

A 2022 AGORA JOURNALISM CENTER REPORT

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Assessing Oregon's Local News & Information Ecosystem

*Connecting news,
information, and
civic health*

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Executive Summary

A growing body of research demonstrates the connection between the civic health of communities and their access to quality, trusted, and inclusive local news. Communities that lack robust local news also tend to experience lower rates of civic engagement, higher rates of polarization and corruption, and a diminished sense of community connection.

At a critical moment in Oregon's history, this report maps news outlets around the state that are regularly producing original local news and categorizes them by platform and ownership type. We find that, after years of closures and contractions, newspapers are still the most common outlet for local news in Oregon, though public radio, online-only outlets, television stations and magazines also play an important role. In terms of ownership structure, Oregon's newspapers are a mix of privately-owned single holdings, small locally-owned chains, and nonprofits, along with about one-third that are owned by large geographically diffuse chains and publicly-traded corporations.

We also find that Oregonians are unequally served by local news media and that some communities have few places to turn for truly local news. And we find that journalists and civic leaders are deeply worried about the state's ability to grapple with its mounting challenges at a time when the number of news outlets is declining, news audiences are shrinking, and misinformation is on the rise. These findings raise concerns about the health of Oregon's news and information infrastructure.

Despite the challenges, many of Oregon's legacy news outlets are finding ways to adapt, innovate, and grow even in an increasingly tough environment. A number of digital start-ups are filling gaps in news for some communities, and taking on regional issues. Newsrooms are collaborating with one another to share stories and to do more local reporting with limited resources. And journalistic support organizations here in Oregon and beyond are providing tools, resources, and guidance to bolster both legacy and start-up news organizations.

The overall picture, however, is concerning. The underlying infrastructure for producing local news has been weakened by two decades of losses of newsrooms and reporting jobs. And news organizations today, from the smallest all-volunteer hyperlocal websites to the largest legacy newsrooms, often sense they are swimming against the tide of economic, technological, political, and cultural changes that threaten the long-term viability of local news production. Ultimately, larger-scale interventions may be needed to create a stronger civic information

infrastructure. We examine innovations and interventions happening around our state and beyond.

The evidence is increasingly clear that the civic health of communities is tied to the fate of local news. This report represents one step toward assessing the state of local news in Oregon and what can be done to strengthen it. Counting and mapping Oregon's local news producers will allow for tracking further contraction or growth over time. And by looking at initiatives underway around the country, Oregon's newsrooms, educators, funders, and policy-makers can consider emerging innovations to build the vitality of Oregon's local news ecosystem.

Foreword

This report builds on a growing body of research showing the critical importance of local news to community civic health, and maps the current supply of local news in Oregon by counting the number of news outlets that regularly produce original state and local news. At a time when journalism is challenged economically, technologically, politically, and culturally — and when our state itself faces unprecedented challenges — we believe it is vitally important to identify ways to strengthen the “civic infrastructure” of news and information. This report offers a first step.

Readers familiar with research about the national crisis in local news and the critical relationship between local news and civic health may wish to skim the opening sections of this report and focus on sections V - X. For other readers, the material in sections I - IV will offer important context for why we produced this report.

As explained in the pages that follow, mapping local news ecosystems is neither quick nor simple, and the snapshot provided here is undoubtedly incomplete — which is why we provide the opportunity for readers to see and offer feedback on our data. Despite the challenges, documenting Oregon's local news outlets — both legacy and start-up — is an essential first step toward understanding the flow of news and information in communities across the state.

We also present insights from conversations with over two dozen journalists, community organization leaders, experts, and other civic leaders who spoke frankly about their concerns for the future of news and civic life in Oregon. Together with our mapping exercise, these conversations highlighted opportunities for building up the supply of local news and information around our state. At a time when journalism is challenged economically, technologically, politically, and culturally — and when our state itself faces unprecedented challenges — we believe it is vitally important to identify ways to strengthen the “civic infrastructure” of news and information.

We see this report as a starting place for what needs to be an ongoing discussion. Where are Oregonians turning for news and information — including beyond traditional journalism? Community organizations, government agencies, and local institutions like libraries and community centers are all important sources of civic information. So are the

We believe it is vitally important to identify ways to strengthen the “civic infrastructure” of news and information.

many online resources, from freelance journalists' social media feeds to local microbloggers, that contribute to Oregonians' information about community life but that are difficult to "map." Ongoing conversations will be critical to fully mapping Oregon's news and information infrastructure. We hope that you will engage in this ongoing conversation by adding your feedback. You can find our interactive data map and a feedback form at <https://sojc.link/news-eco-22>.

This work is an outgrowth of the [Agora Journalism Center](#)'s mission to be a forum for the future of local news and civic health. We build here on previous work by ourselves and our colleagues in the School of Journalism and Communication that has illuminated the current state and future prospects for local news in Oregon. This includes reports in [2017](#) and [2019](#) by our colleague Damian Radcliffe that outlined how local news matters and practical steps newsrooms around the region have been taking to adjust to today's more complex environment for local news¹, and a report called [The 32 Percent Project](#), authored by Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn, that explores the roots of the public's declining trust in the news media.²

We also build here on an initial set of in-person and virtual convenings we organized (with the support of the Oregon Community Foundation and in collaboration with OPB and Oregon Values and Beliefs Center) to better understand where Oregonians turn for information about their communities, where they see gaps, and how to strengthen existing and create new sources of civically relevant information. Against the backdrop of dozens of convenings of journalists, thought leaders, and community members that Agora has hosted since its founding in 2014, this report represents Agora's ongoing commitment to improving the inextricably linked prospects for innovative, community-centered journalism and a healthy democracy.

We hope this report will spur serious conversation and concrete action to improve the health of Oregon's local news ecosystem and present a framework for mapping local news ecosystems that may be replicable in other contexts. Newsrooms will find here examples of collaborative journalism that can help them leverage shrinking resources for greater statewide impact, and links to various support organizations that are

The research reported here makes clear that communities' ability to solve other social problems rests in part on the quality and accessibility of the information that shapes their shared engagement with and understanding of those problems.

1 Damian Radcliffe, "Local journalism in the Pacific Northwest: Why it matters, how it's evolving, and who pays for it" University of Oregon, Agora Report (15 September 2017); "Shifting practices for a stronger tomorrow: Local journalism in the Pacific Northwest," (26 November 2019).

2 Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn, "The 32 Percent Project: How citizens define trust and how journalists can earn it," (3 October 2018), Agora Journalism Center.

helping news outlets chart a course forward. Institutions of higher education—including our own—can find compiled here a growing body of research on the relationship between local news and civic health—research that should guide the development of curriculum and training for future journalists.

Philanthropists and other potential funders can also find here a strong case for the civic importance of local news. The research reported here makes clear that communities' ability to solve social problems rests in part on the quality and accessibility of the information that shapes their shared engagement with and understanding of those problems. To address our state's many challenges requires strengthening the underlying infrastructure for local news and information. That is a problem that policy makers also need to act on. They will find in this report research that can bolster the case for interventions to support local news.

— Andrew DeVigal, Director, Agora Journalism Center

— Regina G. Lawrence, Research Director, Agora Journalism Center

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I. Introduction: Oregon's Critical Moment

Oregon has long been a desirable place to live. Renowned natural beauty — from stunning mountains and high desert to the Columbia River gorge, picturesque wine country, and pristine coastline — along with growing high-tech and creative industries, free-thinking culture, and forward-thinking infrastructure made Oregon a top destination for visitors and residents. Today Oregon ranks 22nd nationally among places to live in the U.S., as does its largest city, Portland.³

But as Oregon grows, with a population projected to increase by over 41% by 2030 compared to the year 2000⁴, its problems have multiplied. While the state continues to attract newcomers, many Oregonians have a sense that it is troubled. In addition to serious [economic](#)⁵ and social disruptions due to the COVID pandemic, we are a state seriously challenged by a [history](#) and a [present](#)⁶ reality of racial injustice; by [rampant houselessness](#),⁷ climbing [housing prices](#),⁸ disappearing [water supplies](#),⁹ and rising [gun violence](#)¹⁰; by the effects of [climate change](#)¹¹ manifesting in increasingly severe wildfires¹² and [record-setting weather extremes](#)¹³; and by a deepening rural-urban divide — including efforts in some corners of the state to [sever ties with Oregon altogether](#).¹⁴ Not to mention the lingering effects of protests that rocked Portland in 2020, putting the city's troubles front and center in

The time is ripe for a holistic assessment of the health of Oregon's news and information ecosystem.

3 U.S. News & World Report, "[Oregon](#)" (accessed 25 August 2022); U. S. News & World Report, "[Portland, Oregon](#)" (accessed 25 August 2022).

4 World Population Review, "[Oregon Population 2022](#)" (accessed 10 October 2022).

5 Oregon Secretary of State, "[Oregon's economy: An overview](#)" (n.d.).

6 Tiffany Camhi, "[A racist history shows why Oregon is still so white](#)," Oregon Public Broadcasting (9 June 2020); Office of Oregon Governor Kate Brown, "[Racial justice & equity](#)" (n.d.).

7 Oregon Community Foundation, "[Homelessness in Oregon: A review of trends, causes, and policy options](#)" (March 2019).

8 Abe Asher, "[How will Oregon address its growing affordable housing crisis?](#)", Portland Mercury (26 November 2021).

9 Alex Schwartz, "[Water is the 'lifeblood' of Oregonians. How will the next governor manage a future of drought?](#)" Oregon Public Broadcasting (27 April 2022).

10 Claire Rush, "[Amid spike in shootings, Portland unveils new initiative](#)," ABC News (22 July 2022).

11 Bradley W. Parks, "[Climate change by the numbers, from 0.1 to 200](#)," Oregon Public Broadcasting (12 January 2021).

12 Hannah Hickey, "[Study synthesizes what climate change means for Northwest wildfires](#)," UW News (1 April 2020).

13 Kale Williams, "[A year of record-breaking weather in Oregon as climate change leaves its mark on 2021](#)," The Oregonian (29 December 2021).

14 Douglas Perry, "[Rural Oregonians who want to merge with Idaho say they 'no longer recognize' their own state](#)," Seattle Times (9 June 2021).

the national news and damaging its national reputation.¹⁵

As Oregonians take stock of the emerging post-pandemic world, many perceive our state to be [politically divided](#) and on the [wrong track](#). A [survey](#) conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center (OVBC) in September of 2022 found that 75% of Oregonians were worried for Oregon's future, with 35% saying they were "very worried."¹⁶ The sense of crisis has been particularly intense in the state's largest city, where frustration among many Portlanders boiled over in an early 2022 [survey](#) that showed 88% agreeing that "the quality of life in Portland is getting worse."¹⁷

How will residents of this state become better informed and empowered to work together for positive change?

Oregon is also a state with a proud tradition of citizen involvement in civic affairs and policy-making. The "[Oregon System](#)" of citizen ballot initiatives and referenda dates back to 1902, and the state's largest city has long been [recognized](#) for its "strong tradition of neighborhood involvement and a culture of participatory democracy."¹⁸ The scholar Robert Putnam included Portland as a case study of a highly civically engaged community in his 2017 book [Better Together](#). But Oregon is also a growing state, and with that growth comes an increased challenge of forging and maintaining community connections.

How do communities around the state come to understand local issues, to hear from and understand the experiences and perspectives of their fellow community members, and to see one another truly as neighbors?

As voters prepare to elect their local and state leadership in the fall of 2022—including the first gubernatorial election [in a generation](#) that will not include an incumbent as candidate—and as Portland voters will be asked [whether to change](#) the city's system of government, the time is ripe for a holistic assessment of the health of Oregon's news and information ecosystem. The complex challenges our state faces will require deep citizen engage-

Just as the physical health of a community depends on the quality of its natural environment, the civic health of communities depends on the flow and quality of news and information.

15 Sra Cline, "[Oregon's biggest city has 'a long way to go' repairing its rep.](#)" (29 October 2021), US News and World Report.

16 Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, "[Social and political change-making.](#)" (28 July 2022).

17 KATU Staff, "[Poll: Most Portlanders say quality of life in the city is getting worse.](#)" KATU (31 January 2022).

18 Amalia Alarcon De Morris and Paul Leistner, "[From neighborhood association system to participatory democracy: Broadening and deepening public involvement in Portland, Oregon.](#)" National Civic Review (4 August 2009), p. 47.

ment and healthy lines of communication among communities and with elected officials.

How well-equipped are leaders and citizens around Oregon to meet our state's challenges with well-informed civic engagement? And how well-equipped are local news media to provide leaders and citizens with the information they need?

II. Why It's Important to Take Stock of Oregon's News Ecosystem

In light of these challenges and questions, it's important to examine the supply of local news and information. ***At a time when our state faces unprecedented challenges, the availability of quality, trusted, and inclusive local news is critical.***

In this report, ***we offer a current snapshot of the number of news outlets in Oregon that regularly produce originally reported news about state and/or local public affairs*** — that is, news about local policies, community problems, and the like. We examine the quantity and the types of these outlets—large and small, legacy and start-up—that serve citizens in communities around Oregon. We identify communities that lack equal access to local news, and communities that are relatively well-served in terms of numbers of local news sources. Taking stock in this way is an important first step toward assessing the health of local news in Oregon, and toward identifying opportunities and needed investments to improve the state's informational infrastructure. And we delve deeper, providing context to this snapshot through in-depth interviews with over two dozen journalists and media-makers, leaders of civic and community organizations, and close observers of Oregon public affairs, to sketch a portrait of the current health of Oregon's news

In this moment of unprecedented challenges, the time is ripe to invest in building a healthier civic infrastructure for news and information in Oregon.

and information ecosystem.¹⁹

Our quantitative data show that Oregonians are unequally served by local media and that some communities have very few places to turn for truly local news. Our interviews reveal that journalists and civic leaders are deeply worried about the state's ability to grapple with its mounting challenges at a time when the number of news outlets is declining, news audiences are shrinking, and misinformation is on the rise. These findings raise concerns about the health of Oregon's news and information infrastructure.

At the same time, our findings show some promising innovations underway around the state. Digital start-ups are filling news gaps for some local communities around the state. Journalists and newsrooms are rethinking how to produce local news even as they face steadily shrinking resources — sometimes with the help of foundations, journalistic support organizations, and other newsrooms. However, the strong sense among those we spoke with is that more needs to be done.

Ultimately, we conclude, Oregon's news and information infrastructure can be strengthened through higher-level innovations, collaborations and investments, not only by the news media themselves but by civic organizations, philanthropies, universities, and other entities with a stake in Oregon's future. This effort calls out for deeper and more sustained investment because, as the research we review in these pages makes clear, the fate of local news is tied to the fate of our state's civic health.

In this moment of unprecedented challenges, the time is ripe to invest in building a healthier civic infrastructure for news and information in Oregon.

In the sections that follow, we first explain why local news is critically important to community life, drawing on a rapidly growing body of research and case studies that shows the linkages between the availability of local news and levels of civic engagement and public accountability. Drawing on existing research, we describe the significant losses in provision of local news around the United States and in Oregon. We then present findings from our own research to present a map of Oregon's

Just as the physical health of a community depends on the quality of its natural environment, the civic health of communities depends on the flow and quality of news and information.

¹⁹ A list of interviewees is available in the Methods appendix.

existing outlets that regularly produce local and civically relevant news. Readers can find the map and data analysis in section VII.

We use two key terms in this report to refer to news and information as a critical resource for community civic life. The term “local news and information ecosystem” describes “the network of institutions, collaborations, and people that local communities rely on for news, information, and engagement.”²⁰ This metaphor compares the supply of information to the availability of natural resources like clean air and water: Just as the physical health of a community depends on the quality of its natural environment, the civic health of communities depends on the flow and quality of news and information.²¹ As valuable as the ecosystem metaphor is, however, it can obscure the critical role of human intervention and investment in creating and sustaining the conditions for civic health.²² Therefore, we also describe news as a crucial element of “civic infrastructure,” akin to the roads, schools, and libraries that make democratic society possible.²³

III. The Civic Importance of Local News Ecosystems

The number of local news outlets around the country has declined rapidly and significantly over the past several decades. One recent report determined that “over the past 15 years, the United States has lost 2,100 newspapers, leaving at least 1,800 communities that had a local news outlet in 2004 without any at the beginning of 2020.”²⁴

20 “[What is a local news ecosystem?](#)” (accessed 26 August 2022), Democracy Fund.

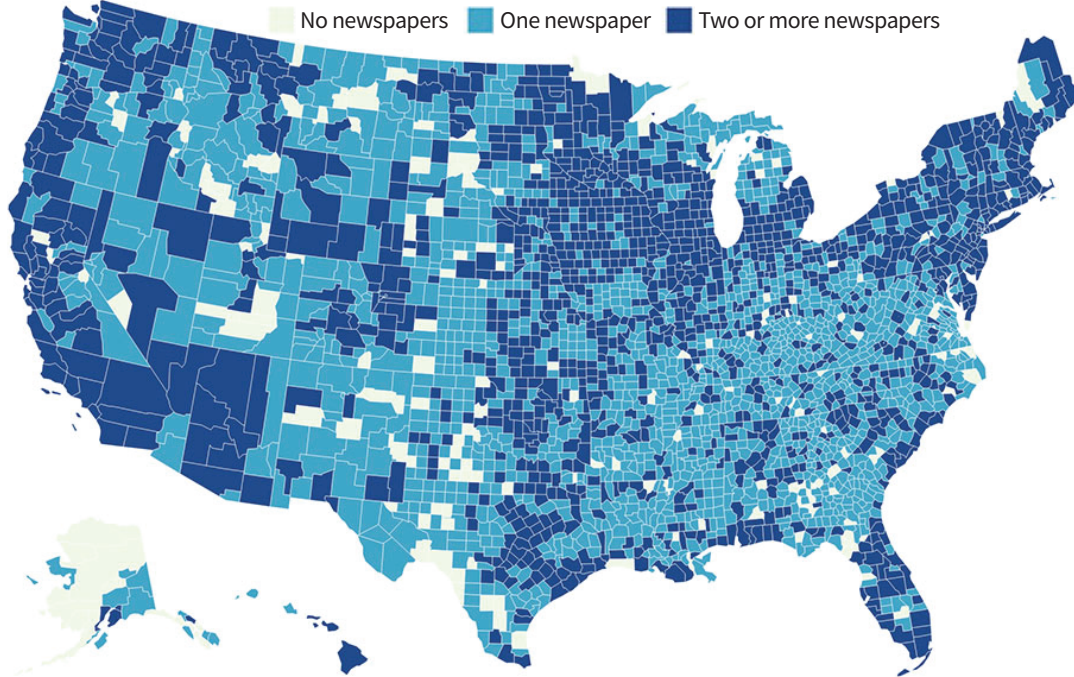
21 “[Informing Communities: Sustaining democracy in the digital age.](#)” (2009) The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy.

22 Anthony Nadler, “Nature’s economy and news ecology: Scrutinizing the news ecosystem metaphor,” *Journalism Studies* (2019) 20(6), pp. 823-39.

