



— National Trust for —
LOCAL NEWS

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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WE BELIEVE

LOCAL NEWS IS TOO VITAL TO VANISH.

Community newspapers are key to thriving local electorates and local economies. Yet 3 million Americans now live in community news deserts.

A MOVEMENT TO REVITALIZE COMMUNITY NEWS IS UNDERWAY.

The National Trust for Local News is dedicated to revitalizing community newspapers and ensuring that local news stays in local hands.

WE HAVE A SOLUTION.

We believe local news can be transformed. By unlocking catalytic resources and building new governance structures, we are able to assess, acquire, transform, and transfer back community newspapers to local hands.

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THIS MOVEMENT.

The genesis of National Trust for Local News was a series of concept papers published by our co-founders in October 2020. We officially launched with the purchase of Colorado Community Media on May 1, 2021. Our startup year of operation was, to put it simply, fantastic.

I am pleased to share the first Annual Report of the National Trust for Local News. Our progress was made possible only with your support, guidance and enthusiasm for our mission to *Keep Local News in Local Hands*.

Elizabeth Hanson Shapiro



We created a first-of-its-kind local news conservancy in Colorado.

———— We stepped into action when our friends at the Gates Family Foundation shared that Jerry and Anne Healey wanted to keep the 24 newspapers they had long stewarded in local hands. The papers are now the foundation of the Colorado News Conservancy, a partnership of the Trust, the Gates Foundation, the American Journalism Project, the Colorado Trust, our lender FJC, and our local partner, The Colorado Sun.



WHAT IS A LOCAL NEWS CONSERVANCY?

We believe that local news should be owned and governed by the people it serves.

Like similar efforts to preserve open spaces, our local news conservancies acquire at-risk and high-value papers and then place oversight and governance in the hands of local stakeholders who know their communities best.

Each of our local news conservancies prioritizes sustainability and equitable access to quality civic news and information over profit.

We honed our theory of change in Colorado and beyond.

During the past eight months, we worked to stabilize and transform Colorado Community Media.

- + We rebuilt the core business functions of the papers, **increased their revenue**, launched a digital transformation strategy, hired and supported a new publisher, and recently launched a community engagement strategy.
- + Our partners formed a **learning group** so that we can capture how this pilot project can scale.
- + We've begun assessing needs of the wider Colorado landscape, to build the CNC's **service capacity**.



LISTENING

We listened to small publishers around the U.S. and learned about their hopes and dreams for the future of community news.

We consulted with **57 publishers in 28 states** and the District of Columbia.

- + These committed leaders are optimistic about the futures of their publications but remain uncertain how to access the resources and expertise needed to transform their newsrooms for a sustainable future.
- + Late in 2021, we launched a set of initiatives in collaboration with the **Local Media Association's Word In Black collaborative** and the **City University of New York Center for Community Media** to better understand and support succession in papers serving communities of color.



STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS

We advised local partners and funders on the landscape of community news and the potential for news sustainability in their region.

Local funders and civic stakeholders increasingly want to know what local news assets exist in their communities and how to build on them.

- + We assisted **Stewart Bainum and the Venetoulis Institute for Local Journalism** with a statewide community media assessment as they built their ambitious plans for The Baltimore Banner.
- + We are undertaking assessment work in partnership with local and national stakeholders to assess the community news landscape in a southern state, and we have initiated state-level partnerships in **New Mexico** and **Kentucky** to support future work.



We built a firm foundation of practices and processes that will allow us to scale our impact.

We developed a robust assessment process to identify the communities and community news outlets where our investments can make the greatest difference.

- + Our county-level sustainability assessment is supported by an analysis of 160 variables combined with expert review. Our title-level sustainability assessment includes a deep dive into the ownership, business structure, sustainability practices and civic value of legacy news titles.
- + These two tools form a solid foundation as we look to expand our impact in 2022.
- + We have developed proprietary diligence and research tools to bolster our understanding of financial sustainability at community papers.



OUR PROCESS



ASSESS

Assess the sustainability potential of communities

Assess county civic, social and economic health

Assess local partners and resources

Prioritize target properties for acquisition or partnership

ACQUIRE

Conduct due diligence + create deal terms

Structure financing

Negotiate terms

Shepherd deal

TRANSFORM

Develop and implement a business and audience growth strategy to grow and sustain titles

EXIT

Develop and implement a strategy for local ownership and governance

We inform and shape the conversation about the future of local news.

We were honored to join in many conversations in 2021 about rebuilding local news.

- + We shared our overall mission and learning at the Knight Media Forum, the Global and Community News Summits hosted by the Google News Initiative, and the Public Media Venture Group CEO Summit.
- + Our work was featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Columbia Journalism Review*; dozens of small papers across the country celebrated our Colorado transaction.
- + We shared details about our innovative work in Colorado at a dozen national forums.



RENAISSANCE.

For years, the narrative about newspapers has been about their inevitable demise. The conventional wisdom is that these trusted, deeply local sources of news are doomed by digital disruption, hedge fund takeovers, the squeeze of corporate consolidation or closure when an owner retires.

We see a very different future.

The National Trust for Local News is part of a broader movement to ensure that our fellow citizens in every corner of this nation benefit from the hyperlocal news and information needed for democratic self-governance and community self-understanding.

