



Minnesota Community News Landscape Today



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Executive Summary

Minnesota’s news and media landscape is evolving in response to the state’s changing demographics. Once predominantly White, the state has seen significant growth in communities of color, largely driven by immigration. As of 2023, White Minnesotans made up 83 percent of the population, with Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities growing rapidly. State projections indicate that these populations will continue to expand at a faster rate than the White population in the coming years.

Despite this demographic shift, traditional media in Minnesota has struggled to provide inclusive coverage, often leaving these growing communities underserved or misrepresented. Many communities of color express distrust toward legacy news outlets, citing biased or incomplete reporting, particularly around crime and civic issues. As a result, these communities have turned to nontraditional media sources, such as social media, digital platforms, and media entrepreneurs within their communities, to access reliable news and information.

We held listening sessions and focus groups with over 600 Minnesotans from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Our researchers found that many people do not rely on traditional media for local news. Moreover, 68 percent had turned to social media in the past 30 days to stay informed.

Participants emphasized the need for trusted, hyperlocal sources of information, particularly for issues affecting their neighborhoods, schools, and local government.

This report also highlights the rise of media entrepreneurs who serve the state’s diverse communities. These small, often underfunded outlets have become vital sources of news for communities of color, immigrants, and rural residents. However, they face challenges in sustainability, with many lacking the financial support needed to grow. In a separate survey of 100 outlets operated by media entrepreneurs who were Black, Indigenous or other people of color found 87 percent see philanthropic funding decisions as inequitable.

Despite this demographic shift, traditional media in Minnesota has struggled to provide inclusive coverage, often leaving these growing communities underserved or misrepresented. Many communities of color express distrust toward legacy news outlets, citing biased or incomplete reporting, particularly around crime and civic issues.

(Powell and Clark 2023) As for those who were receiving philanthropic funding, only 21 percent said the funding was enough for basic operations.

Philanthropy plays an increasingly important role in supporting these nontraditional news outlets. The report emphasizes that funders should prioritize racial equity, civic engagement, and trust-building when deciding where to allocate resources. Increased collaboration between traditional and nontraditional media is also recommended to bridge coverage gaps and foster more inclusive, community-driven journalism.

This report calls for strategic investment in emerging media outlets and for traditional media to embrace more inclusive practices to better serve Minnesota's diverse and growing communities. By supporting media entrepreneurs and creating new models for collaboration, Minnesota can build a more equitable and resilient media ecosystem that reflects the state's evolving demographics.

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— Tracie Powell, CEO, The Pivot Fund

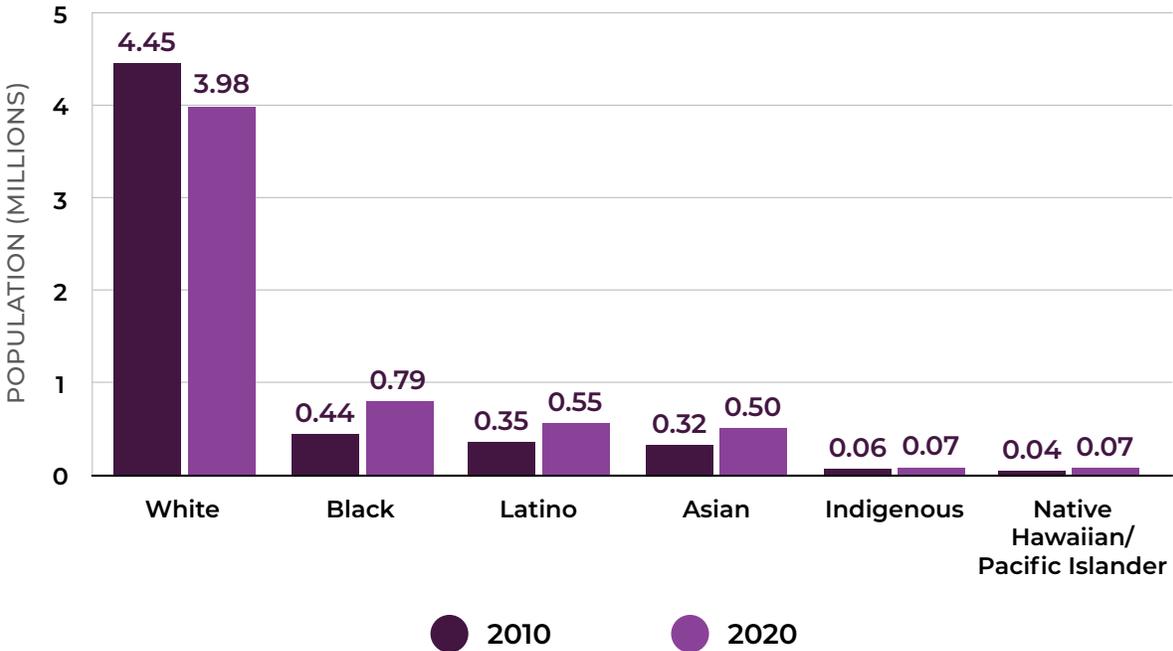


PARTICIPANTS AT A LISTENING SESSION HELD AT THE ST. PAUL NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTER / PHOTO BY ERIC ORTIZ

Minnesota’s Demographic Transformation: The Growing Influence of Communities of Color

Immigration and the natural growth of diverse populations are transforming Minnesota. Today Minnesota is home to growing populations of color that are increasingly shaping the state’s cultural and social landscape. In 2023, the Census Bureau reported that while 83 percent of the population is White, communities of color—including Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Latino populations—are growing at a much faster rate.

Minnesota Population Distribution: 2010 vs. 2020



State demographers predict that Minnesota’s non-White populations will continue to grow more rapidly than the White population. Projections for the coming years show the White population shrinking from 4.45 million to 3.98 million, while the Black population is expected to increase from 440,627 to 785,638. Similarly, the Latino population will grow

ginalize or overlook the experiences and contributions of communities of color. Following the civil unrest of the 1960s, the Kerner Commission of 1968 called on news media to broaden its coverage model to include Black people and their perspectives as part of the national narrative. This goal, however, remains only partially realized. Today, many racial and ethnic communities—such as African American, Indigenous, and immigrant groups—still feel underserved, ignored, or misrepresented by traditional media outlets.

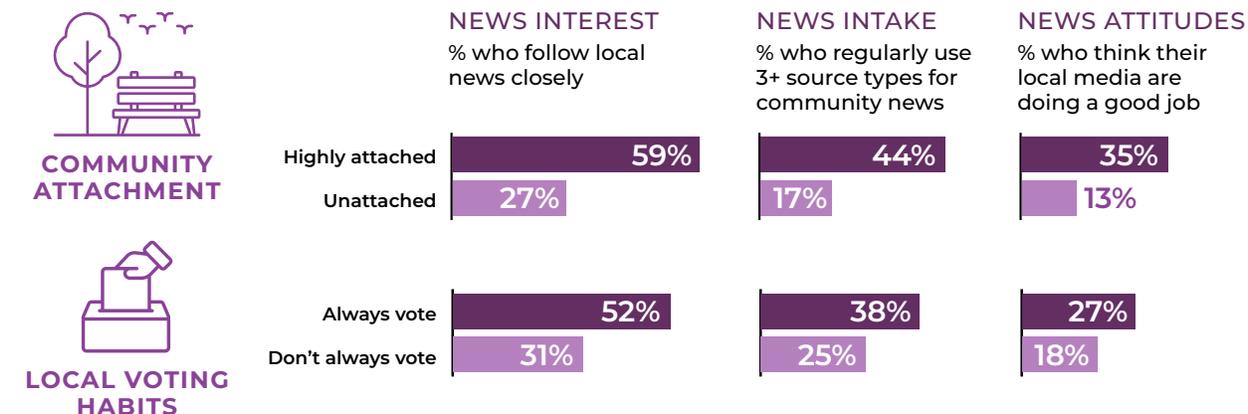
Methodology

This report was compiled using state and federal census data. The Pivot Fund also partnered with [Fieldwork](#), a Minnesota-based market research firm to interview residents across the state about their news and information preferences, including what sources they trust and turn to most often for critical information about their local schools, government, and economic news. From the hundreds interviewed, the market research then identified a representative sample to participate in in-person and virtual focus groups. Participants were paid a modest stipend for their input during 90-minute listening sessions. Personal information collected during the course of this research has been anonymized and is password protected. To protect their privacy, participants are not identified in this report, but instead referred to by listening group or demographic information such as region, age or race. The two groups assembled by Fieldwork represented Minnesota's overall population, with over-indexing for immigrants and populations of color. The first group was drawn from the Twin Cities metropolitan areas, home to more than 60 percent of the state's population. More than 300 people living in rural, urban and suburban areas around the Twin Cities were screened for participation in the listening session. The second group was drawn from rural areas, as well as the Rochester area. The session with rural residents, or those living outside of the urban core, prescreened more than 70 people.

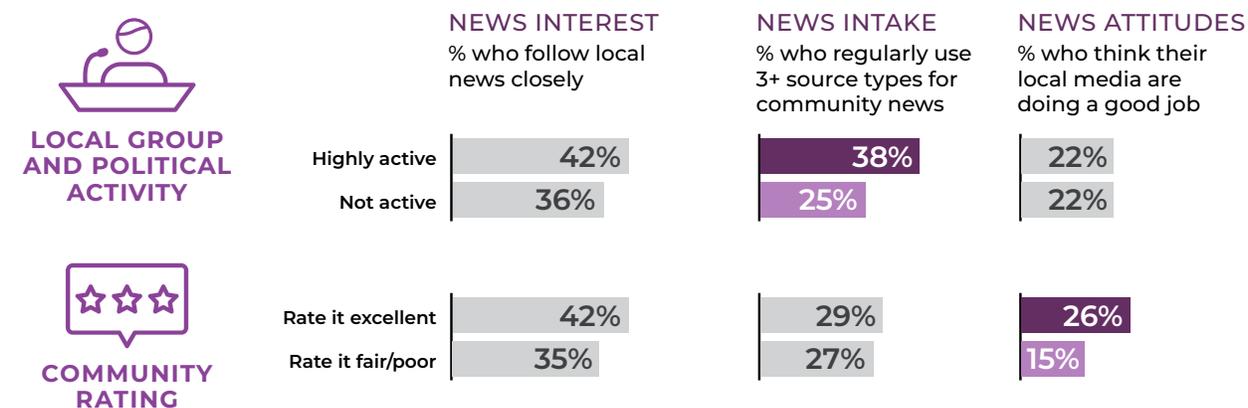
Listening sessions were also held with people in Indigenous, African immigrant, Latino, African American, and Asian communities — the state's growing non-White populations. These deep dive sessions were assembled with assistance from community organizers. Engaging with these groups helped to identify trusted media entrepreneurs and explain why they believe traditional media in Minnesota are not meeting their information needs, particularly when it comes to community institutions, such as schools and local governments. Civic engagement is crucial for the overall health and success of communities. Research from Pew drew a distinct correlation between news consumption and

engagement. Getting information to these growing communities is crucial to the overall health of Minnesota and its cities.

Local community attachment and regular voting connect strongly to local news habits



Local group and political activity, as well as community rating, show less connection



Note: Gray bars indicate no statistically significant differences between the two groups. “Those who always vote” includes only people who are registered to vote and say they always vote in local elections. “Don’t always vote” includes people who vote less than always in local elections, say they never vote or are not registered to vote. “Unattached” consists of those who say they are “not very” attached or “not at all” attached to their local communities.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 12–Feb. 8, 2016. “Civic Engagement Strongly Tied to Local News Habits,” Pew Research Center

In addition to these growing ethnic communities, rural communities are also at risk. About 8 percent of Minnesotans live in rural areas, according to the Minnesota State Demographic Center. (Minnesota State Demographic Center 2017) These areas can experience a “parachute” approach even from media within their state, that is they only get coverage when an event captures the attention of urban audiences and news media.

Questions and Areas of Focus

The listening sessions focused on three primary areas:

- How do communities access local news and information?
- What platforms are they using to consume this news?
- How do they view their relationship with traditional local media?

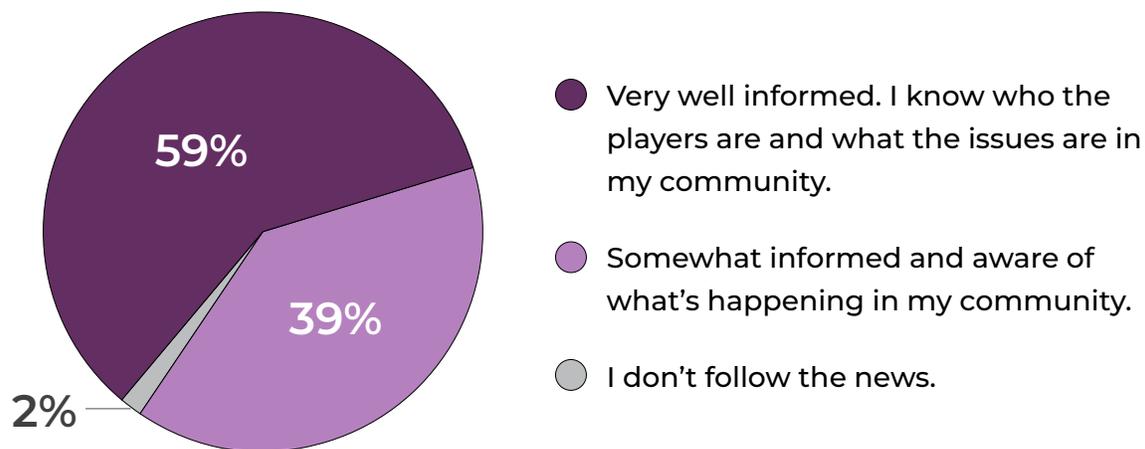
During the sessions, participants discussed the platforms they trusted for local news, how they searched for and verified information, and their overall trust (or distrust) in traditional news outlets.

Key Findings: How Communities Access and Consume News

A clear pattern emerged during the prescreenings: community members overwhelmingly seek information from sources they trust, even when those sources have no formal ties to traditional media. This reliance on community-based media reflects a broader distrust of traditional outlets, which many feel fail to provide accurate or positive representations of their communities. Many respondents described traditional media coverage as focused too heavily on crime and conflict, leaving a void for stories that highlight the positive contributions and cultural richness of Minnesota’s communities of color.

The respondents consider themselves well-versed in state and local issues — 1.5 percent, or just five people, said they “don’t follow the news.” Most, 59.3 percent, said they were “somewhat informed and aware of what’s happening in my community.” While 39.1 percent considered themselves, “very informed.”

Q: “How well do you consider yourself to be informed about local and state issues?”



Concerns about media bias also shaped how respondents engaged with news. Many participants reported seeking multiple perspectives and using search engines like Google to verify information. Some examples of their news consumption habits included:

- “I search on Google and select reputable sites.”
- “I usually go to Google to hear all sides and follow news sites on social media.”
- “I check Twitter, Google, and ask friends and family about what they know.”
- “I do deep dives for more information on Google, TikTok, or YouTube.”
- “I rely on Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Quora, and YouTube.”

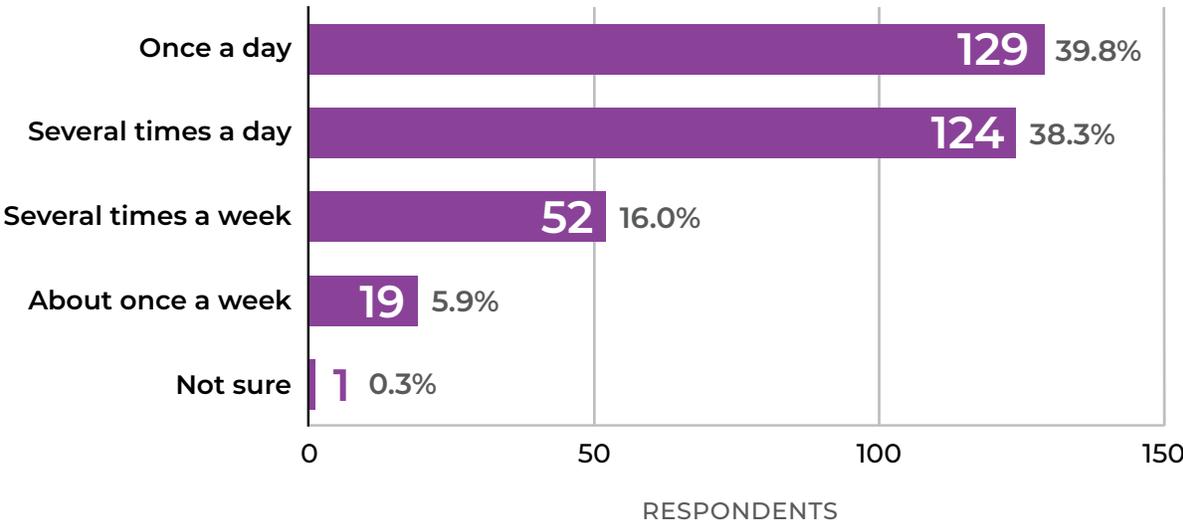
This preference for nontraditional news sources reflects a widespread belief that traditional media tend to skew negative in their coverage, especially in urban areas like Minneapolis and St. Paul. As a participant from the Black community in St. Paul noted, “Instead of having to Google, then look for my local news, and then kind of getting a source from the newspaper, the newspaper is like the majority of all the news. I would like something that’s pertaining to exactly where I am.”

Similarly, participants from the Indigenous community expressed frustration with how traditional media approaches their neighborhoods, often focusing solely on negative aspects. A member of the Little Earth community in Minneapolis remarked, “If they can’t come for good stuff, they don’t need to come for the bad.” This sentiment was shared

by many participants who felt that their communities were either ignored or portrayed through a lens of conflict or deficiency, rather than strength and resilience.

We wanted to make sure that people in the focus groups consumed news at least three times a week. That wasn't a hurdle as most of the respondents said they consume news daily.

