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How Funding Local News Ecosystems Helps American Communities Thrive



Over five years, Democracy Fund has invested \$11 million in six geographic areas across the United States. Here's what we've learned.

ABOUT US

Created by eBay founder and philanthropist Pierre Omidyar, Democracy Fund is an independent and nonpartisan foundation that confronts deep-rooted challenges in American democracy while defending against new threats. Democracy Fund has invested more than \$275 million in support of those working to strengthen our democracy through the pursuit of a vibrant and diverse public square, free and fair elections, effective and accountable government, and a just and inclusive society.

For more information, please visit www.democracyfund.org.



Left: Participants at the Colorado Media Project Summit in September 2023.

Right: South Jersey Information Equity Project reporting fellows graduation. Photo by Joe Amditis.

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Right: 2023 Collaborative Journalism Summit.
Photo by Joe Amditis and William Allen-DuPraw.



their community needs, and we work together to chart the path forward. Then we invest in a network of institutions, collaborations, and people who are working to build up the ecosystem's ability to meet the community's news and information needs. Often, our support involves a pooled fund or other collaborative efforts, steered by local funders.

"In 2023 alone, Democracy Fund and dozens of partner funders are investing more than \$8.5 million across these six local news ecosystems."

We believe this approach provides a more equitable way to support local news because it is rooted in community listening and redistributing resources to areas of greatest need. It also promotes geographic diversity because we're supporting organizations not just in the largest cities in a region but also in rural communities and news "deserts," where people have very little access to local news.

Over the past five years, Democracy Fund has invested more than \$11 million in six local news ecosystems across the U.S. These investments go deep into urban and rural areas that together are home to more than 41 million people – 12 percent of the country's population and growing. Our goal is to seed a forest, instead of just a single tree.

Partnering to Fund Ecosystems

The value and effectiveness of news ecosystems is becoming more and more well known. As a result, many funders are doing related work, from [Report for America's community news funds](#) to the [American Journalism Project's regional research and support](#) and [Microsoft's investments in journalism collaboratives](#). In **2023 alone, Democracy Fund and dozens of partner funders are investing more than \$8.5 million across these six local news ecosystems.**

And our partners are not just funders who traditionally support journalism. If you care about climate change, local journalism is important to your cause. If you care about healthcare, education, or voting rights, same! Strong local news is essential to equip our communities with information needed to make change.

Democracy Fund is currently supporting news ecosystems in New Jersey, Colorado, North Carolina, New Mexico, Chicago, and Oklahoma, and we're expanding our investments to more areas. Read on to learn about the kinds of impact we've seen over the past five years – and how our approach is helping communities build power where they live.

Curious what your local news ecosystem looks like? This [guide](#) can help you find out.

Want to know how funding local news can make a difference for a cause you care about? Talk with us.



Right: The Center for Cooperative Media's 2023 ethnic and community media luncheon. Photo by Joe Amditis.

An Ecosystem Approach Creates Lasting Impact

At Democracy Fund, we believe that a healthy, multiracial democracy depends on the public being well-informed and ready to take action. Issues like healthcare, education, climate change, and racial justice all touch our daily lives. We need information about them that we can trust. For example, if a local school is closing because of potentially discriminatory budget cuts, families need details: Who made this decision, and why? Are there any community meetings happening? Where can people enroll their kids? Trustworthy local journalism can equip people with the information they need. This is the kind of community impact we look for in local news ecosystems.

A Healthy Local News Ecosystem...

- **Partners with communities** in culturally competent and responsive ways
- **Relies on strong listening and relationship-building** to identify community needs
- **Coordinates across journalists and community members** to fix issues
- **Demonstrates transparency** to build trust and credibility
- **Grows the capacity of newsrooms** and information providers to serve the community
- **Builds financial sustainability** by incentivizing innovative business models



Illustration by Joyce Rice.

