

The Shape of Chicago's Media Ecosystem and Possible Paths Forward

BY SHEILA SOLOMON AND
ANDREA HART

PREPARED FOR DEMOCRACY FUND
RESEARCHED IN 2017, WITH A REVISION IN JUNE 2018

AUTHORS

Sheila Solomon is a former newspaper reporter and editor who has worked for the Hampton Monitor, Daily Press, Newsday, The Charlotte Observer and Chicago Tribune. Currently she's the senior consultant in Chicago for the Democracy Fund and the strategic alliance liaison at Rivet, a Chicago-based "smart audio" creation and distribution company.

Sheila has been inducted into the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications Hall of Fame at Hampton University and presented with the Ida B. Wells Award, given by Northwestern's The Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications and the National Association of Black Journalists. She has also been a lecturer and adjunct professor and serves on numerous journalism-related boards and advisory committees.

Andrea Faye Hart is a multimedia-based organizer, social entrepreneur and interdisciplinary educator. Andrea is a co-founder and the director of community engagement for the Chicago-based journalism lab City Bureau. Since 2011 she has designed civic journalism projects for media outlets as well as leading youth media organizations. She was a 2016 Voqal Fellow and a fall 2015 recipient of a Shuttleworth Foundation Flash Grant. She is a proud queer femme and is happy to conspire on: community-centered media, non-profit development and intergenerational educational design.

PREFACE

Democracy Fund believes the future of local news will be built not as a set of disconnected institutions, but as a diverse connected ecosystem of networks.

To that end, we commissioned a series of reports from regions around the country to better understand the complex forces shaping local news from Chicago to New Mexico. In this report, the authors have sought to map out the strengths and challenges facing Chicago, especially some of Chicago's independent and grassroots media, as the landscape of local news continues to shift due to economic and technological change.

Democracy Fund is a bipartisan foundation established by eBay founder and philanthropist Pierre Omidyar. We work on efforts that make democracy work better. Looking at local news and information as an ecosystem forces us to ask different questions. Instead of how will we save local news, we ask how will communities be informed and engaged in the future? Instead of asking which newsroom to place our bets on, we ask how we can invest in ways that strengthen people's access to news and information across the region.

Pierre Omidyar founded Democracy Fund to ensure people come first in American democracy. Our foundation tries to live up to those values by putting people first in our work as well. We are putting the voice and vision of local people first in our local news work by listening through reports such as this one.

This report was compiled and researched with a revision in June 2018 by Andrea Hart and Sheila Solomon, two professionals embedded in the Chicago journalism community. The report also owes a debt of gratitude to many others who contributed, in and outside Chicago, including the City Tech Collaborative; City Bureau; Public Narrative; and the MacArthur, McCormick and Chicago Community Trust foundations.

This report examines successes and failures across Chicago's local news and information landscape, with an eye on possible collaborations, adaptations, and improvements that could move the industry forward. That said, it does not attempt to catalog or cover everything happening in the city's diverse and vibrant ecosystem. We know that there are new developments every day in Chicago, and many have happened since this research began. We welcome feedback, further information, and questions. Send thoughts to: localnewslab@democracyfund.org

Teresa Gorman

Teresa Gorman
Local News Associate

CONTENTS

THE SHAPE OF CHICAGO'S MEDIA ECOSYSTEM AND POSSIBLE PATHS FORWARD

- 5 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
The Contours of Chicago's
Media Landscape
- 7 BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY**
- 9 ACROSS PLATFORMS**
Chicago's News and
Information Ecosystem
- 16 PROJECTS REMAKING CHICAGO MEDIA**
- 22 CHICAGO'S FUNDING LANDSCAPE**
- 25 LOCAL NEWS THROUGH THE EYES OF
LOCAL PEOPLE**
- 28 A WEB OF CHALLENGES**
- 31 CULTIVATING SHARED OPPORTUNITIES**
- 34 POSSIBLE PATHS FORWARD**
- 37 CLOSING THOUGHTS**
- 39 APPENDIX ONE**
Interviewees
- 40 APPENDIX TWO**
Chicago Media Outlets

THE CONTOURS OF CHICAGO'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Chicago's local news and information ecosystem is at a pivotal point in its evolution and growth. New collaborations, experiments and a bevy of talented and innovative leaders have brought new energy and attention to Chicago, as well as new ideas about how to tackle the history of inequality and segregation in the city and its media ecosystem. These changes create the potential for real consequences: tensions between legacy organizations, startups, and national bureaus; competition that may restrict growth; and lost opportunities to serve audiences.