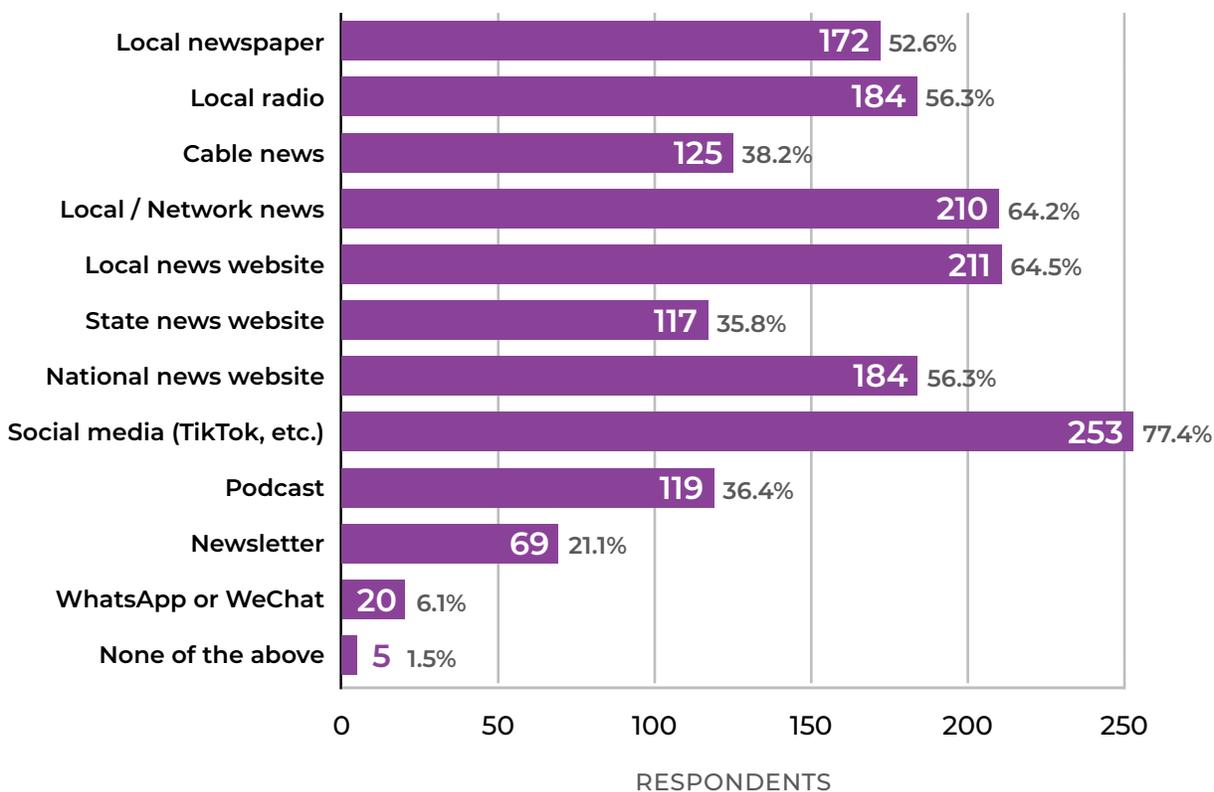
Q: “How often do you consume news?” (Must be three times or more per week to continue)



But for most, traditional media isn't their first stop for information. Instead, 77 percent said that social media is where they had turned for local news during the last 30 days.

Q: “Which, if any, of the following have you read, listened to or watched to get LOCAL news or information within the last 30 days?”

327 Responses



Concerns about bias influence how people seek news. “I look at different sites for different perspectives. I understand certain sites have different biases,” said one person. Most said they regularly seek out more than one source for information through search engines. Watching an evening newscast or reading the local paper, wasn’t enough for the people contacted on our behalf. They spoke of “deep dives,” “broader Google search” and going “to the source.”

Traditional news media has contracted as populations have grown, leaving gaps in coverage, particularly in non-White communities. Many don’t rely on local traditional coverage because it tends to skew negative. Through our discussions, we cataloged more than two

dozen media entrepreneurs who are providing local coverage. Most are doing this with little to no outside financial support.

Participants in all of the listening sessions found the current state of traditional local news in Minnesota lacking. The groups we spoke with don't default to traditional mainstream outlets when seeking local information. Most said traditional outlets often report the same news and say the same things.

"No one is doing true journalism anymore," said a 52-year-old White man from Breezy Point, Minnesota, a rural area in northern Minnesota, during a virtual listening session.

"I think there are a lot of us frustrated with that. It's a true trend."

People in the screenings and the listening sessions are very cognizant that traditional media no longer have a stranglehold on accessible information. The pre-screening data revealed that people use a variety of sources for information, everything from podcasts and social media, to newspapers, local TV networks and cable news.



No one is doing true journalism anymore. I think there are a lot of us frustrated with that. It's a true trend."

A 52-year-old White man from Breezy Point, Minnesota, a rural area in northern Minnesota

As noted, one of the chief concerns about the decline in media outlets is a loss of civic engagement. For example, during the late 20th century, newspapers routinely produced "voter guides" that included candidate information, such as criminal background and history, biography and stances on positions. But as newsrooms have contracted and newshole has shrunk, these guides are not as commonplace.

Focus group participants said they fill the resulting information void with Google searches and deep dives into candidates on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. This is also the approach many take when gathering information about an event. Specifically, participants talked about using Reddit, to gather additional information and viewpoints from those they trust in order to help make up their minds about local candidates, or understand civic issues. "I've been looking at Reddit for, I don't know, probably the last five years or so, just because they have a lot of different communities that are usually moderated by people that have a vested interest in whatever the topic is," said a White man from the Twin Cities during our first in-person listening session. "And I think people are pretty decent about calling other people out when stuff is factually incorrect. So I think it's harder to necessarily be fake."

Skepticism about traditional coverage also drove the conversations. At one point during the virtual session with rural residents, a participant in his 20s did a search to determine who was behind a news site touted as trustworthy by another participant. The twenty-something participant came across political positions held by the site owner and pronounced it biased.

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to crime. Those in the Minneapolis focus group spoke of the harm and false impressions of crime coverage. A White woman in the urban focus group said her friends, also White women, are fearful of venturing into parts of Saint Paul and Minneapolis because of news reports from legacy publications.

Community-Based Media: Filling the Gaps

In response to these gaps in representation, a growing number of independent media outlets, led by communities of color, are working to provide more accurate and holistic coverage. These outlets offer stories that reflect the cultural richness and contributions of Minnesota's diverse populations, while also addressing critical issues like education, housing, and civic engagement.

For example, [Somali TV](#) and [Oromo Diaspora Media](#) have become trusted news sources for East African immigrant communities in Minnesota, offering news in languages like Somali, Oromo, Amharic, and English. These platforms provide essential information to their audiences, from updates on immigration policies to local events and public safety issues.

However, these outlets face significant financial challenges. Many media entrepreneurs are operating with limited resources, often self-funding their efforts. Shukri Hassan, a Somali community leader and media entrepreneur, explained, "Everyone is working

hard and picking from their pocket to provide these services to our community. And it is very difficult.”

Similarly, [Native Roots Radio](#), which serves Indigenous communities in the Midwest, has built a loyal following by providing daily coverage of local and national Native American news and events. However, like many small media outlets, they often struggle with financial sustainability.

In the Latino community, for example, participants highlighted the need for more local, practical information that could help them navigate daily life. “Useful information in Spanish that helps Latino community members navigate local, daily life would make a big, positive impact on the community,” said one participant. Others emphasized the importance of getting information about local politics, schools, and public safety in Spanish.

Similarly, Asian American communities, including Minnesota’s large Hmong population, have turned to independent media entrepreneurs for trusted coverage. Outlets like [3HmongTV](#) and [Hmong Community YouTube TV](#) provide news and cultural content that reflect the values and concerns of the community. However, language barriers remain a challenge, especially for older generations who may not have access to local information in their native language. “There’s a lot of disconnect for more of the people who are youth like me,” said a 24-year-old Lao community member. “For my family and my younger cousins, TikTok has been a big part of what they use daily.”

For Minnesota’s Black community, the lack of media representation has long been a concern. Media entrepreneur Georgia Fort, founder of [BLCK Press](#), shared the long-term vision for how community-based media could fill the gaps left by traditional outlets. “We need to train people and deploy them into those newsrooms. We have to have something that’s also independent, because we can’t control [traditional media’s] culture. They’re showing us over and over again they’re not going to change,” she explained.

This desire for community autonomy in media production was echoed by a Somali participant who works in education. “When other people share our stories through their lens, even in education, it’s often incorrect or incomplete. We want to be the authors of our stories,” she said.

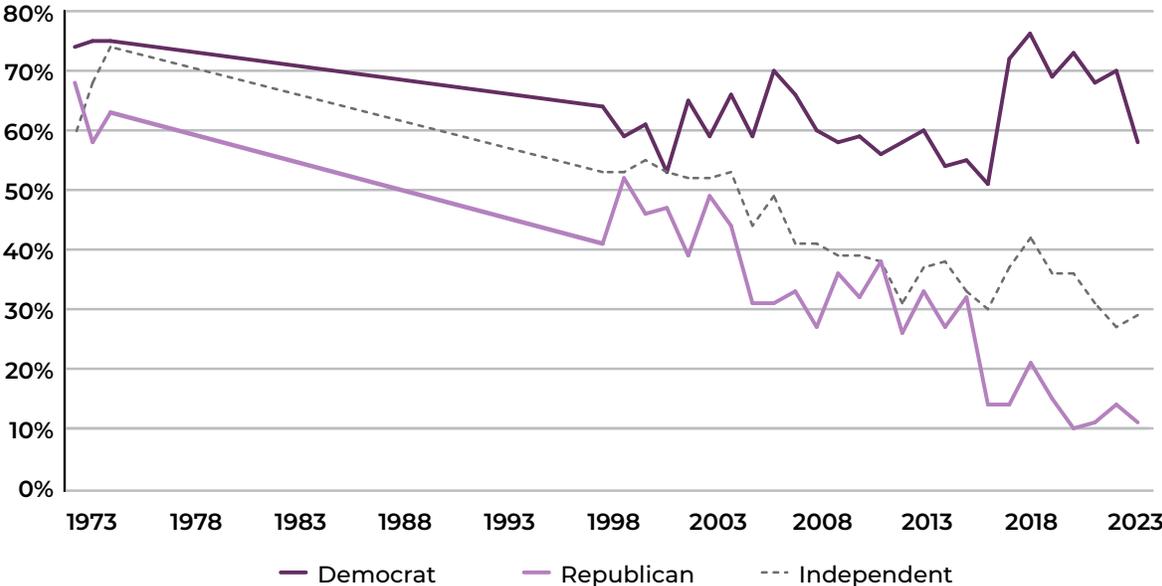
Media representation and trust

The demographic changes in Minnesota are also taking place across the country in a national media ecosystem that remains largely White. A 2022 survey of 12,000 U.S.-based journalists about how their organizations were progressing in matters such as gender, age and sexual orientation, found that race and ethnicity was where newsrooms fared the worst. (Gottfried et al. 2022) Race, and more importantly, cultural competency, has long been part of the discussion about accurate and inclusive news coverage. Most recently, in the aftermath of the murder of Minneapolis resident George Floyd, news outlets, especially legacy newspapers, reflected on the role of their coverage in maintaining, and in some cases promoting, racial discord and White supremacy. In the course of our research, participants repeatedly spoke about journalists ignoring or not understanding their respective communities.

This disconnect undermines efforts to build trust in news media, which has dropped precipitously since Gallup began its annual assessment of the public’s trust in 1997. Figuring out which news sources to trust has become more difficult for audiences. “You take pieces from all of them and kind of come up with your own conclusion,” said a Black man from Minneapolis in our first listening session.

Partisans’ Trust in Mass Media, 1972–2023

Percent “Great deal / Fair amount” of trust and confidence in mass media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly.



Source: Gallup

Last year marked a new low in this measure as just 32 percent of Americans said they trusted the media a “great deal” or “fair amount.” (Brenan 2023) The previous low of 36 percent was recorded in 2021. Gallup considers political affiliation—Democrat, Republican and Independent—in its survey. While this is a fair measurement, it can be read to address political coverage or coverage viewed from a political lens.

“I want to hear centered [news], just the facts ... no left news, no right news,” explained a 35-year-old Black woman who lives in Rochester, Minnesota, during a virtual listening session we held with rural residents across the state.

This sentiment was shared by many in the group.

“I just want to know what is going on,” said a 34-year-old White woman from Cambridge, a small town in Central Minnesota. “Give me the facts, and then I’ll decide what to do with them. I don’t believe anything in the news these days. It’s all clickbait.”

But trust or mistrust in the media can go well beyond politics, especially for non-White audiences whose full experiences aren’t always included in coverage. Research done by Pew found that Black people overwhelmingly distrust news media, no matter their age, gender or political party. (Pew Research 2023) This distrust is rooted in the belief that “news media specifically characterizes them as disproportionately poor, welfare-dependent and criminal.” (Cox 2024) Although they didn’t cite a reporter’s race as a key factor to determining if an article was accurate, many of those surveyed by Pew did say that Black journalists were better equipped to cover race-related issues.

Outlets and Audience

Much of the focus around the decline in the news industry is centered around the loss of oftentimes centuries-old publications. Northwestern University’s Medill Local News Initiative found at least one news outlet in each of Minnesota’s 87 counties in 2023. (Abernathy 2024). But the presence of local news outlets should not be taken as a sign residents are relying on them for information.

In April, hedge fund Alden Capital shuttered 10 newspapers in the southwest Twin Cities and south-

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eastern Minnesota. Much of the industry coverage about the closings centered around the age of the publications and Alden Global Capital's role in the industry's overall decline. Two of the papers served rural areas, while the rest were in the Twin Cities suburbs. The reaction to the closings was mixed.

For example, the Shakopee Valley News served a city of about 46,000, according to 2022 Census data. The Minnesota Newspapers Directory estimated its weekly circulation at 8,000. (Minnesota Newspapers Directory, n.d.) The Chaska Herald was based in the city of Chaska, which has a population of about 28,000, according to 2022 Census data. Its weekly circulation was 4,994, according to the Minnesota Newspapers Directory. (Minnesota Newspapers Directory, n.d.) The parent organization's Facebook brand page had 1,900 followers.

For the rural area, the lapse in coverage was more acute. Morgan Baum, director of local news sustainability for Report for America, said there were about 3,000 subscribers in her community of 6,000 households in Hutchinson (approximately 15,000 people). She said community members moved quickly to shore up the loss of the Hutchinson Leader with 124 people signed up for a community conversation to stay informed and be part of the solutions to preserve local media in their community. Since the closure, other outlets have stepped in to fill the gap. The Herald-Journal, which covers other small towns in the county, made a play for the subscribers, Baum said. CherryRoad Media, which owns and operates papers in 17 states, launched outlets for each town—the Hutchinson Station and McLeod Chronicle. They hired the same editor/publisher, journalist and two sales-people to handle both.

A 79-year-old woman from Hutchinson added, "I just want to have a solid newspaper in Hutchinson. We do subscribe to the print edition of the Station. I am a bit disappointed in the lack of local school board and city council reports. We have not subscribed to the Chronicle but am afraid we have to in order to know what is up in our county and Hutch. I will always advocate for quality local news reporting, but at my age, I do not have the energy to take on more involvement."

During a listening session with people living in rural Minnesota towns, one participant made note of the closures, but his comments were centered around the institution rather than a loss of content. The other participants didn't register the loss on any level, and the conversation continued.

None of the participants in any of the listening sessions cited a legacy publication as their go-to source for local information. Their consumption of traditional sources can be

described as casual at best. Many of the participants, particularly those with ties to immigrant communities, rely on outlets and platforms outside of the traditional ecosystem.

Minnesotans in rural areas as well as the population centers of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Duluth, and Rochester expressed continued frustration with a lack of local news and information. However, rather than go without information, they said they seek out alternative sources through social media and the internet. All of the participants we spoke with said they consumed news on a regular basis and routinely sought out information. A Black woman in

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the Rochester area with school-aged children said she watched the local television news to get information about the school her daughter attends, but often coverage doesn't go deep enough. That's when she searches for information online.

A rural participant, who had a cabin in a rural area, said his neighborhood homeowners association (HOA) newsletter kept him up to date on community issues.

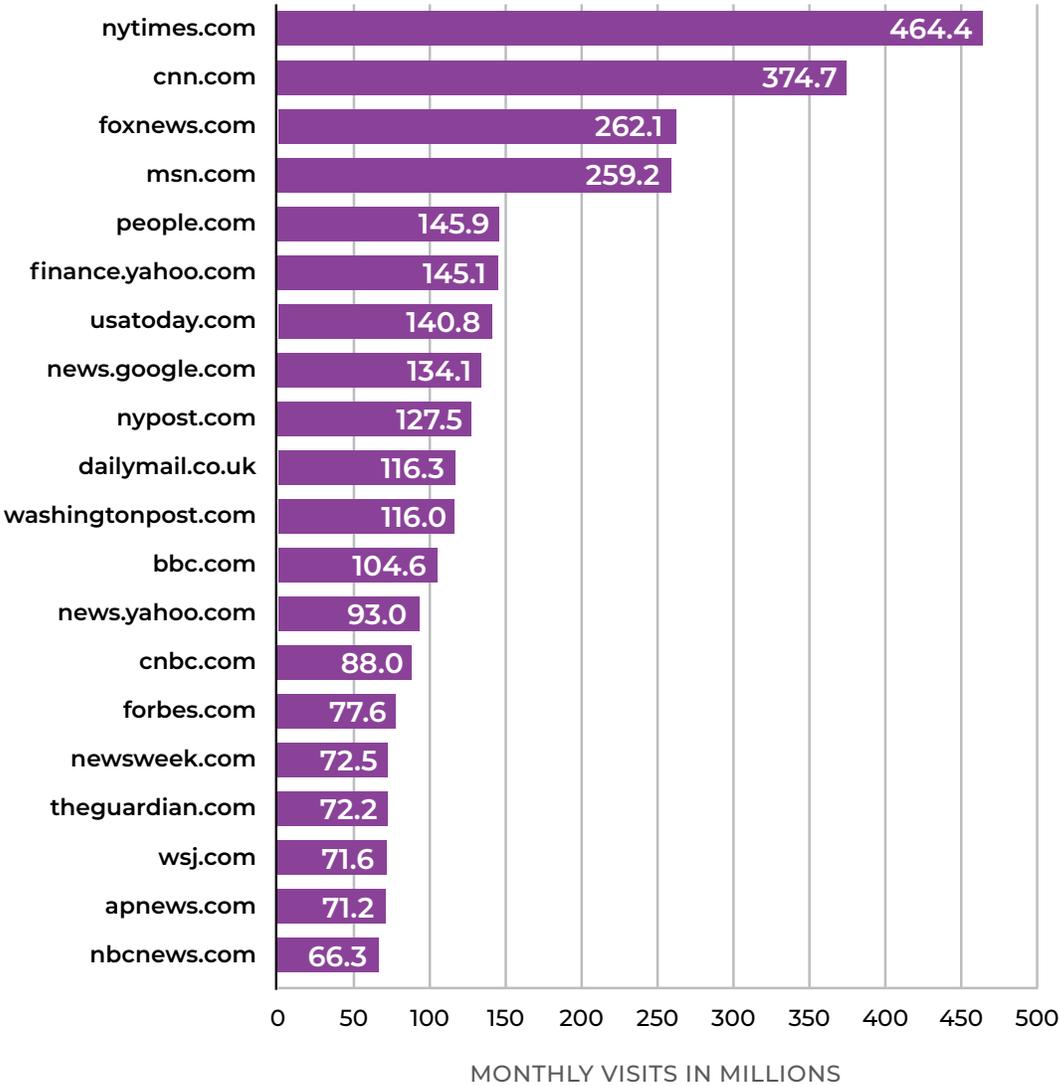
Sources outside of the realm of traditional media include social media favorites such as Facebook and TikTok, but people are also relying on apps, including [Citizen](#), [WhatsApp](#) and county-focused [Reddit](#) channels. Citizen is a subscription-based app that bills itself as a "personal safety network." For \$20.99 a month, it provides real-time alerts and information about public safety matters including crimes, fires and rescues. It's available in 60 cities and has more than nine million users. Participants in the listening sessions who used Citizen said it kept them informed about their immediate area. One man, who worked with drug addicts in Minneapolis, said he learned of an opioid overdose that was near his workplace. He rushed to the site and treated the person with Narcan before help arrived.