Benefits of a Strong Local News Ecosystem

When communities have the news and information they need, it makes a difference. Research on [journalism and democracy](#) has found:

- **Strong local journalism means more people turn out to vote.** Weak local journalism means fewer people vote.
- **Thorough local journalism helps people be less biased** when considering candidates for elected office.
- **Quality local journalism can counter divisive national narratives** that aim to polarize groups of people against one another.
- **Every dollar spent on local news produces hundreds of dollars in public benefit** by exposing wasteful corruption and keeping an eye on government spending.
- **People feel a stronger sense of community** in places with strong local journalism.
- **Local news keeps communities informed during times of upheaval**, like disasters, protests, and pandemics.

We want to be clear that journalism has the power to harm just as much as it can help. The traditional media system has a long history of perpetuating racism, from profiting off the trade of enslaved people by publishing “slave ads,” to publishing op-eds from elected officials who called on the government to use troops against Black Lives Matter protesters, and more. As a result of systemic racism across media, society, and policy, few people of color own media or work in newsrooms, and news stories often contain biases that reinforce racist ideas. To produce journalism that truly serves all, we must transform the way journalism is funded. News ecosystems can help move resources more equitably in that way.



Over 130 people who care about local news and information in Colorado gathered in Denver in September 2023. They reflected on the past five years of growth in the state's local news ecosystem and identified priorities for the next stage.

Trends Unfolding as We Fund Local News Ecosystems

An external [evaluation](#) of Democracy Fund’s ecosystem investments from 2017 to 2022 identified high-level trends that contribute to better outcomes for communities. These include:

- 1. More funding, more equitably distributed.** Leaders on the ground who prioritize community listening and collaboration can work with funding partners to make sure resources are distributed equitably in terms of race, language, geography, and more. They can also keep track of where funding is going over time and where new needs are arising.
- 2. Increased collaborative problem-solving.** The community benefits when local news and information organizations work together — and when they bring in other stakeholders, like educators, healthcare workers, and social service providers. Together, collaborators can devise solutions across fields, rooted in access to information. The growth of pooled funds in an ecosystem creates an easy way for funders to find out about and support this work.
- 3. Shared vision and tools for collective impact.** Ecosystem leaders are uniquely positioned to have intentional conversations with partners to achieve a shared vision for their ecosystem. It’s powerful to have everyone on the same page.

Overall, the most important thing we have learned over five years of funding local news ecosystems is that **community impact doesn’t happen overnight**. According to Stefanie Murray, director of the Center for Cooperative Media in New Jersey, “This is a long-term investment in people and a place to build relationships that bear fruit over time.”

In the case studies to follow, you’ll see some of the benefits that this slow and careful growth can produce.



Strong Local News Ecosystems Need Strong Hubs

In a local news ecosystem, there is often an organization that takes on the role of listener, convener, and organizer. In the regions we fund, sometimes this is a pooled fund at a community foundation, a project at a local institution, or something else. These hub organizations take on activities that benefit the whole community, like conducting research on current needs, fundraising, organizing collaboratives, and building relationships. The organizations named in the case studies in this report are examples of what we consider ecosystem hubs.



Left: 2023 Collaborative Journalism Summit.
Photo by Joe Amditis and William Allen-DuPraw.
Center: Paola Jaramillo of Enlace Latino NC sets up
a camera at a community listening session in 2019.
Right: Meetup of NJ Civic Info Consortium grantees.
Photo by Joe Amditis.

Case Studies

The Local News Ecosystem Approach in Action

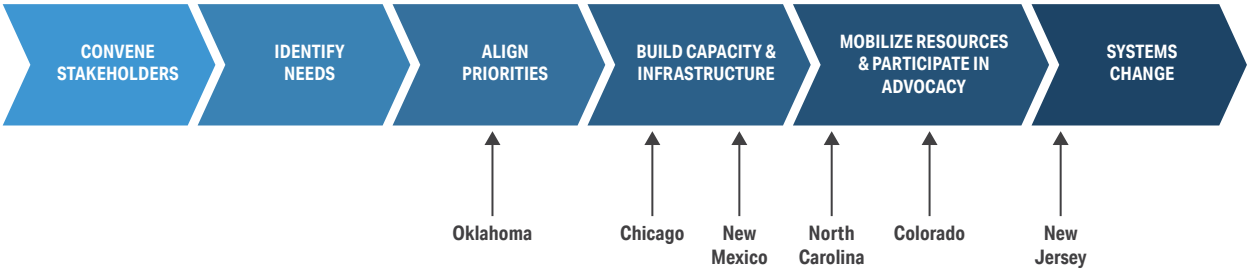
The case studies that follow describe the news ecosystems we support in **New Jersey, Colorado, North Carolina, New Mexico, Chicago, and Oklahoma**. They illustrate the power of this model and how funders across the country have adapted it to maximize real-world impact for residents in their communities.

