enough output or volume of information to meet the community's needs and provide a complete picture of Akron. While the city is not a news desert, it has not been trending in the right direction. The household penetration rate of newspaper circulation in Akron is 15.6%, average among Knight cities.⁴

A critical information need that emerged in the last three years was a lack of information with respect to public health. While in many communities COVID-19 re-established journalism's vital role as an information provider, that role was strained in Akron. Stakeholders often cited a feeling of "powerlessness" during the height of the pandemic, especially amid contentious vaccine debates. At times it seemed that "no matter what we said or did, there was a segment of the population that was either never going to read it or never believe it," said Michael Shearer, editor of *Akron Beacon Journal*, a sentiment that was echoed in interviews with stakeholders in many ecosystems included in this report.

A news and information ecosystem also has broad impacts on other ecosystems within a community. For instance, there are no dedicated reporters to cover the city's business community, and while it may appear there isn't much to report, in a community of this size, the lack of reporting the relevant business news that there is can have ripple effects, including potentially chilled investment in local business.

3. "Knight announces investment in Signal Akron, a new nonprofit news source," February 22, 2023, <https://knightfoundation.org/press/releases/knight-announces-investment-in-signal-akron-a-new-nonprofit-news-source/>.

4. 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 of which report data for 2019 and two for 2021. Household penetration rate is the average daily circulation divided by the number of households in the Akron-OH MSA, according to the Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

In 2022, new initiatives launched in Akron, paired with the announcement of the launch of the new nonprofit Signal Akron, are signaling exciting changes coming to the Akron news and information ecosystem. City Bureau announced its Documenters program would launch in Akron.⁵ Documenters trains local residents to attend and cover local government meetings, and pays them to write summaries of the meetings. This initiative, which is part of the broader Signal Akron project, will increase transparency into and information about local government.

Information Providers

Akron’s media ecosystem is dominated by regional news, largely due to its proximity to the larger city of Cleveland. *Akron Beacon Journal* is the only legacy media outlet based in the mid-size city of Akron and WAKR’s local news show is the last local broadcast show, as more and more outlets, particularly television and radio outlets, are now based in Cleveland. *Akron Beacon Journal’s* circulation of print, digital replica and digital non-replica circulation declined 2.5% from 2019 to 2021. It saw growth in digital-only subscribers from 2020 to 2022, which editor Michael Shearer attributes to the

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	Akron, 2022	Comparison
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	21	
Population per Organization	27,162	9,017	High
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	45,633	
Penetration rate	15.2%	15.6%	Average
Platform Breakdown⁶			
Newspapers	36.8%	4.8%	Low
Television Stations	31.3%	38.1%	High
Radio Stations	10.9%	14.3%	High
Digital only	18.5%	0.0%	Low
Business Models Breakdown⁷			
Nonprofit	11.2%	0.0%	Low
Public Media	11.5%	19.0%	High
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	28.6%	High
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	4.8%	Average
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	42.9%	Low
BIPOC-Serving Media			
African American / Black	1		
Hispanic / Latino	1		
Asian / Asian American	0		
Diversity			
Staff Diversity Transparency		Yes	
Source Diversity Audits		No	
Collaboration		No	
Journalism Funding			
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ⁸	\$3,837,794	\$155,200	
Funders	13	3	
Recipients	8	3	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$0.82	Low

5. “Cleveland and Akron Meetings Now Available on Documenters.org,” City Bureau, December 12, 2019, <https://www.citybureau.org/notebook/2019/12/11/cleveland-and-akron-meetings-now-available-on-documentersorg>

6. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in Akron.

7. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in Akron.

8. 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.

combination of Gannett's focus in growing digital readership and subscribers as well as the publication's participation in the Table Stakes program. And while its print subscription base is in decline, the decline is the smallest among the Knight cities in this assessment.

Akron receives signals from one NPR⁹ and two PBS affiliates; however, they are not dedicated to serving Akron specifically. Ideastream serves Northeast Ohio with multiple radio and television signals, with the signal that serves Akron based in Kent, about 15 miles away. The other NPR affiliate is based in Youngstown, which is about 50 miles away. Ideastream owns a Cleveland-based PBS station that serves Akron, but its primary PBS station is PBS Western Reserve. PBS Western Reserve is based in Kent, but the WEAO signal is licensed to Akron and serves the Cleveland-Akron-Canton television market. The presence of local broadcast media that is based elsewhere and not dedicated to Akron is evident in the presence of national television broadcasters serving the Akron market as well.

In late 2021, the community-owned nonprofit news magazine *Devil Strip* laid off all its employees and closed. There are currently no nonprofit news organizations serving Akron, with the exception of regional public media. However, this will soon change as, noted previously, in February 2023, Signal Ohio announced that Signal Akron will be its second newsroom, launching with the support of Knight Foundation, the American Journalism Project, and other local funders.

BIPOC-Serving Media

Akron has a large Black population (30%), more than twice the percentage of the United States as a whole, but the *Reporter* is the only news organization that specifically serves this population. *Reporter* first launched in 1969. It covers local news, sports, and entertainment. While it has a digital presence, it remains a primarily print publication that relies on print advertising for revenue.

9. WKSU, based in Kent, and WCPN, based in Cleveland, merged in February 2022.

News Outlets Based in Akron

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cuyahoga Falls New Press Nordonia Hills News Leader Stow Sentry Suburbanite Tallmadge Express 		
Print and digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Akron Beacon Journal Hudson Hub Times 		
Radio		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WNIR 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WKSU WYSU
Television		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WEWS WJW WKYC WOIO WQHS WVPX 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WEAO WVIZ

Diversity

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 sparked conversations and initiatives around racism across America, and news organizations were no exception. In August of the same year, *Akron Beacon Journal* pledged to put effort into ensuring its staff was representative of the diverse population of Akron, as did the Gannett company overall.¹⁰

In 2021, *Akron Beacon Journal* began to record and publish its staff demographic information.¹¹ According to this survey, the *Beacon Journal's* staff was 73% white in 2021 and only 5% of staff were Black. The percentage of nonwhite staff was actually down slightly from 2020, a fact that Shearer attributed to “internal company changes” and subsequently the “loss” of two journalists.

Editorially, the publication launched a [series focused on Black-owned businesses](#) in the city and continued the coverage throughout 2022 following public interest in the series. In Akron, the police killing of Jayland Walker in 2022 sparked citywide protests and calls to action, which were covered by *Akron Beacon Journal* and other local news outlets.

Collaborations

This research surfaced no strong patterns of collaboration among Akron’s news organizations, but some smaller projects have occurred in recent years. In one example, *Akron Beacon Journal* worked with Report for America in 2022 to [highlight racial inequity and the Akron Innerbelt](#). The paper has also worked with entities like *Devil Strip* and WKSU on reporting on housing in the city. *Akron Beacon Journal* also has a partnership with the ABC station based in Cleveland, WEWS, which has two reporters working out of the *Beacon Journal* offices. In other ecosystems, the presence of a backbone institution has proven to be vital to kickstart and maintain collaborations, and there is currently no such backbone institution in Akron.

Reporter is one of hundreds of Ohio newspapers digitized through [the Ohio Memory](#) project, a collaboration between the Ohio History Connection and the State Library of Ohio.

10. Michael Shearer, “Why a Diverse Newsroom Is Critical To Accurately Telling Our Community’s Stories,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/opinion/columns/2020/08/20/editor-why-diverse-newsroom-is-critical-to-accurately-telling-our-communitys-quos-stories/113394420/>.

11. Michael Shearer, “Why We’re Focused on Diversity and Accurately Telling the Stories of All Citizens,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/opinion/columns/2021/09/01/akron-beacon-journal-reports-staff-diversity-coverage/5617507001/>.

Local Journalism Support Organizations

While there are some entities that support the news and information ecosystem broadly, including Knight Foundation and Akron Community Foundation, there is recognition across sectors that the city is lacking local journalism support organizations. There are some family foundations active in Akron and northeast Ohio that have concentrated media giving in public media.

The Akron Community Foundation and GAR Foundation have both committed to supporting the Signal Akron newsroom and have the potential to become core support organizations for the news and information ecosystem.

Information Providers and Community

According to the 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey, Akron residents and their relationships to local media are average when compared to other Knight cities, meaning there is opportunity for deeper engagement among providers and community but that the distance between the two isn't so vast as to not be bridgeable.

About half of Akron residents (49%) agree that local news sources cover the area where they live, although this percentage has likely remained static or decreased in the past three years with local media's regional focus and the closure of *Devil Strip*. And more than half of residents believe that local news includes people like them in their stories. More residents of Akron say that local journalists are in touch with their community, that local news covers stories thoroughly and that local media is transparent about their

Information Providers & Community*	Knight Communities Average	Akron	Comparison
% Who say local journalists are in touch with the community	63%	69%	High
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	20%	Average
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	49%	Average
Financial Support			
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	18%	High
% Who say their local news:			
Reports news accurately	71%	72%	Average
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	61%	Low
Provides news that they use daily	67%	67%	Average
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	76%	High
Are transparent about their reporting	62%	73%	High
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	64%	Average
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	58%	Average

*Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey

reporting than the average of the Knight cities analyzed in this assessment. The only area in which it is lower is regarding political oversight.

In general, a side effect of a limited local news ecosystem is a lack of nuance in coverage, which can result in a lack of community cohesion. With the slow erosion of the staff of *Akron Beacon Journal* due to cost cutting measures at the corporate level and the loss of other publications, like *Devil Strip*, many non-media organizations have tried to step up their information sharing capacity to fill the void.

For example, Summit Live 365 creates a free calendar for local arts and culture activities. And the community program-focused GAR Foundation produces its own blogs and newsletter with the goal of producing useful information for community members. Christine Amer Mayer, president of GAR Foundation, says that while these efforts are appreciated and needed, it is difficult to replicate the substance and nuance that a journalism institution can provide. Even as other sources have popped up to address information gaps that exist in Akron, they don't have the market share or mindshare that a news organization would.

Case Study: Devil Strip

Founded in 2014 and shuttered in 2021, the nonprofit Akron Devil Strip had a co-op model that faced financial challenges. The community-owned publication attempted to fill the gaps in local news with deeper reporting on issues like the houseless community, small business and a heavy emphasis on arts and culture reporting. Reporters were also engaged in Akron's twenty-four neighborhoods, creating opportunities for residents to build relationships in some communities where skepticism of the media was strong.

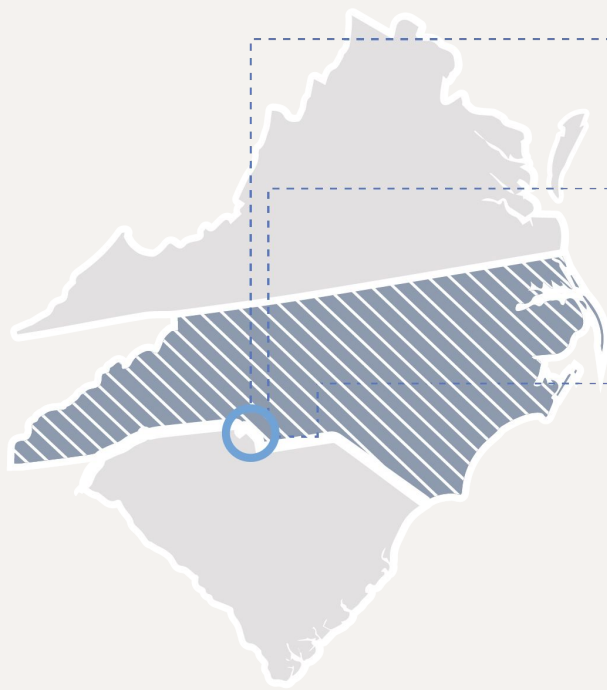
With the closure of *Devil Strip* in the context of Akron's broader media environment, there's a significant loss in the community and exploration of things that make the city vibrant. Beyond meeting information needs, having various sources for news, arts and culture through local outlets has an aspirational quality for communities, often becoming a point of civic pride. *Devil Strip* "changed the excitement for a lot of community members," said Floco Torres, an Akron-based musician and entrepreneur who was the magazine's audience development director. "We had something to be proud of, it showed examples of what to be proud of in the community. Now we don't have that, so what will fill it?"

Opportunities

- **Local backbone journalism institution:** Strong ecosystems often have a local backbone institution, and a backbone institution could help support collaboration across organizations and foster deeper community engagement and relationship building.
- **Nonprofit news:** This gap in nonprofit news is notable in Akron. Nonprofit news organizations—as well as public media—can cover stories and communities that don't always make sense economically, such as deep investigative reporting or culture reporting. Nonprofits also often conduct deep community engagement work that does not have an immediate payoff in terms of subscriptions or revenue. In February 2023, Signal Ohio announced that it would launch its second nonprofit newsroom in Akron, with support from Knight Foundation, the American Journalism Project and local partners including Akron Community Foundation, GAR Foundation, Goodyear, the Greater Akron Chamber, Huntington Foundation, United Way of Summit & Medina, the University of Akron Foundation and Welty Building Construction.

Charlotte, North Carolina

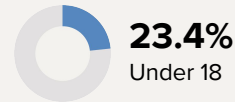
Charlotte, NC



Charlotte, NC

879,709 (2021 ACS)

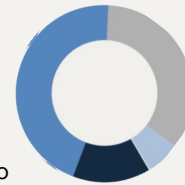
Age



Race

46.7%
White
(Non-Hispanic)

14.6%
Hispanic / Latino



35.5%
Black / African American
(Non-Hispanic)

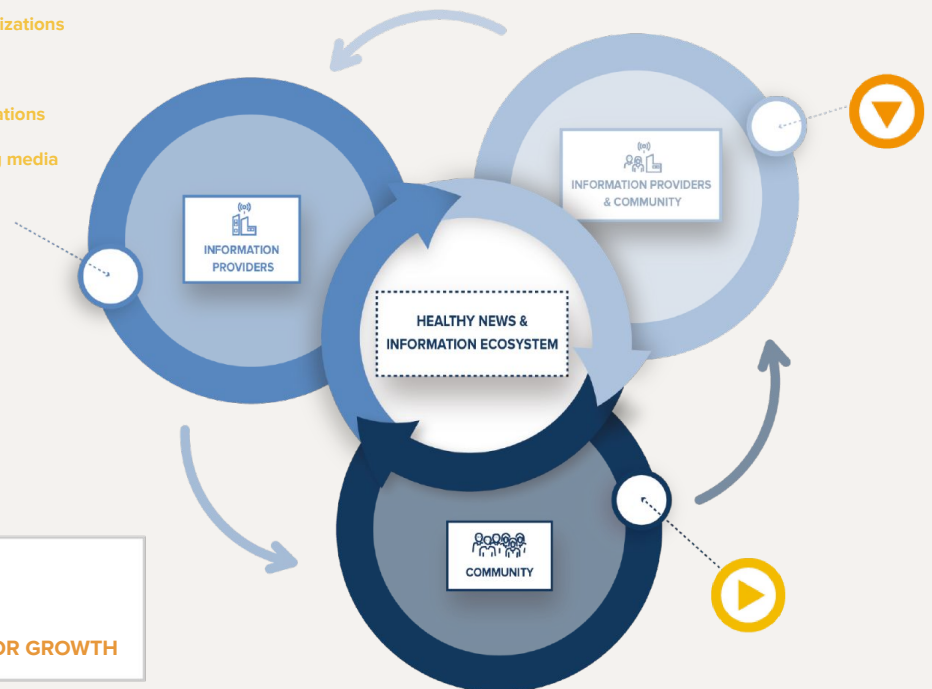
6.6%
Asian / Asian American
Pacific Islander

0.4%
Native American /
American Indian

News & Information Ecosystem 2022

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

- STRONG**
- AVERAGE**
- OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH**



Key Elements



While Charlotte has a diverse range of news options, the landscape is dominated by text content in print and digital media.



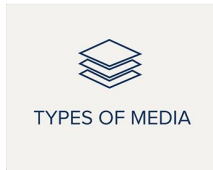
Collaboration has continued to strengthen and crystallize in Charlotte, much of which is institutionalized through the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative, which has continued to serve the region well.



A statewide diversity audit for North Carolina newsrooms found that, on average, 71% of staff and 75% of leadership identify as white, which is significantly higher than the state's 47% white population.



Based on the size of Charlotte's Black and Hispanic/Latino populations, there is a high number of news organizations serving Hispanic/Latino communities, but a small number serving Black communities.



Almost half of the outlets in the Charlotte ecosystem are primarily print media. Among those, all but two are independent for-profit outlets, with the exceptions being Charlotte's McClatchy-owned daily newspaper and a religiously affiliated nonprofit.



While public media has a strong presence in Charlotte, as do nonprofit organizations (8.3% of all outlets), over half of all outlets are independent for-profits, all of them either primarily print or digital only.



There has been little philanthropic investment in the Charlotte ecosystem on a per capita basis in the past three years, although organizations serving statewide in North Carolina have received philanthropic funding.



Based on 2019, 2020 and 2022 surveys, Charlotte residents have a relatively negative perception of their local media.

Summary

Charlotte is located in Mecklenburg County and is the largest city in North Carolina and the fifteenth-largest in the United States. While the city proper has experienced a very slight population decrease of -0.68% from 2019 to 2022 (879,709), the Charlotte metro area is [one of the ten fastest-growing metro areas in the country](#). Charlotte is part of the Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia, NC-SC Metropolitan Statistical Area, a region with a total population of over 2.7 million residents.¹ Charlotte’s growth has contributed to gaps in news coverage as newsrooms struggle to keep up, especially in places like the West End, a historically African American neighborhood.

Charlotte is a relatively young city, with just 10.4% of its population over the age of 65 compared to 16.8% nationally. It is also more racially diverse than the United States as a whole, in particular when it comes to the Black and African American population, which comprises 35.5% of Charlotte’s population compared to 13.6% nationally. Less than half of Charlotte’s population, at least within the city proper, is white.

Community indicators show that Charlotte is an educated city with significant resources invested in libraries and higher education—there are twenty library branches and seventeen universities in Charlotte. But while Charlotte’s median household income has increased since 2020, it has not increased at the same pace as the United States as a whole and is now about 5.4% lower than the national median household income.