Deep divisions exist in both the city and its media, which are complicated, entrenched and difficult to overcome. Chicago's extreme segregation has created a "tale of two cities," which is often visible, even reinforced, in its media. In the face of a range of challenges, including economic, legacy newsrooms have cut back operations to the point of risking their ability to serve large swaths of the city. That void has created an opportunity for a new generation of nonprofit and digital start-up projects, with deep roots in neighborhoods, to cover the areas alongside the community media that has served these audiences for much longer. Collaboration is common within these startups and nonprofits, but legacy institutions have generally been closed off, focusing instead on saving their publishing model.

Examining the media landscape, we found a wide diversity of organizations – including nationally renowned community media and youth media, flagship public media, legacy corporate media, strong non-English channels, historic ethnic media and various startups – all tackling the challenge of telling Chicago's stories from different angles.

All this new activity takes place in a media landscape littered with failed journalism projects – both for-profit and nonprofit. One of the defining stories we heard about Chicago is that people keep trying and building. Startups at the intersection of media and technology have become powerful players, including Smart Chicago (now City Tech Collaborative), Chi Hack Night, Hearken, City Bureau and The TRiiBE. Surrounding these creative and passionate projects is a sense of optimism, tempered only by the understanding that there is a long way to go to deliver on the promises they suggest.

These homegrown startups are joined by national nonprofit newsrooms new to the Chicago scene. ProPublica and Chalkbeat have opened local bureaus, and other organizations are expanding their services in Chicago.

Media associations including the Institute for Nonprofit News, The Media Consortium and Civil have also launched collaborative projects in the city. At their best, these national outlets could create synergies and collaborations between existing media and bring more resources into the region. At their worst, they will create tension and uncertainty as they compete with local journalism leaders for resources and stories.

Supporting several of these efforts is a set of robust philanthropic institutions that fund news and information-related efforts and a business community that has long invested in journalism. Local funders have collaborated in the past on projects that could point the way for future investments. Like the rest of Chicago's media, many of the foundations in this space are undergoing staff and strategic changes right now, which presents new possibilities and real challenges for building long-term capacity in local news.

Engaged journalism – an emerging trend nationally in newsrooms – has found a fertile home in Chicago, thanks in part to the long history of civic engagement in the city. Discussions with community members revealed that civic engagement can play a role in how people get the information they need, from newsrooms to aldermen to block clubs to community meetings. Newer efforts like Hearken – which grew out of WBEZ radio's "Curious City" – and Chicago Community Trust's "On the Table" series are using new tools to connect people and center community building, showing the value of these techniques in an effort to inspire others to adopt them.

Key to the health of an ecosystem is a system of connectors and infrastructure that helps fuel change and support the field. We have not identified a central hub that brings everyone together, but instead, a layer of organizations that convene, connect, and communicate with all those in the media ecosystem in different ways. These include City Bureau, Illinois Humanities, Public Narrative, Chicago Learning Exchange and various colleges across the area.

We can't understand the health of Chicago's news ecosystem without also listening to the voices of people the media is meant to serve. Through focus groups, design workshops and interviews, we've tried to bring the voice of people from across Chicago into dialog with the innovators, leaders, and workers who make Chicago's media. We will elevate their voices throughout this report, and any work moving forward has to continue to engage with local Chicagoans as participants in reshaping their news landscape. In the midst of so much change in Chicago's news landscape, the voice of local people can be a beacon to help ground our work. This is a profoundly important moment, full of potential for creating a shared, bolder vision for Chicago media and new opportunities to make that vision a reality.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Chicago's local independent, ethnic, nonprofit and community media don't have the muscle of the major newsrooms in the city or the national news organizations with Chicago bureaus, but they have other kinds of strengths. These underrepresented communities and organizations have historically been at a disadvantage raising revenue through advertising and philanthropy, relying instead on building deep networks within their communities.

