

LOCAL NEWS STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s Board of Directors endorsed the Local News Big Bet, an effort to **catalyze proven innovations and interventions that center local news as a force for community cohesion, civic participation, and government accountability.**

The strategic plan provides a framework for decision making that will allow Local News to focus on its priorities and adapt as new challenges and opportunities arise. The strategies and activities listed in this plan also will enhance MacArthur’s efforts as a national [Press Forward](#) movement leader.

A glossary at the end of the document provides definitions for key terms used throughout this plan.

LOCAL NEWS BIG BET THEORY OF CHANGE

IMPACT

Spread and adoption of **diverse and sustainable local news organizations**, a **powerfully organized sector**, and **sustained public support**, that together result in **more civically engaged communities**.

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (8–15 YEARS)

Among communities:

- Increased reliance on, trust in, and support of local news organizations by diverse communities
- Increased civic engagement

Among news organizations:

- Spread of proven archetypes of local newsroom sustainability
- Coordination among infrastructure, advocacy, and news organizations

Among institutions:

- Sustained public and private investments in local news
- Policy to create an enabling environment for news as a public good (e.g., AI policy, FOIA policy, etc.)
- Equitable policy implementation

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES (3–5 YEARS)

At least three promising archetypes of thriving local news ecosystems.

- Increased organizational resilience
- Increased financial health
- Inoculation against mis- and disinformation among community members

- Increased trust in and reliance on information providers among community members

- Strengthened networks in news and information ecosystems

- Increased funding for local news organizations

STRATEGIES

- Greater diversity in news organizational leadership and staffing
- Growth of multilingual, culturally relevant content

- Increased engagement among community members and local news organizations

- Increased efficiency and revenue through technology adoption
- Journalistic impact via use of shared data and research for content and engagement

- Mobilized public and private support for local news

- Prioritize the financial stability, capacity, and reach of historically underserved local media organizations
- Prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented communities in newsroom leadership and staff
- Foster representation of historically underserved communities in local news content and delivery

- Encourage participatory journalism and experimentation with news content and delivery formats
- Foster engagement between local news organizations and their communities to build support, trust, and combat mis- and disinformation

- Invest in tech-enabled solutions, new revenue models, and innovative business models
- Catalyze collaborative networks among JSOs, local backbone organizations, funders, associations, universities, and newsrooms
- Invest directly and indirectly in efforts that build the internal capacity of local news organizations*

- Raise awareness among local, state, and national decision makers about the critical role of local news
- Advocate for initiatives that establish and sustain local news as a public good

Equity:

- Ensure people in historically underserved communities benefit from accurate and trusted news that reflects their lived experience

Engagement:

- Strengthen the ties between local media organizations and their communities

Infrastructure:

- Strengthen nascent and emerging local news ecosystems by providing support for essential tools, training, capacity, and services, as well as direct financial support

Visibility:

- Create the enabling environment for news and information by supporting networks, policy, and public understanding of the sector

PRIMARY APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

Within each of the four primary approaches—Equity, Engagement, Infrastructure, and Visibility—the Local News team will focus on specific strategies that will drive toward the target outcomes. Primary approaches and strategies are written with an understanding that (in nearly all cases) MacArthur is supporting—by deploying its financial, social, intellectual, and reputational capital—its grantees and partners in implementing the specific activity described. The visual on page two summarizes the components of the Theory of Change.

Within this plan, Local News will directly fund both local media organizations *and* “intermediaries”—journalism support organizations (JSOs), backbone organizations, other funders, and associations—that will deliver services to local media organizations, convene and collaborate with them, and/or fund them directly.

As part of the strategic planning process, Local News is developing a resource allocation framework aligned with the approaches, strategies, activities, and desired outcomes detailed in this plan. Initial estimates assume \$20–25 million per year in allocations through 2028, and when determining which resources to allocate, MacArthur will assess partnerships (see chart below) for each approach. This assessment will consider **focus areas** (e.g., underserved geographies, archetypes), **resource distribution** (direct vs. intermediary support), **crosscutting priorities** (e.g., equity and sustainability), and what proportion of resources each approach requires to achieve its desired outcomes. Assessment will also include questions to help Local News hone its strategies around localized, place-based funding, such as:

- How or should Local News broaden its stable of intermediaries to include those more focused on target geographies?
- Beyond the geographies it already knows and funds, how can Local News best identify and support local media organizations that are nascent/emerging archetypes or that are demonstrating promising practices—particularly in rural areas and communities with a primary language other than English?
- How will Local News best support local media organizations/intermediaries in ways that reduce the isolation in which many newsrooms operate?

Equity	Infrastructure	Engagement	Visibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Newsrooms ■ News Collaborations ■ Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ JSOs ■ Local Backbone Organizations ■ Funder/Intermediaries ■ Associations ■ Newsroom Collaborations ■ University Centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training Programs and Resources ■ Newsrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocacy, Coalitions, Campaigns ■ University Centers and Institutes

CROSCUTTING PRIORITIES

Local News has identified two priorities that inform the selected strategies and activities in all four primary approaches: Equity and Sustainability.

