

NEW JERSEY CIVIC INFORMATION CONSORTIUM

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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Letter from the director

Dear supporters and advocates of quality local news and information,

Again this year, due to the continued support of our partners, grantees, funders, and the State of NJ, we've been able to significantly expand our reach and deepen our impact in communities throughout New Jersey.

In 2024, we awarded \$3 million to a diverse group of grantees, and our average new grant has grown from \$80,000 to \$82,000, and renewal grants from \$84,000 to \$97,000, still less than needed for ensuring financial sustainability, but a significant boost for start-up and early-stage local news outlets.

Each grantee is working to address the unique needs of their communities. These projects range from hyperlocal news outlets filling gaps in coverage, to student-run publications training the next generation of journalists, to investigative reporting that holds local governments accountable. We are thrilled to see the meaningful contributions our grantees have made, many of which are BIPOC-led, representing the diversity of our state and ensuring that more voices are heard.

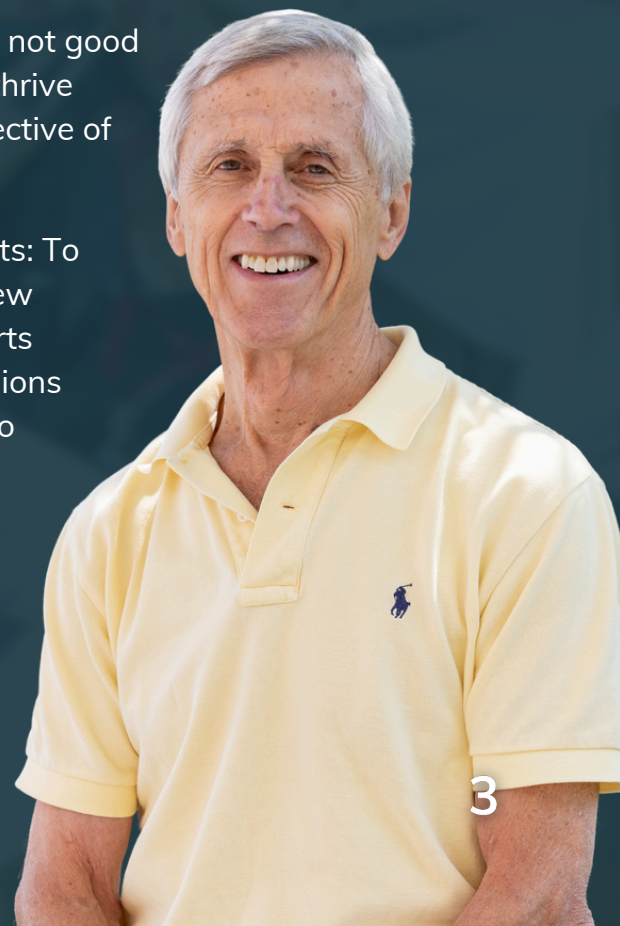
But we need your help. We need to raise much-needed funds to keep the momentum going.

Just Google "the loss of local news" to see for yourself. It's not good for you, nor for our society or democracy, which can only thrive when the flow of news and information is robust and reflective of the diverse places in which we live.

It's why the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium exists: To meet the evolving local news and information needs of New Jersey communities, with a particular focus on news deserts and historically marginalized areas. The Consortium envisions a future in which every person in New Jersey has access to accurate, timely, and representative local news and information that enhances their lives and communities.

Chris Daggett

*Board Chair & Interim Executive Director
New Jersey Civic Information Consortium*



Impact to date

\$7.5M⁺

AWARDED IN
GRANTS SINCE 2021

21

NEWS ORGS COMPLETED
BUSINESS ACCELERATOR*

73

TOTAL
GRANTEES

132

GRANTS
AWARDED

275⁺

GRANT
APPLICATIONS

48%

BIPOC-LED
PROJECTS

3

DOCUMENTERS
HOST SITES*

76%

NJ COUNTIES
REPRESENTED

* Learn more on page 7

About the Consortium

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.

Our grantmaking approach

Focus areas

The Consortium's 2024 grantmaking fell under the following three categories:

Civic news and information reporting

The journalism pipeline

Community engagement

Project values

The Consortium supports ideas and projects that achieve the following:

Perform a public service

Center community information needs

Support media that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive

Strengthen networks and infrastructure

Provide training and education

Promote media by, with, and for

Highlights of 2024

Blue Engine Technology & Sustainability Accelerator

The Consortium launched a Technology & Sustainability Accelerator in December of 2023, bringing together a **cohort of 21 news organizations**. With guidance from expert coaches at Blue Engine Collaborative, these organizations applied performance-driven change principles to address key strategic challenges in their digital businesses. In the process, they also gained comprehensive expertise in managing successful local news outlets.

