



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
**CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY NEWS**

2022-2023

Annual Report

Draft: June 20, 2023

By Richard Watts and Hannah Kirkpatrick

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Letter from the Director:

Engaging colleges and students in supporting local news

When elderly and disabled residents at a senior center in Durham, NC went 36 hours without electricity and medical care days before Christmas, the only reporter to [cover the story](#) was a student at Duke University. Students with Noticiero Móvil – a university-run news source – provide missing coverage of the Latino community in Reno. In Louisiana, student coverage of the statehouse is shipped to 92 news outlets across the state providing legislative coverage to small community papers. In Ohio, Miami University faculty created [the Oxford Observer](#), the only source of local news in town, when the local paper folded. When the Oglethorpe Echo teetered on the brink of closing, [the University of Georgia stepped in](#) and now runs the paper through a reporting class, giving students hands-on experience in community journalism and ensuring the 150-year old paper has never missed a week.

These are just some of the stories we have heard and documented over the last 12 months since founding the Center for Community News in June 2022.

Our mission is to engage universities and colleges in bringing their students and resources to address the crisis in local news. We do that by documenting existing programs, strategically supporting new ones, building shared resources, hosting training and brown bag conversations, and building a community of universities and faculty that support local news.

In this report we outline progress made in our first year and goals for the future.

I have had the great privilege in my 12 months of paid leave from the University of Vermont to travel the country meeting people who are building a future for local news reporting. I've sat in classrooms and conference rooms, coffee shops and faculty offices, and seen firsthand the impact of university led student reporting programs and the work of creative and innovative faculty leaders.

Each campus I visit (about 50 this past year) underscores the relevance and urgency of CCN's mission, further proving that universities are uniquely suited to help address the crisis facing local news thanks to the resources, location and student talent. Faculty are hungry for an organization that connects them with other faculty. And students want to do meaningful work that connects with the larger world; they want to write stories that matter.

In this report we summarize activities from the first year of CCN and lay out ideas for the future. Colleges and universities can and should become a critical engine of local news reporting in America.

— *Richard Watts, Director*

June 2023, Hinesburg, Vermont



Executive Summary

The Center for Community News was founded in June 2022 with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and donors at the University of Vermont. This report documents the first 12 months.

Some highlights include:

- 130 news-academic partnerships documented in 41 states
- 68 case studies and 72 fact sheets describing those programs
- 138 interviews with faculty, staff and students
- 400+ registrants for 10 monthly “brown bag” discussions
- 132 faculty & staff attendees at 11 local news training sessions
- 2,861 subscribers to monthly newsletter & 41% average open rate
- 33 faculty champions funded & four HBCUs funded
- 20 university-led statehouse reporting programs
- CCN reports on funding, partnership structures and statehouse reporting

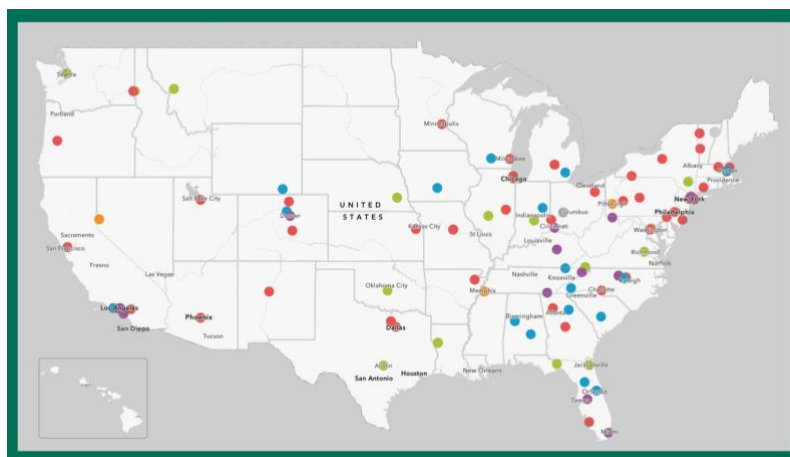
Documenting News-Academic Partnerships

Total Programs

We have identified 130 programs where student reporting is contributing to local news at 125 universities in 41 states. Our focus is on university run programs where a university faculty or staff member is editing and vetting the student content to ensure it meets journalistic standards before it is published.

