

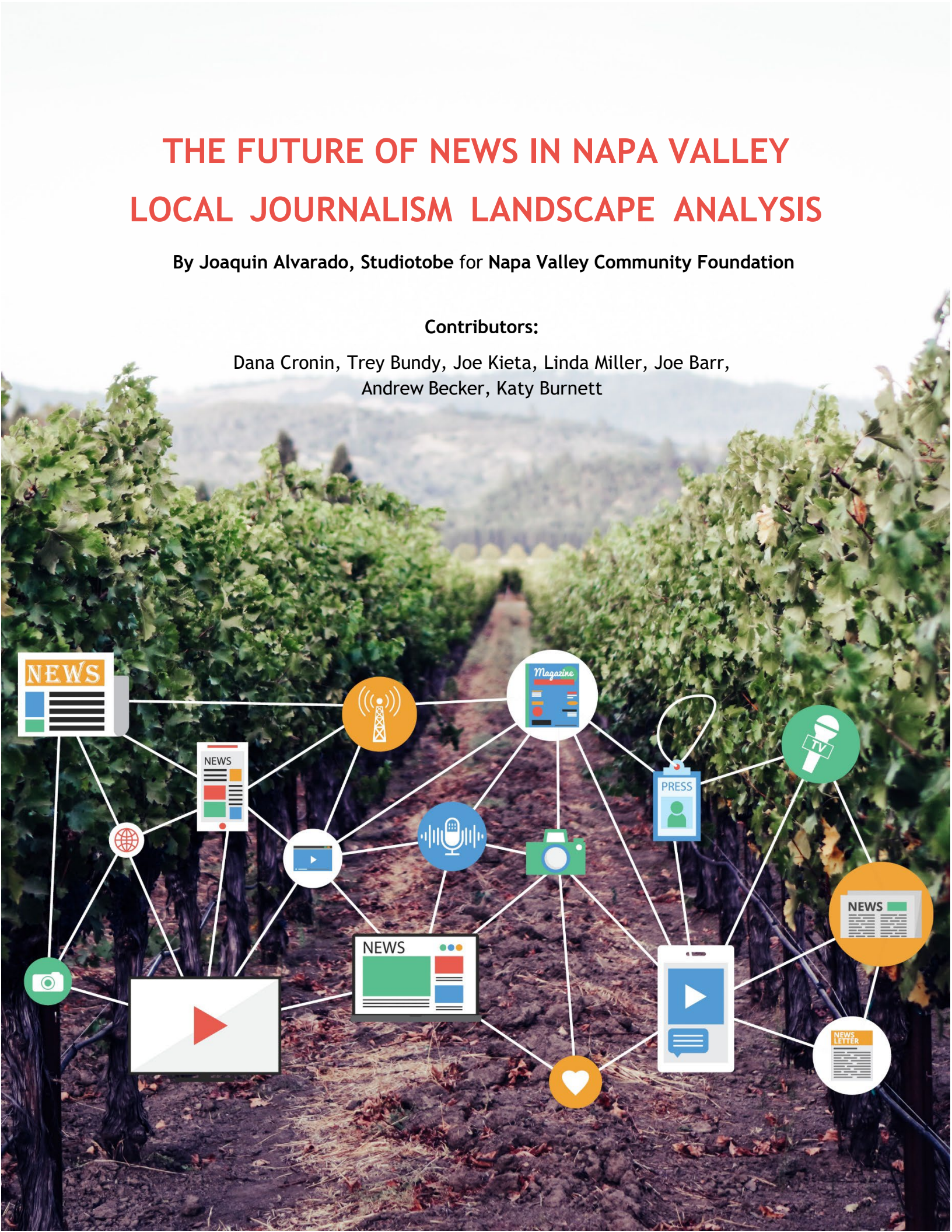
THE FUTURE OF NEWS IN NAPA VALLEY

LOCAL JOURNALISM LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

By Joaquin Alvarado, Studiotobe for Napa Valley Community Foundation

Contributors:

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The background is a photograph of a dirt path winding through rows of grapevines in a vineyard, leading towards distant hills under a clear sky.

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The diagram illustrates a interconnected network of local journalism entities. It features several nodes represented by icons: a newspaper labeled 'NEWS', a globe, a camera, a play button, a smartphone with a play button, a heart, a microphone, a camera, a person icon, a TV set, a newspaper labeled 'NEWS LETTER', a smartphone with a play button, a person icon, a microphone, a camera, a play button, a globe, a newspaper labeled 'NEWS', and a magazine labeled 'Magazine'. These nodes are connected by white lines, forming a complex web that suggests the flow of information and collaboration among different media outlets and individuals in the Napa Valley community.

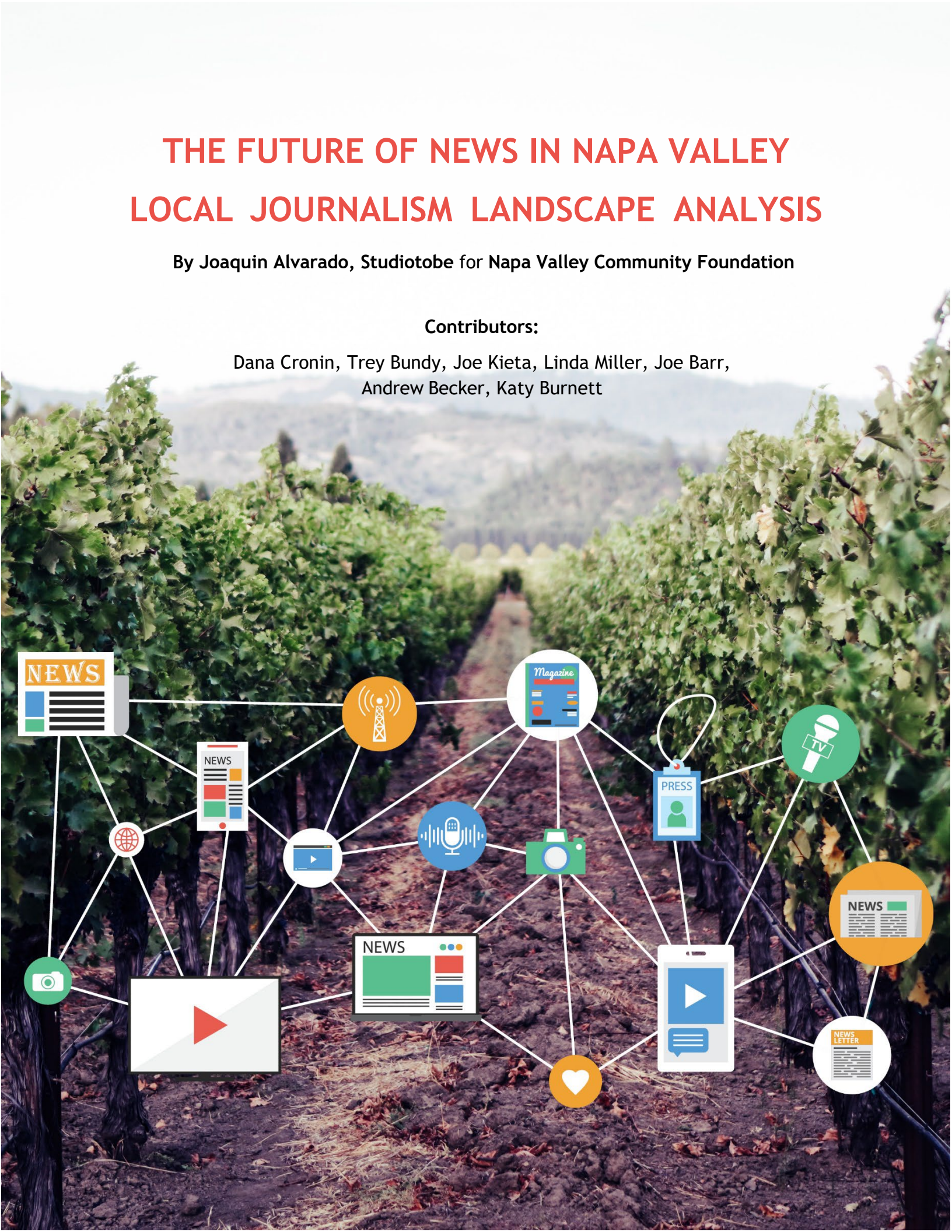
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Table of Contents

