

CRAZYGOOD!

**50 Ideas to Increase
Audience, Revenue and
Trust at Small News
Organizations**



Welcome to CrazyGood!, our second year of assembling revenue-, audience- and trust-building ideas from news and journalism organizations around the country. This is a bit of an odyssey for us. We scour all manner of reports and reporting on industry trends and accomplishments, newspaper contests and research studies looking for ideas hatched at news operations that can be used immediately or can be scaled to match the resources of small journalism enterprises. We look for 50 and do our best to accurately recount these success stories and provide advice, relying on numerous organizations who track such things – Poynter Institute, American Press Institute, Columbia Journalism Review, Nieman Lab, Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, New England Newspaper and Press Association, Local Media Association and more. We don't do original reporting on these; instead we curate what others have already learned and published. You probably have read about some of these initiatives; others we hope are new. We thank all of those who developed the ideas contained in these pages, and we strive for proper attribution.

This publication accompanies an online presentation made at Radically Rural this year. If you would like a link, send me an email at twilliams@keenesentinel.com Radically Rural is a partnership between our newspaper, The Keene Sentinel, and the highly innovative Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship, also based in Keene, N.H. When Radically Rural was first conceived, I thought it important to include community journalism as a track in the programming, thereby joining the other topics of Main Streets, arts and culture, land use, clean energy and entrepreneurship. Local journalism is vital to the success of any community; sustaining small newspapers and helping startup news enterprises thrive is consistent with the mission of Radically Rural, that of improving and advancing life in rural places. And CrazyGood!, the concept of finding great ideas for small towns, is a theme of one session in each track.

I want to credit Tim Schmitt, managing editor for Golfweek and formerly a project manager for Gatehouse Media. Tim gave a presentation at the New England Newspaper and Press Association in 2019 on 50 great ideas for newspapers. His compelling, fast-paced presentation prompted me to ask him if he could tailor it to small newspapers, and he was kind enough to present at last year's Radically Rural. I'm attempting to keep his concept alive and hope you find ideas in the following pages that you can adopt for your operation. Any errors in this report are mine alone; any new ideas are warmly received for next year.

- Terrence L. Williams
President & COO, The Keene Sentinel

1

Striving for racial diversity in small news organizations

We lead this issue of CrazyGood! with references to resources that can help news organizations make progress building racially diverse operations and perspectives. As a small newspaper in rural New England, we find the challenge of hiring people of color just that, a challenge. Having recently emerged from the Poynter Institute's Table Stakes program during a national awakening to issues of racial justice, we recognize that the goal of diversity must move beyond a challenge to a solution. Newsrooms, just like the country, are confronting this issue in a renewed way. You may find helpful some of the following sources toward presenting news in a broader, more inclusive manner and staffing toward that objective, too.

[Race and the newsroom: What seven research studies say](#) – Nieman Lab

[How two local newsrooms are sewing diversity into the fabric of their organizations](#) – Poynter Institute

[4 Ways newsrooms can address a lack of diversity](#) – Columbia Journalism Review

[Digital-only platforms drive race and gender inclusion among newsrooms in 2019](#)

[ASNE Newsroom Diversity Study](#) – News Leaders Association

[Diversity and inclusivity in journalism](#) – American Press Institute

[“Unbias” the news: Lack of diversity in journalism can lead to newsrooms missing out on important stories](#) – journalism.co.uk

[Diversity](#) – Online News Association

[The importance of diversity in the newsroom](#) – Stephen Frost, Forbes

[To increase newsroom diversity, set goals and be intentional](#) – International Journalists' Network

[Good ideas in newspaper diversity](#) – The Freedom Forum

[Is Movement Journalism what's needed during this reckoning over race and equality?](#) – Nieman Reports

Rural states with dynamic weeklies

In our six-month hunt for great ideas to drive revenue, build trust and audience, we find ourselves spending time - and revisiting often - several weekly publications that have thrived through innovation and with a multimedia approach to news coverage, advertising and promotion. Here are three that jump out:

2

Flathead Beacon, Kalispell, Montana

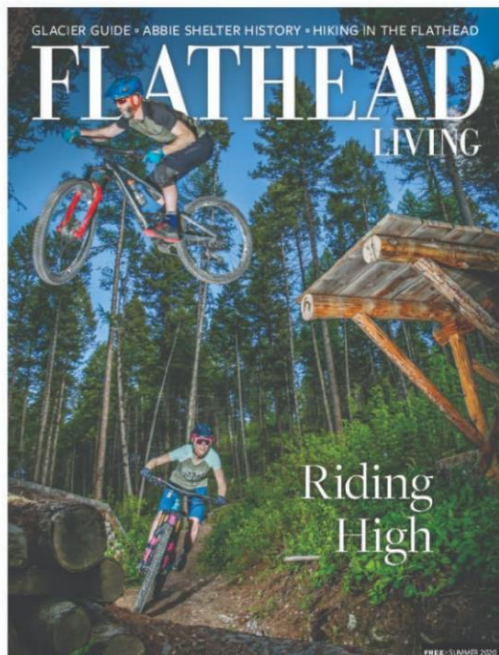
The Beacon regularly dominates the Montana Press Association's Better Newspaper Contest, winning best weekly newspaper and best website in the large weekly division several times since 2009. In the 2019 contest, the Beacon won The Thomas Dimsdale Award for Best Weekly Newspaper in Montana. The paper was profiled by Columbia Journalism Review in 2016 in a story titled ["Why a Weekly Tabloid Owned by Maury Povich Might Have The Best Newsroom in Montana."](#) And Outside Magazine, in 2014, named the company one of its [top 100](#) to work at in the United States.

Among its many initiatives is [Project 7](#), a true crime podcast with the following

compelling lead-in: "On June 12, 2011, David Burgert — a convicted felon and militia leader who hatched a plan to overthrow state and local government a decade earlier — led police on a chase through the forests of western Montana. In a wooded area in the Lolo National Forest, David drove up a hill, got out of his truck and shot at two sheriff's deputies before disappearing into the wilderness.

No one has seen him since."

The podcast is an astounding effort, proving such enterprise does not have to be the domain of large news organizations.



Another Beacon enterprise is Flathead Living, a gorgeous glossy magazine the company produces four times a year. [Flathead Living](#) won best niche publication in the Montana Press Association's 2019 contest.

And the Beacon boasts one of the best event calendars we've come across. See it [here](#).

3

Seven Days, Burlington, Vt.

This weekly, started 25 years ago as an arts newspaper, has grown into a paper regularly doing investigative work and providing compelling state and local news, while presenting impressive lifestyle and entertainment coverage. It is prolific in producing digital newsletters, edgy cultural

restaurants+bars

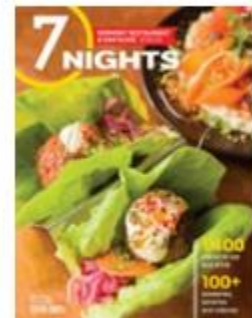
Browse **1643**
locations by...

All Cuisines... ▼

All Regions... ▼

Keywords 

Advanced search



Digital Edition
Updated April 2019



food+drink

FEATURED

NEW

POPULAR

ALL

+ send a food tip



POLITICS

Milk Money: Will Vermont's Migrant Workers Get State Stimulus Checks?

FOOD + DRINK PROMOTION

Good To-Go: Get \$20 Off Takeout from Bud Light!

PAID POST

FOOD + DRINK FEATURES

Entrepreneur Rachel Averitt Creates Business Around Food and Hospitality



restaurants+bars

coverage, vibrant events, strong video work and 80 to 120 pages of print content each Wednesday. Its website is one of the best we've seen for depth and diversity. There's so much to say about Seven Days, but let's focus on how the publication has come to leverage the Vermont food and dining scene. Spend a few minutes with the Seven Days [food + drink](#) section on its website and one immediately understands how editors, writers, tech folks and sales staff have built the definitive guide to Vermont dining. You can search more than 1,600

restaurants by cuisine and region, content that is also captured in the company's glossy guide to Vermont food, 7 Nights.

Jobs in the food industry are listed on the right rail of the food + drink landing page, a clever use of the publication's help-wanted database.

7 Nights Bite Club, a food newsletter can be subscribed to right on the page.

And the left rail navigation bar includes everything from [Bar Fly](#), a tour of local cocktail lounges, to [Agriculture](#), profiles of local farms.

This is a news organization that captures what its readership wants and over-delivers content in print and digital formats. Ideas abound at Seven Days.

4

[Taos News](#), Taos, N.M.

The National Newspaper

Association has awarded its general excellence award to the Taos News nine out of the last 13

years, a remarkable accomplishment for one weekly.

It's easy to see why. This is a newspaper that not only excels at



local coverage, it offers a diverse number of niche publications, particularly in the area of the arts, for which Taos is known. Check out [Tempo](#), the paper's arts coverage section on its website. It's an amazingly deep treatment of local culture with a weekly events calendar stripped along the bottom. We were particularly impressed with one of the paper's annual

magazines, Taos Woman, which recognizes women doing remarkable things in



their communities. This year's issue celebrates 100 years since women finally won the right to vote. The magazine profiled several women winners illustrated with stunning photography of each in a New Mexico setting. A livestream awards event was held in August honoring the eight women.

The newspaper's [website](#) is worthy of study, too, particularly for its impressive blending of content and plentiful advertising.

5

Don't give up on events in the pandemic age

The Poynter Institute, in addition to its invaluable training, is a wonderful resource for great ideas.

