University of Vermont
Center for Community News

University Resources that Support Local Media Ecosystems

An institutional analysis of higher-ed potential

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Key Findings

The Center for Community News at the University of Vermont has a mission to document and encourage university-led student reporting that contributes to local news.

Research, reports, and maps that highlight 200-plus U.S. institutions currently providing their students and communities with these experiences are housed **here** on the CCN website.

But we wanted to take a broader look at higher-ed leadership to examine how they are supporting their state's media ecosystems — beyond traditional student reporting. The Center for Community News surveyed more than two dozen higher-ed journalism programs to do so.

The results show programs of varying sizes from coastal cities to the rural heartland serving as critical infrastructure for the support and sustainability of local news in their individual states.

What programs are doing

- Nearly two thirds of programs surveyed said they have conducted state-level research about their local media scene, such as by creating a local news map, producing a landscape study, or administering a media ecosystem health assessment.

- Half of programs are collaborating on funding requests with media partners in their states.

- Half of the programs support their state's media associations and nearly half support a state or local Press Forward chapter.

Room to grow

- More programs could engage on public policy in their states (about one-third of those surveyed have done so).

- One quarter of programs are producing a newsletter, blog, or social media account that reports on their state's local media scene.

- About one fifth of respondents said they provide shared office space for local newsrooms.

To run a robust program, funding helps to be sure, but a college or university's ability to play a key support role in its local news and information scene doesn't always require a million-dollar endowment. In interviews, those who run programs say it takes being intentional and open to ideas, learning from others, collaborating, and being a first mover. Administrative support is also helpful, but having faculty and staff members who are passionate about the work is critical.

This research of some 28 institutions, which includes case study spotlights of eight individual programs, is by no means comprehensive. It is intended to offer a look at what some higher-ed programs, public and private, large and small, are doing right now — and how — with actionable advice.

Data and information that informs this report comes from voluntary responses to an inquiry survey request sent via email and through listservs to colleges and universities across the country in the summer and fall of 2025. If you would like your program included in a future draft of this report, please reach out to the lead author.

The hope is that visibility on these programs helps others to replicate such efforts.

Introduction

For years, colleges and universities have played a vital role in their state's media ecosystems. They are increasingly doing so in various innovative ways.

Traditionally, higher-ed journalism and mass communications schools have trained and prepared the next generation of journalists and media professionals. Their graduates go on to fill the mastheads of newspapers, broadcast stations, digital outlets, and more.
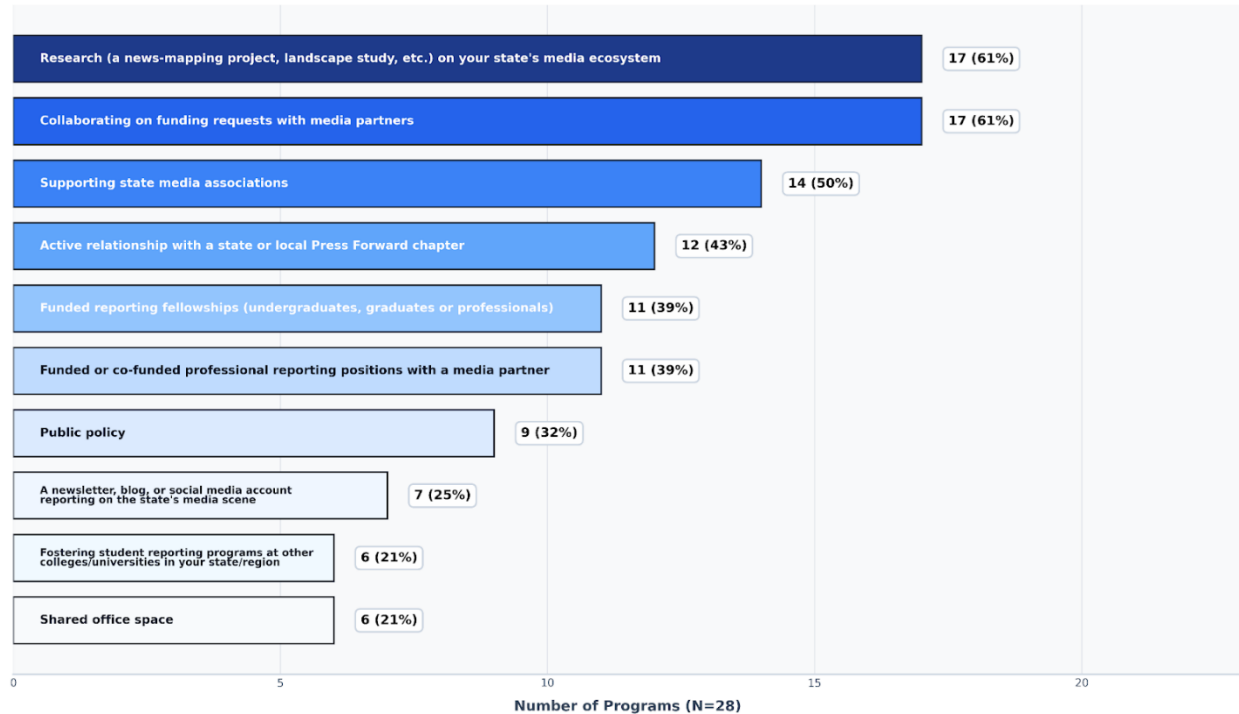
In recent decades, as the local news industry has contracted, students studying on our nation's campuses have increasingly filled gaps in local reporting while in college. Now, across the country, more and more higher-ed academic programs are working to support their state's media ecosystems in vast and various ways beyond student reporting.

