



Sustainable Local Journalism in New Mexico: Community Perspectives

November 2019



NEW MEXICO FIRST
People. Ideas. Progress.



**New Mexico
Local News
Fund**

Convener: New Mexico Local News Fund

Participating Communities:

Los Lunas Rotary Club- Los Lunas, NM

Mesilla Valley Rotary Club- Las Cruces, NM

Native Entrepreneurs in Residence- Albuquerque, NM

Portales Rotary Club- Portales, NM

Taos Entrepreneur Network- Taos, NM

Taos Rotary Club- Taos, NM

Peralta, Belen, and Los Lunas Ad Hoc- Valencia County, NM

Researcher: New Mexico First

Facilitator and Lead Author: Lilly B. Irvin-Vitela, MCRP

New Mexico First

P. O. Box 56549

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87187

Phone: 505-225-2140

Website: www.nmfirst.org

Copyright 2019

New Mexico First typically grants permission to reproduce all or part of this document for educational or public policy purposes. Contact us for reproduction authorization.



NEW MEXICO FIRST

People. Ideas. Progress.

Contents

Sustainable Local Journalism in New Mexico: Community Perspectives	1
Participating Communities:.....	i
Foreword	iii
Purpose of this Report	iii
About New Mexico First.....	iii
About The New Mexico Local News Fund.....	iv
Contributors and Reviewers	iv
The New Mexico First Team.....	v
Questions Used in the Focus Group Process	vi
Introduction	vii
Chapter 1	8
The Importance of Local News	8
A. Community Involvement and Civic Life.....	8
B. Community Connections and a Sense of Place	9
C. Transparency and Good Government.....	11
D. Sustaining Democracy	12
Qualities of a Trusted & Reliable News Source	14
A. Distinguish between Fact and Opinion	14
B. Include Multiple Voices and Perspectives.....	15
C. Aim for the Highest Standards of Accuracy	16
D. Build and Maintain a Credible Reputation.....	18
E. Report in a Manner that is Culturally and Locally Relevant.....	19
Chapter 3	20
Valued Coverage	20
A. Nested Perspectives: Local, State, Regional, National, and International.....	20
B. Human Interest	22
C. Opportunities to Connect.....	22
D. Investigative Journalism.....	23
E. Local Issues.....	24
G. History	25
Chapter 4	27
Local Roles in Sustaining Local News	27
A. Build a Relationship with Local Media	27
B. Subscribe, Advertise, and Support Advertisers.....	28
C. Consume News Ethically	28
D. Engage Youth.....	29
E. Explore Business Models.....	30
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	33

Foreword

Purpose of this Report

This background report builds a rationale for the importance of vibrant local journalism to community well-being. By harvesting the wisdom of civically engaged leaders across New Mexico communities, this report acknowledges the need for accurate and relevant sources of information. Credible information from trustworthy sources allows community members to make informed decisions for their families, businesses, and civic institutions; engage in community-building efforts; and participate in the democratic process. As our world becomes increasingly complex, the value of local perspectives to inform community life, policy, and a sense of place is increasingly important.

The staff and board of New Mexico First believe that effective deliberations require a sound foundation in accurate information, community knowledge, and effective tools to examine opportunities and challenges facing communities. Funding and thought leadership from the New Mexico Local News Fund has provided New Mexico First with capacity to explore questions, concerns, and opportunities to strengthen local journalism in New Mexico. This effort is building on New Mexico First's ongoing commitment to good government. The role of the Fourth Estate in good government is time-honored and as relevant today as at the birth of our democracy. This working principle was amplified in the lively community conversations that emerged in our focus groups statewide.

The focus groups are part of an ongoing body of work that New Mexico has been committed to advancing to sustain community assets and strengthen New Mexico. In March 2018, New Mexico First published a report entitled, *“Advancing Sustainable, Reliable Journalism in New Mexico.”* In the Spring of 2019, New Mexico First hosted a public forum on sustainable journalism. This report is based on focus groups held in five communities across New Mexico, a few guided interviews with key informants, and research about emerging national strategies to protect and sustain local journalism.

Note: There are few right or wrong answers to any public policy question, and the problems and opportunities around our state's journalism and media capacity are complex. As a result, no brief explanation of the situation – including this report – can cover all information and opinions available. The people, media professionals, policymakers and government experts of New Mexico will lend their knowledge and expertise to the question of how to strengthen journalism in New Mexico.

About New Mexico First

A statewide public policy organization committed to civic engagement, **New Mexico First** involves people in critical issues facing their state and communities. The nonpartisan, nonprofit group produces comprehensive policy reports – primarily on good governance, natural resources, education, health and the economy. These analyses inform policy discussions, legislative options and often student and community learning. These documents also provide

the foundation for New Mexico First's unique town halls and forums that convene people to develop proposals to improving the state. The reports are available at nmfirst.org. Our state's two U.S. Senators – Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich – serve as New Mexico First's honorary co-chairs. The organization was co-founded in 1986 by retired U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici.

About The New Mexico Local News Fund

The New Mexico Local News Fund at the Santa Fe Community Foundation is a collaborative fund that supports people and organizations building a more connected, collaborative and sustainable local news and information ecosystem.

Contributors and Reviewers

Steve Fuhlendorf, Executive Director of the Taos Entrepreneurial Network and member of the Taos Rotary, was instrumental in our focus group convenings in Taos, NM. More than 30 residents of Taos, NM participated in one or more focus group convening in the community. Participants included life-long residents of Taos as well as people new to the community. There were people of diverse ages, races/ethnicities, genders and professional backgrounds. There were people with experience working in media and journalism at radio stations, newspapers, other print and on-line publications, and in television. There were people with experience in health, real estate, community development, education, government, and small to large businesses. Participants shared an interest in community life, local journalism, and the importance of civic engagement. The local publisher also attended one of the focus groups.

Karl Terry, Executive Director of the Roosevelt County Chamber of Commerce and Portales Rotarian, and Noelle Bartl, Associate Vice President for Advancement at Eastern New Mexico University, Executive Director of the ENMU Foundation, and President of the Portales Rotary, provided leadership and hosted a strong and engaged focus group in Portales. There were 23 adults ranging across the career lifespan from emerging leaders to seasoned professionals and retirees. A former journalist and editor, a university journalism professor, a local publisher, as well as community leaders with experience outside of the news business attended.

Andrea Dresser, member of Las Cruces Mesilla Valley Rotary International, was key to coordinating a successful early morning focus group with more than a dozen community leaders from diverse personal and professional backgrounds. Local health and human service providers, for profit and not for profit business leaders, high school and university educators, and entrepreneurs participated. There were people with professional experience in the news industry and people who read, watch, and listen to the news daily.

Jake Foreman, Program Manager at New Mexico Community Capital, recruited six members of the Native Entrepreneurs in Residence Program for a thoughtful and considered focus group about the meaning of news, sustainable local journalism, and cultural practices for sharing news. Participants were from Pueblos, Tribes, and Bands from New Mexico and across the United States. All participants were entrepreneurs, and many shared other experiences such as academic and non-profit program management.

