

Nonprofit Media Can It Replace Traditional Journalism Outlets as Reliable News Sources?

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New nonprofit and community-based news organizations can do more than simply fill in for journalism outlets that have closed. They can, and are, building a news media ecosystem that is more collaborative, representative and accessible.

The 450-plus nonprofit newsrooms in the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) network share approximately 20,000 stories per month with more than 7,000 media outlets. INN members — including some NPR and PBS affiliates — also pool resources to cover important stories, such as exploring a national issue from different geographic locations or investigating different aspects of critical regional issues, putting collaboration above competition.

Nonprofit and community-based newsrooms are serving places that were overlooked by traditional media — including rural areas, communities of color and neighborhoods with majority immigrant populations. These newsrooms' journalists represent the communities they serve and thus are able to uncover stories that a reporter dropping in from a metropolitan daily might never find.

What about access? The vast majority of nonprofit news organizations provide all or much of their content for free, by diversifying revenue streams to include individual donations, foundation grants, and business sponsorships in addition to ads. Unchained from the subscriber model, these outlets are increasingly providing content that meets people where they are, whether that is via an email newsletter, a podcast, a text-based messaging service or a Spanish-language group chat on WhatsApp. In



graphic: INN

other words, they are providing essential news and information to people who need it, regardless of whether they can afford a subscription.

Taken together, these shifts show how innovative news leaders are not just tweaking what was done in the past, but are building something even better.

Let us remember that news deserts are not the only reason people lack reliable sources of information. The big, uncomfortable reason many people are uninformed — or, worse, misinformed — is because they are turning away from the news. Consumer behavior has changed, and the news media industry must change with it. Do people want another story about a shooting or car crash? Or do they want to know “why” there has been an uptick in shootings or what is being done to address a local intersection prone to collisions? Communities need journalism that goes beyond identifying partisan divisions on an issue to reveal who is working to resolve the issue.

The question is not what replaces traditional journalism outlets, but how does the journalism field evolve so that it truly reflects and benefits the public it serves.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0>

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News Outlet Profiles From INN's Network

You can check out profiles on all of INN's members under Network on their web page (<https://inn.org/>). Here are two examples of local, community-based nonprofit news organizations.

AfroLA is solutions-focused, data-driven and community-centered journalism for Los Angeles, told through the lens of the Black community, and with emphasis on how news may disparately impact L.A.'s most vulnerable groups and communities of color.

“We are tired of tropes and assumptions about Black people in the media. “We are tired of local news that doesn't scratch the surface of the communities they cover. We want news with nuance and context and narratives from people you might not normally hear from or about.” Check out their website <https://afrolanews.org/>

Block Club Chicago was created by the editors and reporters of DNAinfo Chicago after that award-winning website was shutdown by its billionaire owner. This collaborative, nimble, journalist-run, reader-backed news site reflects and responds to the city's neighborhoods.

Their newsroom delivers reliable, nonpartisan and essential coverage of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods. They went from a scrappy startup to one of Chicago's most respected, read and cited news organizations. Their full-time reporters, embedded in the communities they cover, report with context, respect and deep knowledge, instead of parachuting in. This leads to more accurate portrayals of neighborhoods — and earns the trust of their readers. See <https://blockclubchicago.org/>