



# Fixing Local News

by Ken Buckler  
President and Managing Editor  
*Radio Free Hub City*

<b>Legal</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction: The Decline of Local News</b>	<b>6</b>
The Ramblings of a Data Nerd	6
The Challenges Facing Local News Outlets	7
The Ripple Effect: Impact of Buyouts, Downsizing, and Mergers on Local News Outlets	9
The Rise of "News Deserts" in Rural Communities	11
<b>Chapter 1: The Importance of Local News</b>	<b>14</b>
Defining the Vital Role of Local News in Communities	14
The Evolution of Local Journalism	16
<b>Chapter 2: Understanding the Causes</b>	<b>22</b>
Corporate Influence and its Impact on Local News	22
Looking at the Financial Challenges of Local News Outlets	22
The Evolution of Consumer Habits	22
<b>Chapter 3: Looking at Successful Local News Models</b>	<b>23</b>
Thriving Local (and National) News Outlets	23
Community Supported Journalism Initiatives	23
Innovative Solutions to Sustainable Local News	23
<b>Chapter 4: The Role of Technology</b>	<b>26</b>
Leveraging Digital Platforms	26
The Crucial Role of Social Media and Community Engagement in Local (and National) News	26
The Opportunities of AI in Empowering Small News Teams	28
<b>Chapter 5: Building Community Partnerships</b>	<b>33</b>
Collaborative Endeavors Between Local News Outlets and Community Organizations	33
Engaging Local Businesses and Institutions in Local News	33

## *Fixing Local News*

Creating a Network of Support for Local Journalism	33
<b>Chapter 6: Empowering Citizen Journalists</b>	<b>34</b>
Training Programs for Community Members in Local Journalism	34
Guiding Citizen Journalists with Best Practices	34
<b>Chapter 7: Advocacy for Policy Change</b>	<b>37</b>
Exploring Policy Solutions to Support Local News	37
The Government's Role in Empowering and Preserving Local Journalism	39
Grassroots Movements and Advocacy Campaigns for Local News Empowerment	41
<b>Chapter 8: Sustainable Funding Models</b>	<b>42</b>
Diversifying Revenue Streams for Sustainable Local News	42
Exploring Nonprofit and Community-Supported Models	42
<b>Chapter 9: Entertainment and Journalism</b>	<b>43</b>
The Dance of Information and Entertainment: Navigating the Digital News Landscape	43
Leveraging Live Entertainment Events for Audience Growth	43
Strength in Unity: Partnering with Other Local Independent News Organizations	43
<b>Chapter 10: The Future of Local News</b>	<b>44</b>
Future Horizons: Anticipating Trends in Local Journalism	44
Adapting to the Changing Media Landscape	44
Charting the Future of Local News	44
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>45</b>
Nurturing the Seeds of Local Journalism: Key Takeaways	45
Inspiring Action for Individuals and Communities	45
The Power of Readership: Nurturing Local News Support	45
<b>Appendix: Resources for Action</b>	<b>48</b>

Tools and Resources for Aspiring Local Journalists

48

**Appendix: References**

**49**

DRAFT PREVIEW 5/25/2024

## Legal

*Fixing Local News*

Draft Preview Edition - 5/25/2024

Copyright © 2024 by Ken Buckler

THIS IS A PREVIEW PUBLICATION. THE PUBLICATION MAY DIFFER FROM THE FINAL VERSION UPON COMPLETION.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Artificial intelligence (ChatGPT) was utilized in the initial creation of the outline of the content of this publication.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regards to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is engaged in rendering legal, investment, accounting, or other professional services. While the author has used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional when appropriate. The author shall not be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, personal, or other damages.

## Introduction: The Decline of Local News

### The Ramblings of a Data Nerd

Let me start off by telling you upfront - I never took a single journalism class in high school or college. I did work on the school yearbook as a photographer, but I only wrote maybe one or two sections if memory recalls correctly. I'm a computer nerd - never in my life did I ever think I would want to start a local news outlet. And yet, here I am in my second year of my second attempt, providing local news for western Maryland. I didn't do this to get rich, and I certainly didn't do this because I'm not enjoying my career in cybersecurity. The cold hard truth is, I saw that local journalism has been dying for a decade now in our community, and I wanted to do something about it. So, I started my own local news media outlets. My first attempt at this absolutely failed, and I learned valuable lessons which made my second attempt a success. In the process, I decided it was time to (literally) re-write the book on local journalism. And hence this book was born.

Let's be clear - this book is not a guide to becoming a journalist, at least not in the traditional sense. What it does contain is a blueprint for building a local news media outlet, and how to organically grow this outlet with minimal budget. Do not expect to "get rich" by following this blueprint - this book is more focused on delivering better content, and less on making revenue. Currently at my own local news outlet, Radio Free Hub City, there are 2-3 of us who are delivering content, not even on a daily basis, in our spare time. We're seeing minimal returns on our time commitment, and it took 3 years just for us to break even on expenses by being primarily ad-revenue driven.

I'm a data nerd. I never make a buying decision without evaluating multiple options, comparing features, and quite often even doing a cost-benefit analysis. I have written entire reports, for free, on topics such

as the projected local economic impacts to towns along the C&O Canal if the park started charging admission fees, a comprehensive data analysis of projected tourism benefits of allowing AirBnB in our community, and even an analysis of the projected growth of a local decommissioned military base after private investment. I'm pretty proud of these reports, as they were all very effective at influencing public policy, and helping lawmakers make informed decisions. And best of all, these reports were all presented with a fact-based approach, instead of emotionally charged language.

Unfortunately, news media focus far too often on emotion-based reporting, instead of simply providing the data and facts, then allowing consumers to decide on their own. The best example of the worst of this behavior are the talking heads on major cable news networks with 3 or 5 letters as their name. Some of these outlets are very liberal in nature, and some very conservative in nature, but regardless of which side of the political spectrum these outlets find themselves on, they're absolutely wrong for this biased approach to news reporting. Sadly, these outlets merely create echo chambers, and spend more time focusing on getting their audience to be angry at the "other side" than they do focus on actual fact-based news. Don't get me wrong, it's absolutely acceptable for news organizations to have opinion sections or shows. However, the focus of news organizations should be a healthy ratio of mostly fact-based reporting, with a bit of (clearly labeled) opinion here and there. Presenting opinion as factual news is not ethical, and many news outlets are failing at ethically reporting the news.

### **The Challenges Facing Local News Outlets**

One of the main reasons for starting my own local news outlet was the continued decline I've observed in local news coverage. I have noticed over the past decade, as our local newspaper was purchased by a national corporate media conglomerate and our local TV station relocated

## *Fixing Local News*

to focus on the Washington, DC market, that local news has been dying. Now don't get me wrong, both the local newspaper and the local TV station try to cover local news as best they can, but with very limited local staff and budgets, that presents a lot of challenges.