Sammy Lopez, Executive Director of the New Mexico Press Association and Valencia County resident, was key in supporting the convening of a focus group in Valencia County which included six participants. Participants included people with significant experience in journalism, as well as people with diverse professional experience ranging from information technology and computer programming, to the travel industry, health, and research.

Judge John Chavez, President of the Los Lunas Rotary, arranged an opportunity for members to discuss the importance of local journalism and qualities of trusted media with New Mexico First. 13 community members participated and included current and retired educators, business leaders, elected officials, and a religious leader.

By working primarily with civic organizations and self-organizing community groups, this focus group research intentionally raised the voices of people who are leaders in their local communities and beyond. All the focus groups involved people who are actively involved in creating and participating in community life. Service and volunteerism were common characteristics of participants. People disclosed reading the paper, watching the news, and listening to radio and podcasts at higher rates than the general public. The groups were politically diverse. While no one was asked to disclose their political perspectives, several people disclosed their political ideology throughout the course of the focus groups. There were people who self-described as Libertarians, conservatives, liberals, Republicans, Democrats, Independents, Socialists, progressives, and not political.

A special thanks to The New Mexico Foundation for Open Government (NMFOG), for honoring Senator Gregg Fulfer, a resident of Jal, New Mexico and co-owner of the Jal Record. Senator Fulfer won a Dixon Award for his efforts to promote open government. In his acceptance speech he spoke eloquently about the importance of local journalism in fair and effective governance. Senator Fulfer graciously agreed to an interview, quotes from which are included in this report.

Report reviewers include Sarah Gustavus and Rashad Mahmood of the New Mexico Local News Fund.

We are grateful for the shared commitment to New Mexico's future.

The New Mexico First Team

This New Mexico First report was prepared by Lilly Irvin-Vitela, MCRP, Sharon Berman, MA, Gabrielle Ontiveros, BS, and Wendy Wintermute, PhD. Lilly Irvin-Vitela was the lead researcher, focus group facilitator, and author. The New Mexico First team reached out to communities to help organize focus groups with the assistance of local leaders. Staff recorded and transcribed hours of conversations, and team members reviewed the report to ensure that the voices of community leaders in New Mexico were accurately represented.

Questions Used in the Focus Group Process

1. What is happening in your local press that is positive and strong?
2. How is local news part of the health of your community?
3. What makes you worry about local journalism in your community?
4. What qualities do you look for in local journalism that you trust?
5. How do you support local media right now in your community?
6. How is local news different than news from statewide or national news?
7. What things do you want to see covered in your local news outlets?
8. What challenges do you think news organizations are facing in your community?
9. For business owners or folks who might advertise with local media, how would you describe your role as an advertiser? Follow up: how could your role be different and better support local media?
10. How do you see your role as a subscriber or member of local news? Follow up: What do you think your role could be in order to better support local media?
11. If you were to imagine a new way of supporting local media in your community, what might that look like? (examples: trade of skills like graphic design, event planning, convening potential sources, etc.)
12. Advertising is one way that some local news outlets are currently raising revenue. How can local communities support advertising in local media in new ways?
13. What kind of local content do you think is most important for your local media to cover? Follow up: How could you ensure local media outlets have the resources they need to cover that?
14. What can local communities do to ensure that they are getting news that is locally relevant?
15. Is there a perspective you hoped to share today that you didn't have an opportunity to express?

Where Do We Get Our Information?

Throughout this document, the primary data source is the voices of New Mexicans. We draw from focus group narratives that were facilitated by Lilly Irvin-Vitela, New Mexico First President and Executive Director. Additionally, this report draws from previously published reports, newspaper and journal articles, first-hand interviews and online resources. All direct quotes are from focus groups or interviews conducted for this report unless otherwise noted. We know that policymakers, researchers and students use our reports, so we provide the details you need to learn more and answer your questions. Footnotes provide short references and full citations are in the Works Cited section.

Introduction

Villages, small towns, and cities are trying to protect and preserve local media as an important community asset. National headlines lament challenges to local news, demonstrating a concerning pattern that resonates in New Mexico and beyond. In October 2019, in Vivian Wang’s article, “Local News Is Dying. New York May Try to Pass a Law to Save It,” she describes a “first-in-the nation bill” that legislators in New York are proposing to “force cable companies to offer independent local news.”¹ Legislators in New York are advocating for new requirements which would at a minimum require local news programming with coverage of “news, weather, and public affairs programming.”² This legislation builds on policy efforts at the federal level. The article notes that “Federal regulators have also long set regulations for broadcast networks, including an expectation that they promote a diversity of viewpoints, and foster public understanding of important problems and issues facing their local communities.”³ Wang goes on to explain that this proposed legislation is a “concrete example of shifting attitudes toward corporate responsibility” as stakeholders “acknowledge the need for firms to think not only of profits but also of their impact on society.”⁴ In Fall 2019 focus groups that were facilitated by New Mexico First, participants identified areas of shared responsibility among communities and news media to sustain local journalism.

April Simpson’s October 2019 article, “As Local News Outlets Shutter, Rural America Suffers Most,”⁵ also resonates with what New Mexico leaders discussed in recent focus groups. The article explores the challenges people experience when they live in a “news desert.” While accustomed to deserts in New Mexico, adapting to news deserts and civic engagement deserts creates threats to our sense of community, connections, and democracy. “A vibrant free press, protected from government interference by the First Amendment, can hold the powerful to account and empower readers to make informed decisions on major issues.”⁶ As local news declines and the complexity of decision-making expands in our globalized world, communities are looking for solutions.

The focus groups facilitated by New Mexico First invited community leaders in business, academia, media, faith communities, and civic life to explore the importance of local media, identify the qualities of local media that they want to advance, prioritize the kind of coverage that communities need and want, and consider strategies to sustain reliable local journalism.

¹ Wang, V. (2019, September). *Local News is Dying. New York May Try to Pass a Law to Save It*. Retrieved from The New York Times: www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/nyregion/verizon-news-cable-ny.html

² (Wang, 2019)

³ (Wang, 2019)

⁴ (Wang, 2019)

⁵ Simpson, A. (2019, October 21). *As Local News Outlets Shutter, Rural America Suffers Most*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2019/10/21/as-local-news-outlets-shutter-rural-america-suffers-most>

⁶ (Simpson, 2019)

The Importance of Local News

Informing Community, Connections, & Decision-making



Participants across five New Mexico communities participated in six focus groups in Fall 2019. They demonstrated a strong personal relationship with journalism. Facilitated focus group conversations tapped into core values, world views, our diverse and shared understandings of home town, nation and community. Several of the framing questions in the focus groups invited participants to explain and describe why local news is important to them

personally and why they think it is important in our respective communities. Four centering themes emerged. 1) Local news is an important tool for mobilizing and sustaining community involvement and civic life. 2) Local news facilitates community connections and creates and reflects a sense of place and community. 3) Local journalism is important because of its role as the Fourth Estate to be a vehicle for transparency and hold a standard for open government. 4) Reliable local journalism is an essential ingredient in a healthy democracy. This chapter of the focus group outcomes report raises the voices of participants across New Mexico on issues related to the importance of local news in informing communities, strengthening community connections, informing decision-making, and practicing democracy.