A survey for the Center for Community News this summer and fall found more than two-dozen programs offering myriad initiatives from shared office space with newsrooms, collaborating on funding requests with media partners, offering consulting services free of charge, convening stakeholders, and broadly and deeply sharing their resources and expertise.

Higher Education Programs Supporting Local News Ecosystems

Survey of 28 Journalism Programs (Multiple selections permitted)

Category	Number of Programs (N=28)
Research (a news-mapping project, landscape study, etc.) on your state's media ecosystem	17 (61%)
Collaborating on funding requests with media partners	17 (61%)
Supporting state media associations	14 (50%)
Active relationship with a state or local Press Forward chapter	12 (43%)
Funded reporting fellowships (undergraduates, graduates or professionals)	11 (39%)
Funded or co-funded professional reporting positions with a media partner	11 (39%)
Public policy	9 (32%)
A newsletter, blog, or social media account reporting on the state's media scene	7 (25%)
Fostering student reporting programs at other colleges/universities in your state/region	6 (21%)
Shared office space	6 (21%)

Number of Programs (N=28)

On the research front, within the past few years, a growing number of colleges and universities have been meticulously mapping their state's media landscapes and assessing the health of their local media ecosystems. They have provided recommendations based on what they've found and their research has informed funders on where to deploy resources. Some journalism instructors (though not enough) are publishing newsletters that cover the news *behind* the news in their states and are regularly reporting on their local media scenes while offering visibility about the impact and importance of local news.

Across the country, higher-ed faculty and staff are harnessing new technology to help local newsrooms. They are supporting their state's media associations, getting involved in local or state Press Forward chapters, and advising on public policy under the domes of their state capitols by advocating for legislation aimed at supporting local news.

Following the worst of the business lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, positions in local newsrooms throughout the nation have become more hybrid or remote. Some higher-ed

programs have responded by sharing office space for local journalists. Doing so not only provides a physical place for journalists to work, but can allow students to experience a buzzy newsroom vibe and offers close proximity to professional mentorship on campus.