23 See Fiona Morgan, “[Stronger together: How journalism fits into civic infrastructure.](#)” Medium (5 August 2022); Aspen Institute, “[Local news is critical infrastructure. It’s time we treat it that way.](#)” (6 July 2022).

24 Penelope Muse Abernathy, “[News deserts and ghost newspapers: Will local news survive?](#)” University of North Carolina (2020), p. 13.

■ How many newspapers are near you?



Source: [Medill School of Journalism, Media, & Integrated Marketing Communications](#)

At a time when the nation and Oregon are facing serious challenges, the shrinking supply of local news is a problem. Before we catalog the current state of Oregon's news media, it's important to think about why the health of local news ecosystems matters.

Local News and Community Civic Health

The importance of news to community civic health may not seem obvious at a time when so many Americans say they don't trust the media. Echoing findings by other surveys, a recent Gallup poll found Americans' confidence in news at [historic lows](#).²⁵ Research suggests, however, that attitudes toward *local* news are more positive. A recent study by the Knight Foundation, for example, found that Americans tend to [trust local news](#) more than national news, and that, "compared with other sources of local information, Americans say local news does the best job of keeping them informed, holding leaders accountable and amplifying stories in their

When the flow of community information declines, so does civic engagement.

25 Megan Brenan, "[Media confidence ratings at record lows](#)," Gallup (18 July 2022).

communities.”²⁶ A recent OVBC survey shows the same pattern here in Oregon: 65% of respondents said they follow news about local politics and neighborhood or community issues at least somewhat closely, and 75% of respondents said they trust the information that comes from local news organizations.

■ How much, if at all, do you trust the information about local/community issues that comes from local news organizations?

Response Category	N = 1,781	
A lot	23%	75%
Some	51%	
Not too much	17%	22%
Not at all	5%	
Don't know	3%	

Source: Survey of adult Oregonians (n = 1,781), Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, August 2022

That foundation of trust is important because local news plays a critical role in the civic health of communities. Studies have shown that the supply of local news is correlated with higher rates of civic engagement.²⁷ Robust local journalism matters to how informed citizens are,²⁸ and according to another recent Knight Foundation report, a healthy news and information ecosystem creates “a virtuous circle whereby improved information contributes to improved community outcomes.”²⁹ By the same token, when the flow of community information declines, so does civic engagement. As political scientists Danny Hayes and Jennifer Lawless put it, declining civic engagement is linked to “the dwindling supply of information that citizens need to keep apprised of their elected officials’ actions and behavior.”³⁰

26 Sarah Fioroni, “Local news most trusted in keeping Americans informed about their communities,” Knight Foundation (19 May 2022).

27 Lee Shaker, “Dead newspapers and citizens’ civic engagement,” *Political Communication* 31, no. 1 (2014), pp. 131-148; Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, “The decline of local news and its effects: New evidence from longitudinal data,” *Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (2018), pp. 332-336.

28 Erik Peterson, “Not dead yet: Political learning from newspapers in a changing media landscape,” *Political Behavior* 43 (2021), pp. 339-361.

29 Hannah Stonebraker and Lindsay Green-Barber, “[Healthy local news & information ecosystems](#),” Impact Architects (March 2021), p. 16.

30 Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, *News Hole: The Demise of Local Journalism and Political Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 5.

The loss and shrinkage of local news organizations also reduces accountability of government and of corporate interests. A [recent study](#) by the Harvard Business School showed that regulatory violations increase in towns that lose their local newspaper.³¹ The city of Bell, California learned the hard way how local journalism matters: While local news budgets shrank leaving [fewer reporters](#) to cover city politics, city officials misappropriated funds and voted themselves substantial raises that made them among the highest paid local officials in the country.³² Newspaper closures are also associated with higher local taxes and lower government accountability.³³ Local news outlets are also important for setting the agendas of larger news outlets and of higher levels of government, bringing attention to local-level problems.³⁴ As one recent book about local news argues, while “a robust local news media by no means ensures good government, its absence almost guarantees worse government.”³⁵

***Shriveling
local news
impacts
peoples' sense
of community
connection.***

How Important are Newspapers?

Despite dramatic changes in the media industry, local newspapers remain a critical linchpin in local news ecosystems because they are the most significant producers of local news in most communities.³⁶ Among other things, strong local newspapers can “force local TV to raise its game [and] make elected officials more responsive and efficient.”³⁷ One study of California cities showed that mayoral elections became less competitive when local newspapers closed, illustrating how the loss of local newspapers creates a “low information environment” that gives political incumbents an advantage over challengers.³⁸ Despite the challenges local newspapers face in an increasingly disadvantageous market, they “may...ironically become more important for local journalism as our media environment changes, because they increasingly are the only organizations doing ongoing on-the-

31 Avery Forman, “[How newspaper closures open the door to corporate crime](#),” Harvard Business School (8 October 2021).

32 David Folkenflik, “[How the L.A. Times broke the Bell corruption story](#),” NPR (24 September 2010).

33 Pengjie Gao, Chang Lee, and Dermot Murphy, “Financing dies in darkness? The impact of newspaper closures on public finance,” *Journal of Financial Economics* 135, no. 2 (2020), pp. 445-467; Lindsey Meeks, “Undercovered, underinformed: Local news, local elections, and U.S. sheriffs,” *Journalism Studies* 21, no. 1 (2020), pp. 1609-1626; James M Snyder Jr. and David Strömberg, “Press coverage and political accountability,” *Journal of Political Economy* 118, no. 2 (2010), pp. 355-408.

34 Steven Barnett, “[Journalism, democracy, and the public interest: Rethinking media pluralism for the digital age](#),” Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (September 2009).

35 Hayes and Lawless, *News Hole*, p. 11.

36 Philip Napoli and Jessican Mahone, “[Local newspapers are suffering, but they're still \(by far\) the most significant journalism producers in their communities](#),” (9 September 2019), *The Conversation*.

37 Joshua Benton, “[When local newspapers shrink, fewer people bother to run for mayor](#)” (9 April 2019), Nieman Lab.

38 Meghan E. Rubado and Jay T. Jennings, “Political consequences of the endangered local watchdog: Newspaper decline and mayoral elections in the US,” *Urban Affairs Review* 56, no. 5 (2019), pp. 1327-1356.

ground reporting on local public affairs.”³⁹

However, newspapers are not the only component of healthy local news ecosystems. Public radio, local television stations, digital-only start-ups, and social media networks can all help to fill critical information needs. The notion of “news deserts” sometimes equates the loss of newspapers with the complete disappearance of local news, and focuses attention on saving traditional newspapers rather than examining the overall health of local news ecosystems. In this report, while acknowledging the accumulating research that shows the critical importance of newspapers, we have intentionally looked beyond newspapers to many forms of local news.

The loss of local news also contributes to political polarization. When local newsrooms are hollowed out and news focused on national politics replaces a truly local focus, people learn less about city- and state-level politics, voting levels decline especially in down-ballot races,⁴⁰ and polarized voting increases.⁴¹ In fact, research suggests that “When people read news about their neighborhoods, schools and municipal services, they think like locals,” but “when they read about national political conflict, they think like partisans.”⁴²

Shriving local news also impacts peoples’ sense of community connection. A readily available supply of quality local news and information is especially important because for most people, who are balancing busy personal and professional lives and all the stresses of modern life, civic engagement is “costly” in terms of time and energy. When the ready supply of quality, trusted local news declines, staying civically engaged in one’s community can become even more challenging.

Having access to and keeping up with local news is correlated with a stronger sense of local community attachment⁴³ and higher com-

Community connection is built through flows of information that fairly and accurately reflect the lived experience of all community members.

39 Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

40 Christopher Chapp and Peter Aehl, “Newspapers and political participation: The relationship between ballot rolloff and local newspaper circulation,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2021), pp. 235-252.

41 Joshua P. Darr, “Local news coverage is declining — and that could be bad for American politics,” *FiveThirtyEight* (2 June 2021); David J. Moskowitz, “Local news, information, and the nationalization of U.S. elections,” *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 1 (2021), pp. 114-129.

42 Joshua P. Darr, Matthew P. Hitt, and Johanna L. Dunaway, *Home Style Opinion: How Local Newspapers Can Slow Polarization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

43 Michael Barthel, Jesse Holcomb, Jessica Mahone, and Amy Mitchell, “Civic engagement strongly tied to local news

munity satisfaction.⁴⁴ According to a [recent report](#) for the Knight Foundation, “Community connection is built through flows of information that fairly and accurately reflect the lived experience of all community members.”⁴⁵ Indeed, “local media provide the informational backbone of what people know about social life in their city.”⁴⁶

This correlation between robust local news and a sense of community connection can be particularly important in small and mid-sized communities. Local news helps residents put national issues into local context while they “help residents in a community understand what interests they share with their next-door neighbors.”⁴⁷ The loss of local news can mean that “we lose a fabric that holds together communities; we lose crucial information that allows democracy to function; at the most basic level, we lose stories that need to be told.”⁴⁸

The loss of that sense of connection was poignantly illustrated in a 2021 story published in *The Atlantic*, titled [What We Lost When Gannett Came to Town](#). The story chronicled what happened in a small town in southeastern Iowa when its local newspaper, *The Hawk Eye*, was acquired by the nation's largest newspaper chain:

“These days, most of The Hawk Eye’s articles are ripped from other Gannett-owned Iowa publications, such as The Des Moines Register and the Ames Tribune, written for a readership three hours away. The Opinion section, once an arena for local columnists and letter writers to spar over the merits and morals of riverboat gambling and railroad jobs moving to Topeka, is dominated by syndicated national columnists.

....Stories are the connective tissue of a community; they introduce people to their neighbors, and they encourage readers to listen to and empathize with one another. When that tissue disintegrates, something vital rots away.”⁴⁹

This correlation between robust local news and a sense of community connection can be particularly important in small and mid-sized communities.

[habits](#),” Pew Research Center (3 November 2016); Masahiro Yamamoto, “Community Newspaper Use Promotes Social Cohesion,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 32, no. 1 (2011), pp. 19-33.

44 Stonebraker & Green-Barber, “Healthy local news,” p. 9; see also Nick Mathews, “Life in a news desert: The perceived impact of a newspaper closure on community members,” *Journalism* 23(6) (2020), pp. 1250-65.

45 Stonebraker & Green-Barber, “Healthy local news,” p. 6.

46 Anna Leupold, Ulrike Klinger, and Otfried Jarren, “Imagining the City: How local journalism depicts social cohesion,” *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 7 (2018), pp. 960-982.

47 Abernathy, “News deserts,” p. 13.

48 Whitney Joiner and Alexa McMahon, “[The lost local news issue](#),” *Washington Post Magazine* (30 November 2021).

49 Elain Godfrey, “[What we lost when Gannett came to town](#),” *The Atlantic* (5 October 2021).

“Historical” News Deserts and The Importance of Inclusive Local News

While sounding the alarm about the declining local news industry, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that journalism has not always necessarily served communities or democracy very well. While the “centers of power” across the country “tend to be well served by news organizations, poorer and less densely populated areas suffer from chronic news drought.”⁵⁰ Indeed, many communities are what journalism scholar Nikki Usher calls “historical news deserts” — areas whose lack of access to professional, truly local news about their communities far preceded the contraction in the news industry over the last two decades.⁵¹

Moreover, much of the content provided by locally based outlets may not actually be local news,⁵² and local news outlets have often overlooked important public issues in favor of human interest, scandal, and salacious stories; by featuring content dictated by corporate headquarters over deep local reporting⁵³; and/or by featuring a heavy emphasis on crime, often through a racialized lens, creating distorted pictures of minority communities.⁵⁴

Indeed, whole swaths of the American public, particularly rural and BIPOC communities, have long distrusted and resented how the mainstream media have portrayed them, and news outlets around the country have only haltingly begun to deal with their own historical role in systems of racial discrimination and oppression.⁵⁵ According to a recent book by journalism professors Candice Callison and Mary Lynn Young, provocatively titled *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities*, journalistic “crises in representation, trust, and credibility” are “chronic and persistent.”⁵⁶ From this perspective, legacy journalism's problems run deeper than its faltering business model.

Our hopes for this report is that it spurs conversation about the kinds of information and connection local communities need and how those can be supplied in new ways that rebuild.

50 Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, “The challenge of local news provision” (2019), *Journalism* 29(1), p. 163.

51 Nikki Usher, *News for the Rich, White, and Blue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

52 Jessica Mahone, Wun Wang, Philip Napoli, Matthew Weber, & Katie McCullough, “[Who's producing local journalism? Assessing journalistic output across different outlet types](#)” (August 2019), DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy.

53 See Matthew S. Levendusky, “How does local TV news change viewers' attitudes?: The case of Sinclair Broadcasting,” *Political Communication* 39:1 (2022), pp. 23-38.

54 Neff, Popiel and Pickard, “Philadelphia's news media system,” p. 479; see also Sue Robinson, *Networked News, Racial Divides: How power and privilege shape public discourse in progressive communities* (Cambridge University Press 2017).

55 Brent Staples “[Opinion: How the white press wrote off Black America](#),” *New York Times* (10 July 2021); Los Angeles Times Editorial Board “[Editorial: An Examination of The Times' Failures on Race, Our Apology and a Path Forward](#),” (27 September 2020); Wesley Lowery “[Black City. White Paper](#),” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (15 February 2022).

56 Candice Callison and Mary Lynn Young, *Reckoning: Journalism's limits and possibilities* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 48.

At the same time, as journalism scholar Andrea Wenzel observes, these same legacy news outlets are often still “the most effective way to meet many people where they are....Despite the reservations many have toward existing legacy outlets, residents of numerous communities continue to rely on these same outlets — rural newspapers whose reporting staffs have been gutted, or local television stations that devote a disproportionate amount of airtime to crime.”⁵⁷

One of our hopes for this report is that it spurs conversation not just about the loss of legacy news outlets and traditional modes of journalism, but also about the kinds of information and connection local communities need and how those can be supplied in new ways that rebuild — or build for the first time — trust with communities.

IV. The Nationwide Local News Crisis

Despite its importance to community life, local journalism is in crisis. In the past 15 years, over one-fourth of American newspapers went out of business.⁵⁸ Today, over 200 U.S. counties do not have a local newspaper, and those losses are concentrated in less affluent communities “that have no alternative source of reliable local news.”⁵⁹

It's not just the increasing number of these “news deserts” that is concerning, but also the hollowing out of the news outlets that remain. One recent study concludes that many of the 6,700 newspapers still standing have become “ghost newspapers,” operating with just a fraction of the reporters and resources they once had.⁶⁰ These resource-strapped newsrooms often replace truly local content with cheaper-to-produce national news culled from wire services, internet searches, and social media.

The second-most common reason people gave for dissatisfaction with local news was a lack of local coverage, or what they perceived as too much focus on Portland or national news.

⁵⁷ Andrea Wenzel, *Community-Centered Journalism: Engaging people, exploring solutions, and building trust* (University of Illinois Press 2020), p. 158.

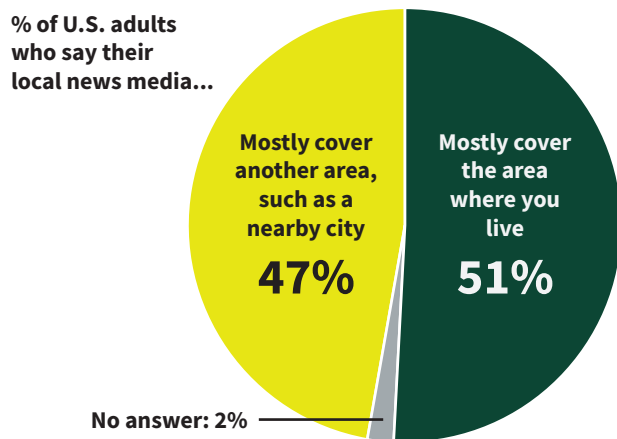
⁵⁸ Tom Stites, “[A quarter of U.S. newspapers have died in 15 years, a new UNC news deserts study found](#),” Poynter (July 27 2022).

⁵⁹ Abernathy, “News deserts,” p. 89.

⁶⁰ Abernathy, “News deserts.”

Overall, in many parts of the country, the public's supply of quality, trusted local news is lower than ever.⁶¹ Almost half of U.S. adults (47%) in a [recent survey](#) said their local news outlets mostly cover areas outside where they live.⁶² That finding is echoed here in Oregon: In a recent OVBC survey, the second-most common reason people gave for dissatisfaction with local news was a lack of local coverage, or what they perceived as too much focus on Portland or national news.

■ Nearly half of Americans say their local news media cover an area other than where they live



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted Oct. 15-Nov. 8, 2018. "For Local News, Americans Embrace Digital but Still Want Strong Community Connection"

The hollowing out of local news is in part due to the increasing conglomerate ownership of local media, including a growing number of news outlets that have been acquired by private equity firms.⁶³ Six conglomerates currently own more than half of U.S. newspapers,⁶⁴ and these owners often reduce staff in order to cut costs, and lack ties to the local community.⁶⁵ These newspaper chains include Alden Global Capital that currently owns more than 200 newspapers around the country; Gatehouse Media (part of Gannett, the largest newspaper

61 However, as documented by journalism scholar Nikki Usher in her recent book *News for the Rich, White, and Blue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), some liberal, upscale and Democratic-leaning communities in certain parts of the country are served by a disproportionate number of news outlets.

62 Pew Research Center, "For local news, Americans embrace digital but still want strong community connection" (26 March 2019).

63 Brier Dudley, "Study: Private equity firms buying newspapers cut local news," *Seattle Times* (February 18, 2022); see also Pickard, *Democracy without journalism? Confronting the misinformation society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

64 Future of Media Project, "Index of US mainstream media ownership," Harvard University (2021).

65 Benjamin Toff and Nick Matthews, "Is social media killing local news? An examination of engagement and ownership patterns in U.S. community news on Facebook," *Digital Journalism* (2021), pp. 1-20.

chain in the U.S.), which owns over 260 newspapers around the country including the *Statesman Journal* and *Register Guard* here in Oregon; and Lee Enterprises, which owns 90 dailies around the country including several in Oregon, such as the Albany *Democrat-Herald* and the Corvallis *Gazette-Times*.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, local television—a [main source of news](#) for many Americans⁶⁷—is also being transformed and challenged. In contrast to the situation facing many local newspapers, the economic picture for local tv stations is relatively strong, which means that many do invest in producing local news coverage. By some accounts, local television news production is higher than ever, leaving local television as seemingly “the most obvious medium to fill the local news void.”⁶⁸ However, overall viewership has declined,⁶⁹ and national stories are increasingly taking the place of local stories on television, just as they are in newspapers.⁷⁰

The increasingly challenging economic environment for local news has meant the loss of many of the reporting jobs that produce local news. Between 2008 and 2021, legacy newsroom employment dropped by 26%, representing a loss of 30,000 newsroom personnel.⁷¹ Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that Oregon is among twenty U.S. states with a comparatively low concentration of news industry jobs.⁷²

The explosion in social media has exacerbated the challenges for local news. Many people now encounter news indirectly via social media networks rather than directly from news organizations.⁷³ From a business perspective, social media platforms divert audiences and siphon off advertising dollars, while digital platform algorithms often disad-

The explosion in social media has exacerbated the challenges for local news. Many people now encounter news indirectly via social media networks rather than directly from news organizations.

