



STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2026



www.njcivicinfo.org

A message from leadership

Local news is the foundation of democracy. It's where social, political, and community discourse begin. We all rely on local news and information to make important decisions about our lives. When done right, local news makes each of us feel seen and heard. Journalists and the communities they serve come to trust in and rely on each other through meaningful relationships, and everyone has the resources they need to thrive.

New Jersey is often seen as a leader in local news and civic information, yet we still have real work to do to make it fully representative and sustainable in all of our diverse communities. It starts with investing in providers who are representative of the communities they serve, connecting them with the resources they need to grow, and increasing awareness of and advocacy for the sector.

It will take all of us — each a critical consumer of this valuable resource. As we look to the future, the Consortium will play a vital role as an investor in growing local news and information to support community-based providers, with a particular focus on underserved communities, including BIPOC, rural, low-income, and non-English speaking immigrant communities — so that every person in New Jersey has access to thriving, representative local news and information that responds to their daily needs. Please join us in our quest!



Chris Daggett
Board Chair and Interim
Executive Director



About the Consortium

The state of New Jersey created the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NJCIC, (www.njcivicinfo.org) in 2018 in response to the growing local news crisis impacting communities across the state's 21 counties. Led by the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization Free Press, a broad stakeholder coalition of thousands of residents, universities, journalists, lawmakers and more crafted the **Civic Info Bill as a way to fund innovative media and civic-technology projects in New Jersey** for decades to come.

A first-in-the-nation project, the Consortium builds on the foundation laid by public media in the United States, and **reimagines how public funding can be used to address the growing problem of news deserts and misinformation, and to support more informed communities.** NJCIC is an independent, 501(c)(3) tax exempt, nonprofit organization that **funds initiatives** to benefit the State's civic life and meet the **evolving information needs of New Jersey's communities.**

Collaboration and partnership are at the root of the Consortium's work. The Consortium brings together six of New Jersey's leading institutions of higher education – **The College of New Jersey, Montclair State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, Kean University, and Rutgers University** – to address the lack of access to local news and information. We provide grants to outlets across the state, with a particular focus on **BIPOC, rural, low-income, and non-English speaking immigrant communities**, and connect grantees to **capacity building opportunities** through these partnerships and training programs.

About our plan

Led by our Strategic Planning Committee (right) with **robust participation** from our full board and staff, we began by **listening to and learning from our diverse constituency**. Through one-on-one interviews and surveys conducted by our planning consultants at Due East Partners, we engaged the following groups of individuals to help shape our Plan:

- Board & Staff
- University Partners
- Nonprofit Partners
- Community Members
- Journalists
- Funders
- Grantees

With help from the very people who are most impacted by the work of the Consortium and critical to the path forward, we became clearer about **what meaningful progress looks like for news and information in New Jersey**, our role in propelling it, and how we can better work together to achieve it. The result is a new Strategic Plan that clearly states our **most valuable role in supporting and growing trustworthy, community-based news and information sources throughout New Jersey**, what we will prioritize to advance our mission, and what steps we will take to **achieve results**.

Additional people engaged:



interview and survey respondents



focus group and survey feedback participants

Strategic planning committee

Chris Daggett*, Board Chair + Interim Executive Director, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium

Molly de Aguiar*, Independence Public Media Foundation

Therise Edwards*, Teshley Solutions

Vanessa Maria Graber, Free Press

Madi McCool, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium

Ayinde Merrill, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium

Jerome Montes, New Jersey Citizen Action

Carla Murphy, The Worker Institute, ILR-Cornell University

Stefanie Murray, Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University

Kim Pearson*, The College of New Jersey

Matthew Weber*, Rutgers University

*Indicates NJCIC Board Member

[Click here to meet our full Staff and Board!](#)



Mission

Providing financial resources to support and grow trustworthy, community-based news and information sources throughout New Jersey.



Vision

Every person in New Jersey has access to thriving, representative local news and information that enhances their lives and communities.

Values

We believe...

- Everyone deserves trustworthy, representative sources of news and information.
- Trusted, accurate, and representative news and information is empowering – and critical to a multi-racial democracy.
- Collaboration, transparency, and sustained funding are key to building thriving news outlets and lead to a more informed and civically engaged New Jersey.
- Equity, accessibility and justice are essential to effective grantmaking.

THEORY OF CHANGE

New Jersey leading the country with its public funding model



2024-2026 STRATEGIC ROADMAP

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PRIORITIES & STRATEGIES

Diverse, thriving grantees addressing the needs of underserved communities

- Solidify grantmaking approach to ensure grant applicants represent underserved communities from across the state
- Support development of outlets and providers in communities with limited to no access to news and information, to encourage civic engagement and dialogue
- Connect grantees to capacity building resources and training
- Invest in research and practices that connect media outlets to audiences
- Enhance partnerships with universities

Consortium financial sustainability and growth for increased impact

- Build financial sustainability by increasing public and private funding
- Ensure strong financial practices
- Hire a full-time Executive Director
- Meaningfully engage key constituents to support fundraising and advocacy
- Develop and maintain a diverse, high-performing Board and staff
- Support grantee impact reporting and share what's working

Visibility and advocacy for the Consortium, its partners, and the evolving news and information needs of New Jersey's communities

- Expand communications team to clarify and promote the Consortium's mission
- Promote grantee impact to increase support for local news and information
- Work with partners, grantees, funders, and policymakers to build awareness and advocacy across the state

PERFORMANCE MEASURES OF THE CONSORTIUM

- 50% of grant applicants who represent underserved communities across the state
- 50% of projects support BIPOC led outlets and 75% in low income and underserved communities
- 3-5 outlets and providers supported in communities with no access to news and information
- 10% increase in number of stories published
- 75% of grantees actively engaged with university partners
- 85% of grantees still in operation after 3 years
- 75% of grantees increase revenue

- \$5M in total annual revenue
- \$3M of multi-year funding secured
- 30% of total revenue from private philanthropy
- 70% of total revenue from public funding

- Increased public awareness of importance of local news and information
- 7-10 annual earned media/press opportunities for Consortium
- 50% increase in philanthropic support for news and information across NJ

OUTCOMES

PEOPLE

Residents value local news and take action to support it

COMMUNITIES

All communities have accessible, trustworthy, representative news and information

ECOSYSTEM

Connected, collaborative, and thriving local news outlets across New Jersey

NEW JERSEY

A more informed and civically engaged state

If the Consortium is successful, it will result in these statewide outcomes.

PEOPLE

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These outcomes will take time to be fully realized, and will take time to track. The Consortium will assess its impact on these points every three years.



**THANK
YOU!**



**NEW JERSEY
CIVIC INFORMATION
CONSORTIUM**