While a 2024 report in Colorado found few journalism programs there focused on placing business students, law students, digital production or technology students in local newsrooms, some higher-ed institutions are making that a priority.
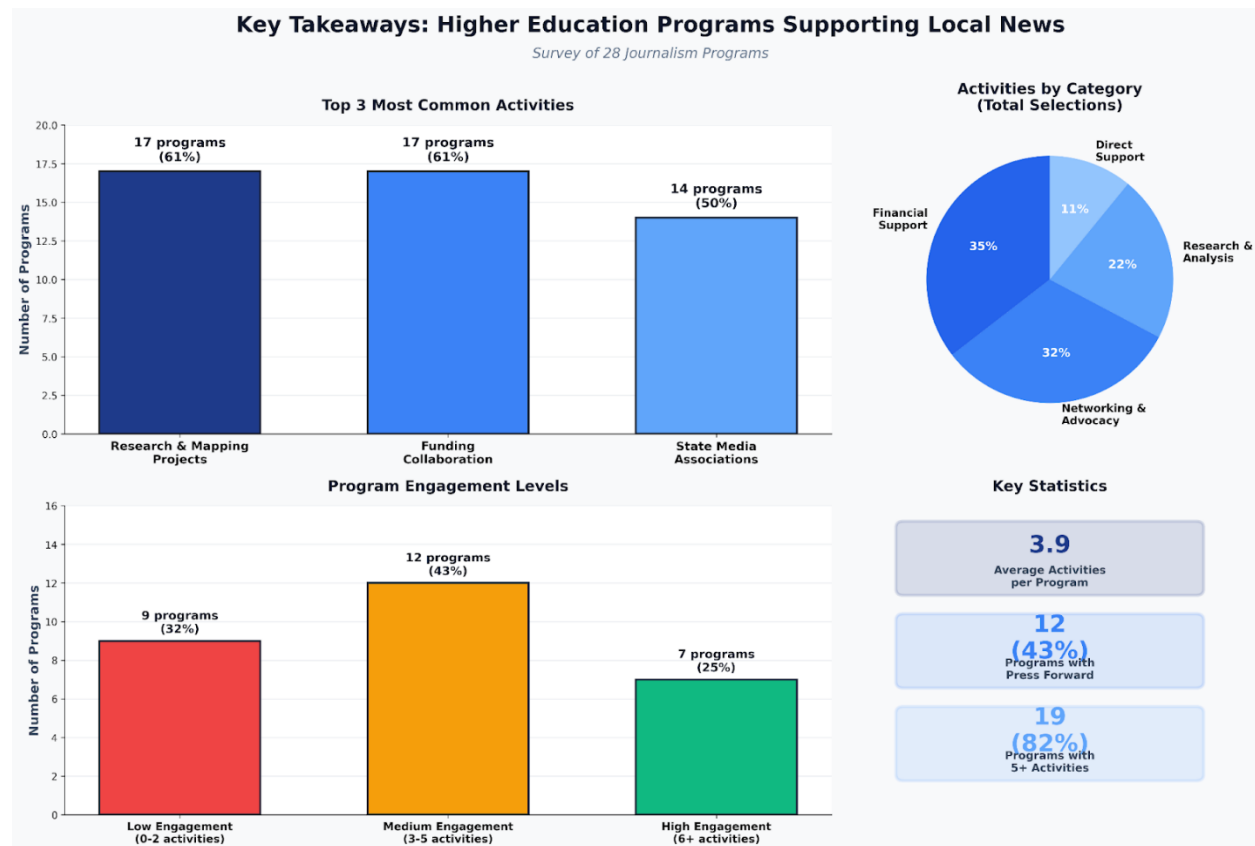
"We're at an urgent all-hands-on-deck moment for journalism both in terms of helping local news with sustainability issues, but also in creation of new news delivery systems and platforms," said Tim Franklin, the founding director of the Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University. "There are experts in various fields at every college and university across the country that could be deployed to help news organizations locally with projects."

Such projects beyond reporting, he said, range from how to use artificial intelligence on the business side or in newsrooms, and how to more effectively use social media and algorithms to deliver local news.

"I would love to see a movement of universities across the country and colleges utilizing and deploying the expertise that they have to help all of us create the new local news ecosystem in America," he said. "Because it's desperately needed."

What They're Doing

Key Takeaways: Higher Education Programs Supporting Local News
Survey of 28 Journalism Programs

Colleges and universities house collaborative journalism hubs for their state

In recent years, an ethos of collaboration has taken root among newsrooms in a growing number of states. The movement has supplanted a legacy tradition of competition. Where outlets previously fought fiercely for scoops, they now share content so as not to duplicate efforts.

Colleges and universities have played key roles in this development. They have acted as first-movers, seed-funded statewide, regional, or nonprofit collaborative hubs, or played a neutral convening role among stakeholders where there might be tension as they compete for resources or when promoting differing outcomes.

- At the University of Oregon, the **Agora Journalism Center** facilitated the creation of the Oregon Media Collaborative that brought together dozens of newsrooms around the state to collaborate toward solutions for the challenges facing local newsrooms.

- Temple University's **Center for Community-Engaged Media** houses the Philadelphia Journalism Collaborative, which supports more than 20 regional newsrooms to collaborate on solutions-oriented coverage. The center also provides research and development for community-centered information hubs and projects like the Philly-Afghan Info Hub.

- At Point Park University in Pennsylvania, the Center for Media Innovation operates the **Pittsburgh Media Partnership**. The project runs a newsroom, staffed with two full-time reporters, housed in a university-leased building, that focuses on government accountability and enterprise reporting. The paper hires early career journalists to support pathways to the industry.

- A visiting faculty member at the University of Denver directs the nonprofit **Colorado News Collaborative** and launched MATCH Lab — it stands for Media, Academia and Talent Collaborating to Help — which unites "newsrooms, classrooms and boardrooms" across Colorado. Students in the lab help local newsrooms with advertising, public relations, social media, and more. A visiting instructor at **Colorado State University** leads it, illustrating collaboration across higher-ed programs.