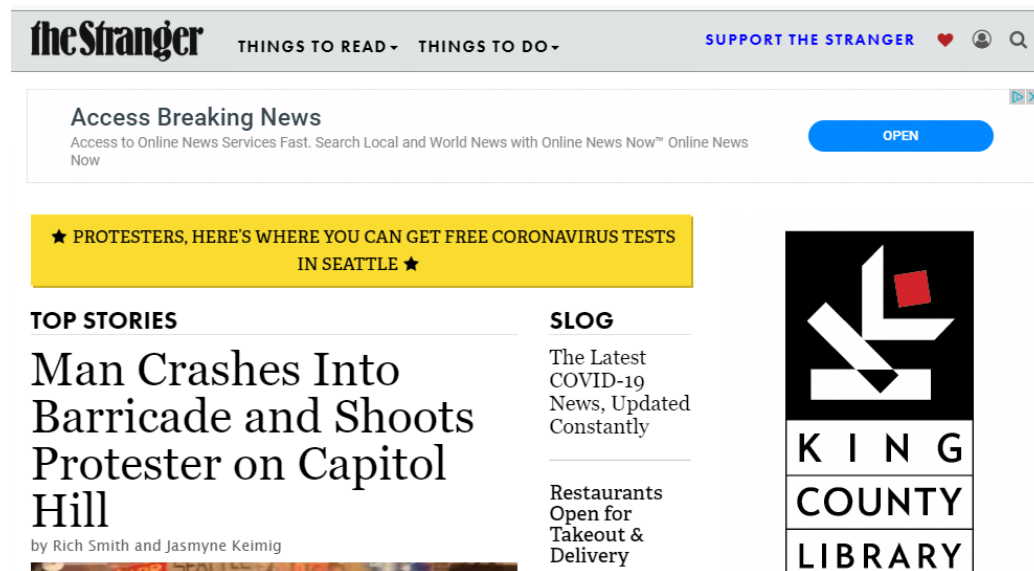
Gregory Scruggs, [writing](#) for Poynter in May, did a piece on how The Stranger, an alternative weekly in Seattle, converted its popular Silent Reading Party event to a "virtual" success.

The Party, Scruggs detailed, had long been a popular monthly gathering of book-loving Seattle residents who gathered at the Hotel Sorento. When COVID-19 infected the Seattle area and Gov. Jay Inslee banned all public gatherings, The Stranger looked to be in trouble. Event business was a significant portion of

The Stranger's revenue, and without the means to pull people together, that money dried up. Prospects were grim.

Founder Tim Keck, president of Index Newspaper, owner of The Stranger, converted the Silent Reading Party to an online event held on Zoom. With little expectation for success – after all, attendees come to read in silence – the paper was stunned at the turnout for the first online event: 231 tickets sold, Scrugg's story details.

The event generated \$4,000 and attendance has since been between 150 and 200.



The Stranger has ramped up its virtual events, even doing a rebroadcast of its 2019 film festival Spliff, which brought in \$13,000 in ticket sales. See the publication [here](#).

6

Come to the “Table”

Ok, an admission: We are advocates of the Table Stakes methodologies for building reader revenue. Having completed nine months as part of Poynter’s program, we emerged as a much stronger news and circulation operation than when we entered (we also grew digital subscriptions 79% year over year). And we were exposed to the successes of The News Reporter, a small North Carolina twice-weekly paper in Columbus County. Table Stakes, among many principles, stresses using data to drive subscriptions, developing best-in-class customer service routines, becoming rigorous about reducing circulation churn and implementing change using cross-departmental teams. It is an acknowledgement that advertising revenue will continue its decline and, so, we better start earning money through our trusted journalism. That’s what Table Stakes news organizations do, and The News Reporter is a sterling example.



Kristen Hare, a reporter for Poynter, [interviewed](#) Les High, publisher, about The News Reporter’s Table Stakes success. (Note, we were lucky to have both taking part in Radically Rural this year.)

Here’s what the paper reported to Hare:

- The paper eliminated 48 different subscription plans in favor of just two
- Became a 24/7 newsroom
- Enjoyed a doubling of page views
- In the first five months of 2019, grew circulation revenue nearly 50% - digital subscription revenue by 493%
- Subscribers have replaced the money lost by advertising reductions

There’s a lot to Table Stakes – and many brilliant ideas have been generated by the thoughtful people who have pushed its benefits the last few years. It’s a commitment but a worthy one toward sustainability.

See the paper [here](#).

Check out Poynter’s Table Stakes program [here](#). Keep tabs on future programs.

7

We love lists....

...as you will see throughout this publication.



The University of Texas at Austin
Center for Media Engagement
Moody College of Communication

The Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin published a list of 10 newsroom lessons learned in 2019. We're not going to give you all of them in this publication, but you can get them [here](#).

Let's share a few that resonate, particularly as they relate to building trust:

- **Explain-your-process box.** Tell readers why you did a certain story, particularly a controversial one. State where the sources came from and how the reporter took steps to be fair.
- Remember, readers don't always see labels, such as analysis, opinion and sponsored content. Media Engagement's research instructs us to place the labels in highly visible areas and to include an **in-story box** that explains what the label means. For instance, what is analysis? Versus opinion?
- Utilize the components of **Solutions Journalism** regularly, which define a problem, present solution ideas, give the steps of implementation for those, report the results and provide insights and data on what works – and what doesn't.

8

Speaking of Trust

We highly recommend Catherine McGloin's [piece](#) published by Poynter and entitled "How to build trust between your newsroom and a community that has never heard of you and has zero reasons to trust you."

McGloin, a Poynter-Koch fellow, ran The Scope, a digital publication that focuses on social justice and is operated by Northeastern University's School of Journalism. The first person hired by The Scope, she essentially operated out of a café in an historic Black neighborhood in Boston. She listed five principles that helped guide The Scope as it

the **BOSTON**
SCOPE

got off the ground at a time when trust in media is low and trust in journalists among minority populations can be non-existent, she says.

1. **Have a clear and visible mission statement.** For The Scope, it is: “We tell stories of justice, hope and resilience in Greater Boston. We practice journalism as an act of service, working to connect communities, inform civic life and amplify voices that are often overlooked or mischaracterized by traditional media. We do this by striving to be transparent, fair and accurate in our reporting.”
2. **Explain what you do and how you do it.** McGloin points out what journalists take for granted. Readers want to know how the job is done; they don’t in many cases understand the reporting process and its myriad components. Tell them, she says.
3. **Be human.** She cites Pew research that reports three-quarters of people have never met a journalist. She said in the communities she was covering, for those who had met a reporter, it wasn’t always a favorable encounter. Making connections with as many people as possible is critical to credibility. Sounds obvious, but often ignored and not easily practiced in these days of a pandemic. She recommends Zoom pop-up meetings.
4. **Let them do the talking.** On this point, McGloin offers this poignant comment: “At the Scope, we wanted to see if we could work ourselves out of a job. We wanted to let members of these communities write the stories themselves.” Bold, but making room for more voices and more ways for people to express themselves builds trust.
5. **Meet your audience where they are.** This is not easy in the COVID-19 era, but when more access is possible, pop-up newsrooms, events and meet-and-greets in neighborhoods can have benefits, she says.

McGloin, in her piece, notes that measuring trust is not exact and perhaps may not be quantifiable at all, but her common sense guidelines, if followed, will lead to improvement.

Find The Scope [here](#)

9

Trust can build reader revenue

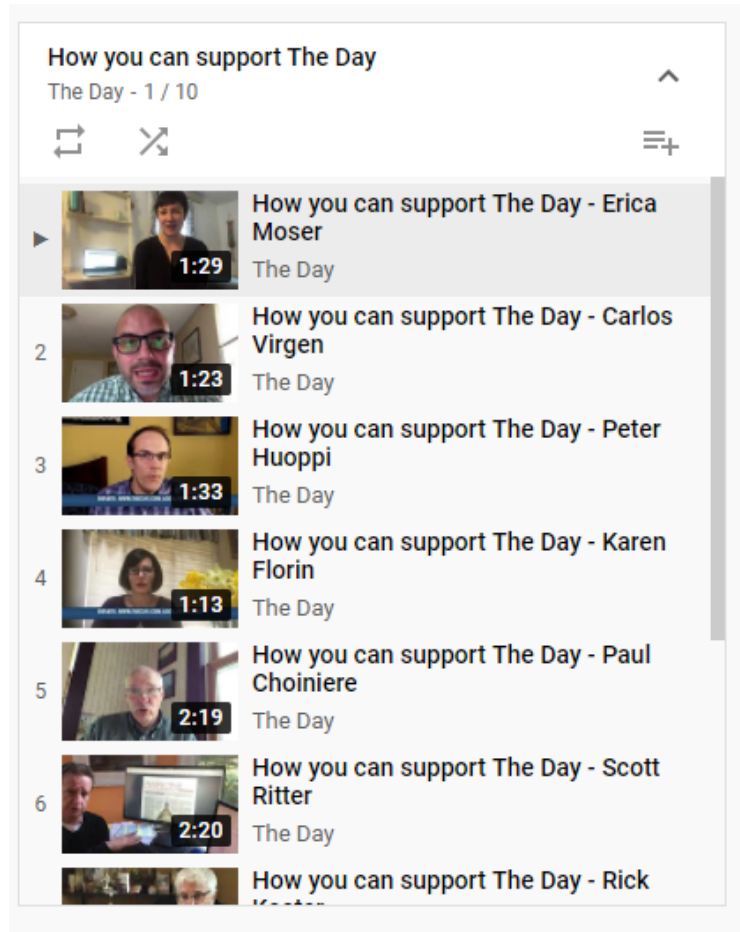
Continuing with our trust theme, here's an important [piece](#) on building reader revenue during this pandemic from What's New in Publishing, a terrific clearinghouse of information helpful to large and small news organizations.

The article, by Damian Radcliff, presents seven recommendations on the current opportunities to establish strong bonds with readers willing to pay for your content.

We're drawn to his fourth item, "Making a Case for Journalism," which discusses the importance of communicating with readers the meaning – and value - of what it is that we do. We see examples these days of this effort by newspapers asking for donations and/or subscriptions to help support coverage of the coronavirus or local reporting.

A [link](#) in the Radcliff's piece is to Trusting News and its own exploration of the importance of honest communication with readers about how news is funded. Under the heading of "Advertising and Funding," Trusting News provides examples of "...how money interacts with the news business. Some of these examples explain paywalls and how to tell your audience why you have one. Some discuss a news organization's financial investment in the community, along with its ownership and corporate structure. Others address how advertising, donations, subscriptions and memberships work."

We like the thorough work done by The Day of New London, Conn., illustrated in the Trusting News examples. Among several measures, The Day released short videos of newsroom staff discussing their work, how they are doing it in a



pandemic and the critical need for community financial support of local journalism. Check out their videos [here](#). Well done!

10

Paywall success in northeast Kansas

The Nieman Lab, last November, profiled The Shawnee Mission Post, based in northern Johnson County, Kansas, and the husband-wife team of Jay Senter and Julia Westhoff.

