



**NEW JERSEY**  
**CIVIC INFORMATION**  
**CONSORTIUM**

**IMPACT**

**REPORT**

**2025-2026**

by Hanna Siemazsko

# Table of Contents

- Introduction..... 3**
- Impact: at a glance..... 6**
  - Content creation and distribution..... 6
  - Digital footprint..... 7
  - Strengthening the pipeline.....8
  - Accountability reporting.....10
  - Collaboration and civic participation..... 12
  - Reaching new and underserved audiences..... 13
  - Revenue, job creation, and sustainability..... 14
    - Annual revenue: increases overall..... 14
    - Revenue breakdown..... 16
    - Job creation.....17
    - Financial sustainability..... 18
    - Blue Engine Collaborative Sustainability + Growth Accelerators..... 19
- Impact: a closer look..... 20**
  - MercerMe..... 20
  - The Trenton Journal.....22
  - Montclair Local.....24
  - NJ State House News Service.....25
  - New Jersey Hills Media Group – Corporation for New Jersey Local Media.....28
  - New Jersey Urban News.....30
- Conclusion.....33**
- Bibliography.....34**

# Introduction

Despite tremendous investment from a number of philanthropic sources and journalism support nonprofits in recent years – in funding, resources, and time – the New Jersey local media ecosystem continues to contract (Siemaszko, 2026).

New Jersey has not been immune to the simultaneous pressures that local newsrooms are facing nationwide. The rocky transition to digital destabilized advertising, forcing providers to look for alternative revenue streams, has shuttered newsrooms across the nation as they struggle to find alternative sources for digital advertising revenue or fail to reach their target audiences (Metzger, 2025; Abernathy & Stonbely, 2023). Recent advancements in artificial intelligence have only escalated this crisis as clickthrough rates have plummeted with the creation of software like AI overview (Savage, 2025). Media consolidation and mergers have led to the gutting of newsrooms, mass closures, and endless rounds of layoffs. The pandemic exacerbated all of these existing pressures, and further deteriorated trust in news and information providers (Metzger, 2025; Abernathy & Stonbely, 2023).

Depending on the source, New Jersey's local media ecosystem is either an optimistic beacon of strength or emblematic of the industry's decline. The Local Journalist Index 2025, a joint project of Rebuild Local News and Muck Rack, ranks New Jersey 49th out of 50 states in local journalists per capita, a mere 5.1 journalists per 100,000 residents. The national average is 8.2 per 100,000 residents. The researchers noted that New Jersey's unique position between two major media markets, New York City and Philadelphia, plays a role in pulling coverage away from the state: "Large news outlets from those cities pull in ad dollars and audience, making it harder for local outlets to get traction" (Local Journalist Index 2025, 2025). New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the country, which may contribute to falling short on this particular metric. In the most recent iteration of The State of Local News report, New Jersey was cited as having lost a larger percentage of newspapers in comparison to other states in the past 20 years (Metzger, 2025). Other assessments have celebrated New Jersey as a strong and thriving ecosystem, often citing the collaborative initiatives of the Center for Cooperative Media and the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (New Jersey, 2024; Abernathy & Stonbely, 2023).

The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium was created in 2018 by the State legislature and governor as an independent, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to fund initiatives across the state in response to address this information crisis in the Garden State, tackling news deserts, news avoidance, low civic engagement, and a vanishing journalism pipeline.

The most recent evaluation of the New Jersey local media ecosystem paints a very unsettling picture. In the five years since the last study, there has been a loss of just under 50 local news outlets serving the state, with more than 20 percent of the losses being ethnic and community media providers (Siemaszko, 2026). According to the report, approximately 43 percent of municipalities lack designated news outlets, with criteria for "designated news outlet" as one

that provides coverage to five municipalities or fewer. About 73 percent of municipalities lack a designated news outlet when the definition for "designated news outlet" narrows to an outlet that provides coverage to one municipality or fewer (Siemaszko, 2026). This same report identified 11 counties as critical information needs deserts, meaning they are lacking in sufficient coverage on one or more of the FCC's categories for critical information needs (Siemaszko, 2026; Friedland, 2023).

The majority of newsrooms in New Jersey are small businesses with an annual revenue of \$500,000 or less. Operating on shoe-string budgets, they often have small staff sizes and even fewer journalists. This report also found that there was a correlation between lower annual revenue brackets and being financially unsustainable.

To those of us who work in this field, these numbers are not surprising or without cause. There have been significant closures and policy changes that significantly affected the New Jersey local media environment in the past decade.

In 2025, The Star Ledger, an affiliate of NJ Advance Media, ceased its print publication; the Jersey Journal, also an affiliate of NJ Advance Media, ceased operations altogether (Friedman, 2024; Bergeron, 2024; "After 157 Years of Keeping Hudson County Informed, The Jersey Journal to Close in 2025," 2024). The Star Ledger has continued its presence on NJ.com, but essentially all reporters who worked at The Star Ledger before its move to NJ Advance Media around 10 years ago have been terminated or incorporated into NJ.com (Friedman, 2024). Advance Local, which owns NJ Advance Media and NJ.com, also announced in 2024 that, in addition to The Star Ledger, print publication would end for The Times of Trenton, the South Jersey Times, and the Hunterdon County Democrat (Bergeron, 2024). After the change in ownership to NJ Advance Media in 2014, The Star Ledger – which at the time boasted a staff of more than 750 – lost about 170 staffers, including 25 percent of the newsroom, affecting non-unionized personnel (Sherman & Mueller, 2014). In 2016, the USA Today Co., formerly known as Gannett, alongside hundreds of local newspapers around the country (and in the UK) purchased North Jersey Media Group. North Jersey Media Group was the owner of The Record of Bergen County (colloquially known as The Bergen Record), one of the largest state dailies (Pompeo, 2016). The change in ownership from North Jersey Media Group to the Virginia-based USA Today Co. led to the consolidation of approximately 20 community newspapers and mass layoffs of more than 50 percent of staff members across all departments (McCarthy, 2016).

In addition to the universal financial pressures, media mergers, closures, and layoffs that local news providers are experiencing both in New Jersey and across the nation, the New Jersey state government has passed specific policies that have intensified the crisis for local media in the Garden State. In 2025, a bill was passed by Gov. Phil Murphy that eliminated the requirement for government entities to publish legal advertisements in newspapers, permitting them to publish these notices on their official websites (Bill S4654, 2025). This bill raised concerns about local government transparency and since legal advertisements are a major source of revenue for local

newspapers this bill will likely financially destabilize newsrooms across New Jersey and lead to more closures.

The pandemic also led to a change in the way the state allocates advertising funds. Prior to the pandemic, state agencies allocated a larger portion of advertising funds to local and community media, though the majority of their budget was directed toward large marketing firms. During the pandemic, the contracts made with these marketing firms ballooned, while the total amounts contracted to local and community media remained stagnant. After the pandemic, the allotments to local sources declined drastically (totalling less than \$1 million in 2024), while the contracts with large marketing firms remained in the multi-millions (Siemaszko, 2024).

The report that included these findings recently informed a bill proposal, NJ-S3744: the bill, proposed by state Sen. Andrew Zwicker, requires that state agencies direct at least 30 percent of their advertising budget towards local news organizations.

One of the most visible attacks on media has been the defunding of PBS and NPR by more than \$1 billion dollars, and the dissolution of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), an organization that was founded in 1967 (Trump, 2025; Bauder, 2026). This loss of funding was a result of an executive order and subsequent rescission of funds by Congress (Fu, 2025; Trump 2025). This has had a profound impact on public broadcasters nationwide. New Jersey's flagship station, NJ PBS, has been operated by WNET out of New York for the last 15 years. WNET announced in September 2025 that it ended negotiations with the state to extend its contract in part because of CPB funding cuts (Metzger, 2025).

While New Jersey remains a diverse and inter-connected news ecosystem with a large percentage of independent and small-business ownership, there is a clear need for the continuation of the Consortium. Despite its dwindling numbers, local news continues to be a source that is more trusted (Hoewe, 2025). Additionally, investment in the Consortium's grantees shows promise in reversing the trends of mass contraction and low engagement in New Jersey local news.

Finally, there is a need to ensure that we meet the growing needs of our New Jerseyans. Most New Jerseyans *need* and *want* more local news, but don't always have adequate access. According to a recent study by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling, 65 percent of New Jerseyans say they want more local news – both at the local and state level. Meanwhile, 24 percent report that they were “not very well” informed by their local news providers and an additional 15 percent report that they are “not well at all” informed by their local news offerings (“Rutgers-Eagleton Poll Shows 65% of New Jerseyans Want More Local News,” 2026).

This report highlights the many ways that the Consortium is providing more opportunities for civic engagement and dialogue, building an effective journalism pipeline, supporting watchdog organizations that hold those in power to account, and creating a collaborative network of local

news providers and community organizations that are striving to, above all, serve and strengthen their communities, highlighting the importance of the Consortium in enabling its grantees to increase their capacity, provide more original content, reach audiences that previously were not served, and move in the direction of financial sustainability.

## Impact: at a glance

Since 2021, the Consortium has awarded \$12,930,439 across 212 grants to 82 organizations, extending support to local news and civic information efforts in 19 of New Jersey’s 21 counties. About 50 percent of funds have been given to projects in civic news and information, while 24.8 percent have been dedicated to restoring the journalism pipeline, about 23 percent have been allocated to projects that further civic engagement in New Jersey communities, and about two percent has been allocated to Blue Engine Accelerator grants.