This cohort was a great success and **resulted in \$121,000 in overall revenue growth and an average 300% increase in audience for the cohort.**

New Jersey Documenters

The Consortium funded the implementation of three Documenters host-sites across the state aimed at promoting civic engagement and transparency in communities. Documenters, **powered by City Bureau**, based in Chicago, is an innovative initiative that trains and pays community members to attend and document public meetings and publish the results.

The three host-sites are in **New Brunswick, Newark, and at Atlantic Cape Community College.**

The NJ Documenters program has successfully **trained more than 50 Documenters across the state**. More than half of the participants identify as BIPOC and as women or nonbinary, underscoring the program's dedication to fostering diverse voices in local civic engagement and journalism.

To learn more about New Jersey Documenters, click [here](#).

Press Forward New Jersey

The Consortium and the Community Foundation of New Jersey (CFNJ) were announced as the home to the New Jersey chapter of Press Forward. This partnership marks an important step in the advancement of local news and civic engagement across the Garden State.

Press Forward is a national movement to strengthen American democracy by revitalizing local news and information. **A coalition of funders is investing more than \$500 million over five years to strengthen local newsrooms, close longstanding gaps in journalism coverage, advance public policy that expands access to local news, and scale the infrastructure the sector needs to thrive.**

Press Forward Locals are a network of chapters across the country where funders bring new donors and foundations together to expand resources for local news. These chapters are an opportunity for funders to create place-based and topically-based initiatives, driven by the specific information needs of their communities.

To learn more about Press Forward New Jersey, click [here](#).

Poll

The Consortium commissioned a poll from the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University and SSRS, which focused on local news in New Jersey. **The poll revealed that Search engines such as Google were by far the most popular source from which New Jerseyans said they get local news, followed by local newspapers and local television stations. When it comes to social media, Facebook is the dominant source for news.**

To read the full results of the New Jersey poll, click [here](#).

“Local news coverage has never been more essential — or more challenging to provide. The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium has enabled [MorristownGreen.com](#) to forge ahead, in a tough economic environment, to serve residents of Greater Morristown with news about things that affect their lives: Development, taxes, schools, crime, politics, leaf blower bans.”

– Kevin Coughlin, Founder
Morristown Green

Looking ahead

Strategic Plan

The Consortium, guided by Due East Partners and a Strategic Planning Committee, launched its efforts by actively engaging with and learning from its diverse constituency, with strong input from our entire board and staff.

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

To read the Strategic Plan, click [here](#).

“The Consortium has been a vital accelerator for Central Desi. What was once just a monthly newsletter written by me is now a fully fledged newsroom with a part-time reporter and a home for fellows to learn the craft of community journalism. The grant has helped support our mission of expanding news coverage by and about the South Asian community in New Jersey, a fast growing population that reports feeling invisible in the Garden State. Through our work, we've been able to partner with major media outlets to amplify stories about this community and demonstrate its diversity.”

**– Ambreen Ali, Founding Editor
Central Desi**

Testimonials

“The NJCIC has supported our vision of creating a media literacy program for young people that encourages them to actively participate in new learning, sharing of knowledge, and the development of media content focused on local issues.”

– **Neal Bennett, Project Leader
Industry Media Arts**

“The New Jersey Civic Info Consortium is a trailblazing model of an equitable local news ecosystem, building a future where people have access to news and information that meets their needs, supports their dreams, and equips them to take action. Democracy Fund is proud to support NJCIC as a community-rooted change agent that brings together diverse stakeholders to enact a stronger New Jersey.”

– **Christine Schmidt, Democracy Fund**

“The time to strengthen local journalism in New Jersey is now. By collaborating with local stakeholders and investing in the future of journalism, we can ensure that New Jerseyans have access to trustworthy, community-driven news and information that reflects the rich diversity of our state.”

– **Hans Dekker, President and CEO,
Community Foundation of NJ**

“The Consortium’s work is essential in preserving the integrity of local news and promoting civic engagement. This renewed funding demonstrates our continued commitment to supporting the more informed and empowered communities.”

– **New Jersey State Senator Vin Gopal**

Consortium staff



Chris Daggett
Board Chair & Interim
Executive Director



Ayinde Merrill
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Madison McCool
Grants and
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Lindsay McNamara
Development
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Acknowledgments

Thank you to the **State of New Jersey, Democracy Fund**, and the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** for your ongoing support. Your commitment to local journalism and civic engagement is vital to ensuring New Jersey communities have access to crucial civic information.

Additional resources

- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Board of Directors](#)
- [Founding Statute](#)
- [Consortium Bylaws](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
- [Strategic Plan](#)
- [2024 Impact Report](#)



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