The small digital news operation is having outsized success signing up new paying subscribers by carefully crafting a paywall/pricing strategy and producing news that drives reader revenue and retention.

The publication hasn't given up on digital advertising but has made the pivot to a paid online model that may be replicable in other small markets. It features a hard paywall.

According to the Nieman Lab [story](#), authored by Christine Schmidt, the site had achieved 2,600 paid subscribers as of the story's publication with a price tag of \$5.95 per month. The first three months of the paywall produced 1,000 paid subscribers.

What is heartening about the Post's success is that bread-and-butter journalism is doing the trick.

"The accountability journalism, the Civics 101 content we put out there – that was the kind of stuff that seemed to get people over the hump and giving us money every month..." Senter told Schmidt. The content that generated lots of page views – crime, traffic accidents and the like – didn't lead to conversions the way public service reporting does.

Julia Westhoff and Jay Senter

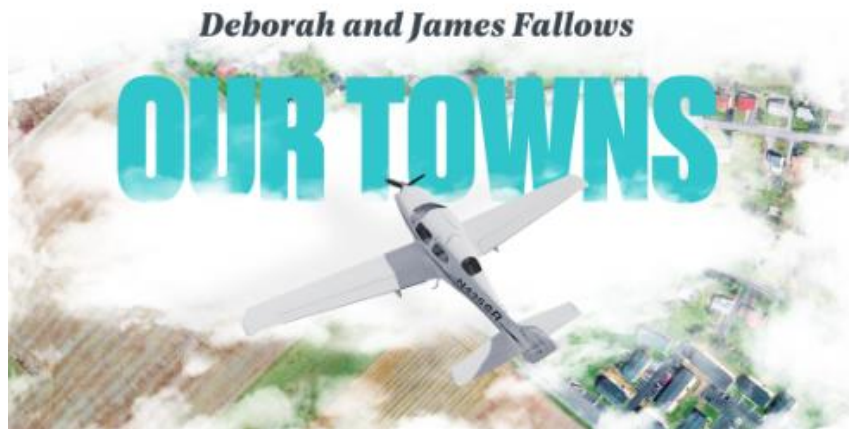


11

Reporter's Notebook: Chronicling new journalism approaches across the country

If you haven't been following the work of Deb and James Fallows, we recommend it.

The couple has been crisscrossing the country telling stories about the American experience at the most local level. Among their pieces are [several](#) in The Atlantic that examine how local news operations are attempting to survive using innovation and ingenuity. As James explains in his note to readers:



“The central premise is that the most positive and practical developments in this stage of American life are happening at the local and regional level—*but* that most Americans have barely heard of those developments except in the communities where they themselves live.”

You can read about the Quoddy Tides of Eastport, Maine; The Commercial Dispatch in Columbus, Miss.; the Shawangunk Journal in Ellenville, N.Y.; The Harvard Press of Harvard, Mass.; The start-up Provincetown Independent on Cape Cod; the Daily Memphian of Tennessee; and the ambitious Report for America initiative.

Fallows lets us know about newspapers and news organizations that are enjoying success because of their localness and their vision for the role they should play in their communities. While there is no single solution in any of these examples, the stories remind us that no one should be throwing in the towel; that sustainable models exist.

Key, James argues, is the structure of the organization. The best operations are locally owned and independent. Chain ownership, he argues, leads to newsroom cuts in favor of profits, and those journalists left behind struggle to cover communities in the manner desired by readers.

There’s plenty of innovation in these operations, too:

- A successful micro payment [program](#) at the Shawangunk Journal
- Successful local fundraising at the Harvard Press, including a [program](#) where readers can and do support the paper at \$100 per year, instead of the typical subscription price of \$30 or \$40
- A non-profit [structure](#) at the Provincetown Independent that has well exceeded its original targeted goals
- The impressive subscription [growth](#) of the non-profit Daily Memphian

- The dense [localness](#) of the Quoddy Tides, a 40-page every-other-week paper serving more readers than residents of Eastport, Maine.

There is a great deal to learn from the Fallows' odyssey. That they choose to partly focus on local news operations in their travels adds emphasis to the important role local journalists play in communities and, for that matter, democracy.

12

Know your numbers

Matt Skibinski, writing for the Nieman Lab

last year, provides a helpful look at vital metrics for today's publishers. These numbers, he suggests, should be widely explained to and understood by all members of a news organization.

One is **customer lifetime value** or CLV. As more and more news organizations come to rely on subscription or reader revenue, understanding the potential value of each subscriber over the time they are retained has never been more important.

To know this is not complicated: Multiply the average revenue per subscriber per month by the average period of time you expect to keep that subscriber. If you charge \$12 a month for a subscription, digital or otherwise, and retain on average a customer for two years, that results in a CLV of \$288. You can extrapolate that to mean that each new start will have a value of \$288, and then decide on a marketing budget to land new subscribers.

Getting at the **average revenue per subscriber** is also not challenging. Divide the total monthly subscription revenue over a six-month period by the average number of subscribers for that same period. To calculate how long to expect a subscriber to stay, divide the number 1 by the monthly churn rate.

Those who have been through the Table Stakes training and have adopted lessons learned in that process will recognize how important the CLV is and how moving that number up can be influenced by customer service, story coverage and beat establishment decisions.

Skibinski also offers helpful ways to calculate revenue per page views. See his work [here](#).

NiemanLab

13

A colorful idea

While we turn most frequently to small news organizations for ideas, since that's the target of this publication, midsize and large news operations are constantly evolving and bringing to market concepts that can be scaled. Such is the case with a product introduced by the Chicago Reader – a coloring book.

As outlined by the Nieman Lab in March this year, the free alternative weekly worked with 50 artists to create a PDF and print version of the book. According to Joshua Benton, who wrote the story for Nieman Lab, the PDF version costs \$30 and the print book, \$45, and the proceeds are split between the paper and the artists.

The book came out at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when The Reader's ad revenue dropped. We suspect this concept can work in any market, though the price tag would need to reflect a community's ability to pay. Still, what an innovative way to get local artists and local news organizations together on a project that readers will appreciate.

Go [here](#) to see more.

READER

Donate and get your copy of the Chicago Reader Coloring Book

Chicago Reader Coloring Book (PDF Version)
A PDF version of the book you can download and print at home
\$30.00 **Add**

1) Gifts 2) Payment 3) Details

No selections yet.
Select an item at left.

Additional contribution: \$ 0.00

Contribution summary

Chicago Reader:	\$0.00
Total:	\$0.00

We make the stories you love to share.

IT'S A
Southern
THING

EXPLORE

THIS IS
ALABAMA

EXPLORE

PEOPLE OF
ALABAMA

EXPLORE

14

It's a Southern Thing

Red Clay Media is a multimedia division of Alabama Media Group, owners of several brands including the Birmingham News, The Huntsville Times and the

Press-Register of Mobile and Baldwin Counties.

This is a large media company, but what might be enticing to small news organizations is how some of Red Clay's ideas can be adapted.

The intro to the [This is Alabama](#) website reads:

"This is Alabama as it should be told. Join us as we celebrate the great state of Alabama and uncover the

amazing people, places and experiences she has to offer."

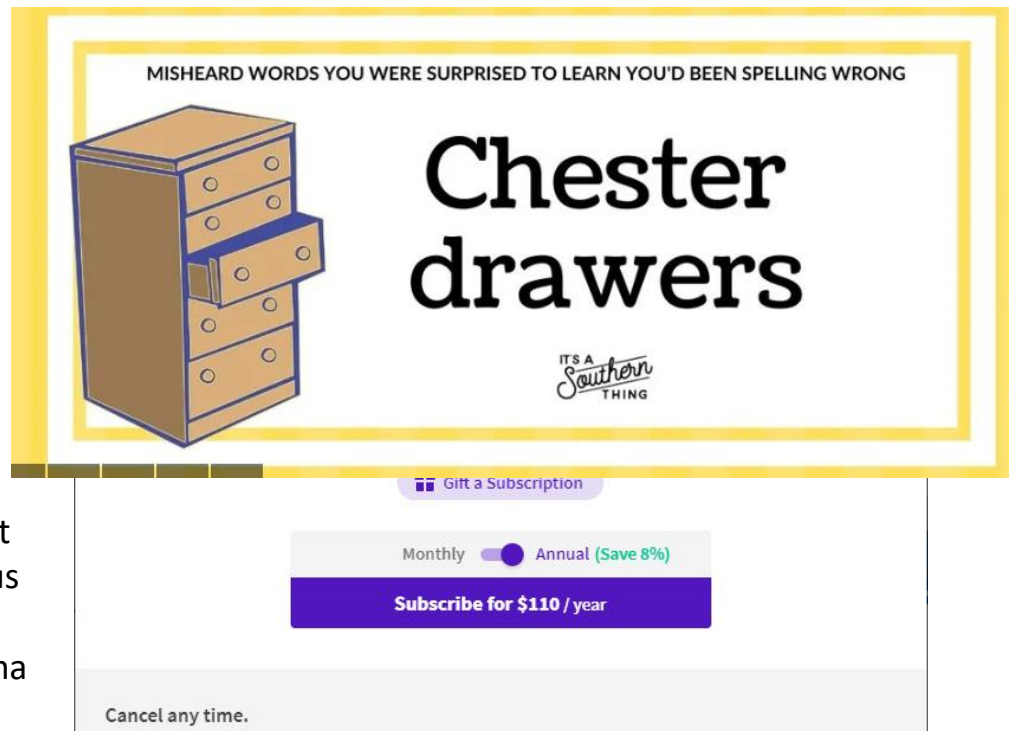
A recent day revealed stories on Philly cheese steaks making their way to the South; a story about the country's best wheelchair rugby team; a piece on teenage entrepreneurs; and a video on birdwatching with an Alabama farmer.

["People of Alabama"](#) is a site to which people upload their own stories answering questions such as "How are you feeling? What do you want to be when you grow up? What is the biggest thing the last two months have taught you?"

["It's a Southern Thing"](#) is a contagious, smart lifestyle site with recipes, hilarious videos, self-effacing posts on what being Southern means and much more.

Questions are posed such as, "What would Monopoly be if it was Southern? Or Southerners' misheard words, like Lawn More, Chester Drawers and Bob Wire. Creative, fun and highly innovative.