So what is driving all of this change, which is ultimately negatively affecting the quality of local news reporting? In the labyrinth of the modern media landscape, local news outlets find themselves at a precarious crossroads, grappling with an array of challenges that threaten the very fabric of community journalism. As we embark on an exploration of these multifaceted obstacles, it becomes evident that the tempest besieging local news is a confluence of economic, technological, and structural shifts. At the heart of the storm lies the financial conundrum, as local news outlets contend with dwindling advertising revenues and a stark decline in traditional print subscriptions. The relentless march of digital platforms, while providing a broader reach, has shattered the revenue models that once sustained local newspapers. The result is a precarious financial precipice, with many outlets teetering on the edge of insolvency (and subsequent corporate takeovers).

The advent of the digital age has ushered in both opportunities and tribulations for local news outlets. While online platforms offer unprecedented access to information, they also present challenges in terms of monetization, algorithmic biases, and the struggle to stand out in an oversaturated digital ecosystem. Navigating this labyrinth requires a delicate dance between technological innovation and the preservation of journalistic integrity. But to complicate this delicate dance, the landscape of local news is marred by the shadows of corporate consolidation, buyouts, and subsequent downsizing. As media conglomerates tighten their grip, the unique voice of local journalism often gets drowned in the cacophony of centralized decision-making. The resultant loss of community focus not only diminishes the quality of reporting but also contributes to the creation of unsettling "news deserts." Even those news



outlets who succeed and grow are often faced with the challenge of balancing hyper-local focus and covering larger demographics for better sponsorship dollars.

In this era of rapid information consumption, readers' habits have evolved, posing an additional challenge for local news outlets. The demand for instant news and bite-sized content has led to a struggle between maintaining journalistic depth and catering to a fast-paced, attention-scarce audience. The delicate equilibrium between substance and speed is a tightrope walk for local news editors.

In the wake of misinformation and declining trust in the media, local news outlets face the daunting task of rebuilding the bridge of credibility with their audience. Navigating the delicate terrain of fact-checking, editorial transparency, and community engagement becomes imperative to mend the rift and reestablish the vital bond between journalists and the communities they serve. As we delve into the intricate web of challenges faced by local news outlets, it becomes clear that the path to revitalization demands a nuanced understanding of these complexities. Only by recognizing and addressing these obstacles head-on can we hope to forge a resilient future for local journalism, where the beacon of community information continues to shine undiminished.

### **The Ripple Effect: Impact of Buyouts, Downsizing, and Mergers on Local News Outlets**

In the ever-evolving saga of local journalism, the chapters on buyouts, downsizing, and mergers loom large, casting a profound shadow over the landscape. As financial considerations and corporate maneuvers take center stage, the repercussions on the vitality of local news outlets and the communities they serve are both intricate and far-reaching.

## *Fixing Local News*

When corporate entities extend their reach into the realm of local news, the ramifications are often felt at the editorial and operational core. Buyouts, driven by profit motives, introduce a paradigm shift that prioritizes economies of scale over the nuanced needs of communities. The result? A metamorphosis where journalistic autonomy is compromised, and the once-proud local voice finds itself entangled in a web of corporate directives. As the economic pendulum swings, local news outlets frequently face the harsh reality of downsizing. While ostensibly a cost-cutting measure, downsizing exacts a toll on the very essence of community journalism. Reductions in editorial staff, newsroom resources, and coverage breadth contribute to a diminished capacity to serve as the community's watchdog. The once-vibrant pulse of local stories weakens, leaving newsrooms grappling with the challenge of doing more with less.

The symphony of mergers resonates throughout the media landscape, often harmonizing corporate agendas but discordant with the nuanced needs of local communities. As media conglomerates amalgamate, the distinctive character of local news outlets risks being subsumed into a homogenized narrative dictated by distant decision-makers. The aftermath of mergers often leaves communities grappling with a diluted sense of identity and a diminished ability to shape their own stories. But behind the scenes of buyouts, downsizing, and mergers lies a poignant human narrative—the stories of journalists navigating turbulent professional waters. Job insecurity, editorial constraints, and the perpetual fear of losing the essence of impactful reporting weigh heavily on the shoulders of those committed to delivering the news. The toll on journalists is not only a matter of professional concern but also a reflection of the broader erosion of the journalistic spirit in the face of corporate imperatives.

As buyouts, downsizing, and mergers unfold, the ripple effect extends beyond newsrooms to the very heart of communities. Local news outlets,

once intricately woven into the fabric of neighborhoods, face the risk of detachment. The resultant gaps in coverage create "news deserts," leaving residents uninformed about issues that directly impact their lives. The erosion of community connection mirrors the broader challenge of preserving the democratic function of local journalism.

Navigating the intricate terrain shaped by buyouts, downsizing, and mergers demands a keen understanding of the multifaceted consequences. As we unravel the layers of this impact, we gain insight into the imperative to safeguard the integrity of local news outlets and, in turn, fortify the foundations of informed and empowered communities.

### The Rise of "News Deserts" in Rural Communities

For those not familiar with the Washington County, MD area, it's a rural community, traditionally a farming community. According to the 2024 research report *Maryland Local News Ecosystem Study* by University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism, 10 out of Maryland's 23 counties have 3 or fewer local news outlets, with Washington County being one of those affected counties. The local news situation in these counties is considered "fragile" due to the small number of local news outlets. Fortunately, Washington County has not found itself in the same situation as Caroline county, which has no local news outlet within its boundaries.

As the winds of change sweep across the media landscape, rural communities find themselves at the epicenter of a silent crisis—the emergence of "news deserts." In the vast expanses of the countryside, where the heartbeat of local journalism once resonated, a stark silence has descended, leaving communities isolated and uninformed. In this chapter, we navigate the terrain of news deserts, exploring the factors that contribute to their rise and the profound consequences for the residents left in their shadow.

News deserts are not mere geographic voids; they are voids of information, wherein the once-thriving ecosystem of local news has withered away. In rural communities, the closing of local newspapers, downsizing of newsrooms, and the absence of dedicated coverage converge to create expansive regions where residents are left in the dark about the issues shaping their lives. The term "news deserts" encapsulates the stark reality of these information vacuums. At the heart of these news deserts lies the quiet demise of local newspapers, often the lifeblood of rural communities. As local newspapers succumb to financial pressures, consolidations, and closures, the ripple effect is felt far beyond the newsroom. Rural residents lose a vital source of information that once chronicled local events, celebrated community achievements, and held a mirror to the challenges faced by their neighbors.

Even in cases where local newspapers manage to weather the storm, downsizing poses a formidable threat. With reduced editorial staff and resources, the breadth and depth of coverage suffer. Stories that once resonated within a community are overlooked, and the essential role of the press in holding local institutions accountable is compromised. The result is an incomplete narrative that fails to capture the richness of rural life.