In 2025-2026, 68 grants were given out to 48 organizations. About 38 percent were dedicated to civic news and information reporting, 35 percent were dedicated to strengthening the journalism pipeline, 15 percent were allocated towards Blue Engine Accelerator projects, and 12 percent of grants were civic engagement projects.

## Content creation and distribution

Between May 31, 2025 and April 30, 2026, 9,576 pieces of original local news content, 3,541 local news briefs, and 317 Spanish-translated news articles have been produced by 33 of the Consortium’s current grantees.

As of May 2026, 46 of the Consortium’s content-producing grantees have produced 17,755 pieces of original local news content and storytelling, 18,034 local news briefs, and 960 translated news articles.

Stories by county (all-time)		
Coverage by county	Total stories serving each county	Population (2024 est.)
Atlantic	4,385	279,114
Bergen	1,449	978,641
Burlington	1,790	475,515
Camden	3,922	533,988
Cape May	3,394	93,875
Cumberland	3,639	155,678
Essex	4,894	881,527
Gloucester	2,521	311,783

Hudson	2,295	736,185
Hunterdon	30	131,708
Mercer	3,309	392,138
Middlesex	1,659	890,119
Morris	2,101	523,053
Ocean	1,560	666,434
Passaic	1,542	526,597
Salem	2,521	65,874
Somerset	239	357,467
Union	237	594,160
Warren	2406	112,031
Statewide	1,815	9,500,851

About 69 percent of these stories produced are by organizations with local reach; 18 percent are by outlets with statewide reach, and 13 percent are produced by student journalists or youth interns/fellows. The nine student content-creation firms that are included are local in scope.

Higher rates of content production have primarily been seen in locations where audiences are underserved, whether it be historically BIPOC or rural communities, because of dedicated funding to content producers, civic engagement efforts, and pipeline programs within those communities. As a result, some higher degrees of content production are seen in counties with larger BIPOC populations like Atlantic City in Atlantic County, Trenton in Mercer County, Newark in Essex County, and Camden in Camden County; higher rates of content production are also seen in more rural counties like Salem, Warren, Cape May, and Cumberland.

The NJCIC grantees have currently not produced content for Monmouth or Sussex counties unless provided by a grantee who is a statewide content producer.

## Digital footprint

Between the period of May 2025 to April 2026, the 30 current grantees that have website data available received 15.1 million visits cumulatively to their websites. On average, these 30 grantees receive 1.2 million visits per month and about 840,000 unique visits per month to their websites.

This total excludes visits to their social media platforms. All 40 current grantees cumulatively have 290,000 followers on Facebook, 248,000 followers on Instagram, and 86,000 subscribers on YouTube.

To provide a snapshot of performance over time, in May of 2025, the 30 current grantees with website data available received about 1.27 million visits cumulatively to their sites. In April 2026, they received 1.36 million visits. Referral traffic to websites overall is trending down, the performance of the grantees is stable. This comparison is especially important within the context of the recent studies showing that many outlets are experiencing massive drops in traffic as a result of the implementation of AI overview, which has virtually seen the elimination of click-through traffic for many outlets (Savage, 2025). About 50 percent of grantees saw an increase in their traffic in this time frame.

Most fascinatingly, the grantees that perform best in traffic are largely locally focused and not statewide. The grantees with traffic increases between May 2025 and April 2026 on average increased 35 percent. Local and regional outlets recorded an increase of on average of 49 percent, whereas traffic to statewide news organizations rose an average 17 percent.

Additionally, many of the grantees that saw declines in website traffic are adapting to the social-media-first news landscape and have seen gradual increases in their social media following since becoming grantees. This reach is growing brand recognition and audience retention.

One hyperlocal grantee that saw a drop in website traffic this past year caters to a Gen Z audience and has increasingly sought to increase its presence on Instagram. In January 2024, it had 1k followers on Instagram; currently, it has 4,500 followers and continues to increase on the platform.

One of the statewide outlets that saw a decline in website traffic covers a specific identity-based community and is geared more toward social media. The outlet grew from 5,000 Instagram followers in May 2025 to 14,100 in April 2026, with monthly Instagram views jumping from 5,000 to 12,800 in that same time frame. The outlet went viral with an Instagram story about New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill, which received more than 147,000 views on Instagram, 99.3% of which were from non-followers. The outlet reached 122,551 accounts with the video report and saw nearly 8,500 interactions with the accompanying Reel.

Another grantee that saw a drop in web traffic over the past year saw an overall increase in recurring donations, indicating brand loyalty and supporters willing to pay for content.

## **Strengthening the pipeline**

**Since 2021, 2,000 children, teens, and college-aged students have been engaged in one of the Consortium pipeline or training programs.**

These programs range in scope and size. Two high schools have been given grants for technical support and modernization updates to enhance their digital journalism and podcasting

curriculum. Across those schools, 812 students have been taught basic skills of podcasting and storytelling.

One grantee serving Camden, Healthy NewsWorks, has the dual purpose of increasing civic engagement and knowledge around health information while collaborating with the students to create a magazine. Using this collaborative approach to content creation with grade school children the team furthers the access of pertinent health information amongst children as well as their parents who are likely to consume the content after it's published. In its first year of being funded, 439 students engaged in the program.

Among the grantees, there is another category of pipeline programs that serve as training initiatives for the next generation of local journalists. These programs are typically facilitated by media professionals or former media professionals and often have an expectation of content creation and production. The expectations for content creation are dependent on the program, but tend to be rigorous. Follow South Jersey, Public Square Amplified, and The Village Green publish student-produced content on their sites and expect high quality work. NJ State House News content is exclusively published by other sites, so this grantee expects professional-grade content from its interns. All of these programs are often resume builders, with the intention of job placement or as feeders into college programs. In total, these programs have trained 550 student interns and fellows.

Many interns and fellows have gone on to successful positions in local news outlets such as [NJ.com](https://www.nj.com), Press of Atlantic City and MercerMe. One former intern from NJ Statehouse News Service received a prestigious paid internship opportunity at The Dow Jones News Fund in partnership with Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) at the University of Maryland; another was hired to do communications for Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald's office. Other fellows/interns have changed their majors to or pursued bachelors/master degrees in journalism after participating in Consortium pipeline programs.

In addition, the Consortium funds four student news organizations across New Jersey: the South Jersey Climate News at Rowan University, The Daily Targum at Rutgers University, The Signal at The College of New Jersey, and, The Tower at Princeton High School. Two grants enable outlets to modernize with desperately needed technology, one grant seeks to help restore university funding, and another grant enables the organization to provide stipends to student journalists. In total, these programs have engaged 225 college and high school students.

**Since 2021, 348 adults have been engaged in one of the adult pipeline or training programs funded by the Consortium.**

These programs help adults gain critical reporting skills from media professionals or in a community college setting. Many of these programs train regular citizens to report on their communities in an effort to build trust within communities that have been routinely underserved.

Outlets including Radio Jornalera, New Labor, and South Jersey Emerging Journalist Project (SJEJP) are training adults to cover regions or audiences that have been overlooked.

Radio Jornalera covers primarily Latin American migrant populations in New Jersey, utilizing radio streaming, social media, and Whatsapp to develop a network of communication. Most recently, it has focused on ICE raid accountability reporting. It collaborates heavily with New Labor (as well as Radio Cosecha, a former grantee of the Consortium), which covers day laborers and migrant workers in New Jersey, specifically focusing on labor conditions and exploitation.

SJEJP places journalists in South Jersey newsrooms for hands-on training with media professionals. This program serves as a pipeline for new journalists who desire to serve their own communities, in a region that has had a deficit of coverage.

Other programs, such as the certificate program created by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities and Journalism + Design offer training less with the intention of creating more journalists, and more with the intention of increasing media literacy, interest in local news, and civic participation. This program works with multiple community colleges across the state to offer a journalism certificate. The program has led to more trained journalists; some students have started blogs, been published by their local news outlets, and New Labor's citizen journalism cohort was certified by this program.

## Accountability reporting

The grantees of the Consortium often act as the sole watchdog within their municipality, their county, or in some instances, their school. The following are some notable examples of Consortium grantees acting as watchdogs for their communities and seeing action and/or change as a result of their work:

### ***Morristown Green***

Morristown Green [broke a story](#) about closed-door talks between town officials and Atlantic Health for a hospital expansion that would be the biggest single development project in Morristown history. As a result of the reporting, citizens flooded town meetings, urging elected officials and the hospital to be forthright about their plans. The public backlash forced the hospital to halt the proposed plans, and [become transparent and inclusive in future propositions](#); No plans have been formalized because of the public inclusion and push back. Additionally, Morristown Green [drew attention to a law](#) set forth by the Morristown council; the law cited the rise of homelessness in the town and introduced a ban for sleeping in public places. [The story sparked a swift backlash](#) from the community. The mayor, who proposed the measure, quickly asked the council to withdraw it.

### ***HudPost***

HudPost's [reporting on remarks](#) made by Jersey City Board of Education President Noemí Velázquez at a school board meeting [prompted public condemnations](#) from the NAACP, National Action Network, and local faith leaders. Separately, HudPost's video coverage of a protest at Dickinson High School [led the Jersey City Board of Education to ban a congressional candidate and former board president from school premises](#), with the Board of Education citing HudPost's coverage as evidence of his involvement.