Interactive Map

Our [interactive map](#) showcases the reach of these programs on the Center’s landing page. The map shows the location of 130 news-academic partnerships in the United States. Most of the data points link to further information about the partnership, including contact information, case study, webpage and fact sheet.



Map showing university-local news partnerships in the United States.

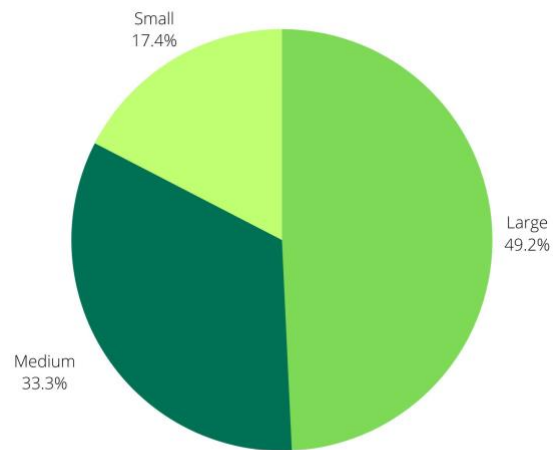
Case Studies and Fact Sheets

To document the existing programs we interviewed faculty, staff, students and administrators, for an ongoing series of short case studies. We also provide fact sheets that highlight key program attributes, including links and contact info. Case studies are featured on our website, in a monthly newsletter and in social media channels.

130 News-Academic partnerships identified at 125 Universities in 41 States

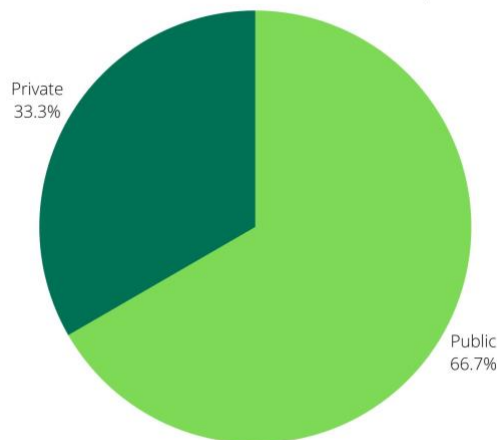
138 interviews conducted with faculty, staff, professionals, and students for 68 Case Studies and 72 Fact Sheets

Size of schools with news-academic partnerships



Based on data collected via interviews, surveys, and research between June 2022 and June 2023. Small = <10,000 students; Medium = 10,000-30,000 students; Large = >30,000 students

Public vs. Private Universities
with News-Academic Partnerships



From CCN News-Academic Partnerships survey of faculty and professionals

Reports

- [University-Led Statehouse Student Reporting Programs](#)
 - By Sarah Gamard, Richard Watts, Emily Sheftman & Hannah Kirkpatrick
 - Published November 2023, last updated March 31, 2023
- [Academic-News Collaborations](#)
 - By Richard Watts
 - Published January 18, 2023
- [Funding for Academic-News Partnerships](#)
 - By Richard Watts
 - Published December 2, 2022
- [CCN Founding White Paper](#)
 - By Richard Watts and Meg Little Reilly
 - Published June 2022

Encouraging More Programs - Site Visits

To identify existing programs and encourage more, CCN has made a concerted effort to visit schools and meet with faculty, administrators and staff. Following is a list of schools visited.

- Amherst College
- Benedict College
- Claflin University
- Duke University
- Elon University
- Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
- Florida International University
- Franklin Pierce College
- Georgia College
- Kent State University
- Louisiana State University
- Mercer University
- North Carolina A & T
- North Carolina Central University
- Point Park University
- Shaw University
- St. Anselm's College
- State University of New York at Cortland
- State University of New York at Oswego
- Tarleton University
- University of Arizona
- University of Augusta
- University of Florida
- University of Georgia
- University of Kansas

- University of Kentucky
- University of Massachusetts
- University of Miami
- University of Mississippi
- University of New Hampshire
- University of New Mexico
- University of North Carolina
- University of South Carolina
- University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
- University of Tennessee, Murfreesboro
- University of Vermont
- Vanderbilt University
- Youngstown State University



Richard Watts with students and Professor Tsitsi Wakhisi at the University of Miami in March 2023.