While digital platforms hold promise as potential lifelines for news dissemination, the reality in rural areas is often a stark contrast. The digital divide manifests as limited internet access, hindering the ability of residents to engage with online news sources. The promise of a connected world remains elusive, exacerbating the isolation felt in news deserts and deepening the divide between urban and rural information landscapes. The rise of news deserts is not merely a matter of inconvenience; it is a threat to the very foundations of democracy. In the absence of reliable local news, civic engagement falters. Residents are left

without the information needed to make informed decisions about local governance, and the accountability of institutions to the public wanes. The hallowed halls of civic engagement echo the absence of a robust local press.

In the vast expanse of rural America, news deserts cast a long shadow, leaving communities stranded in a sea of information scarcity. Understanding the dynamics at play in the rise of news deserts is crucial for those seeking to revitalize local journalism and restore the voices of rural residents in the narrative of their own lives. But fortunately, working together we can fix the local news crisis.

## Chapter 1: The Importance of Local News

### Defining the Vital Role of Local News in Communities

At the heart of every thriving community lies a dynamic force—a force that binds, informs, and empowers. This force is none other than the local news, a linchpin in the delicate tapestry of civic life. In this chapter, we embark on a journey to dissect and appreciate the multifaceted role of local news, unraveling the threads that make it an indispensable cornerstone of community identity.

At its essence, local news serves as the meticulous chronicler of a community's narrative. It transforms everyday occurrences into stories that resonate with residents, capturing the pulse of local life. Whether it's a town hall meeting, a high school sports event, or a community festival, local news acts as the lens through which these moments are magnified, woven into the collective memory, and preserved for posterity. A thriving democracy relies on an engaged citizenry, and local news plays a pivotal role in cultivating such engagement. By providing residents with timely, relevant, and accurate information, local news empowers individuals to actively participate in civic life. From voting in local elections to participating in community initiatives, an informed citizenry is the bedrock upon which a vibrant and resilient community is built.

Local news outlets assume the critical role of the community watchdog, standing as sentinels in the face of power. Journalists investigate and scrutinize local institutions, ensuring transparency and holding those in positions of authority accountable. Through investigative reporting, local news safeguards the democratic principles that underpin a community, fostering an environment where informed citizens can actively participate in the governance of their own destinies. Ever since I started covering local news with my own outlet, *Radio Free Hub City*, I've stated that if I'm not upsetting someone with my efforts then I'm not trying hard enough.

## *Fixing Local News*

And how that has rung true, with stories highlighting lack of disclosure regarding county cybersecurity data breaches or video clips highlighting city council infighting, local news sheds a light on the dark parts of local government so that residents can make better informed decisions at the polls and provide better feedback to their local elected officials.

In the intricate web of community life, local news acts as the connecting thread that binds residents to one another and to the issues that shape their world. From informing citizens about local policies to celebrating achievements and addressing challenges, local news fosters a sense of belonging and shared destiny. It transcends mere reporting, becoming the conduit through which individuals recognize their interconnectedness and are inspired to participate in the communal dialogue. Fortunately, local news doesn't always have to just report the negative, and report on fantastic developments in the community, such as the opening of a new business or the successes of a local nonprofit.

Communities are rich tapestries woven with diverse threads of culture, history, and identity. Local news outlets, as cultural chroniclers, have the responsibility of reflecting this diversity. Through stories that capture the myriad experiences and perspectives within a community, local news celebrates the uniqueness of each resident and fosters a shared understanding that transcends differences. In essence, local news is not merely a conduit of information; it is the heartbeat of a community. Its role extends far beyond the dissemination of facts, reaching into the very soul of civic life. Understanding and cherishing the multifaceted role of local news is the first step towards recognizing its irreplaceable contribution to the vitality and resilience of communities.

In the delicate ballet of democracy, local news and civic engagement are dance partners, each influencing and responding to the movements of the other. As we recognize the interconnectedness between a robust local press and an engaged citizenry, we uncover the key to sustaining a

thriving democracy—one where information is not just a commodity but a catalyst for active and informed participation in the communal dance of civic life.

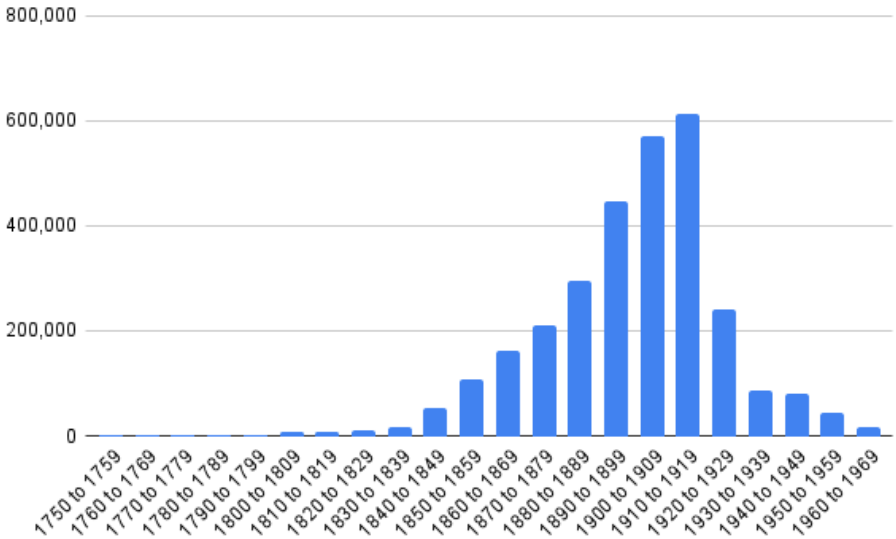
## The Evolution of Local Journalism

To comprehend the intricate dance of local journalism in the present, we must first embark on a journey through its historical tapestry. In this chapter, we unravel the threads that weave the rich and complex narrative of local journalism, tracing its roots, acknowledging its milestones, and exploring the transformative journey that has shaped the role of community storytellers over time.

The seeds of local journalism were sown in the fertile soil of the printing press era. As the printing press democratized information dissemination, local newspapers emerged as vital conduits of community connection. The first inklings of community identity found expression in the pages of these early publications, which chronicled everything from local events to advertisements for goods and services. I personally have strived to try and recapture some of this original purpose and scope of the early local newspapers, and often find myself reading them for inspiration over at the Library of Congress' (LOC) Chronicling America collection.