The Charlotte media ecosystem is relatively robust, with many news outlets serving diverse communities. The institutionalization of collaboration through the Solutions Journalism

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	Charlotte Baseline, 2020	Charlotte, 2021	Trending
Economics				
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$60,886	\$65,359	Improving
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$36,436	\$39,834	Improving
Poverty Rate	11.6%	14.0%	11.9%	Steady
Education				
High School Degree	88.9%	89.0%	89.4%	Steady
Bachelor’s Degree	33.7%	44.0%	44.8%	Steady
Resources & Infrastructure				
Households with Computer	93.1%	92.9%	91.9%	Steady
Broadband Access	87.0%	85.4%	85.2%	Steady
Universities	20	20	20	Steady
Population per University	32,690	44,285	43,985	Steady
Libraries	27	20	20	Steady
Population per Library	23,693	44,285	43,985	Steady
Community Satisfaction ²	60.9	62.2	66	Improving
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66%	47%	72.0%	Improving
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	

1. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US16740-charlotte-concord-gastonia-nc-sc-metro-area/>

2. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=NC>.

Network-led Charlotte Journalism Collaborative has proven to provide valuable reporting and community engagement efforts across the ecosystem, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information Needs

There's been significant change in Charlotte's news ecosystem during the last five years, with contraction in the commercial media space and simultaneous vibrancy in local news initiatives serving diverse sectors of the community. The Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media's 2023 NC News and Information Census found that Mecklenburg County residents have the most access to news in the state (42 outlets).³ This analysis also found there to be a very small reporting gap, relative to other counties, meaning that the majority of outlets that are accessible in Mecklenburg County also cover the county directly. The majority of publications in the state, as well as in Charlotte are print. The household penetration rate of newspaper circulation in Charlotte is 16.1%, about average compared to other Knight communities.⁴

However, there is still often a gap between what the community needs and what news organizations are able to provide given limited resources. In the words of Ju-Don Marshall, WFAE's former chief content officer and executive vice president and current president and chief executive officer, "We run to the fire when there is one, but we fail to look at what's simmering and get ahead of these things so our community is well informed."

For example, while voting guides were a standard offering from legacy news organizations in the past, that has dropped off in recent years due to shrinking newsrooms and a lack of resources. Local public media and nonprofits are working to fill these gaps. For example, WFAE began producing bilingual voter guides and collaborating for distribution with La Noticia, for which they received overwhelming feedback from the community about their utility.

In the past year, the *Charlotte Observer* has increased efforts to be more responsive to audiences and launched a service journalism desk of three reporters and one editor who respond to reader questions, providing a direct line from the community to the newsroom. And the *Observer's* [Mobile Newsroom](#), launched in January 2023 in partnership with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, expands how the

3. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, "NC News & Information Census," 2022, <https://www.cislm.org/research/nc-news-information-census/5/>.

4. 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 Charlotte, according to the Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

organization is engaging with and meeting community information and expanding the local news ecosystem beyond traditional media entities.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored huge disparities in the community at every level in Charlotte, in particular health equity; early on, the impact was disproportionate on communities of color in the city, stakeholders noted. If there's any silver lining to the media's response to the pandemic, it's that most news organizations shifted to community-first mindsets, breaking the mode of how they would normally approach journalism, centering community questions and following a service journalism model. The pandemic showed that journalism can "sometimes make the difference between life and death," La Noticia's publisher and CEO Hilda Gurdian said, citing La Noticia's Spanish-language coverage to the Latino and Spanish-speaking community within Charlotte that was disproportionately affected by the pandemic and lacked access to information.

According to the Gallup/Knight American Views survey, a majority of respondents in Charlotte get their daily news from a television station, although this decreased slightly from 2020 to 2022 (69% to 55%).⁵ In both years, just over one third of respondents said they get most of their news from television. In 2022, only 27% of respondents agreed that local news organizations can be relied on to deliver the information they need.

Information Providers

The news and information ecosystem in Charlotte is complex, with significant local news coverage and innovation in the works, especially among startups and nonprofits, while at the same time the city is experiencing decreasing resources for legacy commercial media. In total, we found 36 information providers in Charlotte, an increase of two since 2020 (*Queen City Nerve* and the *Charlotte Voice*), suggesting there was growth in some areas of Charlotte's news and information ecosystem with new organizations cropping up and some even expanding.⁶ In the state of North Carolina, the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at UNC Hussman School of Journalism found in their 2022 census of news providers in the state that Mecklenburg County, where Charlotte is located, had the most news providers of any county in the state.

5. Responses to the Gallup/Knight American Views Survey are not statistically significant for Charlotte and instead can be considered information to be analyzed together with other data sources. In 2020, there were 171 respondents in Charlotte; in 2022, there were only 35 respondents from Charlotte.

6. In the 2023 "NC News & Information Census," the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media found 29 news providers in Mecklenburg County, <https://www.cislm.org/research/nc-news-information-census/2/>.

However, at the same time, some outlets are shrinking in headcount; in legacy newsrooms like the *Charlotte Observer*, staffing has gone down over the years. According to the Alliance for Audited Media, the *Charlotte Observer's* daily average circulation of print, digital replica and digital nonreplica copies declined 27% from 2019 to 2021 (77,050 to 55,857).

In late 2018, the publisher of Creative Loafing, Charlotte's alt weekly, announced that it would reduce staff and transition to a digital-only format. The transition meant that Charlotte lost a print media publication, but it didn't necessarily lose a news outlet. Not long after Creative Loafing's transition, former staffers of the outlet launched *Queen City Nerve* to serve as a free print alt weekly for Charlotte. *Queen City Nerve* operates as an independent, for-profit publication. Charlotte Voice is another new publication on the horizon that is in development.

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	Charlotte Baseline, 2020	Charlotte, 2022	Trending
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	34	36	Improving
Population per Organization	27,162	26,050	24,436	Improving
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	77,050	55,857	Declining
Household Penetration Rate	15.2%	-	16.1%	Average
Platform Breakdown⁷				
Newspapers	36.8%	50.0%	47.2%	Steady
Television Stations	31.3%	26.5%	25.0%	Steady
Radio Stations	10.9%	8.8%	8.3%	Steady
Digital only	18.5%	17.6%	22.2%	Improving
Business Models Breakdown⁸				
Nonprofit	11.2%	8.8%	8.3%	Steady
Public Media	11.5%	5.9%	5.6%	Steady
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	26.5%	25.0%	Steady
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	2.9%	2.8%	Steady
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	55.9%	58.3%	Steady
BIPOC-Serving Media				
African American / Black		3	4	Improving
Hispanic / Latino		8	8	Steady
Asian / Asian American		0	0	Steady
Diversity				
Staff Diversity Transparency		1 (ASNE)	Audit Underway	
Source Diversity Audits		0	0	
Collaboration		Developed and Institutionalized	Developed and Institutionalized	
Journalism Funding				
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ⁹	\$3,837,794	\$107,015	\$94,464	
Funders	13	6	2	
Recipients	8	5	3	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$0.12	\$0.11	Steady

7. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in Charlotte.

8. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in Charlotte.

9. 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.

It was founded by the editor of *Pride Magazine*, Alicia Benjamin, and is intended to be an independent for-profit outlet providing digital news aimed at Charlotte's Black and African American communities.

Finally, in late 2020, Axios purchased the digital startup Charlotte Agenda and rebranded it as Axios Charlotte.

BIPOC-Serving Media

Charlotte has a robust ecosystem for news in Spanish. It has four Spanish-language print publications aimed at serving Hispanic and Latino communities, in addition to two television stations and two digital news organizations, Enlace Latino and La Noticia. The number of Spanish-language news options is particularly striking given the percentage of the population that is Hispanic/Latino. At 14.6% of the population, it is substantial but still lower than the national percentage, 18.9%.

The Black population of Charlotte is much larger (35.5%) than the Hispanic/Latino population, but there are fewer news options expressly serving this community. Of the four publications aimed at serving Black and African American communities, two are print (the newspaper the *Charlotte Post* and *Pride Magazine*) and two are digital, though one has not launched yet.¹⁰

10. The presence of Telemundo and Azteca América, both well-established Spanish-language broadcast chains, partly accounts for the discrepancy between the number of news options for Hispanic and Latino communities compared to Black and African American communities. Azteca América closed at the end of 2022.

News Outlets Based in Charlotte

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Axios Charlotte Charlotte Ledger Charlotte Voice Creative Loafing Charlotte Q City Metro 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EdNC Enlace Latino 	
Print and digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlotte Business Journal Charlotte Magazine Charlotte Post Denver Citizen El Progreso Hispano Hola News Charlotte Lake Norman Citizen La Noticia Matthews Mint Hill Mecklenburg Times Mundo Latino Newspaper Pride Magazine Q Notes Que Pasa Mi Gente Charlotte Queen City Nerve South Charlotte Weekly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlotte Observer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholic News and Herald 	
Radio		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WBT 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WFAE
Television		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spectrum News 1 Telemundo WBTV WCCB WCNC WJZY WSOC-TV 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PBS Charlotte

Diversity

Among Charlotte’s newsrooms, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have been much more intentional in both internal processes, from attracting and retaining talent, to how newsrooms participate among and engage with communities. And who is in newsrooms also matters to residents: according to the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey, 60% of respondents in Charlotte think that the diversity among a news organization’s journalists is either very or somewhat important when deciding which news sources or outlets to turn to.

In 2021, the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media conducted a statewide diversity survey of newsrooms.¹¹ While these data are reported in aggregate and at the state level, they are interesting nonetheless. The 2022 report found that 71% of staff and 75% of leadership of newsrooms identify as white, a much higher percentage than the 47% white population in the state overall. Black staff (23%) and leadership (18%) are represented in newsrooms at rates far below the 36% of overall population. And the biggest opportunity area for North Carolina overall is with respect to Hispanic/Latino inclusion in newsrooms, which was reported at 6% for both staff and leadership, while statewide the population is 15%.

Public radio entity WFAE is often cited by stakeholders as engaging in substantive DEI work. For example, in June 2021, WFAE launched a [Race and Equity Team](#) in partnership with Report For America to help WFAE fulfill its public service mission “by meeting this moment in history to help lead communities across greater Charlotte in addressing racial injustice.” The initiative raised \$1.2 million for its first three years of funding.

Collaborations

Charlotte is a go-to example of how a collaboration could become institutionalized and grow in a city. The [Charlotte Journalism Collaborative](#) (CJC), launched in 2019 through the Solutions Journalism Network, is made up of seven newsrooms and additional non-newsroom partners like the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and is focused on a single issue: affordable housing in Charlotte. Stakeholders emphasized that

11. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, “2022 Diversity Audit Report,” <https://www.cislm.org/research/ncdiversityaudit/2022-diversity-audit-report/4/>. According to the report, “of the 36 newsrooms that completed the organizational survey, 16 were a nonprofit organization, and nine have independent local owners. Newspapers owned by McClatchy participated in the organizational survey but not newsrooms owned by chains such as Lee and Adams. There was limited participation among Gannett newsrooms.”

collaboration requires significant commitment from participating organizations in order to be successful. Together, CJC members are trying to address community challenges around affordable housing collectively because some of these issues are nearly impossible to approach individually—stories are approached differently, with each newsroom bringing its own identity and skill sets to the work, said Rana Cash of the *Charlotte Observer*.

In many ways, the CJC is an answer to what can happen when newsrooms get smaller—various organizations can collaborate and coordinate to ensure that stories of community importance get expansive coverage. “In the old days of journalism, we would have each of us run to the fire, and cover that story. But wouldn’t it be a better use of resources to aim different people at similar issues and serve the community?” said Ju-Don Marshall, WFAE’s president and chief executive officer.

Over the past three years, the collaborative has started to be seen more broadly as a convener in Charlotte, with far-reaching impact in the city, as outlined in its [Impact Report released in January 2023](#). The CJC is often in the same room with non-media entities working on affordable housing. The CJC is able both to hold power to account but also seen as part of the room and not just covering the room, said Chris Rudisill, director of the CJC.

Case Study: Charlotte Journalism Collaborative’s New Storytelling Approach

In 2021, the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative launched a graphic novel in both English and Spanish, [PANDEMIC](#), detailing stories from the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the community in Charlotte, using innovative storytelling approaches to engage new audiences. Each chapter is based on a real news story published by CJC members, from how contact tracing works to prevent community spread to an undocumented family’s navigation of the health care system. The CJC obtained a local grant from the Arts and Science Council, partnered with local artists through BOOM Charlotte and distributed 2,500 copies of the graphic novel to local libraries, as well as additional copies to local schools and museums, highlighting the work as a historical record of the first year of COVID-19 in the community. The graphic novel also was shared via social media.

Local Journalism Support Organizations

Charlotte has a network of journalism support organizations, including News Voices: North Carolina at the state level, which was particularly active prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are also institutions engaged in the news and information ecosystem. For example, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library participates in the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative and engages with news organizations independently through programs like [the Charlotte Observer's Mobile Newsroom](#).

However, most institutional funding for journalism in Charlotte is sponsorship- or issue-based (for example, the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative's focus on affordable housing).¹² While institutional support exists, there is room for improvement in this area, and perhaps new avenues to pursue. For example, Charlotte has a large financial industry, but those institutions have not yet become supporters for journalism in the community.

This could largely be due to the fact that for many non-media institutions, journalism funding is unfamiliar territory. "It's our job to talk to them and explain the importance of a healthy local news ecosystem," Hilda Gurdian, publisher and CEO of La Noticia said. The pandemic did offer an opportunity to do just that, demonstrating the value of local news in everything from health information to where to find access to resources like food banks.

Information Providers & Community

The Pew Research Center's 2019 Local News Survey data reflect the weak connection between local journalists and residents in Charlotte, with more than half of residents saying that news does not mostly cover the area where they live or include people like them in their stories. And only slightly more than half of respondents felt that news sources cover stories thoroughly, are transparent or deal fairly with all sides.

In 2022, the Gallup/Knight American Views survey included 35 respondents in Charlotte, and while the results of the survey are not statistically significant, they are worth considering to understand the perception of local news among Charlotte residents. While a mere 6% of respondents disagreed that local

12. The Charlotte Journalism Collaborative is funded by the Solutions Journalism Network, which is in turn funded by Knight Foundation.

news organizations have the resources and opportunity to report the news accurately and fairly, only 21% agreed that local news organizations care about the best interest of their readers, viewers and listeners and only 18% agreed that they do not intend to mislead, misinform or persuade the public.

In interviews in 2023, stakeholders reflected that many Charlotte residents have a distrust of legacy media, and are particularly critical of

the newspaper the *Charlotte Observer* and of TV news. Ju-Don Marshall of WFAE said residents feel that they “are booster-ish around local government and talk around growth of the city, masking issues of what it means for residents.” And Rana Cash, executive editor of the *Observer*, said that trust depends on the outlet—for television, for example, “there might not be more trust but there’s more familiarity.”

Despite reductions in staff size, the *Charlotte Observer*, a legacy publication, is consciously working on building trust with sectors of the Charlotte community with which it does not have a strong relationship. To that end, the *Observer* recently launched a mobile newsroom initiative with the public library to give people access to newsmakers and build relationships, especially in Black and brown communities, as well as hosting a “Meet the Observer” open house. As evidenced in the Pew Research Center data and low percentage of residents who say that they have spoken directly with a journalist, Rana Cash said that the *Observer* has historically often “writ[ten] about them not for them,” reflecting that many people in Charlotte have only talked to a journalist if something bad happens.

Together with the NC News Voices, local public radio station WFAE did a number of listening sessions pre-pandemic, talking to local residents about news and trust. Ju-Don Marshall said these sessions specifically sought to break down barriers between the station and community members.

Information Providers & Community*	National Average	Charlotte	
% Who say local journalists are in touch with the community	63%	66%	Average
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	18%	Average
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	45%	Low
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	12%	Average
% Who say their local news:			
Reports news accurately	71%	71%	Average
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	70%	High
Provides news that they use daily	67%	64%	Low
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	60%	Low
Are transparent about their reporting	62%	57%	Low
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	53%	Low
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	48%	Low

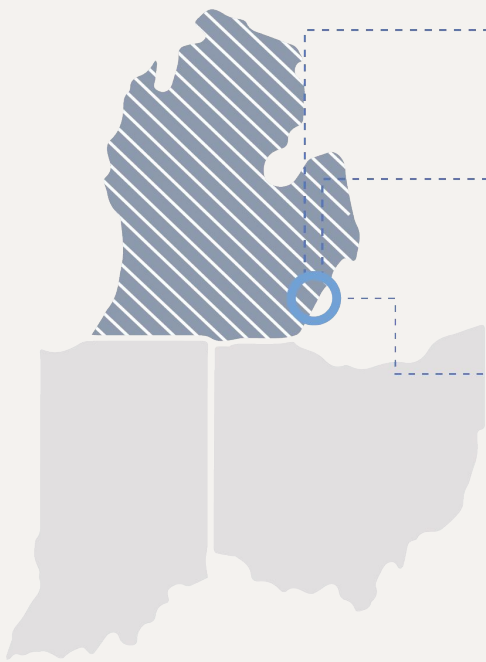
*Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey

Opportunities

- **Institutional support:** While there is investment in local public media and initiatives like the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative, philanthropic investment per capita is low and there is still ample opportunity for increased support for nonprofit organizations to strengthen their institutions and scale their work.
- **Scale up collaboration:** Given the success of the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative, additional resources for new or existing collaborative efforts could expand coverage beyond a single issue facing Charlotte residents.