CCN In the News

Columns and News Stories

- [How student journalists are filling the void to help save local news](#) – Poynter
- [Student reporters fill crucial gap in state government coverage](#) – The Conversation
- [From area roots, Richard Watts looks to grow innovate local news model](#) – The Keene Sentinel
- [To fix democracy, start with colleges](#) – Times Higher Education
- [Colleges and Students Are Stepping Up to Help Rural Newspapers](#) – The Daily Yonder

Monthly Newsletter

Communications outreach is a key component to sharing our research and connecting faculty with support for their partnerships. CCN's online presence includes:

The monthly CCN newsletter where we share case studies of partnerships and promote upcoming events.

- 2,861 subscribers as of June 14, 2023
- 41.1% avg. opens
- 12 newsletters June 2022 to July 1, 2023



Cover of the June 2023 CCN newsletter: Students on the ground for Borderzine at the University of Texas El Paso.

Notable editions:

- Our [November 2022 issue](#) covered university-led student statehouse reporting programs around the country, an early catalyst for our ongoing statehouse research.
- Our [May 2023 issue](#) included case studies of bilingual reporting partnerships in Nevada and Arizona.

Social Media Growth

LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter accounts were created in November 2022. LinkedIn has become the key social platform for CCN to connect with faculty and industry professionals directly.

LinkedIn is primarily used for links to our case studies, upcoming events, tagging organizations and people in our network; LinkedIn also provides the most data on reach of all three social media platforms we use. On Instagram we emphasize case studies with strong photos, also used for timely updates and event promotion. Twitter has been useful for providing timely updates and interacting with our network on an alternative platform but offers less data on reach and has been slower to grow.

LinkedIn

508 followers

14,918 net impressions

7.45% avg. engagement rate

Instagram

118 followers

1,094 net accounts reached

37 accounts reached per post (avg.)

Twitter

76 followers

Faculty Trainings and Organizing Sessions

The Center for Community News offers free training/organizing sessions for faculty and media organizations keen to start or expand a collaboration. These sessions are designed to workshop ideas and move them forward.

Working with partner universities, we hosted 132 attendees in 11 sessions:

- March 6, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri
- March 8, Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi
- March 10, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina
- March 17, Athens, GA: University of Georgia
- March 20, Baton Rouge, LO: Louisiana State University
- March 23, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico
- March 27, Fort Worth, TX: Tarleton State University
- April 14, Cortland, NY: State University of New York at Cortland
- May 5, Virtual 10-12 a.m. EST
- May 12, Kent, OH: Kent State University
- June 16, Burlington, VT: University of Vermont



Faculty attending the March 20 training session at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, LA.

2023 Faculty Training Attendance



Columbia, MO



Oxford, MS



Chapel Hill, NC



Athens, GA



Baton Rouge, LA



Albuquerque, NM



Fort Worth, TX



Cortland, NY



Virtual



Kent, OH



Burlington, VT

Conferences and Speaking Engagements

2022

- New England Press Association, Boston, Mass (May 4)
 - Building local news collaborations, Richard Watts & Panelists
- NH Philanthropy Summit, St. Anselm's College, NH (May 12)
- Poynter: Teachapoolaza, St. Petersburg, Florida (June 10-13)
 - News-Academic Partnerships, Richard Watts
- AEJMC Annual Meeting, Detroit (August 2-6)
- Desert University, University of Kansas, Kansas (October 20-22)
- College Media Association, Washington, D.C. (October 26-29)

2023

- ASJMC, Charlotte, NC (Feb 16)
 - Overview of News Academic Partnerships
- Local Media Research Forum (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Feb 17)
 - University Local News partnerships
- Knight Media Forum, Miami Florida (Feb 22-24)
- AEJMC Southeast Colloquium, Murfreesboro, Tennessee (March 2, 3)
 - Media & University partnerships -- engaging students in local news (with Amanda Bright and Madison Cook)
- Society for Professional Journalists Regional Conference (Roger Williams, Rhode Island)
 - April 22, Changing Landscape in Local News (Richard Watts & panelists)
- New England Newspaper & Press Association, Annual Conference (Waltham, Mass)
 - May 6: Building Local News Partnerships (Richard Watts, with Lara Salahi of Endicott College and Jerry Berger of Boston University)
- Collaborative Journalism Summit (George Washington University; DC)
 - June 7: The Center for Community News examines what can — and should — be the role of universities collaborating with local media partners to report local news?" (Richard Watts, with Sarah Gamard, former CCN Statehouse Coordinator)
- Vermont Journalism Exchange, Burlington Vermont (June 29)



Richard Watts and Sarah Gamard present at the Collaborative Journalism Summit in Washington, D.C. on June 7, 2023.