A. Community Involvement and Civic Life

By reaching out to local leaders across New Mexico, the New Mexico First research team was able to learn from people with a strong track record of civic engagement. These business and community leaders participate routinely in civic organizations and events in a voluntary capacity. By virtue of their recruitment into the focus groups, they are people who lead and serve to strengthen community. It is no surprise that they saw sustainable local journalism as an important contribution to civic life and tool for advancing community involvement. Leaders were also able to identify concerns about the impacts to civic life when local journalism is absent.

Valuable Contributions

- “One of the things I love about eastern NM news is the fact that it is a conduit for the schedule and times and nature of everything, events occurring in Clovis, Portales, and sometimes Tucumcari and Fort Sumner. I read about events that are open to the public. I use it to determine what I want to be involved in. I find it invaluable.” ~Resident- Portales, NM

- “Those of us who want to perpetuate the vision of Portales know how important local news is. Well before WWI, early 20th century, we had local news. It’s such an essential part of the character of the community fabric... a character-building institution. Those of us who want to preserve Portales as an entity as the splendid place it is should support the newspaper.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “In terms of what’s working, KUNM, Native America Calling, and Green Fire Times. They cover Native communities, health, our local economies, and tell our stories.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “From an economic develop standpoint, one of the things that keeps people in community is quality of life. People may go off, have a job, then decide to come back home because there was something there that attracted them. Newspapers are one more thing that can get you involved, make you a part of the community. It’s a positive thing.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Community radio stations and a local paper are amazing assets to share information.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Local media lets people know what we’re doing, like Clothes for Kids.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM

Concerns

- “When there are shrinking media outlets, that means there are shrinking perspectives, and fewer voices in community.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Businesses look at local media to decide to set up in a community. If there’s not much going on, it’s negative. Or if there is little investment, it might send the message to do business somewhere else.” ~Resident- Portales, New Mexico
- “In New Mexico, non-local papers have very little local news, or even local weather forecasts.” ~Resident- Taos, New Mexico
- “You get a different perspective when you’re getting your news from Colorado or Texas. How do you know what’s important in your community?” ~Resident- Taos, New Mexico

B. Community Connections and a Sense of Place



Sim Van der Ryn, an American architect, researcher, and educator, once wrote, “Without local knowledge, places erode.”⁷ While he was writing about physical and social ecology, this understanding speaks to the relationship between communities and local journalism. Sharing information about community relationships, happenings, and history are part of how people experience a connected sense of place. Focus group participants across communities described daily or at least frequent

⁷ Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan. *Ecological Design*. Island Press. 1995.

personal rituals of accessing and sharing news as they develop their own working understanding of the world. They also described the complex process of processing information for themselves and others. People regularly reflected together about the importance of accessing and understanding information to make personal, community, and political decisions from issues ranging from work and home to their neighborhood, hometown, and the larger nation and world. Appreciation was expressed in communities where participants were able to use local news to stay informed and engaged. People who did not have regular access to local news described efforts to try to navigate communities and build an understanding of the people, places, and opportunities to connect to others around them. Participants also expressed concern about the viability of a community that does not have access to local news. In the following quotes from focus group participants, some of the most meaningful aspects of local news are highlighted.

- “A newspaper should be a reflection of its community. If you read the Espanola Rio Grande Sun, it’s a reflection of Espanola. If you look at the Taos paper, it’s very different than the Espanola paper. The Las Vegas paper is different too.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “There is opportunity in local news to provide more than chatter and gossip.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “I always appreciate Betty Williamson’s articles in The Eastern New Mexico News. It’s like having a conversation with your neighbor.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- Local news is important to get to know people. Otherwise, you’re stuck in your house instead of having community.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “Local media is important to draw value back to the community. If you see value in other communities outside of yours, you eventually become part of theirs, move to that community. If your children grow up on media over the state line, they are attracted to that and after school they may go there.” ~ Resident- Portales, NM
- “Youth are leaving the community; local news provides them with visibility and a sense of belonging.” ~Resident, Taos-NM
- “Local news is important in a tactical sense for safety and organization. Knowing what’s happening, or about traffic and roads.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “Community journalism that draws upon local resources, people and expertise, can provide rich and robust reporting on local sports, arts, etc.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- Some radio stations offer free PSAs, though one of our local radio stations is loathe to offer PSAs. It’s a missed opportunity. We have lots of great work being done by local nonprofits.” ~Resident- Taos, NM.
- “Coverage of *The Best of Taos*, *Citizen of the Year*, *Unsung Hero*, and my daughter’s ballet recital are important parts of celebrating a community and focusing on news that brings people together.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Places like Angel Fire and Raton are asking for a paper. Our local paper is trying to provide coverage but financially papers there would be hard to sustain.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Local news should be a community service and cover things like road closures, changes to city policy, school events, and community happenings.” ~Resident, Las Cruces, NM

- “We always want to be aware of our surroundings. We need people. We went to Senior Centers to begin with to sign-up. We felt line dancing would help us connect, so we joined line dancing.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM
- “I do enough with Albuquerque businesses that I like to know what is happening. More often, someone in the news is someone I work with.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “Local news is the closest news to where you are. It’s what impacts you most.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM
- “Local news can contribute to a sense of community or a sense of divisiveness.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM

C. Transparency and Good Government



The Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics speaks to the importance of transparency in government. They identify the ethical obligation of journalists to, “Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. Seek to ensure that the public’s business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.”⁸ They can play a role in how political issues are understood and acted upon. They inform people about would-be candidates and sitting and past elected and appointed officials. Media can and often does exert influence in public policy. Sometimes by framing and informing decisions. Sometimes by acting as the conscience of decision makers who have been entrusted with decisions impacting community, state, national, and world-wide issues.

As one resident of Taos, New Mexico noted, “If you don’t want it on the front page, don’t do it. Local news reinforces local accountability.”

- “We still have journalism that is holding government accountable. I fear it’s slipping in some places. We still have that to some degree here in our local journalism.” ~ Resident- Portales, NM
- “Media is important to resist the untruthful narratives about Native Americans. We can use it to talk about, name, and make visible issues, like the lack of comprehensive k-12 education about Native American people.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Local news covers local government.” ~ Resident- Los Lunas, NM
- “Media is the watchdog of government. Newspapers take that seriously. You don’t see that on social media. They’re not down at the courthouse...only newspapers and television stations. Most radio stations don’t have newsrooms anymore—they read the paper on air. Newspapers must survive for us to have a democracy. We must continue to have a fourth estate. I think they’re going to continue to be a factor in communities.” ~Resident- Belen, NM

⁸ Society of Professional Journalists. Retrieved from <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

D. Sustaining Democracy

Not only is local journalism a check and balance on policy makers in a democracy, a reliable independent press is also a vehicle for democracy and justice. Journalism can raise awareness and understanding about issues that impact our personal and community lives. The press can help find information about candidates, ballot initiatives, and polling places. Local news can also shine a light on how governing bodies are fulfilling the public trust and act as a remedy when that trust is abused. Most participants in the focus group lived in small communities, and the need for local news to sustain a democracy was a resounding theme.