To correct that imbalance, we focus this report on small and innovative newcomers, niche newsletters, neighborhood publications, academics, youth-oriented organizations, nonprofits, broadcast and print media covering mostly underserved and ethnic audiences. The future of Chicago's news ecosystem depends on connecting the dots between large and small, commercial and nonprofit, niche and national.

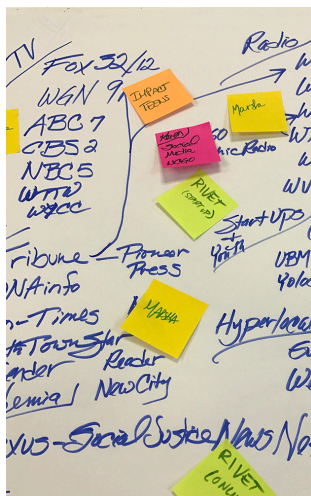
This report is based on more than 50 interviews with representatives from across the media landscape. It includes information from several design workshops facilitated by Sheila Solomon and Andrea Hart which brought together academics, media producers, and funders to map out and discuss where Chicago's news and information is today and what it can be in the future. We also include insights from eight user-focused groups held in partnership with Smart Chicago Collaborative (which merged with sister organization City Digital in December 2017 [to form the City Tech Collaborative](#)), a local nonprofit that specializes in user-design and centering planning on community needs. To match both our own understanding of the landscape, and the community feedback we collected, we considered a broad interpretation of media that includes any organizations presenting news and information to Chicagoans, regardless of size, funding sources or ideology.

By its nature, this report is only a partial snapshot of Chicago media. The full picture is too large and changing too quickly to cover comprehensively in one report. There are many topics – including Chicago media's ability to adapt to changing economic realities, the decreasing ability to make a living as a full-time journalist, journalism's role as a watchdog for the city's infamous corruption and dozens of other forces affecting the ecosystem – that we touch on only briefly or not at all. Instead, our goal is to give an overview of the landscape, acknowledge the latest trends affecting it and make recommendations for how media companies can work together to navigate the current prevailing winds. While we've tried

to include notes to recognize major changes, the research informing this report was last updated in June of 2018, and the report can only be considered fully accurate to that moment in time. (See editor's notes throughout and at the end for select updates)

Grounded by this research, the report looks to the future with timely ideas to move Chicago's news landscape forward by supporting a diverse array of voices and outlets and ensuring communities get the news and information they need. The ideas are meant to be descriptive not prescriptive, they are offered as jumping off points for a conversation about a shared vision for Chicago's news ecosystem. We look forward to these conversations and welcome further feedback and insight into the many-layered ecosystem of Chicago.

CHICAGO'S NEWS AND INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM



Please send your
comments to [localnewslab@
democracyfund.org](mailto:localnewslab@democracyfund.org)



In a series of design workshops and more than 50 interviews, we asked local journalists, media leaders, and community media advocates how they understood the Chicago media ecosystem. We even asked small groups to literally draw maps of Chicago's media by who they served, who they partnered with, who worked there, etc. As with audiences today, these media makers and journalists all saw the local news landscape through their own lenses and experiences. While the maps and discussions varied, we began to see trends emerge. We paired that with our own research and years of work on the ground in Chicago to create an inventory of news organizations, which accompanies this document in the appendix. It is not meant to be exhaustive and we welcome feedback. In the section that follows, we discuss some of the key categories of organizations that participants and interviewees discussed, as well as a few examples in each.

Yes, this report is about local news, but Chicago has often been a home for experiments in local-national partnerships. In the past, the Chicago News Cooperative served as a local partner for the New York Times. Patch tried to cultivate local franchises of a national network in 2007 but its influence dwindled over time. Since the 2016 presidential election, concerns about media's focus on the coasts have increased interest from national newsrooms looking to expand their reach into the Midwest. In October 2017, the investigative news organization ProPublica (whose national organization is supported by Democracy Fund) opened its Illinois office in Chicago. Other national news organizations have also indicated interest in setting up shop in Chicago, though not yet publicly.