Detroit, Michigan

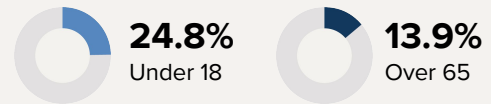
Detroit, MI



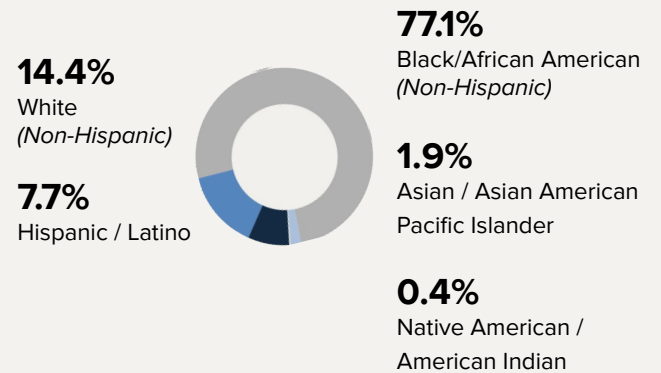
Detroit, MI

632,434 (2021 ACS)

Age



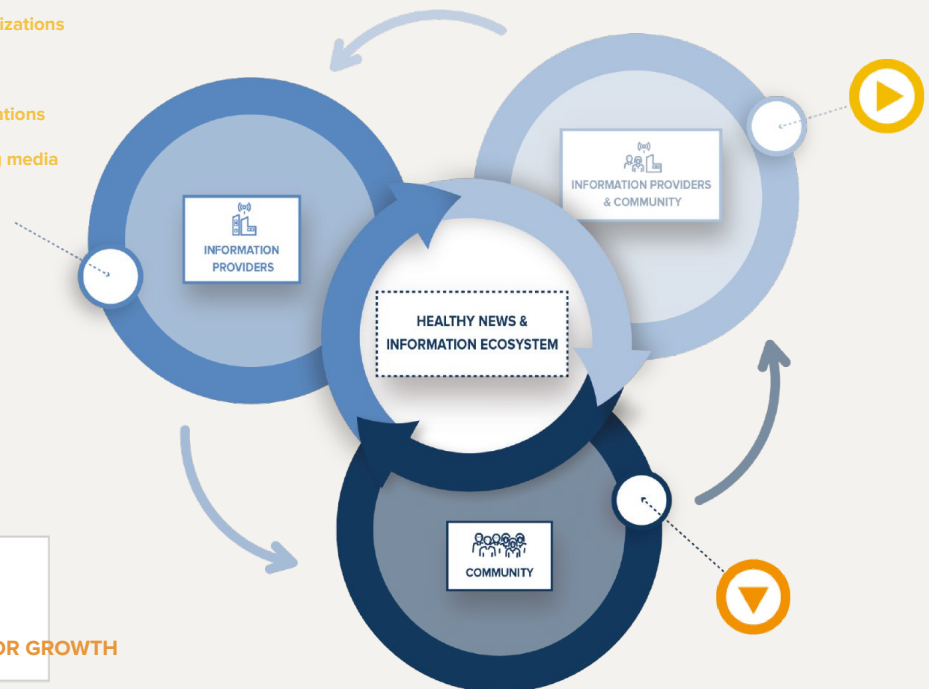
Race



News & Information Ecosystem 2022

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

- STRONG**
- AVERAGE**
- OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH**



Key Elements



Detroit has a high number of news organizations for its population, with high representation of independent for-profit print publications, nonprofit news publications and public media.



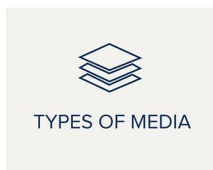
Detroit has seen recent robust collaborations, but they have not continued in an institutionalized way, as the Detroit Journalism Cooperative ceased operations in 2019.



Detroit Free Press records and reports on the racial demographics of its staff.



Detroit has a low number of BIPOC community media outlets; however, given the large Black population (77%), the identified audience of some newsrooms, especially nonprofit newsrooms, is oriented toward diverse sectors of the community.



Detroit is dominated by print media; however, digital media and public media represent significant components of its news ecosystem.



The majority of Detroit's journalism organizations are independent for-profit entities, but it has a significant number of nonprofits.



Philanthropic investment per capita decreased from 2020 to 2022; per capita philanthropic investment for the three years prior to 2022 was \$2.69, compared with \$4.48 for the three years prior to 2020.



The community in Detroit has relatively negative sentiments about their local news media; strengthening this relationship is crucial to bolstering the future of the ecosystem.

Summary

Detroit is home to 632,434 residents and is the 14th-largest city in the United States and the second-largest in the Midwest and Great Lakes region (behind Chicago). While the population of the metro area has remained stable, the population in the city of Detroit has declined 5.6% since 2020, from 670,031 to 632,434 residents. Detroit’s population is 77% Black or African American, 14% white, and 8% Hispanic/Latino. Detroit is part of the Detroit-Warren-Dearborn metropolitan statistical area, which has a total of about 4.4 million residents.¹

Detroit scores low in economic and education indicators. The median household and per capita income figures are both well below the national average, and Detroit’s 33.2% poverty rate is almost three times the national rate of 11.6%. The percentages of the population to achieve a high school education or bachelor’s degree is also lower than the national average, although in both cases they are about two percentage points higher than in 2020.

Since 2020, Detroit has seen an even more marked improvement in terms of technology and infrastructure. The percentage of households with computers is below the national average, but for Detroit it has risen just over six percentage points since 2020. The growth of households with broadband access is even more drastic, rising 12.9 percentage points, from 59% to 71.9%. This growth outpaced the seven-percentage-point rise in broadband access in the United States as a whole. This increase in household connectivity is likely the result of a combination of efforts, including the [Equitable Internet Initiative](#) (supported by the Knight Foundation) and city initiatives.²

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	Detroit Baseline, 2020	Detroit, 2021	Trending
Economics				
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$29,481	\$32,498	Improving
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$17,338	\$19,569	Improving
Poverty Rate	11.6%	36.4%	33.2%	Steady
Education				
High School Degree	88.9%	80.0%	81.9%	Steady
Bachelor’s Degree	33.7%	14.6%	16.4%	Steady
Resources & Infrastructure				
Households with Computer	93.1%	79.4%	85.7%	Improving
Broadband Access	87.0%	59.0%	71.9%	Improving
Universities	20	12	12	Steady
Population per University	32,690	55,836	52,703	Improving
Libraries	27	22	22	Steady
Population per Library	23,693	30,456	28,747	Improving
Community Satisfaction ³	60.9%	60.4%	55.0%	Declining
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66%	41%	33.8%	Declining
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	

1. “Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI Metro Area,” Census Reporter, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US19820-detroit-warren-dearborn-mi-metro-area/>.
 2. Mayor’s Office, “Mayor, Human-IT Launch New Effort To Help Close Detroit’s Digital Divide, Reduce e-waste, Create Jobs,” City of Detroit, <https://detroitmi.gov/news/mayor-human-it-launch-new-effort-help-close-detroits-digital-divide-reduce-e-waste-create-job>.
 3. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=MI>.

Detroit has a relatively robust media ecosystem, with a strong public media station, a newspaper, and a robust nonprofit sector. However, given the economic and demographic differences of Detroit's city proper that is majority Black and experiencing high poverty rates, compared with the surrounding suburbs, which are majority white and more affluent, media has often catered to the information needs of suburban residents given the incentive structure to serve potential paying subscribers and those with greater purchasing power to appeal to advertisers. However, newer organizations, like Outlier Media, have identified this as a problem and are actively working to meet the information needs of all Detroit residents. With a history of collaboration through the now defunct Detroit Journalism Collaborative, news organizations continue to find ways to share content and work together to better serve all sectors of the community.

Information Needs

When considering consumption of daily newspapers, data from the Alliance for Audited Media indicates that the household penetration rate for the print editions, print replica and nonreplica editions of *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* stood at 2.7%, the lowest figure among all Knight cities, though this data doesn't include the *Detroit Free Press's* Sunday edition.⁴ This suggests that residents are not getting adequate news and information from print publications.

According to the Gallup/Knight American Views survey conducted in 2020 and 2022, TV sources are where most Detroiters get their daily news, although this decreased from 71% of respondents in 2020 to 43% of respondents in 2022.⁵ When asked the extent to which local news organizations deliver the information they need, respondents were split roughly into thirds with just over one third agreeing (36%) that news organizations deliver information, 30% being neutral and 40% disagreeing.

One information provider looking to reach Detroiters directly is Outlier Media, a nonprofit based in Detroit. Outlier originally conducted a community information needs assessment when it launched in 2016. In April and May of 2022, Outlier conducted a new information needs assessment, employing its updated methodology.⁶

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

5. Responses to the Gallup/Knight American Views Survey are not statistically significant for Detroit and instead can be considered information to be analyzed together with other data sources. In 2020, there were 298 respondents in Detroit; in 2022, there were only 79 respondents from Detroit.

6. Outlier Media, "Information Needs in Detroit" (June 2022), https://outliermedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Detroit-Information-Needs-2022_Final.pdf

Outlier looks for “resource gaps” in data, which are times when there is a material need that is not being met, by pulling from datasets like 911 response times, property code compliance, municipal spending and calls to United Way’s 211 service. They also ask people directly about the challenges they face and the information they both have and need. In 2022, this took the form of a community survey distributed through Outlier’s text-message-based information service. Outlier has utilized this SMS service since 2017, and in 2021 reached more than 60,000 residents of Detroit city proper, according to Erin Perry, Outlier’s managing editor.

Through this assessment, Outlier surfaced resource and information gaps in Detroit, nearly all of which are connected to the city’s low median income and high rate of poverty. For example, unemployment rates remained higher in Detroit than in Michigan as a whole and residents said they lacked information about how to access benefits as well as about job opportunities, and 65.8% of households in Detroit make less than a “living wage” (\$34,000 for a single person), as defined by researchers at MIT.⁷

Another challenge facing Detroiters is housing, from the rising cost of housing and eviction to poor housing quality and blight. Outlier surfaced housing as a challenge in its original information needs assessment and continues to cover this issue.

Information Providers

The number of information providers in Detroit’s news ecosystem has remained steady since 2020, with 44 information providers identified. There’s a robust presence of nonprofit media, including Chalkbeat and Outlier Media. “Detroit in its inherent nature is very entrepreneurial, local landscape is very strong, resilient, and there’s been significant growth in the last five years,” said Harmony Rhodes, program officer at the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, citing its role following the Grand Bargain in 2014 and its focus on a narrative shift in the city.

A notable change took place in the ecosystem in early 2022 when Detour Detroit, a digital news outlet covering Detroit’s communities with equitable journalism via daily newsletters for Detroiters, joined Outlier Media.⁸ Outlier Media has been a model organization for community-centered journalism, using a direct-to-consumer distribution model (via SMS) to provide critical information to meet community members’ needs. By merging Detour Detroit into the organization, Outlier Media added new avenues for reaching audiences, such as digital text and newsletters.

7. Living Wage Calculation for Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/19820>

8. Detour Detroit, “Detour Detroit joining with Outlier Media to grow the future of independent local journalism in Detroit,” (March 2022). <https://detourdetroit.com/detour-detroit-joining-outlier-media/>

BIPOC-serving media

Detroit has five news organizations that specifically serve a racial and/or ethnic community, two of them directed at the Black and African American community. While this is low considering the overall size of Detroit’s Black and African American population (77%), for a city like Detroit, organizations that aren’t explicitly serving a racial or ethnic community do not necessarily have a default white audience, as might be the case for other ecosystems.

For example, Outlier Media has a staff that is reflective of the city’s population and has developed engagement and distribution strategies with low-income Detroiters as its core audience. Thus, while it might not be captured in the number of BIPOC-serving media news outlets, Detroit does have a robust presence of organizations striving for equity.

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	Detroit Baseline, 2020	Detroit, 2022	Trending
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	44	44	Steady
Population per Organization	27,162	15,228	14,374	Improving
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	74,462	47,009	Declining
Penetration rate	15.2%	-	2.7%	
Platform Breakdown⁹				
Newspapers	36.8%	52.3%	52.3%	Steady
Television Stations	31.3%	13.6%	13.6%	Steady
Radio Stations	10.9%	9.1%	9.1%	Steady
Digital only	18.5%	22.7%	22.7%	Steady
Business Models Breakdown¹⁰				
Nonprofit	11.2%	15.9%	15.9%	Steady
Public Media	11.5%	6.8%	6.8%	Steady
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	13.6%	13.6%	Steady
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	4.5%	4.5%	Steady
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	59.1%	59.1%	Steady
BIPOC-Serving Media				
African American / Black		3	3	Steady
Hispanic / Latino		2	2	Steady
Asian / Asian American			0	Steady
Diversity				
Staff Diversity Transparency		2		
Source Diversity Audits		0	0	
Collaboration		Developed and institutionalized	Developed and institutionalized	
Journalism Funding				
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ¹¹	\$3,837,794	\$3,000,000	\$1,700,000	
Funders	13	13	7	
Recipients	8	7	5	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$4.48	\$2.69	Declining

9. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in Detroit.

10. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in Detroit.

11. 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.

News Outlets Based in Detroit

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deadline Detroit M Live Michigan Chronicle Voice of Detroit 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridge Detroit Chalkbeat Detroit Detour Detroit Outlier Media 	
Print and digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertiser Times Arab American News Between the Lines (PrideSource) BLAC Detroit Monthly DBusiness Crain's Detroit Business Detroit Business Monthly Detroit Jewish News Detroit Legal News Detroit Metro Times Detroit Native Sun Detroit News Hamtramck Review Heritage News Hour Detroit Italian Tribune Latino Press Michigan Korean Weekly News Herald Nuestro Detroit Telegram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detroit Free Press Garden City Observer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South End 	
Radio		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WWJ - Radio 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Radio WDET
Television		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WDIV WJBK WMYD WWJ - TV WXYZ 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detroit Public Television

Diversity

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the *Detroit Free Press*, along with other Gannett papers, committed itself to “increasing the number of people of color working in our newsroom to better reflect our communities.”¹² In line with Gannett’s corporate vow, *Free Press* said its newsroom would be “at parity” with the community by 2025.

In 2022, *Free Press* reported that their staff demographics had “stayed flat” over the previous year, with one-third of staff identifying as persons of color.¹³ They attributed this static position to turnover and the “opportunity to make some remarkable hires.” Since 2020, *Free Press* has increased its Black staff from 12% to 17% and its Asian staff from 8% to 11%. However, at the same time, Hispanic/Latino staff decreased from 3% to 2%.

In the Gallup/Knight 2022 American Views survey, 70% of respondents in Detroit said that the diversity of a news organization’s journalists is very or somewhat important when deciding which news sources or outlets to turn to. This suggests that it is worthwhile for newsrooms to continue to be intentional about their staffing decisions and work to ensure that their staff reflects the lived experiences of Detroit residents.

Collaborations

While the Detroit Journalism Cooperative, formed in 2017, did not formally continue after 2019, robust examples of collaboration remain in Detroit. For example, in 2022, [Outlier Media produced a voter guide](#) in partnership with the Detroit Documenters¹⁴ and with editing support from Michigan Radio. The voter guide was promoted by several local media outlets, including distribution to 1,200 newsboxes in Detroit ahead of the August primary by the *Detroit Metro Times*. Outlier also has a collaboration with *Detroit Free Press* whereby they share a joint reporter who works out of Outlier’s newsroom. This type of collaboration often emerges through informal monthly editorial sessions Outlier Media takes part in with other local outlets, said Erin Perry, managing editor of Outlier Media. Some of these relationships were forged through the Detroit Journalism Cooperative.

12. Peter Bhatia, “Diversity Matters. And the Free Press Itself Must Do Better,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2020/08/20/detroit-free-press-staff-diversity-inclusion/5607357002/>.

13. Peter Bhatia, “Diversity/Inclusion Is an Internal and External Responsibility at the Free Press,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 27, 2022, <https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/2022/07/27/free-press-diversity-report/10158356002/>.

14. Detroit Documenters is a collaboration with the City Bureau Documenters program, which trains local residents to cover city meetings and events and pays them to write news stories.

There's a feeling of intentionality in Detroit's news organizations around building a strong and healthy news ecosystem, but institutionalized coordination has not yet become a staple of the city, according to some stakeholders. Orlando Bailey, engagement director for BridgeDetroit, says the city's news ecosystem is still in the building phase. "Everybody is trying to build this engine, and trying to figure out what coordination looks like," he said, adding that the level of care among news entities is high but funding and incentives for coordination are not there yet, especially for nonprofit newsrooms.

Local Journalism Support Organizations

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan has been heavily involved in assessing and funding the journalism ecosystem in Detroit and the surrounding areas. In addition to its previous support for the no longer active Detroit Journalism Cooperative, the foundation also supports and manages the Detroit Journalism Engagement Fund, a \$900,000 partnership with the Knight and Ford Foundations to expand local reporting and more effectively involve community residents. In 2022, the Detroit Journalism Engagement Fund gave a total of \$208,333 to six organizations based in Southeast Michigan, which brings the total investment over the life of the fund to \$1.3 million. The fund, which was originally designed to be a two-year initiative in 2017, but extended following its success, "has been intentional in increasing engagement and breaking down silos, and incentivizing deep, genuine partnerships and collaboration with each other," said Harmony Rhodes, program officer of CFSEM.

Information Providers and Community

Based on a 2019 Pew Research Center study, Detroiters' relationship with local media is weaker compared to the national findings. Among the metrics included here, the findings for Detroit are either on par with or lower than the national average. Most notably, only 44% said that local news "mostly covers the area where they live," which is seven percentage points lower than the United States as a whole.

In the Gallup/Knight American Views survey in 2022, nearly two-thirds of respondents in Detroit (63%) agree that local news organizations have the resources and opportunity to report the news accurately and fairly; however, only 26% agree that local news organizations care about the best interests of their readers, viewers and listeners, and only 24% agreed that they do not intend to mislead, misinform or persuade the public.

However, in conversations with stakeholders, they suggest that these perceptions have more to do with residents’ views on traditional news outlets, like daily newspapers and television that are perceived as parachuting into communities and covering hot button issues, and less to do with community-centered information providers, like Outlier, Detour Detroit or Detroit Documenters, which have focused on trust-building and community engagement.

Information Providers & Community*	National Average	Detroit	
% Who say local journalists are in touch with the community	63%	62%	Average
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	21%	Average
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	44%	Low
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	11%	Low
% Who say their local news:			
Reports news accurately	71%	73%	Average
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	64%	Average
Provides news that they use daily	67%	62%	Low
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	68%	Average
Are transparent about their reporting	62%	56%	Low
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	64%	Average
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	56%	Average

**Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey*

Case Study: Making News Dynamic Again at BridgeDetroit

Launched in May 2020 amid the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, BridgeDetroit, a nonprofit community-focused news organization, found itself covering a community facing significant, immediate challenges. “Detroit was hit early and hard, we lost a lot of residents in March and April 2020,” said Catherine Kelly, executive director and editor of BridgeDetroit. “It made me understand the importance of being in media again—if tomorrow isn’t promised, there’s no more important work I can do than serving residents.”

BridgeDetroit has been intentional in its growth and evolution, ensuring both that the newsroom looks like Detroit and engages residents, through initiatives like its in-process [Community Priorities Model](#), which will use publicly available data and other information sources like surveys and focus groups to guide dynamic, responsive coverage of Detroit’s communities. Its second [Progress Report](#) in 2021 highlighted residents’ concerns on everything from the pandemic, to home repair, to government transparency, to food accessibility. At the 2023 Knight Media Forum, Kelly highlighted BridgeDetroit’s accountability-focused reporting on the American Rescue Act, ensuring residents had information on fund allocation and expenditure tracking.