It's important to note that impact and success look different depending on the ecosystem and its current phase of growth. One year of investment does not have the same results as 10 years of investment, and different regions benefit from different solutions. And while there is no cookie cutter path here — observations of this work across multiple years can provide the runway to find answers.

Momentum to build an ecosystem often comes from local stakeholders: journalists, funders, and/or community members who are committed to making change where they live. At first, the aims are just getting basic infrastructure and starting to build relationships. The next phase involves building out a network of people and programs that can be funded, if they don't already exist — or identifying and supporting those that already center community needs. Systems change doesn't happen right away, but residents of an ecosystem can benefit in small and big ways as the work advances.

Phases in Ecosystem Evolution

Recognizing it is not a perfectly linear path, we offer this chart from Impact Architects to illustrate where the news ecosystems featured in our case studies are in their journeys as of the end of 2022.



New Jersey



The Center for Cooperative Media Improves Access to News and Information for Underserved New Jersey Communities

In 2012, the [Center for Cooperative Media \(CCM\)](#) at Montclair State University started working to bring news organizations together across New Jersey. Leadership believed that news organizations could accomplish goals together that no individual outlet could achieve separately. This thinking was put to the test immediately when Hurricane Sandy hit New Jersey. Reporters quickly realized the power of collaborating to get information out to people in need, and they kept the teamwork going to cover hurricane-induced hurdles to voting in the 2012 election.

More than ten years later, CCM's many projects are making sure New Jersey residents get authentic news and information that meet their needs. In 2022, CCM's staff launched a Spanish-language news translation service, helping spread stories of New Jersey media outlets to wider audiences. It also introduced [Stories Invincible](#), a project that has created more nuanced coverage about Camden, New Jersey, and its people — a city often funneled into simplistic narratives around danger and poverty.

Democracy Fund investment:
\$3.2 million (2015–2022)*

Democracy Fund grantees: Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, New Jersey Local News Lab Fund

Partner funders: Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation, Independence Public Media Foundation, Victoria Foundation, Inasmuch Foundation, Knight Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Facebook Journalism Project



Meetup of New Jersey Civic Information Consortium grantees. Photo by Joe Amditis.

**This report includes only grants made through 2022. Democracy Fund is still investing in the New Jersey news ecosystem in 2023. See all of our grants in this [database](#).*

The team behind CCM focuses on getting to know and supporting people who have ideas to improve access to information for communities historically marginalized by the state’s media. It connects people who care about local news — and provides operational support and programming to develop solutions together. The Center offers a range of support to the ecosystem, such as advising new outlets through their launch, paying for them to participate in entrepreneurial boot camps, and providing them grants with national partners who trust CCM as a central connector across the ecosystem. “I look at our community impact through that lens — we’re a step removed,” CCM’s director Stefanie Murray said. “But we can see that these people would not be doing this if it weren’t for us — and what they’re doing is having a direct impact on people in the communities that they serve.”

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD

The state of New Jersey has recently allocated millions of dollars to support local journalism through the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, which partners with the Center for Cooperative Media.



Cassandra Etienne of the Center for Cooperative Media (center) leads the inaugural meeting of the NJ Black Publishers Collaborative in June 2023. Photo by Joe Amditis.

Colorado

Colorado Media Project Offers Support for Coloradans to Reflect on and Repair Local Newsrooms' Relationships With Communities of Color

In every region, local news outlets — especially those led by and serving white people or others in power, rather than community-centric media — have often harmed people more than helped them. These harms include profiting off the sale of enslaved people through advertisements and promoting segregation. In 2020, the team at the [Colorado Media Project](#) (CMP) knew it had an opportunity — and a responsibility — to respond to the 2020 racial uprisings following the murder of George Floyd and the longstanding harms it illuminated. Since its founding in 2018 CMP had become a central gathering place for conversations around improving local journalism. By building relationships and momentum, it had grown into a pooled fund shepherding millions of dollars into projects and collaborations to improve Colorado's local news.