Our role in that movement is focused squarely on keeping the ownership of local news in local hands. We know this will take rebuilding, revitalization and reimagining.

We are honored to work alongside and in collaboration with you.

By 2030, we envision a thriving, locally-controlled, next-generation community press that informs and engages citizens in the civic, economic and social life of their communities.

01

Articulate our impact hypothesis.

The Trust's work to preserve community journalism is only part of our mission. Realizing our vision requires us to articulate our impact hypothesis - what civic, economic and social change we believe healthy local newsrooms create.

In 2022, we will begin our impact journey by working closely with our partner newsrooms to trace the impact their journalism and their operations have on the communities they serve.

02

Scale our work to more states.

2021 was just the beginning of our work with publishers and local stakeholders. Communities across the country are at risk of losing trusted forums for community stories and critical news and information. This year, the Trust will expand our preservation and transformation to a handful of other states.

In 2022, we will keep exploring how we can work with local and national partners to create models of community ownership for local news that result in long-term sustainability and civic impact.

03

Support succession planning.

We are fortunate to be partnering with the Local Media Association's Word in Black Collaborative and the Center for Community Media at to address the critical risk faced by trusted legacy sources of news and information serving communities of color.

In 2022, we will continue our collective work to understand the succession and capital needs of legacy news publishers and use these insights to facilitate a series of succession workshops for publishers serving communities of color.

Community journalism can survive and thrive with access to new resources, new talent and new ownership structures.

04

Develop public media anchors for community journalism.

This year we will develop an exciting new model of connecting community journalism to a strong public media anchor institution.

We will soon announce the creation of a first-of-its kind partnership with a public media organization to purchase a high-quality keystone community paper in the Lone Star state. We hope this model will inspire other forwarding-thinking public media institutions to explore the sources of community journalism in their regions.

05

Explore what a community exit looks like.

Our mission, in Colorado and around the country, is to acquire community newsrooms, transform their sustainability and operations, and exit these newsrooms to full community ownership. But what does community exit mean? And how can we work with local partners to achieve it?

These are the questions we will tackle in 2022 as we seek to exit the Colorado News Conservancy to full community ownership.

06

Evolve our approach to audience and revenue transformation.

For too long, community newsrooms have flown under the radar of innovations in technology and practice that would move the needle on audience growth, revenue sustainability and true public service.

In 2022, we will work with our local funders and partner newsrooms to invest in audience growth and sustainability. Our learnings will help us evolve our approach to transformation so that what we learn will help community newsrooms everywhere.

OUR DEEPEST THANKS

We are indebted to many individuals and organizations that provided insights, funding and technical support during our first year.

Thank you.



Google
News Initiative



Telluray Foundation



FTHREE
FOUNDATION

The Trust is a fiscally sponsored project of the **Lenfest Institute for Journalism** as we await review by the IRS. The counsel and support of Jim Friedlich and his team have been invaluable as we launched this effort.

Like so many other media startups, we benefited from the early support of the **Knight Foundation**. We are grateful for the trust placed in our idea by Alberto Ibargüen, Jim Brady, Karen Rundlet, and Jennifer Preston.

The Google News Initiative shared not only financial support, but also serves as a sounding board and thought partner.

Our deep work in Colorado would not be possible without the partnership of the **Colorado Media Project, the Brett Family Foundation, the Telluray Foundation, The Gates Family Foundation, the American Journalism Project, the FJC Family of Funds, and our friends at CoLab and The Colorado Sun.**

The **Democracy Fund, The NewsGuild, the F3 Foundation and the Open Society Foundations** share our commitment to local news as a critical component of an engaged and aware democratic society.

Our thanks as well to the dozens individuals who have made gifts in support of the Colorado News Conservancy and the Trust.

Elizabeth Hansen Shapiro

PhD, CEO

CEO Elizabeth Hansen Shapiro Ph.D. is a leading expert on local news business models, public policies to support local news, and a former management consultant and municipal investment banker.

Lillian Ruiz

COO

COO Lillian Ruiz led operations and newsroom sustainability as founding COO of Civil Media and Civil Foundation.

Fraser Nelson

Managing Director

Managing Director Fraser Nelson led the historic transformation of The Salt Lake Tribune into a nonprofit newspaper.

Steven Waldman

Founding Board Chair

Steve is a co-founder of the National Trust for Local News, and the co-founder and CEO of Report for America. Steve is a nationally-known advocate for rebuilding local news and leads the Rebuild Local News Coalition.

Marc Hand

Founding Board member

Marc is the current Board Chair and a co-founder of the National Trust for Local News. He is the CEO and founder of the Public Media Venture Group, a group of 31 public media entities operating 130 stations.

Ju-Don Marshall

Founding Board member

Ju-Don is a journalist, entrepreneur and digital media strategist and is the Chief Content Officer and Executive Vice President of WFAE, the NPR member station in Charlotte, NC.

John Wotowicz

Founding Board member

John has designed, built and led game-changing organizations across media, technology, financial services and the arts at THE CITY, NPR, Texas Tribune, Morgan Stanley, Dimensional Fund Advisors, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Judd Foundation.



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