A key feature for the organization, Kelly said, is that BridgeDetroit moves “at the speed of trust.” “In a community like Detroit, it takes a while, a long time of showing up and being present to earn trust. You earn that when they see their stories and priorities represented,” said Kelly.

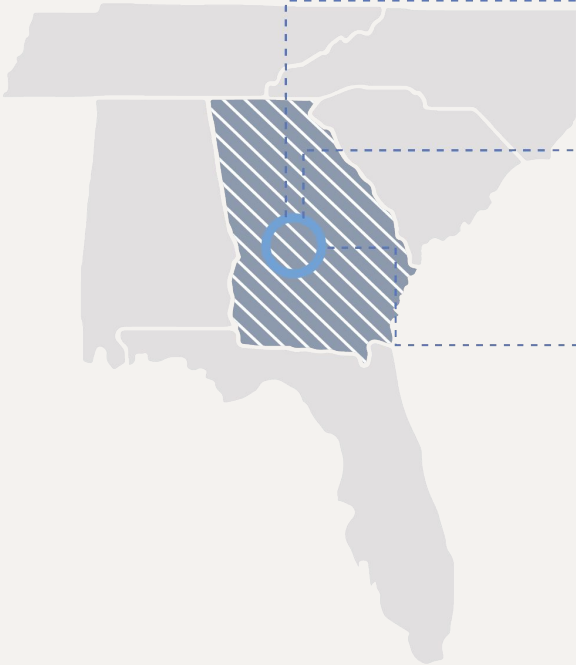
Opportunities

- **Institutional support:** Institutional investment in Detroit’s news ecosystem (per capita) has decreased from 2020 to 2022. With the vibrancy of the nonprofit news sector in Detroit, there is opportunity for increased support.
- **Local backbone journalism institution:** Strong ecosystems often have a local backbone institution, and a backbone institution could help support collaboration across organizations and foster deeper community engagement and relationship building. Given the deep relationships in Detroit across news organizations and the examples of successful collaboration, a backbone institution could help to further develop collaborative opportunities and networks to better serve Detroiters.

Macon - Bibb County, Georgia

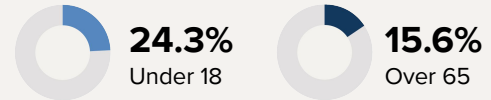
Macon-Bibb County, GA

Macon-Bibb County, GA

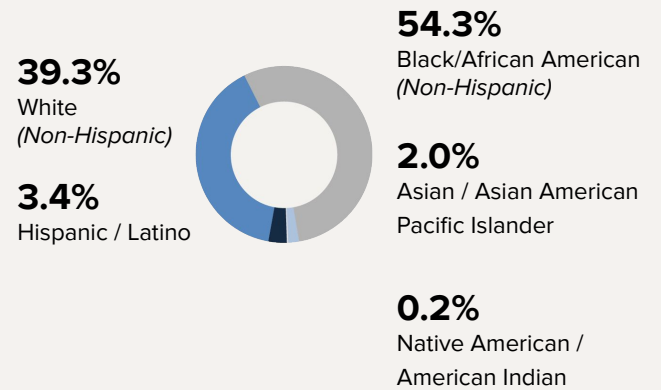


156,762 (2021 ACS)

Age



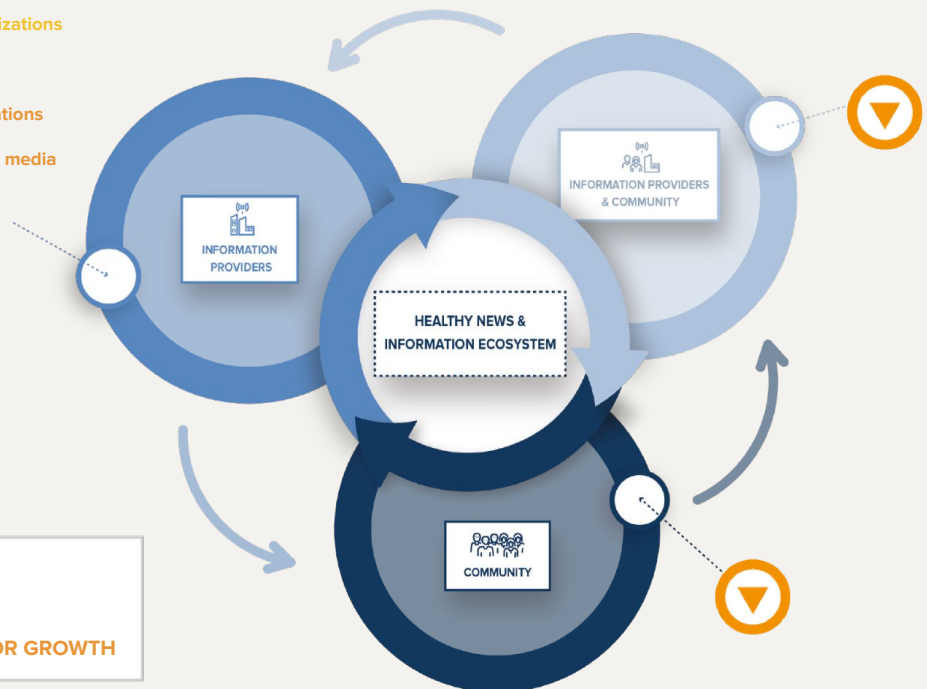
Race



News & Information Ecosystem 2022

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

	STRONG
	AVERAGE
	OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH



Key Elements



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



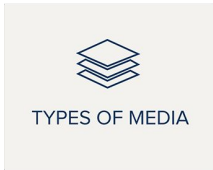
The Center for Collaborative Journalism is an ongoing partnership among Mercer University’s Journalism and Media Studies program, the (Macon) *Telegraph*, Georgia Public Broadcasting, and 13WMAZ.



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
Economics				
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
Education				
High School Degree	88.9%	85.7%	86.4%	Steady
Bachelor’s Degree	33.7%	25.7%	25.3%	Steady
Resources & Infrastructure				
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 ¹	60.9		58	
Voter Turnout of most recent election ²	66%	59.3%	51.6%	Declining ²
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 6th 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.³

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,⁴ 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.

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
Platform Breakdown⁵				
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
Business Models Breakdown⁶				
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
BIPOC-Serving Media				
African American / Black		2	2	Steady
Hispanic / Latino		1	1	Steady
Asian / Asian American		0	0	
Diversity				
Staff Diversity Transparency		0 Reports	0 Reports	
Source Diversity Audits		0 Audits	0 Audits	
Collaboration		Developed and Institutionalized	Developed and Institutionalized	
Journalism Funding				
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ⁷	\$3,837,794	\$3,600,000	\$552,689 ⁸	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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.¹⁰ 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.

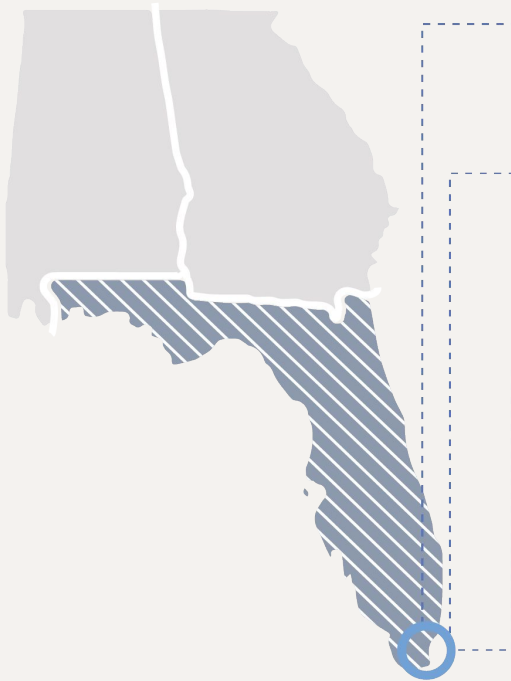
Opportunities

- **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.

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.

Miami-Dade County, Florida

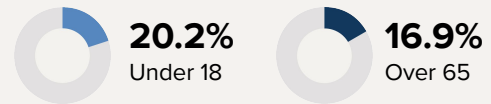
Miami-Dade County, FL



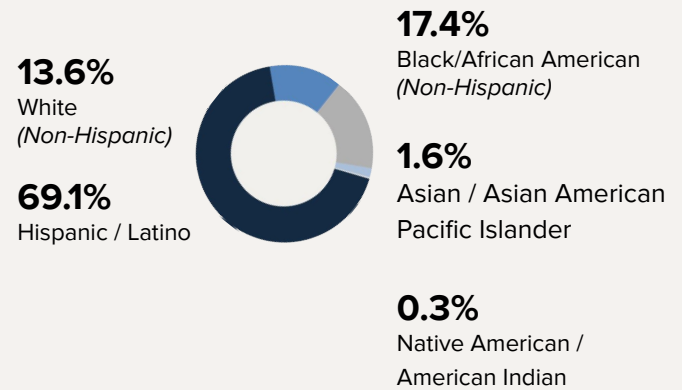
Miami-Dade County, FL

2,662,777 (2021 ACS)

Age



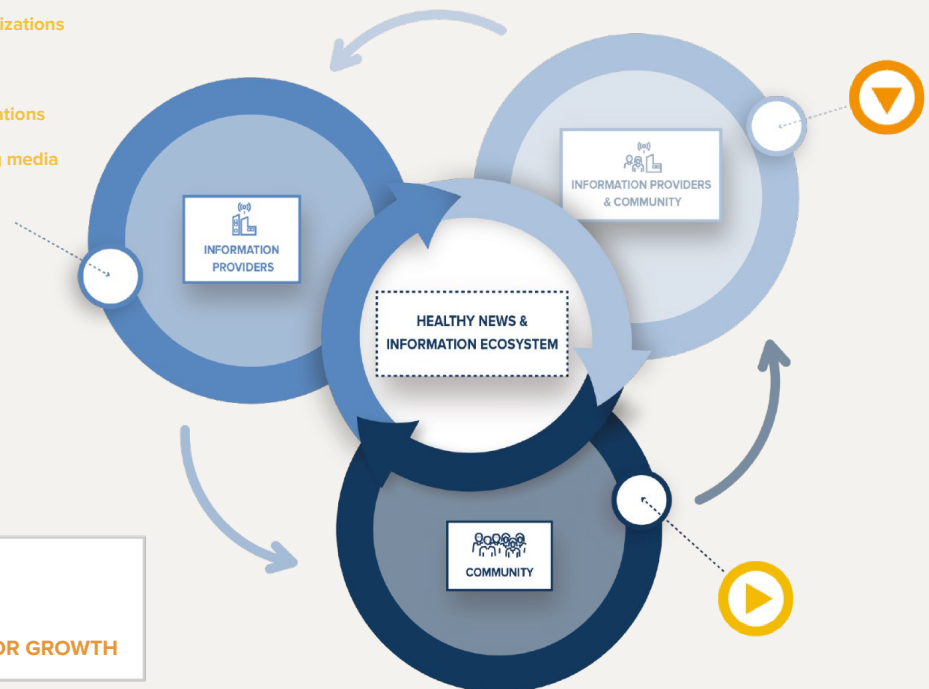
Race



News & Information Ecosystem

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

▲	IMPROVING
▶	STEADY
▼	OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH



Key Elements



Miami has a large and growing number of information providers across media and business model types.



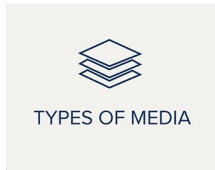
Miami Herald and WLRN are part of an ongoing statewide collaborative to cover climate change and its impact on South Florida.



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



Miami has many news organizations that serve specific populations, especially Hispanic and Latino organizations that serve Spanish-speaking populations and those that serve the large Haitian Creole-speaking communities.



While Miami has many digital news outlets, their relevance, quality and reach are questionable.



Miami has a relatively even distribution of business models, with no one type comprising more than half of all outlets.



Miami has a high level of philanthropic investment on a per capita basis.



Residents in Miami have relatively positive perceptions of their local news when it comes to providing useful news and information and covering stories thoroughly. However, they have negative feelings with respect to how representative and connected information providers are to the community.

Summary

Miami is a diverse, international city on the southeast coast of Florida, with an estimated population of 468,000 in the city proper. The city is the hub of the broader Miami-Dade County, which contains 34 municipalities and a population of 2.7 million, and the broader Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach MSA, with a population of 6.2 million. When considered together, greater metropolitan Miami is the seventh-largest metropolitan area in the United States. Sixty-nine percent of the county’s population identifies as Hispanic/Latino and approximately 90% of the Hispanic/Latino population identifies as both white and Hispanic. Over half (54%) of Miami residents are foreign born, making it the most international city in the United States by that metric. Consequently, Miami is a bilingual city, with 67% of Miami-Dade County residents reporting they speak Spanish at home and 24% speaking only English at home.¹

Miami is a complex ecosystem, a seemingly ever-changing city. In recent years, there has been an influx of new arrivals to the city and surrounding areas, initially enabled by the remote work environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These new arrivals from areas like Silicon Valley and New York potentially bring an opportunity for investment in Miami’s news ecosystem, but thus far it’s too early to tell the impact on local news.

Many news sources in Miami continue to have strong ties to countries of origin and focus on reporting news from these countries. There continues to be an opportunity for local media to bridge gaps across sectors of the community with truly local news.

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	Miami-Dade Baseline, 2020	Miami-Dade, 2021	Trending
Economics				
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$51,347	\$57,815	Improving
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$28,224	\$31,813	Improving
Poverty Rate	11.6%	15.7%	15.2%	Steady
Education				
High School Degree	88.9%	81.0%	82.5%	Steady
Bachelor’s Degree	33.7%	29.8%	31.7%	Steady
Resources & Infrastructure				
Households with Computer	93.1%	90.0%	94.1%	Improving
Broadband Access	87.0%	77.0%	82.6%	Improving
Universities	20	59	59	Steady
Population per University	32,690	46,050	45,132	Steady
Libraries	27	53	53	Steady
Population per Library	23,693	51,263	50,241	Improving
Community Satisfaction ²	60.9	63.1	64	Steady
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66%	75%	74.6%	Steady
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	No	Yes	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	No	Yes	

1. “2023 Demographics: Summary Data for County: Miami-Dade,” Miami Matters, <https://www.miamidadematters.org/demographicdata>.

2. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=FL>.

Information Needs

According to the Gallup/Knight American Views survey in both 2020 and 2022, Miami respondents reported TV as their most common daily source of news, although this decreased from 62% in 2020 to 48% in 2022.³

In local stakeholder interviews, we heard that time, cost and awareness were the largest barriers to information access in Miami. In interviews, we heard that residents are busy and have little time to seek out high-quality news and information and/or may not know all of the sources available to them and may instead rely on information that is delivered through social media or word of mouth. Additionally, there is potentially a lack of trusted, relevant information to meet residents' needs. This reality is reflected in the low household penetration rate of the major dailies in Miami, the McClatchy-owned *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*, at only 4%.⁴ And in the Gallup/Knight survey, respondents were roughly split, with 33% agreeing that local news can be relied on to deliver the information they need and 39% disagreeing.

And while Spanish-language media companies like Univision and Telemundo have high levels of trust among Hispanic- and Latino-identifying residents of the United States—as evidenced by consistently being cited as the top sources of news among this community—we heard that other Spanish-language publications based in Miami, especially those with foreign ownership and/or that are owned by individuals, are perceived to have political and/or business incentives, rather than existing to serve quality news and information to audiences. Furthermore, mis- and disinformation in Spanish-language radio is well documented⁵, including stations in Miami.⁶

Given the frequency of hurricanes and other climate-related issues, in interviews, stakeholders said that news organizations in Miami were well-prepared to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and disseminate local information. “Local papers here have a fifth gear—it’s what happens when a hurricane hits,” said Mario Ariza, investigative reporter with *Floodlight News* and formerly of the *Sun Sentinel*. “This [pandemic] is like a hurricane, it’s public service journalism. This is why you do what you do as a journalist—but, all of the problems are still there when lockdown ends.”

3. Responses to the Gallup/Knight American Views Survey are not statistically significant for Miami and instead can be considered information to be analyzed together with other data sources. In 2022, there were only 62 respondents from Miami.

4. 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 Miami-Dade, according to the Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

5. Gabriel R. Sanchez and Carly Bennett, “Why Spanish-Language Mis- and Disinformation Is a Huge Issue in 2022,” Brookings, November 4, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2022/11/04/why-spanish-language-mis-and-disinformation-is-a-huge-issue-in-2022/>.

6. “The Sale of 2 Spanish Talk Radio Stations Could Counter the Spread of Disinformation,” NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2022/07/16/1111894463/the-sale-of-2-spanish-talk-radio-stations-could-counter-the-spread-of-disinforma>

Information Providers

Miami has a rich information ecosystem, with at least 57 local information providers that exhibit variety across both platforms and business models. Stakeholders cited a plethora of material that residents can consume, from commercial media to student-run papers to neighborhood publications, but awareness of the materials available was a

concern. However, the ecosystem is not without weaknesses and areas of opportunity for investment. In particular, the ecosystem in Miami functions as two ecosystems, with little interconnection between the English- and Spanish-language media in the area, with the notable exception of the McClatchy-owned daily newspapers the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*. There are big disparities as well as complexities around bilingual coverage, which is either presented in English or Spanish, but rarely both, said Mario Ariza.

From a numerical perspective, Miami is served primarily by print and digital outlets and, unlike many cities, there is a strong diversity of business models of news outlets in Miami, including five nonprofit or university-run outlets and a strong public media station.

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	Miami-Dade Baseline, 2020	Miami-Dade, 2022	Trending
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	51	56	Improving
Population per Organization	27,162	53,273	46,715	Improving
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	53,256	37,102	Declining
Penetration rate	15.2%	-	4%	
Platform Breakdown⁷				
Newspapers	36.8%	31.0%	28.1%	Steady
Television Stations	31.3%	12.0%	19.3%	Higher
Radio Stations	10.9%	27.0%	15.8%	Lower
Digital only	18.5%	39.0%	36.8%	Steady
Business Models Breakdown⁸				
Nonprofit	11.2%	10.0%	12.3%	Steady
Public Media	11.5%	2.0%	5.3%	Higher
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	20.0%	17.5%	Steady
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	20.0%	17.5%	Steady
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	49.0%	47.4%	Steady
BIPOC-Serving Media				
African American / Black		3	3	Steady
Hispanic / Latino		22	22	Steady
Asian / Asian American		0	0	
Diversity				
Staff Diversity Transparency		Yes	No	
Source Diversity Audits		No	No	
Collaboration		Ongoing and Separate	Ongoing	
Journalism Funding				
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years	\$3,837,794	\$26,200,000	\$10,900,000	
Funders	13	50	20	
Recipients	8	15	6	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$9.64	\$4.09	Declining

7. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in Miami-Dade County.

8. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in Miami-Dade County.

The baseline analysis of literacy rates cited data from 2009 that found Miami-Dade had the “lowest literacy rates [in Florida] by a margin of about 20 percent” for adults 16 or older at 48%.⁹ County-by-county data for literacy based on that metric isn’t available for comparison. Using high school education attainment as a proxy for literacy, we find that Miami-Dade is behind the national average by about six percentage points. This creates a challenging environment for a news ecosystem that includes so many print and digital outlets.

In addition, as staffing at the large print institution the *Miami Herald* dwindles, there is an opportunity in Miami for local, investigative, independent and/or nonprofit news organizations to fill gaps.

BIPOC – Serving Media

There are many Spanish language outlets serving Miami’s Latin American diaspora community and Haitian Creole language news outlets serving the Haitian diaspora community. However, these news outlets often focus coverage on news and events in countries of origin throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, rather than covering happenings within Miami. As noted in the 2020 report, this is a missed opportunity for creating shared knowledge and identities across Miami’s diverse communities.

9. Laura Edwins, “Miami-Dade Has Low Literacy Rates,” *Miami Hurricane*, November 15, 2009, <https://www.themiamihurricane.com/2009/11/15/miami-dade-cant-read-good/>.

News Outlets Based in Miami-Dade County

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biscayne Times Blogging Black Miami Calle Ocho News El Venezolano News Hy-Lo News Miami Diario MiamiNews24 Political Cortadito The New Tropic The Next Miami 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bisnow South Florida Daily Business Review El Sol Latino Miami GlobeST Miami Impact Edition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coconut Grove Spotlight Key Biscayne Independent PantherNOW The Miami Hurricane The Reporter 	
Print and digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Diario Las Americas</i> <i>Doral Family Journal</i> <i>Haiti Liberté</i> <i>Islander News</i> <i>Le Floridien</i> <i>Miami's Community Newspapers</i> <i>Miami New Times</i> <i>Miami Times</i> <i>Miami Today</i> <i>South Dade News Leader</i> <i>South Florida Business and Wealth</i> <i>South Florida Times</i> <i>Sun Sentinel</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>El Nuevo Herald</i> <i>Miami Herald</i> <i>Ocean Drive</i> 		
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actualidad 1040 La Poderosa WLQY WQVN Piman Bouk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caracol 1260 Radio Mambi WIOD News Radio WQBA Miami 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WLRN
Television	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WBFS WSVN WVFW Estrella 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CBS4 Telemundo 51 Univision 23 WPLG (ABC) WTVJ (NBC) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WLRN-TV WPBT

Diversity

Anecdotally, the staff of Miami's major news outlets are more racially and ethnically diverse than many in the United States, though still not necessarily representative of the complete richness of Miami's population. In 2020, WLRN, the public radio station and affiliate of NPR and PBS, published a diversity statement documenting their staff as 35% white, 37% Black and 28% Hispanic (though we have no specificity here with white-only versus white Hispanic/Latino). Updated data have not been publicly released since then. No other information provider has publicly released diversity data.

From a news consumer perspective, according to respondents of the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey, 73% of Miami respondents said that the diversity of a news organization's journalists is very or somewhat important to them when deciding which news sources to turn to.

Collaborations

As of 2022, we found no organized collaborative initiative or backbone institution serving the news and information ecosystem of Miami, indicating that collaboration continues to be an area of opportunity. The fact that WLRN and the *Miami Herald* participate in state-wide collaboratives suggests that there is already an appetite for this work locally that could be tapped into with a coordinated effort.

Local Journalism Support Organizations

Knight Foundation, one of the largest funders of news and information in the United States, is based in Miami. And while most of its journalism funding goes to local and journalism initiatives, there is potentially more opportunity to invest locally in the Miami news ecosystem. There are a number of family foundations in Miami that donate to South Florida PBS, WLRN and/or the *Miami Herald*, as discussed later in this chapter.

Information Providers and Community

There are not many clear examples of news outlets in Miami conducting deep community engagement. Stakeholders said that news providers need to help residents understand the complexity of Miami and further connect to the city. Similarly in 2020, we heard that many Miami-based outlets focus on keeping residents connected with countries of origin, rather than with the local Miami community. There’s a lack of a collective civic narrative, and though organizations like the New Tropic have attempted to fill gaps, it remains a city of many silos.

In the Pew Research Center’s 2019 Local News Survey, Miami respondents had more distance from news providers than the national average, with 58% saying that local journalists are in touch with the community and less than half (45%) saying local news covers the area in which they live. In this survey, respondents generally agreed that local news reports accurately (72%), provide news they can use daily (71%) and deals fairly with all sides (64%).

In the Gallup/Knight 2022 American Views survey, respondents generally agreed that local news organizations have the resources and opportunity to report news accurately, however, more than half (53%) disagreed that local news organizations care about how their reporting can affect their community; that they care about the best interest of their readers, viewers and listeners (57% disagree); or that they do not intend to mislead, misinform or persuade the public (53% disagree).

Information Providers & Community*	National Average	Miami - Fort Lauderdale - West Palm Beach MSA	
% Who say local journalists are in touch with the community	63%	58%	Low
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	15%	Low
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	45%	Low
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	10%	Low
% Who say their local news:			
Reports news accurately	71%	72%	Average
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	68%	Average
Provides news that they use daily	67%	71%	High
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	71%	High
Are transparent about their reporting	62%	62%	Average
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	64%	Average
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	58%	Average

*Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey

Case Study: Beat Funding at the Miami Herald and El Nuevo Herald

Miami Herald and *El Nuevo Herald* have raised philanthropic funds to cover climate change and resiliency and arts and culture in South Florida, as well as to support investigative journalism. The Impact Journalism Fund launched in 2019 and the publications' approach includes fundraising from local family foundations, institutional funders and through donations from community members.

A number of family foundations have supported specific beats at the *Miami Herald*. The David and Christina Martin Family Foundation and Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Foundation are supporting climate change reporting and the Jorge M. Perez Family Foundation is supporting a bilingual multimedia arts journalist.¹¹ The Esserman Family Fund has directly supported the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald*'s investigative reporting.

In addition to these grants, in 2023 the *Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald* created an "impact journalism fund," run through the Miami Foundation, in order to raise money to increase coverage about economic equity and mobility, climate change and environment, and investigative journalism.¹²

Given the early stage of the *Miami Herald*'s relationships with philanthropic funders, it remains to be seen what lessons will be learned about this as an ongoing sustainability strategy.

Opportunities

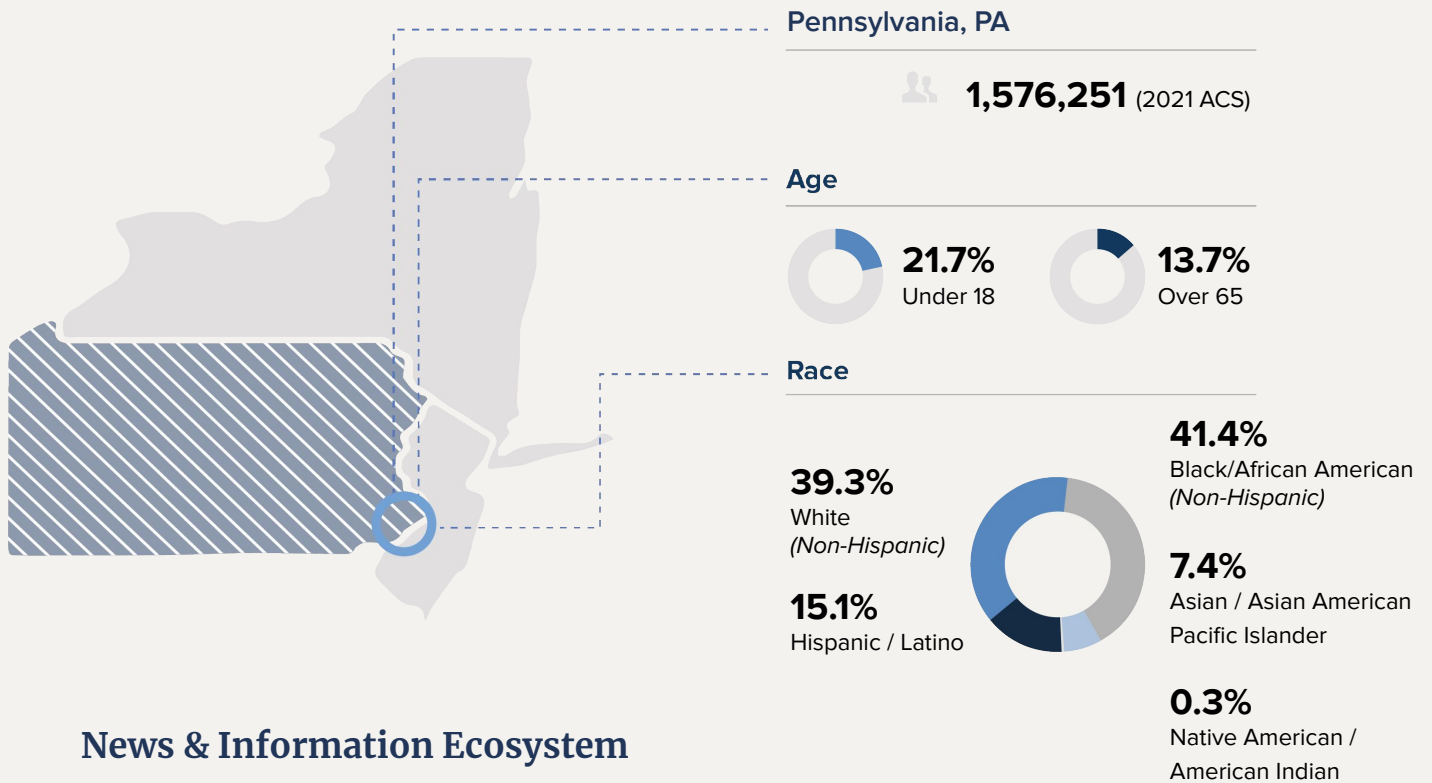
- **Local backbone journalism institution:** Strong ecosystems often have a local backbone institution, and a backbone institution could help support collaboration across organizations and foster deeper community engagement and relationship building.
- **Information needs assessment:** There has not been a formal information needs assessment conducted for Miami-Dade County and having this information could guide additional efforts to support the creation of and access to local news and information across the diverse sectors of Miami.

11. Howard Cohen, "Miami Herald, el Nuevo Herald To Expand Climate Coverage with Gift from Foundation, *Miami Herald*, February 6, 2023, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/environment/climate-change/article272074347.html>.

12. "Impact Journalism Fund," *Miami Herald*, <https://www.miamiherald.com/site-services/article235692297.html>.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

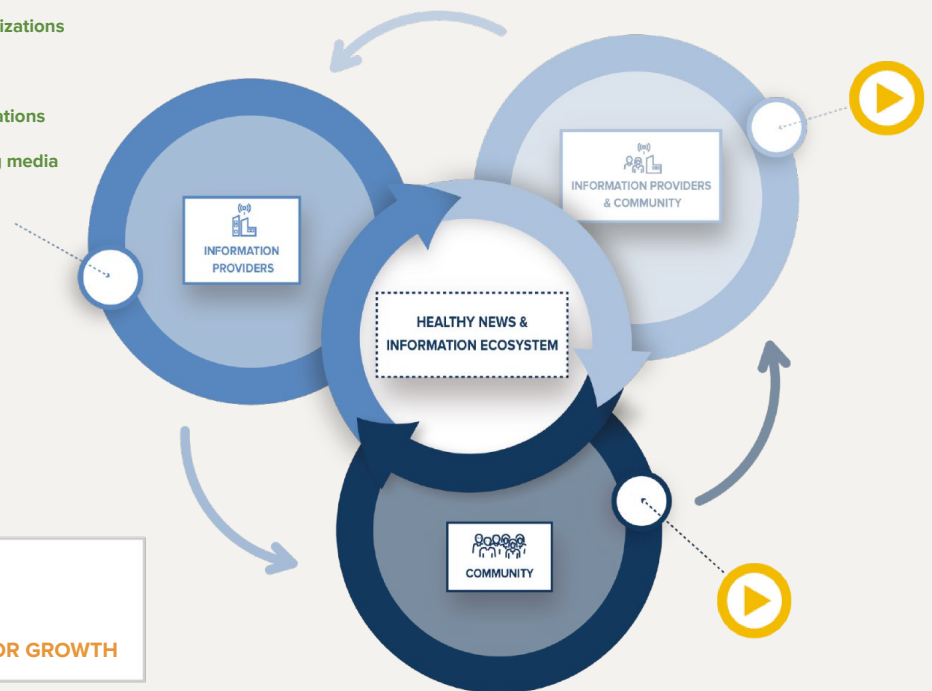
Philadelphia, PA



News & Information Ecosystem

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

- STRONG**
- AVERAGE**
- OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH**



Key Elements



Philadelphia has a high number of news organizations for its population, but low diversity in its business models and formats.



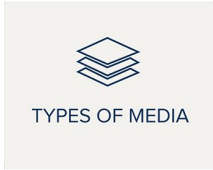
Collaboration is a key feature of Philadelphia’s news ecosystem. Philadelphia has a robust environment for collaboration as a result of the investments made by organizations such as the Lenfest Institute and the Independence Public Media Foundation.



Philadelphia Inquirer, the major daily newspaper, records and reports on staff diversity, and it has also conducted independent source diversity audits. WHYY has published staff and source diversity figures but does not make them publicly available regularly.



Philadelphia has a strong presence of BIPOC-serving and community media, including multiple news outlets for Black and African American communities, Hispanic and Latino communities, and Asian communities.



Newspapers and digital media dominate Philadelphia’s news ecosystem.



The majority of news outlets in Philadelphia are independent, for-profit news organizations.



Philadelphia has had a high amount of philanthropic investment per capita from 2019 to 2021 compared to other Knight cities.



Philadelphians have about average positive perceptions of their local news media, though a lower than average percent of people say their local news includes people like them in their stories.

Summary

Philadelphia is the sixth-largest city in the United States, with an estimated population of 1.59 million. The Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington MSA is the seventh-largest in the country, with a population over six million. The MSA is inclusive of counties in four states (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland), reflecting Philadelphia’s unique geographic location, with suburbs stretching into all three neighboring states. Forty-one percent of Philadelphia’s population identifies as Black or African American, 39% white, 15% Hispanic or Latino and 7% Asian.

Philadelphia’s ecosystem is stronger than many, with high philanthropic investment per capita, high institutional support, and strong collaborative initiatives. There are significant BIPOC-serving media outlets in Philadelphia, although there is opportunity for even more given the size of its Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/Asian American communities, particularly as these communities report being underserved in their information needs. While there has been a very high amount of previous investment in Philadelphia, future investment should look more closely at closing the information gaps for diverse communities of Philadelphians that have not previously been served by, or represented in, the news and information ecosystem.

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	Philadelphia Baseline, 2020	Philadelphia, 2021	Trending
Economics				
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$43,744	\$49,127	Improving
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$26,557	\$29,644	Improving
Poverty Rate	11.6%	24.9%	23.1%	Steady
Education				
High School Degree	88.9%	84.0%	85.7%	Steady
Bachelor’s Degree	33.7%	29.0%	31.2%	Steady
Resources & Infrastructure				
Households with Computer	93.1%	84.0%	88.5%	Improving
Broadband Access	87.0%	74.0%	80.5%	Improving
Universities	20	48	48	Steady
Population per University	32,690	33,001	32,839	Steady
Libraries	27	52	53	Higher
Population per Library	23,693	30,463	29,741	Steady
Community Satisfaction ¹	60.9%	60.8%	66.0%	Improving
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66%	66.0%	46.0%	Declining
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	Yes	Yes	

Information Needs

Stakeholders noted a high demand for news in the city, as communities are generally engaged and have clear ideas about what they need and want from news organizations. This is reflected in the high rate of

1. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=GA>.

penetration of newspapers in Philadelphia at 28.4%, the second-highest of all Knight cities.² According to the Gallup/Knight American Views survey, TV is the most cited source for daily news, although this decreased from 74% in 2020 to 50% in 2022.³

In 2022, the Gallup/Knight survey found that 57% of residents agree that local news organizations can be relied on to deliver the information they need. However, according to Sarah Glover, vice president of News and Civic Dialogue at WHYI, many residents and news providers question whether community information needs are being met generally, and whether the news ecosystem is living up to its potential.

An ecosystem assessment conducted by the Center for Media Engagement found that there are perceived gaps where the public is dissatisfied with media coverage. Across the city, residents gave local media “mediocre” ratings on how well they represent them and their neighborhoods. They also felt that local media aren’t offering “solutions to problems facing my community,” and that they are doing below average with respect to coverage of some issues, the lowest performance ratings being for: infrastructure, roads, and transportation; sanitation; trash removal and cleanliness; the poor, poverty, and homelessness; and traffic and parking.⁴ This same analysis also found use gaps whereby there are outlets that cover specific issues and/or neighborhoods of interest to residents, but the information is not reaching audiences. For example, there is a local media source, *West Philly Local*; however, West Philadelphia residents indicated only “modest agreement” that there are enough stories about their neighborhood, suggesting that this publication might not be reaching local residents.

The ecosystem assessment conducted a survey with Philadelphians and asked where they turn for information about Philadelphia. The top sources of news and information were television (69%) and social media (68%). More than half also said they get information from family, friends and colleagues (59%) and from websites or apps (52%). Forty percent said they get information from the radio, and only 30% of respondents said they get information from print or digital newspapers.⁵ When asked to name specific sources they’d used for news about Philadelphia in the previous 30 days, more than half of respondents named television stations (ABC, Fox, and NBC).

2. 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 Philadelphia, according to the Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

3. Responses to the Gallup/Knight American Views Survey are not statistically significant for Philadelphia in 2022 and instead can be considered information to be analyzed together with other data sources. In 2022, there were only 113 respondents from Philadelphia.

4. Natalie Stroud, Caroline Murray, Emily Graham, Yujin Kim, and Alex Curry, “The News Philadelphians Use: Analyzing the local media landscape” (February 2023),

<https://files.constantcontact.com/12ac0ed3401/dba9ae8a-c817-45c4-9cb3-47e734b72334.pdf?rdr=true>.