Selected traditional news outlets

see also the longer list in the appendix

PRINT NEWSPAPERS

Chicago Tribune

daily newspaper

Chicago Sun-Times

daily newspaper

RADIO

WBEZ

National Public Radio affiliate

WBBM

all-news radio station and CBS affiliate

TELEVISION

ABC7

Chicago's ABC network affiliate

WTTW

Chicago's Public Broadcasting Service member

CBS 2 TV

Chicago's CBS network affiliate

NBC 5 TV

Chicago's NBC network affiliate

Fox 32 TV

Chicago's Fox network affiliate

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

Chicago Reader

an alternative weekly

Of the national publications that have already come and gone, DNAinfo serves as one of the most telling examples, and a warning on the need for diverse funding sources. Founded by billionaire Joe Ricketts in 2009, DNAinfo sprouted up hyperlocal news organizations first in New York, then in Chicago in 2012. In the five years that DNAinfo Chicago was active, it became a trusted source in neighborhoods not used to seeing their stories reflected in the larger local publications. When the staff attempted to unionize in 2017, however, Ricketts, an outspoken anti-union figure, unceremoniously closed all of the DNAinfo sites, as well as the Gothamist publications – including Chicagoist. The shutterings showed the danger of concentrated ownership, particularly when that ownership is concentrated in an individual with his or her own agenda.

Chicago is also home to innovative national media startups which are serving local audiences as part of their national mission. In 2013, Rivet Smart Audio (where one of the authors of this report works) launched an app featuring curated stories from Rivet staff, the Associated Press and other news outlets. Well before the NPR One app, Rivet was pioneering technologies and features for delivering audio reporting. Rivet has also aggressively focused on pushing diverse voices and quality news onto unexpected and new platforms – from smart speakers like Amazon Echo to efforts that replace hold music with news reporting.

Then there are the national publications that found Chicago to be a stable home from which they could grow. Pitchfork started in Chicago in 1995 in a thriving indie music publication scene that included Venus Zine and Punk Planet. While many of Pitchfork's former peers have shuttered in the intervening 20 years, Pitchfork's focus on events and audience engagement helped it grow into a successful business that earned an acquisition from Condé Nast in 2015. While Pitchfork's offices have since left Chicago, several other national cultural criticism outlets continue on from Chicago, including The Onion's A.V. Club and RogerEbert.com.

2) Legacy Newsrooms

Within Chicago's traditional landscape you have a mix of legacy newsrooms spread across different platforms (newspaper, TV, radio) and a complex and interconnected web of ownership structures that continued to shift even as we were writing this report. Like newspapers, TV and radio outlets around the country are facing eroding advertising revenue, large legacy production and distribution costs, and shifting audience attention. Newsrooms are trying to deliver the reporting they always have while also reimagining their business and products.

Also important, however, is the continued insufficient diversity and inclusion in these newsrooms, and the gap between them and the

Selected ethnic and niche news outlets

see also the longer list in the appendix

NEWSPAPERS

The Chicago Defender

weekly newspaper since 1905

Hoy

free Spanish-language newspaper owned by the Chicago Tribune

La Raza

Spanish-language weekly

Windy City Times

LGBTQ+ weekly newspaper

Chicago Chinese News

semiweekly newspaper

RADIO

WVON

urban talk radio

Lumpen Radio

community-led FM radio station

TV

Univision

Telemundo

communities they serve. A litany of forces, including elite universities, low wages, and unpaid internships, work together to keep newsrooms primarily white and well-off in the country as a whole. In Chicago's legacy newsrooms, that lack of diversity in the newsroom is compounded by a lack of diversity in ownership. Decades of consolidation have left the bulk of Chicago's mainstream print publications in the hands of two ownership groups, both comprised mostly of elite, white men. That these owners have diverging interests from the audiences they serve has been a consistent source of tension and, occasionally, scandal. The dependence on a small group of benefactors also puts legacy media in a precarious position should those owners lose interest or funds, as DNAinfo so clearly illustrates in the section above.

We found high levels of distrust for traditional media across our research, which is also supported by national trends. This distrust is layered and part of a long history predating "fake news." According to [a March 2017 Monmouth University study](#), "more than 6-in-10 Americans believe that traditional major TV and newspaper media outlets report fake news."

And yet, these traditional outlets are also valuable anchors in the ecosystem. They have some of the largest audiences in the region and, while diminished, still boast impressive reporting staffs and newsroom teams. These journalists perform important investigations and cover critical stories at a level other local newsrooms can't. Finally, they are influential with policy makers, civic and business leaders, as well as funders.