Democracy Fund investment:

\$1.05 million (2019–2022)*

Democracy Fund grantee:

Colorado Media Project

Partner funders: Gates Family Foundation, The Colorado Health Foundation, The Colorado Trust, Inasmuch Foundation, Bohemian Foundation, Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation, Gill Foundation, Rose Community Foundation



A participant at the Colorado Media Project Summit in September 2023 adds their vote to what the Colorado local news ecosystem should focus on in the next five years.

*This report includes only grants made through 2022. Democracy Fund is still investing in the Colorado news ecosystem in 2023. See all of our grants in this [database](#).

Editor's note: One of this report's authors, Vignesh Ramachandran, is a 2023 grantee of the Colorado Media Project.

Starting in early 2021, CMP joined with Free Press and the Colorado News Collaborative to design and host convenings with [dozens of stakeholders](#) from Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and AANHPI communities to develop calls to action to ensure that local news coverage reflects, respects, and serves communities of color in Colorado. Then CMP put resources behind these recommendations, funding projects led by and serving people of color. In three years, its [Advancing Equity in Local News](#) and [Community News Network](#) programs have made 70 grants totaling nearly \$1.5 million to strengthen service to Colorado’s communities of color, non-English speaking residents, and rural residents. Grantee projects include an in-depth report chronicling one suburban newspaper’s reflection on its own inflammatory coverage of the Black Panther movement in the 1970s, internships for high school and college students coming from underrepresented groups, and an online guide to help community members connect with local reporters and to help newsrooms find diverse sources. Led by Melissa Davis, CMP continues to dedicate resources to journalism led by and serving people of color, with the goal of shifting longstanding power dynamics.

REPAIRING MEDIA HARMS

Media 2070 published a [landmark report](#) in 2020 examining the history of anti-Black harm in the U.S. media system.

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD

The Center for Cooperative Media’s [work with ethnic media in New Jersey](#) is a great example of another news ecosystem’s efforts to center communities of color.



Attendees at the Colorado Media Project Summit in September 2023 listen to lightning talks from different journalists and information providers from across the state.

North Carolina



During Extreme Weather and Other Crises, North Carolinians Can Access More Reliable, Relevant Information

In September 2018, Hurricane Florence battered North Carolina with record-setting rainfall and catastrophic flooding. Hundreds of people needed to be rescued, all roads to the city of Wilmington were deemed impassable, universities and schools closed, and speedways opened their doors for evacuees to camp. North Carolinians affected by the storm needed lots of information, urgently.

This was about a year after the [North Carolina Local News Lab Fund](#) was founded, and it was clear to local leadership that news and information about recovery efforts needed to center those most affected by the storm. “It’s indicative of the intersecting ways that race, class, and geography still keep people in North Carolina stuck sometimes,” Fund Director Lizzy Hazeltine said. The Fund collaborated with the North Carolina Community Foundation to redistribute resources pooled by local and national funders to organizations led by and serving people of color and other people historically left behind in eastern North Carolina.

Democracy Fund investment:
\$3 million (2017–2022)*

Democracy Fund grantee:
North Carolina Local News Lab Fund

Partner funders: Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, Dogwood Health Trust, BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina Foundation, Burroughs Wellcome Fund, The Prentice Foundation, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Cumberland Community Foundation, Inasmuch Foundation



Founding NCLNLF director Melanie Sill talks with participants at an ecosystem event in 2019.

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Over the past five years, the Fund has supported 54 organizations across the state with more than \$4 million. It has developed solutions to improve the accessibility of local news and information both in times of urgency and not. For example, the Fund supported the creation of a text messaging system to inform residents of crises like flooding or COVID-19 in their native language — a big improvement over the English-only email alerts of the past.

When community partners surfaced the need for internet access in the northeastern part of the state, the Fund supported an organization that had a proven plan to deploy Wi-Fi hotspots. “We believe that focusing first on North Carolina’s most marginalized communities is a way to ensure that the entire system shifts because we know race and class are core to how media systems were set up,” Hazeltine said. “It’s a core part of their market failure that this kind of philanthropy is correcting right now.”