66 See McKay Coppins, “[A secretive hedge fund is gutting newsrooms](#),” *The Atlantic* (14 October 2021); Amanda Ripley, “[Can the news be fixed?](#)” *The Atlantic* (18 May 2021).

67 Pew Research Center, “[Local TV news fact sheet](#),” Pew Research Center (13 July 2021).

68 Penny Muse Abernathy, Abernathy, “[Filling the Local News Void](#),” UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media (n.d.).

69 Pew Research Center, “Local TV news fact sheet.”

70 Gregory J. Martin and Joshua McCrain, “Local news and national politics,” *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2 (2019), pp. 372-384.

71 Mason Walker, “[U.S. newsroom employment has fallen 26% since 2008](#),” Pew Research Center (13 July 2021).

72 “[Occupational Employment and Wages](#),” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

73 Matthew Hindman, *The Internet Trap* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Kirsten Eddy, “[The differences seem to be growing: A look at the rising generation of news consumers](#),” Nieman Lab (June 22, 2022).

vantage local journalism compared with other kinds of content.⁷⁴ Social media platforms and search engines “now control as much as 80% of total advertising spent in many media markets... undermining the very business models that sustain local news.”⁷⁵

Yet because audiences now congregate on social media (half of U.S. adults report that they get news from social media at least some of the time)⁷⁶, journalists have to spend more time trying to manage social media feeds, which can leave less time for reporting news.⁷⁷ Most news outlets today maintain a presence on Facebook and other social media because those platforms have effectively become the gatekeepers of online information. But it's not clear that local news can effectively compete with other social media content for the attention of an increasingly distracted audience. Meanwhile, Facebook has recently decided to stop paying news organizations the modest sum it had been paying for their content to run on the platform's News tab.⁷⁸

Earlier optimism about the possibilities for social media advertising and audience traffic to sustain local journalism has faded, while the growing misinformation, mistrust, and polarized debate prevalent on social media create a difficult environment for journalism to make headway in. As one journalist responded to a recent survey, “Cultural polarization is bleeding into people's attitudes toward news”⁷⁹ —a challenge described by many of the people we interviewed for this report, as described further below.

Overall, national trends paint a concerning picture for the local news that is so important to community civic health. What is the picture here in Oregon?

“There’s so much information that media offers and that we rely on...journalists do a lot of hard work to gather and translate and synthesize information quickly for news consumers...my hope is that as media changes in innovative ways, there will be greater recognition for the value of journalism, an essential part of our social fabric.”

— JACKLEEN DE LA HARPE
 Founding executive director,
 Underscore

74 Joshua Benton, “If Facebook stops putting news in front of readers, will readers bother to go looking for it?” Nieman Lab (12 January 2018); Nushin Rashidian, George Civeris, and Pete Brown, “Platforms and publishers: The end of an era,” Columbia Journalism Review (22 November 2019).

75 Toff & Matthews, “Is social media killing local news?,” p. 5.

76 Pew Research Center, “Social media and news fact sheet,” (20 September 2022)

77 Damian Radcliffe and Ryan Wallace, “Life at local newspapers in a turbulent era: Findings from a survey of more than 300 newsroom employees in the United States,” Columbia Journalism Review (7 October 2021).

78 Sara Fischer, “Scoop: Meta officially cuts funding for U.S. news publishers,” Axios (28 July 2022).

79 Radcliffe and Wallace, “Life at local newspapers.”

V. Previous Losses of Local News in Oregon

Mirroring the national trends outlined above, the supply of local news has declined in Oregon too.

A [study of news deserts](#) around the United States in 2020 identified over 20 newspapers that had closed or merged in Oregon since 2004, and identified two Oregon counties (Sherman, with a land area of 831 miles and a population of less than 1,700, and Wheeler, with a land area of over 1,700 miles and a population of just over 1,400) that had no local newspaper. That report also identified 15 Oregon counties that each had only one newspaper — though the report also identified several digital news outlets, public radio stations, and news outlets serving Black and Latino communities in particular that help to fill that void.⁸⁰ A more [recent study](#) by the journalism organization The Poynter Institute identified two additional recent newspaper closures in Oregon: *The Umpqua Post* in Reedsport, which closed in June of 2020, and the *Philomath Express*, which closed in September of 2020.⁸¹

Additionally, we found further closures, such as Chemeketa Community College's student-run newspaper *The Courier*, which closed in December of 2020, and the *Dead Mountain Echo* in Oakridge, which closed in November of 2020. Others changed their circulation models to meet budgetary and resource constraints, such as Portland's Black-owned newspaper *The Skanner* moving to online only production in January of 2020, and Eastern Oregon University's student-run KEOL radio station moving to a podcast-only model in July of 2021. As we were preparing this report, another news desert threatened to emerge in Oregon when the editor and reporters at the *Herald and News* in Klamath Falls left the newsroom, citing low pay and a workload too heavy for them to produce quality news (see below).⁸² And, mirroring a larger nationwide trend, in September of this year, the *Medford Mail Tribune* [announced](#) it would no longer print and deliver a physical newspaper, moving all of its content online. Announcing the news, owner Steven Saslow said, "I made a commitment to the Rogue Valley to keep a printed newspaper

The supply of local news has declined in Oregon.

⁸⁰ Abernathy, "News deserts."

⁸¹ Kristen Hare, "[More than 100 local newsrooms closed during the coronavirus pandemic](#)," Poynter (2 December 2021).

⁸² Allison Frost, "[Herald and News regrouping after loss of all its news staff](#)," Oregon Public Broadcasting (7 March 2022).

as long as we could break even. We eclipsed that a long time ago.”⁸³

These losses have hit less-populated areas of the state particularly hard, as the data we present below shows. As the [Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism](#) (FORJ) observes,

*“In Oregon, nearly a quarter of the state’s newspapers have shuttered since 2004. Two rural counties are news deserts and 16 more are left with only one news organization to cover hundreds of square miles. Just as concerning, more than 50 percent of Oregon’s incorporated cities lack a local news source to report on community government and business activities...”*⁸⁴

The shrinking number of local news outlets in Oregon is connected to declining audiences and a declining public willingness to pay for news — and perhaps, to general unawareness of the financial challenges many newsrooms are facing.⁸⁵ To cite just one example, daily circulation of the *Eugene Register-Guard* reportedly dropped from nearly 80,000 in the year 2000 to under 20,000 in early 2022.⁸⁶

The number of paid subscribers for some newspapers in Oregon, such as some of the Pamplin Media Group papers, is reportedly stable or even growing. The Oregonian’s editor, Therese Bottomly, recently wrote in a newsletter to readers that her paper attracts 9 million unique online visitors monthly, on average, along with nearly 20,000 digital subscribers to their web outlet, OregonLive. But newsrooms even at those outlets are struggling due to a precipitous drop in print advertising, which started during the so-called Great Recession of 2008 and accelerated during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁷ For example, many print publications depended on grocery and retail store inserts, which generated significant revenue with almost no labor costs, but those have now in many cases largely disappeared.

Many of the newsrooms that remain across Oregon have experienced sharp declines in revenues and staff, and some local news outlets that were locally owned have been acquired by national companies — developments that may further threaten the production of quality local news.

83 AP News, “[Newspaper in Medford, Oregon to cease print publication](#)” (21 September 2022).

84 [Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism](#), (n.d.), para.

85 Damian Radcliffe, “[Local news outlets can fill the media trust gap — but the public needs to pony up.](#)” *The Conversation* (19 November 2019).

86 Bob Keefer, “[TRIPS for Journalism: You can now support local journalism around Eugene with tax-deductible donations to a new foundation started by EW.](#)” *Eugene Weekly* (3 March 2022).

87 Damian Radcliffe, “[COVID-19 has ravaged American newsrooms — here’s why that matters.](#)” (20 July 2020).

Many of the newsrooms that remain across Oregon have experienced sharp declines in revenues and staff, and some local news outlets that were locally owned have been acquired by national companies — developments that may further threaten the production of quality local news.

For some Oregon news outlets, disruptions and closures have hit suddenly, hastened by the COVID pandemic. For example, Chelsea Marr, formerly with *Eagle Newspapers*, described to us her experience as publisher of the *Hood River News*:

“When COVID came on, as you know, businesses were really just shuttered. I mean, they couldn't be open, they had limited hours, restaurants ... had to close their doors. So all of those businesses that we rely on for revenue stopped advertising. And then you've got some of your bigger ones like your grocery stores, that, even though they didn't close they couldn't keep their shelves full. So they weren't advertising either. So the inserts, the advertising, all of that really stopped. And we really got hit hard.

...I think newspapers overall, all over the nation, probably I could say, at least in smaller communities, were already teetering on that edge. When COVID hit, it just really slammed us. And so Eagle [Newspapers] had been trying to sell...for a while ...but then when COVID hit, we were just really struggling, and they said 'we're going to close down.' It was quick. I let employees know on Thursday and by the following Tuesday, it was the 31st of March, and that was our last day.”

Reviving Legacy Outlets and Creating New Outlets

The news is not all bad for Oregon's local news outlets, however. For example, Oregon Public Broadcasting has reportedly added 15 new journalism-related positions over the past 5 years thanks to a philanthropic campaign, allowing for greater coverage of areas outside the Willamette Valley such as Pendleton and Bend. They have also added several more positions through organic growth and some shorter-term positions via grant funding.

At the same time, some newspapers around the state have survived (even if sometimes in altered form) by being acquired by Oregon buyers. Ultimately, Marr herself purchased the *Hood River News* along with *The Dalles Chronicle* and several other publications serving the Columbia Gorge and converted them into one Gorge-wide weekly print publication, the *Columbia Gorge News*. Writer Trisha Walker later [told](#) *Columbia*

Gorge News readers, “I know that the combined newspaper is different than what you are used to. It’s not what I’m used to, either. We are now covering five counties in a weekly paper.” But “the paper you are holding now would not exist had [Marr] not stepped up.”⁸⁸

There are other cases as well of Oregonians working together to purchase and repurpose news outlets that were in danger of going out of business or losing their distinctive local focus, such as the purchase in 2019 of the 100-year-old *Bend Bulletin* when its parent company faced bankruptcy. Purchased by locally based EO Media Group, the *Bulletin*, along with the *Redmond Spokesman*, was brought back from the brink of extinction with the help of local community leaders who helped to raise funds.

Another example of Oregonians stepping up to bolster the local news ecosystem is the creation in 2014 of the *Oregon Capitol Bureau* by the Pamplin Media Group, which owns over two dozen newspapers in the Portland metropolitan area and central Oregon, and EO Media Group, which now owns 17 newspapers throughout Oregon and Southwest Washington. The Bureau publishes the *Oregon Capitol Insider*, designed “to counter a disturbing decline in independent news coverage of state government.”⁸⁹ (A report in 2018 found that the Salem press corps shrunk by nearly two-thirds since 2005, from 37 reporters to only 13 in that year’s legislative session.)⁹⁰ The Bureau grew to include the *Salem Reporter*, a subscription-based digital news service started in 2018 by veteran journalist and publisher Les Zaitz. As discussed further below, these entities are playing an important role in revivifying coverage of Oregon politics and government.

Meanwhile, some legacy outlets are adapting to the changed economic environment by reincorporating as nonprofits, partnering with nonprofits to allow them to accept contributed revenue, and/or establishing a membership model. Earlier this year, for example, the *Eugene Weekly* established the nonprofit Twin Rivers Institute for Press Sustainability (TRIPS), which enables it to collect tax-deductible donations to sustain small news

Some legacy outlets are adapting to the changed economic environment by reincorporating as nonprofits, partnering with nonprofits to allow them to accept contributed revenue, and/or establishing a membership model.

⁸⁸ Trisha Walker, “[Behind the scenes: Requesting grace as newspaper navigates some big changes](#),” *Columbia Gorge News* (24 June 2020).

⁸⁹ *Oregon Capitol Insider*, “[About Us](#)” (n.d.).

⁹⁰ Anna Marum, “[Oregon’s dwindling statehouse reporters are ‘treading water.’](#)” *Columbia Journalism Review* (2018), June 13.

outlets in and around Eugene.⁹¹ *Willamette Week* established a fiscal sponsorship with a nonprofit foundation to create an Investigative and Enterprise Fund, and created a membership organization, Friends of Willamette Week

In the next section, we present a more thorough map of the current state of local news in Oregon. Later in this report, we return to more examples of news start-ups and other innovations that are shaping the near-term and perhaps long-term future of Oregon's local news and information infrastructure.

VI. Studying Local Information Ecosystems

In the previous section we reviewed some of what has already been established about the state of local news in Oregon. In the remainder of this report, we provide original and timely data — both quantitative and qualitative — that paints a fuller picture of the health of Oregon's local news ecosystem.

In doing this work, we drew from several frameworks for assessing the health of local news and information ecosystems that have been developed in recent years. While their terminology and methods vary somewhat, a central insight they share is that the civic health of communities is connected to the availability and quality of local news.

For example, a [framework](#) developed by Impact Architects with the support of the Democracy Fund, the Google News Initiative, and the Knight Foundation combines data on the number, size, and types of local news outlets in a community, including the diversity of their staff and of the communities they aim to serve, along with data on forms of financial support for local news and local residents' attitudes and perceptions of local news. These data can then be compared with data from other communities to compare the strengths and challenges for local media systems across

The civic health of communities is connected to the availability and quality of local news.

91 Keefer, "TRIPS for Journalism."

different states and communities. Analyzing nine communities around the country using this framework yielded “consistent evidence that the health of information providers, specifically journalism organizations, and strong relationships among information providers and community members, are correlated with engaged residents, community cohesion, and other positive community outcomes.”⁹²

A [similar framework](#) developed by the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University mapped local news outlets in New Jersey in terms of the municipalities each outlet serves. Those numbers were then correlated with community characteristics including median household income, educational attainment, and rural, suburban or urban setting to reveal structural factors most closely associated with high numbers of media outlets in each municipality. Not surprisingly, that analysis found that higher-income areas are more likely to be served by more media outlets — a finding also documented in other recent research.⁹³

A recent study of Philadelphia’s news ecosystem looked at the characteristics of 38 of the city’s largest media outlets, such as their ownership structures, platform type, and staffing levels, and the news content each produced over a several month period in 2021, and correlated these with the size and socioeconomics of local news audiences. It concluded that “Philadelphia’s news media system underserves communities with lower levels of income and education,” and “this structural gap generates a measurable gap in the provision of news content meeting the critical information needs of these communities,” particularly by over-producing breaking crime coverage and under-producing news about COVID-19.⁹⁴

Other frameworks are more qualitative, rather than quantitative. For example, a report compiled for the Democracy Fund in 2017 explored North Carolina’s news and information ecosystem. While it included an overall description of the state’s news outlets, that report primarily used interviews with journalists and civic leaders to paint a picture of the overall health of the ecosystem and “ways to strengthen people’s access to information that is central to a healthy democracy.”⁹⁵

While it is critical to understand which media Oregonians are choosing to pay attention to and why, this report focuses on understanding what is available for them to choose from.

92 Stonebraker and Green-Barber, “Healthy local news”, p. 127.

93 Nikki Usher, News for the Rich, White, and Blue.

94 Timothy Neff, Pawel Popiel, and Victor Pickard, “Philadelphia’s news media system: Which audiences are underserved?”, *Journal of Communication* (2022), p. 476.

95 Fiona Morgan, “[Learning from North Carolina](#)” (5 December 2017), p. 2.

Our report is only a first step toward these more comprehensive analyses of local news and information in Oregon. As a starting place for future research and a revealing project in its own right, we deliberately focus here on mapping the *supply* of local news around the state of Oregon — specifically, the outlets that are regularly providing original local reporting. For now, we do not focus directly on measuring demand for local news—a subject also deserving of careful research—or on the attitudes of Oregonians toward their local media. While it is critical to understand which media Oregonians are choosing to pay attention to and why, this report focuses on understanding what is available for them to choose *from*.

It's important to note that the overall health of local information ecosystems cannot be measured simply by counting the number of news outlets a community or state contains. For one thing, as we discuss further below, just because an outlet is physically based in a particular locale doesn't mean it regularly produces truly local news content. In fact, it is possible for a community to have many media outlets yet still experience significant gaps in the information residents need to understand and address community problems.⁹⁶

Moreover, some websites purporting to offer local news may actually be engaged in something other than journalism. A growing number of online “news” sites across the country claim to be local news outlets but are actually centrally run by politically aligned organizations. These sites lean heavily on public relations press releases and algorithmically generated content reproduced across a number of other sites.⁹⁷ Metric Media, one such company, operates a number of websites that mimic the look of traditional news sites, such as the Central Oregon Times, the Lane County News, and the South Coast Times. But the stories featured on these sites are often “press release submissions” whose authorship is unclear, or stories whose bylines simply list the name of the website itself, while other stories appear to be algorithmically generated and/or replicated across many of the organization's other websites. Given what's been uncovered about such sites through investigative reporting, it's important to distinguish them from traditional, public interest journalism.⁹⁸

A growing number of online “news” sites across the country claim to be local news outlets but are actually centrally run by politically aligned organizations.

⁹⁶ Brendan R. Watson and Sarah Cavanah, “Community information needs: A theory and methodological framework,” *Mass Communication and Society* 18, no. 5 (2015): 651-673.

⁹⁷ Priyanjana Bengani (2019, December 18), “Hundreds of ‘pink slime’ local news outlets are distributing algorithmic stories and conservative talking points,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (18 December 2019).

⁹⁸ Davey Alba and Jack Nicas, “As Local News Dies, a Pay-for-Play Network Rises in Its Place,” *New York Times* (18 October 2020); Asa Royal & Philip M. Napoli, “Local journalism's possible future: Metric Media and its approach to local information

Although it’s not the only measure for determining the health of a news ecosystem, careful counting and mapping of news outlets is one important step.⁹⁹ Accordingly, we have attempted in our quantitative assessment to be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible—to capture small digital news start-ups right alongside the remaining big legacy outlets.

It is important to note that our method — like any method of measurement — is imperfect. Some outlets that contribute to local news and information might not be captured here, either because they are very small, or don’t have an online presence, or didn’t produce any original local news during our sampling period. *(If you think you notice a missing outlet, you can add your feedback [here](#).)*

It is also important to note that a variety of non-journalistic entities also provide important community information. As vital as legacy news media are—particularly newspapers, which are especially critical for the flow of original and investigative local news reporting¹⁰⁰—their role in the news and information ecosystems of communities is changing, and is augmented by the work of other organizations. In an era marked by the rise of digital and social media “that link concerned citizen groups to one another, citizens and other community institutions...necessarily play an increasingly important role in fulfilling [community] information needs.”¹⁰¹ Organizations that fulfill important information needs “include city governments, government accountability agencies, civic foundations, libraries, schools, and community health clinics, among many others.”¹⁰²

Nevertheless, our focus here is primarily on journalistic organizations because of their unique institutional position.¹⁰³ While many organizations can provide important information

Organizations that fulfill important information needs “include city governments, government accountability agencies, civic foundations, libraries, schools, and community health clinics, among many others.

needs,” DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy (2021).

