ANNUAL REPORT

2022

National Trust for
LOCAL NEWS
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DEAR FRIENDS & COLLEAGUES,

In the two years since the Trust matured from weekend Zoom calls to a national nonprofit, we have learned a great deal. Much of that learning has come from working with you, across many fields, to ensure that all people in this nation have access to local news in the places they call home. Thank you.

We accomplished so much last year. We can now say we have conserved 33 community news titles with 31 journalists serving 4.5 million individuals in counties that otherwise would be without a local source of news. I invite you to learn more about our impact and vision in this report.

As we head into 2023, we’re more committed than ever to ensuring quality local news in small towns and rural communities across the country: preventing the spread of news deserts, strengthening communities, and reinvigorating local democracy.

And as we set our sights on the remaining independent community titles around the country, we are assembling the best talent in the field to tackle one of local journalism’s most difficult challenges: strengthening news in small towns and rural communities across the country.

The National Trust for Local News does not do our work alone. We know that our mission is urgent, but it is also long haul work. We honor the role that you and so many others are playing in our successes to date, and we are pleased to share this 2022 Annual Report with you. I am proud of all that we have accomplished together.

I hope you see your contributions reflected in ours, and I look forward to another year of progress and partnership. Together, we can keep local news in local hands.

Elizabeth Hansen Shapiro
The Trust

Our Mission & Vision
Strong Community News
The Risk of Permanently Losing Local News

Transforming Community News
Our National Reach
Our Approach
Our Mission & Vision

The National Trust for Local News conserves, transforms, and sustains community news organizations. We keep local news in local hands by providing scaled operating capacity paired with local governance.

Our transformation strategies are designed to ensure established, trusted news organizations thrive and remain deeply grounded in their communities.

Strong community news is best supported by long-term sustainability and local governance. To address these needs, we are committed to creating a system of new local nonprofits that can support community news in every state in the country.
STRONG COMMUNITY NEWS RESULTS IN STRONGER COMMUNITIES

When local news disappears, democracy suffers: civic engagement decreases, mis- and dis-information spreads, corruption rises, and polarization increases. Recent research shows that 66 million Americans live in communities at risk of becoming news deserts.

Our country has 4,100 remaining independent community news titles. Most of these titles are in rural communities and small towns whose economics and demographics are unlikely to support a replacement.

These precious civic assets must be conserved and transformed in service of strengthening our social fabric and protecting our local democracy.
The Risk of

PERMANENTLY LOSING LOCAL NEWS

In partnership with the Local News Initiative at Northwestern University’s Medill School and with the support of the National Conference on Citizenship, our research shows that 1,424 counties in the U.S. are at the highest risk of permanently losing local news. These counties have one remaining print news title in operation, no digital alternative, and median household incomes below the national average.

We are currently fundraising to support the conservation and transformation of community news in the regions we have identified as target areas in 2023. These funds will allow us to scale our work and pilot our impact metrics in a total of five states.

Number of Americans in counties at risk of becoming permanent news deserts:

- 3.8 MM people in the West
- 9.8 MM people in the Midwest
- 6.0 MM people in the Southwest
- 23.3 MM people in the Southeast
- 2.1 MM people in the Northeast
- 45 MM people total

States where more than half of counties are at risk of becoming a permanent news desert.
As the fabric of our democracy frays, quality community news sources are our strongest antidote. We can conserve the small community news sources that already exist and help these newsrooms reach far into the future.

Compared to the cost of launching a newsroom from scratch, conserving and transforming existing news sources is an efficient and effective way to strengthen democracy and support the civic and social fabric of small towns and rural communities.

The Trust is the only nonprofit organization that conserves existing community news sources and connects them to resources they need to prevent the spread of news deserts and serve their communities for generations to come.
Conserved community news titles in Colorado and Texas.

Actively working in Kentucky, Georgia, Montana, and New Mexico.

Conserved 33 community news titles

Employed 31 Journalists

Identified 120+ counties for future conservation

Impacted 4.5 million individuals

Our National Reach

THE TRUST

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Our Approach

01 CONSERVE

02 TRANSFORM

03 SUSTAIN
We are unique in our commitment to strengthening community news and information in places outside major cities. The small towns and rural communities we work in are often overlooked and under-resourced due to long-standing social and economic inequalities.

We acquire community news titles that have trusted brands with loyal audiences and committed local advertisers, giving us a baseline of earned revenue that most startups lack. By operating both nationally and locally, we bring down the cost of publishing high-quality news so that communities, no matter their size or location, can benefit from strong local news.