5. Stroud, et. al, “The News Philadelphians Use,”

<https://files.constantcontact.com/12ac0ed3401/dba9ae8a-c817-45c4-9cb3-47e734b72334.pdf?rdr=true>. 17.

WHYY has built out its community and engagement team to attempt to better understand and serve the community. This team is embedded into its newsroom, and the organization holds in-person community listening sessions. One recent example was a listening session on gun violence in the city, featured in a podcast series, in which more than 100 people attended. WHYY plans to conduct a follow-up through a community barbeque in spring 2023 and use the moment to ask how the organization is doing “in a non-transactional way,” said Glover. As part of this work, WHYY developed a News and Information Community Exchange (N.I.C.E.) program, which connects journalists and grassroots content creators with WHYY. WHYY looks to N.I.C.E. partners to share perspectives and news from communities and neighborhoods typically “left out of mainstream news,” and partners benefit from WHYY’s reporting resources and experience.⁶

While Philadelphia is a rich market with lots of competition, residents’ information needs still often outweigh supply. Stakeholders noted in interviews that Philadelphia might have the opposite of a news desert—some call it news jungle—where residents may be inundated with information from all sides. News providers could do a better job of producing less, but better or more relevant content, they suggest.

Among the city’s stakeholders, there’s a belief that there is enough history, assets around community organizing and knowledge, skill, and expertise in place to build up and strengthen the existing ecosystem and reimagine it in a way that meets information needs. But there are many people left out, said Molly de Aguiar, president of the Independence Public Media Foundation. “Philadelphia has a robust news and information landscape, but it’s often siloed by race, ethnicity, class, neighborhood, etc., and coverage of issues often caters to those who can pay for the news, rather than serving everyone’s needs.”

Information Providers

Philadelphia has a large number of news organizations and has remained steady since the 2020 baseline assessment. The major shift was in name but not in kind, as in 2020 *Chalkbeat* absorbed the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* to become *Chalkbeat Philadelphia*. *Chalkbeat* is a national nonprofit with local newsrooms throughout the country. The emphasis remains on K–12 education in the city. The Center Media Engagement ecosystem analysis found that there are coverage gaps in many Philadelphia neighborhoods, as well as a lack of coverage of issues that residents find to be important, such as sanitation, trash removal and cleanliness.⁷

6. N.I.C.E. FAQ, WHYY, <https://whyy.org/nice/faq/>.

7. Stroud, et. al, “The News Philadelphians Use,” <https://files.constantcontact.com/12ac0ed3401/dba9ae8a-c817-45c4-9cb3-47e734b72334.pdf?rdr=true>, 25.

Philadelphia Inquirer is the city's daily newspaper, and as with many major metropolitan dailies, it went through a series of ownership changes in the 1990s and 2000s until its last owner, Gerry Lenfest, donated the paper into nonprofit ownership by the Lenfest Institute for Journalism. Since then, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has been run as a public benefit corporation with nonprofit ownership, the first of its kind. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, it reaches 10 million people a month through its print and digital publications, newsletters, apps and live events.⁸ While the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has made efforts to radically transform, both in terms of its content and its staffing, to more accurately reflect Philadelphia, progress has been uneven.

WHYY, Philadelphia's successful local public media organization, has also increased its efforts to more deeply engage diverse communities across Philadelphia, both in reporting and distribution. Some of this work has been done on its own, while other work has been in partnership with other media organizations in Philadelphia.

Many stakeholders keep the definition of a healthy local news ecosystem top of mind in their work, as a north star that they follow, said Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, co-founder and co-executive director of Resolve Philly. She noted that legacy institutions in particular often face challenges to pivot to new models in community engagement or equitable journalism, noting that there's still a tendency to write about marginalized communities rather than for them.

There are a number of print publications serving immigrant communities in Philadelphia, and there is opportunity to engage with these organizations both for reporting purposes, as well as to build their digital capacity to reach and engage audiences through digital platforms.

8. About the Inquirer, Philadelphia Inquirer, <https://www.inquirer.com/about/>.

BIPOC-Serving Media

Philadelphia has strong BIPOC-serving media, including *Al Día*, *El Hispano*, *El Sol*, WUVP, WWSI and *Impacto Latino* serving the Spanish-speaking community; the *Philadelphia Sunday Sun*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, Scoop USA, WURD and Fun Times Magazine serving the African American/Black community; the *Korean Phila Times* serving the Korean community; and the New Mainstream Media newspaper’s *Metro Chinese Weekly* and *Metro Viet News* serving the Chinese and Vietnamese communities, respectively.

These publications are largely print publications with little to no digital presence. The Lenfest Institute conducted focus groups that suggested that these media are not always reaching the community members they aim to serve as community members were unaware of the publications or aware but did not go to them as a source of news.

Information Providers	Knight Communities, Average, 2022	Philadelphia Baseline, 2020	Philadelphia, 2022	Trending
Number of Organizations				
(newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	56	55	Steady
Population per Organization	27,162	28,287	28,659	Steady
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	183,349	77,924	Declining
Household Penetration Rate	15.2%	-	28.4%	
Platform Breakdown⁹				
Newspapers	36.8%	48.2%	50.9%	Steady
Television Stations	31.3%	12.5%	12.7%	Steady
Radio Stations	10.9%	5.4%	5.5%	Steady
Digital only	18.5%	30.4%	30.9%	Steady
Business Models Breakdown¹⁰				
Nonprofit	11.2%	19.6%	18.2%	Steady
Public Media	11.5%	3.6%	3.6%	Steady
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	12.5%	12.7%	Steady
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	0.0%	0.0%	Steady
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	60.7%	65.5%	Higher
BIPOC-Serving Media				
African American / Black	2.25	5	5	Steady
Hispanic / Latino	3.5	6	6	Steady
Asian / Asian American	0.4	3	3	Steady
Diversity				
Staff Diversity Transparency		3		
Source Diversity Audits		1	1	Steady
Collaboration		Developed and Institutionalized	Developed and Institutionalized	Steady
Journalism Funding				
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ¹¹	\$3,837,794	\$19,300,000	\$12,500,000	
Funders	13	60	37	
Recipients	8	30	19	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$12.18	\$7.93	Declining

9. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in Philadelphia.

10. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in Philadelphia.

11. 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.

News Outlets Based in Philadelphia

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad Street Review Frankford Gazette Fun Times Magazine Generocity Green Philly Philadelphia Weekly Scoop USA University City Review 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Billy Penn Catholic Philly Hidden City Pennsylvania Capital-Star Philadelphia Philadelphia Obituary Project Resolve Philly Spotlight PA The Philadelphia Citizen 	
Print and digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Al Día</i> <i>Business Journal</i> <i>Chestnut Hill Local</i> <i>El Hispano</i> <i>El Sol</i> <i>Jewish Exponent</i> <i>Korean Phila Times</i> <i>Legal Intelligencer</i> <i>Metro Chinese Weekly</i> <i>Metro Philadelphia</i> <i>Metro Viet News</i> <i>Northeast Times</i> <i>NW Local</i> <i>Philadelphia Daily News</i> <i>Philadelphia Free Press</i> <i>Philadelphia Gay News</i> <i>Philadelphia Magazine</i> <i>Philadelphia Public Record</i> <i>Philadelphia Sunday Sun</i> <i>Philadelphia Tribune</i> <i>South Philly Review</i> <i>Southwest Globe Times</i> <i>Star News Philly</i> <i>Uptown Standard</i> <i>West Philly Local</i> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i> 	
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WURD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KYW 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WHYY
Television		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCAU WPHL WPVI WTFX WUVP WWSI 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WHYY-TV

Diversity

Philadelphia's largest media outlets, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and WHYY, have both struggled with inclusion on their staff, as well as diversity and representation in their content. In the summer of 2020, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* committed itself to having a staff that represented the city overall and to more accurately and fairly reporting on diverse sectors of the community. However, by many accounts, it has fallen short of this promise. In February 2022, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a story reported and written by independent reporter Wesley Lowery and edited by Errin Haines titled "Black City. White Paper."¹² This story is an accounting of the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* "failed attempts at newsroom integration, and current efforts at internal reckoning." This article digs into the paper's history, but also documents the ways in which it did not live up to its 2020 commitment to build a culture of inclusion for its staff, which remains ongoing work for the institution.

In 2019, WHYY, the public media station, did an extensive cultural competency audit, including a staff and source diversity report, and committed itself to improving its internal culture as well as its relationships with diverse sectors of Philadelphia.¹³ While it has not published updated staff demographic information, WHYY has partnered with organizations and acquired others, like the nonprofit Billy Penn, in order to diversify its content and reach and engage more Philadelphia residents.

From the resident perspective, according to the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey, only 58% of respondents said that the diversity of a news organization's journalists is very or somewhat important to them when deciding what outlet to turn to for information, a smaller percentage than in other Knight resident communities.

Collaborations

Philadelphia has a strong environment for collaboration and is often cited by stakeholders in other cities as a model to learn from. In particular, Resolve Philly, an organization born out of a one-time collaborative that has collaboration at its core, has led the charge, approaching collaboration from a relationship-building perspective and helping to cement the culture among the city's participating news institutions. For Resolve

12. Wesley Lowery, "Black City. White Paper," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 15, 2022, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/ing2/philadelphia-inquirer-racism-equity-diversity-black-journalists-20220215.html>.

13. Andrea Wenzel, "Sourcing Diversity: WHYY and the Rocky Road To 'Cultural Competency,'" Tow Center, September 30, 2019.

Philly, according to Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, the timing was right in the city's news ecosystem, where people were in a state of wanting to try new things. [Broke in Philly](#), a collaborative reporting project of more than 20 organizations launched in 2018, focused on economic mobility in the city. Resolve Philly emerged from the initiative and dramatically changed the ecosystem, which before had been a notoriously competitive environment.

“This level of editorial integration is incredibly novel,” said Friedman-Rudovsky, co-founder and co-executive director of Resolve Philly. “I don’t know of any ecosystem that’s doing what Philadelphia is doing in terms of collaboration, and solutions journalism that has been incorporated as standard practice.”

Local Journalism Support Organizations

Philadelphia has a robust philanthropic community that supports news. In particular, the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, founded in 2016 by the cable television entrepreneur Gerry Lenfest, is squarely focused on supporting and sustaining the future of local journalism in Philadelphia and across the country. Upon founding, the initiative was granted an endowment of \$20 million, along with ownership of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The institute gives grants, develops partnerships and funds research in pursuit of three goals: high-impact journalism; news technology and innovation; and diverse, growing audiences. In 2022, the Institute [released metrics](#) to measure the impact in Philadelphia’s media ecosystem, the result of a year of work among the organization and its partners, to “track success, hold ourselves accountable, and share what we’re learning with our partners and the broader community.”

Diana Lu, director of the Knight-Lenfest Local News Transformation Fund, noted that unlike in some other major cities, in Philadelphia, philanthropy does not have a strategy or shared vision for funding journalism, with journalism goals instead following national strategies, highlighting this as an area of opportunity for the immediate future.

In addition to the Lenfest Institute, a number of other local foundations and organizations are involved in supporting local news in Philadelphia, including Independence Public Media Foundation, the Philadelphia Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, the William Penn Foundation, Temple University and the Scattergood Foundation. National funders are also invested in the ecosystem, including the Knight Foundation with its investments in the Lenfest Institute.

Case Study: A New Vision for Philadelphia Community Media at Independence Public Media Foundation

Independence Public Media Foundation (IPMF) was founded in 2019 following WYBE’s 2017 relinquishing of its broadcast license as part of the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Broadcast Incentive Auction. WYBE received a one-time payment of \$131.5 million, which it used as an endowment for IPMF. As a new institutional funder with the legacy of a small broadcaster’s vision for how media can create and connect community, IPMF is working to support community-driven media making and storytelling. According to IPMF, the foundation is “committed to transforming the Greater Philadelphia region into a hub for community-owned media, redefining the role of community in philanthropy, and evolving to best meet the needs of the people we serve.”¹⁴

IPMF has expanded the notion of what comprises Philadelphia’s news and information ecosystem, supporting documentary film, community organizing, internet connectivity, youth media training and more, all with the goal of strengthening the community as a whole. Molly de Aguiar, IPMF’s president, says that broad definition of media captures the varied ways that people get information relevant to their lives, from vaccines to what’s going on in their neighborhoods. “Our lens is community ownership of the media, of the tools to do media making, of opportunities to be heard and visible,” de Aguiar said, adding that IPMF’s focus is on news, information and storytelling that helps communities build power.

Information Providers & Community*	National Average	Philadelphia	
% Who say local journalists are in touch with the community	63%	58%	Low
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	17%	Average
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	50%	Average
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	16%	Average
% Who say their local news:			
Reports news accurately	71%	76%	High
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	67%	Average
Provides news that they use daily	67%	66%	Average
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	69%	High
Are transparent about their reporting	62%	65%	Average
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	60%	Average
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	53%	Low

**Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey*

14. Our Story, Independence Media, <https://independencemedia.org/our-story>.

In Philadelphia, 58% of respondents of the 2019 Pew Research Center Local Journalism survey believe that local journalists are in touch with the community, though only 17% say they have spoken with a local journalist. Three quarters of residents (76%) believe their local news media reports news accurately; however, only 53% say the local news does well in including people like them in their stories (the Knight Cities average is 56%).

In the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey, 40% of respondents agree that local news organizations care about how their reporting can affect their community broadly and 41% agree that they care about the best interest of their readers, viewers and listeners.

The 2023 published ecosystem analysis by the Center for Media Engagement found more skepticism. The report shows that nearly half of respondents agreed that there “aren’t enough stories about their neighborhood in the news” (46%) and that “people from their neighborhood aren’t in the news” (45%). CME’s survey also asked the extent to which respondents agreed that the local media are in touch with the community, and 34% agreed, while 38% disagreed. While the question is worded differently than the Pew Research Center’s, which asked

specifically about local journalists (not media), this suggests that Philadelphians continue to see local media as not being in touch with local communities and/or are not aware of the relevant outlets. Furthermore, 42% of respondents disagree that news media do a good job of showing what’s going on with people like them, and 43% disagree that the local media are focused on helping people like them. Finally, half of respondents disagree that the local news media offer solutions to problems facing their community.¹⁵ CME’s analysis found that, in general, older residents and democrats had higher assessments of whether local media represent them.

Lenfest Local Media Landscape (CME, 2022)	Agree	Disagree
Neighborhood		
There aren't enough stories about my neighborhood in the news media.	46%	18%
People from my neighborhood aren't in the news.	45%	21%
Stories about my neighborhood are too negative.	32%	29%
There is a good balance of negative and positive stories about my neighborhood.	32%	31%
Stories about my neighborhood quote the wrong people.	25%	23%
Representation		
Local news media covers the issues that are important to me.	39%	34%
Local news media are in touch with the community.	34%	38%
Local news media include people like me in their stories.	32%	37%
Local news media do a good job of showing what is going on with people like me.	29%	42%
Local news media are focused on helping people like me.	26%	43%
Local news media offer solutions to problems facing my community.	23%	50%

15. Stroud, et. al, “The News Philadelphians Use,” <https://files.constantcontact.com/12ac0ed3401/dba9ae8a-c817-45c4-9cb3-47e734b72334.pdf?rdr=true>. 25.

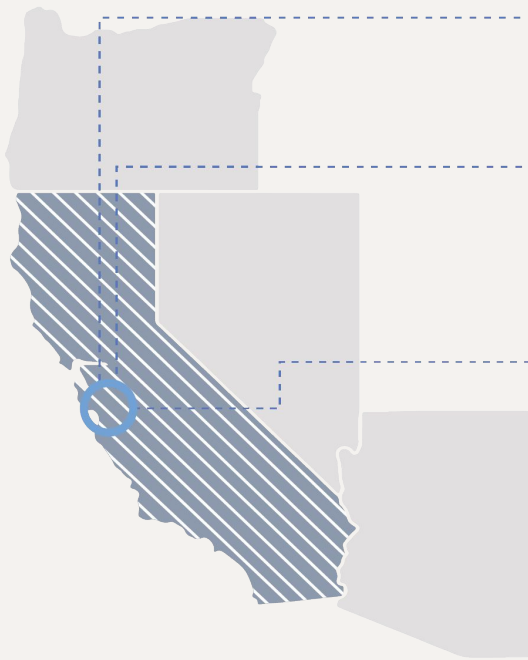
In conversations with stakeholders, we heard that they believe relationships between information providers and community members are improving, in part as a result of sustained collaboration over time.

Opportunities

- **Support for community and BIPOC-serving media:** Community and BIPOC-serving papers serving immigrant communities in Philadelphia would benefit from increased resources to grow their digital capacity in order to reach more of their communities.
Additional resources would also enable them to participate in the robust collaborative efforts in Philadelphia's ecosystem.
- **Shared philanthropic visioning:** Philadelphia has an active philanthropic community supporting its strong news and information ecosystem, and there is an opportunity for these institutions to come together to create a citywide strategy for philanthropic funding.