99 Philip M. Napoli, Sarah Stonbely, Kathleen McCollough, and Bryce Renninger, “Local journalism and the information needs of local communities: Towards a scalable assessment approach,” *Journalism Practice* 13, no. 8 (2019), pp. 1024-1028.

100 Mahone, et al, “Who’s producing local journalism?” (August 2019). This study found that while newspapers accounted for only 25% of media outlets, they produced 50% of original local news.

101 Watson & Cavanah, “Community information needs,” p. 653.

102 Ibid.; see also Pew Research Center, “[Local news in a digital age](#),” Pew Research Center (March 2015).

103 We also focus here only on news organizations even though we agree with the authors of a similar ecosystem assessment that “from a community member’s perspective, a trusted source of information might not necessarily be journalistic for any number of historical, structural, and logistical reasons. However, because there are not consistent databases and datasets for identifying non-journalistic sources of news and information across communities, we focus on journalistic information providers.” Stonebraker & Green-Barber, “Healthy local news,” p. 4.

to the public, the news media have a special role to play in investigating, fact-checking, and holding powerful entities to account and in providing — or trying to provide — a shared picture of reality upon which the public and policymakers can act.¹⁰⁴

VII. Mapping the Local News Ecosystem in Oregon

To create a snapshot of Oregon’s local news infrastructure, we conducted original research from July 2021 to August 2022 designed to identify all outlets around the state that regularly produce originally reported news about state and/or local public affairs. Here, we first describe how we identified these outlets. Then we present descriptive data on the types and ownership of Oregon’s news outlets, where they are concentrated, and where they are lacking.

We compiled our database from several sources, beginning with the Cision database of media outlets in Oregon.¹⁰⁵ We supplemented information found in Cision with information from other organizations, including the [US News Deserts](#) project, the [Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association](#), [Project Oasis](#), the [Institute for Nonprofit News](#), the [American Journalism Project](#), [Poynter](#), as well as through our personal and professional networks. This research yielded a database consisting of 645 media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, online news, radio stations, and television stations based in Oregon.¹⁰⁶

Not all locally based media outlets necessarily produce local news, however. Most notably, commercial radio stations (those that are operated for-profit, which distinguishes them from “public” or “community” radio stations) generally carry limited news programming at best¹⁰⁷, whereas local newspapers, local television, and public and community radio

104 Hayes and Lawless, News Hole.

105 Cision is a for-profit company that maintains a database of active media organizations, based on information provided by those organizations. While it provides a strong starting place for local news ecosystem mapping, the database has gaps due to organizations not providing or updating their information.

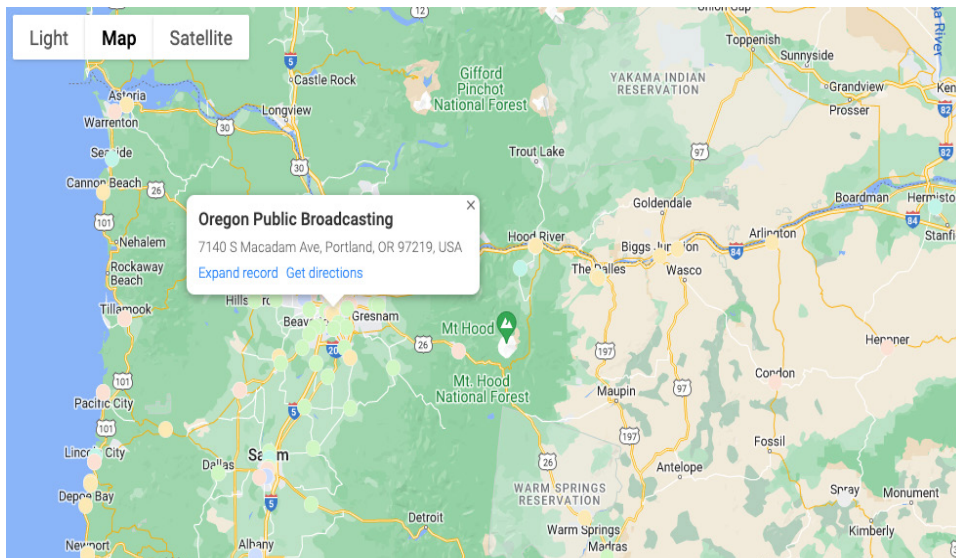
106 Some communities in Oregon are served by news media outlets from beyond the state’s borders (for example, people living in Ontario, Oregon may receive news from local outlet Argus Observer as well as from out-of-state television station KBOI (of Boise, ID), despite this outlet having limited coverage of Ontario news), while in some areas of the state, like the Portland metro area, news from across the Washington border can be highly relevant. For clarity’s sake, we decided to limit this initial ecosystem assessment to news outlets based in Oregon.

107 Abernathy, “News deserts...”, p. 67; Mahone, et al, “Who’s Producing Local Journalism...”, p. 3.

stations are more likely to include original, local news content.¹⁰⁸ And, as discussed above, some sites that look like traditional news outlets actually do not independently produce news at all, but rather, package press releases and algorithmically generated content.

Therefore, to winnow our initial set of media outlets, we created a more refined subset of the database, based on two steps. First, we excluded for-profit commercial radio stations from this subset, while retaining public and community radio stations. (Public radio is an important component of the news ecosystem, since 95% of American households can receive its over-the-air signals, and particularly important to local news in Oregon, which in 2020 was ranked eighth nationally in terms of its number of public radio outlets.)¹⁰⁹

Only a fraction of news content found in local media outlets is actually about local areas.



See the [interactive map](#) to find the location and additional detail of Oregon news outlets.

Second, we took a closer look at the content provided by the remaining outlets. Two coders independently judged whether each outlet a) appears to publish at least some local news content at least monthly, and b) produces original local journalism c) covering issues of local civic relevance.¹¹⁰ This emphasis on producing truly local original reporting is important, and also potentially creates a high threshold for inclusion

108 A recent study noted that “The average amount of weekday local TV news programming increased slightly in 2020.... Local TV stations dedicated an average of 6.2 hours to news programming per weekday in 2020, up slightly from 5.9 hours in 2018 and 2019.” Pew Research Center, “Local TV news...”; see also Abernathy, “News deserts...”, p. 84.

109 Abernathy, “News deserts,” p. 50.

110 According to the second criterion, we did not count job postings or calendars of events for example, as “original journalism.”

in our database, given recent research suggesting that only a fraction of news content found in local media outlets is actually about local areas.¹¹¹

Our emphasis on local civic relevance creates a more selective subset of news outlets that are most actively contributing to Oregon's civic life. Civically relevant local news fulfills broadly important information needs of communities, including information about matters of health and safety, education, economic opportunities, the environment, and politics and policy.¹¹² These included a broad range of stories including those about local government and politics, philanthropy and volunteering, environment, education, health, fire and other emergencies, crime, courts and law, economic issues, transportation, development and real estate, housing, diversity and inclusion, and poverty and inequities. As a practical example of this third criterion, we counted stories profiling local businesses or artists as civically relevant, but stories recommending wines, restaurants, or other products or businesses for consumers to try would not count as civically relevant news.

(For a more extensive description of our methodological decision and coding processes, see the [Methods appendix](#).)

111 Laura Hazard Owen, "An analysis of 16,000 stories, across 100 U.S. communities, finds very little actual local news," Nieman Lab (10 August 2018).

112 While various rubrics have been developed for measuring the civic relevance of news content, most converge around shared elements such as those articulated in a comprehensive and influential report by the Federal Communications Commission: content that helps residents learn about and participate in their community, work together to address shared problems, "make wise decisions that will affect the quality of their lives" and "live safe and healthy lives." See Federal Communications Commission, "The Information Needs of Communities," (July 2011).

■ **Critical Information Needs for Local Communities**

According to the FCC, all U.S. residents need access — in a timely manner, in an interpretable language, and via reasonably accessible media — to factual, nonpartisan information in eight essential categories:

<p>1. Emergencies and risks, both immediate and long-term;</p>	<p>5. Economic opportunities, including job information, job training, and small business assistance;</p>
<p>2. Health and welfare, including local health information as well as group-specific health information where it exists;</p>	<p>6. The environment, including air and water quality and access to recreation;</p>
<p>3. Education, including the quality of local schools and choices available to parents;</p>	<p>7. Civic information, including the availability of civic institutions and opportunities to associate with others;</p>
<p>4. Transportation, including available alternatives, costs, and schedules;</p>	<p>8. Political information, including information about candidates at all relevant levels of local governance and about relevant public policy initiative affecting communities and neighborhoods.</p>

Source: *Regarding Critical Information Needs of the American Public*

This winnowing process yielded a subset of 241 local news outlets around the state that appear to be regularly producing original, local, civically relevant news. These outlets are the basis of the analysis presented below.¹¹³ This analysis and the subset of news outlets on which it is based should be looked at as a potentially incomplete snapshot of the current state of local news in Oregon.

113 Note that these selection criteria filter out online news aggregator sites, such as [Jacksonville Review](#) & [Eugene Daily News](#), which may feature local news but do not appear to produce local news themselves. Also note that due to resource constraints, we did not systematically search for social media pages maintained by outlets in the dataset.

Outlet	Medium	Address	City	County	Pop Density of County	Pop Density Category	Region	Frequency
1 Albany Democrat-Herald	Newspaper	600 Lyon St Albany, OR 97321	Albany, OR	Linn County, Oregon	51.2	Rural	Metro/Valley	Daily
2 Argus Observer Online	Online	1180 SW 4th St Ontario, OR 97914	Ontario, OR	Malheur County, Oregon	3.1	Frontier	Southern Oregon	Daily
3 Ashland News	Online	Ashland, OR 97520	Ashland, OR	Linn County, Oregon	51.2	Rural	Metro/Valley	Semi-weekly
4 Astorian	Newspaper	549 Exchange St Astoria, OR 97103	Astoria, OR	Clatsop County, Oregon	34.3	Rural	Coastal Oregon	Tri-weekly
5 Baker City Herald	Newspaper	2005 Washington Ave Baker City, OR 978...	Baker City, OR	Baker County, Oregon	5.2	Frontier	Eastern Oregon	Daily
6 Banks Post	Newspaper	Banks, OR	Banks, OR	Washington County, Or...	753.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Daily
7 Beach Connection	Online	SW 8th Ave & SW Chestnut St Portland, ...	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Daily
8 Beacon	Newspaper	5000 N Willamette Blvd Portland, OR 972...	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Weekly
9 Beaverton Valley Times	Newspaper	Beaverton, OR	Beaverton, OR	Washington County, Or...	753.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Weekly
10 Blue Mountain Eagle	Newspaper	N Dekum St & N Michigan Ave Portland, ...	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Daily
11 Blue Mountain Eagle	Newspaper	105 N Canyon Blvd John Day, OR 97845	John Day, OR	Grant County, Oregon	1.6	Frontier	Eastern Oregon	Weekly
12 Bridgeline	Online	Portland, OR	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Daily
13 Broadside	Online	NW College Way Bend, OR 97703	Bend, OR	Deschutes County, Ore...	53.4	Rural	Metro/Valley	Weekly
14 Bulletin	Newspaper	320 SW Upper Terrace Dr #200, Bend, O...	Bend, OR	Deschutes County, Ore...	53.4	Rural	Metro/Valley	Daily
15 Burns Times-Herald	Newspaper	355 N Broadway Ave Burns, OR 97720	Burns, OR	Harney County, Oregon	0.7	Frontier	Southern Oregon	Weekly
16 Business Tribune	Newspaper	Portland, OR	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	2x/week
17 Carby Herald	Newspaper	911 SW 4th Ave. Carby, OR, 97013	Carby, OR	Clackamas County, Or...	204.3	Urban	Metro/Valley	Weekly
18 Cannon Beach Gazette	Newspaper	1906 2nd St Tillamook, OR 97141	Tillamook, OR	Tillamook County, Ore...	19.0	Rural	Coastal Oregon	Every other week
19 Capital Press	Magazine	2870 Broadway St NE Salem, OR 97303	Salem, OR	Marion County, Oregon	268.7	Urban	Metro/Valley	Weekly
20 Catholic Sentinel	Newspaper	2838 E Burnside St Portland, OR 97214	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	2x/month
21 Cedar Mill News	Newspaper	3270 NW Kinley Terrace Portland, OR 9...	Portland, OR	Multnomah County, Or...	1626.6	Urban	Metro/Valley	Monthly
22 Central Oregon Daily (KO...)	Television	63090 Sherman Rd, Bend, OR 97701	Bend, OR	Deschutes County, Ore...	53.4	Rural	Metro/Valley	Daily
23 Central Oregonian	Newspaper	558 N Main St, Prineville, OR, 97754	Prineville, OR	Crook County, Oregon	7.0	Rural	Eastern Oregon	Weekly
24 Chief (or Clatskanie Chief)	Newspaper	1805 Columbia Blvd, St. Helens, OR, 97051	St. Helens, OR	Columbia County, Ore...	71.7	Rural	Metro/Valley	Weekly

You can see our completed database at [State of Oregon Local News](#). We encourage readers to provide feedback [here](#) about how our database can be improved.

It's important to note that while the maps shown below indicate where these news outlets are physically located, and that they do offer some kind of regularly produced news about Oregon, being pictured on the map does not necessarily indicate that an outlet is frequently producing news specifically about its immediate locale. Because of limited resources, as described above, outlets may struggle to cover their own immediate communities in depth. Future research should be conducted to answer this question.

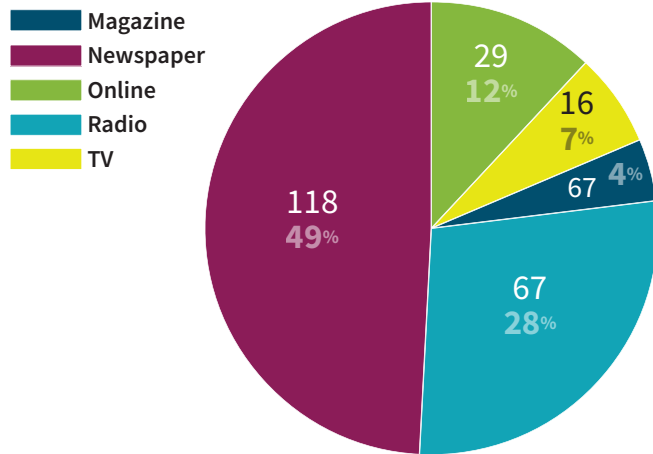
It's also important to note the potentially important news sources that our method cannot account for, such as the role played by community organizations, or libraries, or local bloggers, or even by free-lance journalists doing local reporting primarily via social media. A longer-term goal is to build out this database to encompass a broader range of sources of local news and information.

Characteristics of Oregon's Local News Outlets

Types of local news outlets across the state. Our database shows that newspapers comprise 49% of news outlets in Oregon (defined by the criteria above), followed by radio stations (27.8%). Online only news outlets comprise 12% of the media outlets in our dataset. It is likely that more online news sources exist in Oregon that could reasonably meet our criteria, but given the limitations on the datasets we sourced (see Methods appendix) and the infeasibility of accounting for all Oregon based websites and social media accounts, we present a conservative estimate. Finally, television (6.64%) and magazines (4.56%) make up

just over one-tenth of Oregon’s outlets regularly producing original local news.

■ **Oregon News Outlets*, by Medium**



* Number of local outlets regularly producing original local news content as of August 2022. See the [Interactive Database](#) and [Methods Appendix](#) for more details.

Frequency of publication. Just under half of Oregon’s news outlets publish/broadcast daily (48.5%) and one-third publish weekly (32%). The predominance of daily and weekly content production reflects the fact that newspapers and radio stations make up the bulk of the dataset. The remaining quarter of content is distributed across monthly production and other frequencies (e.g., 2x/month or 2x/week).

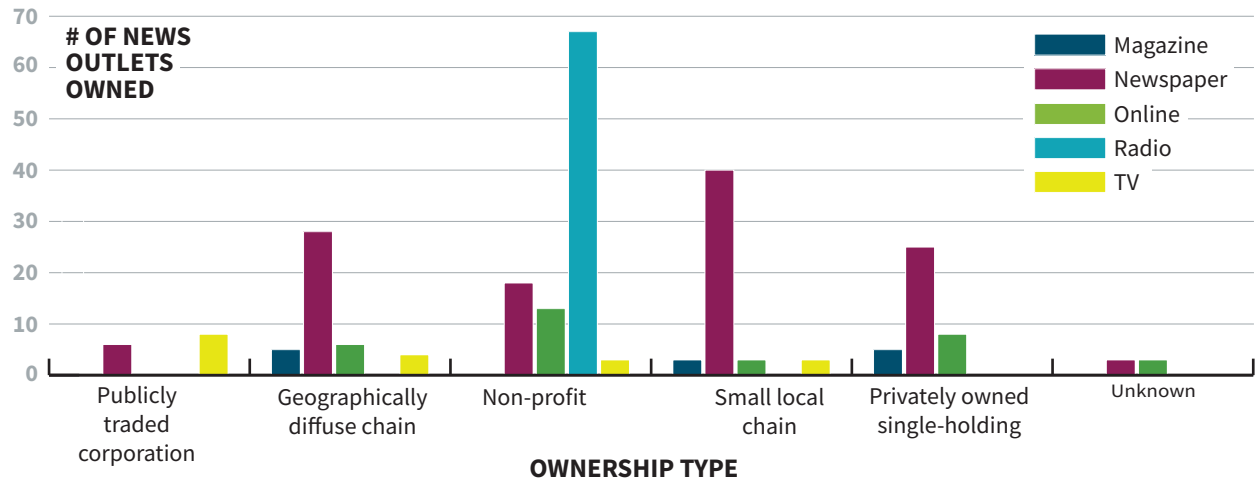
Ownership structure. We identified the ownership type of all 241 outlets in our final database by examining each outlet’s website or, when necessary, searching the Internet for information on their ownership. Using this method, 239 outlets had identifiable owners/funding sources.

We categorized ownership into five types, expanding upon prior research:¹¹⁴

- Publicly traded and shareholder controlled corporation
- Large geographically diffuse chain
- Non-profit
- Small local chain owned in Oregon
- Privately owned single-media holding

¹¹⁴ See Johanna Dunaway and Regina G. Lawrence, “What predicts the game frame? Media ownership, electoral context, and campaign news,” *Political Communication* 32, no. 1 (2015), pp. 43-60. The ownership categories shown here built on the work of Dunaway and Lawrence, though we added a non-profit category.

■ Number of News Outlets*, by Type of Ownership and Medium



* Number of local outlets regularly producing original local news content as of August 2022. See the [Interactive Map](#) and [Methods Appendix](#) for more details.