EQUITY

MacArthur Foundation's research shows that the absence of relevant, accurate, community-centered local news is particularly acute in communities that have been historically underserved, disinvested, or underinvested. In many local media organizations, structural racism is embedded in both formal policies and operating norms, adding to the harm experienced by underserved populations. In response, Local News has identified equity as a crosscutting priority in this strategic plan. Addressing the needs of historically underserved communities requires recognizing these dimensions and working to correct longstanding disparities in support and investment. As a crosscutting priority, Local News will always start with a conversation about the potential impact for historically underserved communities and the opportunity for Local News' support to address disparities in access to accurate and trusted local news and information, in compliance with law. By focusing consistently on aspirational goals for equity, Local News will actively support initiatives that uplift underrepresented voices, promote inclusive practices, and direct resources where they are most needed and can have the greatest impact.

Local News will prioritize local news organizations and funding intermediaries serving the following U.S. geographies because they have high quantities of news deserts, low civic health scores, and high populations of individuals from historically underserved communities. In the case of Chicagoland, the MacArthur Foundation has a longstanding commitment to supporting efforts in its hometown.

CHICAGOLAND

SOUTHERN UNITED STATES, INCLUDING:

- Southeast: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia
- Southwest: Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

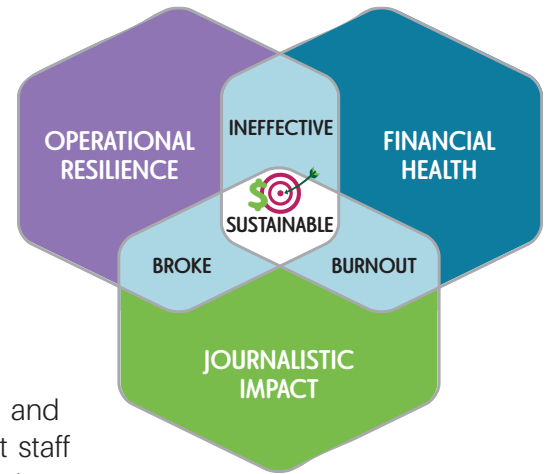
BORDERLAND COMMUNITIES

APPALACHIA

OTHER/ADDITIONAL COMMUNITIES WITH LOW CIVIC HEALTH SCORES

SUSTAINABILITY

It is Local News' explicit intention that the strategic plan lead to more sustainable local media organizations. Per [LION Publishers'](#) definition, sustainability is "the union of three pillars": operational resilience, financial health, and journalistic impact. In LION's model, the three pillars are inextricably linked, and weaknesses in any one of these areas can cause the entire operation to underperform or even fall apart.



- Operational resilience: Without a company culture and systems, processes, and policies designed to support staff and manage growth, news businesses will experience burnout among the very people whose talent and buy-in are critical to their success.
- Financial health: Without a plan for earning money, managing a budget, and monitoring revenue and expenses, news businesses will reach the end of their financial runway without the tools and data they need to acquire more dollars or right-size their operations.
- Journalistic impact: Without a track record of producing meaningful journalism that makes a difference for defined communities, the news organization will not fulfill its mission of providing valuable civic information that enables more participation in democratic processes.