We specialize in print-to-digital transformation using innovation strategies previously inaccessible to small newsrooms. We bring new, diverse talent to our newsrooms through our industry and educational partnerships, including with HBCUs and other BIPOC-led institutions. Our strong, local governing boards help ensure local news stays in local hands.
2022 Impact

2022 Highlights
Our Work in Colorado

Our Work in Texas
Our Work in Georgia
2022 Highlights

FEBRUARY 2022
Harvard Business School profiled NTLN CEO Elizabeth Hansen Shapiro and the groundbreaking work of the Trust with a feature, “BREAKING NEWS.”

SEPTEMBER 2022
NTLN announced a new model of community journalism with the planned acquisition of the Denton Record-Chronicle by KERA in North Texas.

APRIL 2022
NTLN held its first succession planning workshop in partnership with Google News Initiative, Local Media Association, and Word In Black.

NOVEMBER 2022
NTLN celebrated big strides with the Colorado News Conservancy. Its titles gained 19 awards from the Colorado Press Association, a second impact investment in Colorado, and the hiring of a new Editor-in-Chief, Michael de Yoanna.

JULY 2022
NTLN incorporated as a 501c3 nonprofit, strengthening our ability to keep local news in local hands.

DECEMBER 2022
NTLN completed plans for a comprehensive conservation strategy serving rural communities in Middle Georgia.
We launched the nation’s first news conservancy in Colorado in 2021 with an acquisition of 24 community news titles serving towns and counties in the Denver region. Since that time, we have been working in deep collaboration with our publishing and ecosystem partners to strengthen Colorado’s news ecosystem.
Conservation is the first step—the real work is ensuring our titles undertake the editorial and business transformations needed to build sustainability. 2022 was a year of such transformation for the Colorado News Conservancy.

In 2022, our publisher Linda Shapley rebuilt core business operations, streamlining systems, modernizing accounting, and improving wages for our employees. She also flipped the newsroom’s production cycle so that stories appear online first. She hired our first digital editor, who has used her talents to modernize our websites, boost our social media presence, and start coaching our newsroom in digital content practices. Our Colorado newsroom launched eight new weekly newsletters in 2022.

Under Linda’s leadership, our Colorado conservancy also invested in editorial capacity, launching a region-wide, multi-month reporting initiative dedicated to the crisis in affordable housing in the Denver metro region. And our Colorado newsroom embarked on a reporting project to address how our historic coverage in the town of Golden contributed to systemic racism.

“The Trust is a great partner in Colorado. They are not just a group of smart people with big bold ideas—they deliver! We are grateful for their leadership and collaborative nature.”

MELISSA M. DAVIS, VICE PRESIDENT GATES FAMILY FOUNDATION

“Local news is a public good, and the work that our staff is doing proves that case every day.”

LINDA SHAPELY, PUBLISHER COLORADO COMMUNITY MEDIA
With strategic support from the National Trust for Local News, KERA, the public media organization serving North Texas, is stepping forward as a community anchor for the Denton Record-Chronicle. Through this first-of-its-kind partnership, the century-old newspaper plans to become part of KERA, constructing a formidable ecosystem of local journalism.
By welcoming the Denton Record-Chronicle into its family of services, KERA will gain a 13-person newsroom staff with deep regional knowledge and community connections to the growing city of Denton. The DRC will, when acquired, become a nonprofit, and gain the operational support and expertise of KERA as well as its trusted regional reputation. The nearly 150,000 residents of Denton will continue to benefit from vital hyperlocal civic news and information now and in the years to come. KERA and DRC have concluded their discovery and diligence phases and are fundraising to close the acquisition in early 2023.

“Local journalism is the bedrock of a strong, healthy community … We couldn’t be more honored to be in these conversations with the legacy paper, & not only sustain, but expand, local reporting in Denton.”

NICO LEONE, PRESIDENT & CEO OF KERA

“The ability to partner with KERA will provide our media company with new opportunities to better serve our audiences, all in the effort to continue to provide the communities we serve with hyperlocal news & information.”

BILL PATTERSON, OWNER OF THE DENTON RECORD-CHRONICLE

Texas

NTLN LAUNCHES MAJOR INNOVATION IN COMMUNITY NEWS
In 2022 we partnered with The Pivot Fund and local partners in Georgia to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive strategy that will transform and amplify community news in Georgia’s central and southern counties, known as the Black Belt.