Any news organization that seeks to better serve a community would do well to look at what Red Clay produces. In terms of capturing a region and its uniqueness, we've seen few better. Radically Rural was blessed to have Tamika Moore, one of Red Clay's managing producers, as a speaker in 2020.



15

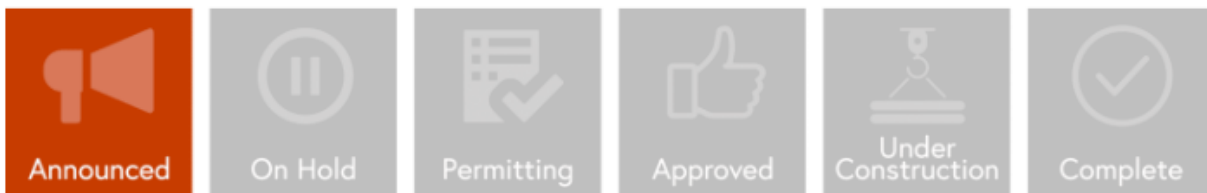
Boise business site showing success

If you are looking for an intriguing local news model, consider what's happening

at [BoiseDev](#). This locally owned news site launched in 2016 has as its primary focus economic stories about the greater Boise area. But behind its strong performance in its niche are interesting strategies that could work for other publishers.

The effort has attracted significant attention, and, according to Publisher Don Day, it's the most trafficked business site in Idaho. The site's revenue comes from some advertising, but it's also a membership model under the name of BoiseDev FIRST.

Writing for Medium in July, Day announced the site had 800 paying members, which at its \$110 yearly rate, translates to annualized revenue of \$90k. At the foundation of this support is a concept he calls a "time wall." Rather than shutting off content to readers after a few stories via a traditional paywall, Day rewards readers who buy memberships by giving them early access to news stories and a daily newsletter with all the day's stories. The newsletter gets opened by seven of 10 recipients – every day. Astounding open rate.



None of this would work without great local content, and BoiseDEV has that. We found an especially helpful feature on the site called [Project Map](#), which provides updates on dozens of economic development initiatives and construction. You can go to Project Map and see a helpful graphic that shows the status of each of several projects. The lit-up graphic shows whether the project has been announced, is on hold, awaiting permitting, been approved, under construction or complete. Clever.

16

Listening first
Newsrooms large and small are struggling with how to better report on

JMR'S PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM PLAYBOOK

A FIELD GUIDE TO LISTENING AND REPORTING WITH COMMUNITIES

by jesikah maria ross

underserved communities and populations.

The Black Lives Matter movement's impact on news coverage about race and the diversity in our newsrooms has justifiably forced us to re-evaluate both.

Jesikah Maria Ross, who directs participatory journalism at Capital Public Radio in Sacramento, has published a helpful guide for newsrooms looking to broaden coverage of minority and underserved communities. The [27-page document](#) can lead a newsroom to not only explore hidden problems facing significant portions of local populations, but it can help journalists build important relationships with these communities.

Called JMR's Participatory Journalism Playbook, part of the guide retraces how CapRadio revisited Meadowview, a South Sacramento community that was ripped apart by a shooting of an unarmed African-American man by two white police officers. Stephon Clark was 22 in 2018 when he was killed in his grandmother's backyard.

CapRadio journalists spent a year in the neighborhood telling a deep and important story about the community, building trust with residents.

"This is a guide to help equip your newsroom to involve communities and create more nuanced and relevant reporting," Maria Ross says. "It uses, as an example, one long-form reporting project and its impact on broad editorial processes."

We highly recommend the guide's sound suggestions to build awareness and better represent the challenges, hopes and dreams of underserved populations.

17

Media bias

We do our jobs at a time when trust in media is low; we've been tagged by President Trump as "enemy of the people." Facts and science are questioned continually by a polarized public.

Many of us question our effectiveness in this divisive time as so many readers gravitate to media that most reflect their beliefs. Is there a middle? Is there balance? What's fairness?

Gallup and the Knight Foundation surveyed 20,000 Americans on questions of media bias. The results are disturbing and should be a call to action for all newsrooms to work against this perception. The survey found "deepening pessimism and further partisan entrenchment about how the news media delivers



on its democratic mandate for factual, trustworthy information. Many Americans feel the media's critical role of informing and holding those in power accountable is compromised by increasing bias. As such, Americans have not only lost confidence in the ideal of an objective media, they believe news organizations actively support the partisan divide."

This publication aims to help those of us who operate news organizations build audience and revenue; perhaps there's no more important way to do that than to improve how we are perceived. We, of course, don't see ourselves as unfair; that matters not if our readers do. We strongly suggest that you and your newsroom read this [report](#) and develop a strategy within your community to reestablish trust in what you do. There's still time as the report also concludes: "...Americans have not lost sight of the value of news — strong majorities uphold the ideal that the news media is fundamental to a healthy democracy."

We should act.



18

Looking for a breakthrough with readers? How about through their stomachs?

The Local Media Association this year awarded its Best New Digital Initiative Award to the Record-Journal of Meriden, Conn., for its RJ [Food & Drink](#) vertical. In an LMA profile on the effort recently, Ashley Kus, the Record-Journal's audience engagement editor, said the paper expanded its focus on the category when they noticed its "On The Menu" weekly feature resonated strongly with readers — more strongly than many other news categories.

Food & Drink is strong on visuals, with a video of food preparation playing in the background, and features stories on new restaurants, recipes from local chefs and food trends. Readership, Kus said, was initially strongest around new

restaurant openings, but when COVID-19 struck, site traffic moved to best take-out and curbside options.

Kus told LMA: “For digital, we wanted to engage food and drink audiences and keep them on the story longer. We did this by creating a different look on the page, compared to our news content...the layout is more visual with image blocks and a photo gallery automatically included in the middle of every story.”

She said staff members built a corresponding Facebook page and regularly ask members for story ideas. A newsletter was launched, too.

5 places to get specialty hot dogs this summer



July 22, 2020 03:23PM

By Bailey Wright, Record-Journal staff



If you're craving hot dogs this summer, consider a few locations in central Connecticut well-known for quality and creativity.

1. [Blackie's Hot Dog Stand](#), Cheshire

Blackie's has been around and family-owned since 1928. The hot dogs literally can't be found anywhere else because for the last 10 years they've been made specially for the stand by [Martin Rosol's Meats](#) in New Britain. Blackie's also offers a homemade hot pepper relish.

Related Stories:



[Long list of lobster dishes](#)

19

Journalists can promote the value of their work and drive subscriptions

We will, in CrazyGood!, cite great ideas from Better News, an initiative of the American Press Institute and funded by the Knight Foundation. B/N is a gem of a resource with great concepts that can scale to small news operations.

The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel had a simple idea useful in any newsroom: Ask your journalists to explain to readers the value of what they do and use social media connections to push for digital subscriptions.

Rachel Piper, writing for the Journal-Sentinel, said the paper experienced significant digital subscription growth the last few years but needed new methods to keep the momentum. It began by stressing with their journalists the importance – and the future – of digital subscriptions. Then through many meetings, constant reinforcement and tools and approaches to ask followers to subscribe, newsroom staff emerged as ambassadors for digital subscriptions. Here's a critical observation made by Piper:

“When encouraging those in the newsroom to share subscription callouts, we’ve made sure to tie it to our journalists’ excellent, important work,” she says. “Rather than telling reporters just to hawk the cheapest deal, we’ve asked reporters to share journalism they are proud of – their own or that of a colleague – and note that people ‘can support work like this by subscribing to the Journal-Sentinel...’”

Shown is a tweet from a JS staffer that resonated with me. You can see more [here](#) on the Journal-Sentinel’s initiative.



20

Small Mississippi daily scores with glossy, sponsored healthcare magazine

One of the best sources of revenue and audience ideas is the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association’s archives and its writer, Jane Nicholes. SNPA is now part of America’s Newspapers. Nicholes has reported on dozens of success stories, and we have turned to her stories frequently.



Last year, she chronicled the work of the [Enterprise-Journal](#) of McComb, Miss. The 5,000- circulation paper had benefitted from a bit of an advertising war between two hospitals, but when that dried up, a revenue replacement was needed.

The newspaper brainstormed and pitched to the Southwest Mississippi Regional Medical Center the idea of a sponsored glossy magazine that would feature stories suggested by the hospital's medical staff. There were two revenue streams from the hospital to the newspaper: About \$36,000 to cover the cost of printing, reporting, photography and distribution; and \$30,000 in advertising sales. Copies of the magazine were inserted into the newspaper and mailed to two zip codes and part of a third, Nicholes reported.

Editor Jack Ryan said the concept can be tried at any newspaper; community hospitals might be particularly responsive since the decision-makers tend to be local.

Here's Nicholes' [story](#).

21

Virtual stage keeps arts alive

The [Post and Courier](#) of Charleston, S.C., came to the aid of the local arts community amidst the novel coronavirus pandemic. With theaters shut down all over the city, the paper launched [“No Intermission,”](#) a series featuring the talents of local music and stage performers.

Adam Parker, the producer of the series, told Local Media

Association that 60 sessions with musicians and actors were presented via the P&C website, featuring jazz, classical and popular music and scenes acted by professional local actors.

He said the idea was to create a virtual stage on which local artists could perform for the enjoyment of viewers, who were encouraged to make donations to the artists. The stage was set up in a local library, using two cameras. The performers mostly presented two songs, poems, sketches or scenes. Over the course of a few days, the 60 sessions were recorded.



‘No Intermission’ Episode 60: Reggie Sullivan and Charlton Singleton

BY ADAM PARKER APARKER@POSTANDCOURIER.COM UPDATED JUL 31, 2020

The videos can be seen on the Post and Couriers website, a landing page set up for all the videos and over the paper's YouTube channel.

Videos received up to 2,000 views with most in the high hundreds, Parker told LMA.

This is a project that any paper could undertake with or without a studio. The goodwill that can be built with the arts community is significant.

