

Our Precarious Local News

*As change disrupts media, how do we
meet our information needs?*

Presented to CABQ Cable Board February 25, 2020
By Michael V. Marcotte

About Michael Marcotte

Veteran journalist who is committed to local public service media

- UNM Professor of Practice in Journalism -- 2013-today
- Owner, MVM Media Consulting -- 2007-today
- UNR Reynolds Chair in Ethics of Entrepreneurial Journalism -- 2012-2013
- Stanford Knight Fellow (focus on local news) -- 2010-2011
- Veteran manager of public broadcasting newsrooms -- 1987-2007
- Faculty at Ohio State, San Diego State, Pacific Lutheran U.
- B.A. & M.A. Journalism/Mass Communication from University of Georgia

Agenda

- What is a local news ecosystem?
- Knight Commission Goals
- Democracy Fund & NM First Research
- Recommendations
- Discussion



A local news “ecosystem” includes many factors affecting information quality and availability.

Knight Commission on Information Needs of Communities

“Information is as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools and public health.”



Informing COMMUNITIES

Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age

A healthy community means...

- People have convenient access to both civic and life-enhancing information, without regard to income or social status.
- Journalism is abundant in many forms and accessible through many convenient platforms.
- People have affordable high-speed Internet service wherever and whenever they want and need it.
- Citizens are active in acquiring and sharing knowledge both within and across social networks.
- Digital and media literacy are widely taught in schools, public libraries and other community centers.
- Technological and civic expertise is shared across the generations.
- Local media—including print, broadcast, and online media—reflect the issues, events, experiences and ideas of the entire community.
- People have a deep understanding of the role of free speech and free press rights in maintaining a democratic community.
- Government is open and transparent.

New Media "Precarious" Local News

The Demographic

Local News Coverage
Michael V....

Contributors
Carolyn
Megan Ka
Sarah Gu
Gwyneth

June 2014

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Radio, Mostly Public
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Funders

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Interactive Map of New Mexico Media
New Mexico Media Database (sorted by county)

AMONG THE KEY TAKEAWAYS

NEED MORE:

- Innovation: Fostering experimentation, risk and entrepreneurship.
- Collaboration: Encouraging journalistic cooperation for public service.
- Talent: Training, promoting, rewarding and retaining skilled and diverse workers.
- Civic Engagement: Deeper listening, better conversations.
- Depth Coverage: Strong stories in context with data, accountability and solutions.
- Media Literacy/Trust: Practices to affirm centrality of news ethics and values.

ISSUES INCLUDE:

- Poverty contributes to the sustainability issue
- "Can you out-Facebook Facebook?" Greg Bright on the REAL competition.
- Practically everyone is moving online and expects their news to be there
- Burnout! "We're all fried" - Damon Scott
- Need more skilled talent
 - From university programs
 - In-migration from elsewhere
- Need to keep skilled talent
- Community dialogue reinforces our role as informers
- The more local, the closer to people's lives. Distant coverage is weaker.
- For a state with an Hispanic plurality, we have very few Spanish outlets
- We need habitual use of our service; we need to feed an info habit!
- Legacy newspapers are still the base of the pyramid, but innovation is going slowly
- Gannett, given its reach, should be a better feeder of original news, but it is shrinking
- Competition and collaboration can co-exist. Both are helpful when used well.
- The barriers to entry in journalism are low -- but new and viable contenders are few and far between. Do we need to encourage greater entrepreneurship?

In 2018, NM First held focus groups with journalists, students, educators in 4 communities to explore challenges in local news today.

FOCUS GROUP OUTCOME REPORT



Advancing Sustainable, Reliable Journalism in New Mexico

RESEARCH PROJECT

CONVENER

Society of Professional Journalists, Rio Grande Chapter

RESEARCHER

New Mexico First

FUNDERS

Thornburg Foundation and Democracy Fund
April 2018



2018

NM FIRST REPORT

FOCUS GROUP
OUTCOME REPORT

Strengthening the Journalism Sector

Impactful Solutions from Journalists and Students

- Cultivating the next generation of journalists
- Professional development for existing reporters
- Improved collaboration on actual reporting
- Legal defense fund for media
- Journalism financing models
- Media literacy for the public

In 2019, NM First held focus groups with leaders in business, academia, media, faith and civic life in 7 communities to explore the importance of local media.



Focus Group Outcome Report



Sustainable Local Journalism in New Mexico: Community Perspectives

November 2019



NEW MEXICO FIRST
People. Ideas. Progress.



**New Mexico
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In 2019, NM First

Sustainable Local Journalism in New Mexico: Community Perspectives

Local journalism was seen as an important way to reflect a community's values and sustain a sense of place that is vibrant and connected. Without local journalism, New Mexicans expressed concern about a community's ability to maintain transparency in decision making... In fact, they questioned the viability of our democracy in the absence of local journalism."



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Recommendations

1: Increase support for **public service media** aimed at meeting community information needs.

2: Increase the role of **higher education, community and nonprofit institutions** as hubs of journalistic activity and other information-sharing for local communities.

Recommendations

3: Develop systematic **quality measures** of community information ecologies, and study how they affect social outcomes.

4: Integrate digital and **media literacy** as critical elements for education at all levels through collaboration among federal, state, and local education officials.

Recommendations

5: Fund and support public libraries and other community institutions as **centers of digital and media training**, especially for adults.

6: Set ambitious standards for **broadband availability** and adopt public policies encouraging consumer demand for broadband services.

Recommendations

7. Support the activities of information providers to **reach local audiences** with quality content through all appropriate media, such as mobile phones, radio, public access cable, and new platforms.

8: Expand local media initiatives to **reflect the full reality of the communities** they represent.

Recommendations

9 **Engage young people** in developing the digital information and communication capacities of local communities.

10. Empower all citizens to **participate actively in community self-governance** to address community affairs and pursue common goals.

Discussion?

- Does the city have a role to play in the health of a local information ecosystem?
- In what ways might the city do more?
- What might some next actions be in this regard?