Our landscape assessment focused on two areas: (1) the strength of existing community news titles and (2) the demographic and economic potential of counties to support sustainable local news.
Georgia

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR CHANGE IN MIDDLE GEORGIA

Local news is key to thriving societies, economies, and electorates. Yet like so many rural and underserved communities across the nation, the counties of Middle Georgia, known as the Black Belt, have experienced ongoing disinvestment in their news and information landscape.

Mis- and dis-information has been on the rise across this part of Georgia. And this year in particular saw the devastating effects of digital information pollution on local democracy and local civic participation.

In 2022, the National Trust for Local News came together with the Pivot Fund and DuBose Porter of the Dublin Courier-Herald to assess the community news landscape and identify opportunities to strengthen community news in Middle Georgia.

Our efforts identified a comprehensive strategy to conserve, transform, and sustain community news in rural Georgia for the long-term.

“Our experience in Georgia confirms that news organizations led by people of color can flourish with access to funds and expertise.”

TRACIE POWELL
FOUNDER, THE PIVOT FUND

“People in rural Georgia need the truth.”

DUBOSE PORTER
EXECUTIVE EDITOR,
DUBLIN COURIER HERALD PUBLISHING COMPANY
Assessing the Community News Landscape Across Middle Georgia

OUR RESEARCH EXAMINED THE SUSTAINABILITY POTENTIAL IN 83 MIDDLE GEORGIA COUNTIES, ALL OF WHICH HAVE A SINGLE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER REMAINING.
Conserve, transform, and strengthen community media outlets serving the Black Belt of Middle Georgia.

Create equitable access to the critical community-oriented news that drives civic engagement.

Build a platform that can help these outlets grow and become financially sustainable for the long-term.

Grow the next generation of journalists committed to a free, fair, and independent press grounded in the communities they serve.
Community Engagement

Community News
Landscape Assessments
Community Listening

Succession Planning
Thought Leadership
Press Mentions
Our Research

COMMUNITY NEWS LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENTS

Research is at the core of our efforts. As the only national nonprofit focused on conserving and transforming community news sources, many of which serve rural and underserved communities, understanding the landscape of community news is foundational to our work. To support our conservation work, the Trust engages in research to assess the overall health of community news at the state level.

This includes: (1) a survey of community news publishers, usually conducted in partnership with the state press association, focused on their business needs and succession plans, (2) a deep analysis of all print and digital products available in the market, and (3) a 160-point economic analysis at the county level, with an eye toward understanding the relative ability of a community to support a local news outlet.

In 2022, we conducted assessments with partners in Eastern Kentucky and Montana.
COMMUNITY LISTENING

As the Trust develops partnerships and deepens relationships in new regions, community listening is a critical priority. With the support of a local foundation in 2021 and 2022, the Trust and the Colorado News Conservancy launched an audience research and community engagement project in Littleton, Colorado.

The leadership of the Conservancy and the reporting staff of Littleton Independent — one of the 24 newspapers in the Colorado News Conservancy — engaged deeply with residents to learn about their priorities.

We compiled and published our findings in the: LITTLETON INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY.

Community members ranked housing issues as a top priority, and we leveraged that insight into a special series, "THE LONG WAY HOME." This in-depth look at the housing crisis involved two dozen journalists and seven months of reporting to explore the challenges of the housing market today.

This work serves as a model for outreach in other communities served by the Colorado News Conservancy.
Our Workshops

SUCCESION PLANNING

As a generation of independent newspaper owners considers their retirement options amidst massive changes to local news, succession planning is essential to avoiding newspaper closures. The Trust has developed a comprehensive succession planning workshop including a pre-workshop diagnostic survey, a guide explaining the groundwork necessary for succession, and a planning tool for publishers to use internally as they begin succession planning.

In 2022 we piloted a half-day workshop in partnership with the Google News Initiative and the Local Media Association's Word In Black collaborative. To share takeaways from the experience with the broader news industry, we co-authored an article with Local Media Association about the top three lessons learned.
To best position the Trust and the broader field to serve communities with quality news and information, we prioritize rigorous research that can compel new lines of inquiry and refine our organizational strategy. In 2022, our team co-authored two major reports in the field.

With the support of Solutions Journalism Network, our CEO and our Director of Impact and Strategic Partnerships co-authored a report about local journalism collaboratives. It was published in spring 2022 by the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism. With our partners at the Wyncote Foundation, we co-authored a report with our colleague Mark Fuerst about public media’s growing local journalism capacity. The report was published in fall 2022 by the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism.