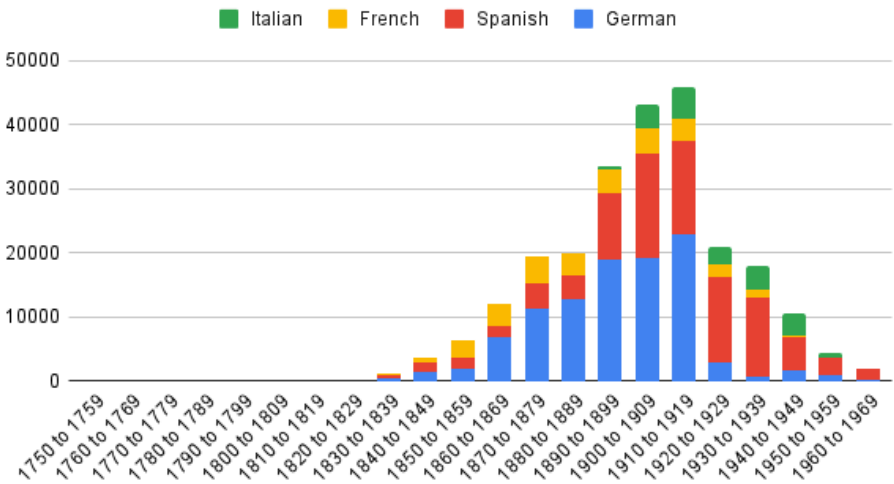
## LOC News Items, Count by Decade



Something that's really amazing about the Chronicling America collection is how it highlights the incredible number of non-English language local newspapers which used to exist in this country, speaking as a testament to the true diversity of the residents of the United States. Beyond English, German was the second language of America's newspapers, with over 600,000 pages of German newspapers and periodicals printed between 1690 and 1963. These local newspapers in the native language of the country's immigrants truly helped build and maintain communities. You can still see the strength in some of these efforts today, with Spanish-language newspapers still common across the United States, though in much fewer numbers than historically available.

## Fixing Local News

### LOC News Items by Top 4 Non-English, Count by Decade



The 19th century heralded the Penny Press revolution, a transformative era that made newspapers accessible to the masses. Affordability and mass circulation allowed local newspapers to evolve beyond elite publications, becoming integral components of daily life for citizens from all walks of life. This democratization of information laid the foundation for local journalism as a communal touchstone.

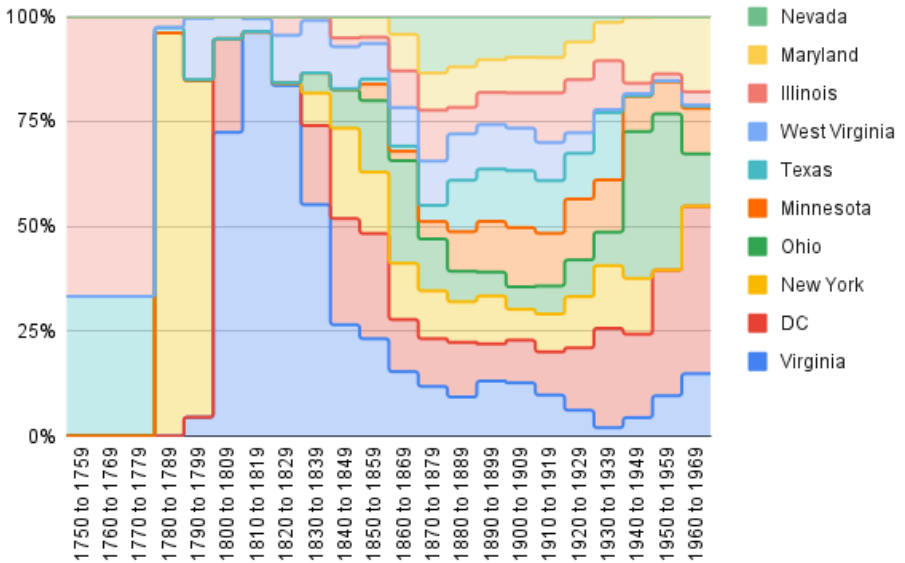
The early 20th century marked the golden age of local newspapers. In every town and city, these publications were more than sources of news; they were community pillars. Local newspapers were the glue that bound communities together, chronicling local history, celebrating achievements, and serving as the trusted voice that reflected the essence of the people it served.

However, in 1920, something changed. Corporate mergers and buyouts began to consolidate newspapers, reducing the volume of local coverage. And the LOC's Chronicling America collection illustrates this perfectly, as

## Fixing Local News

geographic diversity of collection items begins to slowly dwindle. By the 1960's, the top 10 geographic regions covered which were once evenly distributed during the golden era of local newspapers, are now dominated by approximately half of the geographic diversity.

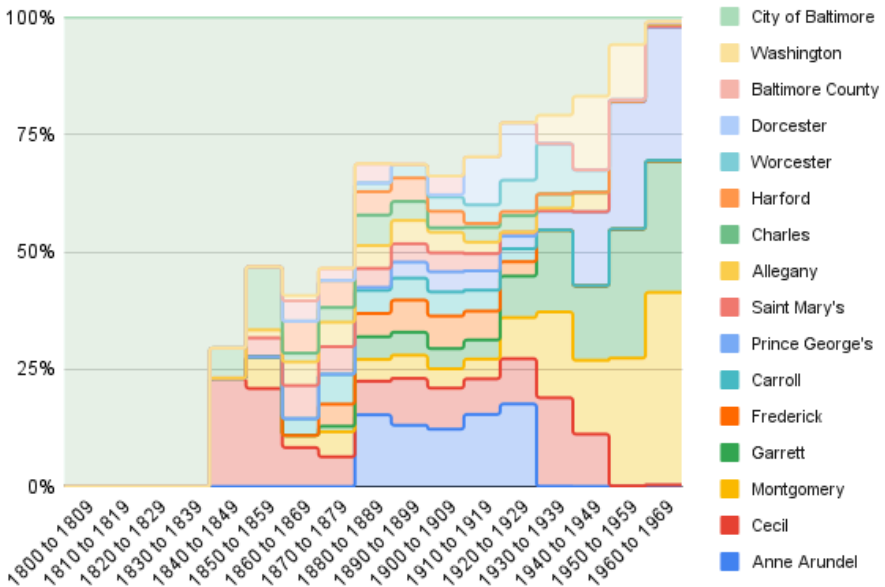
LOC News Items by Top 10 Geo Region, Percent by Decade



The state of Maryland illustrates this changing landscape extremely well when examining the dynamics of local news coverage. From the early 20th century to the 1960's, local newspaper coverage reduced from being rather evenly distributed to focus in only a few geographical areas of the state. And while some of these counties have indeed bounced back in recent years, as illustrated by the *Maryland Local News Ecosystem Study*, for the less populated parts of the state local news coverage continues to be a challenge.

## Fixing Local News

### LOC News Items by Maryland County, Percent by Decade



The mid-to-late 20th century brought further challenges as technology reshaped the media landscape. Local newspapers, once unchallenged in their role, faced the dual threats of declining print circulation and the rise of audio-visual media such as television. The transition to the digital age demanded even further adaptation, as local journalism grappled with the need to maintain its core values while embracing new platforms and storytelling formats.

As the 21st century unfolded, a new chapter in local journalism began to take shape—the era of hyperlocal digital journalism. Digital platforms enabled news outlets to reach audiences with unprecedented immediacy, and the focus shifted to stories that resonated on an intensely local level. Hyperlocal journalism sought to rekindle the connection between reporters and their communities, fostering a more intimate and engaged

form of storytelling. While many in the newspaper industry will blame the internet for their decline, the harsh reality is that newspapers have been struggling for over a century as other new media avenues have taken shape. Digital transformation may in fact be local news' savior, not its downfall.