Community Journalism Lecture Series

The Center for Community News hosts virtual conversations with leading researchers, stakeholders and teachers about once a month. These brown bags offer faculty, professionals, researchers, and students time to hear from leaders in the field and collaborate on complex issues in the development of news-academic partnerships. This series is co-sponsored by the Community Journalism Interest Group of AEJMC and will resume in Fall 2023. Recordings of all past brown bags are available on our [events](#) page. About 400 people registered for the Brown Bags and attendance for each event was generally between 25 and 60 people.

- Sept 16: How To Sustain Local News?
 - Erica Beshears Perel, Mike Rispoli, and Michael Shapiro
- Oct 21: What Is Community Journalism?
 - Andrea Wenzel, Nikki Usher, and Traci Griffith
- Nov 18: Funding For Local News?
 - Meg Little Reilly, Todd Franko, Michelle Srbinovich, and Karen Rundlet
- Dec 9, 2022: Faculty Fundraising Brown Bag
 - Kevin Morgenstein Fuerst, Susan Paterno, Laura Simoes, and Richard Watts
- Dec 15, 2022: Student Statehouse Reporting Programs
 - Colleen Steffen, Alix Bryan-Campos, Chris Drew, Rafael Lorente, and Kathleen McElroy
- Jan 20, 2023: What Are Colleges And Universities Doing About The Local News Crisis?
 - Lara Salahi, Christina Smith, Meg Heckman, and Mark Berkey-Gerard
- Feb 24, 2023: Research On Local News
 - Mimi Perrault, Phil Napoli, and Jessica Mahone
- Mar 31, 2023: Stories Of Local News Partnerships Making A Difference
 - Amanda Bright, Andrew Conte, Emily Sheftman, and Richard Watts
- Friday, April 28: Recruitment, Fundraising & Distribution Of Student Content
 - Alva James-Johnson, Marcie Young Cancio, Elizabeth Stephens, and David Squires
- Friday, May 12: Collaborations With Public Media Organizations
 - Scott Finn, Chris Evans, Courtney Cowgill, Virginia Dambach, and Claudia Cruz

An additional community conversation was held on May 25, 2023 to assess faculty needs - how can the Center for Community News best support the development of more university partnerships with local newsrooms? The information shared during this discussion, along with the results of a survey sent to over 100 faculty members in CCN's network, are being used to further develop our Faculty Resources webpage and faculty communications. (See "Looking Ahead" for more details.)



Elizabeth Stephens, Marcie Young Cancio, David Squires and Alva James-Johnson during the Friday, April 28, 2023 brown bag on Recruitment, Fundraising & Distribution Of Student Content.

Strategic Investments

Faculty Champions

At the core of news-academic partnerships are creative and innovative faculty. In this program CCN provided direct funding to “faculty champions” growing and starting new local news partnerships.

Launched in January 2023 with funding from two generous donors, based on a competitive process, the Center selected 33 “Champions” from 21 different states. Fifteen of the “Champions” work at Minority Serving Institutions where student populations are majority non-white including Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Total funding of \$54,000 is directly provided to the 33 “Champions” and to four HBCUs.

- Luis C. Almeida, Claflin University, South Carolina
- Emilia Askari, University Of Michigan, Michigan
- Doug Blackburn, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Florida
- Dorothy Bland, University Of North Texas, Texas
- Justin Blankenship, Auburn University, Alabama
- Lindita Camaj, University Of Houston, Texas
- Madison Cook, West Virginia University, West Virginia
- Michael J. Cripps, University Of New England, Maine
- Laura Cullen Glasscock, Kentucky State University, Kentucky
- Gregory Gondwe, California State University - San Bernardino, California
- Melissa Greene-Blye, University Of Kansas, Kansas
- Jena Heath, St. Edward's University, Texas
- Alva James-Johnson, Southern Adventist University, Tennessee
- Liefu Jiang, Chicago State University, Illinois
- Caroline K. Kaltefleiter, State University Of New York At Cortland, New York