- Montclair State University's **Center for Collaborative Media** houses the Civic Information Consortium and runs the New Jersey News Commons.

From AI in news deserts and Press Forward partnerships to resource guides, buying a newspaper, and information stewards at rural university extensions

- At Texas Tech, students and faculty are building a program that scrapes government websites for videos of local public meetings. The tool, called Retriever, uses artificial intelligence to convert the information into short news stories that local outlets can use.

- In the Sunshine State, at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, the historically Black college's School of Journalism and Graphic Communication is partnering with its local Press Forward chapter, collaborating on funding requests for local news outlets, and building a distribution model for student-reported content for local newsrooms and partners.

- At Colorado State University in Fort Collins, a journalism instructor has been working with a nonprofit and a media literacy organization to train the school's network of extension administrators on how to become trusted information stewards in each of the state's 64 counties. She intends to distribute and support a course to other content creators across the state as well, and is working with the nonprofit Colorado Media Project, (which I advise), and the media literacy company Ad Fontes Media.

- In Minnesota, when an assassin gunned down multiple state lawmakers in the summer of 2025, the associate director of the Minnesota Journalism Center at U of M quickly compiled a resource guide for local journalists who were covering political violence. "We heard from a lot of people just how valuable that was," the center's director said. "It was responding to a real need."

- Earlier this year, the University of Missouri bought an area weekly newspaper that was slated for closure. The school kept a local institution in local hands when a newspaper lacked a succession plan. The school now operates the paper, and Mizzou students and staff provide content and design.

With land and buildings, campuses are offering shared office space to local newsrooms and journalism support organizations

- The University of New Mexico has given office space to the Association of Asian American Journalists, the nonprofit New Mexico in Depth news outlet, and the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government.

- [Mercer University](#) shares office space with the Macon bureau of Georgia Public Broadcasting, The Telegraph newspaper in Macon, and The Macon Melody, which are co-located with classroom space.

- The [Center for Community News](#) at the University of Vermont shares office space with multiple Vermont newsrooms.

- Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado has a media center that houses a [Tribal Water Media Fellowship](#) and Rocky Mountain PBS.

- Point Park University's [Center for Media Innovation](#) leases office space in a downtown skyscraper that houses the [Pittsburgh Downtown Media Hub](#) and includes several local newsrooms.

Meanwhile, some higher-education journalism programs have found collaborative ways to benefit their state's journalistic communities.

In California, UC Berkeley and UC Irvine partnered with Stanford to [create a public database of police misconduct](#) that anyone can consult.

Some journalism programs house initiatives that benefit their own state's ecosystems —
***and** **those in other states.**

- The University of Kentucky houses the [Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues](#). Within the past two years, it has held training sessions in Florida, New York, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming.

- Northeastern University's School of Journalism and its "[What Works](#)" project at its Center for Transformative Media supports independent community news throughout the country with a frequently updated website and regular podcast.

- The Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University in New Jersey offers training and coaching, hosts a national conference, and runs a new [Collaborative Journalism Resource Hub](#), among other services.

- The Center for Community News at the University of Vermont empowers journalism educators across the country to form partnerships with local media in their home states, hosts a national conference, and more.

Academic programs work on state-level public policy to support local news — and benefit from it:

- When New Jersey lawmakers in 2018 passed a first-in-the-nation law to support local news and information, backed by Free Press, it led to the creation of and state funding for an independent nonprofit called the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium. The consortium, housed at Montclair State University, includes a collaboration among five other public research universities: College of New Jersey, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, Kean University, and Rutgers University. The consortium is now the largest funder of media in the state.

- UC Berkeley oversees a state-funded fellowship program in California where $15 million in taxpayer money goes to support the hiring, training, and deployment of journalists throughout the state because of a new state law.

- The Medill School at Northwestern was a pivotal player on a successful 2024 Illinois law that "makes available $25 million over five years for local news organizations that hire and retain journalists in the form of refundable tax credits." (Northwestern administrators and students worked closely with a legislative task force throughout the process.)

- The Agora Journalism Center worked on an unsuccessful bill in Oregon that would have required tech companies to compensate local news outlets.

- Montclair State University has worked with the national group Rebuild Local News on three state legislative bills.

- Last year, the University of Mississippi launched the Jordan Center for Journalism Advocacy and Innovation, which in part is set to help influence policy and directly advocate for local journalists and the profession.