Download Our Reports
- DEVELOPING JOURNALISM COLLABORATIONS FOR LOCAL IMPACT
- THE GROWING STRENGTH OF PUBLIC MEDIA LOCAL JOURNALISM
In 2022 we were featured in

17 NATIONAL CONVENINGS & 20+ PRESS MENTIONS.

+ Contributions to the General Accountability Office study on local journalism
+ A roundtable on Free Expression at the Center for Democracy and Technology
+ A gathering on Technology and the Future of News with the Computer History Museum
+ Participation in a funder roundtable on investing in the future of independent journalism hosted by Media Impact Funders at the IPI World Congress
+ A presentation at the National Summit on Rural Journalism in America on our survey research in eastern Kentucky
+ A presentation on strategy at the Independent News Sustainability Summit
+ A panel on our work at the Media Impact Funders’ JFunders annual gathering
+ A presentation on what’s next for local news policy at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism
What’s Ahead

The Opportunity
The Urgency
Our Deepest Thanks
Our Supporters

Our Titles
Our Partners
Leadership & Team
Awards & Recognitions
Once a community paper is lost, the chances of that community ever regaining local coverage is slim and expensive.

We are demonstrating that transforming community papers with a built-in audience and the trust of their readers is not only possible—it is cost-effective.
Between late 2019 and May 2022, more than 360 newspapers closed. Time is of the essence.

Penny Abernathy’s research indicates that there are 6,380 papers remaining: 1,230 dailies and 5,150 weeklies. We are targeting the 4,100 we see at the highest risk of closure or takeover.

We are currently fundraising to support the conservation and transformation of community papers in states we have identified as target areas in 2023. These funds will allow us to scale our work and pilot our impact metrics in a total of five states, in addition to continuing our work with publishers of color.
OUR DEEPEST THANKS

We are grateful to the many individuals and organizations that provided insights, funding, and technical support during our second year.

CLICK HERE TO JOIN US
OUR SUPPORTERS

- Anonymous donor
- Argosy Foundation
- Brett Family Foundation
- Colorado Media Project
- Democracy Fund
- Nancy and Bob Farese
- FJC – A Foundation of Philanthropic Funds
- FThree Foundation
- Gates Family Foundation
- Google News Initiative
- The Hearthland Foundation
- Heartland Fund
- Individual donors
- The Klarman Family Foundation
- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
- The Lenfest Institute for Journalism
- Open Society Foundations
- The Roth Fitch Fund at The Chicago Community Foundation
- Way to Rise
Our Titles

- ARVADA PRESS
- CLEAR CREEK Courant
- ENGLEWOOD Herald
- LONE TREE Voice

- BRIGHTON STANDARD Blade
- COMMERCE CITY Sentinel Express
- FORT LUPTON Press
- NORTHGLENN/THORNTON Sentinel

- CANYON COURIER
- HERALD-DISPATCH
- GOLDEN TRANSCRIPT
- PARKER CHRONICLE

- CASTLE ROCK News-Press
- DOUGLAS COUNTY News-Press
- JEFFCO TRANSCRIPT
- SOUTH PLATTE Independent

- CASTLE PINES News-Press
- HIGHLANDS Ranch-Herald
- LIFE ON CAPITOL HILL
- WASHINGTON PARK Profile

- CENTENNIAL Citizen
- ELBERT COUNTY News
- LITTLETON Independent
- WESTMINSTER WINDOW
OUR PARTNERS

- Amplify Utah
- CoLab
- Colorado Media Project
- Colorado Press Association Network
- The Colorado Sun
- CUNY Center for Community Media
- Denton Record-Chronicle
- Dublin Courier Herald Publishing Co
- Google News Initiative
- Impact Architects
- Kentucky Press Association
- KERA
- The Lenfest Institute for Journalism
- Lisa Borders and the LMB Group
- Local Media Association
- Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University
- Montana Free Press
- National Conference on Citizenship
- New Mexico Local News Fund
- Phil Kent
- The Pivot Fund
- Public Media Venture Group
- Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism
- University of Kentucky's Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues
- Word In Black
- Wyncote Foundation
Awards and Recognition

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

We are grateful for our partnership with DECLARATIVE LABS, the creators of our custom, hand-drawn illustrations.

We're delighted to share that our illustrations have won recognition in the 2023 Communication Arts Illustration Awards. This is one of the most well-known illustration competitions in the world. A handful of our images will be published in the May-June Issue of the Communication Arts Illustration Annual 64.

These unique images capture our commitment to local news, and to the role it plays in building and informing communities. We are so thankful for the incredible designers and artists at Declarative who bring our vision to life.