In the present era, local journalism stands at a crossroads. The challenges of economic pressures, digital disruption, and the erosion of trust must be met with innovation, adaptability, and a reaffirmation of the fundamental importance of community storytelling. The historical significance of local journalism serves as both a guide and an inspiration as we navigate the complexities of the contemporary media landscape.

Understanding the historical journey of local journalism illuminates the resilience embedded in its DNA. From the printing press to the digital age, local journalism has weathered storms and celebrated triumphs, each chapter adding layers to its rich narrative. As we stand on the precipice of the future, the historical echoes beckon us to preserve the essence of community storytelling while embracing the opportunities that lie ahead.

## Chapter 2: Understanding the Causes

### Corporate Influence and its Impact on Local News

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Looking at the Financial Challenges of Local News Outlets

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### The Evolution of Consumer Habits

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

## Chapter 3: Looking at Successful Local News Models

### Thriving Local (and National) News Outlets

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Community Supported Journalism Initiatives

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Innovative Solutions to Sustainable Local News

In the dynamic landscape of local news, innovation emerges as a beacon of hope, guiding news outlets toward sustainable models that transcend traditional paradigms. This chapter explores groundbreaking approaches that redefine how local news is produced, consumed, and financially supported. From technological advancements to community engagement strategies, these innovative paths offer a roadmap for the future of local journalism.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the landscape of news production. Automated content creation, natural language processing, and personalized content recommendations powered by AI algorithms are becoming integral to newsrooms. When leveraged in an ethical manner, these innovations enhance efficiency, allowing journalists to focus on in-depth reporting, while also tailoring content to individual reader preferences.

A paradigm shift is underway with the rise of solutions journalism. Instead of solely focusing on problems, this approach emphasizes reporting on constructive initiatives and potential solutions. By highlighting positive change within communities, local news outlets not only contribute to a more balanced narrative but also engage readers in discussions about actionable solutions to local challenges.

Innovative news outlets are moving beyond the traditional role of informer to become collaborators with their audience. Through audience-driven reporting, local news outlets involve the community in shaping the news agenda, identifying issues, and even contributing to the reporting process. This co-creation model fosters a sense of ownership and relevance among readers, and even enabled virtual newsrooms in which communities and journalists collaborate in real time on issues and identify the stories that matter the most to the community.

Blockchain technology, renowned for its role in cryptocurrency, is finding applications beyond finance, and local news is no exception. By leveraging blockchain, local news outlets can enhance transparency, trace the origins of information, and build trust with their audience. This technology holds the potential to revolutionize how news is verified, shared, and consumed in the digital era.

Micropayments provide an alternative revenue model for local news outlets and journalists. By allowing readers to make small, direct payments for individual articles or features, these systems offer a flexible and transparent way to not just monetize content, but democratize it, enabling readers to directly support the journalists they appreciate the most. Platforms such as *Patreon* and *Buy Me a Coffee* further enable this democratization of information.

These advancements in technology have enabled local news outlets to break free from geographical constraints. Remote reporting, virtual



newsrooms, and collaboration tools allow journalists to cover stories from anywhere, reaching communities beyond their traditional boundaries. This decentralization not only enhances coverage but also opens up new opportunities for audience engagement. In the tapestry of local journalism, these innovative approaches serve as threads weaving together a vision of sustainability and relevance. By embracing technology, engaging communities, and rethinking traditional models, local news outlets can chart a course toward a future where journalism not only survives but thrives as a vital force in the democratic fabric of communities.

## Chapter 4: The Role of Technology

### Leveraging Digital Platforms

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### The Crucial Role of Social Media and Community Engagement in Local (and National) News

Traditional news media has secretly feared social media - and rightfully so, as it helps reduce barriers for consumers to obtain information about what's going on. However, social media can be a powerful tool if leveraged properly, not only to gain leads, but also gain trust and build credibility with your audience.

X, formerly known as Twitter, is probably the most successful example of social media and community engagement in news. Whenever there's a breaking news story, the first place I look for indicators as to what's going on is X. Of course, as with any news lead source, everything on Twitter needs to be taken with a grain of salt, and vigorously vetted. However, X isn't the only place I look for breaking news information. Here's my list of a few go-to sources.

- Facebook - There's a lot of misinformation on Facebook, but often there are hidden gems in the sea of complaints and local neighborhood squabbles. The fact that the HOA keeps fining Becky because her grass is too tall isn't newsworthy, but the fact that Becky's neighbor of a different ethnicity isn't getting fined when her grass is twice as tall as Becky's, now that's a possible news story worth investigating.
- X (formerly Twitter) - A great source for initial information as-it-happens, providing a good starting point for investigating

stories. This can be especially helpful during times of crisis or civil unrest. Proceed with caution though, some accounts engage in posting deceptive information with the sole intention of going viral to boost their own reach on the platform.

- Reddit - Sometimes locally focused sub-Reddits can be insightful on what's going on in communities, with stories that might need deeper investigation. These aren't necessarily breaking news topics, but more likely ongoing community focused issues.
- Discord, Telegram, and Private Social Media Networks - Okay, so now we're getting into some of the more "fringe" and borderline "conspiracy theory" stories. However, usually beyond the conspiracies and politicalization, there are some genuinely important conversations happening in these networks, and often good sources for leads that might otherwise be missed.

With that said, X is even more powerful than the other social networks as it often provides something that other platforms lack - the ability to interact directly with not only the news media outlets, but even the reporters themselves. This powerful ability allows organizations and individuals to build credibility and trust within their communities. Think about it for a second, who would you rather get your news from, a large faceless corporation, or a reporter who actively replies to feedback on their stories, even including that feedback in future stories? People want a sense of belonging, and by including those who become interested in the news, they feel as if they belong to something, and aren't just consuming news articles.

Social media's interactive nature allows local news outlets to move beyond traditional news formats. Polls, quizzes, and interactive stories create opportunities for audience engagement and feedback. By encouraging readers to participate in the storytelling process, outlets not only deepen their connection with the community but also gain valuable insights into reader preferences. They also offer local news outlets a