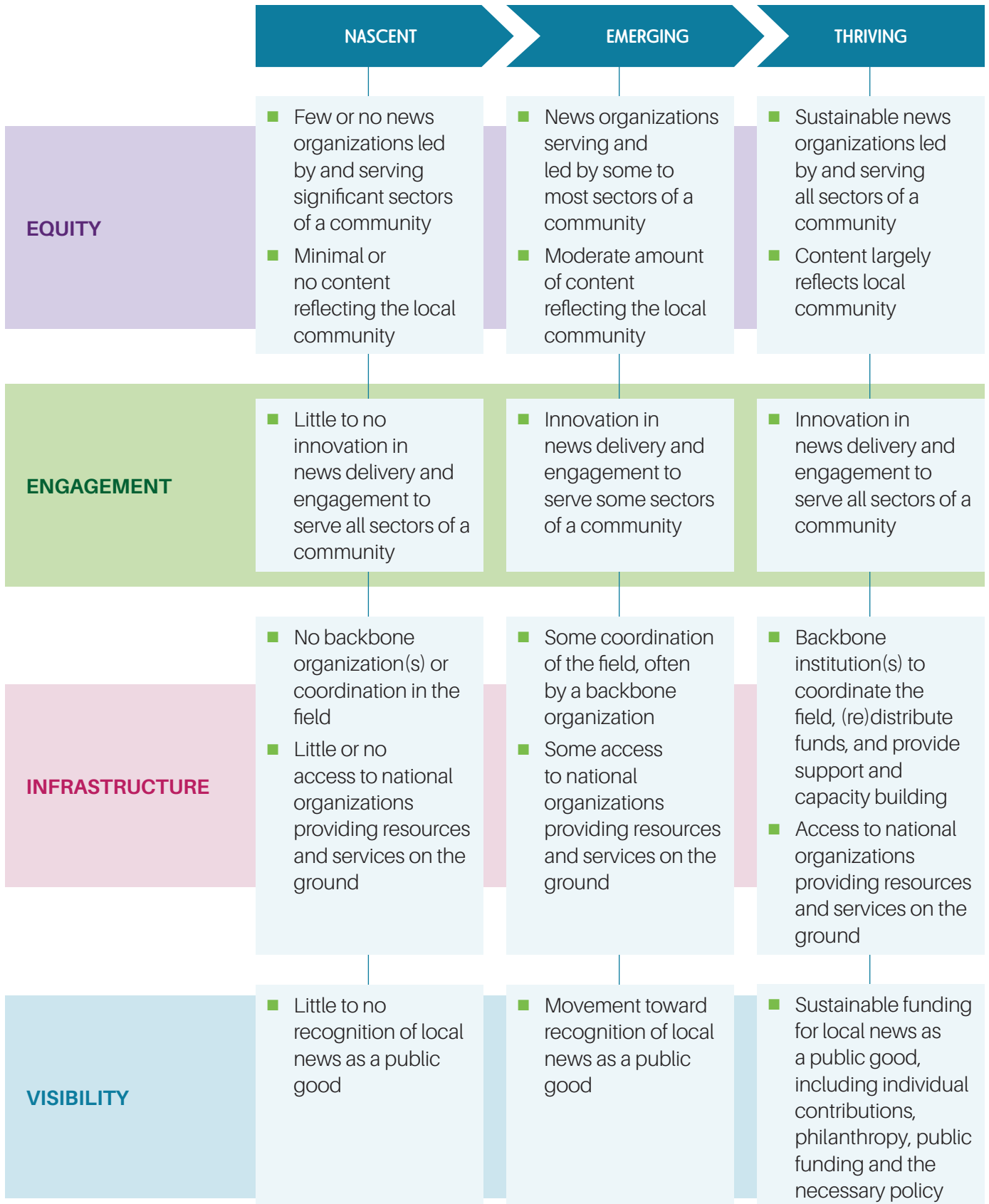
To that end, Local News' strategic plan includes, implicitly and explicitly, strategies and activities that will strengthen local media organizations' systems, processes, policies, revenue, and ability to demonstrate impact.

LOCAL NEWS ARCHETYPES

As outlined in the Theory of Change, a key long-term outcome of the Local News Big Bet is the creation of local ecosystems with replicable components that create virtuous cycles of sustainability, trust, and civic engagement—also known as **thriving local news archetypes**. Local News has identified three archetype phases through which local news ecosystems will move over time and with Local News' support: nascent, emerging, and thriving. Within each Primary Approach section in this plan there is a graphic detailing Local News' current understanding of the three phases and their relationship to the approach.



The table below describes the Local News team's current understanding of three archetypes—nascent, emerging, and thriving—and their relationship to the Local News team's four approaches. It is unlikely that any local news ecosystem will be nascent, emerging, or thriving across all four approach areas. In reality, ecosystems are unevenly developed. Thus, the strategies employed in any one ecosystem will necessarily be specific to the conditions of that place.



STRATEGIC PLAN SNAPSHOT

GOAL:

Catalyze proven innovations and interventions that center local news as a force for community cohesion, civic participation, and government accountability.

APPROACHES	EQUITY Ensure people in historically underserved communities benefit from accurate and trusted news that reflects their lived experience	ENGAGEMENT Strengthen the ties between local media organizations and their communities	INFRASTRUCTURE Fortify nascent and emerging local news ecosystems	VISIBILITY Create the enabling environment for news and information by supporting networks, policy, and public understanding of the sector
STRATEGIES	<p>Prioritize the financial stability, capacity, and reach of historically underserved local media organizations</p> <p>Prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented communities in newsroom leadership and staff</p> <p>Foster representation of historically underrepresented communities in local news content and delivery</p>	<p>Encourage participatory journalism and experimentation with new content and delivery formats</p> <p>Foster engagement between local news organizations and their communities to build support, trust, and combat mis- and disinformation</p>	<p>Invest in tech-enabled solutions, new revenue models, and innovative business models</p> <p>Catalyze collaborative networks among JSOs, local backbone organizations, funders, associations, universities, and newsrooms</p> <p>Invest directly and indirectly in efforts that build the internal capacity of local news organizations</p>	<p>Raise awareness among local, state, and national decision makers about the critical role of local news</p> <p>Advocate for initiatives that establish and sustain local news as a public good</p>

PRIMARY APPROACH 1: EQUITY

Ensure people in historically underserved communities benefit from accurate and trusted news that reflects their lived experience.