### ***Camden Parent & Student Union***

As a result of Camden Parent & Student Union's extensive advocacy work and reporting, former Camden School Advisory Board president [Wasim Muhammad stepped down](#) after allegations of inappropriate conduct. Muhammad [reached a \\$2 million dollar settlement](#) with his accuser, Salema Hicks Robinson, for sexual assault when she was his middle school student. Additionally, Camden Parent & Student Union, collaborating with New Jersey Urban News to report on this crisis, [prevented the shuttering of three high schools in Camden](#). These closures would have dropped the total number of high schools from five to two, eliminating the specialized approach to learning that has been a staple in the high school education system for decades.

### ***New Jersey Urban News***

New Jersey Urban News also has helped to resolve an issue that plagues Hudson County: [helicopter noise pollution](#). As a result of their reporting, a bipartisan group of congresspeople, led by Rep. Robert Menendez, from New Jersey and New York [introduced legislation](#) to curtail the noise pollution in Hudson county from low-flying helicopters. [The article caught the attention of Gov. Phil Murphy](#), who quietly pressed the Federal Aviation Authority in a letter urging action against disruptive flights over Hoboken and Jersey City.

### ***Hammonton Gazette***

Hammonton Gazette recently [exposed a \\$1.5 million debt](#) accrued by a local theater and cultural site. The theater is granted local tax dollars annually, but has a very poor account of their spending. The Gazette's reporting forced the local government to temporarily halt funding and investigate the theater's spending.

### ***The Village Green***

The Village Green's student journalist, Ella Levy, [reported on a "book ban"](#) of Junot Diaz's, "The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" at Columbia High School in Maplewood. The book was purportedly removed from the curriculum as a response to growing concerns about mental health. The students petitioned the action and the ban elicited a response from the author, who argued that "When we fight for books for art we fight not only for the best school we'll ever have, we fight for all our possible selves." The article was picked up by [NPR](#) and [Education Week](#). Although they did not fully return the book to the curriculum, the school district has now [partially lifted the ban](#), and parents can opt-in to permit their child to study the book.

### ***The Tower***

Princeton High School's student newspaper, The Tower, reported on the installation of new surveillance software on student devices, which prompted a full explanation of these changes to the school technology policies to the students. The Tower then [published a piece investigating these modifications](#), interviewing the district Chief Technology Officer to better understand what this means for students. This article sparked greater student concern. Following the publication of the interview the Chief Technology Officer sent out an email to all students with further explanations of the changes citing The Tower's reporting as a reason for providing more clarification. After further student outcry, the monitoring changes have since been reversed.

## **Collaboration and civic participation**

**There have been about 50 documented formal and informal collaborations between grantees and former grantees of the Consortium – most are ongoing, while some are terminal projects.**

The majority of partnerships consist of mutual content sharing practices. Each grantee will republish relevant content or amplify the other's brand to their audience. This is especially the case with grantees that are part of the Center for Cooperative Media's content sharing network or partner outlets of NJ State House News. The content-sharing service enables partnered newsrooms to cross-publish content in a formalized fashion. NJ State House News, a member of this network, was already structured as a "wire service" of sorts, designed to distribute content to partner newsrooms rather than act as a standalone newsroom. The same can be said about the NJ News Commons Spanish Translation Network, a translation service housed at the Center for Cooperative Media. To date, the initiative's 759 stories have been republished 2,875 times by its partners – an average of almost four times per story.

Other partnerships consist of developing and producing content collaboratively. Some have been short-term projects, but many are on-going collaborative efforts. For example, Central New Jersey Network (CNJN) rents out production studio space to clients, assists those clients in content production, and helps them tailor the final product for distribution both on their site and on social media. CNJN collaborates regularly with the Trenton Journal to produce their new podcast, "Capitol Conversations."

Another frequently seen collaboration type is partnerships for training purposes. Some of our pipeline grantees partner with news outlets to house their fellows or interns. For example, the South Jersey Emerging Journalist Project (SJEJP) works closely with Black in Jersey, Atlantic City Focus, and Front Runner New Jersey for on-the-job training for their fellows. Many of these students will continue on as contributors at these outlets after finishing the fellowship.

## Reaching new and underserved audiences

Many of our grantees, by design, are reaching underserved audiences because of the community the outlet serves, either geographically or demographically. Some examples include:

### ***Radio Jornalera***

Radio Jornalera serves day laborers and migrant workers who are often excluded from mainstream media. Radio Jornalera used a grassroots, worker-led media model, often bringing content directly to job sites, community spaces, and trusted networks. The outlet also invested in bilingual programming and on-the-ground reporting, making content accessible and relevant. Additionally, Radio Jornalera trained community members as reporters and storytellers. This has built trust and created an outlet where the community sees themselves reflected, further driving engagement and participation.

### ***NJ News Commons Spanish Translation Service***

The previously mentioned NJ News Commons Spanish Translation Service, housed at the Center for Cooperative Media, is projected to have reached millions of readers in the Spanish-speaking and Latino community through their translated and republished news content.

### ***Atlantic City Focus***

Atlantic City Focus covers the African American community in Atlantic City; the Consortium funds the outlet's creation of a Civic Engagement Guide for Atlantic City, which provides residents with a comprehensive directory of information on local elections, community resources, and leadership.

### ***Front Runner New Jersey***

Front Runner New Jersey covers African American and Latino communities with a restorative perspective to news and information in both Atlantic City and greater South Jersey. This outlet's funding from the Consortium is for general operations, and has allowed them to bring on more freelancers. This has enabled them to increase their reporting capacity and provide more in-depth coverage.

### ***Public Square Amplified***

Public Square Amplified (PSA) serves African-Caribbean diaspora, Indigenous, and migrant communities in Newark. PSA, with funding from the Consortium, also acts as a pipeline for the next generation of local journalists of color who seek to represent their geographic and ethnic communities.

Many of the Consortium's grantees have also been able to successfully reach new audiences as a result of NJCIC funding. Some examples include:

### ***Chalkbeat Newark***

Chalkbeat Newark utilized Instagram Reels to reach parents and students in Newark who prefer social media for news consumption over traditional news sites. By shifting to short-form, platform-native video content, Chalkbeat Newark has adapted by going to where the audiences already are congregating and presenting information in a more accessible and engaging fashion. This enabled Chalkbeat Newark to reach and connect with community members who were previously inaccessible through traditional web-based reporting.

### ***Central Desi***

Central Desi is a community-run news platform that tells the stories of New Jersey's South Asian community. This past year, Central Desi was able to expand outreach and connection to the Sikh community in New Jersey, by dedicating more storytelling and coverage to the community.

### ***HudPost***

HudPost expanded their coverage to Hudson County's Spanish-speaking community through "El HudPostcito", a formal partnership with El Especialito Hispanic Newspaper. With this partnership, El Especialito distributes HudPost's original reporting in Spanish via print circulation and in the county's yellow news boxes, reaching an audience that previously had no access to HudPost's coverage.

### ***Montclair Local***

Montclair Local has seen success reaching readers in West Orange and Caldwell through reporting on issues that were underreported in these towns. This is a direct result of their Consortium funding, which enabled Montclair Local to expand their Essex County coverage.

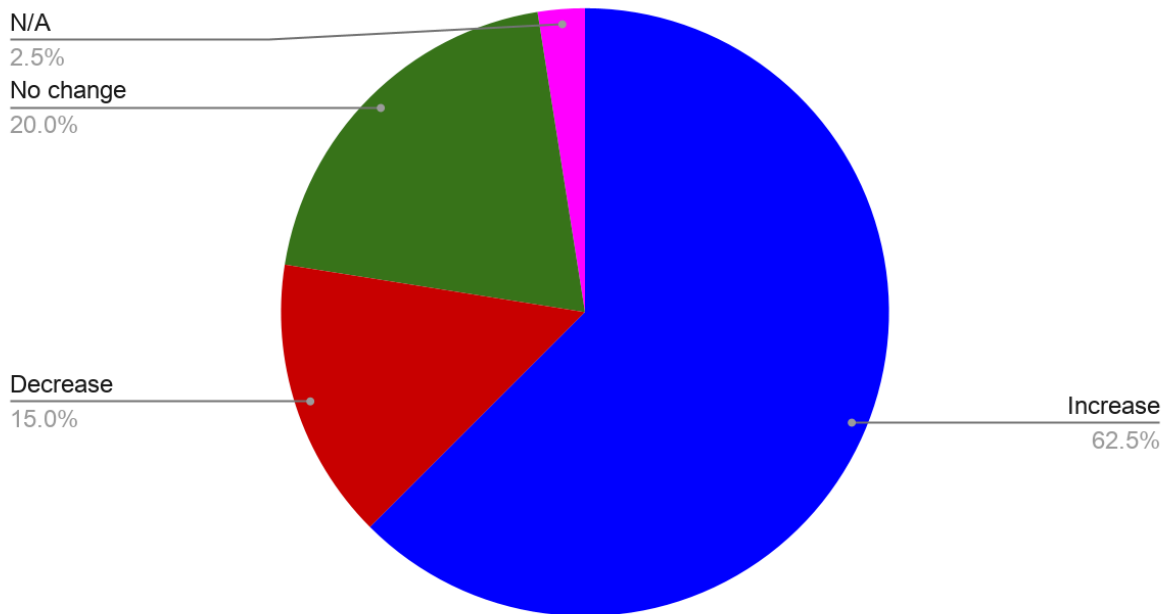
## **Revenue, job creation, and sustainability**

### ***Annual revenue: increases overall***

The majority of grantees have seen an increase in their annual revenue since becoming a grantee.

