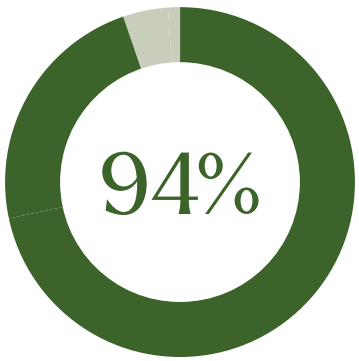


Photo: Caleb Kenna

Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Executive Summary

JANUARY 2026



of surveyed Vermonters agree that **local news is as essential as other public services** like libraries or the postal service.

Vermont's strong tradition of civic engagement depends on access to reliable information. In a world full of noise, local news offers something distinct: trusted and community-generated information that helps people make sense of issues and engage in solving community challenges together. Most of all, local news keeps our communities connected, building our shared identity and social fabric through reporting on local events, community life, and the arts.

As communities faced challenges sustaining connection, shared experiences, and trust in the years following the pandemic, the Vermont Community Foundation elevated the conditions of civic life, including local news, as a core focus of its community philanthropy. In 2024, VCF was selected as a partner in the national Press Forward initiative and launched Press Forward Vermont to strengthen local news statewide. This is a recognition that local news is a public good that is worth investing in now and for generations to come.

Press Forward is a national initiative building a philanthropic network with chapters throughout the country. Its mission is to mobilize funders in collaboration with communities and the local news sector to strengthen local news so we stay informed, connected, and engaged.

Press Forward *Vermont*



70%

of Vermonters surveyed strongly agree that a **well-informed community benefits everyone,** even those who don't consume local news.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

To identify opportunities to strengthen news access, newsroom sustainability, and coordination statewide, VCF commissioned Impact Architects, a national social science research firm, to develop the **Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report**. This report helps us understand the current state of local news, where we can go from here, and how we might get there.

The report draws on:

- Demographic and local news data analysis
- A survey of 441 Vermont residents
- Community listening sessions across the state
- Focus groups
- Interviews with community, civic, and journalism leaders

This work reflects the commitment of VCF fundholders and donors, who have pooled their funding through Press Forward Vermont, because they believe strong local news is essential to Vermont's future.

The Current State of Local News

The report found that Vermont's local news landscape has many strengths, but is also fragile. Vermont's access to local news relies on many committed individuals supporting hyper-local outlets, with limited staff, evolving business models, and unclear succession plans. At the same time, Vermonters value local news and seek more reporting on the issues that matter to them and reflect their lives.

Has local news had any of the following impacts on your life?



n=384

"The question before us is not whether local news matters here. The question is how we sustain it. Thankfully, this is the kind of work Vermonters do best."

- Dan Smith, President & CEO, Vermont Community Foundation

Key Strengths

61

A large number (61) of news and information providers statewide, indicating that Vermont has a strong foundation to build on rather than significant gaps to fill.

80%

A high proportion (80%) of independently-owned and locally operated news outlets, which favors serving community information needs rather than profit-driven content creation.

79%

A majority of survey respondents (79%) reporting they have a trustworthy and accessible local news source.

92%

A majority of survey respondents (92%) say local news should be available to all, regardless of ability to pay.

Robust civic engagement and high rates of volunteerism, indicating more Vermonters may be interested in preserving and participating in the local news ecosystem.

Growing collaboration among local news outlets, which provides an opportunity to build strength throughout the sector.

Nontraditional information providers, including community-based nonprofits, that fill gaps in sharing local news, opening opportunities for more direct collaboration with local news outlets to ensure all Vermonters have access to quality local news and information.





Photo: Caleb Kenna

CRITICAL CHALLENGES

- **The way news is produced and consumed has changed –** meaning old business models that rely on ads and subscriptions no longer sustain local newsrooms.
- **The loss of key federal funding** for public media and the lack of state funding exacerbates financial pressures on newsrooms.
- **Newsrooms operate with limited staff;** many rely on one or two people, aging leadership, less experienced journalists, or volunteer labor – limiting their capacity to cover local issues and raising concerns about outlet leadership succession.
- Some communities, especially youth, immigrant and refugee communities, LGBTQ+ Vermonters, and others historically underrepresented, **do not consistently see their experiences or things that matter to them reflected in coverage.**
- **Access barriers persist,** including cost, a mismatch between the format news is available in and the format people want to consume it in, language access, broadband gaps, and information overload.
- **"Last mile" delivery of news is becoming more challenging** as content creation and platform options increase, making it harder for Vermonters to find trusted information that matters to them, while at the same time, their demand for more localized and hyper-localized content grows.

Without action, Vermont risks a continued erosion of the local news landscape, which could have profound effects on how Vermonters engage with one another and within their communities.