EQUITY

ENSURE PEOPLE IN HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES BENEFIT FROM ACCURATE AND TRUSTED NEWS THAT REFLECTS THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCE

CHALLENGES

BURNOUT AMONG JOURNALISTS FROM MARGINALIZED BACKGROUNDS, AS WELL AS LIMITED CONTENT AND LANGUAGE REPRESENTATION



DESPITE INCREASED DIVERSITY IN NEWSROOMS, THERE IS STILL UNDERREPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP, AND LOW LEVELS OF TRUST FROM IN HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES



MacArthur Foundation

STRATEGIES



INVEST IN NEWS ORGANIZATIONS SERVING HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

- ✓ REPRESENTATIVE
- ✓ ACCURATE
- ✓ RELEVANT



SUPPORT DIVERSE REPRESENTATION IN NEWSROOM LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

OUTCOMES



GREATER DIVERSITY IN NEWS ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING



INOCULATION AGAINST MIS/DISINFORMATION¹

GROWTH OF MULTILINGUAL, CULTURALLY RELEVANT CONTENT

MEASURABLE INCREASE IN SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

- ✓ ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE
- ✓ FINANCIAL HEALTH
- ✓ JOURNALISTIC IMPACT

VISUALIZED by INK FACTORY STUDIO

Strategy 1.1: Prioritize the financial stability, capacity, and reach of historically underserved local media organizations.

CHALLENGES:

The cost of producing quality, relevant local content with reach and impact is a significant barrier to the long-term sustainability of newsrooms, particularly those serving historically underserved communities. Many newsrooms and community media outlets led by and serving historically underserved communities traditionally have not had access to direct funding and face severe financial challenges, with more than half of those serving historically underserved communities at risk of closure within five years.^{2, 3}

²Racial Equity in Journalism Fund. "Repair, Reimagine, and Rebuild: Modeling the Future of News For and By Black, Brown, and Indigenous Communities," July 23, 2024. <https://mediainstutute.org/resource/repair-reimagine-rebuild-modeling-the-future-of-news-for-and-by-black-brown-and-indigenous-communities.html>

³Ruiz, Lillian and Caroline Porter. "A Deep Dive into the Sustainability Needs and Concerns Among Community Media Outlets," National Trust for Local News. September 2023. www.lenfestinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/A-Deep-Dive-into-the-Sustainability-Needs-and-Concerns-Among-Community-Media-Outlets.pdf

These local media organizations need reliable, stable financial resources to overcome these challenges and sustainably create and deliver high-quality local news tailored to their communities' needs and preferences. Local News will stabilize and expand the capacity and reach of local media organizations serving historically underserved communities through the activities listed below.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Provide funding to local media organizations led by historically underserved individuals and located in historically underserved communities.
2. Support collaboration that reduces overhead, provides shared services, and scales reach to create sustainability pathways.
3. Support local media organizations that are launching or scaling promising and/or innovative earned revenue models to meet the news and information needs of historically underserved communities.

Strategy 1.2: Prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented communities in newsroom leadership and staff.

CHALLENGES:

Despite increased ethnic and racial representation in local media organizations, leadership parity has not grown. A lack of succession planning, especially in local media organizations led by and employing people from historically underserved communities, threatens the long-term stability of these organizations. At the same time, journalists from historically underrepresented communities often experience emotional and physical challenges when reporting on sensitive or controversial topics, and there is a lack of culturally competent mental health support for newsroom staff, including freelancers, leading to high stress and burnout.

These systemic realities leave too many communities without local media organizations that reflect their lived experiences and have deep knowledge of place. By implementing the following activities, Local News can cultivate more inclusive and diverse local news organizations.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support growth and leadership opportunities for local journalists from underrepresented communities through mentoring, leadership development, fellowship, and other talent pipeline and professional development programs in accordance with law.
2. Elevate and invest in programs that foster local journalists' emotional and physical safety and well-being and prepare them to navigate obstacles like political interference.

Strategy 1.3: Foster representation of historically underrepresented communities in local news content and delivery.

CHALLENGES:

Traditional media models often fail to meet community needs, as content is often not available in relevant languages, does not address the issues of highest importance to specific communities, fails to reflect people’s lived experience, and is not delivered in a way that meets people’s needs. This can lead to a significant trust gap and make people more vulnerable to mis- and disinformation.

The opposite is true when communities see themselves in the stories that are told and can access relevant news and information: their sense of belonging and trust in local media organizations grows, they become more critical consumers of information, and they protect themselves from mis- and disinformation. Local News will deploy the following activities to ensure local news content and delivery represents the voices and experiences of local audiences.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support the development of multilingual content, innovative local news delivery, and newsroom operations that reflect diverse experiences, perspectives, and needs of historically underserved communities.
2. Support efforts that help local media organizations and networks collaborate on local editorial content and reporting that expands resources and reach in historically underserved communities.

Local Ecosystem Archetype Progression: Equity



Equity Summary

Equity Strategies	Equity Outcomes
Prioritize the financial stability, capacity, and reach of historically underserved local media organizations.	Increased organizational resilience
	Increased financial health
Prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented communities in newsroom leadership and staff.	Greater diversity in news organizational leadership and staffing
Foster representation of historically underserved communities in local news content and delivery.	Growth of multilingual, culturally relevant content
	Inoculation against mis- or disinformation

PRIMARY APPROACH 2: ENGAGEMENT

Strengthen the ties between local media organizations and their communities.