The majority of grantees reporting revenue growth attribute these gains to increased organizational capacity. Enhanced capacity has allowed them to expand coverage, strengthen community connections, and improve the quality of their reporting. These advancements have contributed to stronger organizational performance, helping grantees diversify and grow revenue streams while building long-term sustainability.

## Annual revenue change



One notable example of revenue growth is the Journalism + Design Lab at The New School. The organization won a \$1.5 million Press Forward infrastructure grant which is partially dedicated to building on the NJCIC-funded work supporting a cohort of community colleges in New Jersey training and certifying students in local news reporting.

Craig Richards of The Hammonton Gazette explains that, “The advantages of additional staffing, content generation, and the ability to provide translated articles to our Spanish community has increased circulation and advertising. Grant money has effectively generated more relevant content, especially to the underserved demographics in our area.”

James de los Santos of HudPost attributes their revenue growth to increased advertising and sponsorship sales, which were enabled by the NJCIC grant funding, which helped them to expand their coverage and reach new audiences.

During his time as a grantee, Kevin Coughlin of Morristown Green has seen a 52 percent increase in revenue from advertising and reader contributions between 2023 and 2025.

Richard Torres of Radio Jornalerá, explains that “since becoming a grantee, we have seen a steady increase in our annual revenue, driven by stronger organizational capacity and expanded programming. The support has allowed us to invest in key infrastructure, including hiring a part-time producer/switcher and strengthening our media work through Radio Jornalerá NJ. As a

result, we have increased our visibility, built new partnerships, and secured additional funding opportunities, including press credentials and expanded community engagement. This growth reflects both increased trust in our work and our ability to sustain and scale our impact.”

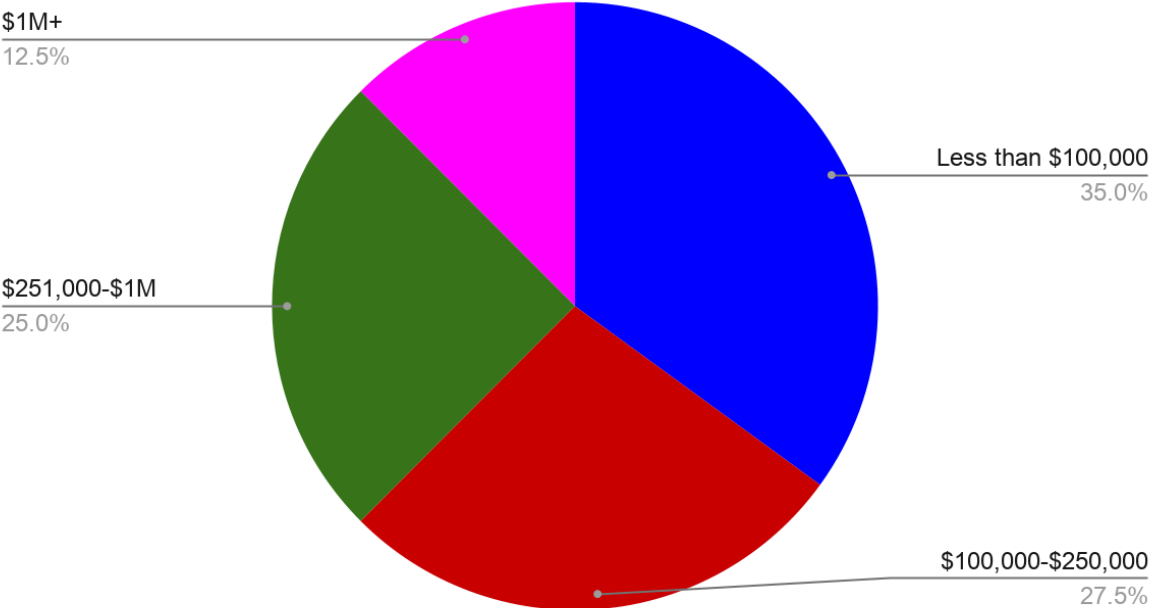
As of April 2026, One grantee, the school newspaper at Princeton High School, The Tower, has generated \$2,080 in revenue.. This represents a significant increase in funding beyond the grant-provided funding that is driven by greater community awareness of the paper’s work through increased subscriptions (an 80 percent increase in subscriptions from last year) and advertisements. The Tower was given [local press coverage](#) when the editor-in-chief of the paper presented the successful acquisition of the NJCIC grant for modernization updates at the Princeton Public School Board meeting.

Krystal Knapp of The Jersey Vindicator, Simon Galperin of The Jersey Bee, Mary Barr Mann of The Village Green, Mark Tyler of Atlantic City Focus, Liz George of Montclair Local, Sylvia Baber at NJ Spotlight, and Byheijja Sabree at Camden Parent & Student Union report receiving other philanthropic funding after their first initial NJCIC grant.

### ***Revenue breakdown***

Of the 40 grantee organizations evaluated, the most frequently used revenue source (aside from philanthropy, which all utilize from the NJCIC) is traditional advertising; the second most used source is sponsored content sales with sponsorship sales following closely behind.

### Annual revenue breakdown



Revenue sources of NJCIC grantees	
Revenue source	Number of grantees
Advertising	18
Sponsorship sales	9
Sponsored content sales	11
Donations or philanthropy	40
Memberships	6
Subscriptions	7
Event revenue	7
Other	7

More than 60 percent of grantees are operating on annual revenues of \$250k or less, with about 35 percent operating on budgets less than \$100k or less. Grantees with budgets less than \$250k have a higher prevalence of being financially unsustainable in their funding and are, as previously noted above, disproportionately ethnic and community media.

## Job creation

Despite tremendous financial hardship, the Consortium has lightened the load of its grantees by enabling them to hire more staff. These hires have largely been content creators, editors, and journalists, but many have also been support, development, and/or operations hires.

NJCIC-supported organizations have created 370 news-related jobs across New Jersey. Based on prevailing wages in the journalism sector, these positions generate an estimated \$24 million in annual payroll (Salary.com, 2026).

Supporting civic participation and government accountability increase the visibility of local businesses, nonprofits, and community institutions, help residents make informed economic decisions, and fill information gaps in communities that would otherwise be underserved.

Job creation in Consortium-funded organizations		
Job creation (All time)	Number of jobs (all time)	Number of jobs (since Jan 2026)
Full-time	32	11
Part-time	71	19
Freelance/contractor	268	131
Total:	371	161

Many of our grantees have reported that the added staff led to increased capacity to better serve and reach new audiences, creating a demand for more content. In some cases this has led to increases in revenue, more growth internally, and the need for additional hires. This transpired at The Hammonton Gazette, where the Consortium funded the outlet to expand their Spanish-translated section “Noticias,” to better serve the growing Spanish-speaking and Latinx community in Hammonton (and surrounding municipalities). The grant enabled the outlet to dedicate three part-time reporters, one part-time graphic, and a freelance translator to the section. Due to the section’s success, a full-time non grant-funded position was established for “Noticias.” Soon after, a part-time web content assistant role was established due to the surge in popularity.

Kevin Coughlin of Morristown Green noted that the presence of freelancers has allowed him to cover stories that would have otherwise not been reported on. In essence, freelancers are acting as a necessary watchdog when Coughlin is unable to be present.

MercerMe’s Mary Galioto has described that the NJCIC funding has enabled her to start paying herself and hire a full-time editor, Seth Siditsky. The increase in reporting capacity enabled the outlet to deepen their relationship with their community, enhancing the breadth and depth of

their coverage. As a result, the outlet has seen a steady increase in their memberships and donations.

### ***Financial sustainability***

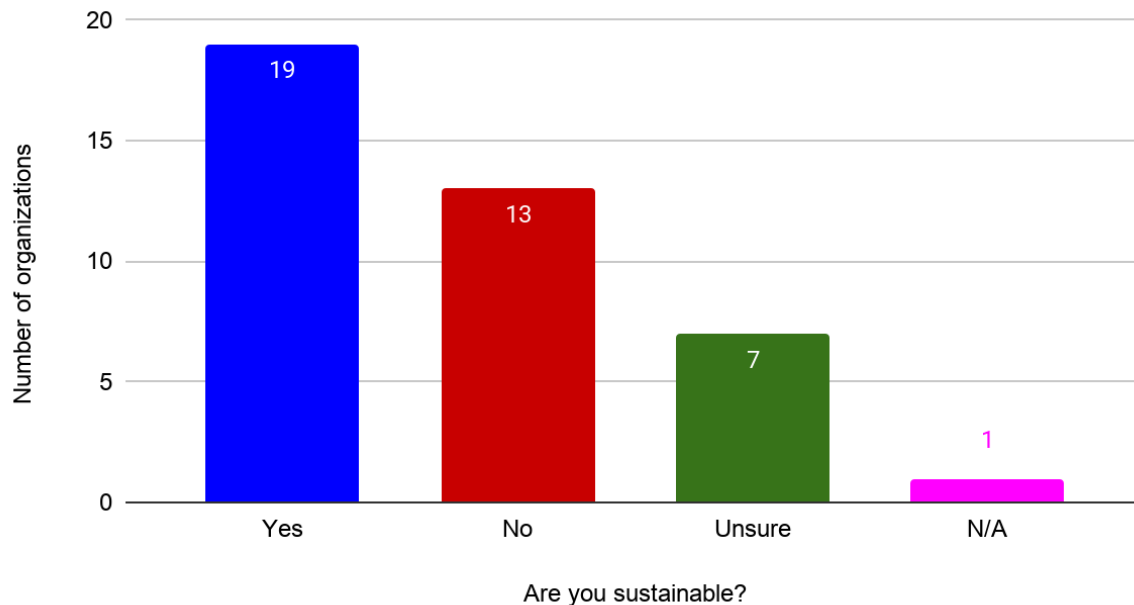
Despite the majority of grantees having seen increases in funding, less than half report being financially sustainable in their business operations. Sustainable is defined here as “currently able to meet all operating and business expenses, including paying for oneself.”