"The fire scanner in the Citizen app, I do use it for work ... I work with the unsheltered and IV drug users," said the 34-year-old Indigenous man who lives in Central City, a rural town in Central Minnesota, and works in south Minneapolis. "I use the fire scanner and Citizen app to find the encampments. ... I use it very much in the area I'm in."

The search for local information reflects the free fall that local news has been in for much of this century. Newspapers and other legacy publishing industries saw a nearly 60 percent decline in jobs between June 1990 and March 2016. (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016)

But while local news media has been diminished, national news media has developed an outsized presence in many communities. In interviews with citizens in Minnesota, they often defined national reporting as “news” and local reporting as “information.” In other words, it’s often easier for Minnesota residents to access content about political skirmishes in Washington, D.C, than a report on a meeting of the local school board. Online outlets such as The New York Times and Fox News have a staggering reach. The Times is the dominant site overall with 464.4 million monthly visits, according to a December 2023 report from Statista. CNN came in second.

Leading Global English-Language News Websites in the United States in December 2023, by monthly visits (in millions)



Notes: Based on mobile web and desktop visits, top 20 from a total 25 sites ranked.
Sources: SimilarWeb December 2023, Press Gazette, © Statista 2024

Fatuma Ahmed and Khadija Ali, co-founders of **Pamoja Women**, a nonprofit community organization in Rochester, Minnesota, call this trend the “nationalization of news.”

“I listen to NPR. I read a lot of news. I’m more of the person who reads a lot. So, BBC, NBC... I just find it’s becoming more biased that you’re not getting the full story of everything,” said Ahmed. “For me, it’s always that I hear one side, but when you go to the other side with the social media and when they show everything else, it’s like the news isn’t portraying everything. So now you come and hear a different story every time.”

Both expressed a need for more inclusive community-centered journalism, unbiased reporting, and community outreach. This disconnect between national news and local information presents an opportunity to create a new local media ecosystem that brings together nontraditional community media with traditional outlets. Minnesota can be a model for this new local media ecosystem.

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Reflecting on a Tradition of Neglect



If they can't come for the good stuff, they don't need to come for the bad."

Member of the Little Earth community, Minneapolis

Minnesota is home to 11 federally recognized American Indian tribes with reservations, and the U.S. Census records the American Indian/Alaska Native population at 1.4 percent. The seven northern reservations extend from the central lakes region to the state's northeastern tip. There are four Dakota reservations in the southern part of the state. Additionally, the East Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis has the nation's first and only urban **Indigenous-preference public housing program**. It is called **Little Earth**, and it is home to 38 tribes and nearly 1,000 residents, with 50 percent under the age of 21.

Little Earth residents who participated in our listening session said they distrust traditional media. One resident said "*they*" (*local and state journalists*) only come to their community to cover the bad, underscoring the notion that mainstream media from traditional sources are often considered outsiders. The disconnect reaffirms a widespread criticism that traditional journalists are not part of the communities they want to cover, and traditional newsrooms are not representative of the communities they need to cover.

Participants said many in the Indigenous community have no interest in engaging with traditional media because representation of the Indigenous experience in traditional media has historically focused on the negative or performative. They described that experience as exploitative, extractive, painful, hurtful and traumatizing.

"If we were ever to come out on top of anything, it's not big news . . . where do you get that information? Nowhere," said one Indigenous man, a 47-year-old Little Earth community member from the Chippewa of the Thames tribe, who participated in our listening session.

Participants described the Indigenous community's experience with traditional media as exploitative, extractive, painful, hurtful and traumatizing.

Instead, those gathered at a community center in Little Earth said they rely on social media and word of mouth to share information. Cassie Holmes, who helped organize the listening session, and her aunt keep the community abreast of events through the Little Earth Residents 411 Facebook page. The private group has 3,500 followers and averages 10 posts a day.

“Whenever something’s going on around the community and reporters come around, the community will run them off because they just don’t know what they want and what they’re going to post and because it’s usually negative,” said Holmes.



PARTICIPANTS IN LITTLE EARTH LISTENING SESSION / PHOTO BY SEAN LIM

There are some efforts by traditional news media to improve coverage. Minnesota Public Radio, for example, has a [Native News journalism initiative](#). Staffed by two Indigenous journalists—senior editor Leah Lemm (Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe) who lives in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and reporter Melissa Olson (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe) who lives in Minneapolis—the initiative launched in September 2023 with a mission to [strengthen Native coverage across the region](#).

“As a team, we are present in the community, taking part in events and meeting with citizens who share thoughts and ideas on what stories to cover, building trust with Native communities and nations while informing all of Minnesota,” said Lemm. “As a sign of success and increasing trust, many times when the team is present for one story, we will receive tips about other potential stories from community members.”

“We bring our backgrounds, experiences and journalistic integrity to our work. We also embrace a culture of collaboration, which is key to increasing Native coverage. And the goal of Native News is shared broadly in the organization—the team supports Native coverage by other reporters, editors and producers around MPR. ... Even so, one challenge is that there are so many important stories coming from Native nations and community members, that it’s oftentimes difficult to keep up.”

MPR is making an effort to report for the Indigenous community instead of about them. Lemm and Olson are tribal citizens and are committed to journalism focused on tribal communities and Native people, but this type of project requires a cultural shift in newsroom culture that has been geared toward MPR’s more general (White) audience since MPR was founded in 1967.

MPR is making an effort to report for the Indigenous community instead of about them.

“In this regard, maintaining the culture of collaboration is necessary,” said Lemm. “In MPR’s newsroom, producers will assist with stories that the Native News team considers significant, though cannot do alone. For Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives’ Day of Remembrance, producers coordinated a Minnesota-wide effort to cover demonstrations and events in various cities, complete with radio reporting, web story and photography from across the state. This couldn’t have been done with two people alone.”

MPR also has built a news partnership with [ICT](#) (formerly Indian Country Today). It is a reciprocal relationship where MPR News can share Native news stories and vice versa. This helps expand “the reach of information from both outlets.”

“Our sights are consistently focused on more collaboration opportunities,” said Lemm, the senior editor of MPR’s project. “The Native News journalism initiative aims to fulfill MPR’s mission by ensuring the inclusion of Native voices and, beyond that, by making Native voices a vibrant and crucial part of MPR’s coverage.”

Some members of the Indigenous community at Little Earth are familiar with MPR’s project and appreciate the effort. “I know Melissa Olson and that she does some

coverage,” said an Indigenous woman and Little Earth community member. “She interviewed some Little Earth and Indigenous community members during a Make Voting A Tradition event, but I never knew the name of the initiative.”

The Circle, a nonprofit community legacy newspaper in Minneapolis published monthly, has been serving the Indigenous community with “news from a Native American perspective” since 1980. The paper is delivered to all tribes in Minnesota and distributed to over 200 free sites in the metro area. The Circle is one of the few non-tribally owned Indigenous newspapers in the U.S., and the only non-tribally owned newspaper in Minnesota.

“The Circle is the bomb,” said Jolene Jones, who runs the Little Earth Facebook page with Holmes. “I feel they cover what they do. I don’t feel like anybody can meet all our needs because we’re too big of a community and too diverse of a community. But I think overall, The Circle does meet the community needs.”

Outside the Twin Cities and the seven-county metro area, in more rural parts of Minnesota, the Indigenous community faces similar information

gaps, particularly with limited coverage by traditional media outlets. It’s difficult to get equitable and fair coverage because of geographical constraints and the response time of media outlets, said an Indigenous woman who works as an executive secretary and office manager in the tribal government center for the Lower Sioux Indian Community, a population of 1,600 Indigenous people located in Redwood Country, just outside Morton, which is 105 miles and two hours southwest of Minneapolis.

To meet the information needs of the community, Lower Sioux community members have created their own information channels, including two members-only Facebook pages and a general public e-newsletter with 400 subscribers. Both are controlled by the tribal government. The tribal government also plans to launch a members-only website in fall 2024.

Another challenge for rural Indigenous communities is engaging youth and elders in community media, with technology and content relevance being significant barriers.



I don’t feel like anybody can meet all our needs because we’re too big of a community and too diverse of a community. But I think overall The Circle does meet the community needs.”

Jolene Jones, a Native woman who co-runs the Little Earth Facebook page

“It is a gap because the elders are not used to technology, and the youth really don’t care about it right now,” the secretary explained. “I’m not saying that they don’t care about technology. They don’t care what’s going on in the community because it’s not quite veered toward their age group.”

Existing programming for Indigenous youth in media production (such as video) makes an impact. There is great interest in audio production and podcasting, and training elders in technology use would help them access digital channels, such as the e-newsletter. The woman said if journalism was made more accessible, either through funding or entrepreneurship opportunities, there would be increased interest for both age groups.

She also said the community is open to more partnerships and collaboration with traditional media.

“We get a hold of our local radio station [[KLGR 1490 AM/95.9 FM](#)], and we get a hold of our local newspaper [[Redwood Gazette](#)] as soon as we know of an event coming up to hopefully help streamline it and get the word out there,” she said. “Sometimes it is after the fact and it’s invite-only-type items. But we’re always open to having discussions with people and the news stations.”

Other nontraditional news sources for Indigenous communities in Minnesota include:

[MIGIZI](#), a nonprofit communications organization in Minneapolis that was founded in 1977 with a goal of countering the misrepresentations and inaccuracies about Native people in traditional local and national media. Today, MIGIZI, which means “bald eagle” in Ojibwe (the bald eagle signifying communication, guardianship, and high standards), partners with schools across Minnesota to bring cultural, educational, and career-building resources to students and young adults. MIGIZI also offers youth programming such as [First Person Productions](#), a paid media internship to empower the next generation of Indigenous storytellers.

[Native Roots Radio](#) is a Twin Cities Native radio talk show from Eden Prairie, Minnesota (a suburb 25 minutes southwest of Minneapolis), that discusses [local and national Native American news and events](#) weekdays from 5 to 6 p.m. on AM950, and on Facebook and during podcasts. Their [Facebook page](#), created in 2017, has 13,000 followers. Invited guests are hosted on their radio program, “I’m Awake,” which is described on their website as a Native American news program that helps “us keep current with Mother Earth, Tribal and Twin Cities issues.”

The Alley is a nonprofit community newspaper that has been providing news and views of the Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis since 1976. It serves more than 20,000 residents and many businesses, agencies, schools, and visitors to Phillips. The diverse and vibrant community south of downtown Minneapolis is home to over 22,000 people and historically has had high levels of poverty. Most residents are working-class with over 70 percent people of color (mostly Black, Latino, and Indigenous). Named after Wendell Phillips, a 19th-century abolitionist, the Phillips neighborhood has a mix of residential, commercial and industrial workplaces and is where the American Indian Movement was founded in 1968.

‘We Want to Be the Authors of Our Stories’



There are so many great things that we are contributing to society that should also be highlighted. It should not be a one-sided story. If we take the narrative and we take our story back, we will be able to sell that ourselves. We don't need somebody else to sell it to us.”

Participant, Somali listening session

Minnesota has the largest population of Somali Americans in the U.S. at over 86,000 people. The 15 people in the Somali listening group included professionals, educators, community leaders, executives, nonprofit leaders, business and strategy consultants, journalists, a college student, and homemakers. They said they didn't trust traditional media or feel represented or accurately portrayed by legacy newsrooms. They said traditional media rarely uplifts the community or reports on positive things happening in the community.

“We also had a focus group with Star Tribune and with the publisher...,” said one participant. “And most of the stuff they cover about the communities gets negative stories. Nothing positive comes out. And that was voiced out in front of them.”

The Somali participants were cynical about journalists and said many in the African community feel the same way. They said reporting is influenced by bias, agenda, or money. This echoes sentiments from the rural listening session participants who characterized the news media as “corrupt.” However, it was clear that participants in all of the sessions distinguished between news and information. When speaking of news, they were referring to “national” coverage. Information was considered “local.” As such, participants lamented a lack of information on topics such as local government, schools and public safety.



PARTICIPANTS AT AFRICAN IMMIGRANT LISTENING SESSION / PHOTO BY ERIC ORTIZ

Media entrepreneurs in the Somali community have provided local coverage since the turn of the century. **Somali TV** launched in the 1990s with public access TV with the Minneapolis Television Network (MTN). Today, its Facebook page has 374,000 followers; the YouTube channel has 211,900. Two participants in the listening session volunteer at Somali TV.

Somali TV journalist Abdirizak Diis said there was a successful collaborative project with **Sahan Journal** until funding for the project ended. Sahan Journal is a nationally recognized nonprofit newsroom founded by journalist **Mukhtar M. Ibrahim** in 2019. Ibrahim immigrated to the United States from Somalia with his family in 2005 when he was 17. Before he launched Sahan Journal, he worked as a reporter at Minnesota Public Radio covering communities of color, and then as a reporter for the Star Tribune covering Minneapolis City Hall.

Ibrahim started the award-winning Sahan Journal to **cover immigrant communities** and provide communities of color with “free, fair, and responsive journalism.” Traditional newsrooms often did not provide this type of coverage for immigrants and communities of color, and when they did cover immigrant communities and people of color, they often **did more harm than good**, said Ibrahim. Since its founding, Sahan Journal has raised

over \$7.4 million from funders and \$2 million in advertising and individual donations. In July, [The GroundTruth Project](#) reported that Sahan Journal had more than over 20 employees and [a \\$3 million annual budget](#). Despite this success, Sahan has room to grow (averaging more than 50,000 unique visitors and 115,000 page views a month). Some in its audience see gaps in its coverage and it is not exempt from questions about cultural competence. Diis noted that most reporters at Sahan Journal aren't Somali.

Ibrahim said trained Somali journalists are rare. With this in mind, respondents said there's opportunity for funders to support journalism training programs, which will create a pipeline of more culturally competent journalists who can cover Somali and other diverse communities.

Until then, Ibrahim said journalists must learn to work with the members of the communities they cover.

"Any reporter who intentionally builds deep trust with communities can cover them well and authentically," he said. "That's precisely what our reporters strive to do. Yes, I'm one of the only Somali employees here. In fact, I'm only one of about six Somali journalists in the entire state. Two have recently left journalism, and the rest are emerging reporters with reporting jobs in local newsrooms... Our reporters are local, they know our communities well, and they've been building deep connections over the past couple of years. There's always more we and other media can do, and we strive every day to approach our stories with an open mind and as much cultural competency as possible."

In 2022 Sahan hired a Somali woman, Aala Abdullahi, to host several meetings with members of the Somali, Latino and Hmong communities. She gathered their thoughts about the media and their recommendations for how Sahan can provide better coverage. Ibrahim said Abdullahi did great work under a time-limited grant. She later moved back to the East Coast, where she attended college, and is now an [engagement editor at The Marshall Project](#).

Minnesota has other African immigrant communities with their own sources for news and information. For example, [Mshale](#), the largest and [longest-running African community newspaper](#) in Minnesota. [Oromia11](#) is a digital platform that serves the Oromo community, people native to the Oromia region of Ethiopia and parts of Northern Kenya

Respondents said there's opportunity for funders to support journalism training programs, which will create a pipeline of more culturally competent journalists who can cover Somali and other diverse communities.

and the second-largest East African immigrant population in Minnesota. **Oromo Diaspora Media** (ODM) is an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit news organization based in Minneapolis that was founded in 2020 and serves East African communities in four languages: Oromo, Amharic, Somali and English.

There still are not enough news sources to meet all the news and information needs of the state's African immigrant community.

"I've been here about eight years. I could be wrong, but from my observation, I don't see myself where they cover about my community at all," Eticha Gudeta Rufa, the founder and CEO of Oromo Diaspora Media, told The Pivot Fund. "As a person who is very closely working with my community from day one, since I came, I don't see when they cover most of something. So wherever you mention KARE 11, WCCO, Fox 9 or whatever, any kind of MPR and something like that one, I don't see when they cover most of my community-based stuff, including the Star Tribune. ... Our voice should be something. ... If they really represent this community, if they really value this community, they have to come out and do it."

During our listening session with Somali community members, they said education is an important issue for them and it is an issue that warrants more coverage for African immigrant communities.

"I think no politicians, no activists, no business people talk about education enough," said a Somali woman who works in education. "And there are a lot of uneducated parents who don't understand how the system works, how the system damages their kids, and by the time they find out, it's too late."

Shukri Hassan, the organizer of the Somali listening session and a respected member of the African immigrant community, said there is dire need for funding. Abdirizak Diis, the founder of **Somali Media of Minnesota**, for example, works for Somali TV in his spare time. His full-time job is as a high school social studies teacher.

"Everyone is kind of working hard and picking from their pocket to provide these services to our community," said Hassan. "And it is very difficult. ...But our users, I'm telling you, are legit. And our news, other cultures have to hear from us as well. And learn something from us, as much as we're learning from them."

"But I believe if we have good funding and we have support from other nonprofits or other organizations that are willing to help us and support us, I think we can be even better than CBS. All these channels and a lot of people will learn something from us..."

The participants said it's important for the Somali community to produce their own journalism. They said traditional media so often gets it wrong when it comes to their daily existence.

“When other people share our stories through their lens, even education, I have professional development trainers who come and they're talking about Somali. I'm like, I'm Somali, you're talking about me. And they don't look like me,” said a Somali woman who is a licensed teacher. “But their information is based on what they study of a small group of Somali. And now they're here, you know, smiling and talking about a whole generalized community of what they are and who they are. That's not true, and that becomes a fact for those who are listening. We want to be the author of our stories.”