San José, California

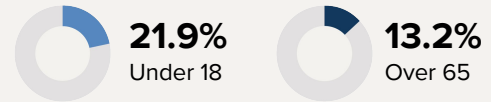
San José, CA



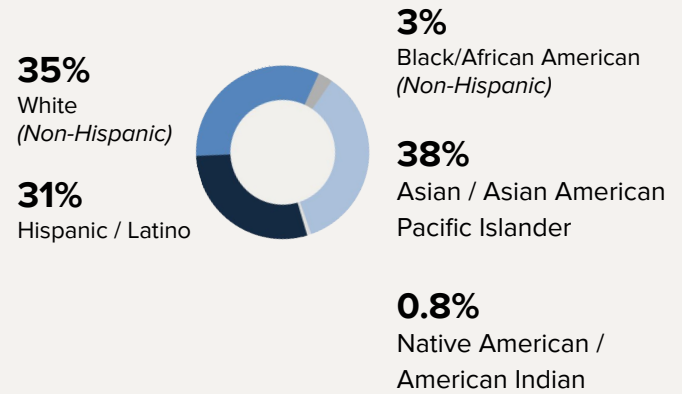
San José, CA

983,489 (2021 ACS)

Age



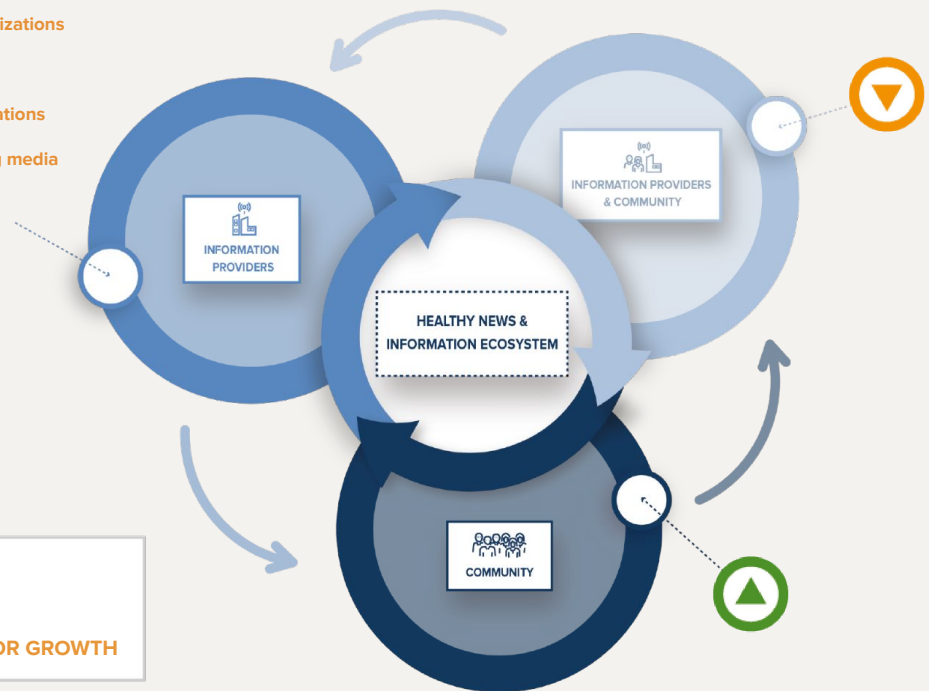
Race



News & Information Ecosystem

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

▲	STRONG
▶	AVERAGE
▼	OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH



Key Elements



San José has a low number of news organizations for its population and a lack of diversity in its business models and formats.



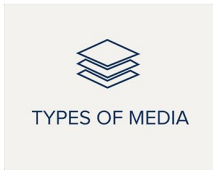
The Bay Area Media Collaborative pilot, run by Renaissance Journalism from 2017 through 2020, has not continued and we found no instances of collaboration in San Jose as of early 2023.



San José Mercury News publishes its staff demographic information.



San José is notably lacking in BIPOC-serving media, particularly within its large Hispanic/Latino (38%) and Asian/Asian American Pacific Islander (38%) communities.



The San José ecosystem is dominated by print media.



More than half of San José's news outlets are independent, for-profit news organizations.



There has been relatively low philanthropic investment in the San José information ecosystem on a per capita basis, according to the Media Impact Funders' database.



According to a 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center, residents of San Jose express a relatively low level of trust in its local media in terms of representation, accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Summary

San José is a city at the southern end of California’s Silicon Valley with a population of 983,489. It is part of the San José-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA metropolitan statistical area. Its population of 1,952,185 people makes it the 36th-largest in the United States.¹ San José is a diverse city, and the 2021 census found that people who identify as Asian had grown to be the largest racial or ethnic group for the first time, making up 38% of the population. Additionally, nearly a third (31%) of San José residents are Hispanic/Latino. San José’s population is relatively young, with only 13.2% of the population over 65, which is three percentage points lower than the national average.

While both the median household income and per capita income in San José are higher than the national average, the cost of living in the Bay Area is also significantly higher than the national average. According to the MIT Living Wage calculator, the living wage for a single person required in San José is \$26.20 per hour, or roughly \$55,000 per year.² There’s a disconnect between perception and reality in Silicon Valley. There is a perception that there’s a lot of money available, but the reality for many residents is challenging. For example, housing and homelessness are major crises in the Bay Area overall and San José in particular.

The housing crisis even impacts staffing among news organizations, as many reporters have to move outside of the San José metro area to afford the cost of living, which also makes it hard to attract and retain talent.

Community Indicators	National Average, 2021	San José, 2021	Comparison
Economics			
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$125,075	High
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$53,574	High
Poverty Rate	11.6%	7.7%	Low
Education			
High School Degree	88.9%	85.5%	Low
Bachelor's Degree	33.7%	45.4%	High
Resources & Infrastructure			
Households with Computer	93.1%	96.6%	High
Broadband Access	87.0%	93.7%	High
Universities	20	13	
Population per University	32,690	75,653	High
Libraries	27	14	
Population per Library	23,693	70,249	High
Community Satisfaction ³	60.9%	66.0%	High
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66.0%	53.1%	Low
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	No	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	No	

1. “San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA Metro Area,” Census Reporter, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US41940-san-jose-sunnyvale-santa-clara-ca-metro-area/>.
 2. “Living Wage Calculation for San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA,” Living Wage, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/41940>.
 3. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=CA>.

The daily newspaper *Mercury News* has suffered cutbacks and consolidation, as have many major metropolitan dailies with corporate ownership, leaving it with fewer reporters to cover more geography. And due to San José's proximity to San Francisco and Oakland, resources and efforts to support media often go to these neighbors rather than the San José ecosystem, resulting in news coming from these neighboring cities.

Information needs

There have been no information needs assessments conducted in San José, although San José Spotlight conducts an annual reader survey to ensure it delivers relevant content to its audience, soliciting feedback on topics of relevance from housing to small business. Stakeholders said that, in general, at least some segments of San José's population information needs are being met, such as Indian American residents served by *India Currents*, but residents have to seek out information piecemeal from different sources due to a fractured ecosystem. According to stakeholders, this is in part due to the fact that the *Mercury News* (formerly *San José Mercury News*) no longer fills the role of a large, general publication serving the community. However, even with the challenges facing the *Mercury News*, the newspaper penetration rate in San José remains very strong at 34.7%, the highest among Knight cities.⁴

San José's population is incredibly diverse, and more than half of residents speak a language other than English at home. However, news and information is largely available in English.

Information Providers

Mercury News is the daily newspaper covering San José. "The Merc," as it is locally known, was purchased from Knight-Ridder by McClatchy in 2006, and then immediately sold to Denver-based MediaNewsGroup (now Digital First Media). *Mercury News* is now run by Digital First's local subsidiary, the Bay Area News Group (BANG).

As with many daily newspapers run by corporations, the *Mercury News* has shrunk over the years, both in head count and in its coverage. For example, in the 1990s, the *Mercury News* had both a Vietnamese and Spanish language publication for local communities, both of which were shut down just prior to the

4. 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 San José, according to the Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

publication's sale to McClatchy. At its peak in 2001, the *Mercury News* alone had 400 employees. In 2018, after a round of buyouts and layoffs, the entire group of BANG newspapers had only 150 people covering the whole Bay Area.⁵

And while overall coverage of San José has decreased with the decline of the *Mercury News*, stakeholders noted that the communities most often left out of coverage as well as who are in need of more and better information are non-English-speaking and low-income communities.

In response to the gaps in coverage in San José, in 2019, the San José Spotlight launched as the city's first nonprofit newsroom. San José Spotlight does local politics and investigative reporting and makes its stories available to other local publications for free, including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the region's largest daily newspaper. San José Spotlight also publishes translations of its stories in Vietnamese and Spanish in order to serve local residents with information in their preferred language.

The pandemic hit at the beginning of San José Spotlight's second year, having a big impact on the community-supported outlet. "We started seeing donations drop off, but after a few weeks, we saw our pageviews spike. People were relying on our coverage to inform them of the novel coronavirus," said Josh Barousse, San José Spotlight's co-founder and executive director.

For other news entities, COVID-19 posed even larger challenges and opportunities. For example, India Currents Foundation, a 32-year-old print magazine focused on the Indian American community, transitioned to a fully digital nonprofit in 2019. This transition to fully digital meant a massive shift in its approach and revenue streams. The organization had been reliant on small businesses for advertising, and many shuttered or withdrew their ads during the pandemic, which led to the staff working on a volunteer basis for a brief time. Publisher and CEO Vandana Kumar eventually secured institutional funding from the United Way and received a boost from readers in India Currents' first-ever ask for individual donations in 2020, which enabled the publication to continue.

An overarching challenge for the San José news ecosystem is the fact that it is part of a region with San Francisco and Oakland. And while the Bay Area does have some regional coverage, because communities are so distinct, each having their own identities, communities and challenges, stakeholders said it can be difficult to find stories that are truly regional, and San José often gets left out.

5. Stephen Perez, "Mercury News Hit By Another Round of Layoffs, Buyouts," San Jose Inside, February 2, 2018, <https://www.sanjoseinside.com/news/mercury-news-hit-by-another-round-of-layoffs-buyouts/>.

BIPOC-Serving Media

San José is an incredibly diverse community, and has a number of BIPOC-serving media outlets, which stakeholders said are vital to serving their communities with local news but also with news about countries of origin. However, most of the community and BIPOC-serving media are primarily print products, limiting their reach.

Because communities are often not represented in legacy media, due to a lack of resources as well as a lack of relationships and access, Vandana Kumar, publisher and CEO of the nonprofit India Currents, said, “If we stop [our reporting], our voices won’t be heard. It’s passion and the recognition that our voices must be a part of the conversation that keeps us going.”

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	San José, 2022	Comparison
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	35	Average
Population per Organization	27,162	28,100	High
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	112,628 (2021)	
Household Penetration Rate	15.2%	34.7%	High
Platform Breakdown⁶			
Newspapers	36.8%	51.4%	High
Television Stations	31.3%	28.6%	Average
Radio Stations	10.9%	5.7%	Low
Digital only	18.5%	14.3%	Low
Business Models Breakdown⁷			
Nonprofit	11.2%	5.7%	Low
Public Media	11.5%	11.4%	Average
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	22.9%	Average
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	2.9%	Low
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	57.1%	High
BIPOC-Serving Media			
African American / Black		1	
Hispanic / Latino		5	
Asian / Asian American		1	
Diversity			
Staff Diversity Transparency		No	
Source Diversity Audits		Yes	
Collaboration		No	
Journalism Funding			
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ⁸	\$3,837,794	\$1,100,000	
Funders	13	11	
Recipients	8	13	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$1.12	Low

6. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in San José.

7. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in San José.

8. 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.

News Outlets Based in San José

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cupertino Today El Observador San José Inside 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India Currents San José Spotlight 	
Print and digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Alianza Metropolitan News</i> <i>Almaden Resident</i> <i>Bay Area Review</i> <i>Campbell Express</i> <i>Campbell Reporter</i> <i>Gilroy Dispatch</i> <i>La Oferta</i> <i>Los Altos Town Crier</i> <i>Los Gatos Weekly Times</i> <i>Morgan Hill Times</i> <i>Mountain View Voice</i> <i>NikkeiWest</i> <i>Palo Alto Weekly</i> <i>Saratoga News</i> <i>The Sunnyvale Sun</i> <i>Willow Glen Times</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mercury News 		
Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KZSJ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KCBS Radio 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KQED
Television		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KBCW KDTV KGO ABC KNTV NBC KPIX CBS KSTS KTVU Fox Telemundo Univision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KPJK KQED-TV KRCB PBS 	

Diversity

The Bay Area News Group, including the *Mercury News*, reported its staff demographic information last in 2019 as part of the American Society of News Editors diversity survey. Eleven percent of BANG staff identified as Asian, 2% as Black and 10% as Hispanic, compared with a population in San José that is 38% Asian and 31% Hispanic.⁹

Overall, community media has improved in San José since 2020, but “can’t say we’re meeting the cultural diversity of who we are,” said Chad Johnston, CEO of CreaTV, a nonprofit community media center.

Collaboration

San José does not have a strong history of collaboration, with most instances happening around one-off stories rather than at the structural level. That could be due to the legacy attitude of competition, speculated Josh Barousse, co-founder and executive director of San José Spotlight. However, that perspective may be changing, with stakeholders like Chad Johnston of CEO of CreaTV, arguing that San José is “ripe for something like that.” And publications like the nonprofit San José Spotlight are making their content available to other publications for republication, which can serve as a gateway to deeper relationships and collaboration in the future.

Local Journalism Support Organizations

There are various institutions in the Silicon Valley region that are equipped to support the news ecosystem, including Knight Foundation, the Google News Initiative, Facebook/Meta and Silicon Valley Community Foundation’s [Local Journalism Fund](#), which prioritizes organizations led by people of color or Black and Indigenous leaders. However, there are no local foundations that support news and information explicitly in San José, although Silicon Valley Community Foundation covers San José and has historically partnered with local news and information providers in service of building a more equitable Silicon Valley region.

9. “Digital and Print Publications – Managers and Salaried Employees,” https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d2df6a6231a750001881b75/t/6042967698b7262ced3b7b67/1614976631174/2019_ASNE_Newsroom_Diversity_Survey+Managers+and+Salaried+Employees.pdf.

Stakeholders noted that local organizations are still struggling to find resources they need, and the culture of individual philanthropy for journalism is not strong in San José, or the region more broadly. Institutional funding is a huge opportunity in San José because of the resources nearby in Silicon Valley, but those institutions need to do a better job of meeting organizational needs and capacities.

Information Providers and Community*	Knight Communities Average	San José	Comparison
Representation and Proximity			
% Who say local Journalists are in touch with the community	63%	61%	Average
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	15%	Low
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	60%	High
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	53%	Low
Financial Support			
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	15%	Average
% Who Say Their Local News:			
Reports news accurately	71%	66%	Low
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	63%	Low
Provides news that they use daily	67%	64%	Low
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	61%	Low
Is transparent about their reporting	62%	60%	Average
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	64%	Average

In general, San José residents have slightly less-positive perceptions of local news and information

**Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey*

providers than do those in other Knight cities, according to the 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey. The one area in which San José stands out is with respect to the 60% percentage of respondents who said their local news source mostly covers the area where they live, significantly more than respondents in other Knight cities.

Case Study: CreaTV and the New Standard for Engagement in COVID-19

[CreaTV](#) is a nonprofit focused on providing “training, tools, and platforms that allow diverse and often under-served communities to tell their stories and express their views through digital media.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CreaTV’s unique tech know-how and value as a convener meant that institutions from news to local government flocked to the organization to go virtual-first for engagement or convenings. CreaTV produces the city and council meetings, which, once virtual, became powerful tools for residents to get more engaged and think about participating in democratic process. “The wall has

been broken in standards of what production should look like—people thought I was crazy ten years ago with broadcasting via Skype. Now, the barrier to engaging with communities has lowered,” said CEO Chad Johnston, adding that new standards will always be virtual and in-person from now on.

Johnston says the organization is rooted in community engagement, with a focus on creating a more just and equitable media system by addressing technological equity. “The output is not the most important part, it’s the power,” he said.

In early 2022, CreaTV was awarded a \$1 million grant by Knight Foundation to develop Open San José, “a new state-of-the-art facility that will feature hybrid spaces for virtual and physical events, including rehearsals, film screenings, community forums and educational activities.”¹⁰

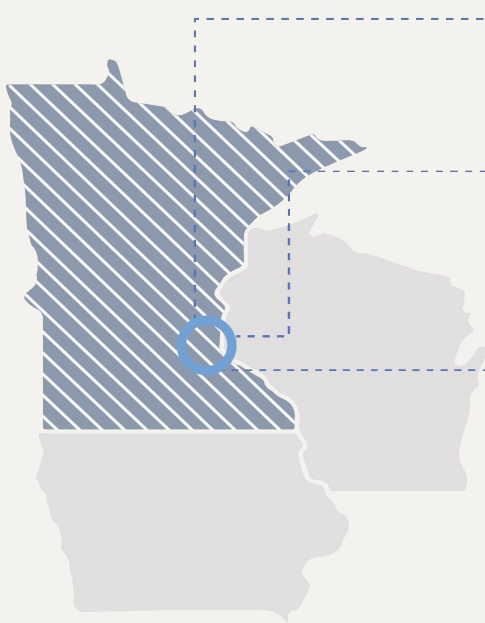
Opportunities

- **Institutional support:** There is little institutional investment in San José’s news ecosystem (per capita), despite a high concentration of wealth in the area. With the growth of the nonprofit news sector and first signs of what could become a vibrant ecosystem, there is opportunity for institutional support to catalyze these efforts.
- **Information needs assessment:** There has not been a formal information needs assessment conducted for San José and having this information could guide additional efforts to support the creation of and access to news and information across the diverse sectors of the community.
- **Support for community and BIPOC-serving media:** Community and BIPOC-serving papers serving immigrant communities in San José would benefit from increased resources to grow their digital capacity in order to reach more of their communities.
- **Collaboration and backbone institutions:** As the ecosystem grows, there is opportunity to proactively seed collaborative efforts and identify potential backbone institutions to support the ecosystem.

10. “CreaTV San José Opens New State-of-the-Art Facility in Downtown San José,” CreaTV, June 6, 2023, <https://www.creatvsj.org/knight-grant>.

St. Paul, Minnesota

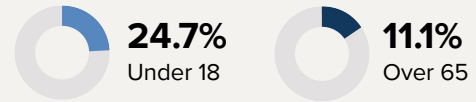
St. Paul, MN



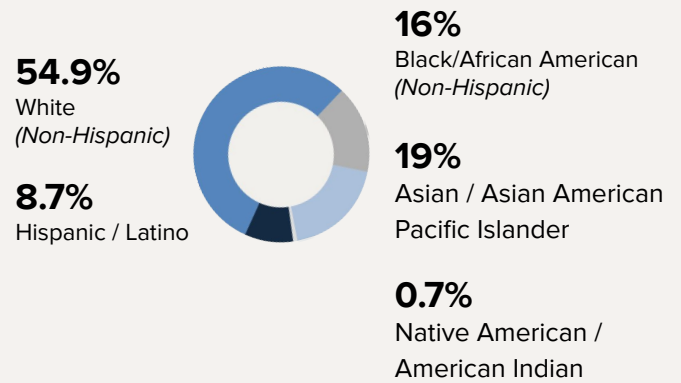
St. Paul, MN

307,193 (2021 ACS)

Age



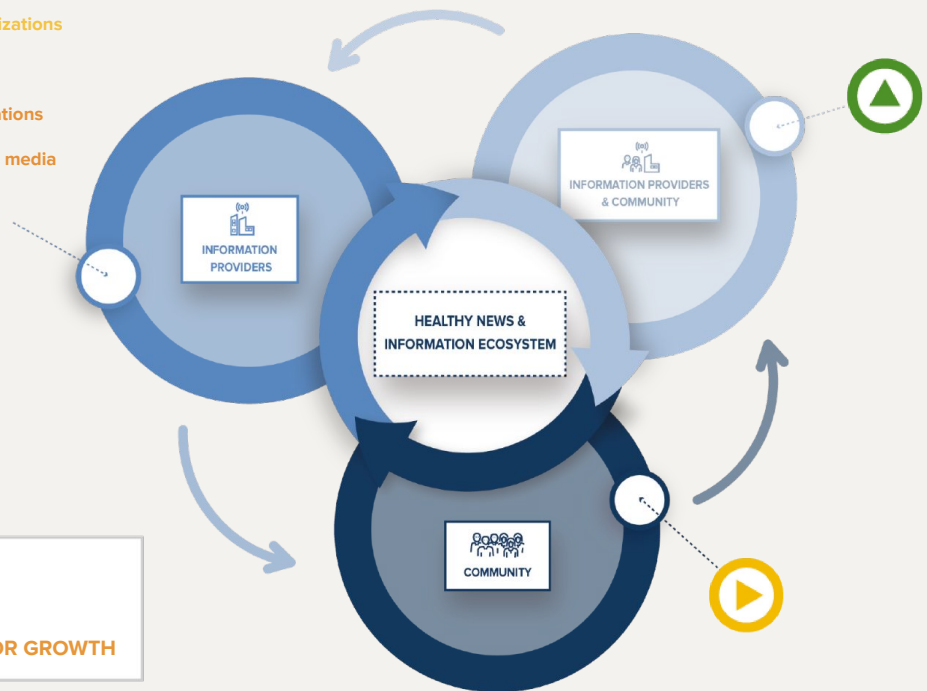
Race



News & Information Ecosystem

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

- STRONG**
- AVERAGE**
- OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH**



Key Elements



St. Paul has a relatively high number of information providers for its population. However, it is dominated by commercial media and there is opportunity for more digital media in the ecosystem.