This indicates that, despite our current level of investment, **more is needed**. This definition *includes* the funding that is already given by the Consortium. With that in mind – only 50% of the grantees are able to meet all expenses with our continued support.

Additionally, the outlets that are not financially sustainable are disproportionately ethnic and community media (ECM) outlets. Of the 10 ECM outlets evaluated, only two are financially sustainable, while six are not sustainable and two marked “unsure.”

Despite having received the comparable levels of funding for the same amount of years from the Consortium there are crucial barriers to sustainability for ECM. ECM serves audiences with less discretionary income to spend, and therefore reader donation, membership, and subscription models can be challenging. Competing for grants is fierce, especially for ECM. Advertising, already destabilized by the transition to digital, is often no longer viable to serve as an “only” source of revenue. Thus, reliance on the Consortium and other philanthropic funding for income is not only necessary, but essential for sustainability. Seven out of ten of these outlets have diversified their revenue sources beyond philanthropic sources, but it remains crucial that the NJCIC funding continues to enable these outlets to be given adequate time and capacity to find other creative ways to generate revenue.

## Financial sustainability



### ***Blue Engine Collaborative Sustainability + Growth Accelerators***

Since 2024, \$215,000 has been given out to 36 local news outlets to participate in growth accelerator and sustainability programs in partnership with Blue Engine Collaborative. These grants have shown tremendous promise in assisting local news outlets in growing their audiences, increasing their revenue, and moving them towards sustainability.

In 2024, 21 organizations participated in the Tech and Sustainability Accelerator 1.0 program and 11 of those outlets (plus an additional three news organizations) continued with the second Growth Accelerator 2.0 in 2025 into 2026. There is also another News Sustainability Accelerator program underway with 12 new organizations, funded by Google, scheduled to conclude in 2026.

Blue Engine Collaborative [evaluated the progress](#) of the first two cohorts, a total of 14 organizations, to better understand the impact of sustained, individualized support over time.

Prior to the first Accelerator, participating news organizations were given a sustainability self-assessment used to measure progression over time on four dimensions: money, audience, product/tech, and people/process. During these first assessments, participants gave themselves an average sustainability score of 41 percent. After participating in the first Accelerator, their sustainability assessment scores rose to 62 percent. After the second Accelerator, the scores again rose to 69 percent (New Jersey Local News Accelerators, 2026).

Additionally, the assessment shows that the outlets “entering their first Accelerator reported declining reach, on average, and virtually flat audience engagement. Both metrics reversed during Accelerator 1.0 as teams gained tools and coaching to grow and more deeply engage their audiences.” The Blue Engine team also noted that financial stability and revenue gains were more likely to transpire in the Accelerator 2.0 (New Jersey Local News Accelerators, 2026).

## Impact: a closer look

In the following section, six case studies are presented to examine the impact that the Consortium’s grantees have on local communities in New Jersey.

Montclair Local, New Jersey Hills Media Group, The Trenton Journal, MercerMe, NJ Urban News, and NJ State House News, represent civic-minded content producers successfully expanding their audiences through community-centered reporting and engagement efforts, leading to steady financial gains, strategic collaborative efforts and partnerships, enabling organizational growth and increased output, revenue generation success stories from a local news chain, and a pipeline program that has a high job-placement rate and fills a massive void in state house news coverage.

### MercerMe

MercerMe, a grantee of the NJCIC since May 2025, is an independent local news site for Hopewell Valley. Founded in 2013, the outlet distinguishes itself from reporting *about* the community; instead they identify as reporting *for* the community. The funding given to the outlet has enabled Mary Galioto to start paying herself, but also maintain a full-time editor, Seth Siditsky. The increase in capacity strengthened MercerMe's relationship with their community, enhancing the breadth and depth of their coverage and generating more revenue through memberships and donations.

Since becoming a grantee in 2025 and hiring Siditsky, MercerMe has seen strong growth in audience-supported revenue, signaling deepening reader commitment and a more sustainable revenue foundation. Recurring supporters have increased from 270 to 404 (a 49.6% increase), while lifetime value (LTV) has grown from \$312.63 to \$1,069.83 (a 242% increase). Average monthly revenue churn rate remains low at 0.63%, indicating strong retention and reinforcing the reliability of this support over time. Galioto and Siditsky credit the increase in support and retention to the greater depth and breadth in their original content as a result of their enhanced community relations.

As an established organization for 13 years, MercerMe has a long legacy and commitment to Hopewell Valley. As Galioto described, it is essential "to be there before the big stories, during them, and long after they've faded from attention." When Siditsky was hired, they built upon that

established legacy. When speaking with Galioto and Siditsky, they explained that a crucial part of Siditsky's role is going out into the community to build relationships, restore trust, and discern the needs of the community. These goals are a bit more tangible because Galioto and Siditsky are community members, have children within the local school system, and have a clear investment in the community that they are serving.

As Siditsky built these relationships in her community, it became clear that there were many gaps in coverage. As a parent in the community, Siditsky noticed immediately that there was no coverage of the school board. In the previous year, the community had voted down educational spending. Now, school board meetings are part of MercerMe's regular coverage to help the community make more informed decisions.

Galioto and Siditsky clarified, however, that MercerMe recognizes the difference between "documenting" and "getting people involved." For instance, MercerMe did a [series](#) regarding a proposed traffic circle project across Hopewell Valley and Ewing which aimed to improve public safety. The outlet discovered, however, that the project would significantly impact the property of a local church, as it would remove several large maple trees along the edge of the property which the property owners tap each winter to produce small batches of maple syrup. The owners of the property had not been consulted about the proposed roundabout because of an unintentional oversight. This article led to a dialogue between all stakeholders involved in the proposed traffic circle, including the church property owners.

From his many conversations with community members and the feedback that community members provide when they donate, MercerMe fills a void, and the people are hungry for the content that MercerMe provides. Community members appreciate that their feedback and voice is taken into consideration. Siditsky mentioned that because MercerMe has a direct relationship with its readers, supporters will sometimes reach out with questions about editorial choices, including why a particular story was not featured in a given newsletter. One supporter noted, "You cover a lot of ground with a small staff and are always responsive to suggestions/concerns from your audience."

In April 2026, Siditsky [served as a moderator](#) for a congressional candidate forum hosted by the Hopewell Valley Democratic Club. MercerMe also solicited questions from the public, contributed to the development of discussion topics, and supported a community-informed dialogue between candidates and residents. Approximately 200 residents gathered to hear from the 11 candidates competing for the 12th District seat.

MercerMe has become an established institution in Hopewell Valley over the past 13 years. The increase in funding from the NJCIC has given MercerMe the capacity to build stronger ties with their community, create more original content with greater depth and relevance, and increase their memberships and donations.

## The Trenton Journal

The Trenton Journal has been a grantee of the Consortium since 2021. This outlet is a powerful study of how community-centered reporting and collaboration can lead to growth and community recognition.

The Trenton Journal is an independently owned and operated multimedia news source serving the capital city of New Jersey through a solutions-journalism lens. According to Kenneth Miles, the Founder and Publisher of the outlet, their mission “is to provide the people of Trenton with accurate, independent, and meaningful journalism that informs, empowers, and uplifts our community.”

Miles, a Trenton resident, explains that the content determinations for the outlet are largely meant to reflect the needs of his community. He sources ideas from not only his own needs, but the needs of his neighbors, his peers, and other community members. The choice to focus on solutions was because “there was not enough coverage about what is good in the community.” For Miles, his position as a provider extends beyond reporting. He sees his position as a journalist providing access to information and resources – from ensuring that content provides actionable information and guidance, to calling readers to assist them in finding a resource they do not know how to access.

As a result, more institutional bodies are recognizing The Trenton Journal, not only as a dedicated resource to house their announcements, but recognizing the outlet for the service it provides to the community. This year, The Trenton Journal became a publication of record for the Trenton school board. Even more exceptionally, the outlet was honored in a resolution for Black History Month to celebrate its service to Trenton. According to Miles, Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson said that when discussing the content that The Trenton Journal produces, “She sees the intentionality,” recognizing how deliberate and thoughtful Miles is in his content determinations in his attempt to uplift his community.