- “Without local news, no democracy has or will survive.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “News about local politics is huge. Local politics is where we have a chance to make an impact still. We can know what local officials are doing.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “I’m from New Mexico and I was away for a while. When I returned, I was alarmed and perplexed. We’ve always had a tradition in NM of closely following politics. I see our communities are disconnected. We don’t get connected until something is in your face, going wrong. Then we get negative about it.
- Maybe that’s not just local. But local media can help with that. There’s disconnect and a lack of training and seasoning on staff. We have a fairly well-connected person on the morning show on the radio who can get to the point on statewide issues. But reporters by-and-large don’t understand NM politics. Oftentimes, they’re not from here and don’t get the significance and nuances that used to be inherent in the reporting back 20-30 years ago.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Local news helps us keep up with local issues and make informed decisions; it creates an educated electorate.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “It was time to vote in Los Lunas. We always vote. We go in and they give us a sample ballot. We went home, researched everyone and everything. We went back to vote. They gave us the wrong sample ballot! I was so furious. On Next Door social media, everyone was asking where to go vote. Without local news, it’s hard.” ~Resident, Los Lunas, NM
- “Local news helps educate the next generation. Take the *Newspapers in Education* program where teachers use the Taos News and connect it to the curriculum.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- Local news creates community and preserves democracy on a local, regional, and national level. It’s critical. Without it, we lose everything.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Local news is less influenced by national trends that are being messaged by one partisan perspective or another.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Media literacy is important and educates people going to the polls. With ranked choice voting, the media should explain this is how it works, not create fear.” ~Resident- Las Cruces NM

Local News is Vital to Democracy

The Jal Record has been an advocate for open government and transparent decision making. Locally, this commitment resulted in uncovering a \$1.3million dollar loss due to how water credits were administered. When asked about the role the Jal Record played in bringing this issue to light over the course of a two-year effort, the owner of the Jal Record, lifetime resident Gregg Fulfer stated, “The paper served its function. A local paper is really needed to shed light on what government is doing. Without a local newspaper, you have world-wide and statewide news, but not the local and it’s so important.”

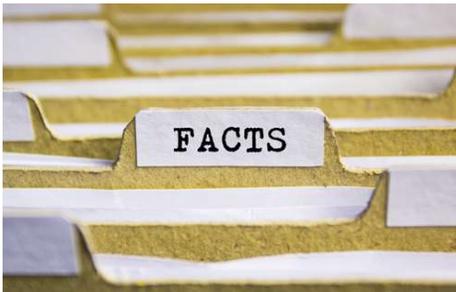
Senator Fulfer also said a local paper is important because that’s how communities “know what’s happening locally and in the community. From City Council and school board meetings which are important to what’s happening in sports activity and people reading about their kids, local news is important.”

(Phone Interview October 2019, Gregg Fulfer with Lilly Irvin-Vitela. See also Peters, (2016)

Qualities of a Trusted & Reliable News Source

Credibility is Increasingly Difficult to Maintain

Participants in the focus group conversations were asked to describe the qualities needed by local journalists to earn trust and be considered a reliable news source. Five aptitudes were repeatedly identified within and across communities:



- 1) the ability to share information in which fact and opinion are clearly distinguished;
- 2) inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives in coverage;
- 3) the capacity to deliver timely and accurate information;
- 4) the ability to build and maintain a credible reputation;
- 5) the skill to identify and report on issues that are culturally and locally relevant.

A. Distinguish between Fact and Opinion

Many focus group participants passionately expressed their frustrations about news that is slanted toward specific political views. The idea that if people do not like the news, they can change the TV channels, radio station, website, pod cast, etc., and find a perspective that is more aligned with their own was deeply problematic to most. Questions about what is factually accurate, standards of truthfulness, and how to make meaning with competing information were raised. One participant acknowledged that she too wants to listen to news that is aligned with her own views, and that it's "just the way it is. There's nothing we can do about it." Others used words like "propaganda" and "misinformation" to describe their perceptions about the veracity of news sources. Others analyzed this struggle for objectivity as part of the problem. "People distrust journalism because it is trying to claim to be objective. It's impossible to be objective. There are always points of view."

Mostly, people found the idea that someone would manipulate the media audience's thinking distasteful and offensive. One participant acknowledged that watching the news, "pisses him off."

Participants had conflicting perspectives on whether the line between fact and opinion was especially blurred now, or if it has always been and people just have a greater awareness now because there are so many sources of information.



“People distrust journalism because it is trying to claim it is objective. It’s impossible to be objective. There are always points of view.”

~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence

- “I’m relatively new here, one-and-a-half years. From my standpoint, in our local news opinion is separated from what the news is. You can get the news without a slant.” ~Resident-Portales, NM
- “No matter the issues, there are opportunities to sway public opinion. What happened to the line between facts and opinion? In

the past, knowing the reporter’s opinion was unclear. It was up to people to form their own opinions. The line is blurred.” ~Resident- Taos, NM

- “I’m interested in what is accurate and factual versus opinion and editorial.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “It’s important to know what news versus entertainment is.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “Fact-based reporting is important—distinguishing fact from falsehood. When our kids were in school and teachers gave students articles from The Onion, kids couldn’t distinguish between fact and parody. As an informed reader, I need to be able to make sense of it. I need to be able to look into the issue in different places. Some places have agendas, or just put out propaganda. Some places are laissez-faire about facts.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “If there is something I like, I will investigate. I look at different forums, TV, radio, church. If they all go together, okay. If not, I get concerned.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “Lack of access to unbiased reporting is the biggest challenge. Growing up, the journalist would give two sides. I see more and more local journalists following a national trend to only report one side. I want to know the facts. Even if it’s slanted toward my opinion, that’s not acceptable. I want to know the facts.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Readers need to have metacognitive understanding. View objectivity critically and raise voices to deepen understanding.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM

B. Include Multiple Voices and Perspectives

Participants in focus groups across communities explained that a practice that makes a news source more trustworthy is the ability to include multiple perspectives. People described their appreciation for articles that demonstrated the reporter’s ability to identify and hear from people with a variety of perspectives on an issue. People wanted to be left to make up their own minds rather than feel like the reporter’s agenda was shaping the content. In addition, for communities who have been stereotyped by journalists throughout history, multiple diverse perspectives decrease the likelihood that the narrative will be one-dimensional and inaccurate. The issue of stereotypes and inaccurate depictions was a refrain when dissecting the dominant narrative about the experiences of indigenous people. One participant spoke pointedly about the importance of recognizing and lifting up dissenting voices. Another participant talked about

not seeing herself in the news and choosing as she's gotten older to intentionally choose news sources that don't erase her. She doesn't want to read articles in which stories about women are only relevant in relationship to men.