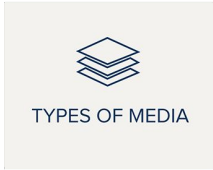
There are no ongoing journalism collaboratives in St. Paul.



MPR News records and reports on staff diversity and has reported on source diversity audits.



There are only two BIPOC-serving media outlets in St. Paul's ecosystem, for the 16% of the population that identifies as Black/African American.



St. Paul's ecosystem is dominated by newspapers.



The majority of St. Paul's news outlets are national broadcast chains or independent for profits.



Philanthropic investment is significant per capita when compared with other Knight communities, however it is concentrated in the state-serving Minnesota Public Radio and American Public Media.



According to a 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center, residents of St. Paul express a high degree of trust in local media in terms of representation, accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Summary

St. Paul is the capital of Minnesota and a city of 307,193, located just east of its larger sister city Minneapolis (population 425,336) across the Mississippi River. St. Paul is part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro Area with a total population of 3,690,512, the 16th-largest in the United States.¹

Stakeholders noted that St. Paul is an odd market in many ways, especially due to the geography of the Twin Cities, with most news organizations serving both St. Paul and Minneapolis. “It’s one metro and two metros at the same time,” said Mukhtar Ibrahim, founding publisher and CEO of the Sahar Journal.

St. Paul has a diverse population, including large Mexican, Somali, Hmong and Indian immigrant communities. Minneapolis-St. Paul is the metropolitan area with the largest Hmong² population in the United States by a fair amount, [according to the Pew Research Center](#), and it also has the [largest Somali population](#). The city is 16% Black/African American and 9% Hispanic/Latino, similar to communities in neighboring Minneapolis. However, at 19%, the Asian population in St. Paul is three times that of Minneapolis (6%).

Duchesne Drew, senior vice president of American Public Media Group and president of Minnesota Public Radio,

Community Indicators	Knight Communities Average, 2021	St. Paul, 2021	Comparison
Economics			
Median Household Income	\$69,021	\$63,483	Low
Per Capita Income	\$37,638	\$35,547	Low
Poverty Rate	11.6%	18.0%	High
Education			
High School Degree	88.9%	87.8%	Average
Bachelor's Degree	33.7%	42.0%	High
Literacy Rate	79.0%		
Resources & Infrastructure			
Households with Computer	93.1%	94.4%	Average
Broadband Access	87.0%	89.6%	Average
Universities	20	12	
Population per University	32,690	25,599	Low
Libraries	27	21	
Population per Library	23,693	14,628	Low
Community Satisfaction ³	60.9%	66.0%	High
Voter Turnout of most recent election	66.0%	80.0% ⁴	High
Prior Information Needs Study	Yes/No	No	
Prior Ecosystem Study	Yes/No	No	

1. “Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metro Area,” Census Reporter, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US33460-minneapolis-st-paul-bloomington-mn-wi-metro-area/>.
 2. The Hmong are an ethnic group with roots in China. Hmong immigration to the Twin Cities began in the 1970s as a result of displacement from Laos.
 3. Community satisfaction is measured by Share Care in partnership with Boston University, <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?defaultState=MN>.
 4. “Historical Voter Turnout Statistics,” Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, <https://www.sos.state.mn.us/election-administration-campaigns/data-maps/historical-voter-turnout-statistics/>.

noted that St. Paul is a dynamic place that is continuing to evolve. He said, “[St. Paul] is way more diverse over the past decades, and that’s part of the tension around the growth—the American story. St. Paul is at a different place than a lot of other metros that were already more diverse 30 years ago.”

Information Needs

We did not find that an information needs assessment has been conducted in St. Paul. Overall, Colleen Stoxen, deputy managing editor of news operations at the *Star Tribune*, believes that the information needs of Minnesota residents are largely well met. “Minnesota’s been very lucky to have a news hungry, well-educated, attentive population. They’re good news consumers and do trust major news entities throughout the state.” As of 2017, Poynter reported that the *Star Tribune* ranked fifth in the United States for its Sunday circulation, while the Twin Cities is ranked 16th by population, supporting Stoxen’s assertion that Twin Cities residents are attentive and actively seek out news at high rates.⁵ However, St. Paul’s newspaper, *Pioneer Press*, which is owned by Alden Global, an investment firm that is notorious for prioritizing profit over investing in local news, doesn’t have the reach of the *Star Tribune*. The household penetration rate of the *Pioneer Press* throughout the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area is 5.8%, among the lowest of Knight cities.⁶

Compared with other Knight resident communities, St. Paul respondents to the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey report less reliance on TV for daily news (34%), and more than thirty percent of respondents reported relying on a newspaper (32%), a website or app (37%) and/or a radio station (32%) as a source of news.⁷ Additionally, nearly half of respondents (47%) agree that local news organizations can be relied on to deliver the information they need.

Mukhtar Ibrahim, founding publisher and CEO of the Sahan Journal, noted a gap in the ecosystem whereby the information needs of immigrant communities in Minnesota were not being met. This led Mukhtar to found Sahan Journal in order to serve diverse immigrant communities (see case study later in this chapter).

5. Rick Edmonds, “Why does the Star Tribune outperform the pack of metros? An update.” Poynter, May 2, 2018, <https://www.poynter.org/business-work/2018/why-does-the-star-tribune-outperform-the-pack-of-metros-an-update/>.

6. 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 the Minneapolis-St. Paul MSA, according to the Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey (ACS).

7. Responses to the Gallup/Knight American Views Survey are not statistically significant for St. Paul and instead can be considered information to be analyzed together with other data sources. In 2022, there were only 53 respondents from St. Paul.

Similarly, Michael Tortorello, editorial director of Sahan Journal, said, “There are a lot of newer, immigrant communities in Minnesota that have strong connections to news but just not news here,” said Tortorello. Tortorello observed that even in St. Paul’s “glory days,” the media ecosystem was white-led, and even those who were served by media weren’t served very well. But given the city’s demographic shifts, the information needs are new and large.

Information Providers

Star Tribune is the multiple Pulitzer Prize-winning daily newspaper that serves the Twin Cities, as well as the state of Minnesota. It was purchased by McClatchy in 1998 and went through a series of corporate owners before filing for bankruptcy in 2009. In 2014, the *Star Tribune* was purchased by billionaire Glen Taylor and is independently owned by his Star Tribune Media Company LLC. Given the *Star Tribune*’s independent ownership, it has not faced staff cutbacks to the same extent as many other metropolitan daily newspapers.

In St. Paul specifically, there are four neighborhood print publications owned by Press Publications, a family-owned group of weekly newspapers located in the Northeast suburbs of the metropolitan area of Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Duchesne Drew of APM and MPR observed that the Twin Cities has a fairly robust media environment with many different sources available for residents, even if industry contraction has reduced the size of many of these outlets. He also said that as a result of the large, healthy, diverse business market in St. Paul, with 15 or so Fortune 500 companies based in the region, there is robust business reporting.

Mukhtar Ibrahim, founding publisher and CEO of Sahan Journal agrees that the St. Paul media ecosystem is relatively strong: “Overall I would say with the existing media ecosystem, reporters are intentionally invested in covering communities in St. Paul . . . trying to do their best to engage communities in ways that are meaningful.”

In addition to the community being supportive financially of news organizations in St. Paul (and Minneapolis), it is a more civically engaged and involved community than a lot of other metro areas. The approach to community engagement has evolved through the years in that it’s more of a two-way street, inviting community leaders in and going out to them, with more awareness and humility in that process, according to stakeholders.

For stakeholders, a healthy news ecosystem should have a good, authentic representation of the community, with a mix of mainstream and niche organizations—and in St. Paul, that’s often where some tension comes in. Smaller organizations that are more focused on specific issues or communities might have different targets, and for larger or more mainstream organizations that serve larger audiences, the goal is “not to shift the circle to left or right, it’s to expand the circle and tell more stories, give more people the mic,” said Drew.

BIPOC-Serving Media

While there are publications serving immigrant communities in Minnesota and the region, we found only one example of a publication based in St. Paul serving local immigrant communities with locally relevant information: Sahan Journal.

Similarly, BLCK Press is the only organization serving Black residents of St. Paul, and it focuses on youth and multimedia.

Information Providers	Knight Communities Average, 2022	St. Paul, 2022	Comparison
Information Providers			
Number of Organizations (newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital)	34	17	
Population per Organization	27,162	19,200	Strong
Daily Average Circulation (Major Daily)	N/A	88,373 (2021)	
Household Penetration Rate	15.2%	5.8%	Low
Platform Breakdown⁸			
Newspapers	36.8%	31.3%	Low
Television Stations	31.3%	37.5%	High
Radio Stations	10.9%	12.5%	Average
Digital only	18.5%	18.8%	Average
Business Models Breakdown⁹			
Nonprofit	11.2%	18.8%	High
Public Media	11.5%	12.5%	Average
National Broadcast Chain	24.4%	37.5%	High
National Newspaper Chain	6.0%	6.3%	Average
Independent For-Profit	46.4%	25.0%	Low
BIPOC-Serving Media			
African American / Black		1	
Hispanic / Latino		0	
Asian / Asian American		0	
Diversity			
Staff Diversity Transparency		Yes	
Source Diversity Audits		Yes	
Collaboration		Ongoing and Integrated	
Journalism Funding			
Philanthropic Dollars over the 3 previous years ¹⁰	\$3,837,794	\$3,700,000	
Funders	13	25	
Recipients	8	11	
Invested Per Capita	\$5.94	\$12.04	High

8. The percentage of news outlets that publish on specific platforms in St. Paul.

9. The percentage of news outlets that have specific business models in St. Paul.

10. 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.

Case Study: Sahan Journal

Mukhtar Ibrahim founded Sahan Journal in August 2019 as a nonprofit digital newsroom dedicated to reporting for immigrants and communities of color in Minnesota. As of early 2023, it had grown to an organization with 18 full-time staff and an annual operating budget of \$2.5 million. Sahan Journal aims to understand what information immigrants and communities of color need and then provide relevant information through accessible languages and platforms. In addition to a website with content in English and Somali, Sahan Journal distributes a SMS newsletter designed for Afghan immigrants in Pashto and Dari, and engages with communities through social media, videos, newsletters and community events. And finally, Sahan Journal makes its reporting available to other publications to republish in full. In 2022, its reporters received three awards from the Minnesota chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

During COVID-19, Ibrahim said that the media's role was different depending on who they served, and all were oriented toward public service journalism. For instance, Sahan Journal did a series of videos on vaccinations, and felt a need to address misinformation in a language that their audiences could understand via someone from their community whom they could trust. Sahan Journal is now pursuing new initiatives, such as exploring a partnership with Somali TV MN to [produce an audio-based newsletter delivered via SMS in Somali](#). As Ibrahim and editorial director Michael Tortorello noted, part of Sahan Journal's experience is that you can't just publish content in people's native languages and expect audiences to find it, you have to reach people where they are. "Sahan Journal and Mukhtar's creation of it is a landmark in Minnesota," said Tortorello.

News Outlets Based in St. Paul

	Independent	National Chain	Nonprofit/University	Public Media
Digital only	Georgia Fort		BLCK Press Sahan Journal	
Print and digital	<i>Insight News</i> <i>Shoreview Press</i> <i>Vadnais Heights Press</i> <i>White Bear Press</i>	<i>St. Paul Pioneer Press</i>		
Radio		WCCO Radio		MPR News/KNOW
Television		KARE KMSF Fox KSTP WCCO WUCW		Twin Cities PBS

Diversity

The Star Tribune participated in the last American Society of News Editors newsroom diversity survey in 2019. At that time, the organization of 254 employees was 1% Native American, 3% Hispanic, 5% Asian and 7% Black.¹¹ *Star Tribune* is consciously focused on having the makeup of the newsroom reflect the diversity of St. Paul's communities, said Colleen Stoxen, the organization's deputy managing editor of news operations. *Star Tribune* also has a committee looking at its coverage, including conducting source diversity audits.

BLCK Press is a nonprofit multimedia training organization that works with youth in St. Paul (and beyond) and has its own newsrooms. This is one effort to train the next generation of diverse media makers to better serve the local community's information needs.

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, was the catalyst for that national movement, and it was an earth-shattering event for the local community in the Twin Cities. In the wake of his murder, stakeholders said that, in general, actors across the news ecosystem in St. Paul have recognized the urgent—even life-and-death—need to address diversity in their organizations, as well as in their coverage. “The George Floyd murder shook this place,” said Duchesne Drew, president of Minnesota Public Radio.

Drew and others noted that there were many organizations working on diversity, equity and inclusion before 2020, but that Floyd's murder brought a new sense of urgency that's shaped the way organizations are moving in communities. Mukhtar Ibrahim of Sahan Journal also noted that “the news ecosystem in the Twin Cities in general has been changing post the killing of George Floyd in terms of who leads these newsrooms or type of people they bring in reporting.” He observed that news organizations are trying to bring in more diverse talent and grapple with their role in structural racism, and he believes the ecosystem is stronger than it was five years ago.

Collaborations

We did not find evidence of institutional or formal collaborations around issues in St. Paul. Projects appear to be one-off or project-based, when they happen. From 2017 through 2019, six media outlets partnered as

11.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d2df6a6231a750001881b75/t/6042967698b7262ced3b7b67/1614976631174/2019_ASNE_Newsroom_Diversity_Survey+Managers+and+Salaried+Employees.pdf

part of the Kellogg Foundation-funded Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation initiative with the goal to replace the deeply held belief system that fuels racism with one that sees the inherent value of all people. According to this initiative, “partners included large, well-resourced, nationally known organizations and small, community-led organizations. Their collaboration offered media professionals an opportunity to meet, build trust and learn about the impact of negative narratives on people and communities of color.” This initiative also engaged young Black men and boys through a mentorship program designed to assist them to develop “new internal narratives and visions.”¹²

Local Journalism Support Organizations

The Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, based in Saint Paul, is a statewide foundation that serves all of Minnesota and has made significant contributions to journalism organizations, including Minnesota Public Radio, American Public Media, Twin Cities Public Television, Sahan Journal, MinnPost and others. Other nonprofits in St. Paul and Twin Cities are also becoming more aware of how they can provide support and investment to news through not only grants but through shared programming and collaboration.

For some news organizations in St. Paul, pursuing foundation funding is still a relatively new idea, but one that is becoming more necessary. “We’re just starting to think about the idea of support from foundations,” said Colleen Stoxen of the *Star Tribune*, adding that the publication is noting that the shift in traditional advertising models for news means changes in the future and is looking at the potential in the local funder ecosystem.

Information Providers and Community*	Knight Communities Average	St. Paul	Comparison
Representation and Proximity			
% Who say local Journalists are in touch with the community	63%	77%	High
% Who have spoken with a journalist	21%	18%	Average
% Who say their local news source mostly covers the area where they live	51%	59%	High
Includes people like you in their stories	58%	68%	High
Financial Support			
% Who pay for local news in the past year	14%	17%	Average
% Who Say Their Local News:			
Reports news accurately	71%	80%	High
Keeps an eye on local political leaders	66%	77%	High
Provides news that they use daily	67%	74%	High
Covers news stories thoroughly	65%	73%	High
Is transparent about their reporting	62%	72%	High
Deals fairly with all sides	62%	70%	High

*Data from 2019 Pew Research Center Local News Survey

12. “Bringing TRHT TO LIFE,” W. K. Kellogg Foundation, <https://healourcommunities.org/#a-tab-13>.

Information Providers and Community

According to the 2019 Pew Research Center Local News survey, St. Paul exhibits very high levels of trust in media, with almost all indicators higher than the national average. However, that expressed level of trust has not translated into monetary support. The percentage who say they pay for news is just three percentage points higher than the national average, which is even lower than in other Knight Cities that expressed less trust.

The results of the Gallup/Knight 2022 American Views survey suggest that residents' perceptions of local media have somewhat worsened since 2019. While 62% of respondents agree that local news organizations have the resources and opportunity to report the news accurately, only 39% agree that these organizations care about how their reporting can affect their community broadly and only 36% agree that they care about the best interest of their readers, viewers and listeners. And perhaps most concerning, nearly half of respondents (49%) disagree that local news organizations do not intend to mislead, misinform or persuade the public.

Opportunities

- **Collaboration:** With more local news outlets experimenting with deep community engagement, a unique commitment to the community in the form of a locally owned daily newspaper, and robust startups like the Sahan Journal serving immigrants and communities of color, St. Paul's ecosystem is ripe for a more institutionalized collaborative effort.
- **Institutional support, especially for BIPOC-serving media:** While there is significant philanthropic investment per capita, it is concentrated in public media. There is opportunity to support BIPOC and immigrant serving information providers.
- **Membership and paid subscriptions:** There is opportunity for newsrooms to experiment with paid membership and/or subscription models given the willingness of residents to pay for news and information and their relatively high levels of trust in the ecosystem.