In addition to their community-centered approach, The Trenton Journal is a highly collaborative outlet. The Trenton Journal’s very beginnings were shaped by a collaborative effort between Miles and the Trenton Branch NAACP chapter four years ago. Miles, a Trenton resident, had heard complaints from other members of the community about the many issues with Trenton’s low civic engagement during local elections and how their needs were not being addressed by their current representation. Miles, alongside the local NAACP chapter, sought to rectify this by arranging a candidate forum for the upcoming council positions. Despite low attendance for the first forum, the collaboration persisted. Three more candidate forums for the mayoral and at-large congressional elections and exceeded expectations in attendance.

Though the partnership with the NAACP chapter to run the forums ended, Miles continued to collaborate with other organizations such as the MultiMedia Interactive Civics Exhibit and Intersystemz to sponsor and [organize a forum in 2024](#). This year, “The Trentonian,” asked to

partner with The Trenton Journal for the mayoral candidate forum, alongside Mercer County Community College.

Miles has a longstanding relationship with Mercer County Community College's J-Lab program and regularly guest speaks, both virtually and in-person. Miles has also previously been invited to speak to students about local news in the journalism department at Princeton University.

His experience with supporting the next generation of journalists has often coincided with his collaborative efforts and community-centered approach. In one collaboration with Isles, Inc., a community development organization in Trenton, Miles acted as a mentor at an after-school program. In this program, he helped young students tell their own Trenton stories, in a variety of different mediums – from print to podcast.

A collaboration with fellow Consortium grantee Central New Jersey Network (CNJN), which was a product of reference from the NJCIC's Program Manager Ayinde Merrill, helped The Trenton Journal branch out in the kinds of content they create and expand their reach. Central New Jersey Network (CNJN), formerly Princeton Television, is a nonprofit dedicated to "advancing public voices through accessible technology and community-driven storytelling," primarily focusing on providing technical guidance and solutions for underserved areas. The organization provides their clients access to a professional-grade production space, hands-on training initiatives, and the tools and skills needed to distribute high-quality content to the New Jersey communities that they serve.

This partnership has helped The Trenton Journal grow their presence on multiple platforms over the past year that they previously struggled to gain traction on, especially Youtube where their new podcast "Capital Conversations" is posted. They have produced 15 of these podcasts together. The growth that The Trenton Journal has seen has been astronomical. Prior to formation of the partnership in April 2025, The Trenton Journal had a meager 20 subscribers on YouTube. As of April 2026, The Trenton Journal has almost 2k subscribers. During the same time frame, the outlet saw a gain of more than 2k Facebook followers, reaching 9k+ followers on the platform.

This partnership and surge in growth provided a job opportunity for a current Rutgers student who became essential to the backend support of the podcast. This partnership has also been mutually beneficial for CNJN. Miles connected Mark Sterling, the Business Director of CNJN, with Diego Maya, the CEO and Founder of Latino Spirit Media. This enabled CNJN to create their first Spanish-language program, "Estamos Con Diego," broadening the organization's reach.

Currently, CNJN and The Trenton Journal are in talks about creating a referral system, leveraging Miles' extensive network, to generate more leads for CNJN. According to Sterling, "The idea came about after we helped him [Miles] conduct a live stream of the congressional forum that

happened April 25th.” In essence, these two organizations are attempting to find a sustainable revenue generation system that is mutually beneficial for both parties.

The Trenton Journal’s success is largely because of its emphasis on community-centered reporting and collaboration. These efforts have expanded the audience of the outlet, increased their community recognition, created opportunities for enhanced civic engagement and community discourse, and led to a possible line of revenue generation for two Consortium grantees in Central Jersey.

## **Montclair Local**

Montclair Local is an independent, digital-first nonprofit newsroom founded in 2017 to serve Montclair, New Jersey. The organization’s mission is to “to spark dialogue, inform objectively and build community in Montclair.”

In 2025, Montclair Local became a grantee of the NJCIC. The purpose of the grant was to provide funding for a dedicated reporter for a new vertical “Essex Local” – which focuses on Essex County – expanding their coverage beyond the confines of Montclair. As a result of this new hire and expansion in their coverage, the organization has had tremendous success in reaching new audiences and increasing their fundraising capacity.

Liz George, the publisher of Montclair Local, explained that the surges in growth corresponded to specific stories and accountability reporting series on Essex Local that overperformed. For example, a multi-part series about Caldwell traffic safety garnered significant web-traffic (each story receiving about 9k views and visitors), which translated to an increase in new subscribers to the Essex Local vertical.

Even more fascinating, Montclair Local did not see a dip in their traffic after the implementation of AI overview on Google in 2024, and still has not seen any effects from the change. A possible reason for this is that people are trusting the brand and navigating directly to the Montclair Local site, or perhaps are navigating from social media. From January to March in 2026 Montclair Local’s Instagram received 1,075,577 views. A majority of views (61.4%) came from non-followers, compared to 38.6% from followers — which is a strong indicator that Montclair Local’s content is reaching well beyond its existing audience and being discovered by new users. Montclair Local’s Instagram surpassed 10,000 followers in February and continued growth into March, adding 235 followers in February and 667 in March, with a great deal of the growth attributed to the Essex Local content, which saw surges in their page views during this same period.

With the increase in audience, there has been an increase in donations. George also explains that, “not only are people giving, they are giving at a higher amount.”

The donations are often coupled with gratitude, praise, and, most often, the reason for the donation. Some examples include:

"I've been so impressed with the reporting that the staff of the Montclair Local has done in recent months, especially the way you stepped up on the school funding issue. Excellent on-the-news coverage of the twists and turns, great explanatory work breaking down the issues so residents understand them, and also great new use of social media channels to get news out to people quickly where they are. Truly a great community resource."

"I gave today for a few reasons. First, I have long appreciated having a local news source. I subscribed to The Montclair Times for decades and then the Montclair Local in its print form. I don't think most people realize how critical it is to have a local newspaper – online or print. As a person without children in the school system I'm not sure how I would have found out about the enormous education budget shortfall. Or the referendum. Or that it was called off. (I have a friend who went to the polls! I told her to subscribe to you). I know that statistically, towns with a local news source have lower taxes than those that do not. There is a reason for this. Local news sources help shine a light on things those in control would rather us not see. So thank you for that."

"I really appreciate your dedication to local reporting, especially your explanation of the confusing school tax special election -- I would have been totally lost without your excellent coverage!"

Montclair Local provides critical coverage and elucidating complex information to increase accessibility for the everyday citizen. It acts as a resource and guide for the people of Montclair and Essex County to understand crucial information that otherwise would fly under the radar. The grant from the NJCIC enabled Montclair Local to increase their capacity, expand their coverage, serve more audiences, and grow as a business.

## **NJ State House News Service**

The NJ State House News Service is a nonprofit organization which acts as a “wire service” for New Jersey state house reporting, while simultaneously training student journalists from partner universities on state government reporting. In a quick two years, the organization has grown tremendously, giving the next generation of local journalists the translatable skills they need to report on the state government. The program has assisted many young journalists in securing reporting positions in newsrooms across New Jersey. This service has also provided state government coverage to outlets that lack the needed staff or needed expertise for this kind of reporting.

Deborah Howlett, the founder and editor of the news service, is a seasoned reporter with more than 25 years of experience covering government and politics in New Jersey for USA Today and

The Star-Ledger. During her time at the Star-Ledger, she watched the number of state house reporters in the newsroom drop from twelve to two. She realized that with the dwindling numbers, there was inadequate experience and capacity for training the incoming generation of journalists in state house reporting. Howlett set out to rectify that.

With humble beginnings, the organization started in the Spring of 2024 with a small grant of \$1k from The Vermont Community Foundation. Deb Howlett brought on two interns from Rutgers and The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). With limited funds, she was unable to provide the students with a stipend; despite limited funds, she secured partnerships for content sharing with 13 news organizations and chains, including NJ Spotlight, The Trenton Journal, MercerMe, The Press of Atlantic City, Planet Princeton, Morristown Green, The New Jersey Hills Media Group, and the TAPinto chain.

The experience that students are given during this internship is practical and hands-on. As Howlett describes, the program is “like a teaching hospital, but for journalism.” She explains that, “this is a newsroom, not a classroom” and it is “run as any newsroom would be run.” The students do all the leg-work and if they need help trouble-shooting, Howlett provides guidance.

At the start of the program, Howlett brings the interns on a tour of the state house to orient the students and help them navigate the space. She will bring them to their first senate and assembly hearings, advising them on who they need to speak to. Since they are students, Howlett is well-aware that the students will need significant oversight and guidance. With that said, Howlett impresses that one of the reasons that she believes that her students successfully acquire jobs upon leaving the program is because of the high standards of the internship. Students are expected to put out professional-grade journalism for their partners and are required to be in Trenton at least one day per week.

One of the goals that Howlett has for this program is to make reporting on the state house relevant and relatable for her students. She believes that a lot more people would be interested in this beat if they did not perceive it as “intimidating.” Howlett emphasizes that the skills learned by doing this kind of reporting are translatable to any other reporting beat— especially reporting on any other government body.

As a result of their demonstrated success, the program secured Consortium funding in the Fall of 2024, and brought on six interns in the Spring of 2025, all of whom were given a stipend. In addition to the increase in interns, Howlett brought on a part-time managing editor, Elise Young, to assist in both training and editorial oversight. They were also able to bring on two interns during the summer (also given a stipend) as a result of a partnership with Princeton University. In addition, Howlett hired a previous Spring intern to cover the state legislature during the Summer to ensure continuity of content for their news outlet partners. This student was given a higher wage as the demands for this role are slightly more rigorous than those of the internship.