22

Turning to readers for support

Many newspapers have asked readers for support during the pandemic, helping to offset devastating advertising revenue drops. Crowdfunding is probably something most publishers never anticipated having to do. Those who have report results ranging from reasonable to resounding,

depending on approach and market. Here are links to three stories that might be of help if you are considering such an option:

<https://niemanreports.org/articles/crowdfunding-the-news/>

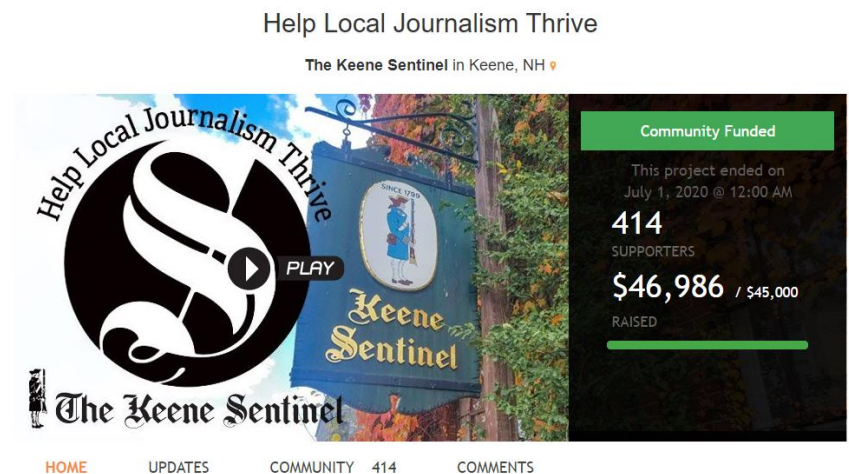
<http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/donations-and-crowdfunding/>

<https://localnewslab.org/guide/crowdfunding/what-works-for-crowdfunding-local-news/>

In the case of our paper, The Keene Sentinel, we were thrilled with the results of our campaign, which we called "Help Local Journalism Thrive."

We used a platform called [The Local Crowd](#), which is company based in Wyoming but with a representative in our region. Most crowdfunding platforms come with a playbook, and it's good to review recommendations in advance of launching any campaign. Efforts for non-news media endeavors often require a multi-month period to organize the campaign, plan the outreach and develop a social media strategy. Fortunately, for newspapers, because of the marketing horsepower already in place, a campaign can be under way in a month.

Our efforts were broken into two components. Before we decided to crowdfund, we identified 20 or so local businesses or individuals whom we thought would be



supportive of lending financial support to The Keene Sentinel. This was done by email or letter. We asked that each commit \$1,000 a month for three months to back our COVID-19 coverage so that we could keep that coverage free to the community (we have a paywall). We asked folks with whom we had strong personal or business connections and were mindful of their own circumstances due to the pandemic.

This effort generated about \$42,000 in pledges, and we listed these donors at the bottom of our coverage in print and online as helping to make this coverage possible and free. Some requested anonymity, and we, of course, complied.

Then, we launched a public campaign, and we did so by telling how the novel coronavirus was affecting our newspaper, specifically dramatically reducing our advertising revenue. We asked readers of The Keene Sentinel to contribute to supporting local journalism – and more than 400 donors did.

We set as a goal \$30,000, and within a week we exceeded that. We extended the goal to \$45,000 and achieved that in about 40 days, well short of the two months we intended to run the campaign.

In our messaging to readers, after we hit our first goal, we said we'd put whatever was raised additionally toward business coverage so that readers would know more about the plight of local companies dealing with the pandemic. When we exceeded our second goal, we announced we would end the campaign early so that other local causes could get additional attention.

Between the two efforts, \$88,000 was raised, less credit card fees and fees paid to Local Crowd.

We formed a team of managers to write personalized letters of thanks to everyone who gave, and those who contributed \$75 or more got a Keene Sentinel coffee mug.

There were a few keys to our results:

- A database of emails that included our subscribers (many for whom we had emails) and those who participated in events, contests or subscribed to our newsletters
- A good message – local journalism is critical to the strength of the community, and we stressed how towns that have local newspapers pay

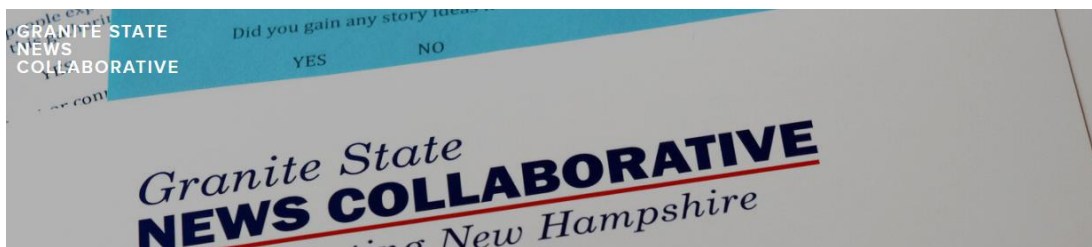


less in taxes, have better bond ratings and a stronger sense of connectedness

- Leveraging the history of the newspaper – we’ve been around since 1799 Social media was helpful, but email by far was the best tool. We saw open rates of 30-plus percent, and we used the database multiple times during the campaign. We had been told to expect an average gift of \$50; we came in at more than \$100 per donation.

Don’t rule out your newsroom taking part in the messaging. We had a reporter record her experiences working from home and covering the coronavirus; she produced a compelling message to readers.

Many newspapers have sought support from their readers; ours is just one example. But we were pleased – dramatically so - with how the community got behind The Sentinel.



COVID-19 COVERAGE

CONTENIDO EN ESPAÑOL

Working Together to Connect New Hampshire

23

Collaborative journalism hub takes root in New Hampshire

Filling some of the gaps created by news deserts, lost journalism jobs or closed publications is collaborative journalism, which is hitting its stride as an effective strategy and model. Look to join one.

These collaborations take various shapes, from loose news-sharing agreements among a few organizations to formal, non-profit entities with staffs and budgets. New Hampshire is blessed by one such group, the Granite State News Collaborative. GSNC has funding from several sources, including the Knight Foundation, Solutions Journalism Network and New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. The non-profit is active on two fronts to produce and share deep,

compelling stories on the issues facing the state: its 20-plus members *and* a roster of freelancers, many of whom lost their reporting jobs during the pandemic. The organization pivoted to coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, producing a staggering number of stories that its member newsrooms broadly share with readers.

Melanie Plenda runs the collaborative, which coordinates coverage among the partners and contracts with freelancers to fill gaps.

Here are her words about the Collaborative.

“So, to date we have 17 media outlets, a university and (New Hampshire Press Association) as partners. We also have several community partners, including Citizens Count and NH Fiscal Policy Institute, which also shares content with us. The partners have made available to share all COVID and social justice-related stories...We've cross published to date, [917 stories](#). Every outlet has published at least one story from another outlet, and the majority of them re-publish multiple stories daily. Of the published stories, Collaborative freelancers produced 258.

“It is so hard to say what the biggest impact is. One thing, in a crisis, we all came together to do what we knew was right for our communities. Competition just wasn't really a factor there; it was about service. And when our outlets started losing people, The Collaborative was able to step in and do its part to help continue that mission. Not only were we able to get furloughed and laid off reporters and freelancers, who lost work, right back to work for our local communities, but we were able to keep vital information, news and ideas flowing to those communities. We are only able to accomplish that through the generosity of service and spirit of our partners.

“It kind of amazes me that out of that chaos we've created something new, something that has the ability to reach every person in every corner of our state with the news they need, all because we knew working together was the right thing to do.”

24

...And in regions around the country

GSNC was only one of several collaboratives recently referenced in March in a Medium [article](#) by Stefanie Murray, director of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

Murray, who was a speaker on the topic last year at Radically Rural, also cited the work of collaboratives in Oregon, Philadelphia, several Midwest public radio stations, New Jersey and North Carolina. And also mentioned was the work of topic-specific collaboratives such as Ensia, The Climate Beat and Local Voices Network. The advantages of joining collaboratives cannot be overstated. See Murray's work on her center's [website](#).



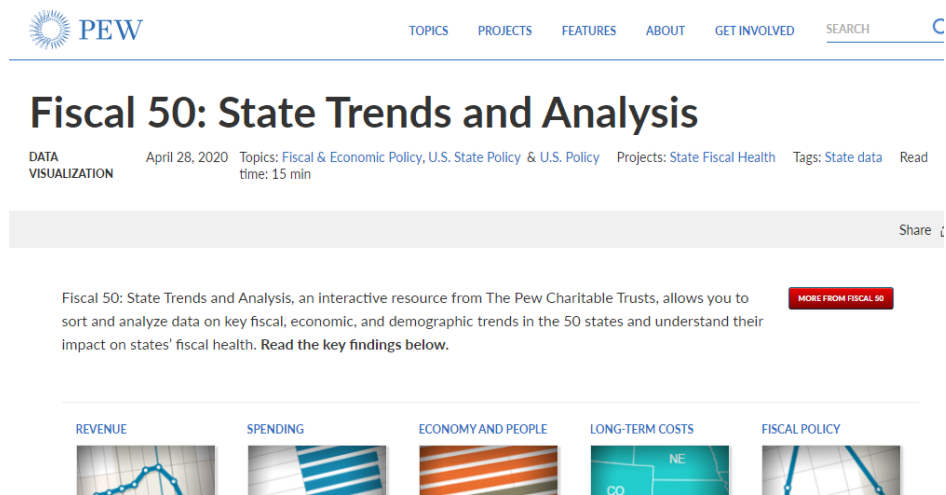
25

Stateline – A Pew Charitable Trust resource

Check out Stateline, a digital publication of the Pew Charitable Trust, for helpful information and news about states, often told through rural lenses.

Recent articles include [one](#) by staff writer April Simpson who did a piece on state fairs in the age of COVID-19. [Another](#), by Alex Brown, shows how farmers are working with local food banks to stay in operation. The journalism on this site is outstanding, but it's also a resource for story ideas.

Also examine [Fiscal 50](#), a great tool if you're trying to analyze financial trends in your state. With a decline in the number of journalists doing statewide work, this can be a helpful instrument for small newsrooms to provide a broader perspective on state policy and legislative changes. Here's Pew's description of Fiscal 50:



“Pew’s *Fiscal 50: State Trends and Analysis* is an interactive tool that allows you to sort and analyze data on key fiscal, economic and demographic trends in the 50 states and understand their impact on states’ fiscal health. With this tool, you can:

- Compare states over time, with each other, or with national trends.
- Gain insights into each state’s long-term financial well-being.
- Read analysis from Pew experts.