A Note from Napa Valley Community Foundation.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
PHILANTHROPY’S ROLE.....	5
PROFITABLE IN DECLINE.....	6
WHAT ABOUT LEE ENTERPRISES, WHICH OWNS NAPA VALLEY REGISTER?.....	7
STATE OF THE STATE	7
CONSUMER AND COMMUNITY NEEDS	9
HIGHWAY 29	10
COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS + LOCAL JOURNALISM + MEDIA.....	10
INNOVATIVE & EQUITABLE MODELS FROM THE GRASSROOTS	13
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF NEWS IN NAPA VALLEY.....	15
RECOMMENDATION 1: DEVELOP A COMMUNITY REPORTING LAB	15
RECOMMENDATION 2: TALENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.....	16
RECOMMENDATION 3: ADAPT AND KEEP IT SIMPLE	17
APPENDIX A: NAPA/SONOMA RADIO MARKET OVERVIEW	18
APPENDIX B: ANALYSIS OF LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE	20
ENDNOTES.....	23

A Note from Napa Valley Community Foundation

At Napa Valley Community Foundation, we believe that our community and our democracy are more vibrant when everyone participates in the decisions we make about our future. But all too often, certain segments of our population face obstacles to civic engagement— like the lack of affordable legal services to obtain citizenship, or the dearth of local journalism.

Championing our community is not just a value—it's an action. It's one of the four key areas we prioritize in our annual grantmaking.

Our commitment is evident in the more than \$3 million we've invested in our One Napa Valley Initiative, aiming to assist Napa's immigrant community in their journey to citizenship. It's why we launched a Media & Democracy Fund last year to preserve and grow independent journalism that can cover the important topics affecting our quality of life — like housing, education, and climate — and inform and engage residents in solutions to such issues.

The past 15 years have witnessed a seismic shift in the local media landscape. A prime example is the Napa Valley Register, which once boasted a staff of over 100 dedicated individuals but has since experienced a significant contraction.

In times of crisis, the role of trusted news outlets becomes paramount, and the issue of language accessibility takes center stage. As this report will show, the avenues available to cater to the news and information needs of our Spanish-speaking community members remain woefully inadequate.

Yet, we remain optimistic. We envision a future in which our community is more interconnected and better informed. Achieving this requires knowledge, understanding, and proactive measures. We hope this report illuminates a path forward, guiding Valley-wide endeavors to provide the news and information all of us need.

Napa
Valley
Community
FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

In communities across the nation, including Napa, there are devastating shifts in the journalistic landscape. The economics of local journalism, which relied on reader revenue and advertising have been overtaken by the digital advertising duopoly of Alphabet (Google, YouTube) and Meta (Facebook, Instagram), leaving most legacy newsrooms in the hands of overleveraged ownership groups or hedge funds motivated by profit over service. The divestment and consolidation that has resulted in most markets show no sign of stopping. The Napa community is experiencing this firsthand, as catastrophic reductions at the Napa Register and St. Helena Star, owned by the highly distressed Lee Enterprises, have resulted in a major decline in local reporting. Given the ownership realities of the Register and Star, it is not realistic to imagine a significant turnaround for existing news outlets.

In California and across the nation, the deteriorating health of the for-profit local news business is not breaking news. It's just more bad news.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, [more than 100 local newspapers](#)¹ — mostly weeklies — closed. Large companies, many owned by [hedge funds](#)², have gobbled up the majority of community newspapers and operate them in large chains with centralized and streamlined functions.

In Napa County, two important outlets were recently at risk of shuttering. With the emergence of Highway 29 Media, the potential closures of the Calistoga Tribune and Yountville Sun have been averted in the short-term, but challenges remain for moving the two papers to sustainability and launching a meaningful digital presence. With its public benefit structure, Highway 29 has a channel for developing community support, but will need to expand digital access quickly because the fundamental economics of printing a weekly newspaper are not favorable, and are trending towards the untenable.

As Lee Enterprises shows, consolidation of news outlets under centralized corporations can create temporary economies of scale. Initially, this helped to preserve local news reporting jobs while such tasks as copy editing, page design and back-office business tasks were consolidated. But as financial pressures intensify, the consolidation has forced ongoing rounds of significant cuts in local news reporting resources.

The reduction most acutely affects rural areas. For instance, The Salinas Californian, which is owned by Gannett - the [largest operator of local newspapers](#)³ in the country - now functions [without a single reporter](#)⁴. Gannett's consolidated editing hub repurposes stories from the chain's other properties and feeds them into the Californian's digital and print editions. This scenario is not unique to Salinas.

"Ghost ship" newspapers exist to varying degrees in every major newspaper company, including Lee Enterprises, which owns the Napa Valley Register. Yet, many communities

don't even have a "ghost ship." An ongoing study by University of North Carolina researchers [found that at least 200 U.S. counties were "news deserts"](#)⁵ - meaning there was no local news source serving those communities. And half of the nation's counties — 1,528 — have only one newspaper, usually a weekly.

At the same time, interest — and trust — in the news is also flagging, and reporters and journalists have been targets of intimidation or violence. Recent examples include a small paper with a news staff of four on the brink of bankruptcy as it [fends off an ongoing legal challenge](#)⁶ in rural Wisconsin, and the much-publicized police raid of a small-town paper in Kansas that may have [literally killed the 98-year-old co-owner](#)⁷ of the *Marion County Record*.

In one survey, nearly 40% of U.S. respondents say they [sometimes or often avoid the news](#)⁸. [Democrats trust the news more than Republicans](#)⁹, and 6 in 10 Americans [say that they suffer from information overload](#)¹⁰ with the speed of the news cycle, smartphones, and a proliferation of online national news, culture, and information sources.

PHILANTHROPY'S ROLE

While the struggle to sustain local news outlets is essential, [many local news organizations are confronted with the same issues of diversity that other institutions face](#)¹¹. **Any initiative to protect local journalism has a responsibility to improve the design and development of the coverage and its relationship to all communities.** The socio-economic dynamics of each community are reflected in the local press and journalism has had a [complicated history](#)¹² in this regard. In Napa County, the current journalistic marketplace is falling short in its service to the Latino communities. Organizations working to reverse the collapse of journalism have critical leverage in creating measurable goals for how their support for journalism should produce the public service reporting it promises.