The Opportunity Ahead

The report points to a clear path forward. Vermont can build on its network of committed local news outlets and strong civic culture to strengthen local news as a public good. Efforts like Press Forward Vermont can help newsrooms collaborate and innovate to remain financially sustainable while meeting the needs of Vermonters, and spur philanthropic investment in local news as essential to thriving communities.

Key Opportunities Include

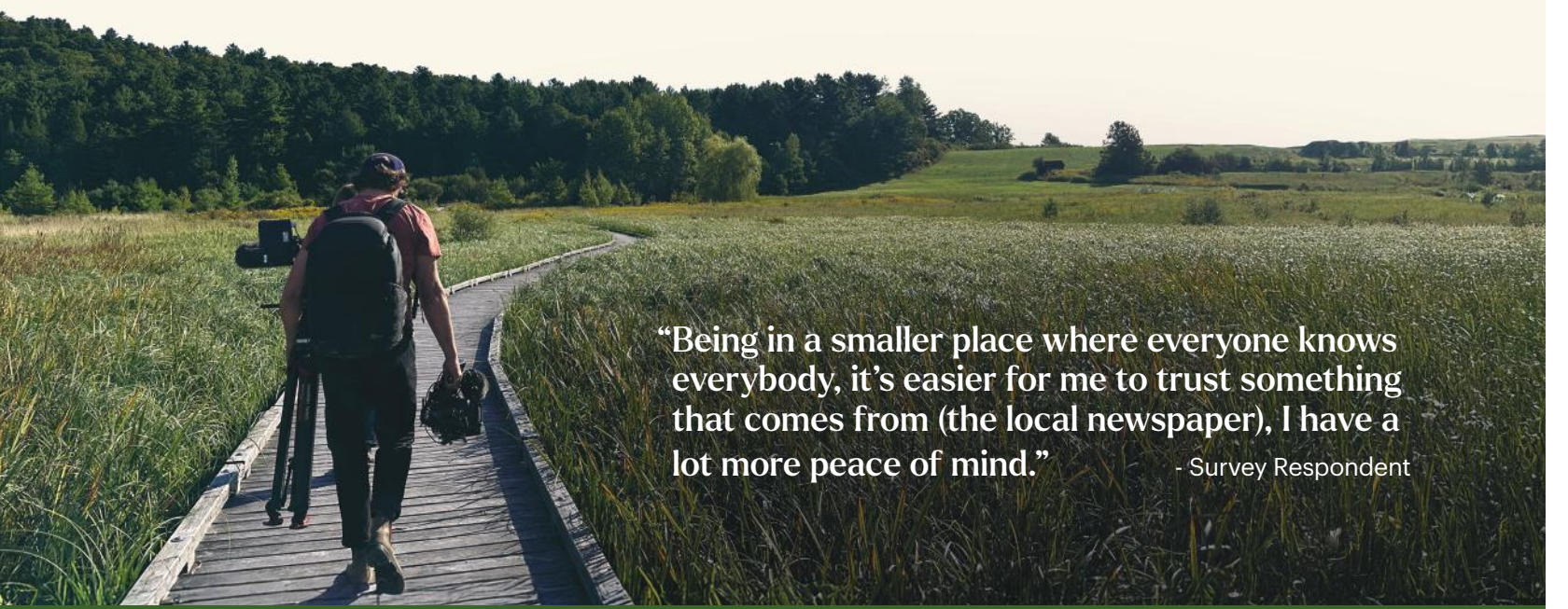
- **Strengthen shared infrastructure:** Cultivate backbone institutions that provide services—beyond content sharing—to strengthen and grow financially sustainable local news outlets.
- **Empower community journalism:** Engage Vermonters in telling the stories of their communities and develop partnerships with community organizations already providing information to underserved populations.
- **Mobilize funding:** Continue to build the philanthropic network of donors supporting local news, like Press Forward Vermont, and provide more avenues for public funding, earned revenue, and community-based support.
- **Deepen collaboration:** Build on efforts among news providers to develop a sustainable vision and strategy for local news in Vermont.
- **Address "last mile" content issues:** Seek to better understand community and audience engagement challenges and provide solutions-oriented reporting on key issues for Vermonters like housing, healthcare, and schools.

Why This Matters

Local news supports every aspect of community life, from community connection to civic participation, and helps us understand Vermont's most pressing issues so we can build solutions together. Vermont has a strong foundation of support for our broad network of local news providers, and we are at a pivotal moment if we want to maintain and strengthen this sector. Philanthropy has a critical role to play in stabilizing local newsrooms, supporting innovation, and ensuring that trusted local information remains accessible to all Vermonters. Growing support, from individuals in our communities to our state government, is key to a future news ecosystem that meets the needs of Vermont.

Read the full Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report at

» vermontcf.org/press-forward



"Being in a smaller place where everyone knows everybody, it's easier for me to trust something that comes from (the local newspaper), I have a lot more peace of mind." - Survey Respondent