The primary objective of *Fiscal 50* is to provide insights into states’ long-term fiscal health on a range of metrics.”

26

Powerful ‘Solutions’

Members of the Solutions Journalism Network, or those who practice solutions journalism, will find a trove of ideas at the SJN website using its [Story Tracker](#) tool. By now, many are familiar with the focus of solutions

journalism and what it seeks to achieve – journalism about better ways to solve pressing issues. It is both a reader-retention tool, in that it strives to be helpful and do the work that readers can’t, and a tool by which community life can be improved. It recognizes that solutions can be elusive, so the approach focuses on measurement of results. As SJN’s website says, “Solutions Journalism helps us get smarter together and build a better world.”

The SJN Story Tracker is a searchable repository of hundreds of stories powered by a solutions approach. Newsrooms covering certain community problems can easily sort through the database for reporters’ work that may have tackled similar issues.

The screenshot displays the 'J SOLUTIONS STORY TRACKER' interface. At the top, there are links for 'BROWSE' and 'SEARCH'. Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Type here to search stories'. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains filters: 'SEARCH FULL TEXT OF STORY' with 'YES' and 'NO' buttons, 'TRENDING TOPICS:', 'SORT BY' (with options: Relevance, Most Favorited, Newest First, Oldest First), and 'START YOUR SEARCH HERE:'. The right column shows search results: 'We found 2 results for:' followed by a red button labeled 'VOTER SUPPRESSION' with a close icon and a 'Clear' link. Below this is a table header 'TITLE & DESCRIPTION' and a single result entry: 'Young voting advocates take up the fight against suppression'.

Got a problem with policing in your town, check out this [story](#) about Canton, Ohio. The Canton Repository did multi-part series looking at how the town's police department might learn community policing lessons from Lowell, Mass., Boston and Philadelphia.

How about problems with rural healthcare? Read the [work](#) of Liora Engle-Smith of the North Carolina Health News as she details the use of telehealth in rural North Carolina during the current COVID-19 crisis. This a story that could be done in any small town with broadband issues or a shortage of doctors.

Looking for election coverage guidance and worried about voter suppression, check out this [piece](#) by Milan Polk from the GroundTruth Project. Polk looked at growing activism among young people fighting voter suppression around the country. It leads with a student at Furman University mailing in a ballot but getting back a questionnaire asking her to prove her residency. She and two other students successfully sued the Greenville, S.C., County Board of Voter Registration and Elections, contending inequality in treatment of voters.

This is an incredible resource showcasing inspiring work. Anyone tackling a project that aims to make life better or correct some wrong, this Story Tracker is a great place to start.

27

Capitalizing on craft beer

Southern Newspaper

The Charlotte Observer

Publishers Association archives (SNPA is now part of America's Newspapers), under its revenue category, notes how The Charlotte Observer found revenue creating a pub crawl of sorts – a concept that can work in any market that has craft brewers.

Jane Nicholes, SNPA's correspondent, [interviewed](#) Phyllis Weber, who was at the paper when it launched beer tasting cards as part of its daily deal program a few years ago. While many papers don't run such programs these days, it's possible to create partnerships with local craft breweries and come up with a deal for readers.

Weber told Nicholes that local breweries in Charlotte offered tastings to folks who paid the paper \$20 per piece for cards, which were good at 15 to 18 local breweries. The breweries got the foot traffic and the additional revenue from beer sales that came with the cards; The Observer pocketed about \$13,000 in



digital revenue from about 650 cards that were sold. The Observer sweetened the deal by sending to all who completed the “crawl” a gift basket, which included a Charlotte Observer pint glass.

The Observer used Second Street Media’s deal platform, but this is a promotion that can be run without such tech, offering the potential for both digital and print advertising in conjunction with the effort.

28

Putting teaches in the spotlight

The struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on first responders who test for and treat those suffering with the virus. And while their work continues apace, teachers are among those next up to deal with the threat. Those instructors returning to classrooms find their word dramatically changed. This might be the time for news organizations to promote the work associated with that profession.

Zach Teichert, of the News-Press and Gazette Company, which operates several newspapers and TV stations in the Midwest and West, [writes](#) about the success of KIDK-TV’s promotion, Teacher of the Year. Using the Second Street Media platform, the television station, based in Idaho Falls, Idaho, ran a contest in which viewers entered the names of teachers they thought were doing outstanding jobs in classrooms.

Some 300 were nominated in the contest, which was sponsored by a local credit union, an office equipment company and Domino’s Pizza. Staff at the station selected a teacher each month from those nominated based on the strength of the recommendation. Winning teachers received a Domino’s pizza party for their class and a gift basket from the credit union. From the monthly winner, a Teacher of the Year was selected by viewers who cast ballots through the contest platform. The winner garnered \$1,500 for classroom improvements from the office supply company. For the station, the contest generated \$7,500 in revenue



Hi {{User.FirstName}}

Vote for our Teacher of the Year 2019!. The winner gets \$1,00 from Valley Office System Ricoh and \$500 from Domino's Pizza to go to their school for classroom improvements.

You can vote once per day through Monday, June 24th 2019 at 11:59pm Mountain Standard Time.

Good Luck!
KIFI/KIDK

and a 63% opt-in rate to receive other offers from those who looked at KIDK's newsletter.

29

Scour winning press association entries for ideas....

A great place to find revenue-building ideas are state press association contests. Look in the small-paper categories for inspiring ways to either start new projects or perfect old ideas.

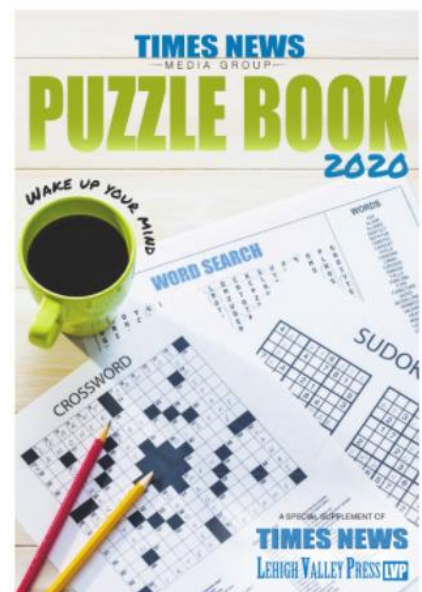
In 2019, the Pennsylvania Newsmedia Association named The Times News of Leighton, Pa., its winner in the Wild Card division, which is a collection of varied entries. The entry was for its special coverage and section of the [West End Fair](#), an annual event dating back 98 years. The fair is on hiatus this year, typically taking place in August, but the 2019 event drew its usual huge crowds of more than 20,000.

Papers in small towns in which community fairs are often *the* annual event may want to look at The Times News section for its effectiveness, color, comprehensiveness and deep advertising. With so many events in communities now on hold due to COVID-19, this is the time to plan for the reopening of such occurrences and for sales departments to think about how past efforts can be improved upon when and if normality returns.

30




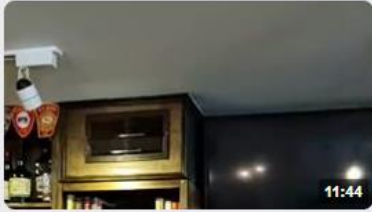


.....And while you're looking for new concepts

Check out the Times News' [puzzle section](#), printed in 2020. Puzzles and games are proving to be significant retention tools for newspapers, in print and online. This



24-page section is a combination of word searches, crosswords, crypto puzzles and more – and jammed with ads and sponsors, one of the best we’ve seen.

Related Videos

		
<p>SPONSORED by CANNA PROVISIONS for Open For Business Live The Keene Sentinel ✓ 2K views · August 14</p>	<p>SPONSORED by GARY JACKSON HEATING SERVICES Open for Business Live The Keene Sentinel ✓ 2.5K views · August 14</p>	<p>SPONSORED BY POST & BEAM BREWING for Open for Facebook Live The Keene Sentinel ✓ 2.3K views · July 31</p>
		
<p>SPONSORED BY COOPER'S HILL PUBLIC HOUSE for Open For Business Live The Keene Sentinel ✓ 1.2K views · July 31</p>	<p>SPONSORED BY FROGG BREWING Open for Business Live The Keene Sentinel ✓ 1.7K views · July 31</p>	<p>SPONSORED: Facebook LIVE "Pub Crawl" with Elm City Brewing The Keene Sentinel ✓ 1.6K views · July 31</p>

31

Facebook and live events

Facebook Live is used by numerous small news organizations looking to hold events, showcase retailers and interview newsmakers. The platform, for those who use Facebook, is simple; you need a concept and a decent cell phone camera. Borrowing an idea we first saw at The Record-Journal of Meriden, Conn., we launched Open for Business – Live. The program features salespeople doing live broadcasts on location of local businesses, which have reopened following shutdowns or curtailments due to the coronavirus. Each Friday, we schedule with retailers eight- to 10-minute interviews and post the schedule online. We’ve done as many as eight interviews in one day and include all manner of retail and service establishments.

We couple the live presentations with a print ad buy into our lifestyle and entertainment weekly, and the program has proven more popular than expected. Revenue from twenty presentations thus far is about \$10,000, and this is a program that can be expanded as we improve our interviewing and presentation

skills. Here's a [link](#). If you do these, remember to wear a mask; viewers will remind you in their posts if you appear to be improperly socially distancing or if your mask slips on your face.

32

On the subject of Facebook and events....

[Facebook app](#)

Paid Online Events for Small Business Recovery

If you choose to leverage the social

media giant's platform (not easy for all publishers), you might want to use it for staging paid events. For the next year, publishers who want to use Facebook to hold paid promotions can do so without Facebook taking a cut. Using Facebook Pages, publishers can create an online event, set a price, promote the event, collect payments and host it, Facebook [says](#) in a recent announcement.

Newspapers typically have the largest Facebook followings in their market, so the marketing opportunity to these followers is significant for event attendance.

Some of this is already being done at small businesses for cooking demonstrations, expert talks, trivia events and fitness classes. This would seem to cut out ticket platforms and allow for publishers to create quick pop-up events. More to study here, for sure, but worthy of consideration.