Bringing People Together with Information



Useful information in Spanish that helps Latino community members navigate local, daily life would be useful and make a big, positive impact on the community.”

Participant, Latino listening session

Latinos made up 6 percent of Minnesota's population in 2023, but the 13 participants in our Latino community listening group, which was conducted in Spanish, said they felt invisible to traditional media. The diversity of Latinos in Minnesota compounds the situation as they are linked by a language but often separated by geography. There are more than 300,000 Latinos in Minnesota. Demographers predict that number will rise to 500,000 by 2035. The top countries of origin for Latinos in Minnesota are Mexico (66 percent), Puerto Rico (6 percent), Ecuador (4 percent), Guatemala (4 percent), El Salvador (3 percent), and Cuba (3 percent), according to the Minnesota State Demographic Center.

Participants stressed the need for information that can help people be civically engaged and meet the needs of everyday life. They said they wanted information on topics such as managing money, saving money on electricity, staying healthy, best prices for groceries



PARTICIPANTS AT LATINO LISTENING SESSION / PHOTO BY ERIC ORTIZ

and insurance, as well as health services and community programs. They viewed information as a path to being a better citizen, connecting with neighbors and local businesses. In short they want to be equipped with information that helps them address issues they care about.

The Latino participants called for more local political information.

“Local politics affects their day-to-day experiences,” said Viviana Salazar, a Latino community leader in North Minneapolis.

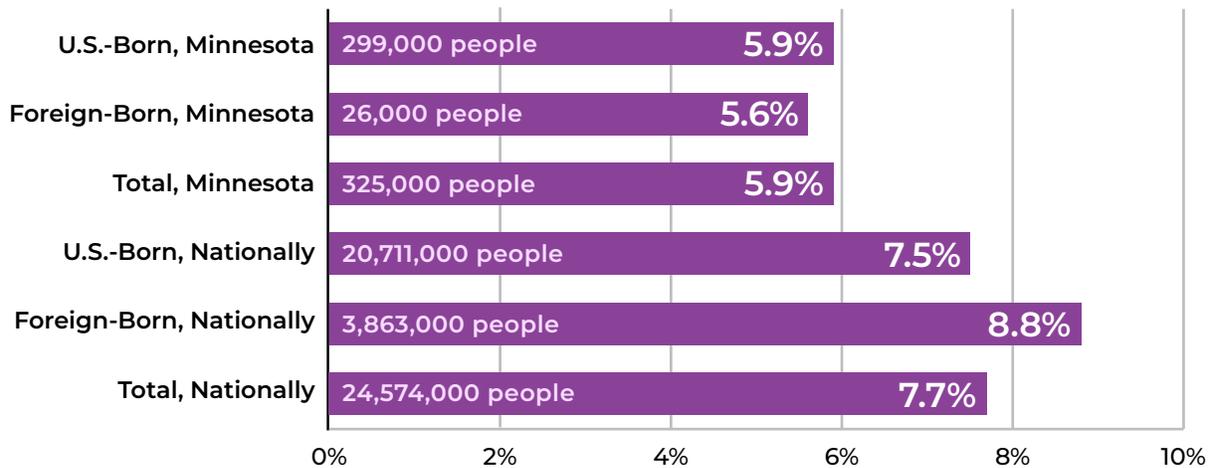
Some said it’s not unusual to get local news and information from their church.

“I also hear about news from my colleagues because we have a community in the church,” said a Latino community member who works in construction. “It’s a big group. And sometimes if something happens we communicate either by text or by phone.”

Many people in the Latino community, and many communities of color and immigrant communities, rely on mobile phones for communication. Not everyone, especially low-income individuals and families, have access to a personal computer, but almost everyone has a cellphone and can access information on it. Nearly 90 percent of Minnesotans had a broadband internet subscription between 2018-22. In its report examining the internet gap, the American Immigration Council reported that in 2019, 1 in 17 Minnesotans lacked internet—this includes dial-up. (American Immigration Council, n.d.)

The AIC report found that immigrants were disproportionately represented among those with internet access.

Share of individuals with no internet access, by nativity, 2019



Source: *Examining Gaps in Digital Inclusion in Minnesota*, American Immigration Council, December 2022. https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/examining_gaps_in_digital_inclusion_in_minnesota.pdf

Some listening session participants questioned the wisdom of relying on a religious institution for unbiased information. A church is a good option, said one participant, but how will a church give information about abortion and women’s rights?

There’s also a need for information to be in Spanish.

“Useful information in Spanish that helps Latino community members navigate local, daily life would make a big, positive impact on the community,” one participant said. “If the information isn’t in Spanish, it’s not as useful as it could be.”

Like the participants in the other groups, the members of this session said they have come to rely on social media—specifically TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp. One participant said if she hears of something that interests her she will research it on social media platforms to see if it’s true.

But another quickly cautioned, Facebook does have news, but it’s hard to know what is true and what is not.

Almost 40 percent of Minnesota Latinos are under 18. The youngest Latino focus group participant was 15 years old. He spoke quietly, but he inspired the group to find technical solutions such as an app that would provide news and information relevant to the needs of Latino communities in Minnesota.

Participants said Univision Minnesota and Telemundo Minnesota provide general, mostly national news coverage, not the kind of hyperlocal information they want and need on a daily basis.

Respondents also complained that traditional local journalism often lumps Latino residents into one monolithic group, an approach that misses the mark when it comes to more nuanced and inclusive storytelling.

“Latinos are an ethnic group, not a racial group, so we have Afro-Latinos who come from the Caribbean and other countries,” Ruby Azurdia-Lee, the president of Comunidades

Latinas Unidas en Servicio

(CLUES), an organization in St. Paul that provides social services, told WCCO, the CBS affiliate in Minnesota.

“We have Indigenous people, we have people with white skin [and] fair skin.”

“The key is we have to sit at the table, because if we don’t sit at the table, we’re on the menu,” said Mauricio Montes de Oca, a Latino community business leader in St. Paul. “We’re sitting at the table. This is a table, but we have to sit at the tables where decisions are made so that people like us are listened to and say, what does my community need? My community needs this and this. And you give them this, but they don’t consume it, they can’t access it. So that’s the missing part. I’m very positive, but I focus on what we lack, because if not, we don’t grow.”

Participants from the Latino community stressed the need for information, in both Spanish and English, that can help people be civically engaged and meet the needs of everyday life.

There are several publications and media platforms that target Minnesota’s Latino communities and Spanish-speaking audiences. One is La Voz Latina, a monthly newspaper with a circulation of 8,500 published by the St. Paul Publishing Co., which also publishes three English-language newspapers (St. Paul Voice, Downtown St. Paul Voice, and South St. Paul Voice) and has been providing community news since 1966. La Voz Latina was founded in 1997, and distribution includes home delivery to the West Side, the Twin Cities oldest and most established Hispanic community, and high-traffic areas in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area.



Latinos are an ethnic group, not a racial group, so we have Afro-Latinos who come from the Caribbean... We have Indigenous people, we have people with ...fair skin.”

Ruby Azurdia-Lee, president of Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)

Other Latino media serve more as marketing and advertising vehicles for businesses and nonprofits to reach Latino consumers rather than repositories of the daily information participants said is needed. They are packed with press releases, entertainment news, national headlines, and ads.

The **Latino Communications Network** (LCN) has been creating and circulating publications and resources to the Minnesota Latino Community for over two decades. LCN Media includes **Vida y Sabor** (an entertainment magazine since 1999), **El Directorio** (a Hispanic business directory), and **La Prensa** (a weekly newspaper since 1991). In 2015, LCN Media became a part of **NewPublica**, a diverse public relations and strategic communications firm, to help strengthen its reach to Minnesota's Latino communities. A few years ago, NewPublica launched **NewPrensa**, a weekly news aggregator covering local communities of color and international news, made by young people for young people.

Latino American Today presents news and profiles to connect the Latino American community in Minnesota. Launched in 2013 by Rick Aguilar, the founder and president of **Aguilar Productions**, Latino American Today is free and distributed in over 80 locations in high-density Latino American communities.

There are some emerging nontraditional Latino community news and information sources. **El Minnesota de Hoy**, a local news and information source for the Spanish community in Minnesota, is run by Gustavo Mancilla, a former general manager at Univision Minnesota and the founder of Hispanic marketing, advertising, and communications agency **MLatino Media** in Minneapolis. The online news site includes **audio updates on SoundCloud**, and a video news program **on YouTube** with over 1,000 subscribers that is broadcast on Minnesota public access channels SPEAK MPLS in Minneapolis, SPNN in St. Paul, CCX Media in Brooklyn Park/Brooklyn Center, BCAT in Bloomington, and QCTV in Anoka, Andover, Ramsey, and Champlin.

Conversaciones de Salud (Health Conversations) is an e-newsletter on public health and community issues. The newsletter is produced by **Carmen Robles and Associates LLC** and delivered monthly to over 3,000 people in the Hispanic/Latino, Afro-Latino, and Indigenous-Latino community. The newsletter covers crucial health issues such as mental health and substance use disorder, particularly focusing on the impacts of



The key is we have to sit at the table, because if we don't sit at the table, we're on the menu."

Mauricio Montes de Oca, a Latino community business leader in St. Paul

fentanyl and opioids. Community engagement events, such as town halls, help reach more Latino community members.

The digital radio program “[Entérate Minnesota](#)” (Get Informed Minnesota) is hosted by Erika Rivera and produced by [Minnesota Latin Radio](#), which is owned by Neli Silie, a Venezuelan native who works at Univision Minnesota as a reporter. In 2023, Silie bought La Jefa Radio, where she also worked, and rebranded it into Minnesota Latin Radio. Since then, Minnesota Latin Radio has grown to 30,000 followers on Facebook, and its impact is growing with its audience in serving the news and information needs of its intended audience.

Like many communities, the challenge for the Latino community in the Twin Cities is to bring people together. A lot of great work with Latinos gets done in silos. There isn't a lot of collaboration.

Latino community members in the listening session saw this as an opportunity. Participants said a lot of community news and information exists in different places with different people and organizations. They called for a system that collects local information and brings the information together. This would enable more Latinos in Minnesota to have access to information about their community and benefit from that information.

“It's important to listen to the community and know what people need,” Montes de Oca, a Latino community leader in the Twin Cities, reminded everyone. “It's very true, there are a lot of events, we have organizations like [CLUES](#), like [COPAL](#) [Comunidades Organizando El Poder y La Acción Latina], like Casa de Esperanza [now [Casa United](#)], there are a lot of organizations doing fantastic things, but there is no place where you can click and say, what events are there on Saturday that benefit the community? There is nothing.”

Tremendous Potential for Innovation



We do as much as we can, but we still lack information, resources, and [we have] limited funding.”

Participant, Asian focus group

Minnesota has a sizable Asian American community, including the largest urban Hmong community in the U.S, with more than 94,000 people. The top Southeast Asian countries of origin for Asian American immigrants in Minnesota are Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Korea. Most reside in the Twin Cities. Like the other immigrant groups, they are underrepresented in traditional newsrooms and local coverage. As a result, the community relies on nontraditional news sources.

This listening session included many of the most successful media entrepreneurs from the Asian community in Minnesota. They are trusted media sources for the Hmong community: 3HmongTV, Hmoob Twin Cities News, Hmong Radio Broadcast, and Hmong Community YouTube TV. Their cultural competence also comes through in coverage that promotes Hmong arts, history, culture, traditions and commerce.

Language is a generational barrier for many in this community. Young people are limited in their communication with older generations who still speak the languages of their homeland. Meanwhile, older generations have limited access to local information because it's in English.

“The biggest issue is that there’s a lot of disconnect for more of the people who are youth like me,” said a male Lao community member who lives in a suburb of the Twin Cities and works at a nonprofit organization that serves the Lao community. “I’m 24. I’m really the younger generation.”

“I get all my news from Reddit,” he added. “That’s all I use. I know the Hmong have their own subreddit, but we Lao in Minnesota, we don’t have something like that. ... I’m subscribed to Minnesota or the Twin Cities, and get some really local news of what’s going

on in our general community. But there's nothing for me on the cultural level. I don't know what our community is doing. I feel like we could definitely have a subreddit for that."

Those who are younger often turn to TikTok.

"In the high school, elementary school, TikTok has been a very big boom in our community," he added. "That's what they use. ... For my family and my younger cousins and my other external family, TikTok has been a big part of what they use daily and Instagram. So that's kind of where they are at."

Even older generations rely on social media channels.

"The elder—the ones with low socioeconomic, low education—they really don't have any avenue of news," said another younger male Lao community member who works in non-profit social services. "Just word of mouth or what they hear, rumors. A lot of them watch Thai YouTubers, and those can be very extreme."

There are more traditional outlets available.

3HmongTV is a Twin Cities Hmong television station that has been providing news and information since 2005. It has 100,000 subscribers on YouTube and 70,000 followers on Facebook. Hmoob Twin Cities News has 7,800 followers on Facebook. Hmong Radio Broadcast (106.7 FM/(K102.1 FM HD3)/WIXK 1590 AM/103.3 FM) is a commercial radio station primarily serving the Twin Cities Minnesota metro area and western Wisconsin that is owned by a Hmong woman, Kongsue Xiong, through licensee Asian American Broadcasting, LLC. Its mission is to empower the Hmong community in Minnesota (and globally) by delivering a variety of Hmong music, community education, and news.



3HMONGTV IN STUDIO COVERING COMMUNITY NEWS



One community member said it's obvious why people bypass mainstream media and instead turn to coverage by Asian American media entrepreneurs. "We want to enhance, to build up, to provide whatever resource we can to build the media in our community so that we can continue to get more accurate information from trusted individuals that we are working with, whether it be on YouTube, TV, radio, whatever, on social media," he said.

But these outlets are small and starved for resources. They can't provide all of the information that is relevant to their communities because they don't have the resources or equitable access to information.

"We somehow have to be involved in government to get that information. And so how would I know? How would these guys know? We don't," said a participant. "And that takes a lot of effort just to be at that level. ... There's bureaucracy that you have to deal with. And that's why it's so hard for ethnic news media."

The barriers to access make it challenging for these communities to connect.

“What I see happening because of stuff like that, it’s hard for a community to coalesce on anything,” said a younger community member who works at the Lao Center of Minnesota, an organization that has been providing social services to low-income Lao families in Minnesota since 1983. “So it’s like, oh, the county is doing this career drive. They’re actually going to hire people at the fair. It’s a good opportunity for people who have labor experience. I would want to know that for my community. But if I find that out two days before the event, and I make a Facebook post that day, after doing everything else I had to do that day, I’ll get two people who can actually do anything about it. So, yeah, it makes it hard for us to again coalesce and as a community act on the news.”

Mitch Lee, executive producer of 3HmongTV, suggested creating “a central hub ... where we have a Lao representative there, a Hmong representative, a Cambodian representative, they’re all working together in that one hub and then writing links and information.”

The nontraditional local news channels operate separately. Even within the same community, sometimes there is a disconnect. Creating a hub would enable everyone to work together for maximum efficiency and maximum impact.

“We can have folks from the Lao community to cover Lao events, and so then we have to get together, and then we have to work together,” said another Hmong community leader.

“This is actually what I’ve been waiting on for a long time,” added Lee, a media entrepreneur in the Hmong community.

“It’s a first step in the right direction. I just think we can do more to serve our community better. There’s a huge disparity when it comes to where our community members get their daily news. I’m optimistic about the future of ethnic media in Minnesota. We can do better.”



There is a huge disparity when it comes to where our community members get their daily news. I’m optimistic about the future of ethnic media in Minnesota. We can do better.”

Mitch Lee, executive producer of 3HmongTV and a media entrepreneur in the Hmong community



Putting the Community First with Journalism



We're tired of having to get outside information to get inside. We're tired of having cultural appropriators tell the story for us. And we have to fix it."

A business executive from the Black community who lives in St. Paul

Black people have lived in Minnesota since at least the 18th century. But the members of the listening group we spoke with at the St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) said they are often overlooked by traditional media or cast in a negative light. There is coverage by Black-owned media, but like the other ethnic media cited in this report, they are under-resourced and their reach is limited.

"We're tired of having to get outside information to get inside," said a Black community business leader. "We're tired of having cultural appropriators tell the story for us. And we have to fix it."

Participants said Black communities in the state have been damaged and harmed by biased coverage in traditional media. Participants in our Black community listening session were a very diverse group, from young to old, with a wide range of backgrounds, and occupations from CEOs to media entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, teachers, and students. All of them agreed they want to see larger financial support for Black community media so they can have leadership autonomy and management control to build the type of local news and information ecosystem that serves all of their needs.

"Even if there's an opportunity to use the funds to make inroads into the established media as the system, there has to be changes or shifts to some of that information, because we can't make an echo chamber," said a Black woman and community leader at the listening session. "If we just make a new thing, and it becomes another echo chamber, that's not changing the massive view and exposure."

She explained that growth through local news will only come by taking a different approach to money. This new approach has to be based on production, rather than consumption.

“We have to change the whole thinking system, because that’s why, after all this time, we’re still fighting for crumbs in this economy that we, this nation, that we built,” she added. “It’s been built. We have all these dollars, and we don’t get them. We don’t have them, like when people come in and talk to us, like we should, because we use our knowledge as consumers instead of the way to get the stuff done that we want to get done.”



We have to change the whole thinking system, because that’s why, after all this time, we’re still fighting for crumbs in this economy that we, this nation, that we built.”

A Black woman and community leader at the Black community listening session

Participants suggested a four-pronged model of success that includes media training, equipment, jobs and businesses. They would funnel people into the media ecosystem by providing media training and supplying the equipment. After community members get trained, they would provide jobs and employment in a newsroom they built. That newsroom would become a sustainable independent business.

“As I’m hearing what everybody’s saying, and this has been so phenomenal to hear what the community really wants from news,” said Georgia Fort, a Black media entrepreneur and community leader in Minnesota who participated in our listening session. “We need a financial say ... political, we even need information on the legislative process. ... There’s so much need. And so even when I think about it, it’s a building, and it’s a newsroom, and it’s such a huge vision. And so I carry that with me every day, while I’m still trying to show up and tell like, OK, this is where we’re at, this is in 25 years and hopefully in 10. Hopefully in five. Because it’s doable. It’s solvable. But we do need to train people and deploy them



PARTICIPANTS AT A LISTENING SESSION HELD AT THE ST. PAUL NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTER / PHOTO BY ERIC ORTIZ

into those newsrooms. We have to have something that's also independent, because we can't control (traditional media's) culture. They're showing us over and over again they're not going to change."