In the Fall of 2025 the program housed six interns again. After receiving a grant increase from the Consortium, this enabled Howlett to increase the managing editor's employment status from part-time to full-time. This allows Howlett to focus more time on management and administration.

The program currently hosts six interns for its Spring 2026 session, will host two interns again from Princeton, and will again hire an alum from the Spring session to cover the state legislature during the summer. With the added capacity that a full-time managing editor brings, they will also train two summer interns from the NJCIC's summer internship program.

The alumni of the program have had a high success rate of acquiring positions in local news, journalism, and political communications. Three alumni have gone on to work as full-time reporters at NJ.com, one alum was hired as a full-time reporter for The Press of Atlantic City, one intern was hired as a reporter for MercerMe, one former student was hired to do communications for Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald's office, one alum received a prestigious paid [internship](#) from The Dow Jones News Fund in partnership with Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE) at the University of Maryland, and one more intern received a paid internship at NJ.com upon completion of the program.

Currently, NJ State House News Service partners with six universities and more than 16 organizations and chains (for a total of more than 100+ outlets statewide). NJ State House News Service has formalized partnerships with TCNJ, Rowan University, Rutgers University, William Patterson University, Rider University, and Princeton University. In addition to NJ Spotlight, The Trenton Journal, MercerMe, The Press of Atlantic City, Planet Princeton, The Jersey Vindicator, Morristown Green, The New Jersey Hills Media Group, and the TAPinto chain, three other news organizations have published content created by interns: New Jersey Urban News, 70and73, and Central Desi. The partnerships with news organizations have largely been informal; however, Howlett is in the process of establishing formalized agreements, a feature that is included in the statewide [content-sharing network](#) launched by the Center for Cooperative Media.

Partners of the organization, especially smaller hyperlocal outlets, credit NJ Statehouse News Service with providing content that would otherwise be inaccessible because of inadequate staff or expertise for state house coverage. Seth Siditsky of MercerMe has noted that the service has been an asset to their small operation because, "covering the statehouse is not something that we can do regularly, so knowing that we have stories coming from the statehouse allows us to provide some statewide coverage to help keep our community informed about what is happening."

Other partners have noted that this service has created a pipeline of well-trained local news journalists to fill their ranks. Buzz Keough, Executive Editor of The Press of Atlantic City, hired an alum of the program. He describes here why this program is successful in creating a local

journalism pipeline, while simultaneously producing high quality New Jersey state house news content: “The quality of the reporting is consistently professional, accurate and fair. Just as important, the program's structure allows students to learn from experienced journalists. It also gives them direct access to policymakers and state officials, which is difficult to accomplish in a classroom setting. This all leads, eventually, to creating quality graduates with local NJ reporting experience, which is a plus for them and for local newsrooms seeking to hire.”

The NJ State House News Service created a pipeline that is beneficial to both the young journalists seeking reporting positions and the local news outlets in New Jersey hungry for talent. It filled a void by providing state government coverage to outlets that lack the capacity to perform this specific beat, enabling these providers to better inform their audiences.

## **New Jersey Hills Media Group – Corporation for New Jersey Local Media**

The New Jersey Hills Media Group (NJMHG) is a network of 13 local news websites and five weekly newspapers serving more than 50 municipalities across Essex, Hunterdon, Somerset and Morris counties, owned by the nonprofit organization the Corporation for New Jersey Local Media.

In June 2025, the Consortium gave the Corporation for New Jersey Local Media a grant of \$71,856 to enable the New Jersey Hills Media Group to hire a digital advertising consulting firm, [Broadstreet](#), with the aim of growing their digital ad sales.

Prior to receiving the training from the Broadstreet program, the sales team at NJMHG was booking \$514 in digital advertising revenue per month on average. In fiscal year 2024, the team booked less than \$10k total in digital advertising sales.

After only one month of training with the Broadstreet program, in September 2025 alone, the NJHMG sales team booked \$27,650 in digital advertising revenue for the months of September through December 2025.

As of April 2026, NJHMG has already booked \$70,825 in digital ad sales revenue for the calendar year 2026 and the team has already booked \$20,425 in digital revenue for delivery in the calendar year 2027. The team budgeted to secure \$100,000 in digital sales revenue for 2026, but is already on track to significantly surpass that target.

In addition to the increase in ad sales, there has also been more retention of clients. The clients that NJHMG works with are a diverse group of local businesses across New Jersey, ranging from gyms, bakeries, and restaurants, to art galleries, schools, and salons. The sales team has received feedback from a number of these clients who have highlighted surges in their business after advertising with NJHMG. One team member said that one of his accounts told him that,

“people who came to his restaurant said they saw the ad on our website!” and are “interested in running in future months!” Another team member said that an ad placed for her led to “increased traffic in their store almost immediately.” Another client said that, “We have tried many different digital advertising options online and none have given us these kinds of results on a consistent basis. We couldn't be happier with the results.”

Joe Territo, the CEO and Publisher of the Corporation for New Jersey Local Media, and Jerry O'Donnell, the COO who oversees the sales team, provided insight as to why they have seen such dramatic results in such a short span of time.

O'Donnell explained, "This is the first time a digital advertising solution provider has learned our business and provided custom training specific to our unique family of local news publications. Broadstreet has helped us to build the right pitches and packages for our specific local markets around our local websites."

Broadstreet meets with the sales team weekly for one hour, combining a variety of different training approaches with a variety of different members of the Broadstreet team, with various levels and kinds of expertise. Methods include educating the staff about the various digital advertising products available and how to apply them effectively, instruction around reporting and presentation with potential clients, and even including role playing pitches.

One of the most important elements of the training that both Territo and O'Donnell emphasized is the importance of talking directly to the local business and client with whom they are trying to work. Additionally, both emphasized that Broadstreet taught the team that it is crucial that they change how they communicate to a potential client: instead of approaching as a chain of local news papers, it is essential to approach as the local digital news site that is relevant to that specific local business.

According to Territo, the training has dramatically increased the self-efficacy of the sales team members in their perceived ability to book ad sales. As of April 2026, every member of the team had booked a digital ad sale. The training provides the necessary skills for growth, in a cooperative and supportive environment. Sales Representative, Arielle Moss, elaborates:

"Broadstreet has taught new skills and techniques that have helped me grow as a salesperson. Their classes taught me how to sell digital products, and their methods have helped me to also increase my print sales. My confidence as a salesperson has grown, and I believe my most recent successes in sales can be attributed to the undivided attention the Broadstreet team has provided."

## New Jersey Urban News

New Jersey Urban News, founded in 2018, is dedicated to covering New Jersey's Black, Brown, and marginalized communities through informative stories and thorough coverage. Penda Howell, the Co-Founder, CEO and Publisher of the outlet, has more than 30 years of experience in executive leadership and revenue strategy, helping to drive growth and move journalism organizations toward sustainability. He has held positions at New York Amsterdam News, North Jersey Media Group, The Herald News, The Montclair Times, and NPR. In addition, Howell has coached media organizations across the country and mentors emerging Chief Revenue Officers.

New Jersey Urban News became a grantee of the Consortium in 2024, receiving an infrastructure grant to expand their staff, increase their reporting capacity, and enable Penda Howell to shift some of his focus to his strengths: revenue generation and business development.

Since becoming a grantee in 2024, Howell has been able to hire additional staff, such as a full-time Contributing Editor and dedicated local reporters, to increase editorial capacity, to cover areas that were previously underserved, and to produce higher quality original content.

One community that has seen an increase in coverage from the outlet is Camden, as a result of the hiring of dedicated staffers to cover the community. With the increase in coverage, there has been a tremendous response from community organizations in Camden, asking for additional coverage, to collaborate on future content, or to partner in general. Camden Parent and Student Union, a grantee of the Consortium as well, has developed an informal partnership with New Jersey Urban News. Camden Parent & Student Union informed New Jersey Urban News about a proposal to shutter three of five high schools in Camden. Their [coverage](#) helped prevent these closures from transpiring.

Howell's position as a grantee of the consortium, in addition to the expansion of coverage into Camden, led to a potential advertising opportunity with state government agencies.

As a grantee of the Consortium, Howell has been given access to a different network that previously had been less accessible: state government actors. Recently, Howell has been invited to work on the committee for the advertising set-aside bill NJ-S3744, proposed by state Sen. Andrew Zwicker, which requires that state agencies direct at least 30 percent of their advertising budget towards local news organizations.

Howell was invited by the Consortium to testify for restoring its funding this year. In his testimony, he explained:

“This funding is not just a line item — it's a lifeline and vital to the sustainability of families, businesses, and local media in New Jersey. [...] We're not just publishing articles — we're building civic muscle. We cover school board meetings, public health policy, and municipal issues in plain language. In language that gets to the heart of the issue and provides insight into how this

affects their families, lifestyle, and quality of life. We highlight neighborhood leaders, unsung heroes, and small businesses, and help residents navigate government programs and services.”

After this testimony, two state agencies reached out to Howell to discuss advertising opportunities, specifically because of New Jersey Urban News’ expanded coverage in Camden and South Jersey. The Consortium enabled this increase in original reporting, but also led to this increase in exposure with relevant stakeholders. According to Howell, he spent the past two years trying to get in touch with these state agencies about advertising opportunities, who never returned his calls or emails; however, after being brought into the room and being given a platform to speak directly to the people who work within these agencies, they learned more about Howell and his credible experience, and the breadth and reach of his work.