With all of this as background, Napa Valley Community Foundation (NVCF) is emerging as a potential leader in this crisis. However, to genuinely make a lasting impact and broaden the scope of its initiative, a longitudinal strategic approach is paramount. While in its early stages, there are existing philanthropic models and learnings that can be applied in Napa County over time. And it will take time. Stakeholders must be prepared for a commitment spanning two to three years to establish a robust foundation for this initiative.

There are financial risks of taking action to save local news outlets. The media landscape has undergone significant shifts in recent years, with traditional revenue models, primarily based on advertising, being disrupted by digital platforms. Investing in local news outlets, especially those already grappling with these shifts, presents inherent financial uncertainties.

While philanthropic and community-based investments aim to bolster the sustainability of local journalism, there's no guaranteed return on investment. Some outlets, despite receiving support, might continue to face economic challenges due to changing consumer behaviors, the rise of alternative media sources, and the decline in traditional advertising revenues.

Stakeholders, including community foundations and philanthropists, must be prepared for potential financial setbacks. It's crucial to approach such investments with a long-term vision, understanding that immediate profitability might not be achievable.

Going forward, this report will provide context for how community foundations are engaging, which projects offer applicable lessons, and finally, how NVCF can best focus its energy and resources.

PROFITABLE IN DECLINE

While the economics of the news industry seems dire, consider this fact: Every local news chain is profitable. What's changed is the volume of revenue and a massive reduction in expenses (including the number of journalists) to keep the chains in the black.

The top revenue generator for local newspapers 10 to 15 years ago was print advertising. Large and small advertisers - department stores, national retailers, car dealers, local real estate groups, small-dollar classified ads - combined made up more than 50% of a local newspaper's revenue. Subscriptions were a smaller percentage of total revenue.

Today, that equation has flipped. Print advertising has largely vanished as advertisers fled for digital platforms. Much of the digital ad money goes to behemoth tech companies like Alphabet (Google, YouTube) and Meta (Facebook, Instagram). To compensate for this loss of revenue, local newspapers have cut down on staff, reduced the number of pages printed and dramatically increased the cost of print subscriptions. A print subscription 15 years ago did not come close to paying for the cost of the service. Rather, it was subsidized by advertising. Today, subscription prices have been raised to cover the full cost.

The large newspaper chains all recognized that digital is the present, and the future, of the industry. In the last five years they've implemented paywalls to generate digital subscriptions. A digital subscription is much less expensive than a print one, but the benefit of not having high production and delivery costs make them profitable. Companies are experimenting with a variety of paywall strategies - [including the use of AI¹³](#) - to generate dynamic personalized paywalls that can optimize subscriptions.

Another strategy is to boost website pageviews to feed programmatic advertising. At McClatchy - one of the larger chains - this process included an [analysis of content that had low readership and a corresponding plan to reduce the production of that content¹⁴](#). Entire

coverage areas were eliminated as part of this process - much of it dry but critical local government news. And emphasis was placed on content that could go viral. Headlines now contain “curiosity gaps” in an effort to get the audience to open the story and, hopefully, to subscribe; essentially a recycled version of *clickbait*.

WHAT ABOUT LEE ENTERPRISES, WHICH OWNS NAPA VALLEY REGISTER?

Lee Enterprises of Davenport, Iowa, is a publicly traded company that publishes 77 daily newspapers in 26 states. It is one of the largest U.S. newspaper chains. In 2022 it was an acquisition target of Alden Global Capital, which owns MediaNews Group and is largely derided as a bottom-line predatory operator. Lee was able to fend off the hostile takeover bid.

Lee announced an [involuntary two-week furlough of some employees¹⁵](#) earlier this year. This is after a [layoff of hundreds of employees¹⁶](#) in 2022. Napa Valley Register and St. Helena Star are Lee’s [only California properties](#). Lee’s largest newspaper is the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and most of its operations are concentrated in the East and Midwest.

Even benevolent local and regional ownership can run aground. Recently, the LA Times announced [major layoffs¹⁷](#) and its owner [sold the San Diego Union-Tribune to MediaNews Group¹⁸](#), owned by Alden Global Capital. Following their well-documented pattern, the new ownership immediately announced staff reductions as well.

STATE OF THE STATE

Understanding the current landscape for journalism and potential interventions requires baseline data on what existing channels are producing content related to the Napa Community. A content audit was conducted to identify and code stories produced by 6 outlets to establish a baseline analysis. These outlets were:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Napa Valley Register | 4. Calistoga Tribune |
| 2. St. Helena Star | 5. Yountville Sun |
| 3. The Press Democrat | 6. The Yountvillian |

In total we analyzed each outlet for stories related to Napa County, including individual cities, from January 1, 2023, through May 31, 2023. The exceptions are Calistoga Tribune and Yountville Sun, which was limited in time span by lack of web archive access. The top three outlets producing specific content about Napa were Napa Valley Register, St. Helena Star, and The Press Democrat. We used the following content categories for our analysis:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. crime/tragedy | 3. business/agriculture/wine |
| 2. real estate/housing | 4. government/courts |

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 5. weather/environment | 9. community/nonprofit/arts |
| 6. people/history | 10. education |
| 7. transportation | 11. sports |
| 8. health | |

The results of this audit (*Appendix B*) provide a perspective on what is being covered, and just as critically, what is not. A major finding is the low level of coverage for Education, Health, and Housing.

[Wine Down Media](#)¹⁹ has also provided news coverage on its radio stations, particularly during natural disasters, unfortunately there are no web archives to conduct data gathering. Wine Down Media has commendably stepped up, offering a critical platform, especially during emergencies such as the fires. Co-owner Will Marcencia has expressed a commitment to expanding coverage if resources become available.

There are also a few digital outlets that do not qualify as newsrooms but offer some very basic information. [Napa Valley Patch](#)²⁰ aggregates some news stories, mostly from Government information releases, as well as social media posts, press releases from community groups, and commentary from individual Patch users. Unfortunately Patch archives are not searchable. [Patch does employ one staff journalist](#)²¹ for the news portion of the site, but they seem to be assigned to multiple regions within the Bay. Material covered includes local festivals, restaurants, traffic closures, and crime.

[Nextdoor Napa](#)²² is another source of hyperlocal updates that might be relevant, but in the absence of editors and verification, it doesn't meet the minimal standards of a newsroom. As a social media site, Nextdoor provides a space for users to post about happenings in their neighborhood, often becoming an aggregator of alleged criminal activity. While an important channel for local information exchange, it lacks the editorial integrity required of local journalism. [A recent study by Adam Fetterman at the University of Houston](#)²³ indicates that Nextdoor users may have a skewed perception of crime rates.

The journalistic landscape has some new investment occurring. The Santa Rosa-based Press Democrat is investing in the region with new products and editorial positions. Other notable entities, such as KQED, remain largely absent. Engaging such entities, perhaps through a collaborative North Bay Bureau or Reporting Lab, might be a solution to bridge this void. Napa Valley Community Foundation's support for Highway 29 includes funding for a bilingual, bi-cultural Latino communities reporter, whose content will be shared for free with other local media outlets. However, one bilingual reporter is almost certainly not sufficient to meet the news and information needs of the growing Latino community.