Traditional media have the potential to be platforms for new kinds of partnerships that build on the unique capacity of grassroots newsrooms and amplify the best of what legacy outlets offer. These partnerships are starting to happen, but real investment could create new networks for journalism that reach different communities and strengthen new voices in the media. They're also an opportunity for legacy media to learn and benefit from these grassroots newsrooms – namely by adopting new lenses to do inclusive community reporting and by evaluating their internal policies to better serve and create a diverse staff.

3) Ethnic and Niche Media

Successful community engagement efforts are one of the greatest strengths of ethnic and niche media. They build deep relationships with their audiences, translating into loyal customer bases, according to Windy City Media Group Publisher and Executive Editor Tracy Baim [*Editor's Note: Since this research, Baim has been named publisher of the Chicago Reader*]. In the focus groups we conducted, audiences told us that they see ethnic and niche media as "champions of the community," especially since many of the reporters at these outlets come from or have similar backgrounds

Selected youth media news outlets

see also the longer list in the appendix

Yollocalli

formerly Radio Arte

Free Spirit Media

Urban Broadcast Media

Westside Media Project in Austin

Columbia Links

currently on indefinite hiatus

Street Level Youth Media

now under Urban Gateways

Young Chicago Authors

to the places and people they report on. The Chicago Defender is just one publication with a history full of these champion moments: It has partnered with WVON radio on election polling, while its charity wing sponsors the Bud Billiken Parade, the largest African American parade in the country.

Not all ethnic, foreign language and niche media are small either. Univision Chicago, for example, won an Emmy for Best Evening Newscast in 2017. Throughout our interviews, Teri Arvesu, vice president of content and news at Univision, was consistently described as a critical local leader in the media landscape. “The Spanish language market’s not shrinking as fast as it is in English. Univision has a huge focus on unique storytelling, including an investigative team that launched in November,” Arvesu told us. Arvesu said Univision Chicago is honing in on quality local content and breaking down barriers between audiences and advertisers who haven’t always seen Spanish language media as a place to invest. “Advertisers want the 18-49 year-olds and Univision’s No. 1 with them at 5 p.m.,” she reported. “But we still can’t set rates as high as English-language stations with fewer viewers [do].”

4) Youth Media Organizations

While not always considered as part of the local news landscape, our research found that youth media projects and organizations comprise a critical layer of activity and infrastructure in Chicago’s media. Illinois recently implemented [a civic engagement requirement](#) in high schools, and youth media organizations are now infusing it into their programming. While curriculum within these nonprofits shifts to reflect the times, youth media organizations have always prided themselves on having lower barriers to entry and an intention of providing safe spaces for professional training or geeking out. They aim to provide opportunities for youth-led civic and community engagement while creating networking opportunities and pipelines for new voices and talent.

We also found that youth media organizations served as a kind of connective tissue, using their work to engage diverse communities and newsrooms in ways that build important relationships for future partnerships. For example, from 2013 through 2016, Free Spirit Media (FSM) collaborated with Smart Chicago Collaborative, Mikva Challenge (a youth civic organizing nonprofit) and the Adler Planetarium to run a summer series where youth participants explored the intersections of tech, media, and politics. This collaboration led FSM to expand its programming to include 18-24 year olds.

But collaborations have their own unique roadblocks for youth media organizations, especially when it comes to connections with other institutions, such as schools. “Any time there is a budget crisis and strikes

Selected nonprofit news, tech and arts organizations

see also the longer list in the appendix

REPORTING

City Bureau

Invisible Institute

Better Government Association

The Chicago Reporter

CAN TV

The Triibe

El Beisman

Gozamos

ARTS

OpenTV

60 Inches from Center

TECH

HIVE Chicago Learning Network

Smart Chicago Collaborative
now defunct

Chicago Data Collaborative

ChiHack Night

– or the threat of one – Chicago Public Schools shuts itself off from any new opportunities with our programming,” said Erika Hobbs, former communications director and Chicago program manager at the News Literacy Project.