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD

After the initial Democracy Fund investment, funders across North Carolina have stepped up to commit more than \$4 million to support local journalism and information through the North Carolina Local News Lab Fund.



North Carolina residents participate in a series of Spanish-language community listening sessions hosted by Enlace Latino NC in the eastern part of the state in 2019.

New Mexico

New Mexicans Needed More Local News, and Local Students Wanted More Journalism Opportunities. Enter New Mexico Local News Fund Fellowships

Talking with people across the fifth-largest state by area in the U.S., the leaders of the New Mexico Local News Fund heard a recurring theme: brain drain. Communities were losing journalists to larger media markets with more opportunities. If they were replaced, the new folks needed training that took time that people just didn't have. News outlets were shuttering because they didn't have staff to serve the community, and corporate owners didn't prioritize investing in a low-wealth region. Throughout New Mexico, people were struggling to find trusted, local reporting about where they lived, raised their families, and owned businesses.

But the team behind the [New Mexico Local News Fund](#) (NMLNF), a pooled fund at the Santa Fe Community Foundation that works with local and national funders to develop programs

Democracy Fund investment:
\$2.125 million (2018–2022)*

Democracy Fund grantee:
New Mexico Local News Fund

Partner funders: Thornburg Foundation, Con Alma Health Foundation, The Marshall L. and Perrine D. McCune Charitable Foundation, Inasmuch Foundation, Solutions Journalism Network



New Mexico journalists and other stakeholders talk about informing underserved audiences at the New Mexico Local News Summit in September 2023.

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based on community-identified needs, had an idea. “We found out that a lot of journalism students we talked to love New Mexico and would love to start their careers here — stay in New Mexico, give back to the place that they grew up in — but that there were almost no entry-level jobs at that time,” said Rashad Mahmood, the Fund’s executive director. So NMLNF worked with the University of New Mexico’s Communication & Journalism Department to place four fellows per year in newsrooms around the state.

In contrast to national programs that might partially fund early-career opportunities at mid- or large-sized newsrooms, Mahmood wanted NMLNF’s program to be equitable by fully funding positions for small newsrooms around the state, too. Since the fellowship began, the initiative has grown to fund seven fellows in 2023. Over two-thirds are people of color — an important step for a state with a majority-minority population. And it’s working: Of the first 16 fellows, 12 are now working full time in journalism in New Mexico, producing reporting that responds to community members’ needs. In 2023, the state of New Mexico committed \$125,000 to almost double the size of the program. This means even more people have access to quality news reported by journalists from their communities for years to come.

BUILDING THE NEW MEXICO LOCAL NEWS FUND

Read more about the process of building NMLNF in this [three-part series](#) by founder Sarah Gustavus Lim.

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD

State-funded journalism fellowship programs are [also taking off](#) in California and Washington state.



Mia Casas, who is learning and practicing journalism as part of the partnership between the New Mexico Local News Fund and the University of New Mexico, reports on a demonstration for KUNM. Photo by Megan Kamerick.



Chicago

The Chicago Independent Media Alliance's Collective Fundraising Efforts Keep the Lights on for Local Newsrooms That Serve the City's Most Marginalized

With dozens of local news innovators, funders, other stakeholders, and experiments, Chicago has been called “[America’s news lab](#).” Local organizations including City Bureau have built transformative infrastructure to serve communities with projects like its Documenters Network, which trains and pays people to attend public meetings and create a more accessible public record. Funders including the Field Foundation have stepped up to refocus resources on communities with the highest need, through Field’s illuminating and groundbreaking analysis of divestment in communities of color leading to poverty and trauma. New ideas in journalism and resources are being infused across Chicago’s local news ecosystem, leading to more accessible information for all.