With added editorial capacity Howell is deliberate and thoughtful when launching a news product, thinking about how to immediately monetize by creating strategic partnerships around revenue generation. His emphasis is around creative storytelling approaches that center the community and add value to the end user. He ensures that his content informs the reader, includes resources, or provides guides for further information.

His goal when navigating his relationships with advertisers is to try to balance the information needs of his readers with the priorities of his clients. Howell remains selective about which organizations New Jersey Urban News takes advertising from; he sees it as the outlet’s responsibility to “be a good neighbor.”

When conceptualizing how to finance New Jersey Urban News, Howell made sure to create an environment that accommodated sponsored advertising and branded content around specific themes, and to develop verticals which will attract regional and statewide entities that will be attracted to advertising around those topics. His goal was to tie all urban markets together and aggregate those audiences to provide local credibility within those markets, enabling him to gain local brand recognition. With aggregating those voices, however, advertisers view New Jersey Urban News as a “one-stop-shop” for their advertising needs, without inhibiting the outlet from courting local business advertising either.

With his demonstrated experience, he was able to show many of his previous clients, such as JP Morgan & Chase Co., that he was a safe investment. For new clients, however, Howell needed to develop a portfolio of proven experience with New Jersey Urban News.

His successful pitches rely heavily on local storytelling and experiential advertising and strategies that focus on immersion and real-world connection, allowing the end-user to directly engage with a brand. The goal of this type of marketing is to drive brand recognition and loyalty.

Howell notes that first party data collection is important, but competing with the large marketing firms on these metrics is not feasible. In order to compete effectively, the emphasis needs to be

placed on New Jersey Urban News' unique role as a local news provider and their direct relationship with the community. If the goal is to reach a niche, targeted community, their outlet will always be the better option.

Due to the lack of transparency and oversight Howell explains that the emphasis on storytelling is essential because the traditional metrics that potential clients use are becoming more unreliable, resulting in an influx of fraudulent practices. Many local news organizations have also seen massive losses in their traffic and impressions since the implementation of AI overview. Howell notes that many are resorting to inflating their numbers fraudulently because of the lack of guardrails.

Howell says, "it speaks directly to the credibility of the organization [...] I can purchase 200,000 impressions per month, but at the end of the day, you are going to be found out." After the implementation of AI Overview, his traffic all but disappeared. Rather than resorting to purchasing his audience, he looked at how to market more effectively to grow organically.

One such opportunity emerges with a potential merger that is underway, which could give New Jersey Urban News access to untapped audiences and greater local brand recognition. Additionally, the Consortium has given New Jersey Urban News the capacity to do so much more original reporting and the infrastructure to support it; there are still opportunities to collaborate and forge partnerships that Howell has not been able to undertake. The proposed merger aims to provide a solution for this issue of capacity as well.

Howell is in the works to merge with two other black-owned newsrooms that are located in and serve two distinct BIPOC communities in New Jersey. Both owners have a unique talent for developing strategic collaborations and partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders within their communities; they tend to struggle, however, with the business side of their operations. The proposed merger would be beneficial for all parties. The two other news outlets, which would fall under Howell's parent company, would benefit from Howell's business and advertising acumen; NJ Urban News would benefit by gaining local credibility, local cache, and developing greater brand loyalty and recognition, helping combat the effects of the drop in traffic that resulted from the implementation of AI overview last year. All parties would gain access to new audiences with this proposed merger.

According to Howell, he has already obtained two potential clients for these new businesses if the merger is successful. With this merger, he would hope to shift more of his focus to business sustainability. In addition to advertising, he has diversified his revenue generation strategy to classified advertising and other philanthropic sources. He received notice that he will be host to a Report for America corpsmember. The new full-time reporter will be placed in Newark with a focus on health equity, housing equity, education and local political coverage. His goal is to start developing advertising clientele around those themes.

The funding from the NJCIC, in addition to facilitating access to relevant government stakeholders, has helped New Jersey Urban News increase their staff-size and reporting capacity, and has allowed Howell to prioritize revenue generation and business development.

## Conclusion

While New Jersey remains home to a diverse, interconnected, and highly dynamic news ecosystem—one still largely driven by independent and small-business ownership—it continues to shrink at an unprecedented pace (Siemaszko, 2026). This ongoing contraction underscores the critical need for the Consortium’s renewed funding to continue addressing the evolving information needs of New Jersey residents. Although local news outlets are declining nationwide, they remain among the most trusted sources of information (Hoewe, 2025).

New Jerseyans both need and want greater access to local news, yet many still lack sufficient coverage and information. According to a recent study by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling, 65 percent of New Jersey residents say they want more local news at both the community and state levels. At the same time, 24 percent report feeling “not very well” informed by their local news providers, while another 15 percent say they are “not well at all” informed by the local news available to them (“Rutgers-Eagleton Poll Shows 65% of New Jerseyans Want More Local News,” 2026). This demand for local news and failure to meet those demands falls within the context that a high percentage of New Jerseyans lack a designated news outlet within their municipality. Approximately 43 percent of municipalities lack designated news outlets, with criteria for “designated news outlet” as one that provides coverage to five municipalities or fewer. T, about 73 percent of municipalities lack a designated news outlet when the definition for “designated news outlet” narrows to an outlet that provides coverage to one municipality or fewer (Siemaszko, 2026).

The Consortium, however, is addressing these gaps in coverage. Since 2021, 46 content-producing grants have produced 17,717 pieces of original local news content and storytelling, 18,034 local news briefs, and 960 translated news articles in 19 of 21 counties. Between May 2025 to April 2026, 30 grantees, which have website data available, received about 15.1 million visits cumulatively to their websites. On average, these 30 grantees receive about 1.2 million visits per month and about 840,000 unique visits per month to their websites.

Since 2021, 2,000 children, teens, and college-aged students have been engaged in one of the Consortium pipeline or training programs. 348 adults have been engaged in one of the adult pipeline or training programs funded by the Consortium since 2021.

The Consortium is expanding opportunities for civic engagement and public dialogue, strengthening the journalism pipeline, fostering collaboration among local news organizations and community groups dedicated to serving and empowering their communities, and creating organizations that can hold those in power to account. The Consortium enables grantees to build

capacity, produce more original reporting, reach previously underserved audiences, and advance toward long-term financial sustainability.

## Bibliography

After 157 years of keeping Hudson County informed, The Jersey Journal to close in 2025. (2024, October 30). [NJ.Com](#).

Bauder, D. (2026, January 5). Corporation for Public Broadcasting votes itself out of existence. *Associated Press (AP)*.

Bill S4654, Senate, No. 4654, State of New Jersey, 221st Legislature.

Chang, A., & Garcia McKinley, E. (2024). *New Jersey (Democracy in Local News & Information Ecosystems)*. Impact Architects.

Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Biased Media, Executive Order 14290 (2025).

Friedland, L. A. (2023). Taking It to the States: The Origins of Critical Information Needs. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 707(1), 21–28.

Friedman, M. (2024, October 31). RIP The Star-Ledger. *Politico*.

Fu, A. (2025, July 18). Congress signs off on Trump's request to rescind \$1 billion in funding for public broadcasting. *Poynter*.

Hoewe, J. (2025, June 12). Americans still have faith in local news—But few are willing to pay for it. *NiemanLab*.

*Local Journalist Index 2025*. (2025). Muck Rack and Rebuild Local News.

McCarthy, C. (2016, September 14). Gannett announces layoffs at The Record, community papers. [NJ.Com](#).

Metzger, Z. (2025). *The State of Local News—The 2025 Report* (The State of Local News Project). Medill Local News Initiative, Northwestern University.

Muse Abernathy, P., & Stonbely, S. (2023). *The State of Local News—The 2023 Report* (The State of Local News Project). Medill Local News Initiative, Northwestern University.

*New Jersey Local News Accelerators*. (2026). Blue Engine Collaborative.

Pompeo, J. (2016, July 6). Gannett buys North Jersey Media Group papers. *Politico*.

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll Shows 65% of New Jerseyans Want More Local News. (2026, April 8). *New Jersey Civic Information Consortium*.

Salary.com. (2026). Journalist Salary in New Jersey.

Savage, M. (2025, July 24). AI summaries cause 'devastating' drop in audiences, online news media told. *The Guardian*.

Sherman, T., & Mueller, M. (2014, April 3). Star-Ledger cuts 167 jobs, including 40 newsroom positions. [NJ.Com](#).

Siemaszko, H. (2024). *NJ State Advertising Spending*. Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University.

Siemaszko, H. (2026). *Forthcoming Report: NJ Local News Ecosystem Study 2026*. Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Written by:** Hanna Siemazsko

**Designed by:** Madi McCool

**Edited by:** Colleen Sullivan and Stefanie Murray

**A special thanks to the State of New Jersey  
and the following Consortium funders:**

**Democracy Fund**

**EQUIP NJ**

**F.M. Kirby Foundation**

**Press Forward**

**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

## **CONTACT**

**New Jersey Civic**

**Information Consortium**

1 Normal Avenue  
Montclair, NJ 07043

njcivicinfo.org  
info@njcivicinfo.org

**For an interactive version of the report, click  
[here](https://njcivicinfo.org/impact-report) or go to [njcivicinfo.org/impact-report](https://njcivicinfo.org/impact-report)**