Moreover, there's a conspicuous absence of digital-native startups in the area, indicating a potential gap in innovative journalistic approaches. This absence, combined with challenges in recruitment and talent retention, paints a picture of a sector grappling with multiple challenges. Even if the funding were to materialize to invest in new positions, a key

question will remain on how best to attract veteran and emerging journalists to the market.

CONSUMER AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

It's clear that there's no one-size-fits-all solution or "silver bullet" to address the myriad issues facing journalism in the region. A multifaceted approach, drawing on both traditional and innovative methods, is essential to rejuvenate and sustain journalism in Napa County.

Napa Valley is home to a large network of community-based organizations diligently working on the front lines to address some of the region's most pressing issues. This report is informed by stakeholder interviews with fifteen of them. These leaders possess invaluable insights into challenges many in the county confront, providing a unique vantage point crystalizing the community's concerns. There's a strong understanding among these leaders about the crucial role of local journalism in shedding light on these issues, emphasizing the profound impact of informed reportage in promoting community welfare.

However, it's undeniable that the current reporting in Napa has significant gaps, especially when it comes to covering issues that concern some of the most vulnerable members of the community. These gaps not only hinder a comprehensive understanding of these challenges, but also deprive marginalized groups of a voice. Therefore, any attempts to enhance local journalism's reach and efficacy must prioritize addressing these coverage voids, ensuring that the reportage is inclusive and representative.

Key themes of education, housing, and health were consistently underscored in the stakeholder interviews conducted for this report. The interconnection between these issues was also stressed. While some of these topics did receive coverage in the outlets analyzed, the relatively small percentage compared to other topics, like crime, is notable. Stakeholders considered coverage of positive stories, local events, and cultural activities as equally worthy of coverage and essential for community connection.

The role of philanthropy in this context cannot be overstated. Philanthropic initiatives must be rooted in an unwavering commitment to serve all communities equitably. A lapse in this commitment risks perpetuating existing structural disparities, undermining the case for local journalism. The need for new funders to step up is also evident. Leveraging relationships with current funders, particularly in Education and Health Equity, can be a strategic approach to source these investments. Encouragingly, there are successful precedents in other communities that can serve as blueprints for Napa Valley's journey towards a more inclusive and robust journalistic environment. These will be detailed later in the report.

HIGHWAY 29

Highway 29 is an important new player in Napa County journalism. Led by a seasoned team of current and former media executives, the startup organized quickly to acquire the Calistoga Tribune and Yountville Sun, and are currently publishing weekly papers serving the Calistoga and Yountville communities (combined population 8,547.)

Established as a Public Benefit Corporation, Highway 29 has added staff to both outlets and maintained or improved the quality of reporting coming from those outlets. Napa Valley Community Foundation and its donors have been early and significant backers of their efforts to purchase, sustain, and modernize the two print weeklies above. However, Highway 29 faces a number of challenges not unique to journalism in Napa County.

Currently, the websites for both papers are archival in nature and minimal in function, limiting options for online subscribers. The advertising environment is shrinking, which reduces revenue generating opportunities. There are limited options for printers willing to run weekly editions and the [costs for such printing have risen dramatically](#)²⁴. Meanwhile, unsurprisingly, audiences are overwhelmingly accessing content over digital devices and television. [A Pew Research study](#)²⁵ found that in 2022 only 5% of news consumers in the U.S. preferred Print Publications as their first choice. Digital Devices was the primary choice with 53%, ahead of Television at 31%.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS + LOCAL JOURNALISM + MEDIA

By pooling the financial resources of local families, individuals and organizations, community foundations – which [collectively grant more than \\$6.5 billion](#)²⁶ each year and manage more than \$82 billion in charitable assets – are able to effect change across a broad range of public-interest issues and meet the specific and unique needs of the places and people they serve. They help sustain the nonprofit organizations that serve as our social safety nets, improve access to local healthcare, address food insecurity, promote social justice, rebuild after disasters, and, increasingly, invest in local journalism.

Momentum has been building for greater engagement in journalism and media. In 2009, community foundations gave just \$2.6 million to support journalism, news and information, according to [data collected and analyzed](#)²⁷ by Media Impact Funders. In 2021, that amount mushroomed to \$23.1 million, with cumulative support since 2009 totaling \$124 million.

Yet community foundations bring more than just money to the table. They have subject matter expertise on key community issues, the infrastructure to manage grants and hold grantees accountable, boards that often represent a cross-section of the community. Community foundations are also unique in their power to convene multi-sector stakeholders and unite them in pursuit of common goals.

Support from community foundations for local journalism provides an important lifeline for a distressed industry. It also signals a growing recognition by civic leaders and philanthropists that supporting local media should be an integral part of a larger strategy to build and sustain healthy communities. The wide range of issues community foundations work to change are all impacted by the decline of local coverage.

Those [early experiments](#)²⁸ helped to fuel a growth spurt of nonprofit news sites formed to fill the gaps created by newspaper cutbacks and commercial media consolidation. They also set the stage for future – and more substantial – commitments by community foundations. Today, foundations are sparking innovation, spurring collaborative action, and paving the way for reimagined news models capable of creating more integrated, equitable civic media ecosystems that are community-centered and solutions-oriented. Exploring these initial grantees from 14 years ago provides perspective on emergent strategies which have now become fully integrated into the field. They also provide a cautionary tale of how hard it is to operationalize novel approaches within the economics of local news.

Promising Models: [The Seattle Times](#)²⁹ partnered with [Seattle Foundation](#)³⁰ in 2013 to launch its [Education Lab](#)³¹, a partnership with the [Solutions Journalism Network](#)³² that spotlights promising approaches to some of the most persistent challenges in public education. Seattle Foundation serves as fiscal sponsor for the project, making it possible other nonprofits – in this case the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Knight Foundation – to provide philanthropic funding to a for-profit business.

The Times and Seattle Foundation have since expanded their partnership to launch four more community-funded initiatives – [Traffic Lab](#)³³, [Project Homeless](#)³⁴, [The Mental Health Project](#)³⁵ (funded by [Ballmer Group](#)³⁶), and the [Investigative Journalism Fund](#)³⁷ – providing both insights and partnership for the Local Media Association's [Lab for Journalism Funding](#)³⁸.

In 2021, Microsoft borrowed from and expanded on the Seattle model in launching its multimillion-dollar, multi-year pilot program, partnering with community foundations and other local partners to preserve local journalism and incentivize collaboration in five communities/regions: Yakima, Wash. ([Yakima Valley Community Foundation](#))³⁹, Fresno, Calif. ([Central Valley Community Foundation](#))⁴⁰; El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico ([El Paso Community Foundation](#))⁴¹; Jackson, Miss. and The Delta ([Community Foundation for Mississippi](#))⁴², and Northeast Wisconsin ([Greater Green Bay Community Foundation](#)⁴³ and [Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region](#)⁴⁴). In addition to funding, newsrooms receive technology support, training, and legal support.

Those investments are part of a larger trend aimed at funding news collaborations that address the information needs of people and communities who are too often missing, marginalized, and misrepresented in mainstream news coverage.