More award-winning ideas

We grabbed some examples of outstanding work at small newspapers from the Texas Press Association's contest for 2018-2019.



33

Cover design moves people. Impactful ways to display a story on page one can remind readers of an event's import and impact in a way few media can.

This front page by the Victoria Advocate of Victoria, Texas, featuring those impacted by Hurricane Harvey is, well, unforgettable.

34

One impressive magazine

The Fredericksburg Standard-Radio Post, a weekly based in Fredericksburg, Texas, produces Rock & Vine, easily one of the most impressive glossy publications we've seen a newspaper develop. The



quarterly publication is a pleasant dive into Texas Hill Country, known for its fine food, wines and brews. At more than 100 pages, the issues we reviewed were artfully laid out, brimming with great design and content and

jammed with ads. The 2018-2019 Texas Better Newspaper Contest named it the best in its division for "routine special section."

Nothing routine about it.

35

Funding journalism

In last year's issue of CrazyGood!, we published an extensive list of various funding sources for newsrooms and journalists. If you'd like the list again, email me and I'll send it to you, though we won't update it again until next year. As newspapers struggle to maintain staffing, philanthropy is becoming a necessary

PAGE DESIGN



Victoria Advocate, First Place, Division 2

(and frequent) conversation among publishers. We find any list of donors who or organizations that support journalism, particularly at the local level, important to review for potential funding of individual stories, initiatives or positions.

So, in that spirit, we refer you to Julia Hotz's [piece](#) in Medium from last June: "16 Grants to Support Your Solutions Reporting." If you follow solutions techniques in your reporting, this list is valuable. Begin by registering at the Solutions Journalism Networks Hub, and you will get updates as SJN grants become available. Her list of 16 include several that could be of use at the small news organizations:

[Rosalyn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism](#)

[Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting](#)

[IWMF Fund for Women's Journalists](#)

[Fund for Environmental Journalism](#)

[Marguerite Casey Foundation Fellowships on Poverty](#)

[The GroundTruth Project](#)

[The Peer Learning + Collaboration Fund](#)

[Fund for Investigative Journalism](#)

36

And while we're discussing funding...

...NewsFuel, a project just completed by

Local Media Association, matches journalists and publishers with funding sources. This effort took nine months to complete, \$300,000 from a Google News Initiative Challenge grant and was unveiled last month.

This looks to be a significant development for newsrooms; it contains a searchable database of prospective funders. And at the time of the launch, LMA opened applications for investigative reporting stipends of up to \$5,000 for local journalists.

"Journalism supported by philanthropy is one of LMA's three core pillars for 2020-2021 as we look to reinvent business models for news," said Nancy Lane, LMA CEO.

News Fuel, according to LMA, starts with four data types:

- Funders of local journalism
- Opportunities for funding
- News organizations in North America that could be eligible for funding
- And news projects, ongoing or proposed, that could land financial support

LocalMedia
association

NewsFuel

We see this as a breakthrough resource, particularly for small news organization which, without this clearinghouse, might struggle for traction or even ideas on where to turn.

Here's a [link](#) to the guide to get started.

37

Election Coverage 2.0 in 2020

Bridget Thoreson, reporting for Poynter in August, provides a must-read piece on upcoming election coverage. There's still time to put in place some of the concepts encompassed in the "citizens agenda." Her story credits media critic and journalism professor Jay Rosen for evangelizing this approach, which, at its core, asks this simple question: "What do you want the candidates to be talking about as they compete for votes?" The "you" in that query is not the journalist; it's the voter, and the approach depends on asking the community what's important. Hence, the citizen's agenda.

More than 100 journalists have taken part in a four-week project called Election SOS to create their own citizen's agenda specific to their coverage areas or audiences. That number was to swell as another cohort was to be accepted into the training last month. If you didn't take part, there's already a resource that can be downloaded – the [citizens agenda guide](#).



The effort is well described by Mark Baldwin, executive editor for the Rockford Register Star, in Thoreson's story:

"It's going to focus on the public's agenda, what we know people are interested in, and not simply the kind of soundbite campaign coverage that is so typical."

The article provides links to more than a dozen radio stations and newspapers following this path. We were fortunate to be selected to participate and you can see the start of our work at this [link](#).

Also, check out the efforts of the [Shawnee Mission Post](#) of Kansas, [LNP/Lancaster Online](#) of Pennsylvania and [BenitoLink](#) of California.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
PRESENTS

ART FROM THE HEART

KIDS THANK THE FRONT LINES

38

Thanking front-line workers – with the help of children

As reported in Better News, the American Press Institute’s deep repository of helpful ideas for newsrooms and publishers, The Atlanta Journal Constitution came up with a concept that can be used by news organizations of any size. Mark Waligore, managing editor for the paper, said the paper was struck “by the wave of gratitude that had been sweeping across our city” toward first responders to the coronavirus pandemic. He said the newsroom felt it needed to develop some “counter-programming” to the grim news surrounding COVID-19. They, with the paper’s advertising department, conceived “Art from the Heart,” a project that solicited artwork from children thanking those who were helping the city and its residents during the crisis.

The paper, through its website AJC.com, asked parents to send in pictures that their children drew or painted with the goal of thanking all front-line workers. They wanted broad expressions of gratitude to include folks not always thought about during this emergency – postal workers, grocery store clerks, trash collectors and others.

The response was significant as parents uploaded the artwork via a form online. Advertisers supported the campaign in print and online; traffic to the website was strong. The paper printed a special section that included 70 of the pictures – Waligore said they wished they could have included more. You can see the work [here](#).

39

Newsletters: Invaluable connections to niche audiences and key subscription drivers

The benefits of publishing online newsletters are several:

- They can provide deep connections with a defined audience
- They are proven tools to move non-subscribers to becoming paid
- They resonate with advertisers seeking to reach niche audiences – or who appreciate the high open rates many of these products have
- They are useful as news aggregators, meaning original content is not always necessary
- They are habit forming

Tatyana Monnay, the Reynolds Journalism Institute Student Innovation Fellow, writes helpfully on where to go to get guidance on starting, marketing and topic-selection for newsletters. Find the article [here](#).

In the piece, she interviews Eric Lubbers at the Colorado Sun, an expert in such enterprises. Lubbers tells Monnay that deciding whether the newsletter is *the* product, for instance a local dining guide, or the *connection* to other products.

Other keys, offered by Monnay and from our experience:

- Selecting a platform – Substack and Mailchimp are popular, she says
- Ask for feedback – and respond
- Promote it thoroughly using all the power of your media brand; growing the subscriber list is critical to advertising
- Extensively utilize the platforms metrics to measure open rates, referrals
- Involve your advertising department in the project; it can be helpful in topic selection, which will be key if you want sales support

40

Rust to Resilience: Case study in collaboration

The Institute for Nonprofit News published a recounting of a 12-story project undertaken by seven news organizations that looked at climate change and its impact on the Great Lakes.

The report, introduced in a [column](#) by Sarah Vassello, audience development specialist for INN's Amplify News Project, said the project reached more than 100,000 unique visitors in 13 states across six member news outlets.

The member participants were Belt Magazine, The Conversation, Ensia, Great Lakes Now at Detroit Public Television, MinnPost, Side Effects Public Media and non-member WUWM Milwaukee. The project was organized at a meeting in Detroit in September 2019, and, nine months later, in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the project was published from April 20 through May 1.

The stories drew on the reach of all seven partners along with 170 Patch sites spread throughout the Midwest.

The stories included some of the following:

- [A future with less coal](#)
- [Climate change comes to Duluth](#)
- [Sustainable power](#)
- [“Third Coast” at risk](#)
- [Threats to water quality](#)

In a blog post about the rationality behind the effort, Sharon McGowan, collaborations leader for INN, said: “The series was prompted by the perception that the Great Lakes, which make up the largest body of fresh water on earth, could become a ‘climate refuge,’ where temperatures are relatively moderate, and water is abundant.

“However, the region also is highly vulnerable to the heat waves, flooding and severe storms that are expected to increase with climate change. Aging infrastructure and sewer systems that combine stormwater with wastewater, along with shorelines vulnerable to rising water levels, make Great Lakes municipalities especially susceptible to the impact of climate change.”

The report on the collaboration details the funding behind the effort, the scope of the series and how the diverse group of news organization kept things on track. The dozen stories were republished nearly 100 times. One of the stories, according to Vassello, was a television piece that found its way onto stations in three midwestern states.

Impressive were the diversity of partners involved with the project, how they were supported by INN and its connections and the approach to the stories.

For more, read Vassello’s [column](#) here and McGowan’s blog [here](#).



41

New starts showcased by NewStart

Jim Iovino, Ogden Newspapers Visiting Assistant Professor of Media Innovation, is leading the NewStart Newspaper Ownership Initiative at West Virginia University.

We highly recommend his newsletter, The NewStart Alliance, which chronicles the efforts of news entrepreneurs

across the country. Iovino, another of our speakers this year at Radically Rural, was deputy managing editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, which was awarded the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Reporting for its Tree of Life massacre coverage. (He was also a presenter at this year's Radically Rural.)

Recently, in The NewStart Alliance, we were introduced to Amy Duncan, a former Gannett vice president who ran several weeklies for the Des Moines Register.

Duncan lost her job a couple of years ago.

The story revisits her launch in 2019 of the Indianola (Iowa) Independent Advocate in the city of 16,000.

Since then, Duncan has sold more than 1,200 subscriptions to the online site, and she tells NewStart, "To

the community we are doing a lot of things right."

She sells four subscription packages, ranging from \$100 for a year for two people to \$1 a day. She does offer some free content, including the Advocate's COVID-19 coverage. Now, she, her sales rep, two writers and her photographer husband are expanding beyond Indianola to rural nearby communities. They livestreamed from the county fair as part of that expansion.

Duncan told NewStart, "We chose not to do print (as a main product) because it's such a huge expense in paper and postage. So, online was an inexpensive way to get into it."

INDIANOLA
Independent Advocate

NEWSTART

What We're Doing

Buying

Selling

FAQ

Info Sessions

2020-21 Fellows

DO YOU WANT TO OWN A NEWSPAPER?

Before you dismiss the idea, consider this: profitable newspapers can be had all across the country. That's right. They're **PROFITABLE**. And they're available. Right now.