Of these 241 media outlets, 41.5% describe themselves as nonprofits. The prominence of nonprofit outlets in our data is related to our decision to exclude commercial radio stations, meaning that 100% of all radio stations in our database are nonprofits.

The remaining outlets are relatively evenly distributed across ownership models: Privately owned single-holdings, small local chains, and large geographically diffuse chains each make up between 15-18% of the dataset — that is, 36 to 43 outlets in each category. Publicly traded corporations make up a smaller portion of news outlets producing original local news in Oregon, comprising just about 5% of the dataset.¹¹⁵

Among other things, these data illustrate the continuing importance of newspapers in Oregon's local news ecosystem, and also highlight the importance of non-profit media, particularly public radio. And the data show that a significant portion of outlets that regularly produce local news content are non-profits, privately held single properties, or part of small, locally owned chains.¹¹⁶

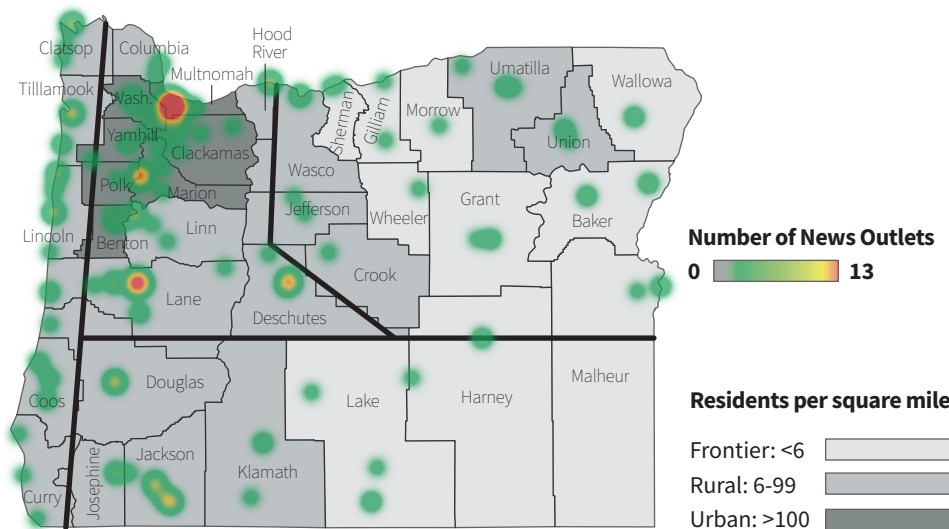
Where Oregon's news outlets are located. The 241 media outlets we identified that regularly produce original local news (based on the crite-

¹¹⁵ Two outlets' owners (New School and Wheeler County News) could not be determined.

¹¹⁶ Further analysis shows there is a significant association between medium and ownership type in Oregon ($\chi^2(20) = 221.88, p < .000$). Television stations in Oregon are particularly likely to be owned by publicly traded corporations; radio stations that produce local news are particularly likely to be non-profits (again, this finding reflects our methodological choices), and most small local chains in Oregon are newspaper outlets.

ria described above) are located in 97 different Oregon cities. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate how they are distributed around the state. Additionally, Table 2 lists the number of news outlets by county. The data indicate that eight Oregon counties have just 1-2 local news outlets each.

■ Number of News Outlets* per County, Accounting for Population Density



* Number of local outlets regularly producing original local news content as of August 2022. See the [Interactive Map](#) and [Methods Appendix](#) for more details.

The map above consists of three layers:

1. County-level population density: In gray-scale, counties are represented as either frontier, rural, or urban. This classification is adapted from [Oregon Health & Science University and the Oregon Office of Rural Health](#). Including this layer sheds light on how well the density of news outlets matches (or does not match) the density of county-level populations in Oregon.
2. Regional dividing lines: These lines segment Oregon into four rough geographic regions: Southern Oregon, Eastern Oregon, Coastal Oregon, and Metro/Valley, following a categorization developed for survey research by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.
3. City-level heat mapping: News outlets are marked by the city where they're based, with a gradient indicating how concentrated outlets are in that city/metropolitan area (green indicating less concentrated and red indicating more concentrated).

(More information about the specifics of the map (e.g., population density

ranges, regional divisions by county) can be found in the [Methods appendix.](#))

Together, the data show that access to local news is unevenly distributed across the state. Areas with higher population density tend to have more news outlets serving them — a pattern identified in studies of other locations around the U.S.¹¹⁷ The areas of the state with lower population density are also geographically large, however, meaning that it can be harder for the few news outlets covering those areas to effectively cover all communities. The uneven distribution of outlets regularly producing original local news also means that, for some communities, if even one area outlet is at risk of shrinking or disappearing altogether, the impact for those communities is greater.

Indeed, our data also confirm that some Oregon counties have very little access to original local news. Our findings align with the US News Deserts project’s conclusion that Sherman County is a “news desert” lacking a local newspaper,¹¹⁸ since the county is served by just two OPB rebroadcasting stations (KOTD in Biggs Junction and KOPB in Rufus).¹¹⁹ The US News Deserts project also categorizes Wheeler County as a news desert, but our research uncovered Wheeler County News, a print publication, as an outlet possibly partially filling the gap.¹²⁰

Meanwhile, there are a number of counties in Oregon that have precious few local news outlets. Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Klamath, Lake, and Wallowa counties would each be left with one newspaper as their sole source for original Oregon news were it not for local stations rebroadcasting OPB and Jefferson Public Radio. We also could find only one news outlet fitting our criteria in Crook county, east of Bend. Additionally, Morrow County, near Pendleton, was nearly classified as a news desert, as it has one newspaper (*Heppner Gazette-Times*) which appeared to be lacking in recent content available online during our initial rounds of coding.

117 Usher, *News for the Rich, White, and Blue*, p. 81.

118 Abernathy, “News deserts.”

119 It’s important to note that despite the lack of any journalistic news organization serving that county, there may still be local news circulated there. For example, a Facebook group called “SCON..Sherman County, Oregon NEWS” seeks to “fill the void of E NEWS” in Sherman County and currently serves over 1,000 members (with Sherman County’s population being 1,600 as of the 2020 census). It’s also important to note that several other counties in Oregon are predominately served by public radio rebroadcasts.

120 Though their website appears to be defunct, populated only with old content and not content that would fit our definition of original, local, civically relevant news (as described above), they still offer subscription rates for a print publication and run a Facebook page with more recent content than their website. Airing on the side of inclusion, we do not categorize Wheeler County as a news desert because the various available signs point to a print newspaper that may be serving that community.

■ **Number of news outlets by county.**
Counties served by 0 - 2 news outlets in bold.

County	# Outlets	County	# Outlets	County	# Outlets
Baker	4	Benton	4	Clackamas	12
Clatsop	5	Columbia	3	Coos	6
Crook	1	Curry	3	Deschutes	11
Douglas	6	Gilliam	2	Grant	3
Harney	3	Hood River	4	Jackson	9
Jefferson	2	Josephine	3	Klamath	3
Lake	4	Lane	25	Lincoln	11
Linn	12	Malheur	3	Marion	13
Morrow	1	Multnomah	50	Polk	2
Sherman	2	Tillamook	7	Umatilla	4
Union	3	Wallowa	2	Wasco	3
Washington	10	Wheeler	1	Yamhill	4

VIII. Local News and Civic Life in Oregon: The View from Journalists and Civic Leaders

While these numbers tell part of the story, we wanted to flesh out the picture of how things are changing in Oregon's local news ecosystem. We interviewed over two dozen people, including journalists, editors and owners of Oregon's media, along with various experts and leaders of civic and community organizations (see [Appendix](#) for a full listing of those who agreed to speak with us on the record). While the list of people we could potentially have spoken with is very long, we began with a manageable number of interviews with people who could share useful insights either from their perspective as key members of Oregon's news media, or as key observers and participants in Oregon civic life.

Recognizing that Oregon's media — like many of the state's other institutions — have long skewed overwhelmingly white and middle-class, we endeavored to include organizations that represent poorer, BIPOC, and immigrant communities.

The conversations with interviewees, held online, each lasted 30-45 minutes. Our interview script was straightforward, centering on three questions:

- Where are the big gaps in providing news and information to Oregon's communities?
- What are the new, emerging sources of news and information — either as competitors, concerns, or as exciting developments?
- How do you see trends playing out in the mid- to long-term? What will the local media landscape in Oregon look like 20 years from now?

Here we outline major themes that emerged across these interviews.

Gaps and Challenges in Oregon's News Ecosystem: Shrinking Capacity to Cover Local News

In answer to our first question about gaps in news provision for Oregonians, many interviewees talked immediately about the economic challenges facing news organizations today. Journalists are trying to do their work with limited and dwindling resources, including time, staff, and budgets—a problem that has become more acute over time. Consequently, according to *Willamette Week* editor and publisher Mark Zusman, “The list of uncovered beats is far longer than the list of covered beats.” Many of those we spoke with would agree with Kaia Sand, executive director of *Street Roots*, who told us, “I worry about the ill health of daily news.”

Lee Shaker, Associate Professor of Communication at Portland State University and an expert on the civic importance of local news, observed that 15 years ago, answers to our question would have centered on the declining demand for local news, not the supply. Today, he said, there are big gaps in both. That supply gap was noted by almost every journalist we spoke with, with many noting that shrinking newsroom resources particularly affect communities that are already not as well-served by news.

“The list of uncovered beats is far longer than the list of covered beats.”

— MARK ZUSMAN
Editor and publisher,
Willamette Week

According to Heidi Wright, chief operating officer of EO Media Group, “The smaller the community is ... the more at risk the community health is because there simply are not enough resources to professionally produce journalism.” Some small communities are “a retirement away from becoming news deserts,” Wright said, and she noted that four Oregon newsrooms are currently approaching “the end of the owner’s career path,” with no succession plans clearly in place.

Lisa Heyamoto, Director of Teaching & Learning at LION, Local Independent Online News Publishers, told us, “Small size newspaper folks... they're just despairing. They just can hardly serve anybody because they're so strapped. ...I just think there must be so many people who are completely not even being served at all and it's not necessarily for lack of trying [and] I think some people who are being served are probably people who are used to being fairly well served [by media].”

And Morgan Holm, Chief Content Officer for OPB, told us, “A lot of the small towns are really struggling. I mean a lot of them do have newspapers still but ...the ones that are fortunate enough to still have some staff have almost no staff left.” Many newsrooms in smaller towns are “barely able to keep their heads above water just covering what’s happening in town,” Holm said, “between city council and school boards and whatever the county is doing and things like that. And it's out of sight out of mind... People in Portland probably don't give it a second thought if people in Klamath Falls are getting a decent news diet.”

These resource challenges for Oregon’s newsrooms matter for the amount and depth of the local news Oregonians get. Many of our interviewees worried about news becoming increasingly shallow, and about the loss of “watchdog” journalism that keeps a close eye on government — a gap *Willamette Week* editor and publisher Mark Zusman described as “number one in terms of the yawning need.” Greg Retsinas, News Director at KGW, told us that when it comes to covering government, “there's a lot to look for, a lot to learn. You need seasoned reporters, investigators, to dig in and we don't have a lot of those working in the state, you know, just a few of them....We have two investigative reporters here and their to do list is probably 100 stories and... that's 98 that probably won't get done.”

Moreover, newsrooms that are stretched thin find it harder than ever to

“The smaller the community is ... the more at risk the community health is because there simply are not enough resources to professionally produce journalism.”

— HEIDI WRIGHT
Chief Operating Officer,
EO Media Group

cover issues from a truly local perspective. Our interviewees noted this problem in particular for Oregon's rural, coastal, and historically marginalized communities:

"As bad as things are in the valley, I think things are even worse once you get outside of the Willamette Valley, as far as resources. And even within the rural parts of the valley...newsrooms that used to have 25 journalists are down to three, and they're covering vast geographic areas. And they're just saying they literally cannot get to — physically — they cannot physically get to the areas that they used to cover because they'd spend all day driving." (John Schrag, Executive Editor of Pamplin Media Group)

"There's hundreds of stories out there in each community and...a lot of them aren't being done." (Yachats News owner and editor Quinton Smith)

"I think we basically outsource the entirety of Eastern Oregon to the Bend Bulletin and a handful of dedicated but short-staffed outlets ... if you really want good journalism then you need a journalist who knows that community and who's a part of that community." (Kevin Frazier, founder and former editor of The Way)

The gap in local news coverage is also felt in terms of inadequate pay and training for journalists. Many reporters lack the time and resources to do their jobs well, let alone update their skills or dig deeper into stories. As John Schrag, executive editor of Pamplin Media Group put it, "Everyone wants more bodies." But, he continued, "the newsroom leaders I've talked to from rural areas say number one it's hard to hire people to come to rural communities and it's hard to retain them. Not so much because of the environment — it's the pay." Echoing that theme, Kaia Sand, executive director of *Street Roots*, said, "People are working hard, journalists are already trying to figure out how to not work 70 hours a week."

For newsrooms large and small, a sense of being overwhelmed and exhausted was palpable, especially given the enormous stories unfolding in our state in the past two years. As Therese Bottomly of *The Oregonian* put it:

"Last year is such a blur between the pandemic and then

"If you don't have a voice and you're not seen, then you're essentially rendered invisible. And if you're invisible ...in news coverage, that is a form of structural racism."

— JACKLEEN DE LA HARPE
Founding executive director,
Underscore

... we staffed the [racial justice] protests for more than 150 nights. And then we had the wildfires in September, the historic wildfires. And then we had the election, so it was just kind of an exhausting year and... I think everybody still is feeling the effects of that, and then this summer we still have the pandemic and we had the unprecedented heat wave that killed 116 people in Oregon. So it just feels like the fire hose never ends.”

Many we spoke with saw this challenging moment as a time for newsrooms to re-think standard practices in order to better manage limited resources and meet community information needs. Veteran journalist and publisher Les Zaitz spoke about this challenge:

“We're still sort of trapped in the past...And we all wring our hands about where we're going and ...we just keep doing the same thing [though] we might dress it up differently. You know, we might put different curtains on our windows, but the house is still the same.... We gotta be much smarter. If a community's gonna give me resources to put three journalists to work well, I better make sure every hour that they're working for the community is productive and effective and...is something that people care about.”

Inclusiveness Urgently Needed, but Capacity Remains Thin

Newsrooms' resource challenges also matter for the inclusiveness of local news coverage. Our interviewees worried that Oregon's LatinX and Spanish-speaking communities are seriously overlooked in most news coverage, as are Oregon's Black and Native American communities. As Caitlin Baggott Davis of the North Star Civic Foundation put it, “I just don't think we have enough journalists ...and that as a result the journalists who are in the field are spread thin ... there isn't budget for [multiple] journalists to cover things from different points of view.”

A continuing reality is that Oregon's newsrooms struggle with how to cover minority communities. As the editor and publisher of the *Malheur Enterprise*, Les Zaitz said he was “terribly frustrated with trying to figure out how to cover the Latino community. Not report just on but for it. ... I think that is so essential to what we need to do in our profession in Oregon if we're going to appropriately report on a growing segment of our population.” Local journalist and media-maker Bruce Poinsette pointed out how the state's leading news organizations have no Black editors and few if any Black reporters, meaning that “Many of us ... haven't had other black editors” to work with and learn from. For BIPOC journalists

and storytellers, he said, consistent and sustained funding and professional development is needed.

John Schrag echoed those concerns with respect to Native American communities: “As legacy media organizations,” he said, “we have not done a very good job of covering tribal issues. I don't think that's unique to Oregon but it's certainly something I've heard from more than one newsroom leader, which is, we have a significant tribal population in our geographic area and we've not done a very good job.” Jackleen de La Harpe, founding executive director of *Underscore*, a digital news site that focuses on Indian Country and other marginalized coverage areas, told us, “Historically, indigenous people haven't been covered well—if at all—by mainstream or legacy media... If you don't have a voice and you're not seen, then you're essentially rendered invisible. And if you're invisible ...in news coverage, that is a form of structural racism.”

The news gap — both in terms of who is covered and how by mainstream news, and in terms of access to news — is also true for Oregon's immigrant communities. For example, Therese Bottomly of *The Oregonian* described how “There's a very large Russian language speaking community in East Portland and East Vancouver, like 130,000 people who listen to Russian language radio. And there's a gentleman ... who called me and he said, can I, you know, read one story a day and translate it? And I said sure. But those are kind of ...informal collaborations that are in service to getting the word out to more people but ...it's a little too ad hoc. There's no real long term strategic plan” for how to provide news more regularly to these communities.

This theme was echoed regarding how to reach readers in Oregon's rural areas, where internet coverage is uneven. According to Jackleen de La Harpe at *Underscore*, “The lack of broadband in rural areas is a huge problem for accessing media...the majority of news is delivered digitally, so a good Internet connection is essential to be informed.”

Fragmentation, Disinformation, and Mistrust

While the “supply gap” loomed large for many of our interviewees, they also were deeply concerned about the flip side of that problem: lagging public demand for journalism. Despite a recent OVBC survey showing that about two-thirds of Oregonians pay at least some attention to local

In today's fragmented media environment with declining levels of trust in media, the people we talked with are concerned that Oregonians are having a harder time staying informed.

news, our interviewees described a kind of tectonic shift that has separated mainstream news from a public that increasingly turns elsewhere for news and information. “So many of us are getting our news from so many places that are self-curated and hard to track,” said Adam Davis, executive director of Oregon Humanities. Caitlin Baggott Davis of the North Star Civic Foundation observed, “There are a lot of people, and not just teenagers, who, you know, no longer look at the *New York Times* website, never mind the newspaper, but instead are seeing what’s showing up in their [social media] feed.”

As professor Lee Shaker of Portland State University, who’s been studying civic engagement and news for many years, put it, in part due to the decline of local news outlets and in part due to the fragmentation and proliferation of other media sources, people are “cobbling things together And this is one of the challenges for a less engaged audience member.” He added,

“You know, students, ask me all the time, because I teach about things that relate to this and they hear these lectures and they start to think to themselves yes, you're right this does really matter, I do care about public safety and safe drinking water and schools for my kids....So where do you get information? And then I have to tell them, well I use 10 different things....I mean like it's like the whole unwieldy mess, to try and figure out what's going on.”

In today’s fragmented media environment with declining levels of trust in media, the people we talked with are concerned that Oregonians are having a harder time staying informed. Some worry that the combination of losses of traditional news outlets and the new panoply of online sources will exacerbate public confusion and the media trust problem. Consequently, it’s harder now for people to have a shared sense of the state’s problems. Adam Davis, co-founder of the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center and founder of the polling firm DHM, has been documenting public opinion trends in Oregon for decades. Davis (not related to Adam Davis of Oregon Humanities) said flatly, “Just generally speaking, people’s general feelings about the media are probably more negative than I’ve ever seen.” And he described to us a decreasing public familiarity with leaders and issues and increasing reliance on social media that is creating “a perfect storm for declining civic health.”