Funding for the [Yakima pilot](#)⁴⁵ supports a collaboration between the Yakima Herald-Republic, its Spanish language newspaper, El Sol de Yakima, and Radio KDNA, the goal of

which is to reach new audiences and demonstrate the value of local news as the community seeks solutions to four crucial challenges: health care, missing Indigenous people, gangs and kids in Yakima Valley, and economic opportunity in Lower Yakima Valley, home to the Yakama Nation and many smaller, underserved Hispanic communities.

The [Puente News Collaborative](#)⁴⁶ is a partnership between eight area news outlets to report stories about significant issues facing the cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, including Juárez's *La Verdad Noticias*, and *Noticias Ya El Paso*, the first Spanish-language television station in El Paso.

The [Central Valley Community Foundation](#)⁴⁷ (CVCF) funded the Fresno pilot as part of its Impact Media and Measurement Fund, established to “increase civic agency for both informing and engaging residents, as well as increasing transparency and accountability in achieving community goals.”

The idea for the fund [came from conversations with The Fresno Bee and the James B. McClatchy Foundation](#)⁴⁸ and was united around a shared goal of amplifying community voices and improving accountability through local reporting and storytelling. The project evolved into a portfolio of six special projects overseen by Foundation staff, and eventually helped lead to the creation of the [Central Valley Journalism Collaborative](#)⁴⁹ (CVJC), a nonprofit “superstructure” dedicated to keeping public service journalism thriving throughout California’s Central Valley, which is home to over 7.5 million people across nearly 20,000 square miles speaking 105 languages.

Other partners include the [Stanislaus Community Foundation](#)⁵⁰, the [Sacramento Region Community Foundation](#)⁵¹, the James B. McClatchy Foundation ([JBMF](#)⁵²), [The James Irvine Foundation](#)⁵³, the [Microsoft Local Journalism Initiative](#)⁵⁴, and [StudiosTobe](#)⁵⁵, which led fundraising and engagement efforts. The purpose of CVJC is to respond to the current state of local journalism in the region and target gaps regarding ownership, operating capacity, and resources, while embracing diversity, equity and inclusion as a core tenet of the work.

The [Cleveland Foundation](#)⁵⁶, the nation’s first community foundation founded in 1914, recently joined with the Knight Foundation, [American Journalism Project](#)⁵⁷ and a handful of other local foundations in bankrolling [Signal Cleveland](#)⁵⁸, a news startup that “fuses community building with local news reporting.” The nonprofit launched in November 2022 with a web site, a newsletter, a staff of 15 professionals, three freelancers, and 400+ community members trained and paid to cover public meetings across the area, known as the Cleveland Documenters.

The Cleveland Foundation’s investment — \$2.65 million — accounts for about a third of the \$7.5 million raised yet surpasses the total amount of journalism funding by all community foundations in 2009. What’s more, it has sparked funding for a similar startup in nearby Akron with a goal of expanding the model throughout Ohio and creating a roadmap for other nonprofits to get news to the underserved.

Looking Ahead: Regardless of the region, subject matter or funding amounts, community foundation investments, if scaled, would transform the way communities value and fund local media by demonstrating that independent, culturally-relevant journalism is the key to creating an informed and engaged public.

[As one foundation president put it](#)⁵⁹, “If [foundations] do not have a megaphone, they do not have a way to amplify the issues they are concerned with, then they are not going to be successful in their missions. The best way to do that is through quality local journalism. The best way to have civic engagement is to have quality local journalism. The studies are bearing that out. It’s not sold as journalism, it’s sold as, ‘If you care about any issue in this town, then you need to put aside some portion of your spending to support strong, quality local journalism that makes an impact.’”

INNOVATIVE & EQUITABLE MODELS FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Many Latinos live in news deserts, with limited access to reliable information sources, making them more vulnerable to the influence of misleading or false information. Improving information quality among Latinos requires interventions that deliver accurate information and also enable Latinos to engage actively in the political process, [notes Columbia University’s Yamil R. Velez](#)⁶⁰, who studies the intersection of racial and ethnic politics, political psychology, and political geography.

Below are three examples of community-centered media projects that prioritize the information needs and empowerment of Latino people and communities, who are too often missing, marginalized and misrepresented in mainstream news coverage. Two of these, El Tímpano and Conecta Arizona recently received new major funding from the Democracy Fund to expand their work.

[El Tímpano](#)⁶¹ — Spanish for “eardrum” — is grounded in the Listening Post Collective’s model of participatory community journalism. It exists to inform, engage, and amplify the voices of Latino and Mayan immigrants of Oakland and the wider Bay Area, foster civic and political engagement, and create a more inclusive local media ecosystem.



El Tímpano uses deep community listening to surface stories and questions important to its audience, then uses those insights to drive its reporting. They utilize in-person engagement as well as an SMS- based reporting platform to provide timely information and facilitate conversation. Questions are often requests for local resources like what to do when a water main breaks or where to get vaccinated.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, El Tímpano’s text messaging service provided both crucial information and a platform for subscribers to ask questions, share concerns, and receive credible public health information that they then shared with friends and family. Nearly half of the organization’s subscribers engaged at least once between March 2020 and March 2021. The most common response to El Tímpano’s text messages? “Gracias” or the prayer hands emoji to say, “thank you.” (Source: [Gather](#)⁶²)



When it first emerged at the onset of the pandemic, [Conecta Arizona](#)⁶³ aimed to slow the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 to Arizona’s Spanish-speaking border communities. What began as 12-person chat group has since transformed into a multimedia news service, information-sharing platform, and key resource for a community that is often neglected in the political sphere and misrepresented in the media.

In three years, Conecta Arizona has logged 864 hours of [live information sessions](#)⁶⁴ on WhatsApp, sent [188 newsletters](#)⁶⁵, and produced an award-winning podcast. Founder Maritza Félix hosts a daily “coffee hour” text conversation and informative session on WhatsApp and creates space for members to learn and discuss controversial topics, like abortion and the coronavirus vaccine. Félix said holding space for uncensored and difficult discussions is a primary goal of the organization, because these topics “are already a part of life” for her readers, listeners and followers.

Félix also partnered with Spanish-speaking freelance journalists working in the border region to find feel-good human stories under the tagline ‘We build human bridges while others are building walls’ to launch a newsletter and a podcast, ‘[Cruzando Lineas](#)⁶⁶, reaching nearly a million listeners. (Sources: [Feet in 2 Worlds](#)⁶⁷, [aidóni](#)⁶⁸)

[Reportajes de la Comunidad Latina](#)⁶⁹ – or Latino Communities Reporting Lab – is a long-term initiative launched in March 2021 to amplify the voices of local Latino communities in Meridian, CT, while providing empowering, fact-based news and information, and shining a light on injustices and inequities to promote greater understanding and showcasing the successes and contributions of Latinos.



The Lab is funded through a variety of grants, donors, sponsors and advertisers, in partnership with a non-profit fiscal sponsor, the [Meriden-Wallingford Community Foundation](#)⁷⁰, which enables the Record- Journal to accept foundation funding and tax-deductible donations.

Like El Tímpano, the Record-Journal conducted months of deep community listening before launching, engaging the Latino communities, and gathering data to learn about them and their information needs.