- Joseph Kasko, Winthrop University, South Carolina
- Hans Meyer, Ohio University, Ohio
- Caitlin O'Neil Amaral, University Of Massachusetts, Dartmouth
- Bob Page, Queens University, North Carolina
- Novia Pagone, Governors State University, Illinois
- Toby Rosenthal, Stockton University, New Jersey
- Lara Salahi, Endicott College, Massachusetts
- Katerina Spasovska, Western Carolina University, North Carolina
- David Squires, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, North Carolina
- Charles Strouse, Florida International University, Florida
- Nick Taylor, Northwestern State University, Louisiana
- Jason Torreano, Bloomfield College, New Jersey
- Demi Washington, Lane College, Tennessee
- Stephenson Waters, University Of Louisiana At Lafayette, Louisiana
- Chad Whittle, Georgia College & State University, Georgia
- Joanne Williams, Olivet College, Michigan
- Marcie Young Cancio, Salt Lake Community College
- Jerry Zremski, University of Maryland, Maryland

CCN also provided \$6,000 each to four HBCUs where faculty champions work: Claflin University, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Lane College and North Carolina Agricultural & Technical University.

Faculty Champions by the numbers...



9 work at private universities and 24 work at public universities



15 work at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) and/or Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

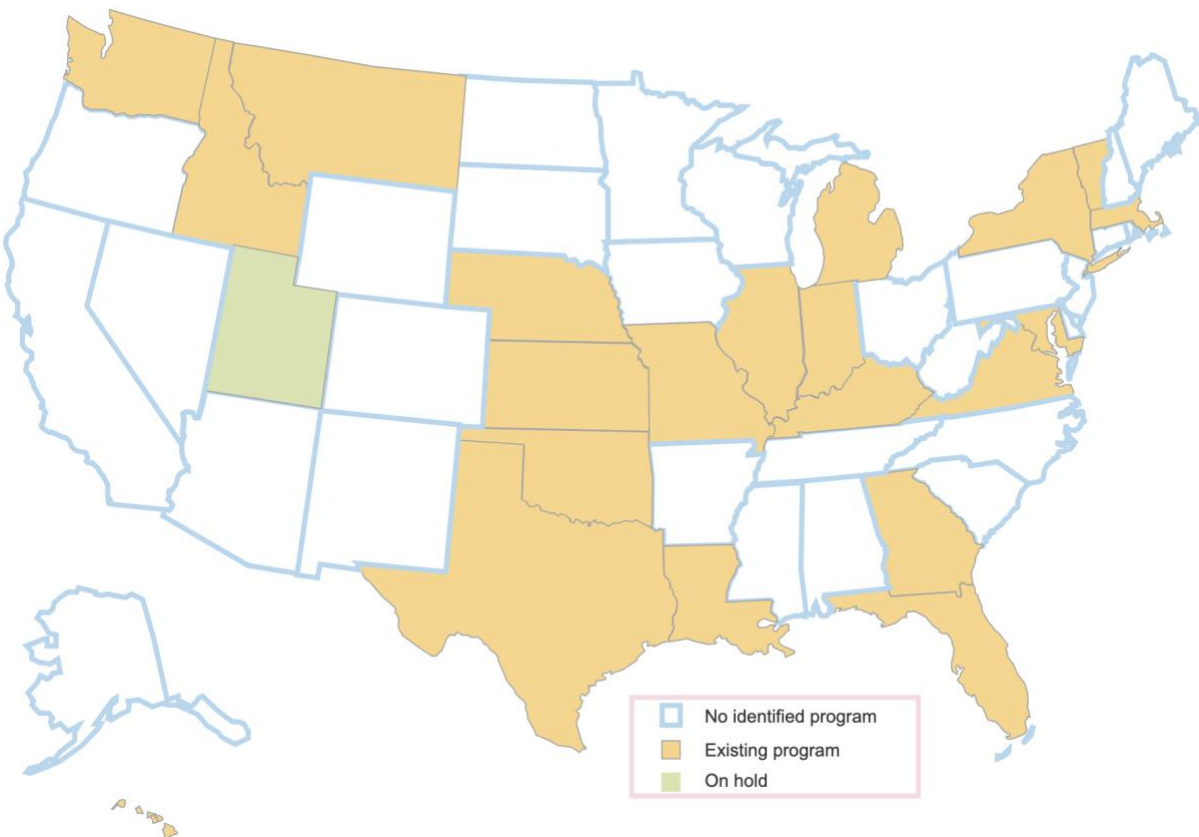
Statehouse program

There are 20 university-led statehouse reporting programs in 19 states (Florida has two). Covering the nation's statehouses has never been more important as voting rights, abortion, diversity, higher education, regulating gun ownership and gender issues are increasingly being debated and decided at the state level. Yet regular [statehouse reporting coverage has declined](#). One growing source of statehouse reporting is [university-led statehouse reporting programs](#).

CCN interviewed the leaders of the existing programs and [summarized the findings in a report](#). In 2022, more than 250 student reporters, working under the direction of faculty and staff, published more than 1,000 statehouse news stories that were circulated to more than 1200 news outlets.

CCN now coordinates a monthly meeting of statehouse program leaders and is working with the University of Missouri to host the first annual university statehouse reporting conference in September 2023.

This summer, CCN will launch the “Statehouse Faculty Champions” program to encourage more statehouse reporting programs.



Staff, Students & Advisory Board