At the same time, Davis noted that social media is here to stay and has become an important part of many peoples’ news diets, for better or for

Lacking access to inclusive and trusted news is a real problem, our sources said, but so is nostalgia for a supposedly more unified Oregon.

worse. For example, he pointed to the social media platform Nextdoor, which is “replacing community for many people; it is really their only connection to neighbors and is responsible for whatever level of awareness and knowledge they have about their neighborhood and, more broadly, local issues.” Similarly, Daniel McArdle-Jaimes, a public information officer with the city of Portland, told us that WhatsApp groups seem to increasingly be seen as safe channels for various communities to share information. His observations were echoed by Jessica Lagunas of Latino Network, who pointed to Facebook groups and WhatsApp as main channels of information for the communities her organization serves.

Meanwhile, many interviewees voiced alarm about rising levels of misinformation and disinformation—including disinformation aimed at the mainstream media. Greg Retsinas of KGW reported that, “In our newsroom that’s our number one threat....The disinformation toward media is just relentless, relentless, and I think the last year of the vaccine rollout has shown that...it can’t be underestimated, the strength of that.” John Schrag of Pamplin Media Group concurred: “There’s a deep concern about the lack of information and then there’s a growing concern about misinformation and this confusion over what is news, what is not news.”

As a consequence, many talked about a growing sense that Oregonians are struggling to separate truth from falsehood and are living in different realities defined by their media choices — a problem that is particularly concerning among communities who are underserved by the news media to begin with. As a former communications manager for a Portland-based community organization told us, “We still struggle with misinformation a lot... I think primarily it’s because of this widespread lack of access [of] a lot of community members...It’s been a huge challenge.” Daniel McArdle-Jaimes, public information officer with the city of Portland, reframed the problem in terms of building media literacy and communication skills: “How can we create our own local media competency, as it relates to deciphering good information from bad information? We need to look into...getting more media competency and literacy, and expanding the skills that are so desperately lacking, especially with our young people and those who primarily receive their information via social media.”

Overall, our interviewees worry that Oregonians lack a shared, trusted place to get news and information, to hear multiple views, and to dis-

“This is an opportunity-rich environment, which I think is code for an environment in which there’s a lot of need.”

— CAITLIN BAGGOTT
DAVIS
Executive Director,
North Star Civic Foundation

cuss issues. Moreover, according to at least one person we interviewed, “A lot of Oregonians just don’t have a platform” for expressing their views that links different parts of the state and isn’t beholden to commercial or advertising interests.” Other observations we heard included these:

*“There’s so many silos — that’s just such a challenge in the current media landscape that everyone just gets the info that they want.”
(Allie Yee, Co-Executive Director at APANO Communities United Fund)*

“I can’t think of many things that aren’t being talked about. It’s more that people aren’t aware who’s talking about them, or where they’re being talked about ... we don’t quite know where to have the shared conversation together about this stuff.” (Adam Davis, executive director of Oregon Humanities)

“There used to be a sort of a shared mental map in communities... everybody walking into [the governor’s briefing] room had read the Oregonian. ... People don’t carry those shared mental maps around anymore. They’ve got the NextDoor map or the Facebook map... there are still good media sources out there but it’s much more fragmented.” (Mac Prichard, president, Prichard Communications)

At the same time, some we talked with reminded us that as Oregon grapples with today’s fragmented media system, we need to cultivate attention to the multiple perspectives and experiences of diverse publics. For example, Allie Yee at APANO Communities United Fund warned against “the danger of a single narrative,” referring to the concept popularized by author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in [her 2009 Ted Talk](#). Lacking access to inclusive and trusted news is a real problem, our sources said, but so is nostalgia for a supposedly more unified Oregon. Historically, the sense among majority publics of being “on the same page” has often overlooked the different perspectives and realities of marginalized communities. Reaching for a single shared picture of reality shared by all Oregonians is, from this perspective, neither possible nor desirable. The challenge is to create more *sharing* of perspectives and experiences in hopes of creating a larger, if more complex, picture of reality.

Declining Civic Health in Oregon?

Overall, our conversations with the more than two dozen Oregonians we interviewed left a deep impression of a state whose residents are having

trouble connecting with public life and with one another — and a state that may lack some of the civic capacity it needs to meet its challenges.

More broadly, these journalists, experts, and civic leaders worried about the fabric of democratic society in Oregon — and our nation. John Schrag, Executive Editor of Pamplin Media Group, said, “Those people who are paying attention to civic life and the free flow of information know that something is wrong.” “Following the 2020 elections...there’s very little that we can accomplish if we don’t strengthen our democracy first,” said Caitlin Baggott Davis, Executive Director at North Star Civic Foundation. “This is an opportunity-rich environment, which I think is code for an environment in which there’s a lot of need.”

IX. Emerging Innovations: New Outlets, Newsroom Collaborations, and Journalistic Support Organizations

Over the past decade or more, Oregon’s newsrooms have been seriously challenged, and some have closed altogether. Many that remain have tried to innovate in ways that will make their work more relevant and sustainable in a rapidly changing world. As one report from 2019 on [shifting practices in newsrooms](#) around the Pacific Northwest said, “there is a widespread recognition that for newsrooms to survive, they need to adapt and evolve.”¹²¹ That report identified a number of ways newsrooms around the Pacific Northwest were striving to evolve, including by making the most of limited resources, working to build trust with the public, and intentionally changing newsroom routines and news formats to better suit the public’s needs. While a complete review of all those efforts is beyond our scope in this report, we offer a glimpse here into a few of the organizations, projects, and initiatives our sources

¹²¹ Damian Radcliffe and Destiny Alvarez, “[Shifting practices for a stronger tomorrow: Local journalism in the Pacific Northwest](#),” Agora Journalism Center (2019), p. 9.

mentioned as pointing toward hopeful pathways forward for Oregon's local news ecosystem.

Our conversations highlighted that, amidst all the challenges, emerging innovations promise potential improvements. The consensus seemed to be that simply trying to restore the the kind of journalism that once existed in the state is neither possible nor necessarily a good idea, given changes to the larger media system, and the problematic ways mainstream news media tend to cover (or to ignore) underserved communities. As Kaia Sand of *Street Roots* put it: "I'm trying to figure out how to dream ahead, where I'm talking about what we've lost without being nostalgic for what was wrong with it."

In this section, we highlight some of the developments and innovations that may point toward the next phase in the evolution of Oregon's information ecosystem. Although at least one interviewee we spoke with observed that "it feels like there's sort of less innovation and less excitement going on in the media industry here," many also pointed to what another interviewee described as a "germination of experiments" across Oregon — new outlets and newsroom collaborations that that might help build a strengthened information ecosystem of the future.

Creating New News Outlets

Oregon's news ecosystem is marked not just by losses in traditional media outlets, but also by the emergence of small-scale hyperlocal news outlets around the state, often started and staffed by late-career journalists. These emerging outlets in Oregon reflect a national trend. [Project Oasis](#) out of the University of North Carolina found that 266 digital native local news organizations started up around the country between 2015 and 2020, an increase of nearly 50%. (One-in-seven overall have emerged in areas that are so-called "news deserts", though none listed in that report were in news deserts in the West). That number included several start-ups here in Oregon, including the *Banks Post* (founded in 2016) and the *Salem Reporter* (founded in 2018). Overall, according to Project Oasis, "a growing group of small, independent online news organizations are helping to fill local news gaps," though they also "operate in a challenging financial environment."¹²² Most are tiny, many with no full-time staff beyond the owner/founder, and many were launched solely with the owners' personal finances.

¹²² The report also found that, according to self-reports, 3/5 are already sustainable or believe they are on a path to sustainability, but many are bootstrapped, self-funded by founders, and/or reliant on a single source of revenue.

A few hyper-local start-ups mentioned by our interviewees include the *Columbia Gorge News*, discussed above, along with *YachatsNews* and the *Highway 58 Herald*. The latter two are nonprofits, reflecting a growing trend nationally.¹²³

*Started in early 2019 by longtime journalist Quinton Smith, **YachatsNews** features coverage of community issues such as retaining local firefighters, dealing with local homelessness, and controversial development projects. The publication's "About" page states that "Residents of Yachats and south Lincoln County are very interested and involved in their community — and very demanding of it. But the demise of traditional media and news coverage by even the smallest newspapers has left a void of clear, contextual, straight news reporting to help people understand what is going on." It says that it now receives over 100,000 page views per month and its "breadth of coverage has grown from just the Yachats area, to Waldport, some overall Lincoln County issues, and to reporting on the mysteries of that great body of water just to the west."¹²⁴*

As newspapers everywhere have shrunk, "that's left opportunities for little places, you know, like Yachats News," said owner and editor Smith. "It's a fractured landscape that allows little things like mine to happen." Speaking in November, 2021, Smith said "There's lots of opportunities for things that I'm doing, but the question of course is can it be monetized or should it be and how should it be." In June 2022, Smith announced a fundraising campaign to raise money to hire a reporter, and in July, the outlet reported it had raised almost \$56,000 for that purpose.¹²⁵

*Businessman and former Marine George Custer was a founding member of the board of directors for **The Highway 58 Herald**, a nonprofit outlet headquartered in Oakridge that provides "news and information for all communities along the 87-mile scenic corridor through the Oregon Cascades."¹²⁶ Founding editor Doug Bates wrote in his welcome letter on the site that the all-volunteer outlet aims "to provide professional news reporting and vital information as a free service to communities along one of Oregon's busiest mountain*

123 Laura Hazard Owen, "Local sites are driving the growth of nonprofit news, new research shows," Nieman Lab (27 July 2022); Naomi Forman-Katz, Elisa Shearer and Katerina Eva Matsa, "Nonprofit news outlets are playing a growing role in statehouse coverage," Pew Research Center (29 April 2022).

124 YachatsNews, "Welcome to YachatsNews.com," (n.d.).

125 YachatsNews, "Thank you! Readers donate nearly \$56,000 over five weeks to help YachatsNews sustain local effort and hire a reporter" (7 July 2022).

126 "About Highway 58 Herald: Our mission, our pledge," (n.d.).

highways. We have come together to fill a glaring news vacuum in a beautiful landscape where traditional media aren't just withering but are vanishing altogether.”¹²⁷

Interviewed on OPB's Think Out Loud in January of 2022, Custer said, “We felt it an emergency that we start getting the news out to the people of Oakridge...and other communities around here” after their local newspaper closed. “It was apparent that social media had taken kind of a death grip on our communities and we felt an absolute need to first of all be a watchdog on our city government and that the people need local information both on a daily basis and particularly in times of emergency.” The site relies on his and others' volunteer time and on donations, since, Custer explained, advertising dollars in such a small community can't sustain a news site: “We're holding on by a shoestring but by golly we're going to keep this thing going.”¹²⁸

Along with these kinds of hyperlocal start-ups filling some news gaps in local communities, other new outlets are focusing on statewide and regional issues affecting Oregon. Some examples are *Columbia Insight*, *Underscore*, and *The Way*, an online publication from OR 360 Media, all of which are nonprofits, with varying levels of external funding.

Columbia Insight, based in Hood River and started in 2015, covers local environmental issues in the Columbia Gorge region. Some of its popular articles have examined innovative technologies to restore access to clean water for Warm Springs residents (“Warm Springs Is Creating Drinking Water Out of Thin Air”) and the aftermath of the 2017 Eagle Creek fires (“Why Four years Later the Trees Still Aren't Coming Back”). Its self-described mission is “to inform and inspire readers with original, balanced journalism about environmental issues affecting the Columbia River Basin. We publish stories that highlight the connection between the environment and all the people who call this place home.”¹²⁹

Publisher Susan Hess told us “At the time I started this, which unfortunately holds just as true today... newspapers were losing revenue, they were cutting size, and the first people they were cutting were

127 “[Highway 58 Herald: Greetings from the founding editor](#)” (n.d.). According to an editor's note on the post, Bates has since resigned from his position at the site.

128 Allison Frost, “[More than 70 local news outlets opened in the U.S. during the pandemic — including some in Oregon](#),” OPB (13 January 2022).

129 “[About Columbia Insight](#)” (n.d.).

the environmental reporters... At the same time, the population's booming, we have this climate crisis. I just thought 'God, I've got to do something.' And, so, you know, however little it is, I'm going to try."

Underscore's mission is to “produce impactful, revelatory stories that might otherwise go unreported and unheard, with a special focus on Indian Country and other marginalized coverage areas.” Noting that “newsrooms are closing at an alarming rate, leaving many communities without the news and information they need to thrive,” Underscore aims to “elevat[e] underrepresented voices to foster conversation, interrupt stereotypes, untangle complex issues and promote a better understanding of one another.” Its operational model is to “maintain a small newsroom that delivers the most impact by bridging the gap between underreported communities and rural, tribal and legacy media newsrooms in Oregon.”¹³⁰ Operating with grant funding from Oregon's [Meyer Memorial Trust](#), the national organization [Democracy Fund](#), and the [Facebook Journalism Project](#), among others, this year, Underscore was selected as a [Report for America](#) newsroom, a national project funded by Meta (formerly Facebook), the Knight Foundation, and other major corporations and philanthropies, making it eligible for a funded position for one emerging journalist.

Oregon 360 Media is a for-profit collaboration among three Oregonians (Kevin Frazier, Ben Bowman, and Alex Titus) who are not journalists by training, but who set out to create “a civic community that has a set of shared information and a space where we can have shared conversation,” according to Bowman. Its offerings include a blog Frazier created called [The Way](#), which gathers essays on state issues from contributors with a range of political viewpoints; [The Bridge](#), an issues-focused, cross-partisan podcast started by Bowman and Titus; and [The Liftoff](#), a subscriber-supported weekly newsletter on, as Bowman puts it, “everything you need to know about Oregon politics.” Bowman says the three partners in OR 360 Media “disagree on most major policy issues” but share a sense that there's a big gap in the state's media ecosystem. Says Bowman, “In the 90s you could probably just read the Oregonian and know everything going on in Salem. But now there isn't any one news outlet doing that—it's a hodge podge system” that makes it harder for Oregonians to find information and context on state and local issues. Moreover, Frazier says, “A lot of Oregonians just don't have a platform” that links different parts of the state and isn't beholden to legacy media and advertising interests. As a result, he says, “It's really hard for

130 Underscore, “[Who we are](#)” (n.d.).

Oregonians to find context” and to share information and dialogue that crosses party lines. Notably, the blog, podcast, and newsletter all feature commentary that is not defined by journalistic norms of objectivity, aiming instead to present readers a range of viewpoints. The organization currently operates on volunteer labor of the three partners plus contributing writers; as of this writing, the organization was launching some grant-writing and finalizing arrangements with its first advertiser.

These diverse Oregon start-ups share at least one commonality: The question of sustainability. As Jackleen de La Harpe, founding executive director of *Underscore*, describes it, “One challenge many newsrooms—nonprofit and for profit—struggle with [is] money. News and information is necessary and needed, but how can newsrooms be sustained economically? ...Will we be able to fund *Underscore* for the long haul?” While some start-ups like *Underscore* have been helped by foundations and corporations (Project Oasis estimates that 20% of small digital news start-ups receive philanthropic funding¹³¹), some sources we spoke with wondered about the sustainability of that kind of support, and about the larger picture of maximizing impact for Oregon. Les Zaitz, editor and publisher of the *Malheur Enterprise*, mused, “With all of the amounts of money flowing from foundations and even corporations to support and sustain...local journalism -- there's all sorts of experiments and iterations and various issues with success. And I worry that the resources... become dissipated instead of focused on what an assessment might tell you is -- here's what you need.” Moreover, at least one source we spoke with wondered whether smaller start-ups can make real impacts on policy, especially at the state level, since “they don't have a large enough platform and a large enough audience to make a difference.” How, in other words, can local news generate large-scale public attention in today's fragmented media landscape?

Overall, our interviews provided nuance to the picture sketched by our quantitative mapping of Oregon's news outlets. While the Oregon news and information ecosystem is struggling to adapt to a changed environment, hyperlocal and other specialized start-ups are filling some critical gaps that were created by the shrinkage, closure, or consolidation of traditional newspapers or — in the case of outlets like *Underscore* — by the media's historical blind eye to entire communities. In some cases, foundations and corporations funders are helping; in other cases, owners, editors and journalists are donating their time to create news

131 Project Oasis, p. 9.

for their community. Whether these experiments can survive, grow, and make a bigger impact remains to be seen.

Newsroom Collaborations



Beyond individual start-ups, many of the journalists we spoke with also talked about the promise of more collaboration across newsrooms. With resources stretched thin at most outlets, working collaboratively offers a way to produce more quality content that can be shared across many audiences, engage new audiences, and enable better accountability reporting.¹³²

According to a framework developed by the [Center for Collaborative Media](#) at Montclair State University, collaborative journalism initiatives can be either one-time or finite in nature, or ongoing or open-ended. They can also involve various levels of coordination among newsrooms, ranging from projects in which each partner newsroom creates content independently, to projects involving collaboratively produced content, to larger-scale collaborative arrangements across organizations. “Collaboration is challenging at any level,” [observes](#) Agora Journalism Center director Andrew DeVigal. But “everyone knows that these days, most newsrooms are hard-pressed to cover the day’s news as fully as the public deserves. Shifting from a scarcity mindset to one of abundance can widen the lens of what’s possible.”¹³³

132 Nieman Lab, “[We asked journalists to share what it’s like working with other newsrooms. Here’s what they said.](#)” (27 July 2022).

133 Andrew De Vigal, “[Shifting from a scarcity mindset to one of abundance widens the lens of what’s possible.](#)” Oregon Capitol Chronicle (15 May 2022).

■ Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism

	 ONE-TIME OR FINITE COLLABORATIVE REPORTING PROJECT	 ONGOING OR OPEN-ENDED COLLABORATIVE REPORTING PROJECT
Partners create content separately	TEMPORARY & SEPARATE GOOD FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-time collaborators • Small outlets looking to expand • High-interest or passion topics 	ONGOING & SEPARATE GOOD FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orgs that want greater reach • Topics that require the expertise of multiple orgs • Orgs that need more content than they produce on their own
Partners work together to create content	TEMPORARY & CO-CREATING GOOD FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigative and/or accountability reporting • Time-sensitive projects requiring lots of resources • Leveraging unique newsroom skills in return for something you lack 	ONGOING & CO-CREATING GOOD FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orgs in the same region with similar audiences • Orgs that want to supplement resources • Partnership with resources to hire a collaboration manager
Partners share content, data, resources at org level	TEMPORARY & INTEGRATED GOOD FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects handling large amounts of data • Orgs with experience collaborating • Orgs with buy-in from all levels 	ONGOING & INTEGRATED GOOD FOR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orgs that need back-office support • Orgs that need supplemental content • Orgs willing to give away some control over operations

Source: [Center for Cooperative Media](#)

Oregon has seen several varieties of collaborative journalism in recent years, ranging from small and informal to larger-scale and ongoing.

Lisa Heyamoto, Director of Teaching & Learning at Local Independent Online News Publishers (LION), described an example of informal, open-ended collaboration: a group of reporters who cover education in Oregon who communicate regularly using the Slack platform. “They have this really tight-knit group,” Heyamoto said, “and what they understand is that, you know, they can all do their work in isolation, but especially when they're covering statewide education initiatives...they can work together to do something better than what they all could do on their own.”