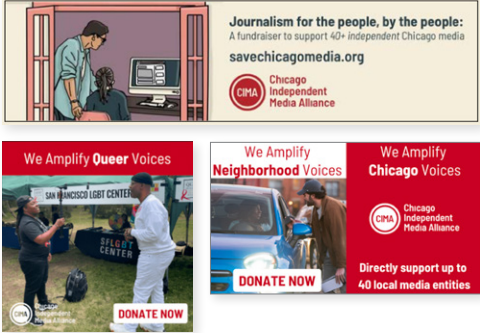
In 2019, leaders in the region’s independent news scene came together to surface the needs of local outlets, especially those led by and serving marginalized groups, in a more united way. To build power across the city among the local journalists and with the people they aimed to serve, they created the [Chicago Independent Media Alliance](#) (CIMA). Months later, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, CIMA members raised the need for a joint fundraiser to rally support for local newsrooms and help them continue publishing information that Chicagoans needed.

CIMA’s first collective fundraising effort, in May 2020, brought in more than \$160,000, including \$60,000 in matching funds from local foundations. This funding helped keep newsrooms afloat and serving their communities. In the past three years, CIMA’s annual fundraisers have raised more than \$500,000 for local, independent newsrooms, from community members who trust them. CIMA’s team surveyed members and found the impact of the joint fundraising was palpable. “Without CIMA we would not have been able to afford the necessary subscriptions to publish our content for the year,” one newsroom leader reported. “CIMA membership has been nothing short of transformative,” another outlet’s staff person

Democracy Fund investment:
\$1.7 million (2017–2022)*

Democracy Fund grantees: Chicago Independent Media Alliance, City Bureau, The Field Foundation’s Media & Storytelling portfolio

Partner funders: The Field Foundation of Illinois, The Chicago Community Trust, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Robert R. McCormick Foundation, The Driehaus Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Reva and David Logan Foundation, and others



CIMA used various graphics highlighting its work during fundraising campaigns in 2020 and 2022.

**This report includes only grants made through 2022. Democracy Fund is still investing in the Chicago news ecosystem in 2023. See all of our grants in this [database](#).*

said. “The money and awareness we raised in the two joint fundraisers has kept us afloat, allowed us to launch a new website, and to expand our coverage.”

The dozens of CIMA members serve thousands of Chicagoans, across languages and neighborhoods, with reporting on elected officials, schools, LGBTQ+ rights and events, COVID-19, and more. Thanks to CIMA’s power-building work, more people have more access to news they trust and see themselves reflected in — and the journalists doing the work have a better chance of “keep[ing] the lights on,” as one member put it.

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD

Colorado’s [#newsCOnneeds matching campaign](#) has also shown great success.



The Chicago Reader led the creation of the Chicago Independent Media Alliance and its early fundraisers while converting its own structure to a nonprofit model. Photo by Bryan Hayes.

Oklahoma

How the Oklahoma Media Center Helped Its Neighbors Understand a Momentous Supreme Court Case

In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court shocked many people across the United States with *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. This decision, which many considered a major win for Native American rights, ruled that much of eastern Oklahoma legally belongs to Native American tribes, and therefore the prosecution of crimes on those lands must be handled by tribal courts. In Oklahoma, home to 39 tribal nations, the ruling marked a huge moment. It led to a flood of appeals from inmates seeking to overturn their convictions and had many other implications, including changing the way the state could regulate coal mines on native land. Oklahomans — both journalists and the community members they aimed to serve — needed to have an accurate understanding of the full picture.

Democracy Fund investment:
\$25,000 (2020–2022)*

Democracy Fund grantee:
Oklahoma Media Center

Partner funders: Inasmuch Foundation, Kirkpatrick Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, Indigenous Journalists Association, Local Media Foundation



Fifty journalists from 30 media outlets in Oklahoma attend a training on trust in journalism led by Joy Mayer of Trusting News, held at the University of Oklahoma in fall 2023.

**This report includes only grants made through 2022. Democracy Fund is still investing in the Oklahoma news ecosystem in 2023. See all of our grants in this [database](#).*

At the time, Rob Collins had just begun leading the newly formed [Oklahoma Media Center](#) (OMC), launched by the Inasmuch Foundation at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. OMC started as a hub for collaboration among Oklahoma journalists, with 25 of the state’s newsrooms as founding members. Collins immediately saw the value in starting up a collaboration among local journalists, guided by training from the Indigenous Journalists Association (then called the Native American Journalists Association), to help OMC members better cover an underreported area. “We learned a ton on historical context, tribal landscape, importance of free press and how not to cover that subject matter in a biased way,” said Collins. The collaborative project spurred [more than 450 stories](#) on the McGirt ruling.