- “Print and radio are like the entry point to a house. They introduce you to what’s relevant. Then it’s important to understand diverse perspectives and go deeper.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Talk radio and call-in shows can be good, like Native America Calling. This means making news is a two-way street. We don’t have this kind of information sharing as much on local radio.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “It’s important (for journalists) to tap all sources in the community and go to all of the stakeholders involved in an issue so that your community is aware and can form their own opinions.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Radio and print media provide wider representation of community voices. On radio, people can get on the air and take more time. There are more interviews with local folks.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Native people understand that the cultural practices around news sharing are different. In Native American Pueblos and Nations. Outside news may be limited or of limited relevance.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Ask the community to be the eyes and ears to inform journalists.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “Some of the shifts in creating and publishing content mean that news is already dated once it gets on-line. As newsrooms empty, there are fewer reporters in the field, coverage is watered down. If the public is being called to be engaged and involved in reporting and sharing news rather than consuming ideas, who fact checks? Who determines is it true?” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “If I’m following a story, I read 4-5 versions. While we have information at our finger tips, quality is up for grabs. Media literacy is important.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “If people are not educated about candidates and processes, that suppresses the vote.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “Money is driving lack of perspective and programming with local and regional news.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve tended toward feminist news sources. The other sources seem misogynistic. Since we’re in a time when we have so much access to so many news sources, I’m going to go toward things that resonate with my experiences and pay attention to how they’re positioned.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM

C. Aim for the Highest Standards of Accuracy

Community leaders’ capacity for complexity in the news media they consume is profound. People are interested in coverage that has depth and breadth locally and otherwise. People want to hold themselves accountable for learning from multiple sources and remain open to a variety of perspectives. People demand professionalism in writing conventions as well as professionalism in the quality of information being shared.

D. Build and Maintain a Credible Reputation

Community members across geographies, ages, genders, race, and ethnicity are hungry for media that is credible. A theme that emerged in conversations in Taos, Portales, Albuquerque, and Valencia counties was concern about independent journalism. Participants questioned news outlets for their efforts to remain economically viable and independent. One participant asked, “is there ever an over-reliance on advertising - does it compromise reporting?”

Trust

“As a publisher, you look at ethics and public trust. Once you lose the public’s trust, that damages your paper indefinitely. It is a constant daily effort to keep the public’s trust.”

~Resident- Belen, NM

- “One of the worst stories I had to cover was a school shooting, where two kids lost their lives in one afternoon. I guarantee you, kids were reading the newspaper. That month we had over a million views. Covering a story like that is so difficult. We had two editors and 11 other staff. There was a release that came out from the Navajo Nation stating that 30 people had been injured. We couldn’t run the press release until we corroborated the facts. Several of the television stations ran with it. We had to verify our information first. We had information, so we didn’t get the story wrong.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “As Rotarians, we wonder if news passes the Four-Way Test: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendship? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM



“I enjoy reading the news on my computer. Now we have access to TV news via an antenna. We have a daily feed of news now. News pisses me off, makes me angry. I’d rather read it.”

~Resident- Los Lunas, NM

- “When what’s considered breaking news is always horrible, tragic, and violent, the news outlet is then known for that approach.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “The editors/publishers are the experts in their community. They know elected officials, business people, the history of the community. One of the toughest things is when I went to a new community. I had to immerse myself in the history, the politicians, who were advocates for what. People have missions: schools, libraries, senior centers, hospitals, etc. That’s the diversity of coverage newspapers bring a community.” ~Resident- Belen, NM

- “When I’m reading news, I think about the way the outlet reported on news in the past. I think about the ways they talked about US involvement in Latin American in the 1980s. I take reporting with a grain of salt thinking about coverage not being fully factual.”
~Resident- Peralta, NM

E. Report in a Manner that is Culturally and Locally Relevant



Across communities, leaders spoke about the importance of news that is relatable. People want to learn and know about people, places, and ideas that resonate with their values and world view. New Mexicans do not want their only news to be from neighboring states, national political pundits, or cable news. People want news to be reported with an understanding of local place and cultural values of the people and communities in their audience.

- “So much innovation is happening here. Things are happening here that aren’t happening anywhere else. It’s like magic sauce.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Even when there have been news stories with national attention coming out of Taos, locals still provided the coverage locals valued.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Our local media should stay intensely and unapologetically local and commit resources to cover the school districts in the far reaches of the area.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “I used to write for the Green Fire Times. I curated the stories on the local economy. Letting people tell their stories in their own voices. For us it was free content!”
~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Local news really matters in Taos. I think we have 10 local radio stations.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Local news provides a sense of “realness,” as in “real news,” or news you can trust, because it’s happening around you; local news breaks through skepticism.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “There’s a culturally appropriate way to navigate and not offend.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “How can the dominant white culture understand and respect Native stories? I’ve experienced some journalist who don’t even want to tell the Native story because they’re too scared to offend. There’s an education piece there for them.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM

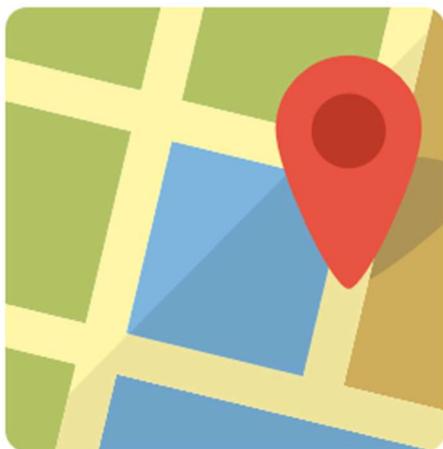
Valued Coverage

Balancing What We Need to Know And Want to Know

What people want from their local news is complex. People want truth-telling, and they want it in a way that they can relate to and connect with their own experiences. Communities want hard hitting investigative journalism as well as human interest stories that are heartfelt and uplifting. People want access to local heroes as well as some entertaining click-bait about celebrities. People want highly localized information as well as international news that is filtered through a local perspective that helps frame why those global issues matter at home. People want buffering from horror and tragedy and to read the crime blotter. People are nostalgic for newspaper columns that describe where their neighbors vacationed, who had tea, and who was promoted. There is a desire for timely and accurate coverage of current events and articles about the history of beloved places and people.

At the same time community members want to know what elected and appointed officials are doing with public resources and how they're making those decisions. Leaders want information that can help maintain democratic values and worry about how others will use information about their community. People want to be informed and entertained, find the local ball game and not miss the local feast day. We want so much to connect and are also overwhelmed by information and perspectives, and we're still navigating norms around how we address our own needs for information as well as community standards in a digital age.

A. Nested Perspectives: Local, State, Regional, National, and International



In New Mexico, there are counties without access to local news. At a time when people's appetite for information is growing and people have access to information that was difficult to conceive of just a few short decades ago, people value coverage that is place-based and local. Information feels both at the touch of our fingertips and inaccessible.

Many leaders in the focus group want to know what is happening statewide, within their region, and globally. Some people in New Mexico are getting the majority of their news from national sources. Others are getting their news from news outlets in neighboring states such as Arizona, Colorado, and Texas. Across the board, people expressed curiosity, concern, and commitment to their local communities.