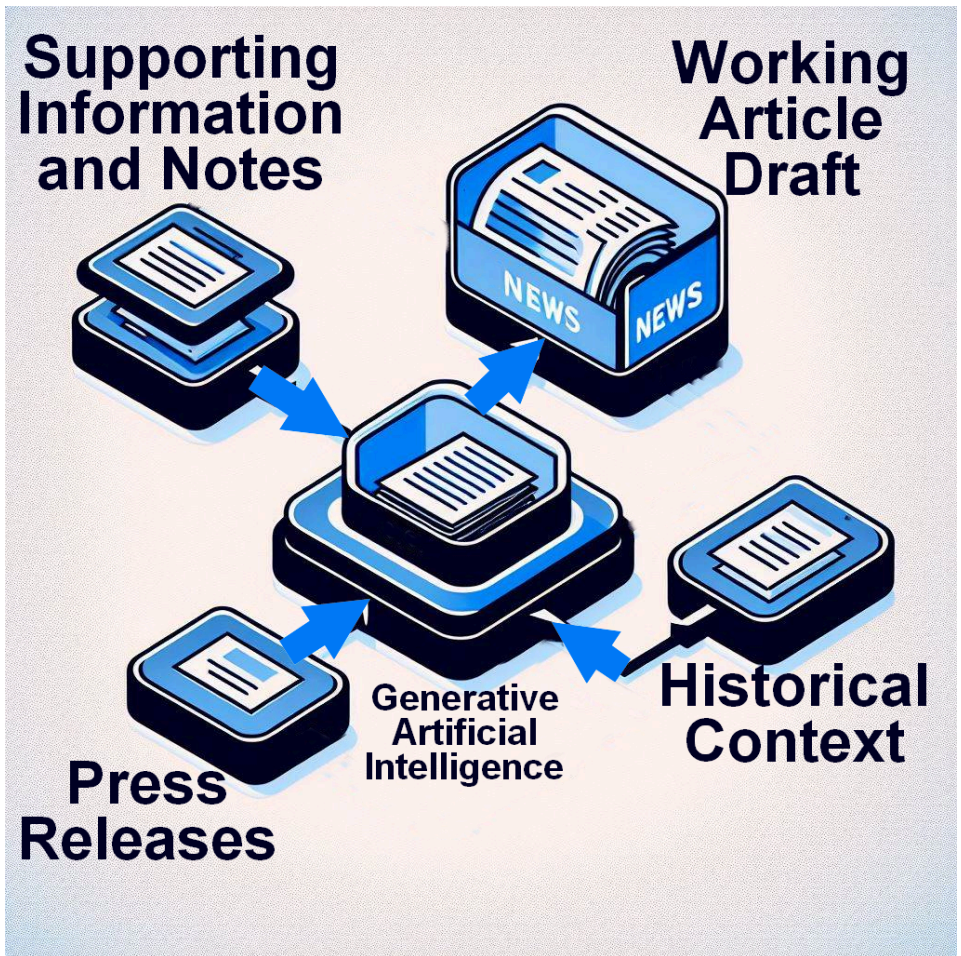
space for community building and digital dialogues. Through forums, groups, and live chats, outlets can facilitate conversations around local issues, events, and shared interests. This fosters a sense of belonging, transforming the news outlet into a digital hub where residents engage not only with the news but also with one another. Community engagement on social media extends beyond casual interactions to collaborative investigations and crowdsourcing. Local news outlets can tap into the collective wisdom of their audience, seeking input on stories, gathering eyewitness accounts, or even collaborating on investigative projects. This not only strengthens the journalistic process but also enhances community involvement in the storytelling journey.

Social media's visual and interactive capabilities reshape the landscape of storytelling. Local news outlets can harness multimedia elements, such as images, videos, and infographics, to enhance the narrative impact of their stories. This not only captures the attention of a diverse audience but also aligns with the preferences of a generation accustomed to visual communication. Building trust is fundamental to the success of any local news outlet. Social media platforms provide a direct line of communication between outlets and their audience. By transparently sharing behind-the-scenes glimpses, clarifying editorial decisions, and responding to audience queries, news outlets foster an environment of openness, accountability, and trust.

In the digital age, the symbiotic relationship between local news, social media, and community engagement is indispensable. By recognizing the power of these interconnected elements, local news outlets not only amplify their reach but also cultivate a deeper and more meaningful connection with the communities they serve, transforming journalism into a shared and participatory experience.

## **The Opportunities of AI in Empowering Small News Teams**

In the ever-evolving landscape of journalism, emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), have emerged as catalysts for innovation and efficiency. In fact, I'm happy to say that AI helped me in writing this book, specifically by drafting the initial outline and helping me get started in writing. This chapter explores the vast opportunities presented by AI, specifically in empowering small news teams to generate content from primary sources such as local government announcements and press releases. Importantly, it emphasizes the ethical use of AI, framing it not as a replacement for news staff but as a strategic ally for smaller news organizations striving to compete with larger corporate entities.



Artificial intelligence has transcended its role as a mere tool and evolved into a collaborative partner for small news teams. Leveraging machine learning algorithms, natural language processing, and data analysis, AI can sift through vast datasets, extract relevant information, and generate preliminary reports. This transforms AI from a passive tool to an active contributor in the news creation process. For small news teams grappling with limited resources, AI presents an invaluable ally in streamlining information processing. By automating routine tasks, such as sorting

through government announcements and press releases, AI allows journalists to focus on more complex aspects of reporting, fostering efficiency and enabling the team to cover a broader range of stories with depth and precision.

AI's ability to analyze data at scale opens doors to enhanced content generation. Small news teams can harness AI to transform raw information into cohesive narratives, ensuring that local government announcements are not merely reported but are contextualized and enriched. This capability enables news outlets to provide more in-depth coverage, uncover hidden insights, and better serve their communities. In diverse communities, language can be a barrier to effective reporting. AI-powered language translation services enable small news teams to access and understand local government announcements and press releases in multiple languages. This inclusivity not only broadens the scope of news coverage but also ensures that all community members have access to crucial information in their preferred language.

AI's capacity for rapid data processing facilitates real-time updates, ensuring that small news teams can deliver breaking news and timely information to their communities. By automating the monitoring of official channels, AI can alert news teams to relevant announcements as soon as they are made, enabling swift and accurate reporting in an era where information moves at unprecedented speeds.

The ethical use of AI in journalism is paramount. It's crucial to emphasize that AI is not a replacement for human journalists but a complementary tool that amplifies their capabilities. Small news organizations can maintain their commitment to journalistic integrity, storytelling nuance, and community connection, while AI takes care of repetitive and time-consuming tasks, allowing journalists to focus on the uniquely human aspects of reporting. Think of AI as a starting point, not the end-all-be-all tool to everything. One of the most significant

opportunities AI offers to small news teams is the ability to compete more effectively with larger corporate giants. While larger organizations may have extensive resources, AI allows smaller outlets to bridge the gap, providing them with the tools to process information at scale and deliver high-quality content without the need for a vast newsroom.

In embracing the opportunities presented by AI, small news teams not only enhance their efficiency and coverage but also reaffirm their commitment to serving their communities. The ethical integration of AI transforms it into a collaborative force, working hand in hand with journalists to navigate the challenges of the digital age and ensuring that local news remains a vibrant and essential aspect of community life.



## Chapter 5: Building Community Partnerships

### Collaborative Endeavors Between Local News Outlets and Community Organizations

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Engaging Local Businesses and Institutions in Local News

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Creating a Network of Support for Local Journalism

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

## Chapter 6: Empowering Citizen Journalists

### Training Programs for Community Members in Local Journalism

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Guiding Citizen Journalists with Best Practices

Empowering citizen journalists is a transformative endeavor that requires a strong ethical foundation. This chapter explores the ethical considerations and best practices essential for guiding and supporting individuals as they contribute to the local journalism landscape. From respecting privacy to upholding accuracy, these principles ensure that citizen journalists play a responsible and respected role in shaping the community narrative.