An early example of “ongoing and separate” newsroom collaboration

here in Oregon is the Northwest News Partnership. Created by Oregon Public Broadcasting in 2013 with support from the Oregon Community Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the initiative has created ongoing content-sharing relationships across the state. This has allowed stories produced by one organization to gain wider exposure both in other regions of the state and across platforms, such as OPB stories that appear on local newspaper websites, and stories from local reporting partners that are shared by OPB via broadcasts and email newsletter. OPB is continuing to seek opportunities to report collectively and create in-depth statewide reporting projects. This collaborative reporting could then have greater statewide public impact through broad distribution among the wide group of partner news organizations.



An example of “finite” collaboration involving independent news production based on shared resources happened in 2019, when 40 of Oregon’s newsrooms worked together on a project called [Breaking the Silence](#) to

“highlight the public health crisis of death by suicide” in Oregon. Working from a common set of data, the participating newsrooms produced nearly 100 stories, segments and editorials that were made available to all participating outlets and to the public via the project website. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the story-sharing elements of that collaboration were tried again, when participating newsrooms shared their pandemic coverage with other news outlets free of charge.

More recently, over 60 newsrooms around the state participated in a [collaborative effort to improve coverage](#) of Oregon’s gubernatorial race. Participating newsrooms shared the work of gathering responses to a series of policy questions from primary election candidates. The candidate responses were then incorporated into a side-by-side candidate guide embedded on each participating outlet’s website. This effort evolved into the [Oregon Media Collaborative](#), offering readers around the state a curated, searchable list of election coverage by participating newsrooms.

Formal, ongoing, distributive collaboration is baked into the operating model of the *Oregon Capital Chronicle*, founded in 2021. It publishes stories using a [Creative Commons](#) license, which allows other

“One of the really remarkable differences in the last several years for me has been the level of collaboration among former competitors.”

— THERESE BOTTOMLY
Editor and Vice President
of Content,
The Oregonian/Oregon Live

outlets to republish them for free. A recent internet search for the term “Oregon Capital Chronicle” shows that many Oregon outlets are utilizing this resource, including the *Philomath News*, *Eugene Weekly*, *Highway 58 Herald*, *Gales Creek Journal* and *YachatsNews*, among others.

According to Therese Bottomly, editor of *The Oregonian*, “One of the really remarkable differences in the last several years for me has been the level of collaboration among former competitors. But collaborations like these, our interviewees said, require support and resources to work well (a point that the Center for Collaborative Media’s [research](#) also highlights).¹³⁴ As *Willamette Week*’s Mark Zusman put it, “We have no shortage of people that want to collaborate with us. But they don't have resources, we don't have resources.” As Lisa Heyamoto of LION pointed out, in some areas of the country there are more institutional frameworks to support newsroom collaboration. In Oregon, such collaboration is still largely do-it-yourself.

One effort to provide a firmer framework for ongoing, statewide collaborative journalism is the Oregon News Exploration (ONE), a group of reporters and editors (led by long-time journalists Emily Harris, Lee van der Voo, and John Schrag) who have been working together since 2020 to envision a non-profit newsroom that would, in their words, “amplify and augment the resources of existing news organizations and coordinate their shared efforts.” Such a newsroom would, in their vision, leverage the strengths of Oregon’s remaining news outlets to undertake the kinds of resource-intensive journalism that many newsrooms can no longer afford to do on their own. An integral part of this vision is not only to create a framework for ongoing collaborative reporting, but to provide needed training to journalists and to intentionally diversify Oregon journalism. With philanthropic funding through the Oregon Community Foundation, along with private donations, ONE has interviewed journalists from all career stages — importantly, including BIPOC journalists — to understand the challenges they and the communities they serve face. Working with the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center and diversity consultant Mike Green, ONE has also commissioned survey research and focus groups to better understand Oregonians’ information needs, and shape strategies to combat and respond to misinformation across the state. As of this writing, their effort continues.

Yet while collaborations are an increasingly critical way to augment the capacity of individual newsrooms to produce local news, collaboration alone may not be enough to address the underlying losses in the state’s

¹³⁴ Center for Collaborative Media, “[Comparing Models of Collaborative Journalism](#)” (September 2017).

news infrastructure. Even van der Voo, who was among the earliest of Oregon journalists to pioneer collaborative journalism during her time at InvestigateWest, told us that “no amount of collaboration” will be able, on its own, to overcome those gaps. We return below to examples from around the country of state-level efforts to inject new resources to invigorate the local news ecosystem.

Regional and National Journalism Support Organizations

Over the past several years, efforts around the country to mobilize and coordinate support for local journalism have gained steam. In fact, one academic study recently described a constellation of efforts large and small across the country as an emerging “trust-building” network, a “constellation of corporations, technology companies, government bodies, non-profits, consultants, programs, projects, journalists and other journalistic agents” seeking to fundamentally transform how journalism is produced, all with an eye toward making journalism more relevant and trusted.¹³⁵

Some efforts focus on sustaining existing local outlets and supporting the creation of new outlets. Here in Oregon, the Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism ([FORJ](#)) is “committed to preserving professional journalism in rural Oregon.”¹³⁶ A nonprofit led by journalists, FORJ offers training and support in capacity building, fundraising, and financial sustainability to newspapers around the state. (FORJ has also [mapped](#) Oregon’s remaining rural news publications.) Beyond Oregon, [Local Independent Online News Publishers](#) (LION) provides resources like a weekly newsletter with tips for nonprofit news entrepreneurs. The [National Trust for Local News](#) takes a different approach. Modeled on the concept of land trusts, it works with communities to transform the ownership structure of local news organizations to make them more economically sustainable.

Larger national entities are playing a role in bolstering local news in Oregon as well. Google News Initiative (GNI) publishes a [Startups Playbook](#) that walks would-be news

Some states around the country are responding to the local news crisis with state-wide initiatives to catalyze broad-based innovation, collaboration, and funding for local news ecosystems.

¹³⁵ Sue Robinson and Regina G. Lawrence, “[The Trust-Building News Ecosystem: Changing journalist roles & skill sets,](#)” presented at the International Communication Association annual meeting, May 2022.

¹³⁶ Fund for Oregon Rural Journalism (n.d.).

entrepreneurs through the steps of identifying their audience, creating a business model, and building out their news product. GNI also provides grant opportunities to local newsrooms, such as one that supported the *Eugene Weekly* to increase its coverage of rural and underrepresented communities. On the nonprofit side, the Institute for Nonprofit News has created an extensive set of [guides](#) for creating or converting to a news nonprofit. [Report for America](#) is currently supporting five reporting jobs at outlets around the state (the *Statesman Journal*, *The Oregonian*, *Underscore*, and at the Associated Press statehouse beat); another five were supported since 2018, including at the *Herald & News* in Klamath Falls, the *Malheur Enterprise*, and *Willamette Week*. Meanwhile, the [American Journalism Project](#), which calls itself a “venture philanthropy” and has [reportedly raised](#) over \$90 million to fund local journalism, has helped funnel philanthropic and corporate donor funds (such as from the Meta [formerly Facebook] Journalism Project) to newsrooms around the country, including, here in Oregon, *Underscore*.

While these journalism support initiatives are undoubtedly valuable, a recurring theme in our conversations with journalists was that setting aside time and money to grow innovations is tough to do when the market for local journalism is so uncertain. While models for innovation are popping up nationwide, finding the bandwidth to study and emulate them can be hard. Some of our sources told us that newsrooms may feel stretched too thin to take full advantage of the help and resources offered by various support organizations.

As Susan Hess, publisher of [Columbia Insight](#), put it to us, support organizations are “all putting out things every day. You know you could do nothing but read their emails and newsletters. I mean you really, you could devote every waking moment to just reading things from” them, Hess said. “They're wonderful, but they all take time.” Les Zaitz, editor and publisher of the *Malheur Enterprise*, agreed: “There are a lot of really hard working people in this arena with a lot of good ideas. Here's the challenge, I think, is, I could spend eight hours a day reading professional journals or looking at other websites and getting ideas. And I just don't have the time for that and most people don't.”

This is where a more coordinated, larger-scale effort to reinvigorate Oregon's news and information infrastructure could be especially important and impactful. As Lisa Heyamoto of LION said, “I'm really interested in states who are harnessing all of that,” Heyamoto said, “and helping create pipelines for funding and partnerships and things like that. You see that a ton in North Carolina you see that a ton in Pennsylvania. And so I think there's room for that in a state like Oregon.”

X. Strengthening News Ecosystems at Scale: State-level Interventions

Some states around the country are responding to the local news crisis with state-wide initiatives to catalyze broad-based innovation, collaboration, and funding for local news ecosystems. The [New Mexico Local News Fund](#) leverages support from a number of state-level and national foundations to grow the state's infrastructure of local news through grant-making and organizational support. In a somewhat different model, the [Colorado Media Project's COLab](#) involves journalists from over 100 Colorado news outlets on a variety of collaborative reporting projects; the project aims "to strengthen and transform local journalism at an ecosystem level by catalyzing a broad-based coalition of information providers."¹³⁷ According to Nancy Watzman, former executive editor for the Colorado Media Project, these kinds of state-level supports are an important intervention because,

"In today's climate for local news, it's hard for any one news organization to meet all the challenges alone.... State-based organizations that serve as hubs to support local news ecosystems can help local news organizations by fostering collaboration, exploring ways to generate more revenue together, build cost-saving infrastructure, and developing community support. With this kind of support, the sum is much larger than the individual parts."¹³⁸

Similar efforts are underway around the country in various cities, such as the [Houston Local News Initiative](#), and at the state level, such as [North Carolina Local News Lab Fund](#) and [The Nebraska Reporting Fund](#).

Going further, some states are considering and even implementing state funding to support a healthier local news ecosystem — some modeled on recent efforts at the federal level.¹³⁹ Various

Building state-level ecosystem support here in Oregon is one area where a larger role could be played by foundations, philanthropies, universities, and journalism support organizations.

¹³⁷ De Vigal, "Shifting from a scarcity mindset."

¹³⁸ Quoted in Mark Glaser, "5 business models for local news to watch in 2020," Knight Foundation (7 January 2020).

¹³⁹ Thus far, enacting these federal government funding ideas has [proven elusive](#). In the U.S. context, advocating for government funding for media is a fraught topic, given American attachment to the idea that the "Congress shall make

recent congressional proposals have sought [to provide](#) tax breaks and direct subsidies to local outlets, advertisers and subscribers, features of HR 7640, the Local Journalism Sustainability Act, that attracted more than 70 co-sponsors from both parties. Certain provisions of the [Build Back Better Act](#) also aimed to help local newsrooms with an earmarked payroll tax credit.



The Colorado Media Project recently spearheaded state-level efforts to reimagine the role of public funding in the future of local news. Under the banner of “Local news is a public good,” the CMP has advocated for the role “state and local

governments [can] play...in stabilizing and sustaining the future of local news, information, and independent journalism.”¹⁴⁰ At the national level, [Rebuild Local News](#), an organization representing the National Newspaper Association, National Newspaper Publishers Association, and other industry groups, has framed their advocacy for these sorts of interventions as strengthening “democracy’s civic infrastructure.”

Reimagining the relationship between government support and local news ecosystems has gone farthest in New Jersey, where in 2018 the state legislature passed a Civic Information Bill creating state-level funding to spur innovation and transformation of local news, overseen by an appointed 15-member non-profit [New Jersey Civic Information Consortium](#). The Consortium, a collaboration of five of the state’s leading universities and overseen by a board appointed by the governor, legislature, participation universities as well as technology and community groups, “builds off the foundation laid by public media in the United States, and reimagines how public funding can be used to address the growing problem of news deserts, misinformation, and support more informed communities.”¹⁴¹ In 2021, the state provided \$500,000 for the Consortium to support innovations in local news through grant-making.¹⁴² As of early 2022, the consortium had distributed \$1.35 million in public funds into initiatives “that benefit the state’s civic life and meet

no law” clause of the First Amendment ties the federal government’s hands regarding the local news crisis; see Regina G. Lawrence and Timothy Cook, eds., *Freeing the Presses: The First Amendment in Action*, 2d edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014). Both scholarship and advocacy on this point are evolving, however; see Pickard, *Democracy without journalism?* Notably, most federal and state-level efforts involve indirect rather than direct government subsidies to local media.

140 Colorado Media Project, “[Local news is a public good: Public pathways for supporting Coloradans civic news and information needs in the 21st century](#)” (n.d.).

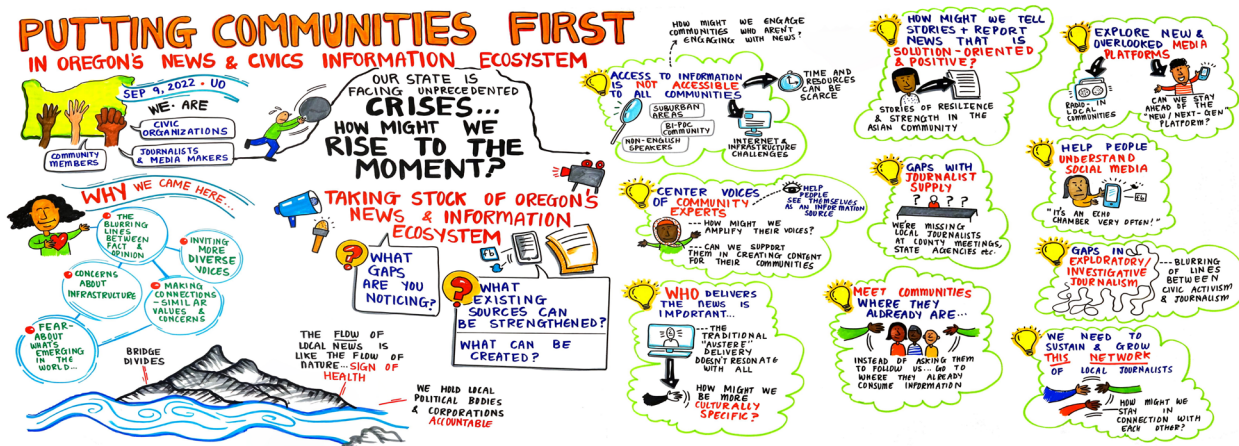
141 New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, “[About the consortium](#)” (n.d.).

142 New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, “[Groundbreaking New Jersey initiative announces inaugural series of grants to fund local news and information](#)” (11 June 2021).

the evolving information needs of New Jersey's communities."¹⁴³

Oregon has — so far — not seen the same level of coordinated, state-wide action some other states are taking to bolster our civic information infrastructure.

XI. Conclusion and Recommendations



A graphic recording of a recent convening of journalists, community members, and community organizations organized by the Agora Journalism Center. Credit: Drawbridge Innovations.

Local news and information providers — legacy newsrooms especially — face a challenging reality, even an existential crisis. Yet research shows again and again the crucial connection between local news and civic health. Communities where trusted, high-quality sources of local news and information are readily available see higher levels of political and civic participation, lower levels of polarization, higher government and corporate accountability, and higher levels of community connection.

This does not mean that the only path forward for Oregon's civic health is simply to try to restore the journalism system of the past. Too much has changed — technologically, economically, politically, and culturally

143 Free Press, "Why the Civic Info Consortium is Such a Huge Deal" (24 March 2022).

— to turn back the clock. And while the internet has made possible the wide dissemination of mis- and disinformation, digital technologies have also created, in the best sense, rich possibilities for non-journalistic sources to fill critical information needs and for communities to serve as their own story-tellers. Today's news and information ecosystem is complex, and news organizations no longer occupy the same privileged place they once did at the center of community life.

But despite that changing context, communities still need a steady supply of high quality, inclusive and trustworthy information about community life and public affairs. And journalistic organizations are still critical producers of that kind of information.

Journalism's crisis presents opportunities for significant innovation in journalism practice—in particular, around new ways to engage in deeper relationship building with communities. University of Oregon journalism scholar Seth Lewis identifies points to the practice of “relational journalism” that is “focused on better understanding, listening to, and engaging with people in ways that are mutually beneficial, solutions oriented, and fundamentally relationship driven.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, among the leading recommendations in a 2019 Knight Foundation report on trust, media and democracy is for journalists to “develop strategies to better engage with the public and reflect the interests of their communities.”¹⁴⁵

Clearly, journalism has much work to do as it adjusts to changed economic realities and finds new footing with a more fragmented public. While the news industry works to transform how journalism is practiced, opportunities beckon to create more foundational and state-wide support for our local news and information infrastructure — work that can be undertaken not just by journalistic support organizations, but also by institutions of higher education, philanthropies and other funders, and by policy-makers. The research reported here points toward several recommendations:

- **Update curriculum and training for journalists to better prepare them to fulfill journalism's democratic functions in an environment of rapid change and ongoing uncertainty** — for example, training in collaborative and community-centered journalism.
- **Create a statewide framework for ongoing, integrated newsroom support and collaboration that increases the underlying pool of**

144 Regina Lawrence, Eric Gordon, Andrew DeVigal, Caroline Mellor, & Jonathan Elbaz, “[Building engagement: Supporting the practice of relational journalism](#),” Agora Journalism Center (2019); Seth Lewis, “Lack of trust in the news media, institutional weakness, and relational journalism as a potential way forward,” *Journalism* 21(3) (2020): 345-348.

145 Knight Commission, “[Crisis in democracy: Renewing trust in America](#),” The Aspen Institute (2019)

journalistic resources. Successful models for newsroom collaboration need to be adapted to Oregon's unique information ecosystem, and resources identified to make that adaptation happen in a sustainable way.

- Adapting and learning from models being tried in New Mexico, Colorado, North Carolina, and New Jersey, **create a state-wide local news innovation hub with potential collaboration across universities and other institutions.** This hub would work to leverage support from journalistic support organizations and foundations to grow the state's infrastructure of local news through close community collaboration, grant-making and other critical support for newsrooms large and small.
- **Identify and activate potential sources of sustained funding for local news — including reimagining the role of public funding in creating a healthy local news infrastructure.** The research reviewed here demonstrates that quality, accessible local news truly is a public good. Sustaining a robust local news ecosystem is, simply put, critical to community civic health — as critical as clean air and clean water are to the physical health of communities.
- **Create opportunities for ongoing research across institutions.** This report has offered an important first step, but much more needs to be learned about our local news ecosystem, and key statistics (e.g. staff sizes, circulation data, declining and emerging beats, etc.) need to be tracked over time. Researchers can do more to pinpoint gaps and emerging strengths in local news around Oregon and to document successful innovations.

As our state grapples with its mounting challenges, improving the vitality of the local news infrastructure may prove pivotal to Oregon's future.

XII. Methods Appendix

How We Created the Database of Oregon News Outlets

As described in the main report, the data on Oregon's news outlets presented in this report are based on a data set consisting of 241 media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, online news sites, radio stations, and television stations that we concluded regularly produce original local news content (further defined below). It represents our best efforts to catalog all Oregon news outlets meeting that definition at the time this report was written (mid-2021 — mid-2022).