But the Latino Communities Reporting Lab is not a startup. It was created by The Record-Journal, a 5th generation, family-owned media company in central Connecticut. So far, the Lab consists of an editor, two reporters and an intern, and just received a grant from the Knight Foundation to hire a director of development and a bilingual coordinator.

“As a 154-year-old family-owned company, we feel this is essential to continuing our mission in our local community, where Latinos represent 29.1% of Meriden’s total population, including 58.2% of Meriden students,” [explained](#)⁷¹ Publisher and Executive Vice President [Liz White](#)⁷² Notarangelo.

Through its digital initiative, “VOICES, Community Powered Journalism,” the Lab [continues to deploy](#)⁷³ community listening and engagement strategies, soliciting questions and publishing answers in both English and Spanish using Instagram stories, Facebook groups, email newsletters, and QR codes on posters in grocery stores, libraries, and schools. Reporters also encourage sources and people in the community to interact with them and invite them to share story ideas and feedback which helps shape news coverage.

In addition to the mission of amplifying the voices of local Latino communities, a primary goal of the Lab has been to model listening strategies for other local news publishers in the United States to better inform coverage of underrepresented communities. The Record-Journal just released its [Latino Communities Listening Playbook](#)⁷⁴, which is the culmination of a 12-month in-depth community listening and engagement project funded by the Google News Initiative. And a portion of Knight Foundation’s grant will be used to produce a companion Growth Playbook focused on strategies for building long- term sustainability through a combination of philanthropic funding, sponsorships, and advertising as well as building audiences. (Source: [The Record-Journal](#)⁷⁵)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF NEWS IN NAPA VALLEY

RECOMMENDATION 1: DEVELOP A COMMUNITY REPORTING LAB

Establish pilot project team to engage stakeholders in a codesign process to launch a multi-platform bilingual Community Reporting Lab focused on Education, Housing, and Health Equity in Napa County.

Timeframe: 3 to 6 months for pilot project; 2-3 years thereafter if pilot is successful.

Estimated investment required for pilot: \$50,000 to \$100,000.

Estimated investment required post-pilot: \$200,000 to \$250,000 per year.

At the heart of reshaping editorial priorities lies the principle of community engagement. It's essential to ensure that the voices and concerns of the community are not just heard but actively integrated into the decision-making process. The feedback gleaned from our stakeholder interviews highlighted a myriad of pivotal issues revolving around Education, Housing, and Health. These concerns spanned from the realms of equity, economic opportunity, to the intricacies of family social services. Addressing these concerns through a dedicated reporting lab would fill coverage gaps and resonate with a cross-section of the community, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive coverage.

Launching a pilot philanthropic reporting lab can also activate newsrooms in new ways, while cross-pollinating audiences. Such an initiative would also act as a beacon, attracting new funders to the region. By focusing on the multi-dimensional aspects of Education, Housing, and Health Equity, this project can draw on the strengths of participating newsrooms, media outlets and encourage greater audience awareness.

RECOMMENDATION 2: RECRUIT & RETAIN DIVERSE TALENT

Continue to fund a bilingual, bi-cultural Latino communities reporter position for Highway 29 Media, whose content will be shared across other local media platforms at no cost.

Timeframe: 2 years. **Estimated investment required:** \$75,000 per year.

Talent recruitment and retention lie at the heart of creating a vibrant and representative journalistic landscape in Napa Valley. The region's stories and experiences demand a cohort of journalists who reflect the people who live in the community. For instance, effectively reaching and resonating with Spanish-speaking communities necessitates having Spanish-speaking reporters on board. Beyond linguistic capabilities, cultural competence is paramount, ensuring that stories are not just reported but also understood and contextualized within the broader community's experiences.

Building a sustainable talent pipeline for local journalism is not an overnight endeavor; it necessitates a deliberate and multi-year strategy. Moreover, as the media landscape evolves, there's a pressing need to prioritize the recruitment of digital-native reporters, individuals who seamlessly navigate the digital realm and understand its nuances. Additionally, with the rising popularity and impact of audio journalism, the recruitment of skilled audio producers and reporters becomes crucial in serving Napa County's audiences.

To truly make strides in talent acquisition, community engagement must be at the forefront. By establishing strong community ties, news organizations can not only enrich their stories but also create an environment that attracts and retains talent. Furthermore, proactive outreach to the broader journalistic ecosystem, including participation in conferences, engagement with affinity groups, and collaboration with professional organizations, can open doors to a more diverse and skilled pool of journalistic talent. Such concerted efforts

will ensure that Napa Valley's stories are told by those best equipped to understand and convey them.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ADAPT AND KEEP IT SIMPLE

Invest in digital infrastructure for local news outlets by adopting shared and managed service solutions for a Content Management System (CMS) and a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Warning: Do not fund software development or experimental solutions.

Timeframe: 3-6 months.

Estimated investment required: \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year, not including staffing.

To tap into new audience segments and remain competitive, news organizations must invest in stable yet agile technological solutions.

Shared and managed services emerge as a pivotal strategy in this context, offering a pragmatic approach to mitigate rising operational costs and harness the efficiencies of collective resources. Platforms like [Newspack](#)⁷⁶ exemplify this ethos, bringing together a community of users on a unified Content Management System (CMS). Additionally, Customer Relationship Management systems (CRMs) are indispensable tools, streamlining the management of both donors and advertisers. By leveraging shared services, news organizations can also explore the potential of selling regional advertising across multiple outlets, unlocking new revenue streams, and expanding their reach.

The overarching goal for news organizations should be to maximize their reach and impact. Achieving this necessitates the adoption of interoperable distribution platforms that facilitates seamless content sharing and distribution. Embracing shared development strategies not only paves the way for cost savings but also fosters an environment conducive to innovation. In such a collaborative framework, challenges can be collectively addressed, best practices can be shared, and innovative solutions can be co-developed. Funding new technology development should be avoided if existing solutions exist in the marketplace, which they do for the major operational functions of newsrooms.

APPENDIX A: NAPA/SONOMA RADIO MARKET OVERVIEW

ANALYSIS

For the purposes of this analysis, the area comprised of Napa County and eastern and Sonoma County are defined as the “Napa/Sonoma market.” The area has a variety of radio programming formats with a significant amount of locally produced content. The majority is “community radio” news, information, and music programming from non-commercial KSVY, KBBF and commercial KVYN and KVON. KVON and KBBF target Spanish language listeners. These stations provide the most consistent local coverage and discussion of the area. KAWZ is a Christian station with all satellite programming and no local content. Three public radio stations have signals reaching into the market. Most significantly KRCB, Rohnert Park on Sonoma County which has sporadic news coverage of Napa and Sonoma. It has produced some wildfire crisis updates for the Napa/Sonoma area. KQED in San Francisco has produced sporadic coverage, reaching out to Napa/Sonoma including segments about the wine industry and restaurants in the region industry. Forum produced an “on the road” show from Napa in 2019. CapRadio in Sacramento has done minimal coverage of the region. Neither KQED nor CapRadio has locally based resources in the area. There is no radio station that consistently and journalistically covers local news events, government activities, elections and is a known, dependable source for updates in crisis situations.