ENGAGEMENT

STRENGTHEN THE TIES BETWEEN LOCAL MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

CHALLENGES

HISTORICAL LACK OF RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING BETWEEN COMMUNITY, LOCAL LEADERS, AND NEWS ORGANIZATIONS



OPPORTUNITIES HAVE BEEN MISSED TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST WITH AUDIENCES AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS



MacArthur Foundation

STRATEGIES

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM AND EXPERIMENTATION WITH NEW CONTENT AND DELIVERY FORMATS



BUILD SUPPORT AND TRUST



COMBAT MIS/ DISINFORMATION



FOSTER ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN LOCAL NEWS ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

OUTCOMES

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LOCAL NEWS ORGANIZATIONS



COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE INCREASED ACCESS TO AND TRUST IN INFORMATION PROVIDERS

VISUALIZED by INK FACTORY STUDIO

Strategy 2.1: Encourage participatory journalism and experimentation with new content and delivery formats.

CHALLENGES:

Traditional local media organizations often struggle to reach historically underserved communities because they have not experimented with diverse content formats and innovative news delivery platforms such as podcasts, multilingual content, SMS, and a variety of digital media. It also is challenging for many local media organizations to implement participatory journalism that involves their audience meaningfully and consistently in the creation, production, and dissemination of news content, which can mean less relevant content and limited reach. The activities below will help create a media landscape where community members feel empowered to participate in shaping the news narrative.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support projects that are experimenting with diverse content formats and distribution channels (e.g., multilingual content, text messaging, explainer videos, local radio, podcasts, WhatsApp, newsletters, artificial intelligence, print) to reach historically underserved audiences.

2. Support local journalism models that involve community members in content creation, news production, fact-checking, and newsroom decision making to ensure that coverage is relevant and reflective of community needs.

Strategy 2.2: Foster engagement between local news organizations and their communities to build support, trust, and combat mis- and disinformation.

CHALLENGES:

Local media organizations often lack systems for soliciting community feedback and fostering ongoing dialogue, which limits opportunities to build trust, support, and the ability to combat mis- and disinformation. Local media organizations struggle to partner with local leaders, influencers, and universities, or involve students in youth journalism programs. Through the activities listed below, Local News can help local media organizations develop local talent, reach more people, strengthen community ties, enhance community members’ ability to avoid the harmful effects of mis- and disinformation and ultimately, foster civic engagement.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support new and existing engagement systems and models that allow community members to provide feedback on local coverage and engage in ongoing dialogue and interactions.
2. Support partnerships with local community leaders, influencers, and organizations to share news content through trusted channels, leveraging existing relationships to combat mis- and disinformation.
3. Support organizations that implement ongoing media literacy programs and workshops that provide community members with the tools to critically assess and engage with news content, especially around mis- and disinformation.
4. Support community engagement with local media organizations through in-person events, such as town halls, community forums, and meetups.
5. Support collaborations with universities and youth media organizations to create programs that involve students in local journalism and build talent pipelines

Local Ecosystem Archetype Progression: Engagement



Engagement Summary

Engagement Strategies	Engagement Outcomes
Encourage participatory journalism and experimentation with news content and delivery formats.	Increased engagement among community members and local news organizations
Foster engagement between local news organizations and their communities to build support, trust, and combat mis- and disinformation.	Increased trust in and reliance on information providers
	Increased media literacy among community members

PRIMARY APPROACH 3: INFRASTRUCTURE

Strengthen nascent and emerging local news ecosystems by providing support for essential tools, training, capacity, and services, as well as direct financial support.

INFRASTRUCTURE

STRENGTHEN NASCENT AND EMERGING LOCAL NEWS ECOSYSTEMS BY PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR ESSENTIAL TOOLS, TRAINING, CAPACITY, AND SERVICES, AS WELL AS DIRECT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

CHALLENGES



MacArthur
Foundation

STRATEGIES



OUTCOMES



Strategy 3.1: Invest in tech-enabled solutions, new revenue models, and innovative business models.

CHALLENGES:

Many local media organizations, especially in historically underserved communities, struggle with outdated technology and lack access to essential digital tools like data analytics, artificial intelligence, and content management systems. These are important tools to make local media organizations more efficient and responsive to audience needs and when used well can streamline newsroom operations, allowing journalists to focus more on in-depth reporting. Many local media organizations also lack the capacity to develop and implement new revenue models that will foster sustainability and bring additional benefits in terms of audience engagement and trust-building. The activities below can help address both challenges for local media organizations, and ideally, attain internal and external economies of scale.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support collaborative efforts to acquire and implement digital tools such as data analytics, content management systems, and artificial intelligence that will upgrade newsroom capabilities.
2. Support collaborative efforts to develop and test new revenue models, such as membership programs and subscription services.
3. Support technology and innovations that improve efficiencies.