Program Spotlights

Minnesota Journalism Center, University of Minnesota

From mapping Minnesota's local news landscape, advising on state-level public policy that supports local news, partnering with a Press Forward chapter, and producing a newsletter about the state's media scene, the Minnesota Journalism Center, which has been around since the 1970s, does a lot.

For 50 years, the Center's mission has been to act as a resource to Minnesota's journalism practitioner community. In recent years, it has re-focused that mission *specifically* to support local news.

"The state of local news is not what it was in the 1970s and 1980s and there are some real clear needs where we feel like the university is in a unique position to play a very helpful and supportive role," said Benjamin Toff, a professor and the director of the Minnesota Journalism Center.

Such roles include researching needs of the statewide news and information ecosystem, fostering connections, offering training, and forming collaborations.

This year, the program has been convening a network of nonprofit and publicly supported news organizations throughout the state and providing monthly training while developing opportunities for more connection and collaboration.

The program also:

- Works with the state's Press Forward chapter, including advising on public policy.

- Surveyed newspaper publishers across the state about their financial health, transition plans, and needs.

- Operates "Report for Minnesota" to help build the state's journalism pipeline.

- Offered training for the state newspaper association on AI.

- Serves as a supportive partner on funding requests with organizations like the nonprofit MinnPost local news organization and Documenters program that trains people to attend and report on underreported public meetings.

- Partnered with the Minneapolis Star-Tribune on public opinion research.

- Associate director Megan Martin compiled a resource guide for Minnesota journalists who are covering political violence in the wake of assassinations of state politicians.

- Is working to create more connective tissue among Minnesota colleges, universities, and high-school journalism programs.

A healthy endowment that supports a longstanding center with a specific mission to support local news is a key reason for the university's ability to do so much.

"The fact that there is a dedicated source of funds to support the existence of the center is essential," Toff said. "It gave me some runway in terms of developing a broader strategy around what we could carve out in terms of our role."

The center has also been able to attract external funds from organizations like the McKnight Foundation, which leads Press Forward Minnesota. Philanthropic donations from individuals help build capacity for students to get journalism experience outside of the classroom.

The work is also time-intensive and requires buyout of time from academics and staff. "It's not as though this is easy to do," Toff said.

Advice: "I think there's a tendency to want to prioritize things that serve our students above all else. And I think the thing that I would emphasize is how much it's maybe not a direct support to our students, but it is hugely important. The health of these organizations and the broader ecosystem in general is critical if our students are going to graduate into a viable career path in journalism. The ways in which we can serve to support the ecosystem only helps to establish more opportunities for our students, both while they're students and beyond." — *Minnesota Journalism Center director Benjamin Toff*

Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University

The Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, founded in 2012, is the largest journalism support organization in New Jersey.

The program's flagship project is the New Jersey News Commons, a network of news providers across the state that functions much like a trade association. Outlets that join don't have to pay membership dues, and they gain access to the program's communications, opportunities for grants, fellowships, training programs, research, and more.

"We will do anything and everything that we can to support local journalists, from startup to maturation and everything that they may need in between," said Stefanie Murray, the director of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University.

In 2020, the center created a first-of-its-kind interactive news map of New Jersey, which positioned it as a key resource within the state's media ecosystem. The center's staff remains on call to help with whatever someone might need, whether it be help hiring the top editor of a large newspaper, providing editing assistance to a small nonprofit newsroom, or help with a grant application.

The center also:

- Provides training, coaching, and development to local news outlets in New Jersey.

- Offers a Spanish language translation program.

- Offers training with artificial intelligence tools and backend content management systems.

- Supports the state's ethnic community media outlets with resources.

- Is helping to link up local news organizations with coaching from Blue Engine around revenue and capacity.

- Works with its state Press Forward chapter.

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- Provides reporting fellowships around elections and investigations.

- Hosts the Collaborative Journalism Summit as a national conference in a different city each year.

- Publishes The Newsroom Digest weekly emailed newsletter that tracks the "latest developments in New Jersey local news."

"Montclair is very invested in supporting the local media ecosystem in this state and they have put their money where their mouth is for 13 years now because they've always operated like this," Murray said, adding, "they view it as an act of community service."

Advice: "The first thing to think about is: what is your lane? What are you, as a university, most interested in, and what are you good at?... Who are you already serving? What expertise do you already have? Then, look at who are the players in the ecosystem and how you can support them. That's the first place to start, because no one wants to see someone coming in and creating a brand new thing and big-footing other people in the process. … And if when you're looking at the other players in the space, there aren't any, or they are weak or they are struggling, there is an opening for you." — *Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University Director Stefanie Murray*

Missouri School of Journalism, University of Missouri

As the oldest journalism school in the nation, the University of Missouri, with its Reynolds Journalism Institute, helps local media thrive throughout Missouri in various ways.