RELEVANT STATIONS

KSVY 91.3 FM Sonoma - Community Radio

<https://ksvy.org/>⁷⁷

Owner: Sonoma Valley Community Communications

Format: Community Radio/Variety: Locally hosted music shows, news, arts and other conversations

Notes: Non-Commercial. Extensive schedule of locally originated programming

KVON 1440 AM and FM 96.9 Napa - Spanish Language

<https://www.kvon.com/>⁷⁸ <https://www.winedownmedia.com/>⁷⁹

Owner: Wine Down Media

Format: Locally hosted Spanish Hits

Notes: Commercial. Locally originated programming

KVYN Napa 99.3 FM - Music

<https://www.993thevine.com/>⁸⁰ <https://www.winedownmedia.com/>⁸¹

Owner: Wine Down Media

Format: Locally hosted Adult Album Alternative

Notes: Commercial. Locally originated programming

KBBF 89.1 FM Calistoga - Spanish/English

<https://kbbf.org/>⁸²

Owner: Bilingual Broadcasting Foundation Inc

Format: Spanish Variety

Notes: Non-Commercial. Extensive locally originated programming

KRCB-104.9 FM Rohnert Park - NPR/Public Radio

<https://norcalpublicmedia.org/radio/radio>⁸³

Owner: Rural California Broadcasting Corp.

Format: Public Radio - NPR News network programming with a mixture of local News and music content

Notes: Non-Commercial. Locally originated news and music programming with sporadic coverage of Napa/Sonoma

KQED 88.5 San Francisco - NPR/Public Radio

<https://www.kqed.org/>⁸⁴

Owner: KQED Inc.

Format: NPR News network programming with local news and information content

Notes: Non-Commercial. No locally originated programming from Napa/Sonoma but some sporadic news coverage, including election coverage.

CapRadio 90.9 FM Sacramento - NPR/Public Radio

<https://www.capradio.org/>⁸⁵

Owner: California State University, Sacramento

Format: NPR News network programming with local news and information content

Notes: Non-Commercial. No locally originated programming from Napa/Sonoma. Rare coverage of the area.

KAWZ-88.1 FM Napa - Religious non-local

<https://csnradio.com/>⁸⁶

Owner: CSN International

Format: Christian talk and music

Notes: Commercial. Satellite fed: No locally originated programming.

APPENDIX B: ANALYSIS OF LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

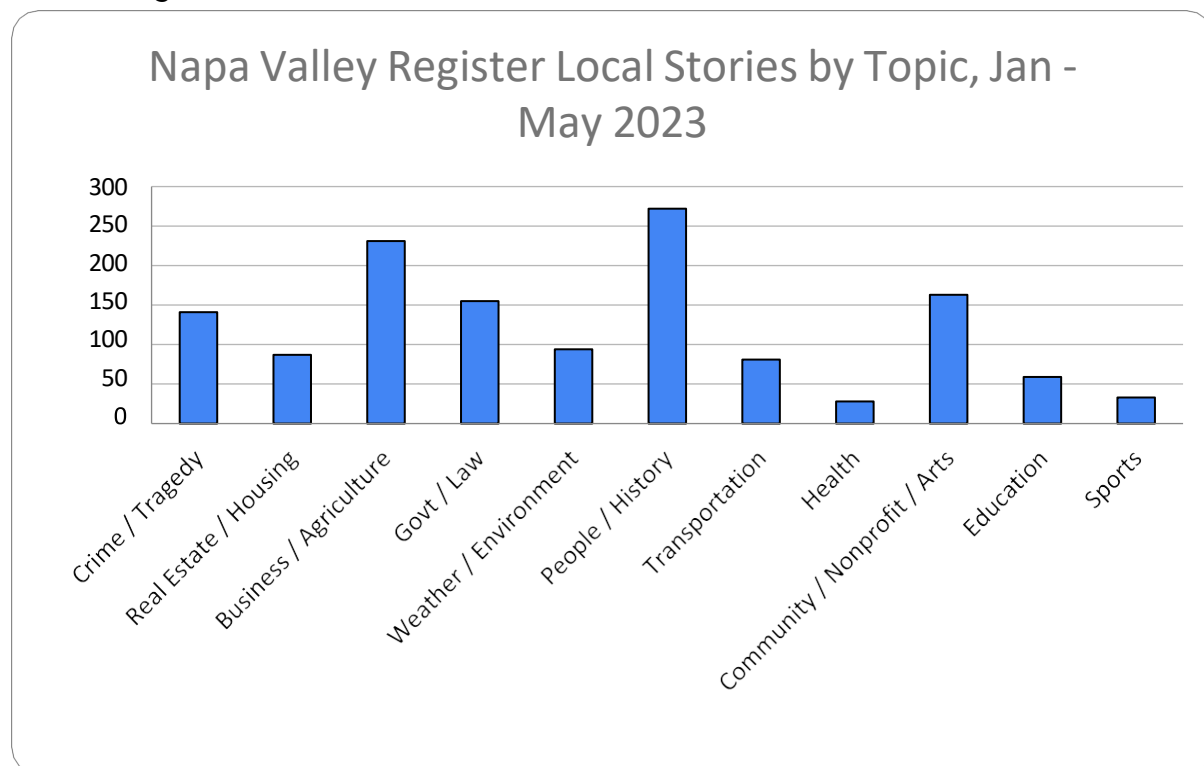
A content audit was conducted to identify and code stories produced by 6 outlets to establish a baseline analysis. These outlets were:

1. Napa Valley Register
2. St. Helena Star
3. The Press Democrat
4. Calistoga Tribune
5. Yountville Sun
6. The Yountvillian

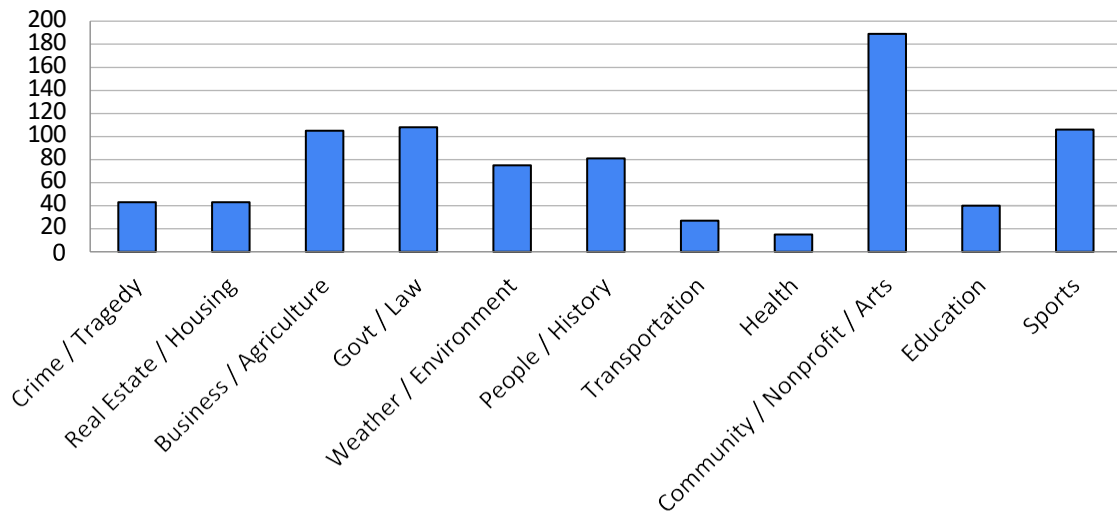
In total we analyzed each outlet for stories related to Napa County, including individual cities, from January 1, 2023, through May 31, 2023. The exceptions are Calistoga Tribune and Yountville Sun, which was limited in time span by lack of web archive access. The top three outlets producing specific content about Napa were Napa Valley Register, St. Helena Star, and The Press Democrat. We used the following content categories for our analysis:

1. crime/tragedy
2. real estate/housing
3. business/agriculture (including wine)
4. government/courts
5. weather/environment
6. people/history
7. transportation
8. health
9. community/nonprofit/arts
10. education
11. sports

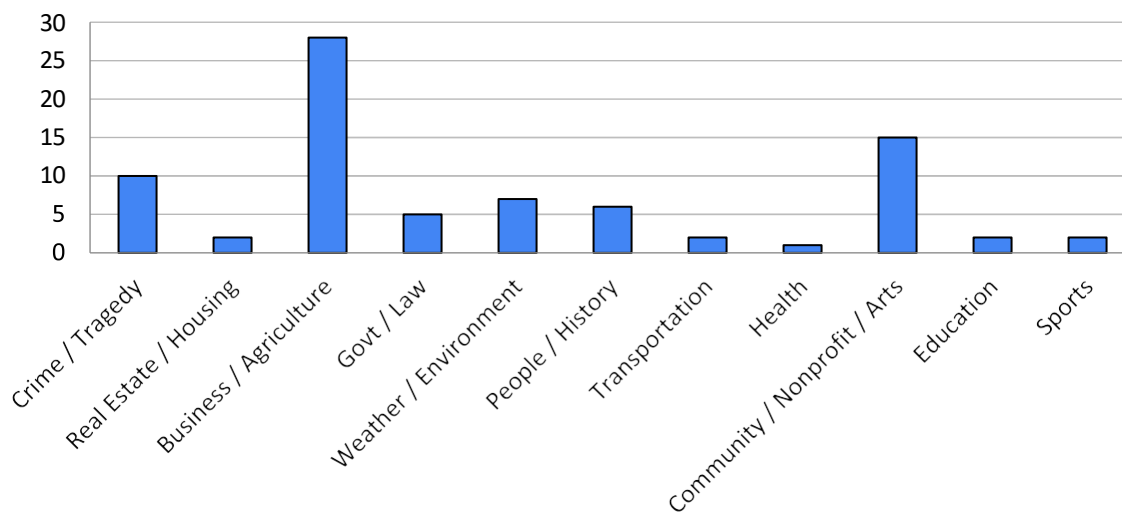
The results of this audit provide a perspective on what is being covered, and just as critically, what is not. A major finding is the low level of coverage for Education, Health, and Housing.



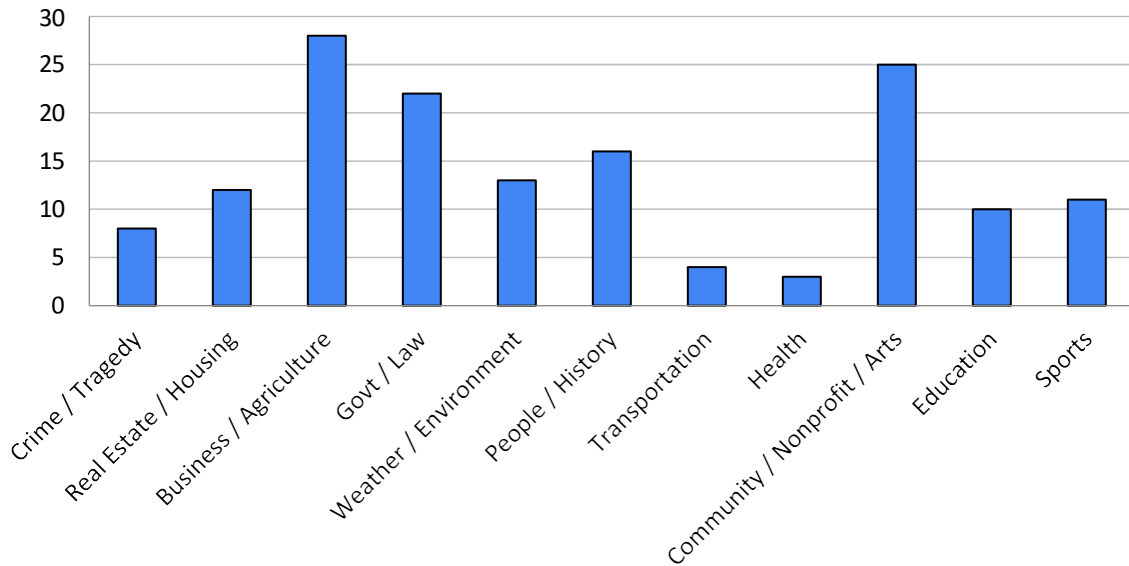
St. Helena Star Local Stories by Topic, Jan - May 2023



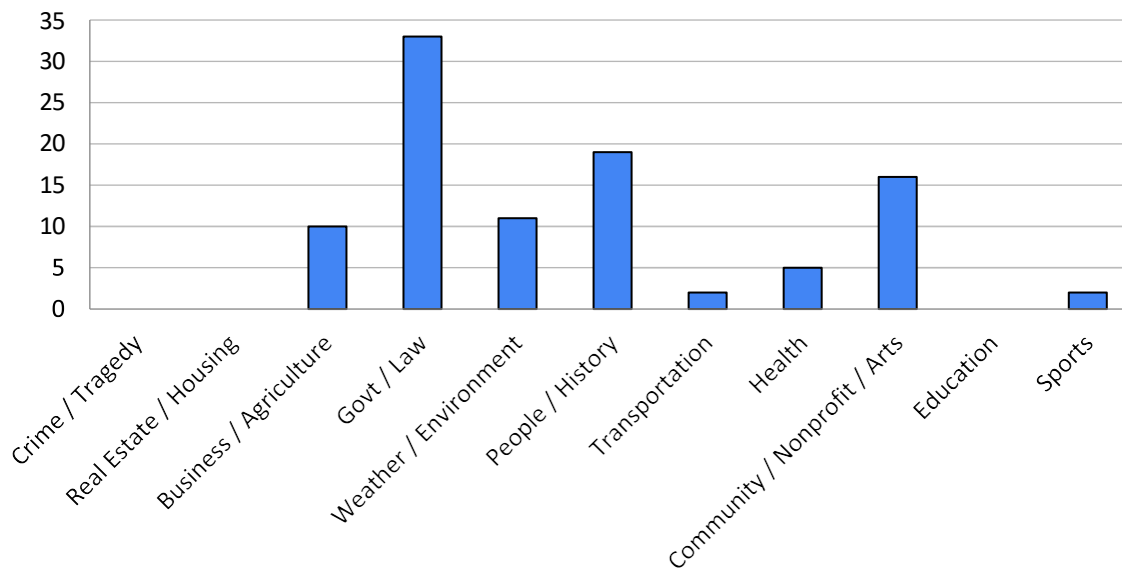
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Calistoga Tribune articles, March - April 2023



Yountville Sun articles, 3/2/23-4/6/23



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