Strategy 3.2: Catalyze collaborative networks among JSOs, local backbone organizations, funders, associations, universities, and newsrooms.

CHALLENGES:

Local media organizations around the United States face similar challenges in achieving sustainability, and there are numerous intermediary organizations serving these organizations; they have not yet, however, coalesced into a network with collective power for shaping the future of the sector.

Local News is uniquely positioned to change this dynamic, drive collaboration, and help local media organizations save money and time, tap into larger funding sources, gain access to broader skill sets, support one another, and execute projects that would be too resource-intensive to handle alone. The activities outlined below can help achieve economies of scale that will make local news ecosystems more sustainable.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support regional and local service hubs that reduce operational costs and promote economies of scale within and across local news ecosystems through shared services agreements for services like editorial, legal, information technology, data collection and use, and human resources.
2. Support regional and local partnerships and collaborations that promote the pooling of resources, fundraising, sharing of expertise, and collaboration for operational efficiency and collective impact.

Strategy 3.3: Invest directly and indirectly in efforts that build the internal capacity of local media organizations.

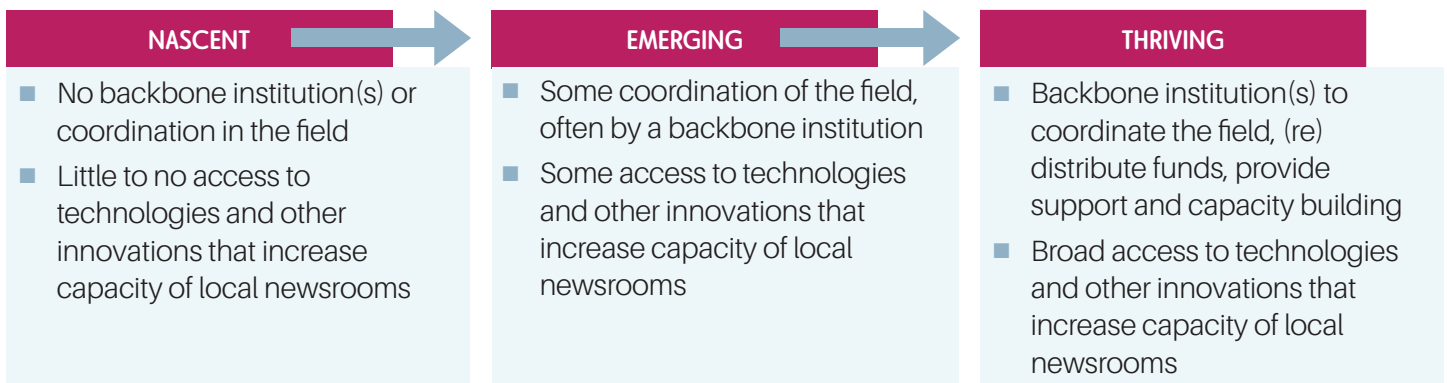
CHALLENGES:

Local media organizations often struggle to effectively use available resources, systems, and skills to achieve their goals and adapt to challenges while ensuring sustained performance and growth. The activities below will help ensure local media organizations have the necessary funding, tools, knowledge, skills, processes, and structures to fulfill their missions, overcome roadblocks, and become more sustainable over time.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support Press Forward Local Chapters and funding intermediaries in growing local, regional, and national fundraising and grantmaking efforts specifically for local media organizations.
2. Support capacity building programs that strengthen operational resilience (e.g., business and financial operations, operational efficiencies, fundraising, leadership development, and digital transformation) for local media organizations.
3. Support programs and initiatives dedicated to building leadership skills, succession planning, and growing and sustaining a strong local journalism workforce.
4. Support conservancy and consolidation efforts that keep existing local news outlets in local hands and prevent the political weaponization of local news infrastructure.

Local Ecosystem Archetype Progression: Infrastructure



Infrastructure Summary

Infrastructure Strategies	Infrastructure Outcomes
Invest in tech-enabled solutions, new revenue models, and innovative business models.	Increased efficiency and revenue through technology adoption
Catalyze collaborative networks among JSOs, local backbone organizations, funders, associations, universities, and newsrooms.	Strengthened networks in news and information ecosystems
	Journalistic impact via use of shared data and research for content and engagement
Invest directly and indirectly in efforts that build the internal capacity of local news organizations.	Emerging archetypes of organizational sustainability

PRIMARY APPROACH 4: VISIBILITY

Create the enabling environment for news and information by supporting networks, policy, and public understanding of the sector.

VISIBILITY

CREATE THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR NEWS AND INFORMATION BY SUPPORTING NETWORKS, POLICY, AND PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE SECTOR



Strategy 4.1: Raise awareness among local, state, and national decision makers about the critical role of local news.