- “It’s local, local, local. If you’re trying to get educated on state or national issues and news, you don’t get anything.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “News comes in many different flavors: entertainment, calendars, political reporting, information you need to know and information that excites you about your community. What we’re seeing now in the news business is local, local, local. Newspapers that used to handle national are refocusing to local.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “What’s happening to sacred sites, fracking, that’s what matters. National news, it’s like we’re just listening, it’s not as important as what’s coming out of our Governor’s mouth.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “There needs to be coverage of friction between Native and non-Native views, with water for example. ~Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Taos News is an award-winning paper, an amazing production, especially given the size of the community and the resources available. Acknowledging community activists, great sports coverage, and broad news coverage, it’s positive and covers concerns, too.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Stories need to be in depth and more than a paragraph.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “We know a story is worthy of being told when it meets a local intrinsic system of community values.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “When we’re living outside of our home community, coverage from back home connects us.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “TV news could do a better job of covering Taos. There’s very little TV coverage of Taos, and when we do get it, it tends to be negative or tragic.” ~Resident- Taos, NM.
- “Younger people are looking to social media for connection and information about what is going on in a local setting.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “I want to know about bad things as well as good things. I’m new here. It’s hard to find a way to get news. We belong to a group on-line that shares neighborhood or area news. We want to know if there was an accident or if someone had two bales of hay stolen, but we have no formal connection with the county.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM
- “I’ll spend an afternoon with the Sunday New York Times. It’s got well written stories that are well thought out, reporting at its finest. I also like the Washington Post.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “I really enjoy the crime report in almost any newspaper. It opens up an interesting dialogue nationally about why people are so interested in that. When there are so many horrific things going on, it gives people a feeling of control. I’m skeptical about the feel-good pieces.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “I read most national papers. I’ve lived in multiple places in the last couple of years. Reading local papers is interesting to me. In Galicia, I read La Galiciana, which was interesting, so I could understand and juxtapose local versus national perspectives. Now I spend a lot of time in the car and listen to podcasts. I stopped listening to the Washington Post, which reported on Spain. It was incorrect. I realized their priority isn’t to understand what the people are experiencing.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM

B. Human Interest



The need to celebrate what is best in each other and community was another common theme. Not only do people want to see stories about their neighbors, children, and grandchildren, people want reminders that there is good in the world. However, people resent efforts to pacify them and soft-sell larger community concerns. The opposite is also true. People resent fear-based reporting that is meant to incite insecurity and mistrust. Human interest stories that are thoughtful and connected to relatable experiences are the kind of good news that many people expressed appreciation for in their local media.

- “Celebrate the good news, good things happening in the community.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “I’m invested in media informing the community about the work we’re doing to improve health and celebrating successes.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- We need more inclusion of Indigenous success, not just vulnerabilities and challenges.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “When journalism tells the hardest stories, it appeals to the shadow side of people. That’s why local TV is depressing instead of informative.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “When a story is bad, is there also the other view reported about resilience?” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “I like the feel-good stories. I really enjoy it. Now they have videos showing people going out of their way to do something good. A lot of the stories finish up with a moral: Not all cops are bad. They don’t need to justify it.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM
- “At this point in life, I want to be happy. I read about kids. I send it to my husband so he can read it too. The world has not been a great place lately. Somehow, once you have kids and grandkids, you think and care more about future generations. There comes a point when you worry about things that are going to happen. I’m a Jewish mother, I’m supposed to worry.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM

C. Opportunities to Connect

- “I want to go to Pueblos, feast days and other festivals in the state. I want to know about football and basketball games. If there is information about the community, I’m getting the information I want.” ~Resident- Belen, NM
- “Media needs to go to all of the organizations in the community and have a person they can talk to about the issues if they need information.” ~Resident- Belen, NM

- “A constant complaint that I hear from all over Portales and Clovis is that there’s never anything to do. In point of fact, there’s an enormous number of things to do just at local schools and universities and colleges. The conduit is the Eastern New Mexico News. If you pay attention there’s plenty to do.”
~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Being distracted by what’s going on outside of your community takes you away from special things here. After spending time outside my community, I’m getting back into what’s in the newspaper. It can draw back the attention of what’s actually valuable to me inside my community. We need something to draw back the attention to the local community.”
~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Fifty to sixty years ago, we had a town square. Now we meet at high school basketball or football games. It takes sports coverage to make that happen. We may not be interested in sports. Knowing that, a lot of people go there to socialize in our small-town world. It’s important.” ~Resident- Portales, NM



D. Investigative Journalism



There are complex people, situations, policies, and courses of events that do not lend themselves to quick reporting. New Mexico has a growing body of on-line journalists focusing on in-depth investigative journalism. There are also emerging independent film makers who are focusing on newsworthy topics rather than entertainment. There were people in each community who talked about the importance of investigative journalism.

- John Acosta’s work to more deeply understand youth homicides by making a documentary showed that “he cares enough about the issue to talk to people.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “I want to know what is really happening. When things were better and people were paying attention to facts, it was still probably not all true. The School of the Americas was a training school run by the USA; there was little coverage.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “I’m most interested in investigative journalism, and international news is low on my scale.” ~Resident- Belen, NM

E. Local Issues

Local issues were described as the issues that have the most practical impact in terms of safety, transportation, tracking life events, understanding local resources, and engaging in the issues that many feel they are able to exert influence on in decision-making. Local news also telegraphs how people within a community see and present themselves to people outside of a community. This has implications for who will visit and who will make a community home. As participants in Portales and Taos noted, it also influences economic development.

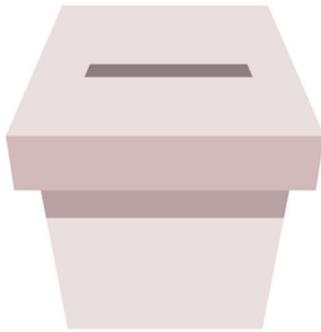
People and Places

“I cover eight counties throughout southeastern New Mexico. I see a lot of communities rich with people who care about their community. I’d like to see feature articles on those people, their rich history of what they’d see through time. This is relevant and helpful.” ~Resident- Portales, NM

- “If a local journalist slams a community too much with negative stories, the community becomes that and understands themselves in that way. Also, we can’t have the country club view. It’s important that coverage includes both and is balanced.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “We need more conversations about how to improve the economy and how it is improving. Lots of times maintaining community comes down to economics. People need to understand that it’s possible to make it.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “We’re not saying that national news isn’t important, but it isn’t sufficient.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Good visuals and compelling photos help inform.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “There’s a legitimacy when you’re covered in local news. My husband was in the Tribal paper, and my grandma saw him in a different light. When you have community members that are covered, that matters. Farmington daily news covers a lot of Navajo news. There’s more accessibility of things happening in your community. It’s an access question.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “I feel disconnected: what is local news? I am getting that it is Albuquerque and Santa Fe. I feel I am an outsider. We don’t get local news in my Pueblo. If you get papers, you get it in the gas station. They stopped delivering newspaper in the ‘80’s and ‘90’s.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “One of the things I appreciate about local newspapers is that you can get more in-depth information. One thing I dislike about social media is that they tend to be very superficial, and they give a point of view that may not show much deliberation. Whereas the print media gives that opportunity for someone who has thought about the issues and can present a couple of sides succinctly and give you enough information that you can decide to explore it further. It would be a tragedy to lose it.” ~Resident- Portales, NM

F. Politics and Civic Institutions

The value that focus groups participants place on coverage of civic institutions and politics relates strongly to two of the primary reasons people want to sustain local journalism: 1) transparency and good governance; and 2) sustaining a healthy democracy. One participant noted that democracy is active sport, and local news is a tool to participate. One participant also spoke about the importance and challenges involved with trusting political leaders. In the absence of trust in civic institutions, reliable journalism about politics and governance is even more vital to people in communities.