"The whole idea is that the school is an essential part of journalism in the state," said University of Missouri School of Journalism professor Mark Horvit.

"We *are* the local news ecosystem in many ways for Boone County where we are," he said about the daily newspaper the journalism program runs for a county of 180,000.

The school's Missouri News Network includes five community-focused outlets owned by the university, which help train Mizzou students while serving the state's news needs.

"It's a responsibility we take seriously," Elizabeth Stephens, an associate professor and executive editor of the Columbia Missourian, said in a statement. "We are the first journalism school in the country and a land-grant university, so it's our mission to set the example. Yes, we train students to be journalists, but we also serve as a lab for the industry. Everything we do — from preparing students to return and work in their community newsrooms to partnering with MU Extension to distribute certain publications statewide — reflects our goal of having a broader impact across the state."

The program:

- Runs the Potter Digital Ambassadors program, which helps local news organizations in Missouri strengthen their audience engagement efforts. Students help by developing and monetizing newsletters, crafting social media strategies, and training staff how to utilize technology tools.

- Partners with the Missouri Press Association and Broadcasters Association.

- Provides a faculty member to conduct news literacy training through the university's extension program.

- Provides Student Innovation Fellowships that focus on projects that "create, extend or build upon innovative work in each newsroom."

- Commits students to work for two years at a small Missouri newspaper after completing a school-funded internship in partnership with the state press association.

Advice: "The key to all of this — what I've learned over time — is collaboration. It's not just assuming you have something that everybody wants or needs, but reaching out through your press association, through the connections you might already have with regional media, and finding out what they need. There's no point in creating solutions that people don't want. What I've found is that things work best when you meet with people, when you talk to them, when you

listen to what they need — and then you think about how your program can address those needs.” — *University of Missouri professor Mark Horvit*

Center for Community News, University of Vermont

The Center for Community News, founded in 2022, helps grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs across the country. But the center also does plenty for its own state of Vermont.

In 2025, CCN launched the Vermont Journalism Coalition, which for the first time brings together nearly every newsroom in the state, large and small, and across various platforms. The coalition shares stories, aims to work on public policy to support newsgathering, provides shared resources, and is considering pooled legal insurance for the state's journalists and newsrooms.

“At a moment when news outlets started to appreciate that they needed to work together if they were going to survive — and residents were starting to recognize the value of these outlets for civic health — we stepped up to try to knit everybody together to create some pathways to funding these things,” said CCN's managing director, Meg Little Reilly.

The university program provided staff support to help the coalition take off. The hope is that the VJC can eventually become a sustainable independent nonprofit.

The Center for Community News also:

- Provides shared office space for multiple Vermont newsrooms.

- Plays a key role in Vermont's Press Forward chapter. (It coordinated a relationship with a community foundation, which became the anchor for the chapter.)

- Contributes 50% of a reporter position at the Vermont Public broadcast outlet. (The reporter also teaches broadcast classes at UVM.)

- Contributes 25% of a reporter position at the VT Digger digital news outlet. (The reporter also advises UVM students and speaks to classes.)

- Participates with Mizzou's Digital Ambassadors program with five students from UVM to serve in Vermont newsrooms.

- Offers summer scholarships and internships.

- Hosts an annual statewide event for local journalism stakeholders.

The Center for Community News is known to have attracted large grants — but most of that money is dedicated to its national work. "So, we are still working with limited resources in the state," Little Reilly said. "Our state budget has not changed dramatically, so it is much more a reflection of intentional programming than anything else."

Advice: "Just jump in and do something. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money. When we started this, we had really no money at all, and we were just hosting conversations. And then we were hosting some in-person meetings, and it was really all just low-budget connections and networking. And then that was kind of consciousness-raising for everybody." — *Center for Community News Managing Director Meg Little Reilly*

Agora Journalism Center, University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication

The University of Oregon's Agora Journalism Center has mapped and assessed the health of Oregon's news and information landscape — twice.

"These projects show how Oregonians access, trust, and share information, and how local news, libraries, and civic organizations can help strengthen those community ties," said Andrew DeVigal, the Agora Center's director.

Alongside the labor-and-time-intensive research, the center has facilitated listening sessions and information-needs assessments in communities throughout the state, including a Hispanic community in the Willamette Valley.

To do that, the university distributed a survey in which it collaborated with local communities and media, and then engaged its journalism students to make a report with recommendations based on their findings.