CHALLENGES:

Leaders and decision makers do not yet fully understand the consequences of the decline of reliable, fact-based local news, including threats to democracy, increasing polarization, and the spread of mis- and disinformation. It is critical that thought leaders and decision makers in many industries and sectors and all levels of influence understand the risks and be able and willing to use their individual and collective power to drive increases in public and private funding for local news and move public opinion in favor of local news. The activities below will help raise awareness and outline clear action steps for stakeholders around the country.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support discussions and public forums at the local, state, and national levels addressing the impact of news deserts and the essential role of local news.
2. Support Press Forward’s effort to fundraise and build local coalitions of civic leaders, foundations, community organizations, and local media organizations that promote local news.

Strategy 4.2: Advocate for initiatives that establish and sustain local news as a public good.

CHALLENGES:

Coalitions of local news advocates and organizations do not have sufficient funds to organize across jurisdictions, conduct necessary research and communication efforts, and introduce innovative policy that recognizes news as a public good—a benefit everyone can access regardless of identity, location, or socioeconomic status. Local News will support education and advocacy efforts through the below-listed activities.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Support organizations that advocate for public policies that sustain and strengthen local news ecosystems (e.g., tax credits, grants, public funding, broadband access, artificial intelligence equity, Freedom of Information Act access, etc.).
2. Build capacity within coalitions to engage in public education and outreach to raise awareness of the importance of local news.
3. Support research and data-sharing that informs existing and/or new coalitions and their policy priorities, facilitates equitable policy implementation, and helps stakeholders prioritize public and private funding interventions.

Local Ecosystem Archetype Progression: Visibility



Visibility Summary

Visibility Strategies	Visibility Outcomes
Raise awareness among local, state, and national decision makers about the critical role of local news.	Mobilized public and private support for local news
Advocate for initiatives that establish and sustain local news as a public good.	Increased funding for local news organizations

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Civic Information Opportunity Index: A data driven map and dashboard of 21 indicators, created by the Listening Post Collective and Information Futures Lab at Brown University's School of Public Health (IFL), to identify what civic health looks like (including access to information) on a county-by-county level across the U.S. The indicators range in topics from news and information access, civic engagement, health access and barriers, and economic mobility.

Disinformation: False or deliberately misleading information that is spread with the intent to deceive or manipulate.

Equity: Providing fair, inclusive coverage that represents diverse communities and addresses issues affecting all demographics, especially those historically underrepresented, while working to eliminate barriers to full participation and representation.

Funding intermediary: An organization or entity that acts as a bridge between funders (foundations, government agencies, individual donors) and the recipients of funding (nonprofit organizations, community projects, initiatives). The primary role of a funding intermediary is to facilitate the flow of resources, knowledge, and support to ensure that funds are effectively allocated and utilized.

Historically underserved communities: Communities that have faced systemic barriers preventing equitable access to public or private funding and typically reside in communities with low civic health scores. These communities are characterized by intersecting factors such as geography, ethnicity, race, ability, sexual orientation, and other social, economic, and demographic characteristics.

Innovations: Innovations can include new technologies, business models, or new practices applied to operating media organizations, engaging in community and building trust.

Journalism support organizations (JSOs): JSOs provide support, resources, and services to journalism outlets and journalists to enhance their capabilities and sustainability. These organizations can vary widely in their offerings and focus areas, but they generally aim to strengthen the journalism ecosystem, particularly for local and independent news organizations that may lack the resources or infrastructure of larger media companies.

Local backbone organization: A central coordinating entity that supports and drives collective efforts within a community or specific field.

Local news archetype: An ecosystem that has replicable components that create virtuous cycles of sustainability, trust, and civic engagement.

Local news ecosystem: The network of various organizations, individuals, and institutions involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of news at the local level. It encompasses not only traditional news outlets like newspapers, radio, and TV stations but also digital platforms, independent journalists, community media, nonprofit organizations, universities, student/youth journalism programs and even local leaders, influencers, and social media channels that provide or share local news.

Local newsroom: An outlet or platform that provides coverage of news, information, and issues specific to a particular geographic community or region.

Media literacy: The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate information through various forms of media. It involves understanding how media messages are constructed, the purposes they serve, and their influence on individuals and society. Media literacy equips individuals with the skills to critically engage with media content; discern between reliable and unreliable sources; recognize biases or misinformation; and make informed decisions about the media they consume and share.

Misinformation: False or inaccurate information that is spread, regardless of intent to deceive.

Participatory journalism: A form of journalism in which the audience actively contributes to the news creation process by submitting stories, sharing insights, or engaging in discussions. It encourages collaboration between professional journalists and the community, allowing the public to help shape the news agenda and content.

Underrepresented individuals/communities: Individuals or communities whose voices, experiences, and opinions are not represented in the media or within local, state, or federal policymaking venues.

MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK WITH INDICATORS

Local News Approach	Local News Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Short-, medium-, long-term	Site of long-term outcome	Data source/ methodology
Equity	Prioritize the financial stability, capacity, and reach of historically underserved local media organizations.	Increased organizational resilience	# and % of FTE roles; # of orgs with media liability insurance	Medium-term	Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Third party data provider (e.g., INN, LION)
		Increased financial health	YOY revenue; Revenue mix (# of revenue streams)	Medium-term	Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Third party data provider (e.g., INN, LION)
	Prioritize the inclusion of under-represented communities in newsroom leadership and staff.	Greater diversity in news organizational leadership and staffing	Staff and leadership demographics; Increased number of news organizations implementing emotional and physical safety and well-being programs for staff	Short-term;	Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Third party data provider (e.g., INN, LION)
				Medium-term		
	Foster representation of historically underserved communities in local news content and delivery.	Growth of multilingual, culturally relevant content	# of multilingual newsrooms; Amount of content in community members' first languages and that is culturally relevant	Short-term;	Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Content analysis
				Medium-term		
	Inoculation against mis- and disinformation	Audience size; Audience engagement; Audience trust; Audience reliance on local news for information; Decrease in reported mis- and disinformation	Medium-term	Communities	Grant reporting; Civic info census; Third party research about mis- and disinformation	

Local News Approach	Local News Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Short-, medium-, long-term	Site of long-term outcome	Data source/ methodology
Engagement	Encourage participatory journalism and experimentation with new content and delivery formats.	Increased engagement among community members and local news organizations	# of community members engaging directly with news organizations through innovative methods; # of community members directly involved with news gathering and production; Attendance at in-person and virtual events; Digital engagement metrics	Short-term	Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Grantee reporting
	Foster engagement between local news organizations and their communities to build support, trust, and combat mis- and disinformation.	Increased trust in and reliance on information providers	Audience trust; Audience satisfaction with desired information; Audience reliance on local news for information	Medium-term	Communities	Civic info census
		Increased media literacy among community members	# of participants in media literacy initiatives; # of students engaged with journalism pipeline and/or media literacy initiatives	Medium-term; Long-term	Communities	Grantee survey; Civic info census

Local News Approach	Local News Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Short-, medium-, long-term	Site of long-term outcome	Data source/methodology
Infrastructure	Invest in tech-enabled solutions, new revenue models, and innovative business models.	Increased efficiency and revenue through technology adoption	New and/or strengthened skills; Cost savings; # instances of increased access to technology	Short-term; Medium-term	News organizations across the U.S. served by JSO grantees; Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; third party data provider (e.g., INN, LION)
	Catalyze collaborative networks among JSOs, local backbone organizations, funders, associations, universities, and newsrooms.	Strengthened networks in news and information ecosystems	Network analysis	Medium-term	News organizations across the U.S. served by JSO grantees; Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; network analysis
		Journalistic impact via use of shared data and research for content and engagement	# instances of use of shared data	Short-term	News organizations across the U.S. served by JSO grantees; Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Grant reporting
	Invest directly and indirectly in efforts that build the internal capacity of local news organizations.	Emerging archetypes of organizational sustainability	# news orgs with increasing sustainability (as measured and reported by grantee JSOs); Case studies	Medium-term	News organizations across the U.S. served by JSO grantees; Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Field analysis; Case studies
Visibility	Raise awareness among local, state, and national decision makers about the critical role of local news.	Mobilized public and private support for local news	# public forums/discussions, network/coalition meetings, and one-on-ones at the local, state, and national levels on the role of local news; # of data reports to support local news; Pickup and use of these resources	Short-term; Medium-term	Institutions	Grant reporting; Case studies
	Advocate for initiatives that establish and sustain local news as a public good.	Increased funding for local news organizations	Amount of public and private \$ secured for local news	Short-term; Medium-term	Institutions	Grant reporting; Case studies

Local News Approach	Local News Strategy	Outcome	Measures	Short-, medium-, long-term	Site of long-term outcome	Data source/methodology
		More diverse and sustainable local news ecosystems	# of sustainable news organizations; Demographics of leadership and staff; Content attributes	Long-term	News organizations across the U.S. served by JSO grantees; Grantee news organizations	Grantee survey; Third party data (e.g., LION, INN); Case studies
		Increased reliance on, trust in, and support of local news organizations by diverse communities	Audience increased use/access of local news across U.S.	Long-term	Communities	Civic Info Needs Survey
		Coordination among infrastructure, advocacy, and news organizations	Network analysis; Case studies	Medium-term; Long-term	News organizations across the U.S. served by JSO grantees; Grantee news organizations	Network analysis; Case studies
		Spread of proven archetypes of local newsroom sustainability	Case studies	Medium-term; Long-term	News organizations; Communities; Institutions	Case studies
		Sustained public and private investments in local news	Dollars invested in local news	Long-term	Institutions	Funding analysis; PF data
		Policy to create an enabling environment for news as a public good (e.g., AI policy, FOIA policy, etc.)	# of policies proposed; # policies enacted in support of local news	Medium-term; Long-term	Institutions	Policy analysis; Case studies
		Increased civic engagement	Voter registration; Voter turnout; Volunteerism; Participation in political meetings; Participation in social mobilizations	Long-term	Communities	Civic Info Needs Survey