- “When there is no local journalism, there is no investigation, no monitoring of right and wrong on the city council or county commission.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM
- “I’m disturbed that there are places with no coverage of the county commission, school boards, and municipal boards.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Communities deserve to know what and how decisions are being made.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “Local news is important in terms of accountability and sharing information.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “This is the worst situation for people of color. We’ve never been in this kind of situation before. Politicians are liars. We want to trust what’s being said.” ~Resident- Los Lunas, NM

G. History



People expressed appreciation for media coverage of local history. People are proud of their heritage and their family ties to communities. For people who are long-time residents and people who are newer to communities, there is curiosity about the rich history of local and neighboring communities. Print, radio, and electronic coverage that links our history to current events matters. Looking at history also allows communities that have gained more visibility and power to correct misperceptions based on incomplete and inaccurate coverage in the past.

- “One of the things that The Eastern New Mexico News has started that I really like is showing a photograph from time past and asking if people know anything about the photo. I love history. I thrive on it, anywhere, anytime. I really like that particular portion of the newspaper. It makes me really appreciate what we had. I come from Connecticut, which is almost like the other side of the world. I heard different stories growing up. I came here with a lot of ignorance about the local area. I appreciate the historical aspect that the newspaper brings. When I can talk to people who are longtime here, I appreciate the legacy that exists here.” ~Resident- Portales, NM

- I like the connection to our history, the *Tradiciones* section.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “We get siloed. People tokenize us and then ask, how can we include Native America? Open your front door! The county has a poor curriculum when it comes to Native, Black and other communities of color. That’s where journalism comes in. Our educational system doesn’t support a comprehensive system. Journalism can fill-in that discussion, name things, and talk about them. It can be a catalytic tool.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM

Local Roles in Sustaining Local News

Local Leaders See Themselves as Part of the Solution

There were strong ideas and feelings that were on display in focus groups. People care about local journalism, and this concern is an asset. Many people described ways that they are already working to sustain local journalism and were open to listening to others and considering additional ways to be a part of the solution. The resilience of local journalism is tied to the resilience of communities and the smart, resourceful, innovative, and passionate people who comprise community.

A. Build a Relationship with Local Media

Several community leaders described an effective working relationship with media. Some described more ambivalence about their interactions with media. There were others who acknowledged limited if any collaborative interactions with local journalism. While people understand the necessary independence of the local media, people in focus groups routinely identified examples of how they could strengthen relationships in mutually beneficial ways. Local leaders saw ways to promote initiatives they care about while facilitating coverage of local relevant news.



- “We are bad at tooting our own horn. When we do have positive stories, they should be lifted up even higher.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “Liking local media pages, you use it as an amplifier.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “If I know of something that’s coming up or know it’s newsworthy, I let David (the publisher) know. I try to put something on the radar.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “It’s so important to do a news release. You’ll get the item onto the calendar at the news station, the radio. They may use it as an idea to put a story together. So, in this day and age of tired staff on local media, it’s important that we help them out. It’s not just by volunteering. If your group, like the Rotary Club, can disseminate information about your events, it will stimulate more news journalism than anything else you can do.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Media should think, what agencies are out there that work with Tribes? Like 19 Pueblos can take information in and then let it trickle down through the Pueblos. As one, their voice is that much stronger. When journalists are scared to offend, they can take it to the entity and they can filter. That’s their job.” ~Participant, Native Entrepreneur in Residence, ABQ, NM
- “We need local media to be a place where you feel welcomed. Know journalists and members of the community. Participate in on-line surveys.” ~Resident- Taos, NM

- “Media can promote more “My Turn” opportunities and allow people to write about the issues that are important to them. People have the opportunity to editorialize.”
~Resident- Taos, NM

B. Subscribe, Advertise, and Support Advertisers

While subscriptions and advertising alone do not provide enough income in most markets to sustain local media, they are a way to support local journalism. One-third of participants in Portales identified themselves as subscribers to one or more publications. One participant in Portales approached the facilitator after the community conversation. He shared a story about



being a subscriber to the paper for most of his life. He recently let his subscription lapse. It wasn't due to a lack of belief in the importance of local journalism. It was a response to a diminishing footprint of the local press. He explained that the most recent reduction in days that the local paper is published was too much. The daily routine of reading the printed paper was no longer routine. It was just too little of what he wanted to be satisfying.

Several Rotarians in Taos and members of the Taos Entrepreneurial Network identified themselves as advertisers and said that their decisions about who to do business with are in part informed by wanting to support other advertisers because, “I want to support businesses that are investing into our community.” ~Resident- Taos, NM

- “We can support local news by buying advertising; at public venues, praise and fully appreciate local media; take advantage of special publications; and use the news as a resource in local research.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “I’m thinking that it would be novel to have a “Go Fund Me” page and try to sustain local journalism as a community interest to take care of local media. Not pressure local businesses to buy advertising. The only other way is to go out and get your money elsewhere. Subscriptions – I subscribe. Think of it as a charitable organization. You give money to things because it makes you feel good and responds to your moral compass.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Use the local media to advertise for a job.”

C. Consume News Ethically

Across communities, leaders acknowledged the importance of being ethical consumers of news media. By being intentional and purposeful about what news sources are used or ignored, that active role helps to sustain the sources that are reliable. Seeing ourselves as participants in news making and news sharing is an alternative perspective to passive news consumption that a few communities explored.

- “We need to not take our freedoms for granted; free press is what we’re all about as a country. We need to be active participants as we use news and not be vulnerable to undesirable directions.” ~Resident- Las Cruces, NM

- “So we’re responsible and community is responsible for knowing what is going on in a metropolitan sense, nationally, and internationally. Local issues are a microcosm of what’s going on.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “If we’re not happy with how something is being reported, if we don’t think it’s credible, we shouldn’t purchase it, click on it and give their advertisers mixed messages, or support their advertisers. We also need to distinguish for ourselves when we’re engaging in news media for fun versus something that looks like news but is really entertainment. When we can draw that line, we need to tell others too so we can all be more careful about what we’re supporting.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM

D. Engage Youth

Every community had ideas about the important role youth will play in sustaining local journalism as well as other civic institutions. The role of youth was described as a burgeoning consumer of news. However, communities extended the understanding of youth’s role as newsworthy members of our community. Some thought was also given to mentoring and teaching youth about media literacy as well as journalism as a career option.

