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Public Radio-University Partnerships Could Help Save Local News

New report reveals broad interest and potential for growth in student reporting partnerships

BURLINGTON, Vt. — The Center for Community News at UVM released on Monday a first-ever [nationwide survey](#) on the state of university-public radio news partnerships. Findings revealed that, while there are 182 university-licensed public radio stations in the U.S., most stations surveyed do not have reliable reporting partnerships with their host universities and 91% want to collaborate more.

“Public media stations and U.S. colleges are already aligned on many key values,” said CCN Director Richard Watts. “Both are mission-driven, with a commitment to educate, enrich, and strengthen civic engagement. These are natural partnerships that can help fill critical local news gaps. With this survey, we’ve identified the untapped potential and obstacles to growth.”

The Center for Community News is working to grow public media-university partnerships around the country, informed by the success it has documented at stations like KBIA at the University of Missouri, WUFT at the University of Florida, and the University of Illinois student newsroom at Illinois Public Media. Such partnerships are providing a sustainable and trustworthy source of local news for the long term in their communities, and reinforcing a culture of civic engagement across generations.

CCN is also host to its own successful public media partnership between the University of Vermont and Vermont Public, which produces regular student-reported stories under the guidance of professionals, reaching hundreds of thousands of listeners each month. Building on that enthusiasm from students, news editors, and listeners, UVM is in the process of hiring its first full-time faculty member to lead coursework in public media news production.

“This partnership is a win for everyone,” said Vermont Public President and CEO Scott Finn. “Students receive an immersive experience that opens doors to a range of meaningful careers, and our audience hears and sees stories they’d never find otherwise.”

You can find the full report at the [Center for Community News](#). Key findings are below.

Building Synergy: Public Radio and Universities

KEY FINDINGS

Based on CCN's survey of 95 public radio stations in 38 states:

- More than three quarters of public radio stations in the survey reported some level of student involvement.
- More than three quarters of current public radio-university involvement is limited to traditional internships.
- About half of the public radio respondents broadcast student-reported stories that are edited by faculty or staff.
- Only about 10 of the stations in the survey regularly partner with classes at a local university.
- 91% of public radio stations want to collaborate more with local universities.

In their open-ended responses, public radio stations listed primary obstacles to expanding collaboration with universities, including:

- Cost
- Not enough staff to oversee student reporting
- Inadequate institutional support from their university

THE TAKEAWAYS

Demand for more public radio-academic collaboration is high.

Public radio stations recognize the benefits of onboarding young reporters and working collaboratively with their local universities. They want more of it.

The old systems aren't working.

Traditional internships have not forged close relationships between public radio stations and their local universities, or established student reporting as a fixture in public newsrooms. In order to formalize these partnerships and create sustainable pipelines of student reporting, universities need to lead by creating formal programs that are woven into course offerings, with dedicated faculty attention.

The field is ripe for growth.

At least 182 public radio licenses are already associated with universities, and these stations are enthusiastic about greater collaboration. With this infrastructure already in place, and a number of successful programs already serving as models, the potential for growth is high.

About CCN

The [Center for Community News](#) at UVM is a nonpartisan nonprofit that is working to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs around the country, to create a more sustainable future for local news outlets and the communities they serve.

About the University of Vermont

Since 1791, the [University of Vermont](#) has worked to move humankind forward. UVM's strengths align with the most pressing needs of our time: the health of our societies and the health of our environment. Our size—large enough to offer a breadth of ideas, resources, and opportunities, yet intimate enough to enable close faculty-student mentorship across all levels of study—allows us to pursue these interconnected issues through cross-disciplinary research and collaboration. Providing an unparalleled educational experience for our students, and ensuring their success, are at the core of what we do. As one of the nation's first land grant universities, UVM advances Vermont and the broader society through the discovery and application of new knowledge. UVM is derived from the Latin Universitas Viridis Montis (in English, University of the Green Mountains).