The Center has two full-time positions, Research Director Hannah Kirkpatrick and Outreach Coordinator Emily Sheftman. We rely on a mix of undergraduates and graduate student researchers to meet our mission. (See [our team](#) on our website for more.)

The Center's [advisory board](#) draws from industry, academia and practice to provide insights and networks.

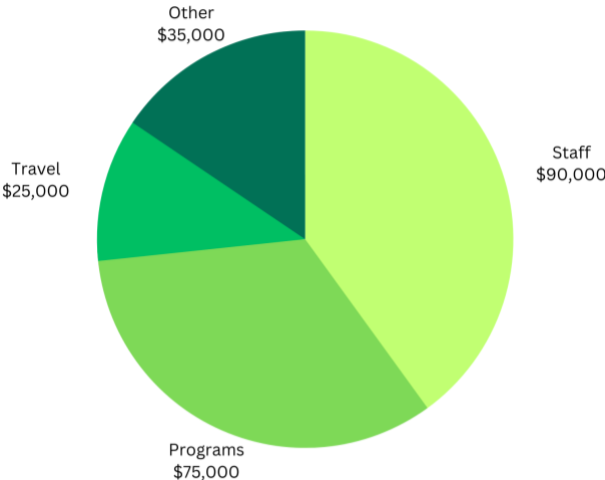
- Meg Little Reilly, Chair
- Barbara Allen
- Patrick Ferrucci
- Scott Finn
- Teri Finneman
- Traci Griffith
- Heidi Legg
- Duc Luu
- Kathleen McElroy
- Christina Smith

CCN collaborators include:

- The Community Journalism Group of AEJMC
- The Future of Media Project at Harvard University
- The Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media

Funding and Budget

The Center authorized \$225,000 in spending in the 12 months covered in this report. \$150,000 of those funds came from a matching grant to the Center from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and donors to the College of Arts & Sciences. An additional \$75,000 came from donors to support the new HBCU/MSI and statehouse faculty champion programs. (General numbers – exact audited spending is available through UVM.)



Looking Ahead

We intend to build on the success of our first year in several ways:

National partnership of colleges/universities

One major contribution that CCN has made to local reporting over the last year is by becoming the central resource for universities and faculty to learn about other programs, best practices, and innovations happening at other schools. CCN also became a place to connect with peers around the country, to build momentum around this work and organize for the future.

CCN is excited to continue to build around this core competency to meet the demands of faculty around the country by: adding to our online resources; building more robust communications in this community; hosting regular virtual conversations; and planning for our first major conference in the fall of 2025.

University/local news trainings

Faculty trainings have built individual capacity but also helped connect faculty in states and regions, enabling university partners to take state leadership. In 2023-2024, we intend to host ten more of these trainings with partners in new states/places.

Strategic Investments

We intend to grow university and faculty programs that enable new programs in underserved areas. Rural areas, majority-minority communities, and news deserts will be top priorities as we accelerate CCN's outreach to the places that need university-led student reporting programs. The faculty champions model has proven a successful approach to galvanizing more programs.