There are bright spots. Duchesne Drew has been president of [Minnesota Public Radio](#) since 2020, and Phil Harris was named the [new opinion editor for the Star Tribune](#) in June 2024 after spending much of his career in Ohio, including nearly 30 years at the Plain Dealer, where he served as an editorial writer and metro columnist. Both are respected Black journalists, but overall Black representation is severely deficient in traditional newsrooms and media outlets in Minnesota.

"I think that the media organizations are trying to do better. I want to acknowledge that," said Fort. "... what concerns me is the legacy stations have continuously, even when they're doing their best, have continuously failed and have proven that they're not the best option for serving communities of color. . . And it concerns me that the legacy stations take up so much space and so much resources that the Spokesman or BLCK Press [Fort's independent for-profit journalism organization] really can't grow and thrive and fulfill the need that they were created to fulfill.

Fort said that it's not enough for legacy media to make more inclusive hires, they also need to address the newsroom culture so that they can retain those employees. "But it concerns me that they're so worried about checking a box or like the perception and not really addressing the root problem, which oftentimes is the culture within their organizations that no matter how many Black reporters they hire, they can't retain them," she said.

Fort noted that the dramatic shifts that occurred after the murder of George Floyd in 2020 haven't been sustained.

"Largely things have just gone back," Fort said. "There was a huge influx of resources and support and programs and initiatives in 2020 and 2021. But

by 2022, 2023, I think a lot of those things started unraveling. I think a lot of people started going back on their commitments. We've seen an attack on affirmative action." Fort pointed to the [recent successful lawsuit](#) against The Fearless Fund, a venture capital



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Georgia Fort, a Black media entrepreneur and community leader in Minnesota who participated in our listening session

fund aimed at addressing funding disparities for women of color entrepreneurs. “And I think that those things are creating a climate where Black-led organizations, including media organizations, are getting less and less support.” Fort concluded.

The [Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder](#) is the oldest Black-owned newspaper in Minnesota. Civil rights activist and businessman Cecil E. Newman launched the Spokesman-Recorder in 1934 as two separate papers, the Minneapolis Spokesman and the St. Paul Recorder. They merged into one single news publication in 2007. Today, his granddaughter, Tracey Williams-Dillard, is CEO/publisher of the Spokesman-Recorder, which is celebrating its 90th year of operations and impact. For Williams-Dillard, who was honored as one of AARP’s “50 Over 50” most influential people in Minnesota in 2022, running the Spokesman-Recorder is “a labor of love.” Besides running the weekly newspaper, she also leads a monthly event for women, [Sister Spokesman](#), “where women of color come together to discuss pertinent issues in their communities and encourage and support each other while building networks and supporting Black entrepreneurs in the vendor marketplace.” The paper also hosts an [annual boat cruise](#) social event to [support its journalism](#).

“When my grandfather opened these doors in 1934, he had hopes of becoming a news beacon for the Black community,” [Williams-Dillard told the Spokesman-Recorder](#) in 2022. “Undoubtedly, times were extremely challenging for our people. But yet he pressed on, gained the trust of our community, and showed how important it was to build relationships, including the power chambers of the state legislature,” she continued. “... none of this is possible without a supportive community.”

Al McFarlane has been running [Insight News](#), which serves Minneapolis’ African American north side for 50 years. It started as a magazine in 1974 and became a community newspaper in 1976 after McFarlane bought the rights to the publication. McFarlane is a leader in Minneapolis ethnic media as the president and CEO of McFarlane Media Interests. He also runs [“The Conversation With Al McFarlane,”](#) a daily webcast/podcast that features conversation with community leaders. It’s streamed on YouTube pages for Insight News and [Black Press of America](#).

There are also grassroots efforts to produce more reparative journalism, which addresses past wrongs done by journalism and seeks to repair those harms by closing gaps in coverage of underrepresented communities and rebuilding trust with audiences through ethical storytelling and inclusive reporting. [North News](#) practices reparative journalism.

“Folks have been so harmed and folks have so much baggage related to even the idea of journalism,” said Kenzie O’Keefe, the former editor of North News and current executive director of ThreeSixty Journalism, a high school program that introduces teens to journalism. “We’re at a point where almost all journalism needs to be produced through a lens of understanding the particularities of the harm that it’s caused.”



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Kenzie O’Keefe, former editor of North News and current executive director of ThreeSixty Journalism

The monthly print paper has a circulation of 10,000 with 400 public bulk drop sites and home subscriptions in 15 neighborhoods that make up North Minneapolis. Founded in 1992, North News was bought by Pillsbury United Communities in 2016. North News runs a year-round internship program for local high school students and has taught a daily introductory journalism elective at North High School since the 2016-17 school year.

ThreeSixty Journalism also focuses on teens. The non-profit runs a multimedia storytelling program for high school students at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, “It’s so important that we not just teach, because it’s not one-directional, like bestowing upon, but dynamically engaging young people in the development of reparative approaches to journalism.”

North News also pursues narrative justice with Pillsbury United Communities (PUC), a network of diverse neighborhood centers and social enterprises that offer empowerment programs and initiatives such as a radio station in south Minneapolis (KRSM, 98.9 FM) and a Documenters program that trains citizen journalists to cover local government meetings.

“As a lifelong newspaper person, I can see some improvement in the way media engages North Minneapolis,” said David Pierini, the editor of North News. “Newspapers and TV outlets have made more diverse hires and now provide some space for features and other positive stories. But the way crime and poverty continue to be reported triggers trauma and reinforces narrow and misunderstood views of North Minneapolis.”

Some participants in our listening group get information from KMOJ (89.9 FM), a community-oriented radio station that is known as “the people’s station.” Owned and

operated by the nonprofit Center for Communications and Development (CCD), on Minneapolis's north side, KMOJ was created in 1976 and is a member of **AMPERS** (Association of Minnesota Public Educational Radio Stations), Minnesota's independent public radio network with 17 unique and diverse community radio stations from border to border.

But community members we spoke with said coverage is limited in scope and does not provide information that applies to them.

"North News does good work, but their paper focuses on a small neighborhood, so often their articles don't apply to me," said a Black woman who is a community leader in the Twin Cities. "KMOJ and KRSM do not produce any news."

Built to Provide Solutions with Community Journalism



The radical sort of right voices just get amplified because they're the ones writing in. The rest of us are like, eh. And as a business owner, I don't want to take a stance, or else I'd be the one refuting that, you know? So I feel like it is way more purple in these small towns than the media portrays."

Kristine Shelstad, owner of Madison Mercantile, a community innovation center in Madison, Minnesota, a town of 1,500 in the southwest part of the state



Rural conditions in Minnesota have changed, and growth in populations of color is not just happening in urban areas. The pandemic brought a significant shift in population patterns, and for the first time in decades, rural counties experienced population gains while the seven-county metro experienced population loss.

According to the Center for Rural Policy and Development, a nonpartisan nonprofit policy organization seeking solutions for Minnesota, that trend continued in 2022, and much of greater Minnesota has **experienced considerable growth** in Black, Indigenous, Latino and people of color populations. Three of the top five counties with the highest percentage of populations of color are outside of the seven-county metro:

Mahnomen (55 percent), Nobles (44 percent), Ramsey (40 percent), Hennepin (33 percent) and Watonwan (30 percent).

In fact, populations of color now are a significant percentage across many rural Minnesota counties, and the counties with the highest percentages are expected to have continued population growth.

Rural communities face many of the same challenges as urban communities in accessing trusted news sources. Local newspapers, radio stations and digital platforms are not meeting all the information needs of communities. Community members and independent media entrepreneurs are making efforts to create a welcoming and inclusive community through journalism and community events to bridge cultural divides and foster dialogue.

One of those people is Kristine Shelstad, the founder of [Madison Mercantile](#), an arts and innovation center in Madison, Minnesota, a town of 1,500 people, about three hours and 155 miles west of Minneapolis in Lac qui Parle County, in the southwest part of the state near the border of South Dakota.

“Dawson, which is 11 miles away, is about the same size. And we’re the two big towns,” Shelstad said. “The other towns are 200 to 400 in the community. And I would say 90 percent have the exact demographics, but Madison itself is 95 percent White Norwegian Lutheran.”

Agricultural business brings Latino families to town for work. There is a large Micronesian population in Milan. There’s a Latino and Somali population in Willmar, about one hour away, in Kandiyohi County.

“We want to be known as a place where they’re comfortable living,” said Shelstad, who spent 30 years in the U.S. Army and describes herself as a “tree hugger in a uniform.” “Because we want them to come, be comfortable, and decide to stay. ... [W]e have a shared high school out in the middle of the country, that’s Madison, Appleton and Milan. And I want to say fully 50 percent of the younger grades are non-white or mixed.”

Madison, like many rural towns above 1,500, still has a newspaper, the [Western Guard](#), a weekly. They also have their own radio station, [KLQP 92.1 FM](#).

But they aren’t used by everyone.

“They’re very trusted by those that use them,” said Shelstad, a self-described news junkie. “But I think the problem is people that use them are getting to be less and less. ... If you talk about the community, the tools are there. There’s between city and county run

Facebook sites, websites, newspapers, and radio. The tools are all there. Whether people are accessing them is questionable.”

The West Central Tribune in Willmar serves as the regional paper.

Like urban media, rural media needs to earn the trust of audiences. Reporting for communities, not about them, is how to build deep, enduring relationships with communities.

“I think we have to earn it back because there’s a reason that people don’t trust us, and there’s a reason some communities never trusted us,” Nora Hertel, the founder and executive director of **Project Optimist**, a solutions-focused news organization covering greater Minnesota, told The Pivot Fund. “... [W]e really do rigorous fact checking. We fact check all of our stories and almost nobody fact checks their stories. I see a lot of ethical breaches in local news, crime coverage that includes identifying details about victims, things that are sensational for people. They want to see that, but it’s not really ethical. And sensationalize, focus on the negative. But people see a lot of typos. People, if they get featured in the newspaper, their wife’s name is spelled wrong. That kind of thing happens a lot. Obviously, you can’t catch everything because we’re human, but because we don’t have copy editors anymore, all of that stuff really contributes to that wearing away of trust. And I think we have to, there has to be ethics there for everybody, the community. Commitment to community needs to be there, and fact-checking. Everybody needs to fact-check, but I know how many resources that takes.”

Hertel has some ideas on how additional resources could help meet the needs of more underserved communities.

“Funding for stipends to advisory board members can keep lines of communication open into those communities without asking people to provide free labor,” said Hertel. “Support for partnerships and collaborations can help outlets cross pollinate their audiences and produce journalism that’s more complex than any organization can do



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Nora Hertel, founder and executive director of Project Optimist, a solutions-focused news organization covering greater Minnesota

alone. Keep building and growing the training and education pipeline for young people of color so that they can diversify the journalism workforce.”

More community voices could help the local news ecosystem in rural northwest Minnesota as well.

“There’s a lot of room for improvement,” said Kristin Eggerling, a promotions specialist for the Northwest Minnesota Arts Council in Warren, Minnesota, which is over five hours and 325 miles from Minneapolis in Marshall County, and 60 miles to the Canadian border. “It’s definitely through the lens of the editor and the journalist. So if it’s in their world, then they might do an article about it. But it’s a bit myopic.”

Eggerling lives in Hallock, Minnesota, in Kittson County, 45 minutes north of Warren, and would love to see more collaboration and community engagement with local news sources.

“They might think they’re open,” Eggerling said. “I would not call them open. ... They do empower some people, like, say, the librarian has a column that she’ll write once a month or every two weeks. The person at the senior center, they have a column they have in every newspaper. The ministers take turns writing columns. So they do have those things. ... We don’t have enough people to do all the work. And we all get tasked with many, many, many things that we have to take care of, or things just don’t get done. And so I’m sure they would be open to other people writing things, but I don’t know if we have the capacity here for other people. You know what I mean? We’re all tired out.”

There are dozens of local newspapers in rural northwest Minnesota such as the [Grand Forks Herald](#) in Grand Forks in Polk County, which also covers northeast North Dakota, and the [Thief River Times](#) in Thief River Falls in Pennington County. Staffing is an issue for most of them.

“They’re understaffed,” said Mara Hanel, the executive director of the Northwest Minnesota Arts Council, a nonprofit that serves seven counties. “I think if they had more staff that desired traveling out to find more feature stories, they would. Just their budget and their staff at the local newspaper level is tight.”



[Local news organizations] are understaffed. I think if they had more staff that desired traveling out to find more feature stories, they would. Just their budget and their staff at the local newspaper level is tight.”

Mara Hanel, executive director of the Northwest Minnesota Arts Council, a nonprofit that serves seven counties

Chelsey Perkins, the news director at [KAXE/KBXE - Northern Community Radio](#) in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, in Itsaca County, located in the northern Iron Range region, is leading efforts to build out the local news capacity of the oldest rural community radio station in the country, which has been in operation since 1976. The station has had some success by taking a nontraditional approach and adapting to local news challenges with philanthropic support and a strategic focus on local news to drive growth and community engagement.

A key growth driver has been the newsroom listening to the concerns of rural Northern Minnesotans, particularly regarding housing, school funding, and economic development. The editorial approach to community engagement has focused on storytelling through public interaction and the cultivation of a culture that values hearing from people directly affected by the issues. This approach has resulted in a remarkable surge in digital audience, but they still have room to grow.

A key growth driver has been the newsroom listening to the concerns of rural Northern Minnesotans, particularly regarding housing, school funding, and economic development.

“Our top challenge is discoverability,” Perkins said. “We’re not known as a news source, so basically developing that reputation, just establishing ourselves as a trustworthy source with new audiences. I think that’s our biggest challenge right now is when I want to be able to say where I’m from and have people say, oh, I know that, right, versus every single time having to explain who we are.”

Partnerships have become more important to sustainability in rural and urban areas alike. Nontraditional collaborations with local businesses and media channels can boost support, influence and bottom lines.

Existing and Emerging Media Entrepreneurs

The digital age has created the opportunity for a media renaissance. Control is no longer concentrated in the hands of corporate owners or the wealthy. Media entrepreneurs have entered the space, often after using social media sites, such as Facebook, as an incubator to grow audiences. These outlets have loyal followings that in some cases rival mainstream media. As part of the charge of this analysis, the Pivot Fund sought out media entrepreneurs whose target audiences are communities that traditional media have largely neglected. These entrepreneurs and their work are attempting to fill longstanding voids and vacuums, but their financial stability is precarious:

- A private Facebook group called [Little Earth Residents 411](#) was created in 2014. Its mission is “to inform Little Earthlings about upcoming events, programs, opportunities and trends happening in and around our communities.” It has 3,500 active members and an average of 10 posts a day and 400 posts a month.
- Somali TV started in the mid-1990s airing on Minnesota Television Network, the former public access community media center. Today, Somali TV has a TV studio in Minneapolis, a [Somali TV website](#), a [Facebook page](#) and a [YouTube channel](#) with over 23 million views.
- [Pamoja Women](#) was co-founded by Fatuma Ahmed and Khadija Ali. The Rochester nonprofit serves and empowers East African women. Ahmed and Ali have become a news source for the Rochester community, translating local stories into other languages for the community (Swahili, Somali, Arabic) and sharing them on different channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.
- [Dose of Reality](#) is a talk show created by Shukri Hassan. She dissects local issues that impact immigrants and examines the role media plays in shaping our society and culture amid information chaos and mistrust of major news outlets among communities of color.
- Entérate Minnesota (Get Informed Minnesota) is hosted by Erika Rivera. The weekly digital radio show airs on [Minnesota Latin Radio](#), a bilingual digital radio channel in St. Paul. Entérate Minnesota provides information and education

from community leaders in Spanish and English. The show launched in 2023, and it has grown to 30,000 followers on Facebook.

- **Minnesota Latin Radio** is owned by Neli Silie, who immigrated from Venezuela a few years ago. She currently works at Univision Minnesota as a reporter and also in sales. After she finishes her day job at Univision, she works the night at Minnesota Latin Radio.
- **Carmen Robles and Associates LLC** is a community engagement strategic consulting firm that has been serving the Latino community and taking action for health and education equality since 2004. President Carmen Robles also is the publisher of **Conversaciones de Salud**, a popular **monthly e-newsletter** that serves the Latino community and has grown to over 3,000 engaged subscribers since creating its current e-magazine format in 2022.
- Georgia Fort is an independent Black journalist and founder of **BLCK Press**, a two-time Emmy award-winning news and multimedia production company that builds equity through storytelling and media, and co-founder of **Center for Broadcast Journalism**, a nonprofit focused on transforming media to reflect the communities they serve.



- The Center for Broadcast Journalism was co-founded by Marianne Combs to accelerate the change in the demographics of newsrooms and journalism. The idea is to make journalism a trade school model. This can lower the barrier to entry for journalism and create more opportunities. The Center for Broadcast Journalism provides media education, training, equipment, internships, and career opportunities for youth and community members of any age.
- **ThreeSixty Journalism** is a diverse high school journalism program that trains the next generation of diverse thinkers, communicators and leaders. The skills journalists need now are technical, ethical, and entrepreneurial.
- **Hmong Radio Broadcast** is committed to serving community. Xeng Xiong, does a morning show, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 10 a.m., and a real estate show with Tou Fang on Saturdays at 8-9 a.m. They are local radio and broadcast through the AM, FM, and HD format. They cover the Twin Cities metro area and the west side of Wisconsin.
- **3HmongTV** has broadcast in the Twin Cities since 2005. It has 100,000 subscribers on YouTube and 70,000 followers on Facebook. Mitch Lee has been the executive produce of 3HmongTV since 2014 after leaving his career in computer programming.



- **Hmong Community YouTube TV** began when Neng Xiong started posting news and information videos on YouTube for the Hmong community in 2009. Today it has more than 57,000 subscribers. He covers news in the Twin Cities metro area and events, meetings, conferences, and anything that is valuable for his communities. Today, Hmong Community YouTube TV has over 2,700 videos with 13.1 million views.
- Kristine Shelstad started **Madison Mercantile** in 2021 to build community in Madison, Minnesota, a small rural town three hours from Minneapolis in south-west Minnesota. The multipurpose space has a coffee house, gift shop, art gallery, stage for live music, community workshop, classrooms, offices, a wellness room, and gathering areas for community groups.



COMMUNITY EVENT AT MADISON MERCANTILE

- **Project Optimist**, a solutions-focused news organization that was founded in 2021 and covers environment, business and social issues in greater Minnesota. Project Optimist uses community journalism as a catalyst to unite people and surface challenges and solutions in rural Minnesota, reframing problems and engaging problem solvers with stories, events, training and art.”