- “A youth radio station might encourage young people to stay here; KTAO used to do this – a youth night with youth DJ.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “There were multiple instances in the last five years with high school newspaper teams breaking huge national and international stories. Giving kids the opportunity to understand and take part is important.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM
- “If there was a way to align the students of the university (PR, communications, etc.) with the media industry, several students could write, and students and the newspaper could pick the best stories to run. The students could build their resumes, busy staff could have some relief, communities would get more coverage.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Reading newspapers is an art. I did not grow up with that. I learned later.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “I think we all like to read about ourselves. When I referenced how my parents would read the paper every day – I saw them reading it. But I didn’t read it. It was full of old stuff. Politics. Could our local paper have content that is more teen-oriented, issues that they are faced with (addictions, drugs, sex, etc.) and have to deal with? More stories with how teens are dealing with those issues, hopefully positively, could bring in younger readers.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Young people don’t feel they have to be involved in what their elders did. I think coverage of what they’re doing might be helpful. I remember when Rotary was comprised of 100 members instead the 23 it is now.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “Part of sustaining journalism is workforce development. We can partner with UNM Taos and have internship programs, work with students, have students earn money while learning a trade, consider grants and funding to grow our own. Look to early childhood workforce development as a parallel.” ~Resident- Taos, NM

- “We need to promote literacy, use media more in the classroom, and support teachers to use media in the classrooms.” ~Resident- Taos, NM
- “I was thinking about youth in the news. The puerile news we are subjected to daily—like the ridiculous things on Facebook. Kids are potentially in a place where everything they do is news. They have a well-documented and often embarrassing life story, the kind of thing I look at when hiring.” ~Resident- Peralta, NM

E. Explore Business Models

Senator Gregg Fulfer, co-owner of the Jal Record and State Senator, really demonstrated his New Mexico values and belief in the importance of people. When asked about what’s needed to keep a local paper going, he said, “It’s a passion to keep the community informed. A good person can bring a small paper around. That’s the key.”

A journalism professor in Portales provided a historical perspective on some of the challenges to sustaining local journalism. “Between 1993-95, journalists gave away the ship. There was no economic model to sustain journalism. It’s been a slide downwards since then. In 1993 when the web became a big deal, we began using email, getting scores from espn.com or TV. They basically started giving away for free most of their content. It was only about 10-12 years ago that they started to take it back.

- “I have a crazy idea. This is starting to happen. There are billionaires who are taking over newspapers who are running it as an eco-train. An NFL owner who has made their money – they are doing that. We can use more of that. If the Eastern New Mexico News went poof, I would try to enlist one or more wealthy person to take up a newspaper, maybe have a competition. We can quit worrying about making money, or maybe breaking even. That way we have journalism still.” ~Resident- Portales, NM
- “One strength is that we have choices. We have Eastern New Mexico News, public radio, radio, an online newspaper, The Roosevelt Review, school newspapers. Where things fall, people can step up – Roosevelt Review is a semi-commercial publication.” ~Resident, Portales, NM
- I’m a lifelong journalist, didn’t care anything about making money. They made me publisher, and I am starting to learn about that aspect of it. I’m really humbled and very excited. You all said nice things about the paper. The question that really caught my eye is, do we want a community to support us like we’re a charity? I’m not sure that’s sustainable. We need to be relevant. We need for businesses to need us, that they feel they benefit by buying advertising, that readers benefit from reading the paper. I am uncomfortable with people feeling they need to support us. One thing – I don’t have numbers – I suspect that newspapers for the most part have mostly been free. Whatever small amount collected went into printing it and bringing it to the house. Advertising -- businesses who wanted to promote their business had to do it through the media. Now there are so many other choices, and most of them are free. We printed other people’s newspapers, business cards, horse race books at Ruidoso. Then our print shop went away. The last five to six years, we’ve gone from a daily to a twice weekly paper. That’s because we’ve had to rely strictly on paid advertising. There’s not

enough money, there hasn't been enough in forever. Print shops paid the way. We're trying to figure out how to be a business." ~Resident- Portales, NM

- "With media there is print but also online. Is there a place where all the news outlets could come together and figure out how to maintain a local perspective, economies of scale, sharing costs? It could be marketed by the whole and keep costs down." ~Resident- Portales, NM
- "We need to look at our business models. If we take care of business models, then the public good (news) takes care of itself. We need to invest not retreat. Take the example of Cid's Food Market. They have a good product. There's no retreat. They treat employees right. They have strong leadership and a customer orientation. They invest in the community, people, and programs." ~Resident- Taos, NM
- "Whatever direction the industry goes in, we go the other. We do a glossy magazine, like a summer guide. We have diversified income." ~Resident- Taos, NM

Conclusion

When we make time and space together in community to engage in values-based conversations about the issues that matter to us, both common ground and respectful dissent emerge. Local journalism is a valued community resource. Local journalism at its best supports community involvement and civic engagement. From appreciation for community calendars and advertisements of local businesses to concern about the impact of losing opportunities to engage with others, the value of local perspectives was affirmed by focus group participants. Furthermore, local journalism was seen as an important way to reflect a community's values and sustain a sense of place that is vibrant and connected. Without local journalism, New Mexicans expressed concern about a community's ability to maintain transparency in decision-making about issues that impact our lives. In fact, participants across the communities visited by New Mexico First questioned the viability of our democracy in the absence of local journalism.

Focus group participants identified several qualities that are essential to their willingness to trust in local news media as a valuable and reliable resource. The overarching qualities that engender trust included the ability to discern fact and opinion; the commitment to raising multiple points of view on issues and give audiences the ability to form their own opinion; adherence to rigorous standards of accuracy and ability to acknowledge when mistakes are made; the ability to earn and maintain a credible reputation through consistency; and coverage that is locally and culturally relevant.

New Mexicans were also invited to name and describe the kind of coverage that they value most. People are curious and engaged in the world around them and want local news and local perspectives on issues outside of their communities. They want local news to help them find ways to connect with their neighbors and human-interest stories. People want political coverage and to know what's happening with people and issues that impact our communities.

Participants were eager to share ways that they already support local journalism while considering ways to sustain journalism now and into future generations. Standard forms of support such as advertising and subscribing were noted. In addition, people thought about creative ways to finance local news. From new business models for local news to the role of youth as an audience and creators of news, communities thought creatively and strategically about how to maintain local journalism as a valuable asset.

Bibliography

Bryan, S. M. (2017, July 14). *Effort to Bring Water to Eastern New Mexico Inches Along*. Retrieved from U.S. News: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/new-mexico/articles/2017-07-14/effort-to-bring-water-to-eastern-new-mexico-inches-along>

New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. (2017). *State Water Plan Technical Report*. Retrieved from [https://www.ose.state.nm.us/Planning/SWP/2018/3-2018 SWP Part II Technical Report plusAppendixes.pdf](https://www.ose.state.nm.us/Planning/SWP/2018/3-2018%20SWP%20Part%20II%20Technical%20Report%20plusAppendixes.pdf)

New Mexico Public Education Department. (2010). *About Us*. Retrieved May 3, 2011, from <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/>

Open School of Journalism. (2019, September). Retrieved from [9https://www.openschoolofjournalism.com/](https://www.openschoolofjournalism.com/)

Peters, J. (2016). *City gave ranch million-dollar water discount, records show*. NM Political Report. Retrieved from <https://nmpoliticalreport.com/2016/09/22/city-gave-ranch-million-dollar-water-discount-documents-show/>

Simpson, A. (2019, October 21). *As Local News Outlets Shutter, Rural America Suffers Most*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2019/10/21/as-local-news-outlets-shutter-rural-america-suffers-most>

Thomson, B. (2013, March). *H. Balas, Interview*

Wang, V. (2019, September). *Local News is Dying. New York May Try to Pass a Law to Save It*. Retrieved from The New York Times: www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/nyregion/verizon-news-cable-ny.html