Citizen journalists must navigate the delicate balance between the public's right to know and an individual's right to privacy. Training programs should emphasize the importance of obtaining informed consent when covering personal stories, respecting boundaries, and carefully weighing the public interest against potential harm. By instilling a commitment to privacy, citizen journalists contribute to ethical reporting practices.

Maintaining accuracy is paramount in citizen journalism. Training programs should stress the importance of fact-checking, cross-verifying information, and seeking multiple sources. Citizen journalists play a crucial role in enhancing the overall credibility of local news, and instilling rigorous verification practices ensures that their contributions are reliable and trustworthy. While citizen journalists often bring unique perspectives, they should strive for independence and impartiality in their reporting. Training programs should underscore the importance of presenting facts

without undue influence, recognizing and managing personal biases, and seeking diverse viewpoints to ensure a well-rounded narrative that serves the entire community.

Empowering citizen journalists involves promoting sensitivity to the diversity of voices within the community. Training should emphasize the importance of inclusive reporting that reflects various perspectives, cultures, and experiences. Citizen journalists can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of local issues by ensuring that their reporting is representative and respectful of the community's diversity. However, it's important to understand that diversity is not the cookie-cutter racial and ethnic concept often relayed by major news media. True diversity includes understanding socio-economic conditions of residents, their education, background, and even geographic location. While the world may feel more connected through the digital world, often residents in remote communities find themselves isolated, not only from a connectivity standpoint, but often isolated from the governments which pass down new laws and regulations with little opportunity for the most distant community members to provide input. For example, one of the most distant towns in Maryland, Oakland, is over 200 miles from the state capital of Annapolis. How likely is it that a resident of Oakland will feel adequately represented in Annapolis? Very unlikely. And only a local resident from the Oakland area will know how to effectively communicate the stories that matter most to the area residents.

Training programs should provide guidance on informed consent and effective interviewing techniques. Citizen journalists should understand the importance of transparent communication with interview subjects, explaining the purpose of the story, and respecting their right to decline participation. These practices foster trust and transparency, essential elements of ethical journalism. And just as importantly, they reduce the likelihood that the citizen journalist will find themselves in legal hot water.

Accountability is a cornerstone of ethical journalism. Citizen journalists should be taught to acknowledge and correct errors promptly. Training programs should emphasize the importance of humility, openness to constructive feedback, and a commitment to learning from mistakes. This not only builds credibility but also reinforces the ethical responsibility that comes with contributing to the community narrative. Before publishing stories, citizen journalists should be encouraged to consider the potential impact on the community. Training programs should teach them to assess the consequences of their reporting and weigh the benefits against any potential harm. This thoughtful approach ensures that citizen journalists contribute positively to the community's well-being.

With the rise of digital journalism, citizen journalists need awareness about digital security and safety. Training programs should cover topics such as online harassment, protecting sources, and securing personal information. By equipping citizen journalists with the knowledge to navigate the digital landscape safely, ethical considerations extend beyond content creation to encompass the well-being of those contributing to local journalism. In empowering citizen journalists, ethical considerations are the compass that guides their journey. By instilling these principles through robust training programs, local news outlets can cultivate a cadre of responsible contributors who enrich the community narrative while upholding the highest standards of journalistic integrity.

## Chapter 7: Advocacy for Policy Change

### Exploring Policy Solutions to Support Local News

Local news serves as the lifeblood of communities, but its vitality is under threat. From financial incentives to regulatory adjustments, these proposed policy measures aim to create an environment where local news outlets can flourish, ensuring that communities remain well-informed and connected.

Introducing tax credits for local news outlets can provide crucial financial relief. By incentivizing advertisers to support local media through tax deductions, governments can stimulate revenue for news organizations. This policy solution not only bolsters the economic sustainability of local news but also underscores its importance as a public service.

Governments can establish public funding initiatives to support local news outlets, especially those serving underserved communities. Through grants or subsidies, public funds can help offset operational costs, ensuring that even smaller outlets can thrive. This policy solution addresses information inequity, promoting a diverse and inclusive media landscape.

Granting nonprofit status to local news outlets can unlock new avenues of financial support. Additionally, community endowments can be established to ensure long-term sustainability. This policy solution safeguards editorial independence by reducing reliance on advertising revenue and commercial interests, fostering a sense of community ownership. *Maryland Matters* is an excellent example of a successful nonprofit news outlet, and you should check them out at [marylandmatters.org](http://marylandmatters.org).

## *Fixing Local News*

Governments can establish community information hubs that act as centralized resources for local news. These hubs can streamline information dissemination, promote collaboration among news outlets, and serve as a one-stop source for community members seeking reliable and timely information. This policy solution enhances efficiency and accessibility in the local news ecosystem. Governments can also contribute to a thriving local news ecosystem by implementing open data policies. Making public information more accessible facilitates investigative reporting and empowers local news outlets to hold authorities accountable. This policy solution reinforces the symbiotic relationship between a transparent government and a robust local journalism sector.

Furthermore, to address the long-term sustainability of local news, governments can introduce policies that support journalism education initiatives. By providing funding for journalism programs and internships, policymakers can nurture a new generation of reporters committed to serving local communities. This policy solution ensures a continuous pipeline of skilled journalists.

Encouraging the formation of local journalism collaboratives through policy incentives can enhance information sharing and resource pooling among news outlets. These partnerships can lead to joint investigative projects, cost-sharing initiatives, and increased coverage depth. This policy solution fosters a collaborative environment that strengthens the collective impact of local journalism. Governments can also implement policies that promote diversity in local media ownership and content. Initiatives supporting minority-owned outlets, diverse programming, and community-driven media projects contribute to a richer and more representative local news landscape, and help provide journalism which can better understand target communities' concerns and issues. This policy solution nurtures pluralism, ensuring that local news reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

Exploring these policy solutions offers a roadmap for creating an environment where local news can not only survive but thrive. By aligning public policy with the vital role local journalism plays in community well-being, governments can contribute to the sustainability of this essential pillar of democratic society.

### **The Government's Role in Empowering and Preserving Local Journalism**

Local government plays a pivotal role in maintaining a vibrant local journalism ecosystem, ensuring that communities stay well-informed and connected. This chapter explores the delicate balance that local government must strike—empowering local journalism without interfering with its ability to cover matters crucial to the community. By fostering an environment that supports independent reporting, governments can contribute to the preservation of a healthy and robust local news landscape.

Governments can provide financial support to local journalism through grants, subsidies, or tax incentives. However, it's crucial that this support comes without strings attached regarding editorial control. Independence is the cornerstone of ethical journalism, and financial assistance should empower local news outlets without compromising their editorial integrity. Governments should also enact and enforce laws that protect journalists from harassment, censorship, or legal action designed to stifle their reporting. Providing legal protections ensures that journalists can fearlessly pursue stories in the public interest, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency that benefits both the community and the government itself.