GOOD IDEAS SPREAD

In Philadelphia over the past five years, Resolve Philly has led a [local reporting collaborative](#) that provides solutions-oriented reporting on poverty and economic mobility.

This is one step in a longer journey for Oklahoma’s local news ecosystem: “I’m a fifth-generation Oklahoma resident, and I understand the stakes having been a local journalist. You can see where the industry is and how we’re kind of at a dangerous tipping point,” Collins said. “Running collaboratives is like herding cats: You have to find that kind of coalition of the willing. People have to quit thinking about ‘me’ and start thinking about ‘we.’” Today, OMC is working with local researchers to study where Oklahomans get their local news, why they believe or trust information, and what would make them financially support local journalism. It provides training, 1:1 coaching, and stipends to support solutions led by newsrooms that build on the [research](#).



Oklahoma Media Center collaborators.

A Sustainable Way Forward for Local News

Information is power. No matter who we are or where we live, we deserve to have the facts we need to stay safe and healthy and to participate fully in our communities, economies, and democracy. For more than five years, Democracy Fund's local news ecosystem grantees have helped fuel a transformation in journalism to bring this vision to life.

"Everybody wants communities to thrive and be healthy," North Carolina Local News Lab Fund Director Lizzy Hazeltine said. "When that's your starting point, you can have different on-ramps to news and information grantmaking for players who want to participate in good faith. There are so many different ways that you can invite people to invest together."

In ten years, if we are successful, Democracy Fund envisions people all across America exercising their power — making decisions for their families, mobilizing their neighbors and friends, and organizing in their communities — fueled by local reporting from journalists they know who respond to their needs and reflect their lived experiences.

That's why over the next five years, we are doubling down, investing millions of dollars in these existing local news ecosystems and emerging hubs. In 2023, we have committed \$4.3 million over the next three years to the ecosystems featured here, in addition to new investments in other regions. We need more vibrant ecosystems and equitable networks across the network that reimagine news and information as civic infrastructure, and we need more partners in the effort.

Stand Up for Your Local News Ecosystem

Are you interested in joining an existing ecosystem funding effort, or exploring starting a new one? We'd love to talk. Please reach out to Democracy Fund's local news ecosystem leads: Teresa Gorman ([tgorman \[at\] democracyfund.org](mailto:tgorman@democracyfund.org)) and Christine Schmidt ([cschmidt \[at\] democracyfund.org](mailto:cschmidt@democracyfund.org)).

One resource you may find helpful is this [guide](#) that walks through the steps of assessing an existing ecosystem and getting started. But nothing beats a conversation, so please do reach out. We're learning new things from our partners across the country every day, and we'd love to hear about your experiences and interests.

Thank you to our partners over the years who have helped us assemble and understand the lessons shared in this report: ORS Impact, Impact Architects, Fiona Morgan, Sarah Gustavus Lim, Sheila Solomon, Andrea Hart, Melanie Sill, Jason Alcorn, Mike Marcotte, Tran Ha, and all of the grantees and partner funders listed in this report. Special thanks to Vignesh Ramachandran for research and writing support.

"That's why over the next five years, we are doubling down, investing millions of dollars in these existing local news ecosystems and emerging hubs."



Democracy Fund
1200 17th St. NW, Ste. 300
Washington, D.C. 20036

[DEMOCRACYFUND.ORG](https://democracyfund.org)  [@DEMOCRACYFUND](https://twitter.com/DEMOCRACYFUND)

Cover images, left to right: 1. 2023 Collaborative Journalism Summit. Photo by Joe Amditis and William Allen-DuPraw. 2. Adobe Stock. 3. Mia Casas, who is learning and practicing journalism as part of the partnership between the New Mexico Local News Fund and the University of New Mexico, reports on a demonstration for KUNM. Photo by Megan Kamerick. 4. Adobe Stock. 5. 2022–2023 fellow Jeanette Dedios interviews state Rep. Derrick Lente (D-Sandia Pueblo) for KUNM-News. Photo by Gwyneth Doland.