We cannot say with certainty that this is a complete census, since the media landscape is constantly changing and some outlets that publish news infrequently, do not have an online presence, or do not reach a broad local audience may not be picked up by the methods we used to create this media map. We welcome [feedback](#) here as to how our database could be improved.

Defining the Scope. Although some communities in Oregon are served by news media outlets from beyond the state's borders, we decided to limit our ecosystem assessment to news outlets based in Oregon. While similar studies in a few other states have addressed how media in their neighboring states may offer relevant content to state residents, those states are more densely populated than Oregon and their media markets may overlap more than in Oregon. There are certainly some media outlets in Washington, Idaho, and California that serve some areas of Oregon as well, but overall these appear to be limited.

As a note, there are two possible methods for identifying relevant news outlets in a given state, based on either physical location or on locales reached (via broadcast signal, circulation, etc.). Both of these options take a top-down approach to media mapping. A bottom-up approach that maps media ecosystems based on where audiences in a state actually go to get various kinds of news has yet to be developed (Stonbely, 2021), particularly at a scale like the one used in this study.

The Initial Database. Following the method used in another state-level media mapping project,¹⁴⁶ we began mapping Oregon's media land-

¹⁴⁶ Philip M. Napoli, Ian Dunham, and Jessica Mahone, J. (2017). "Assessing news media infrastructure: A state-level analysis. News Measures Research Project."

scape by consulting the Cision media database. Cision, a platform that catalogs media outlets, programs, journalists, and influencers, offers a search function that can retrieve all media outlets registered with their site by location. This search produced a dataset of 1,250 media entities based in Oregon. We then culled that list by removing specific programs offered by a media outlet (e.g., Tillamook Today — KTIL-FM), individual people (e.g., freelance journalists), duplicates (e.g., “1859 — Oregon’s Magazine” and “1859 — Oregon’s Magazine Online”), and defunct outlets (e.g. shuttered newspapers or inactive blogs).

Importantly, Cision has coverage gaps, and other researchers have therefore recommended the use of supplementary databases in addition to Cision.¹⁴⁷ Accordingly, we also compiled data from the [US News Deserts](#) database, [Unite OR](#), [Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association](#), [Project Oasis/Local Independent Online News Publishers \(LION\)](#), [Institute for Nonprofit News](#), [American Journalism Project](#), and [Poynter](#), as well as adding outlets we found through convenience sampling (e.g. the researcher hears of or knows of an outlet that has yet to be added) and snowball sampling (e.g. collecting data on one outlet leads the researcher to another).¹⁴⁸ All said, our combined database from the eight existing databases and two additional forms of sampling resulted in 645 individual media outlets.¹⁴⁹ Data collection, from identifying the first sources to completing the coding process, was conducted from July 2021 to August 2022.

Variables and Coding Process. The following pieces of information were collected for each media outlet:

- Outlet name and website link.
- Address (as precise as possible; e.g., street name or crossroads, city, zip code).
- Medium (i.e., blog/online, circular, magazine, media & community organization, newsletter, newspaper, radio, television).
- Frequency of distribution (i.e., 2x/month, 2x/week, 2x/year, annually, daily, every other month, every other week, irregular, monthly, quarterly, semimonthly, semiweekly, triannually, triweekly, weekly).
- Keywords related to the outlet (e.g., business, politics, Spanish-language, Indigenous).
- Chain/owner of the media outlet.

147 Philip M. Napoli, Matthew Weber, Katie McCollough, and Qun Wang, (2018), “[Assessing local journalism: News deserts, journalism divides, and the determinants of the robustness of local news.](#)”

148 We also compared our dataset with the [Metric Media](#) dataset that identifies right-wing AI journalism pages. None of these sites were included, as they do not meet the criteria for original, local civic news content as outlined in our coding process.

149 Additional radio stations were later added to the dataset as we accounted for the various rebroadcasts and member stations of KLCC, Jefferson Public Radio, and Oregon Public Broadcasting stations throughout the state.

- Year the outlet was founded.
- Circulation/audience size for print publications.
- Contact information (name, email address, title, phone number).
- Source of the information (e.g., Cision, LION).

This information was extracted from the database in which we located the outlet (e.g., Cision, US News Deserts) and/or the outlet's own website. If the information was unavailable through either method, it is listed as missing in our database.

Winnowing for Relevant Outlets. In order to identify which of these 645 outlets regularly produce local news, two independent coders examined each of the media outlets' websites to identify recently published content that met the criteria set forth below. Both coders had to agree on inclusion, with borderline cases discussed with and verified by a third researcher. Coding was conducted from December 2021 to May 2022 and resulted in 241 retained media outlets, represented by the [interactive map](#) of media outlets in the main report.

Some platform-specific decisions needed to be made. For newspapers and magazines, we included monthly and bimonthly publications, business journals, lifestyle magazines and zoned editions, among other publication types, so long as they met the criteria for producing regular, local, original civic news reporting described below. In this we differed from the approach taken by the widely cited [News Deserts](#) report, which excluded some of these publication types.¹⁵⁰ In the case of local newspaper chains, we allowed that the content produced by one zoned edition or outlet in a chain counted as local, original content for other outlets and editions in the chain — consistent with our overall definition of “local” news as news pertaining to Oregon.

For broadcast outlets, as described in the main report, commercial radio stations were removed at this juncture, based on national studies showing generally low levels of news content aired by such outlets.¹⁵¹ Public radio stations and television stations were examined in a similar manner as other forms of content, by visiting the station's website and checking for recent, original, local news content. Radio stations and television stations were considered “daily” content producers, and as

150 Abernathy, P. M. (2020). “[News deserts and ghost newspapers: Will local news survive?](#)” University of North Carolina Press, p. 114. The author states, “Intentionally excluded from our proprietary database are shoppers, community newsletters (which focus on people and events, instead of news), specialty publications (such as business journals and lifestyle magazines), monthly and bimonthly publications, advertising inserts, TMCs (Total Market Coverage publications), and some zoned editions that feature minimal local journalism relevant to the county where the zoned edition circulates.”

151 Abernathy, “[News deserts...](#),” p. 67; Jessica Mahone, Wun Wang, Philip Napoli, Matthew Weber, & Katie McCullough, “Who's producing local journalism? Assessing journalistic output across different outlet types” (August 2019), DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy, p. 3.

with newspaper chains, stories written by the same owner (e.g., KVAL and KMTR) counted as original for members of the chain.

The Final Data Set: Regular Production of Original, Local, Civically Relevant News

Our final database, upon which all data presented in the main report are based, includes Oregon-based outlets that 1) publish at least some local news content at least monthly, and b) produce original local journalism c) covering issues of local (i.e. Oregon or local Oregon communities) civic relevance. Importantly, due to resource limitations, only outlets whose content could be accessed online are included in this database.

“Regularly produced” news. We defined “regularly” producing content as:¹⁵²

- **Dailies and weeklies** that publish an average of at least one local original story on issues of civic relevance each week. A maximum of two weeks’ worth of content was reviewed by coders to determine whether to include the outlet.
- **Bi-weeklies** that publish an average of at least two local original stories on issues of civic relevance per month. A maximum of one month’s worth of content was reviewed by coders to determine whether to include the outlet.
- **Monthlies** that publish an average of one local original story per month. A maximum of two months’ worth of content was reviewed by coders to determine whether to include the outlet.¹⁵³

This is a broader and more lenient standard than that taken in a widely cited Pew Research Center study, in which “All providers identified as producing at least weekly content were analyzed” (Pew, 2015, p. 10).

“Original local content.” Content was counted as “original local content” if it was a “reported” story, meaning the content creator gathered information from spokespersons, experts, documents and other sources and attributed information in the story to those sources. If an outlet appeared to only run stories produced by other organizations, including wire stories and press releases, we did not include that outlet in the

¹⁵² These standards were established after a pilot review of 40 sites. We wanted to include as many news and information sources as possible, and purposefully developed a low publishing frequency standard for this reason.

¹⁵³ Not all types of publications were included in this assessment. While we are aware that local community organizations, cultural organizations, government agencies, nonprofits, businesses, industry groups and other organizations and people produce newsletters, social media posts, websites and other types of valuable content, we do not have the staff to locate and evaluate all of these types of content sources. For this reason, the focus of our review is news outlets with a website.

database.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, if an outlet appeared to only publish opinion pieces, essays and editorials, press releases, or algorithmically generated content, we did not include it.¹⁵⁵ We also did not count marketing or sponsored content, or conflict of interest content (for example, someone writing about themselves or their organization, or a business writing about their business or industry) as original local content.

“Civically relevant news.” A broad range of topics is included in our definition of civically relevant content, including coverage of local government and politics, philanthropy and volunteering, environment, education, health, fire, emergencies and weather, crime, courts and law, economic issues, transportation, development and real estate, housing, diversity and inclusion, poverty and inequities. Also included are local sports, local arts, and local entertainment stories — all offer opportunities for residents to gather, get to know one another and create community. Profiles of local businesses, artists, coaches and other newsmakers in the community are included. Not included are consumption-oriented articles, including for example articles that suggest wines or restaurants you should try, places you should travel and items for consumers to try.

Our coding choices were informed by the work of other research teams who have mapped local news ecosystems by looking for coverage that “is original, is about the local community, and addresses critical information needs.”¹⁵⁶ We define civically relevant content (the terminology we use here, instead of “critical information needs”) as content that helps residents learn about and participate in their community, work together to address shared problems, “make wise decisions that will affect the quality of their lives”¹⁵⁷ and “live safe and healthy lives.”¹⁵⁸ Our choices were also informed by other news mapping projects, such as one by the Pew Research Center, which included as “civic” topics: “government, police/fire departments, campaigns/politics, development, court/legal system, business/economics, education, transportation, health/medicine, environment, charity/philanthropy, drug policy, ... religion, and science/tech.”¹⁵⁹

154 In cases where content appeared to be a press release but was not labeled as such (which was not infrequent in smaller publications), we performed Google searches to see if the content source could be identified. We did include content that was produced by another outlet in the same chain or owned by the same company.

155 Often these were labeled as opinion pieces, essays or editorials, but sometimes they were not. In cases where the author expressed opinion, or recommended action to readers, politicians or others, or declared developments or issues to be good or bad, these pieces were considered essay, opinion or editorial.

156 Napoli, P. M., Stonbely, S., McCollough, K., & Renninger, B. (2017). Local Journalism and the Information Needs of Local Communities: Toward a scalable assessment approach. *Journalism Practice*, 11(4), 373-395. p. 373.

157 Abernathy, “News deserts,” p. 18.

158 Friedland, L., Napoli, P., Ognyanova, K., Weil, C., & Wilson III, E. J. (2012). *Review of the literature regarding critical information needs of the American public*, p. v.

159 Pew Research Center (March, 2015), “[Local News in a Digital Age](#)”. A similar project by an experienced research team at the University of Wisconsin (Friedland et al. 2012, p. v), used the following categories of information, most of which we

We chose not to include content that was in the form of simple listings, such as bus schedules, job listings, and calendar listings promoting upcoming events. So, content telling audiences about “opportunities to associate with others” (a criterion adopted by another research team¹⁶⁰) would be included if it were an original story about an upcoming local event, but would not be included if it were a calendar listing. And while we would count a story about a series of new job training classes, we would not count calendar items that merely list the hours and addresses of job trainings.

Database management. Datasets were maintained in a private Microsoft Teams server that was only accessed by the authors of the report. As all the data are based on publicly available information and did not involve human subjects, no Institutional Review Board approval was required for the compiling of the database. Readers may access the database of 241 Oregon news outlets [here](#).

Ownership Type. For each media outlet, we used information from either the relevant data source (e.g., Cision), the outlet’s own website (e.g., “About Us” page), or from Internet search queries (e.g., “X news owner”) to determine the owner of the outlet. Once collected, these were re-classified¹⁶¹ into one of the following categories¹⁶²:

- **Privately owned single-media holding:** A media outlet owned by a private company with a single holding (i.e., asset, company, or business). An example of this model from our dataset is *The Nugget Newspaper* in Sisters, which is owned by The Nugget Newspaper, LLC.
- **Small local chain:** A media outlet owned by a private company that has multiple holdings within Oregon. An example of this model from our dataset is any newspaper owned by Pamplin Media.
- **Large geographically diffuse chain:** A media outlet owned by a private company that has multiple holdings within and outside of Oregon. An example of this model from our dataset is any newspaper owned by EO Media Group (as they have holdings in Oregon and

included: 1. emergencies and risks, both immediate and long term; 2. health and welfare, including specifically local health information as well as group specific health information where it exists; 3. education, including the quality of local schools and choices available to parents; 4. transportation, including available alternatives, costs, and schedules; 5. economic opportunities, including job information, job training, and small business assistance; 6. the environment, including air and water quality and access to recreation; 7. civic information, including the availability of civic institutions and opportunities to associate with others; 8. political information, including information about candidates at all relevant levels of local governance, and about relevant public policy initiatives affecting communities and neighborhoods.

160 Friedland et al., 2012, p. v.

161 Owner name is included in our dataset as a separate variable. Using the interactive map, owner name can be viewed for each media outlet entry.

162 See Johanna Dunaway and Regina G. Lawrence, “What predicts the game frame? Media ownership, electoral context, and campaign news,” *Political Communication* 32, no. 1 (2015), pp. 43-60. The ownership categories shown here built on the work of Dunaway and Lawrence, though we added a non-profit category.

Washington).

- **Publicly traded and shareholder controlled corporation:** A media outlet owned by a corporation in which controlling stocks are not held by a single owner or family. An example of this model from our dataset is any television station owned by Sinclair.
- **Non-profit:** A media outlet that is supported by non-commercial funding (e.g., donors, federal funding), is a registered 501c organization, or is otherwise not affiliated with a corporate model of ownership. There are 10 sub-types of non-profit outlets in the dataset. These are: Employee-owned (i.e., *Burns Times-Herald*), environmental/science (e.g., *Columbia Insight*), Jefferson Public Radio affiliates, KLCC affiliates, Oregon Public Broadcasting affiliates, non-specific/nonpartisan (e.g., *KBOO FM*), political and grassroots organizations (e.g., *KEPW FM*), religious (e.g., *Catholic Sentinel*), tribal/Indigenous (e.g., *Smoke Signals*), and university/schools (e.g., *Student Insurgent*).

Mapping the Data. The density heat map provided in the report consists of three layers:

1. **County-level population density:** Counties are represented as either frontier, rural, or urban in the first layer of the map. This classification was adapted from one similarly used by Oregon Health & Science University and the Oregon Office of Rural Health.
 - Frontier:** Counties with 6 or fewer people per square mile - Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa, Wheeler.
 - Rural:** Counties with more than 6 people per square mile but fewer than 100 people per square mile - Clatsop, Columbia, Coos, Crook, Curry, Deschutes, Douglas, Hood River, Jackson, Jefferson, Josephine, Klamath, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Tillamook, Umatilla, Union, Wasco.
 - Urban:** Counties with more than 100 people per square mile - Benton, Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Washington, Yamhill.
2. **Regional dividing lines:** Four dividing lines are placed on top of the map to signal where regional geographic distinctions are made. This mapping was adapted from one provided by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center.
 - Eastern Oregon:** Counties located in the easternmost segment of the state - Baker, Crook, Gilliam, Grant, Jefferson, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco, Wheeler.
 - Coastal Oregon:** Counties located in the westernmost segment of the state, alongside the Pacific Ocean coastline - Clatsop, Coos, Curry, Lincoln, Tillamook.
 - Southern Oregon:** Counties located in the southernmost segment

of the state - Douglas, Harney, Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, Lake, Malheur.

Metro/Valley: Counties located in the Willamette Valley and metropolitan areas of the state - Benton, Clackamas, Columbia, Deschutes, Hood River, Lane, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Washington, Yamhill.

- 3. City-level heat mapping:** News outlets are marked by the city where they're based, with a gradient indicating how concentrated outlets are in that city/metropolitan area (green indicating less concentrated and red indicating more concentrated).

Interviews

In addition to mapping Oregon's news outlets, we wanted to understand their current context, challenges and innovations—and to understand how well Oregon's media are serving Oregon's many communities. So we interviewed a broad swath of journalists, community organizations and civic leaders, asking them these questions, among others:

- Where are the big gaps in providing news and information to Oregon's communities?
- What are the new, emerging sources of news and information — either as competitors, concerns, or as exciting developments?
- How do you see trends playing out in the mid- to long-term? What will the local media landscape in Oregon look like 20 years from now?

We spoke on the record with 28 sources in Portland and around Oregon. Seventeen of our sources were content producers, newsroom managers, publishers of local news startups and others working in media and media support organizations. Of the others, one works in local government, four are researchers, and seven work with foundations, community services organizations or advocacy organizations.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Subjects gave us permission to record the interviews, and were told that we would share with them any direct quotations we'd like to use in the report before publishing it.

As a validity check for this research, we also did some limited “respondent validation” in which we asked some key sources to review sections of the report or the entire report, and to comment on whether the findings resonate with them, whether the report contains gaps, and to offer follow-up observations as needed.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Bock, M. A. (2011). Newspaper journalism and video: Motion, sound, and new narratives. *New media & society*, 14(4), 600-616.

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Interviewees

We thank all the people who shared their valuable time to speak with us about the state of local news, information, and civic life in Oregon. We thank the following individuals for speaking on the record:

- Therese Bottomly, Editor and Vice President of Content, The Oregonian/Oregon Live
- Ben Bowman, co-founder Oregon 360 Media
- Adam Davis, Executive Director, Oregon Humanities
- Adam Davis, co-founder, Oregon Values and Beliefs Center
- Caitlin Baggott Davis, Executive Director, North Star Civic Foundation
- Jacob Fenton, Editor, The Portland Record
- Kevin Frazier, co-founder Oregon 360 Media
- Jackleen de La Harpe, founding Executive Director, Underscore
- Lisa Heyamoto, Director of Teaching & Learning, Local Independent Online News Publishers
- Susan Hess, Publisher, Columbia Insight
- Morgan Holm, Chief Content Officer, Oregon Public Broadcasting
- Jessica Lagunas, Arts & Culture Manager, Latino Network
- Chelsea Marr, owner, Columbia Gorge News
- Jonathan Maus, editor and publisher, Bike Portland
- Daniel McArdle-Jaimes, Public Information Officer, City of Portland
- Bruce Poinsette, freelance writer, educator, and organizer
- Mac Prichard, Founder and President, Prichard Communications
- Greg Retsinas, News Director, KGW
- Kaia Sand, Executive Director, Street Roots
- John Schrag, Executive Editor, Pamplin Media Group
- Lee Shaker, Associate Professor, Portland State University
- Quinton Smith, owner and manager, YachatsNews
- Lee van der Voo, journalist and former managing director, InvestigateWest
- Amaury Vogel, Associate Executive Director, Oregon Values and Beliefs Center
- Heidi Wright, Chief Operating Officer, EO Media Group
- Allie Yee, Co-Executive Director, APANO Communities United Fund
- Les Zaitz, editor and publisher, Malheur Enterprise
- Mark Zusman, editor and publisher, Willamette Week