Encouraging collaboration between the government and local journalism outlets is essential. Initiatives that foster partnerships without

compromising editorial independence can lead to more informed reporting on government activities. This collaborative approach promotes transparency, strengthens communication, and ensures that the government's actions are accurately and fairly represented. Governments can contribute to a well-informed citizenry by supporting media literacy programs. By investing in education initiatives that teach residents to critically evaluate news sources, governments empower citizens to distinguish between reliable journalism and misinformation. This approach aligns with the shared goal of fostering an engaged and informed community.

The Freedom of Information act, as well as state equivalent acts, are absolutely vital to ensuring transparency in democracy, and news outlets use them quite often. Governments should uphold and strengthen Freedom of Information Acts, ensuring that journalists have affordable access to government records and proceedings. Transparent governance relies on an informed public, and journalists play a crucial role in facilitating that transparency. By respecting freedom of information, governments contribute to a thriving local journalism landscape.

Governments can contribute to the preservation of local journalism by publicly acknowledging its vital role. Proclamations, awards, and official statements recognizing the contributions of local news outlets reinforce their importance in the community. This recognition fosters a sense of appreciation for the watchdog function of local journalism and its positive impact on civic life. Governments should refrain from using legal measures to retaliate against journalists engaged in investigative reporting. Freedom of the press is a cornerstone of democratic societies, and governments must ensure that journalists can carry out their responsibilities without fear of undue legal consequences. This protection encourages robust investigative journalism that serves the public interest.



In navigating the delicate dance between government and local journalism, a commitment to empowering independent reporting is paramount. Governments can play a crucial role in preserving local journalism by providing support, transparency, and legal protections without compromising the outlets' editorial autonomy. In doing so, they contribute to the health of the local news ecosystem and the vibrancy of democratic societies.

### Grassroots Movements and Advocacy Campaigns for Local News Empowerment

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

## Chapter 8: Sustainable Funding Models

### Diversifying Revenue Streams for Sustainable Local News

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Exploring Nonprofit and Community-Supported Models

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

## Chapter 9: Entertainment and Journalism

### The Dance of Information and Entertainment: Navigating the Digital News Landscape

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Leveraging Live Entertainment Events for Audience Growth

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Strength in Unity: Partnering with Other Local Independent News Organizations

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

## Chapter 10: The Future of Local News

### Future Horizons: Anticipating Trends in Local Journalism

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Adapting to the Changing Media Landscape

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Charting the Future of Local News

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at  
<https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

## Conclusion

### Nurturing the Seeds of Local Journalism: Key Takeaways

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### Inspiring Action for Individuals and Communities

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>

### The Power of Readership: Nurturing Local News Support

The vitality of local news is intricately tied to the engagement and support of its readership. In this chapter, we delve into the pivotal role that readers play in sustaining and revitalizing local journalism. From fostering a culture of informed readership to advocating for the importance of local news, individuals can become catalysts for positive change in their communities.

Building an informed readership is the bedrock of a thriving local news ecosystem. Readers can actively seek diverse sources of information, verify news authenticity, and engage critically with content. By cultivating a culture of informed readership, individuals contribute to a community that values accuracy, transparency, and the pursuit of truth.

Readers can directly support local news outlets by subscribing to newspapers, magazines, or digital platforms. Membership programs offer an avenue for individuals to invest in the sustainability of local journalism. These financial contributions not only provide vital support but also reinforce the value readers place on having a robust local news source.

Engagement goes beyond passive consumption; readers can actively participate in the local news conversation. Commenting on articles, sharing stories on social media, and participating in online forums contribute to a dynamic dialogue. Local news outlets can, in turn, benefit from valuable feedback and insights from an engaged readership.

Readers have the power to advocate for the importance of local journalism within their communities. By speaking out about the value of trustworthy local news, individuals can influence public opinion, engage with local leaders, and foster a collective understanding of the indispensable role local journalism plays in shaping community identity.

Submitting letters to the editor or similar community feedback initiatives allows readers to share their perspectives, opinions, and concerns with the broader community. This platform amplifies diverse voices and ensures that the local news outlet reflects the rich tapestry of community perspectives. Readers can actively contribute to shaping the narrative of their community.

Local businesses that advertise in local news outlets are integral to sustaining journalism. Readers can actively support these businesses, creating a symbiotic relationship between the local economy and local journalism. This support extends beyond subscriptions, as readers become advocates for the businesses that contribute to the financial health of the news outlet.

Readers can actively participate in local news events organized by news outlets. Town hall meetings, forums, and community gatherings provide opportunities for face-to-face interactions with journalists, community leaders, and fellow residents. These events strengthen community bonds and reinforce the shared commitment to a thriving local news ecosystem.

## *Fixing Local News*

Readers can act as ambassadors for local news by actively sharing stories that resonate with them. Utilizing social media platforms, email, and word-of-mouth, individuals can amplify the reach of local news content. Sharing impactful stories not only broadens the readership but also contributes to the overall visibility and influence of local journalism.

Engaging in citizen journalism initiatives allows readers to become active contributors to local news coverage. Local news outlets can provide platforms for individuals to share firsthand accounts, community events, and unique perspectives. This participatory approach enriches the news landscape and ensures that a diverse array of voices is heard.

Readers can foster sustainability by making a long-term commitment to supporting local journalism. Whether through regular subscriptions, active engagement, or advocating for the importance of local news, individuals play a crucial role in ensuring that local journalism not only survives but thrives as a resilient and integral part of community life.

In the symbiotic relationship between local news outlets and their readership, individuals hold the power to shape the future of local journalism. Through informed engagement, active support, and a commitment to community-driven news, readers become champions of a vibrant and resilient local news landscape.

## Appendix: Resources for Action

### Tools and Resources for Aspiring Local Journalists

Embarking on a career in local journalism requires a robust set of skills and access to valuable resources. This appendix provides a curated list of tools, platforms, and resources to empower aspiring local journalists in their journey to inform and engage their communities, even if you don't have any experience as a journalist.

This content is available in the full book. Purchase at <https://leanpub.com/fixinglocalnews>



## Appendix: References

Abernathy, Penelope Muse. “The State of Local News.” Local News Initiative, Northwestern University, 16 Nov. 2023, <https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/projects/state-of-local-news/2023/report/>

CTIA (Cellular Telecommunications & Industry Association). <https://www.ctia.org/> (Data compiled by Google Gemini)

Congress, Library of. *Chronicling America*. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america/>

Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/> (Data compiled by Google Gemini)

Rosenstiel, Tom, and Jerry Zremski. *Maryland Local News Ecosystem Study*. University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism. April, 2024. <https://merrill.umd.edu/articles/merrill-college-releases-inaugural-maryland-local-news-ecosystem-study>