"That's what's possible in a 10-week program — in a term," DeVigal said. "Of course, there's lots of work for those information needs assessments that happens before the term starts."

The program also:

- Put together the Oregon Media Collaborative and oversees a Slack channel where nearly 100 journalists throughout the state communicate. "The goal of it is to just bring journalists together, and hopefully emerging journalists, a.k.a, our students as well, to be part of that story."

- Worked on a bill at the state legislature that would have required tech companies such as Google and Meta to financially compensate local newsrooms for using their content. If it had passed, 10% of revenue generated from it would have gone to the University of Oregon where the school would have provided grants to support the state's news-and-information ecosystem.

- Hosts the annual Society of Professional Journalists conference and a regional conference on its campus.

- Created Gather, a platform to "support community-minded journalists and other engagement professionals."

Advice: "Start building that coalition as early as possible. It takes a lot of work to build that trust. So, rather than trying to do it right before a grant proposal is due, you build and cultivate those relationships ahead of time. It's an ongoing effort, and building trust with each other across the media landscape takes time." — *Agora Journalism Center Director Andrew DeVigal*

"But also, when you start building out, [expand] that coalition or collaborative to other perhaps non-journalistic institutions, whether they're civic community organizations that are looking at civic information and distributing civic information, or even libraries. So, again, it's a slow

effort, and it takes time to build those relationships so that we really can kind of start trusting each other with the same common goal of supporting our state's local news and civic information health." — *Agora Journalism Center Director Andrew DeVigal*

Medill School, Northwestern University

The Chicago-based Northwestern University, with its large journalism school, does beaucoup work at the national level to support local news. Through its Local News Initiative, it is currently housing some of the most important research on the state of local news and tracking news deserts at the county level nationwide.

But the Medill School also heavily supports the local news and information landscape across Illinois.

In the summer of 2025, Illinois became the first state in the nation to enact a law that distributes money directly to local news organizations for employing journalists. Northwestern was a key player in the legislation. A task force that convened to work on the bill relied on Medill's research of the Illinois media scene, but the journalism program's involvement went much deeper.

Tim Franklin, a professor and the John M. Mutz Chair in Local News, was a member of the bipartisan legislative task force that hashed out the legislation. Two students, Hannah Carroll and Mary Randolph, interned on the project where they interviewed experts, wrote memos to the committee, participated in hearings, and took part in the process about what lawmakers should propose to the General Assembly and governor.

"It was a remarkable opportunity from beginning to end for those students," Franklin said. Following passage of the new law, 40 local news entities that operate 120 outlets received $4 million in state tax credits.

Beyond working on successful state-level public policy, Medill:

- Runs the [Local News Accelerator](#), which offers free assistance to local newsrooms across Illinois and provides audience research, competitive analysis, strategy, business model consulting, and more. "As part of this, we help news organizations launch new products and sunset old products that are maybe not as efficient and effective as they were when they were born," said Mackenzie Warren, the interim executive director of the Local News Initiative.

- Operates the [Media Innovation and Leadership Academy](#), which Warren describes as "like an MBA in a week for news leaders" that's designed to help local news organizations become more sustainable. Warren described the journalism graduate of today as needing to be a "one-person audience development command and control center," which is what they learn to become by participating in such projects.

- Closely works with the [Chicago Press Forward](#) chapter, which was one of the first early robust local chapters. Medill and its Local News Accelerator initially helped the chapter on its strategic plan including research and advising Press Forward Chicago on how it might deploy its resources across the state. Since then, Press Forward has hired Medill for more research, programming to their grantees, and more.

- Reports on [local news issues in Illinois](#) via the Local News Initiative.

- Maintains a relationship with state media associations, including on an educational webinar, providing a tax expert on the state's new tax credit law, and more.

- Operates the [Medill Midwest Solutions Journalism Hub](#).

Advice: "We're at an urgent all-hands-on-deck moment for journalism both in terms of helping local news with sustainability issues, but also in creation of new news delivery systems and platforms. There are experts in various fields at every college and university across the country that could be deployed to help news organizations locally with projects ranging from how to use AI or deploy AI on the business side or in the newsroom or how to more effectively use social media to how to better understand the AI algorithm to how to utilize TikTok and Instagram and YouTube in the delivery of news. So, I would love to see a movement of universities across the

country and colleges utilizing and deploying the expertise that they have to help all of us create the new local news ecosystem in America because it's desperately needed." — *Tim Franklin, the founding director of the Medill Local News Initiative*

Florida A&M University School of Journalism & Graphic Communication

At Florida A&M, the historically Black college's School of Journalism & Graphic Communication has multiple partnerships with local media.