- **North News** is a hyperlocal monthly newspaper serving the 15 neighborhoods of North Minneapolis since 1992. They are owned by **Pillsbury United Communities** (PUC), a nonprofit organization that has been serving Minneapolis for over 100 years. North News provides nuanced and solutions-based reporting with a community newspaper and is building out its digital side.
- **Native Roots Radio** is a one-hour weekday radio program that airs daily (Monday to Friday) on **AM950**, the only progressive talk radio station in Minnesota, and Facebook Live. Robert Pilot, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and retired high school teacher, is the host and executive producer of Native Roots Radio. Pilot started Native Roots Radio in 2017 during the opposition of the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. Native Roots Radio is broadcast in the Twin Cities and across Wisconsin, and continues to uplift voices and information about issues and programs for Indigenous people in the Midwest. It has a reach of 200,000–300,000 listeners per week on radio airways and 100,000 listens per week on social media, live streams and podcasts.
- **Oromia 11** is a trusted news and information source for the Oromo community in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, and with over 50,000 Oromo people in Minnesota, the largest population of Oromo people outside their homeland in Ethiopia and Kenya. The Twin Cities are known as Little Oromia by Oromo people worldwide. Oromia 11 launched in 2020 to address the chronic information gap on issues that affect the Oromo people and other people of the Horn of Africa in East Africa.
- **Oromo Diaspora Media** (ODM) is an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit news organization based in Minneapolis. The media platform was founded in 2020 and serves East African communities in four languages: Oromo, Amharic, Somali and English. They report on the Oromo (Ethiopia) diaspora members in Minnesota and beyond, inform the Oromo community about important issues (with a focus on health, education, politics and the economy), and increase awareness about the lives and unique socio-economic needs of East African refugees and immigrants.

See **our appendix** for more about media entrepreneurs in Minnesota.

Cultural Competency

As noted in the introduction, Minnesota has changed dramatically through the years and become a multicultural state. These changes mean that the media have to have an understanding and respect for cultural differences. Coverage has to reflect the nuances around an issue, or risk alienating the audience. Culturally competent coverage can also help bridge gaps between communities.

In March 2024, the Sahan Journal's education reporter Becky Dernbach's coverage of proposed cuts to heritage language programs was part of why Minneapolis Public Schools reversed course. Dernbach's connections with parents, students and communities allowed her to explain the value of the programs to the community. She explained the story in a [Sunday newsletter for Sahan Journal](#).

Superintendent Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams announced the reversal at a school board meeting and apologized to the community.

"To really report things with diverse perspectives, we have to make it more nuanced," Sahan Journal founder Mukhtar Ibrahim told The Pivot Fund. "We have to talk to educators, we have to talk to people who are working in the system, we have to talk to the state, we have to talk to the school board, and we have to talk to many, many people so that we can provide that comprehensive nuanced story."



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Mukhtar Ibrahim, founder of Sahan Journal

The Sahan Journal's origin's story could serve as a model for future publications. For the first year, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) served as an incubator for Sahan. MPR [paid Ibrahim's salary](#) as he built the organization, and MPR leaders offered him guidance.

These days, the Star Tribune partners with Sahan and regularly runs stories from the news site in the Sunday edition of the paper. Local and national foundations [provided meaningful grants to support Sahan's growth](#), allowing funds to be used for general operations, and thousands of individual donors and businesses have invested in the organization.



CENTER FOR BROADCAST JOURNALISM TEAM WITH GEORGIA FORT AND MARIANNE COMBS

Long-Term Strategy

Philanthropy is positioned to play a key role in the evolution of media in the coming years. Any long-term strategy has to go beyond shoring up traditional media and include media entrepreneurs in the growing ecosystem. Growth, sustainability and collaboration are areas of focus. Many of the media entrepreneurs we spoke with don't have the capacity to extend their reach without dollars. The current infrastructure doesn't offer them a sound revenue stream in part because of scale.

Sponsorships and events could help drive revenue. Collaborative advertising models could also prove to be a lifeline for some.

"When you talk to some of these big advertisers, they don't have time," said Bekki Yang, a business development strategist with 3HmongTV. "They're like, 'Hey, I have a hundred thousand dollars I need to spend.

And I don't have the time to go out there and nitpick all of the network and make sure I'm hitting all the communities.' I think there is an opportunity there, especially here in the Twin Cities."

Grant amounts need to be meaningful. Consider multi-year funding that also comes with support.

Grant amounts need to be meaningful. Consider multi-year funding that also comes with support. In the case of media entrepreneurs, support might be helping to develop financial or newsroom infrastructure; traditional media might need additional dollars for cultural competency training. Be creative, and consider ways to bring media entrepreneurs together for the benefit of the respective audience.

Look beyond traditional platforms. Social media has become an incubator for media entrepreneurs. Don't dismiss its role when considering applications.

What's Next?

Journalism now and in the future needs to serve the needs of all communities. That starts by listening, then giving people the information they want and need to strengthen their community. That is not happening today with most traditional media organizations in Minnesota. Many communities of color, immigrant, rural, young, and low to moderate income communities are not engaging with traditional media outlets in the state. Instead, they are turning to nontraditional sources to get their news and information.

These nontraditional news sources need funding, resources and support to grow their operations and increase their frequency, quality and impact. They also can benefit from nontraditional partnerships. If traditional media organizations want to serve communities that are tuning them out, unsubscribing, and looking the other way, they've got to go to communities directly. Collaborations with nontraditional media can help traditional news organizations build trust and increase community engagement.

Entrepreneurship excels with mutual support. In return for community access and engagement, traditional news organizations could provide financial compensation to nontraditional community news sources for this service. If traditional news organizations have a cooperative and collaborative mindset with nontraditional community news sources, more community members can benefit.

Look to Sahan Journal. Since its founding in 2019, Sahan Journal has had five years of steady growth and is a thriving organization, serving many communities as a trusted news source. Sahan Journal has emerged as a leading voice in nonprofit news, with a commitment to racial equity, innovation and public service. Sahan's newsroom has produced groundbreaking coverage of housing, education, public safety, health care, the environment, and labor: stories that put the experiences and needs of diverse communities on the front page of Minnesota's news agenda. And while Sahan is criticized for not having enough Somali journalists, it does boast one of the most—if not the most—diverse newsrooms in the country. Philanthropy can help Sahan and others train more Somali journalists. Funders can help train more immigrant, Black and Latino journalists and make it attractive for them to work in independent newsrooms for that matter.

News deserts are not the only reason people lack reliable sources of information. Many people are uninformed and misinformed because they are turning away from the news. Consumer behavior has changed, and the news media industry must change with it. People do not want bad news, another story about a shooting, drug overdose or car

crash. They want to know why there are more shootings and drugs in the community, why some local roads have higher accident rates. They want to know what is being done to address community issues and create solutions for the rise in gun violence, drug addiction, and car collisions. Respondents in our research for this report said they do not need more partisan journalism and do not want more polarization in their communities. They need responsive journalism, reparative journalism and solutions journalism. They said they need journalism that helps resolve issues and makes their lives better.

Recommendations

- 1. Provide transformational philanthropic support** and wrap-around services to existing or emerging media entrepreneurs and their local news sources.
- 2. Support creation of intergenerational community convenings/news hubs** for Indigenous, Southwest Asian, Latino, Black, African immigrant communities. Connect community-based organizations for each community with media entrepreneurs and community members from each community. Youth run social (Reddit, TikTok), elders share information, media entrepreneurs run hubs.
- 3. Support more collaborative approaches to mutual aid**, and couple that with community engagement projects around news and information. The reason why many hyperlocal newsrooms are successful is because they are seen as community resources by the people they serve. Not only can residents get critical information from these news outlets, they can also get information about how to navigate the DMV, local schools and more.
- 4. Fund trade school model with organizations serving youth.** Teach technical, ethical, entrepreneurial skills and provide workforce development opportunities. All three of these skills are valuable, foundational life skills today and the categories of knowledge that young media makers need to be successful now and in the future. Organizations serving young people with a community approach to journalism can help create a solutions mindset and prepare youth to do more than just make a living or have a career. Technical understanding, effective communication, critical thinking, civic engagement, and resourcefulness are transferable to other fields. They can show youth how to be good citizens, productive contributors, and positively impact their communities. These skills also can lead to paid work.
- 5. Support existing community media centers and fund the creation of new community media centers** so every community in the state has access to a community media center that can provide media space, equipment, and training for community journalism production. Connect community media centers to schools, parks, after-school program, civic institutions such as libraries, and community organizations that serve youth, adults, and seniors. Create hubs and incubators for community journalism training that can serve as a pipeline

to community journalists of all ages from youth to elders for traditional and nontraditional newsrooms.

- 6. Fund community and civic engagement efforts**, which strengthens democracy, promotes accountability, and empowers communities to address inequities and build resilience. Without such investment, marginalized voices risk being left unheard, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and inequality. Through these efforts, philanthropy can play a transformative role in fostering more inclusive, equitable, and just societies.
- 7. Fund journalism training programs** to develop more immigrant journalists, and to create a pipeline for bilingual and multilingual journalism.
- 8. Fund experimentation around advertising and revenue generation initiatives** that support community-based media and ethnic media.
- 9. Support the creation of a platform** or service that connects nontraditional and traditional media organizations. This type of connection service can ensure the stories of all communities are told and the voices of all communities are heard.

Resources

Minnesota population/demographics: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/minnesota-population>

Gottfried, Jeffrey, and Tomasik, Emily. 2023. "U.S. Journalists' Beats Vary Widely by Gender, Employment, Race, and Other Factors." Pew Research Center. April 4, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/04/us-journalists-beats-vary-widely-by-gender-and-other-factors/>

APPENDIX

Media Entrepreneurs in Minnesota

We have a great opportunity to create a community news ecosystem that works for everyone and all communities. The newsrooms of the future will not look like the newsrooms of the past. They will look more like the communities they are covering, and in many cases, they will be the communities they are covering.

To create a media ecosystem that ensures equal access and representation, we need stakeholders at all levels of a community to buy in and participate. Everyone needs to understand the outcomes journalism will produce and see the value of having more informed and represented communities. We are not there yet, but people are starting to see how journalism is interconnected to a healthy society.

These are some nontraditional media entrepreneurs in Minnesota who are serving their communities with trusted news and information. They are helping to create a local media ecosystem that serves all communities with journalism and builds a healthy society for everyone.

Little Earth

Jolene Jones, a community elder aunt, and Cassie Holmes, her niece, are helping Little Earth residents get their news and information through a private Facebook group called [Little Earth Residents 411](#). Their mission is “to inform Little Earthlings about upcoming events, programs, opportunities and trends happening in and around our communities.” The group was created in 2014 and has 3,500 active members with an average of 10 posts a day and 400 posts a month. They want to increase their impact.

“I would love to have more resources,” said Jones. “I would love to expand that. I would love to be able to do highlights for the week of news, like this program’s doing this, this is happening, kind of like hard copies and, and do, like, information census.”

She would like to branch out into radio or podcasting.

“I think a podcast would be really good. ... It doesn’t involve reading. It doesn’t involve a certain age group,” said Jones. “Everybody in the community can listen to the radio and listen to a podcast. They can listen on their phone. They can listen with the regular radio. They can use their computers. I think that would be awesome to have that in our community participation.”

Holmes, the younger half of the duo, would like to see more opportunities for community members in the 30-50 age bracket, especially parents.

“I feel like we’re still missing a group, an age group,” said Holmes. “We still have adults that we would love to give more opportunities. I would love to see them more active and doing more things that, so that they could be someone that their kids can look up to if their kids aren’t, because, you know, we have some kids who are very into it and very active. And then we have some kids who aren’t and their parents aren’t doing anything either.”

The women surveyed the Little Earth community by going door-to-door and handing out questionnaires.

“We did a survey that was by the community for the community,” said Holmes. “And we had like a 97 percent success rate of people answering it. Up to five people per household could get a \$10 gift card. We weren’t at a hundred percent cause some of our homes were vacant. We would stand right there and we would throw it in a big envelope with everyone. Cause there were no names, no numbers, but it was just so successful because community members went door to door. They talked about it. And if people even were like, I’m busy right now, but come back, we, they would go back.”

This type of in-person engagement is important and necessary. A big challenge in the Indigenous community can be just getting community members to leave their apartments. “There is a lot of anxiety with community members,” explained Holmes “This is due to a lot of trauma and not having opportunities now to even really share in all spaces without people being [critical]. Even on Facebook, people can comment and be like, ‘Oh, I don’t agree. Well, I didn’t hear it that way, so you must be wrong.’ Which is really sad, too, because that’s not our way.”

Somali TV

Somali TV started in the mid-1990s airing on Minnesota Television Network (MTN, the former public access community media center in Minneapolis that is now SPEAK MPLS). Somali TV staff in those early days paid for airtime on MTN out of their own pockets.

Today, Somali TV has its own TV studio in Minneapolis. They also have [a Somali TV website](#), a [Facebook page](#) and a [YouTube channel](#) with over 23 million views. Seven people work on Somali TV with a shoestring budget and support from the community. They focus on the Somali community living in Minnesota and do journalism in the Somali language as well as English. All of the Somali TV staff view the news and information they are providing the community as a service to the community. They are not making money from Somali TV, and many Somali TV staff continue to pay money out of their own pockets to produce Somali TV.

Despite the obstacles, the Somali community remains optimistic about their future and the future of Somali TV.

“Somali TV is not me,” said Maxamuud Mascadde, a freelance journalist who has worked on Somali TV for many years and is a leader within the organization and in the community. “It’s bigger. We focus on the local issues. Education, health, and community awareness. That’s what we do. And we don’t talk about what we think or just like create things that are not there. But any story that we’re talking about, we bring experts who exactly know the topic that they are discussing. And we fact check, as real journalism does. We don’t tell anything that we are not sure. Two sources a story. I mean, if let’s say a kid was killed here, we’re not going to report like, oh, so-and-so was killed, unless we know that comes from the police, verify that we talked to the parents of that kid. So we check everything.”

Somali TV has become a respected and trusted source of news and information for the community by listening to the community and putting the community first. They address the issues the community wants addressed and provide the information they need.

“That’s who we are,” said Mascadde. “We are the community.”

Abdirizak Diis is another one of the Somali TV journalists. He once had an English talk show for the channel and currently is a high school social studies teacher. He also is [a 2023 Bush Fellow](#) and created the first Somali ethnic studies curriculum in the country for Minneapolis Public Schools. Born in a refugee camp in Somalia, he understands the

needs of immigrant children starting school with little preparation and significant language barriers and believes in the power of education to change lives.

Education continues to be a big part of Somali TV, and Diis still would like to see more educational opportunities for youth. Media training with youth, in high school or even before high school, could help.

“There’s no training on the media [for Somali youth],” said Diis. “They get their high school diploma and they go to university for journalism. It is supposed to be, but there’s no other community targeted or specific training that’s happening that I know of. And I have been in this field for a while now and I’m connected to many people. Funding is the issue. I tried. I applied for multiple grants for Somali TV, but we couldn’t succeed. I think it’s the system that is pushing us up. The antiquated system. Yeah, it’s the system that we need to change. Someone like me, who is educated, knows what I’m doing. I’m writing a perfect grant when I write it, and people listen to me. And I’m a Bush Fellow too, and that’s what I did for myself. People don’t listen to me, don’t support us. That’s a problem.”



Funding is the issue. I tried. I applied for multiple grants for Somali TV, but we couldn’t succeed... People don’t listen to me, don’t support us. That’s a problem.”

*Abdirizak Diis,
founder of Somali Media Minnesota
and journalist for Somali TV*



Another issue is that the Somali community could use more community reporters to represent their community. Youth could fill this coverage gap.

“The bad information reaches to the community first in Somalia, before the good news,” said Diis. “So it needs extra effort to take the extra mile in order to get this good information at the front of the bad one so that the community can get the correct information. That doesn’t get easy. It needs a lot of effort, time, effort and energy and a lot of resources. And that’s how it could happen.”

This commitment to community has made Somali TV an important community news source for the African immigrant community in Minnesota. They are a reliable, valuable resource for information that brings people together.

With more support and resources, Maxamuud Mascadde, Abdirizak Diis, and everyone at Somali TV could tell more stories for the community, deliver more necessary information, and reach a wider audience.

As one African immigrant community member at our listening session put it, “Somali TV is authentic. It’s the truth.”

Pamoja Women

Fatuma Ahmed and Khadija Ali are the co-founders of [Pamoja Women](#), a nonprofit in Rochester that serves and empowers East African women and has a very strong community. They believe nonprofit community organizations such as Pamoja Women could fill the gaps in news coverage and help news organizations reach more people.

“I truly wish that local news would reach out to a nonprofit organization led by the East African community,” said Ali. “If they reach out to Pamoja and say, what do you think of this, then we could help educate the community too.”

Ahmed and Ali have become a news source for the Rochester community with Pamoja Women. They translate local stories into other languages (Swahili, Somali, Arabic) for the community and then share these stories on different channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. Some of the information reaches people outside Rochester in other Minnesota cities such as Stewartville, Bryon and Mankato. Some people even forward their reports to international audiences. If traditional news organizations engaged with the Pamoja Women co-founders, traditional news organizations could decrease biases in their coverage and increase trust with the community.

“Please come to us because we are putting this news out there,” said Ali. “Because when people ask us and say, ‘Hey, why aren’t you posting the whole fraud thing [Feeding Our Future case] in your WhatsApp?’ We don’t have enough information for us to post it. Because guess what? We have to answer a lot of questions after we post something. So we want to be knowledgeable of what we’re posting so we can give them like right away answer all the questions that will pop up.”

Ahmed and Ali, who lead Pamoja, have expressed a desire for local news outlets to engage with them and seek input from other community-led organizations. Pamoja already has an engaged community that follows them on digital channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, and in person at events.

“That’s the thing with us here at Pamoja,” said Ali. “What we do is that we do get our news from the local and then with language being the biggest barrier for our community, we use WhatsApp. Our community uses that a lot. So what we do is when we see something in the local news that is very important and will help our community, we gather what we get in that article or everything, and then we share it on our WhatsApp page. And then we translate it with our own. So Fatuma speaks Swahili. She says it in Swahili. I give it to them in Somali, and then we have an Arabic volunteer. She does it in Arabic. So those three big languages are the ones that we basically share.

“We take the news and then we put it out in a way that everyone will understand it. Like a huge thing that is happening in the school district that the parents need to know. So what we do is we go to these new local websites, gather everything that’s news, and then we put it out in our WhatsApp page and then distribute it to people and tell them.”