Flagship public universities

We intend to support the leadership role that flagship public universities are taking in their states, knitting together other programs and mentoring smaller schools. CCN is uniquely well suited to help other states and regions draw on the existing resources, connections, and deep roots of their flagship schools to meet critical reporting needs.

Distribution model

One of the challenges we regularly encounter is the difficulty many schools face in getting their faculty-vetted student journalism out into the world. For the next phase of CCN, we envision the creation of state level "wire services" and a national wire service of professional-grade student reporting content that is easily accessible to media partners, akin to the Rural NewsWire or AP StoryShare. This fall, CCN will launch a pilot wire service in Vermont, called the Community News Service, to further test this approach. We are also working with national partners and several other public universities to explore ways to distribute high quality student content more broadly.

Statehouse programs

There are 20 university-led statehouse programs in 19 states. That leaves 31 states without a program, with hundreds of colleges/universities and tens of thousands of students within a few miles of their statehouse. Here we will continue to support the existing 20 program cohort and seek ways to grow more programs with a new “Statehouse Faculty Champion” program and a statehouse news conference in Missouri.

Communications between programs & faculty

To facilitate communications between programs, we are creating a Slack channel and a refreshed faculty resources web page that will include the following:

- Program Models & Workflows
- Partnerships & Communities
- Syllabi & Curriculum
- Funding & Financials
- Legal & Ethical Considerations
- Products & Platforms
- Potential Partner Organizations

Research Projects

This summer CCN has launched four research projects to inform future investments and outreach.

Impact Report: CCN researchers are contacting each news-academic collaboration identified in the original survey to determine the approximate number of student journalists that participate in news-academic collaborations each year and detail the average number of stories produced by each student.

Public Media: There are about 182 university licensed public media radio stations yet many have limited interactions with their host university. Here we analyze existing relationships and provide some templates for increasing interactions to increase local news.

Student Media: Here we seek to understand opportunities for student media to increase local reporting in partnership with university led reporting programs and extend resources to meet local news needs.

Private universities/colleges: Although two-thirds of the institutions of higher education in the U.S. are private, they make up less than 20 percent of the 130 programs identified. How can we engage more private schools in providing local news?

Conferences

We will continue to attend and present at conferences. Some upcoming include:

- AEJMC Pre-Conference Workshop: Sunday, August 6 from 9am-12pm
 - Training session for faculty interested in starting a local news partnership
- “Key themes in news/academic partnerships: Results from leader interviews,” presented by CCN Research Director Hannah Kirkpatrick and Research Associate Jocelyn Rockhold: Monday, August 7 at 12:30pm at AEJMC
- AEJMC Council of Affiliates Partner Session: Tuesday, August 8 from 12:30pm-2pm
- AEJMC Spotlight Session: Wednesday, August 9 at 10:30am
- Online News Association, Local News Partnerships, August 23
- Public Radio Program Directors, Public Radio and Local News/university partnerships, August 28
- University Statehouse Programs, University of Missouri Sept 28-29

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincerest thanks to the many people who supported the Center for Community News in its first year. Our students; Jocelyn Rockhold, Savannah Arciaga, Autumn Crabtree, Amelia Canney and Cora Smith. Our consultants, writers, and editors; Carolyn Shapiro, Justin Trombly, Lauren Milideo, Sarah Gamard, Caroline Embleau, Amanda Bright and Nada Merghani. Our advisory board and Chair Meg Little Reilly. The many, many faculty (too many to name) who gave us advice and encouragement and hosted trainings at their universities and mentored their fellow faculty.

National organizations like the Center for Cooperative Journalism, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Report for America have been generous with their time and support. Our partners at the Knight Foundation who give advice and more, including Duc Luu and BA Snyder and a special recognition to Eric Newton who has been championing the “teaching hospital” approach for decades. Universities are finally catching up. And of course, the excellent support we have had at the University of Vermont from our business managers; Andrea Rosencrantz, Joshua Cheney and Jen Prada and most significantly, from College of Arts and Sciences Dean Bill Falls and Provost Patty Prelock. None of this would be possible without you. Thank you!



June 16 faculty training attendees outside of the Billings Library at the University of Vermont, home of the Center for Community News.