Most recently, the university has linked up with a local public broadcast station that received grant support from a local foundation through Press Forward's North Florida chapter.

The goal is to support reporting in rural areas in the Sunshine State.

A university student is currently serving as a reporter for the initiative, which the school hopes to broaden into TV with more partners, said Mira Lowe, the dean of Florida A&M University School of Journalism & Graphic Communication.

While the Florida A&M journalism school has its own newspaper, TV station, radio station, and magazine and focuses on career-readiness in multimedia, the program wants to help build capacity in the local media community outside of campus.

The school also:

- Collaborates on funding requests with Florida State University, the Community Foundation of North Florida, and a First Amendment journalism support organization.

- Is working on building a distribution model for student-reported content that is publishable by local newsrooms and partners.

- Runs a Capitol Bureau that provides coverage of the Florida statehouse with a goal to distribute it among broader media partners.

"It's the partnership and collaboration that makes this work," Lowe said. "If you can identify whether it's a local media operation — TV, radio, public media or not — if you can find a partner in your community that you can work with, I think that is a tremendous way to kind of help broaden the tent."

Advice: "Having a faculty member and advisors who are passionate and committed to do the work — we all are stretched in some form or fashion — but to have champions who are willing to do this work with students is critical." — *Mira Lowe, dean of Florida A&M University School of Journalism & Graphic Communication*

Center for Media Innovation, Point Park University

The Center for Media Innovation at Pittsburgh's only downtown university launched in 2016 with a mission to make sure local news has a present — and future.

Its very mission statement says it exists to strengthen "southwestern Pennsylvania's media ecosystem by providing local news organizations with essential resources, talent, and support to ensure residents connect and stay informed."

The program, supported by $8.5 million in grants raised from nearly two dozen funders, is in some ways the Big Bang of Pittsburgh's local media collaboration and convening in recent years.

In 2019, the center created the Pittsburgh Media Partnership, a collaborative reporting initiative that includes more than 30 local media outlets that serve a 10-county area of southwestern Pennsylvania.

Housed on nearly two floors of an antique skyscraper downtown, the Pittsburgh Downtown Media Hub is leased by Point Park University as an extension of campus. There, students commingle with journalists from several local newsrooms including the city's alt-weekly, nonprofit and for-profit newsrooms, print and online outlets, a queer publication, and a podcast.

"The idea there was that they each have their own offices, but by putting them in proximity with each other, we were hoping that would lead to more collaborative reporting," said the Center for Media Innovation's managing director, Andrew Conte.

Students from other area schools are also welcome in the space, and Point Park runs several internship programs throughout the partnership.

Last year, when Press Forward was looking for cities, regions, and states to plant a local flag, the Center for Media Innovation convened a meeting with a handful of local philanthropic organizations. The Center now runs Press Forward Pittsburgh with five local foundations.

"They weren't aligned before, they weren't aware of what others were doing before except in anecdotal ways," Conte said about the foundations. (Collectively, they had each given some $24 million in grants for local journalism in the past five years but hadn't yet been working collaboratively, he said. The Center is also a grantee of some of the funders.) The Center also hired a consultant to work on a strategic plan for the local Press Forward chapter.

Conte said he quickly learned that a higher-ed journalism program can serve as a neutral broker and convener of stakeholders that might have competing visions.

"That's the thing that I didn't realize when I started this center, was that that's the main role that we play," he said. "We bring together these news organizations that otherwise couldn't get together on their own, and we bring together these foundations that weren't getting together on their own."

He added that an academic program can become a safe space for people with different ideas and their own programs to come together and sit around one table. "It's kind of magical that way," he said.

The Center also:

- Has a relationship with the Press Club of Western Pennsylvania where Conte is the president.

- Works closely with the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation, the Women's Press Club, and Pennsylvania News Media Association.

- Hires two full-time graduates for local newsrooms.

- Collaborates with other nearby colleges and universities on initiatives.

Philanthropic funding certainly allows Point Park the ability to do what it does, but it also counts institutional support from the university administration.

"I'm in my third president, but all three administrations have looked at what we've done and said 'This is good for the university and good for our students because it's public-facing, and it bridges that divide and gets our students out into the public and gets the public onto campus,'" Conte said. "That's a big piece of it."

Advice: "One thing that was surprising to me was setting aside a physical space for the Center and saying 'This is a priority for us.' Just having that space catalyzed actions outside of the university in ways that we hadn't anticipated." — *Center for Media Innovation Managing Director Andrew Conte*