This nontraditional form of newsgathering could be developed into a more formal collaboration with community organizations and traditional media outlets. Such partnerships could do more than just boost engagement and inform communities. They could help revitalize local news.

Dose of Reality

Shukri Hassan has been uniting people for a long time. Hassan wears many hats in the African immigrant community, and one of them is hosting her own TV talk show called “[Dose of Reality](#).” Through this platform, Shukri dissects local issues that impact immigrants and examines the role media plays in shaping our society and culture amid information chaos and mistrust of major news outlets among communities of color.

Hassan engages with high-profile individuals and discusses pressing societal issues. Past guests have included Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison. The show used to be recorded live on [Minneapolis Television Network](#) (MTN) and also broadcast on Facebook. It was a very popular show in the community with an engaging format that allowed community members to interact with community leaders and ask them questions and get answers. Despite financial constraints and pandemic-related challenges, the show gained international viewership and facilitated cultural exchange, showing the importance of building bridges and addressing important topics.

“We talked a lot about different types of topics, and I’ll bring people and stuff like that,” Hassan said. “What really amazed me, a lot of the community people that were here, it

was a live talk show, so people were coming and sitting there and were able to engage with the guests that we had, and any questions that were shared and the connections were done so it was like more like the connection was done at the same time and people that wanted to meet these individuals that didn't have an opportunity before were able to do that. I created a platform that allowed the community to connect with high-end people they were not able to meet. So we learned a lot."

Hassan did the show for two years. She used to pay for everything out of her own pocket, including paying for training at the studio for her friends. She was even teaching them. Then Covid hit. It got more difficult to do the show, and she took a break after 2021.

"We were helping each other," Hassan explained. "But we were not getting paid. We were not getting an income. So the little income I had from my job is what I was putting there. ... At the end, I couldn't afford it. So slowly, I started backing off. But the community always talks about it. And everybody that sees me is like, are you bringing the show back? Which episode is coming in? Who is coming? We want to come."

Hassan is a natural leader and charismatic person. Her impact on the community is substantial. By day, Hassan works in the Social Security department, a job she has had for many years.

"I love working there," Hassan said. "They find out I was doing the talk show one time. And you know how they do the citizenship event where they get the citizenship, the immigrants get that. And they're like, Shukri, we need you. And I'm like, for what? They're like, you need to do a speech like your show to the immigration immigrants in the immigration office. And I'm like, no, I can't do that. I was done with that. And they're like, no, you have to. So I had to do speeches a couple of months ago. Over 2,000 people. Wow. Yes. And she was like, you are amazing."

Hassan would love to restart her community news program, and the community wants her to bring it back. Restarting "Dose of Reality" show could create positive community connections and lead to solutions, not just within her African immigrant community but throughout the Twins Cities and beyond. Many people could benefit from Shukri Hassan's perspective, intelligence, and ability to bring people together.

Entérate Minnesota

Another community leader bringing people together is Erika Rivera, the host of “Entérate Minnesota” (Get Informed Minnesota), a weekly digital radio show for [Minnesota Latin Radio](#), a bilingual digital radio channel in St. Paul. Entérate Minnesota is a space to provide information and education from community leaders in Spanish and English.

The show launched in 2023, and it has grown to 30,000 followers on Facebook. The shows are live streamed on Facebook in Spanish with subtitles or Spanish with translators or English. Guests have included leaders in the Latino community, such as [Rosa Tock](#), the executive director at the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, and leaders in the state, such as [Steve Simon](#), Minnesota’s secretary of state and chief elections administrator.

Rivera is a strong community leader who is a community health liaison for Carver County, a diversity and inclusion consultant, and a member of the Chaska Rotary Club. She has worked for governments, religious institutions, nonprofits, education systems, and community-based organizations. Through these experiences, she has become a leader statewide.

Rivera is an immigrant who came from Mexico to the United States in 1994. She became a U.S. citizen and is a great role model and spokesperson for all the opportunities America can provide. In June 2024, she earned a master’s degree in organizational leadership, and she continues to reach new heights.

“The United States of America is the dream of many people in the world, and many soldiers of this wonderful nation have paid a high price to give us a land of liberty, freedom, and opportunity. As an immigrant, I love my native country, but I love America the same way,” [she wrote for the Chaska Herald](#) in 2022. “I am honored to be an American citizen, a leader, and proud mother of a U.S. Marine. Although my life has not been easy, America has given me safety, opportunity, friends and family. It has empowered me, and for that I am eternally grateful. God bless America.”

Without any formal journalism training, Rivera has become an inspiring community journalist. She does not get paid for her work on Entérate Minnesota, but with a little support, she could make a bigger impact in the community.

Minnesota Latin Radio

Neli Silie is making a big impact in the Twin Cities as the owner of Minnesota Latin Radio. Silie is originally from Venezuela and came to the United States a few years ago. She didn't study journalism in her native land. She studied business administration and worked in sales at an oil company, among other jobs, but she has been in the media for four years. She currently works during the day at Univision Minnesota as a reporter and also in sales. After she finishes her day job at Univision, she works the night at Minnesota Latin Radio. It's a 24/7 passion for her.

Silie previously worked at Minnesota Latin Radio when it was La Jefa Radio. They changed the name in 2023 and now have eight shows. Two of them are bilingual, and they have a variety of professional programs from Monday to Friday. The people who do the programs include journalists, health professionals like Erika Rivera, teachers from Minneapolis Public Schools, and a civil engineer. Their biggest audience and followers are on Facebook with 30,000 followers, but they also publish on Instagram.

"The audience has been very receptive to our programming and broadcasts," said Silie. "If there is something, an event that the community is invited to, for example, food, clothing, or a vaccination event, the audience is very receptive to that, asks questions, shares the broadcast, comments. There is interaction from the public."

Minnesota Latin Radio has some sponsors, from immigration lawyers to someone who sells jewelry. They also work with [CLUES](#), a nonprofit community organization. Silie has plans to keep growing.

"What we need right now, I mean, everything is through sales, of course," she said. "If you don't have income, your company stagnates or doesn't grow. We can say that right now we are generating income through advertising, but we need a lot more income, obviously, to get where we want to go and to hire more staff. Right now, there are two of us working full time for the radio and, of course, we have a salary. But yes, my plan is to have a receptionist, another salesperson, and a producer who is there for eight hours. So what we need right now is to get many more contracts that are permanent and that give us enough to cover the expenses of two or three more people in radio."

They have advanced a lot in a short time.

"People already know us and have much more confidence in us," she said. "I realized that since we changed the name last year, there are people or businesses that now come by

themselves and contact me via email. They say, 'Hey, I've seen your post, I'd like to do an interview, I'd like to advertise with you. I've seen your work, I like what you are doing.' We didn't have that before. We had to knock on doors, send emails, practically introduce ourselves. Now, I see that it's about 60-40, 40 percent come by themselves and 60 percent still require door knocking. But this is a step-by-step job."

The digital radio channel keeps growing and getting more popular with national and international reach outside Minnesota. Her focus is on delivering trusted local news and information to underserved communities and growing the radio network.

"I have been talking about it a lot with Erika," said Silie. "Both Erika and I love making connections with the community, with the public."

There aren't many media outlets meeting the news and information needs of the Latino community in Minnesota. Silie is happy to provide this service.

"We really need much more information from Latino media," she said. "There are only Telemundo and Univision on Latino television. There are no more. And on AM and FM radio, there are only two: Radio Rey and Radio Raza. Now there are digital radios, like mine and a few others. So, yes, we need to spread more information."

Silie is very excited about the future and the potential to serve the growing Latino market.

"Investing in the Latino community is the future, definitely," she said. "The Latino community is growing every day, and business owners nowadays, who are Americans, who previously didn't have Spanish-speaking staff, are hiring Spanish-speaking staff because the Latino community is growing. They need staff who speak, who are bilingual in this case, and they also need to expand into that market, that Latino audience. So investing in the Latino community will always be a step forward."

Carmen Robles and Associates LLC

Carmen Robles has been serving the Latino community for many years. Robles is the president of **Carmen Robles and Associates LLC**, a community engagement strategic consulting firm that has been taking action for health and education equality since 2004. She also is the publisher of **Conversaciones de Salud**, a popular **monthly e-newsletter** that serves the Latino community. The newsletter has grown to over 3,000 engaged subscribers since creating its current e-magazine format in 2022 with the help of Paulina Lopez-Valencia, Robles' business partner who lives in Mexico.

They also do community webinars and town hall meetings to educate the Latino community. There are plans to expand the newsletter's content to include special editions for events like Hispanic Heritage Month and the positive impact of the newsletter on local news and community engagement.

"Well, I think consistency has been very important to us," said Lopez-Valencia, who graduated from a Mexican university in June. "The newsletter is monthly, and we have these special issues. We send not only the newsletter. We send, for example, when we have these town hall meetings, we send emails. We try to be consistent every month, and something is always related to the community. So I think that's our key to what we are doing. It's very good information, too."

Robles has been working with youth for decades and puts community first in everything she does. She also loves to involve influential community members and families in her initiatives. The focus of her work today is on opioids, substance use, and youth. She is the founder of Jóvenes de Salud, an umbrella program that unites various community youth groups under the direction of the **Strong Mind Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation** (a nonprofit youth and community development organization) and the Youth Community Journalism Institute, directed by Eric Ortiz. Together, they launched a youth community journalism micro internship program this summer at **SPEAK MPLS**, the community media center in Minneapolis.

The youth community journalism micro internship program has nine students ages 12-15 from diverse backgrounds in Minneapolis schools. Students are participating from Ella Baker Global Studies and Humanities School, Andersen United Middle School, South High School, South All Nations, Thomas Edison High School, and Risen Christ Catholic School. The program teaches the fundamentals of community journalism, including reporting, storytelling, interviewing, multimedia journalism, video production, field reporting, and live studio production. As part of the program, youth did field reporting at Mercado Central, Centro Guzman, Target Field, Centro Guadalupano, and the Minnesota State Capitol interviewing Attorney General Keith Ellison and House Rep. Maria Isa Pérez-Vega. The youth community journalism program culminated with a live community news show produced by students and broadcast on a SPEAK MPLS public access TV channel. They plan to continue with monthly youth community news TV shows and community journalism projects.

The summer youth community journalism program is part of the **Youth Community Journalism Institute** at the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation and builds on a youth community journalism program that was piloted at **Ella Baker Global Studies and**

Humanities School in Minneapolis Public Schools in spring 2024. Students were taught the fundamentals of community journalism, and an online youth-led school newspaper, Ella Baker News (ellabakernews.com), was created to give them a platform to report on their community and empower their voice.

A 14-year-old eighth-grade student wrote a commentary on homelessness for Ella Baker News. The article ran in the May Southwest Connector newspaper (page 5), a local newspaper in Minneapolis, and also was published on the Southwest Connector website. The student wrote two more articles about homelessness for Ella Baker News. He wants to do more.

“I’ve been writing more articles for the school newspaper, and I’ve been wanting to write for something bigger,” the student wrote to Eric Ortiz. “I was kind of wondering if I could write an article about homelessness and police brutality for the Southwest Connector, if that’s possible at all.”

He added: “I really appreciate all of your continued support to help me with furthering my journalism skills and for giving me all of those wonderful community solutions and leadership opportunities this year. I hope to continue to stay in contact with you and to work with you next year to hopefully start another journalism program at high school next school year.”

The young student is going into ninth grade. Carmen and the Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation plan to help him develop his journalism skills and use journalism to serve his community as a vehicle to create positive change. They are creating a bilingual (Spanish) version of the youth community journalism program and plan to implement the program in more Minneapolis Public Schools in the 2024-25 academic year with their partnership with SPEAK MPLS, the community media center.

They want to inspire more students to do the same. They would like Ella Baker News (and all future middle school newspapers they help develop) to be a place where students, teachers, parents, and school communities can share their voices and be empowered to create change and solutions. The Minneapolis Public School District has 97 schools and over 30,000 students. The district’s minority enrollment is 60 percent, and 32.5 percent of students are economically disadvantaged. There are 17 middle schools and 36 high schools. Only eight MPS schools have a school newspaper or some type of digital or social media platform to report school community news, according to an MPS employee. The Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation will keep promoting the message that every voice matters and wants to give more young people and school communities more

opportunities to share their voices (online, in print, on TV, on the radio, at events) and turn ideas into action.

This is the power of community-centered journalism. This is the power of youth. This is the power of youth putting community-centered journalism into action.

As part of the youth community journalism micro internship this summer, youth participated in the **Mercado Central Local Journalism Project**. Mercado Central is a pioneering Latino marketplace in Minnesota at 1515 E Lake St. in Minneapolis that is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year as a business cooperative and incubator, a national model for **asset-based community development**, and a world-famous example of how local leadership can create a **gathering place for commerce, community, and culture** with a structure for ownership and control.

The Strong Mind Strong Body Foundation is leading the Mercado Central Local Journalism Project and will produce a documentary with youth about Mercado Central and multimedia stories of Mercado businesses. They also will be developing an innovative youth news team kiosk and organizing a youth community journalism solutions festival that will provide community economic empowerment training to show how anyone can be an entrepreneur, start their own business, and strengthen communities through asset-based community development.

“This journalism program is a wonderful opportunity for youth to be heroes for their community,” said Robles. “The biggest crisis our state and nation is facing today (next to opioids/fentanyl/other substances) is social media and the mental health of youth. This program directly offers solutions to this growing dilemma. In addition to encouraging communication and storytelling, our project enhances reading, writing, comprehension, civic engagement, and determination skills, which directly affect mental health. It’s a win-win for all.”

Besides growing her newsletter, Robles is excited to launch her community information kiosks with youth to serve the Latino community news and information. The kiosks will be run by youth community news teams at public places such as markets. Youth will gather information from the community and distribute information to the community. The in-person interaction will build connections and trust with young people and community members, leaders, stakeholders and elders. This intergenerational community engagement can have positive impact on the whole community.

Robles believes in the power of intergenerational programs to engage young people. Youth can be creative in so many different ways. That creativity can be powerful. A few

years ago, a group of youth under her leadership created a logo with an artist. It's this big butterfly with an eagle in it. That's their opioid logo. And then they also created PSAs.

"One young lady, she was a sophomore. She did a PSA in her backyard," Robles. "Hi, this is blah, blah, blah. And I go to school and opioids this and that. And then she said it in Spanish. And hey, talk to your friends about it. So she sent it to her small group of friends, and by the end of that summer, she had 2,500 followers.

"Kids themselves can create these messages and send them out to their friends and then we can collect the data so that they could present it maybe to, you know, the House of Representatives," said Robles. "I like to include it because then the school really likes that the kid is exposed to policymaking and other things."

Robles loves creating opportunities for youth to connect with the community and older generations and share experiences.

"There's this myth that youth don't have a long, big attention span," said Robles. "But if you engage them, they will be very interested. They're genius. They're genius. And they want an audience. They want to show off. And who better than an abuelo abuela who has no interest in, you know, changing the directory of their life. They just want to spend time. And I think a key of that, and I did that with my youth group, we would go visit the elderly at the nursing homes because they needed to know how to give back and how to appreciate their abuelos and their home country."

Robles is not your traditional teacher. She can relate to youth in a unique way, and parents love the new educational opportunities that are provided for their children.

"Yes, the parents love it because the parents want their kids in school ... We can make them into community heroes."

She has a vision for a media environment based on community engagement, community media, and practical information that can make the lives of people better.

"The news of the future doesn't have to come from a newsroom, or a paper, or a website," said Robles. "It can be in the community, a town hall event at a restaurant, have a conversation at a restaurant, then you can turn that conversation, record it. You can put it out as a video or audio. It could go all these different places for different audiences, wherever the audience is getting their information. We can think about creating the content and engaging with the community because that's what they need. People need more information that's going to make their lives better on a daily basis. They don't need all the bad

news. They need the good news. They need the information that can help make their lives good.”

This is what Robles is doing with her newsletter, with her youth community journalism work, with everything she does.

“I would like more information on real news for the community,” said Robles. “I think that’s why we have this little niche, because we’re all about real news. We’re not about who’s famous, or the dance, or my granddaughter at her quinceanera twerking. We’re just about health. We keep our opinions to ourselves. We just share the information. Yeah. Facts. Just the facts, ma’am.”

She also wants to share the wealth in the future.

“Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. I can’t imagine not sharing,” said Robles. “My whole thing is sharing it. I would love to have a co-op where this media, Conversaciones de Salud, people would have a stake in it. They would have ownership in it. So that it isn’t just a job that you go to, but it’s a part of ownership. They own that. A co-op, yeah.”

Georgia Fort and BLCK Press

The Black community in Minnesota points to Georgia Fort as a beacon of hope for news and information that serves the Black community in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Fort is an independent Black journalist who is the founder of BLCK Press and co-founder of Center for Broadcast Journalism. BLCK Press is a two-time Emmy award-winning news and multimedia production company that builds equity through storytelling and media. With BLCK Press, Fort produces a TV news show called “Here’s the Truth” that airs weekly on the CW Twin Cities. When BLCK Press first launched in 2020, they published news on their site, expanding with a formal newsroom in 2022. The incubation of their newsroom was so successful that it became its own organization in 2023 and now publishes news stories daily on Power 104.7 FM. That organization is the Center for Broadcast Journalism, which is a nonprofit focused on transforming media to reflect the communities they serve.

Fort took the entrepreneurial path to local journalism out of necessity because no local news organizations in the Twin Cities would hire her, even though she was an experienced and accomplished journalist.

“I started my career in radio,” Fort told The Pivot Fund. “I worked in radio for about seven years, worked in different formats in different markets, and then transitioned into news.

I've worked as an MMJ [multimedia journalist]. I've worked as an anchor. I've worked as a reporter, producer. When I came back to Minnesota, I'm originally from here, there were just a lot of challenges around gaining and sustaining employment, being a reporter and anchor who was focused on telling Black stories in a pre-George Floyd society.

"And I say that because I think that, you know, after George Floyd was murdered, this community had to really look in the mirror and get serious about the issues with racial disparities. But before then, those of us who are non-White, we had to live in the reality of what that community was like before that happened. And I was one of those people. For example, some of the experiences I had that led me to doing independent journalism I came back, I had a job, I was anchoring the news for a major affiliate in Duluth, Minnesota, and my husband and I found out we were expecting and I didn't get maternity leave.

"I ended up unemployed after working in the career field for over 10 years, having two Emmy nominations. And I really tried to be optimistic about finding employment in my career field, coming back here to the Twin Cities, applying to all the stations, you know, because obviously this wasn't about my performance. My ratings were great. The stories I was covering were really powerful and they were enterprise stories.