They did, however, publish a print section reporting on the results from the fair and will make “judicious” use of print products in the future.

She tells NewStart, “There’s such a vibrant world of people who have left Gannett and other corporations and are finding communities that do want news, and are hungry for it, and finding ways to provide it. Now we can do what fits our town, instead of the corporate world.”

Check out the Indianola Advocate [here](#) but make sure to sign up for The NewStart Alliance [here](#).

42

High school football “Team of the Week” promotion drives readership

Shaw Media recently won Local Media Association’s Digital Innovation Award for best contest and/or promotion, and the cornerstone of that award was its Team of the Week concept.

Shaw’s Illinois Editor John Sahly told LMA the papers capitalized on a high school football expert reporter to boost coverage and interaction with readers. The writer predicts who will get

playoff bids in all of Illinois’ eight divisions, and that popular forecast is supplemented with power rankings, the state Team of the Week and a newsletter.

The Team of the Week feature includes the MVP belt. Based on player performance in Friday night and Saturday games, readers submit about 100 nominations of players by position. This list is whittled down to about 60 and those are posted on Shaw’s contest platform. Readers pick 11 winners on offense and 11 winners on defense, and the top vote-getter is named the Team of the Week MVP.

Voting runs from Sunday mornings through Monday evenings, Sahly tells LMA. A reporter from Shaw presents the MVP belt to the winning player on Tuesdays, usually at practice, and an article is published on the week’s MVP.



Shaw landed a sponsor for the belt, 25,000 newsletter signups and huge attention on social media as coaches, parents, players and athletic directors urged voting for top performers.

Read more [here](#).

43

Strong use of video can increase audience engagement



The New England Newspaper and Press Association awarded a first place in the entertainment video category to Seven Days, a Vermont weekly we've described earlier in this publication. The [video](#), entitled "Stuck in Vermont: Burlington High School's Dance Team Brings the Crowd," shows a newspaper's multimedia talents in an inspiring production sponsored by a local credit union. The video, produced by Eva Sollberger, was episode 560 of Stuck in Vermont, which has produced an voluminous archive of videos about Vermont and its people by one of the



smartest small media companies around. The video, with 3,600 views, captures the racial diversity and harmony of a high school in Vermont.

44

More good work from Vermont

The New England Newspaper and Press Association awarded its Outstanding [Newsletter](#) first place

to the Stowe Report, published by The Stowe Reporter.

“Great newsletter, clean and crisp, easy to read. Highlighting local sports, local life, local politics all very well done with beautiful crisp pictures to accompany stories,” the judges said.

And, [Vermont Ski + Ride](#) earned top honors for general excellence in the specialty publications category. Judges said: This amazing publication is loaded with compelling stories, excellent writing and wonderful photography. The print quality is in a league of its own. The website is graphically pleasing and easy to use. Businesses must be very happy with the high-end treatment their ads received.”



45

Writing contest give voice to local authors

Newport Life Magazine, a Gannett publication in Rhode Island, conducts a writing contest annually, looking for the best prose from its readership. This year is its

10th anniversary of honoring writers and you can find the winners [here](#). Last year's contest won first place from the New England Newspaper and Press Association in community/audience involvement category. It included a piece from a 14-year-old writing about a street-corner

"guitar dude" who danced to music coming from his earbuds; work from several poets with observations about birds, the ocean, dancing and late August popsicles; even an essay on the purpose of frogs.

The appeal of this contest, assembled skillfully by Fred Albert, the magazine's editor, is its simplicity. Inviting independent writers into any publication, to present their creativity and new voices to readers, makes perfect sense these days as we do as much as we can to build trust and honor our craft. A great concept from which we can all borrow. And, by the way, the magazine is a handsome publication.



46

Timely resource for understanding polling

Chances are you are reading this when we are about five weeks from the general election in November. If you are an editor or publisher, you are bombarded with stories about polls. Following the 2016

What makes your election coverage credible?

Tips for getting credit for your integrity and public service



election, many of us have grown skeptical of polling, and our readers may even be more so. Here's a [resource](#) from the Pew Foundation, written by Courtney Kennedy, to share with your newsrooms and your readership.

The recommendation comes from Trusting News' Joy Mayer who says, "Political polls are a lot to navigate: There are new ones continually. They seem to contradict each other. It's hard to know which ones to trust, or if we should even bother paying attention.

"As journalists, we learn how much credence to give polls. We learn to look for independence in the pollsters (financial and political). We inspect their methodology. But are you explaining any of that? Doing so could build trust in your methods and can also help your audience be more educated consumers of polling data."

If you have 15 minutes, this [video](#) is helpful.

47

Politics and Pancakes – a long-standing event goes virtual in the pandemic

The Michigan Chronicle, a weekly newspaper that covers interests of African-Americans in southeastern region of the state, came up with an innovative way to continue



its popular political breakfasts – holding them virtually. The Chronicle is a division of Real Times Media, which includes the Chicago Defender, Atlanta Daily World and RTM360°, a digital studio.

Tanisha Leonard, president of RTM360°, told Local Media Association that The Chronicle didn't want to cancel the events, which have been staged for 15 years, in the face of the COVID-19 crisis this year. So, the paper pivoted to hold the breakfasts as online broadcasts using Facebook Live, and staff expanded the series from four to six breakfasts. Leonard shares how this went in an article you can find [here](#).

We offer the experience of this metro weekly because the idea can scale to small news organizations looking to probe political or local issues without the cost of meals, venues and other overhead expenses needed for live gatherings.

In The Chronicle's case, the series included a sit-down with Michigan Gov.

Gretchen Whitmer; you can see that video [here](#).

Sponsors of the series are extensive, proving even remote events can be significant revenue generators.

Leonard told LMA, "It has allowed us to expand the impact of the program. We have always kept the live events small so we would not lose the intimacy of the networking opportunity. Going virtual allowed us to keep this intimacy while broadcasting the content to a larger audience."

48

Another virtual opportunity – career fairs

The Toledo (Ohio) Blade, in conjunction with its employment platform Recruitology, staged an online job fair this year. The event, according to Local Media Association, which reported its success in this [article](#), drew 18 employers and almost 200 job seekers. See the Blade's article [here](#).

Virtual vendor booths were set up. There was a chat function allowing employers to communicate with prospective employees. (There are some virtual platforms that allow one-on-one video conferencing.) The live chat was provided over two days with recruiters able to set up appointments. The Blade provided bundles of advertising to participating employers.

Connie Cross, The Blade's classified advertising manager, told LMA: "We're happy we

THE BLADE

[Home](#) | [Local](#) | [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [A&E](#) | [Business](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [eBlade](#)

found a new way to help our employers. Our Recruitology team worked hard to make this a success for everyone."

49

A guide to membership models

We anxiously await the Lenfest Institute's upcoming publication on membership models, which news organizations can adopt to build sustainability.

Writing for the Lenfest Institute, Joseph Lichterman says the organization will be out this month with a report assembled in partnership with the Membership Puzzle Project and supported by the Google News Initiative. It will be the result of three years of work and will be a guide, Lichterman says.

“It will be a handbook, a tool, and a knowledge base, and it will cover the full arc of a news organization’s membership journey, from determining whether membership is the right model for you to practices for retaining the members you have,” he says. “Our goal is to offer advice, best practices, case studies, and templates that will help newsrooms at any stage of becoming member-driven. We’re designing for both the moment when you’re sitting down to build your strategic plan and the moment when you have to make a quick decision before the end of the day. With so much excellent work already done to begin addressing the questions above, this project will be just as much thoughtful curation of existing resources as it will be original research.”

Lichterman says the report will come, in part, from studying 25 news organizations.

Here’s a [link](#) to his article and his [link](#) to more information on this exciting project.

50

A reminder of the important work we do

Our 50th and final idea we present to you is more about the inspiration, aspiration and foundation that drive our work. It is both an example of what can be accomplished and why it should be so.

The exhaustive work by the Anchorage Daily News and ProPublica, collaborating to tell the heartbreaking story of sexual assault in rural Alaska, earned a Pulitzer Prize in

public service this year. “Lawless” is an inspiring example of what a newspaper can accomplish. The way the two organizations worked together is a story, too, of

LAWLESS

Sexual Violence in Alaska

The Anchorage Daily News and ProPublica are investigating sexual violence in Alaska, and why the situation isn’t getting better.

FEATURED



Unheard

Alaska has the highest rate of sexual assault in the nation. Yet it is a secret so steeped into everyday life that discussing it disrupts the norm. These women and men did not choose to be violated, but they now choose to speak about what happened.

by Adriana Gallardo, Nadia Sussman and Agnes Chang, ProPublica, and Kyle Hopkins and Michelle Theriault Boots, Anchorage Daily News, June 1, 8 a.m. EDT

taking innovative approaches to news gathering, combined with tireless traditional reporting to uncover horrifying wrongs. You can find the incredible reporting [here](#) and a helpful roadmap to how reporters got victims to tell their stories [here](#).

We leave you with a gripping lead to *Lawless*, authored by Kyle Hopkins.

KIANA, ALASKA — *Village Police Officer Annie Reed heard her VHF radio crackle to life in the spring of 2018 with the familiar voice of an elder. I need help at my house, the woman said.*

Reed, who doesn't wear a uniform because everyone in this Arctic Circle village of 421 can spot her ambling gait and bell of salt-and-pepper hair at a distance, steered her four-wheeler across town. There had been a home invasion, she learned. One of the local sex offenders, who outnumber Reed 7-to-1, had pried open a window and crawled inside, she said. The man then tore the clothes from the elder's daughter, who had been sleeping, gripped her throat and raped her, according to the charges filed against him in state court.

Reed, a 49-year-old grandmother, was the only cop in the village. She carried no gun and, after five years on the job, had received a total of three weeks of law enforcement training. She had no backup. Even when the fitful weather allows, the Alaska State Troopers, the statewide police force that travels to villages to make felony arrests, are a half-hour flight away.

It's moments like these when Reed thinks about quitting. If she does, Kiana could become the latest Alaska village asked to survive with no local police protection of any kind.

An investigation by the Anchorage Daily News and ProPublica has found one in three communities in Alaska has no local law enforcement. No state troopers to stop an active shooter, no village police officers to break up family fights, not even untrained city or tribal cops to patrol the streets.