"I was just really confident I'd be able to get hired here in the Twin Cities and then that didn't happen. I spent probably two to three years working different odd jobs, but when the pandemic happened and when George Floyd happened, I was still just internally kind of unsettled and unsatisfied with work because I was not doing the thing that I loved. And then when I looked around, I realized that there was a huge need for a reporter and a storyteller like me.

"To tell the stories. And so I just said, you know what, I've had to do in television news, they call it multimedia journalists, MMJ, fancy word for a reporter with their own camera. I had to do that every single day, go out, schedule the interview, film the interview, go film another interview, get all your B roll, write the script, edit the story and have it all ready to go and look pretty for the five o'clock newscast.

"I knew I was capable of publishing stories from start to finish, just on my own. After George Floyd was murdered, I just made a commitment that I was going to do three stories a week on social media. And that's really how my journey started in independent journalism, is responding to a need in community for authentic stories about the Black community that reflect our lived experiences."

Now, BLCK Press is transcending boundaries and captivating hearts with their storytelling. Their mission goes beyond crafting stories. They "are architects of equity, amplifying

voices that resonate with the shared human experience” and creating a world where “every narrative is a catalyst for change and every story is a stepping stone toward a more inclusive world.”

Center for Broadcast Journalism

Marianne Combs, the co-founder of the Center for Broadcast Journalism, has a bold idea on how to accelerate the change in the demographics of newsrooms and journalism. Make journalism a trade school model. This can lower the barrier to entry for journalism and create more opportunities.

“I know a lot of people entering newsrooms are coming from four-year liberal arts colleges. I really believe journalism should be a trade. It should be a trade school career,” said Combs. “And there’s no reason why we can’t create a trade school model for journalism that gets people in and doesn’t require them to put down year \$200,000 for their education. We have to make the skills of journalism readily available, create a one- or two-year degree program that is cheap, that’s affordable, but focuses on the pragmatic skills needed by a journalist today and wrestles with the issues that journalists are facing today.”

We can shift this competitive mindset to collaborative and think about how that looks. One piece of it is thinking about creating a trade school model for journalism. With journalism as a trade, we can lower the barriers of entry and make journalism more accessible, create equitable access to journalism opportunities for youth and people of any age.

We have to adapt to how we serve the community. Social media has changed everything. And so it’s rethinking the whole model of what journalism is, reimagining journalism. It’s not just teaching the old way journalism was taught. We’re still going to teach the fundamentals, but it’s much more than that. We have to teach community engagement. How do you really partner with the community, with the audience? It’s a lot of community building. That’s where there’s an intersection between community building and journalism. Those skills kind of overlap.

Internships are another way to create the pathways from training to opportunities. “I’m a graduate of a four-year elite liberal arts college, and I know that’s how I got in the door at NPR as an unpaid intern,” said Combs.

As part of a summer journalism intensive, the Center for Broadcast Journalism partnered with the St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) to offer diverse low-income residents of Ramsey County ages 17-24 training in online, radio and video reporting, and other key

journalism skills. After four weeks of training, students got internship opportunities and placement in a Twin Cities newsroom for either a four- or eight- week work experience with local newsrooms, including the Star Tribune and Minnesota Spokeman-Recorder. Participants also received a \$1200 stipend and key reporting equipment. Ramsey County Workforce Solutions provided the funding.

“We are providing them with professional audio recording equipment, a camera, a laptop. They’re getting to take this all with them,” said Combs. “So we’re providing them with the skills. Ramsey County has said, you know, we’ll give you gas cards, Metro Transit cards. We will provide you with money, a Target gift card if you need to buy an outfit for your job interview. So we are doing like creating this pipeline, taking these young people and giving them the skills they need and getting them right into the newsroom for that experience.”

ThreeSixty Journalism

The skills journalists need now are technical, ethical, and entrepreneurial, as Kenzie O’Keefe says. O’Keefe is the executive director of [ThreeSixty Journalism](#), a high school journalism program for diverse youth at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul. The program trains the next generation of diverse thinkers, communicators, and leaders.

“I feel excited. I mean [technical, ethical, and entrepreneurial] was birthed from what do young people need,” said O’Keefe. “What are sort of the categories of knowledge that young media makers need to have and to meet this moment that we’re in? And it’s all three of those. ... It was always hustling for dollars too and thinking about community dynamics and harm and the problems of the objective approach. And it’s even more urgent now, I think, that we prepare young people for the actual careers that they’re going to have. And not just careers, but the ways that they can positively impact their communities through journalism.”

Hmong Radio

A commitment to serving community is what drives [Hmong Radio Broadcast](#) and Xeng Xiong, who does a morning show, Monday through Friday, 8–10 a.m., and a real estate show with Tou Fang on Saturdays at 8-9 a.m. They are local radio and broadcast through the AM, FM, and HD format. They cover the whole Twin Cities metro area and the west side of Wisconsin.

Even though they have been broadcasting for many years, they are not well-known outside their communities. They have no interaction or partnership or collaborations with mainstream news organizations. Places such as the Star Tribune or NPR have not reached out, and neither have small community news sources.

“For my understanding, they largely do not care much about a little community like that,” said Xiong. “So we, let’s say I’m on the radio for many years, 18 years. I hardly hear anything from them, but the true cause is maybe we do not tell them enough that they know who we are, too. That’s why we have a gap from them. And because our community is so little, we don’t have the liaison or we don’t have the connection. We do not have the outreach to those big-time broadcasters. They don’t know that we are here to serve the community. And they only do their part to serve overall. They’re not going to serve each individual community.

“So I don’t see that yet, but as time goes because we are small we do not have like we say we do not have the funds to pay somebody to go sell what we do to them. They don’t know us, and that’s the part that we let go. But we might need more resources, and more people to go out there and tell them this is what we are.”

Money is an issue. Business training would help.

“That’s a hard part,” said Xiong. “If you can have some funding come in or we start to build up the thing, then we start to have people come and say, ‘OK, you come and do a show, and I’m gonna give you this much money to do a show and then you can go find a sponsor and to sponsor this time that’s how we do too.’ But the hard part is I think our community is in here, but we are not educated enough to go find the sponsor out there and to make the money. ... So we have a hard time to keep people that will do for a long time. Like I did for many years because I can die with this and I sleep. I can dream with this.”

3HmongTV

3HmongTV is a Twin Cities Hmong television station that has been providing news and information since 2005. It has 100,000 subscribers on YouTube and 70,000 followers on Facebook. Mitch Lee has been the executive producer of 3HmongTV since 2014 since leaving his career in computer programming. Like many underserved ethnic communities in Minnesota, the Hmong community wants more original news and information. If there were sources for more local news, hyperlocal news, neighborhood news, people would tune in.

“One hundred percent,” said Lee. “I think so. Yeah. I think the thing is that we have limited resources as a news and media company. Because with limited resources, we can’t have someone go out there and gather that information. And so for me, then it would have to be myself going out there. And me doing all of these things, I can’t possibly go out there and do it. So I have to hire somebody to do it. And do I have money to do that? The funding to do that? No.

“And so I don’t feel that we’re right nowadays. I don’t feel that we’re all informed about what’s going on. We go to social media, but that’s it. When it comes to newsgathering and informing our community, it’s still not enough because we can’t be there because of the limited resources that we have. So I think we’re not, we’re far, still far, you know, we’re still not being informed.”

Collaborations with bigger outlets could also help get more information to audiences. But today, there are no relationships with traditional news organizations.

“One of the problems is that mainstream companies or folks in the community, if they have something that they want to message or something they want to push out to the community, who do they go to?” said Lee. “They have no way of knowing who to trust in our community. So who do they go to? When they have a message, a really important message to send out to reach out to the community, there’s no reach out to the person that goes out there and knows these people that know people like us doing the news. So that’s one thing that they can’t get that information out to the community in a time-sensitive manner.”

There are enough people who want to serve the community. It’s been 10 years since Lee quit his job as a computer programmer to go into journalism.

“I’m a news junkie,” he said. “I worked at the state for 20-plus years, and I decided that this is something that I want to do. And so I just got out of my job and say, ‘Hey, this is what I want to do,’ but it’s really hard. But over time, when you’re a trusted person in the community, they come to you. So now people are starting to notice that the stuff that you put out there are legitimate.”

Hmong Community YouTube TV

Neng Xiong started posting news and information videos on YouTube for the Hmong community in 2009 and has more than 57,000 subscribers. He covers news in the Twin Cities metro area and events, meetings, conferences, and anything that is valuable for his communities.

Today, [Hmong Community YouTube TV](#) has over 2,700 videos with 13.1 million views. Xiong also has a strong Facebook following. Aside from revenue from Facebook and YouTube, he self-finances everything.

“When I go out to the community, a lot of elderly people and a lot of people, they say, thank you for what you’re doing,” said Xiong. “We appreciate what you’re doing. They appreciate what I am doing, and that’s the way that’s motivated me for the last 10 years. I keep going because I know that my communities, they are watching, they are waiting.”

Madison Mercantile

Kristine Shelstad started Madison Mercantile in 2021 to build community in Madison, Minnesota, a small rural town in southwest Minnesota.

The multipurpose space today has a coffee house, gift shop, art gallery, stage for live music, community workshop, classrooms, offices, a wellness room, and gathering areas for groups from a Quilt Club to Narcotics Anonymous.

Shelstad, the founder and CEO (chief energizing officer) of Madison Mercantile, is building a recording studio at the Mercantile that can serve as an intergenerational community media center for community youth and elders.

Shelstad is taking a solutions approach to community building and wants to spark a rural renaissance. She believes creating a more trusted media ecosystem with a solutions focus to community building could play an important role in the revival.

“I want it to be that public square,” said Shelstad. “And I feel like sometimes people come here to find out what’s going on. ... We see an issue in the community. I’m like, how can we either lead the fix to that or provide a space for that or whatever.”

Project Optimist

The solutions focus for a “public square” was inspired by Shelstad’s friend, Nora Hertel, the founder and executive director of [Project Optimist](#), a solutions-focused news organization that was founded in 2021 and covers environment, business and social issues in greater Minnesota. Both Shelstad and Hertel were [awarded 2022-23 Initiator Fellowships](#), a [program for entrepreneurs in greater Minnesota](#). Hertel is based in St. Michael, Minnesota, in Wright County, 40 minutes north of Minneapolis, and Project Optimist uses community journalism as a catalyst to unite people and surface challenges and solutions in rural Minnesota, reframing problems and engaging problem solvers with stories, events, training and art.

“People in my region can see and feel the impact of declining news. We’ve reached a point where I don’t usually have to explain why I created Project Optimist—they understand it quickly. Residents feel the pain of negative news coverage, less local coverage, poor quality control in news (typos and outright errors), and divisive and sensational framing. So when I define solutions journalism (our speciality) to regular people, they light up. They may not have heard of it, but they feel the need.

“The decline in trust and the decline in interest (news avoidance) is a hurdle that I have to overcome in my work. This is an ongoing challenge. Not all news outlets take the time to fact check and to balance out problem/crisis-focused coverage. It’s very common for people to lump all ‘media’ together, and obviously the media is an incredibly diverse field. We do try to address this with solutions journalism, rigorous fact-checking, and close consideration of our audiences’ needs and thresholds for intense news.”

The biggest challenge for Project Optimist, a member of the Tiny News Collective news accelerator, besides funding and “trying to replace the old business model,” is having to repackage and sometimes rewrite information for different audiences.

“For example, I know that some of our younger, underserved audience is getting information on TikTok, but we don’t have the capacity to keep up a presence on TikTok right now. So we’re trying to reach some of those folks through Instagram, but we’re not reaching them all. We also know that we’re not really in a position to publish in Spanish or Somali, so we are looking to partner with the Somali radio station and community groups that serve Latinx groups in rural areas. We’re also targeting second-generation folks who speak English. I really want Project Optimist to center design thinking and produce content to meet people where they are online, but we also have to do so within our capacity.”

North News

North News has been a hyperlocal monthly newspaper serving the 15 neighborhoods of North Minneapolis since 1992. David Pierini joined North News as a volunteer photographer in 2016 and has been the editor of North News since 2022.

North News has a staff of two with Azhae'la Hanson and Pierini writing and taking pictures. As editor, Pierini also sells ads, edits, prepares content for layout, coordinates distribution, and manages the website and two social media accounts.

Azhae'la leads youth programming, one of the most important parts of North News' work. They have an after-school program at North High School, and in the summer, they have interns from the city's **Step Up program**. They are a training ground for youth, and throughout the year, their young journalists write and photograph for the paper. They hope to generate a new generation of storytellers but are just as proud if they take the skills they learn and apply them to other fields.

North News was bought in 2016 by **Pillsbury United Communities** (PUC), a nonprofit organization that has been serving Minneapolis for over 100 years. In purchasing North News, PUC wanted to amplify voices of a marginalized community that for decades was reduced by local news outlets to a one-sided, deficit-driven narrative. North News continues to provide nuanced and solution-based reporting with a community newspaper.

"It is our hope that centering the voices in our community helps amplify what residents want and need, projects that are for them and not just done to them," Pierini, the editor of North News, told The Pivot Fund. "North News is a newspaper where folks can see themselves."

They are building the digital side of their program. They post stories and important news update on Facebook and Instagram and are searching for ways to reach more people, including starting a weekly newsletter in fall 2023 that includes stories, a calendar of events, links to good stories from other news sources, and a section called "Pride of the Northside" that celebrates positive achievement in the community.

"Other media outlets tend to focus on crime, poverty or some sort of political battle on the Northside. This is what gives folks here a feeling of not being represented completely or accurately," said Pierini. "North News does not shy away from these types of stories. We share stories in a way that focuses local voices, their solutions, and allows their dignity and humanity to be front-facing and not reduced to a statistic or data point."

Pierini added, “North News is not perfect. Our top priority is taking care of the trust we believe we have with readers. We take all feedback seriously and always find something we can do better. It is common for a journalist to take ownership by saying this is ‘my story.’ We take a different view. ‘It’s your story and thank you for trusting us to share it with your community.’”

Native Roots Radio

Native Roots Radio is a one-hour weekday radio program that airs daily (Monday to Friday) on **AM950**, the only progressive talk radio station in Minnesota, and Facebook Live.

Robert Pilot, a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and retired high school teacher, is the host and executive producer of Native Roots Radio. Pilot started Native Roots Radio in 2017 during the opposition of the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. Native Roots Radio is broadcast in the Twin Cities and across Wisconsin, and continues to uplift voices and information about issues and programs for Indigenous people in the Midwest.

Native Roots Radio has a reach of 200,000–300,000 listeners per week on radio airways and 100,000 listens per week on social media, live streams and podcasts.

“The demand is there,” said Chad Larson, the owner of AM950.

Oromia 11

Oromia 11 is a trusted news and information source for the Oromo community in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, and with over 50,000 Oromo people in Minnesota, the state has the largest population of Oromo people outside their homeland in Ethiopia and Kenya. The Twin Cities are known as Little Oromia by Oromo people worldwide.

Oromia 11 was launched in 2020 to address the chronic information gap on issues that affect the Oromo people and other people of the Horn of Africa in East Africa.

“People don’t know what to trust,” Safi Geleto, the general manager at Oromia 11, told The Pivot Fund. “Even in politics, they tell us between the conservatives and the Democrats, I think we lost you again.”

People in the Oromo community have been helping Oromia 11 to meet the needs of their community as much as they can on a daily basis.

“There’s a story to tell,” said Geleto. “Oromia the way, 11, the number 11 will present 11 regions of Oromia that are so diverse, but one speaks the same language, very little dialects maybe, but the customs are very different, Sometimes, there are so many things that are so diverse and bringing this community together, bringing them along also with the diverse communities of Minnesota. Our vision is really to become the media for diverse communities of Minnesota because we’re not alone. We’re not on our own.”

Oromia 11 has office space and a TV studio in downtown Minneapolis that was donated by a successful businessman who runs a large school transportation business in Minnesota. In March, Oromia 11 hired a community engagement manager, Jetta Wiedemeier, and she helps with grant writing. But the biggest challenge for Oromia 11 remains making payroll.

“Everything in the studio has been bought by the board,” said Wiedemeier. “What they’ll do is they’ll do a GoFundMe for a camera, or the board chair will say, I’m funding payroll this month, right? They hired me because I was connected to the community, and I’m a grant writer. And so we’ve written four or five grants, smaller ones, we’ve gotten two of them. ... That’s kind of where we’re at is trying to figure out how we do this because we’ve been around for a few years, we’ve got the foot in the door, and now we need the sustainability to make it work into the future.”

Oromo Diaspora Media (ODM)

Oromo Diaspora Media (ODM) is an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit news organization based in Minneapolis. The media platform was founded in 2020 and serves East African communities in four languages: Oromo, Amharic, Somali and English. They report on the Oromo (Ethiopia) diaspora members in Minnesota and beyond, inform the Oromo community about important issues (with a focus on health, education, politics and the economy), and increase awareness about the lives and unique socio-economic needs of East African refugees and immigrants.

“Our vision is to empower all of us, to speak about what is right,” Eticha Gudeta Fufa, the founder and CEO of Oromo Diaspora Media, told The Pivot Fund. “That’s the first thing. Whether it’s on WCCO or Fox 9 or KARE 11 or any kind of platform, Star Tribune or whatever it is, any kind of printing media or electronic media, they have to speak out. They

have to know the freedom of speech. Without undermining the others, or insulting the others, speak out what they have. We build that kind of confidence in our community.”

Fufa, 37, is a trained journalist who came to the United States from Ethiopia in 2016. He is married with two kids and works in a hospital during the day. He has built Oromo Diaspora Media with a team of volunteers and some grant funding (despite not having a grant writer). Oromo Diaspora Media has a small TV studio in Minneapolis, and they also work with SPEAK MPLS to broadcast their video content on public access cable TV. With more resources and equipment, Oromo Diaspora Media could accelerate its growth.

Fufa wants to build the media platform into “the exemplary media” for other immigrants and refugees, not only for East Africa. They have expanded their reach on social media (223,000 followers on [Facebook](#) and 136,000 subscribers on [YouTube](#)) and begun connecting with others outside their community. They want to connect more with all communities and all types of media, traditional and nontraditional.

“We are Minnesotans,” said Fufa. “No matter what, what kind of background we have, historical background, educational background, and level of education could be different. No matter what, we’re Minnesotans. As Minnesotans, connecting Oromo with other communities, including the Asians, the Europeans, or the Latinos, and something like that one, and even the Indigenous or Native Americans. That’s our plan. Because at the end of the day, we are all human beings.”