5) Local Nonprofit News and Arts

Local nonprofit news organizations tend to be similar to niche media in that they build strong community ties. Nonprofit media and news organizations have also served as essential experimental components of the ecosystem – and have often been the catalyst for significant partnerships.

While not directly news-oriented, it is important to note the role of nonprofit arts organizations in capturing narratives often missed in mainstream journalism. One prime example is Open Television (OTV), a “nonprofit platform for intersectional pilots and series, supporting Chicago artists in producing and exhibiting indie series.” It’s produced original web series and orchestrated better reach for existing works. OTV collaborates with a wide range of mostly Chicago-based queer, people of color and women media makers. “What I’m trying to do with Open TV is provide a space for people to come and see some quality work and give those creators the recognition to get them to the next level I want to show that in television today we’re no longer just thinking about comedies, dramas and reality TV, we’re beginning to think about artistic expression across a number of disciplines and people,” founder Aymar Jean Christian [told the Chicago Reader in October 2016](#).

These spaces are on the fringe of journalism but are part of the larger ecosystem conversation often ensuring more nuanced assessments of problems as well as solutions.

In some instances, the nonprofit art landscape in Chicago collaborates with the news sector, as is the case with Free Street Theater and ProPublica Illinois. The organizations started “a six-month initiative in February of 2018 to engage with communities around the state” where “Free Street will facilitate workshops ... to spark discussion around the news and information that impacts Illinoisans. Based on what we’ve learned, Free Street will then provide ProPublica Illinois and the communities we visit with the tools to host future conversations,” according to ProPublica’s website.

6) Schools and Educators

Chicago-area universities and colleges are making concerted efforts to engage communities and media organizations within the city. That said, these institutions, especially the private ones, must overcome their historical baggage, including accusations of being too removed from

Selected university programs

see also the longer list in the appendix

Columbia College

Loyola University

DePaul University

Roosevelt University

Northwestern University

City Colleges of Chicago

communities, too bureaucratic and too centered on learning techniques that don't foster collaboration.

Still, these private institutions have more capacity to innovate because financially they are safer from market changes. Universities can incubate solutions for sustainable funding models, one of the industry's most pressing challenges. In April of 2018, Northwestern University announced it was launching a "two-year research and development project aimed at providing greater understanding of how digital audiences engage with local news and finding new approaches to bolster local news business models." The Chicago Tribune will be one of the "Learning Labs" for this Local News Initiative, which is being supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.

Both Columbia College Dean of Media Arts Eric Freedman and former Loyola University Dean of Communications Don Heider also put plans into motion to leverage students and their classrooms to work better with communities throughout Chicago.

Other experiments are being attempted across the city, including Columbia College's Social Media Digital Strategy major. It will be the only Chicago school to offer this major. The Knight Lab at Northwestern University is also experimenting, and sharing its tools. "Chief Nerd" Joe Germuska, who runs the lab, also sits on the City Bureau Board of Directors and has assisted its reporting fellows in using Knight Lab tools like TimelineJS.

Looking at Northwestern's recent efforts, it's hard not to wonder what the ecosystem would look like if it and other institutions started earlier with resource sharing. Or if, for example, Northwestern's prestigious Cherub program for high school students offered an intentional pathway to make local journalism more inclusive. Northwestern University as a whole has made these efforts. The larger institution has partnered with Lake View High School, a northside neighborhood Chicago Public School, to revamp its STEM programming. This partnership "will include programming to support postsecondary planning and preparation, teacher development and student teaching experiences for Northwestern graduate students" [according to a January report](#) from school paper The Daily Northwestern.

Columbia College Dean Freedman told us he wants 100 percent of students to become engaged in civic media projects across the greater Chicago area. He says they're the labor source, they're the future of civic media here in Chicago and, the future of understanding what matters in communities. To make that true, and to keep students in Chicago after they graduate, universities need to create a solid pipeline from neighborhoods to Chicago Public Schools to Chicago colleges to Chicago jobs.

Many of the local colleges have programs that cause their students to interact with the surrounding communities. Heider, former dean at Loyola

Selected network building organizations

see also the longer list in the appendix

Public Narrative

City Bureau

Illinois Humanities Council

Hive Chicago Learning Network

Chicago Youth Voices Network

The Media Consortium

University, says just sending students out is invaluable and a huge benefit. He says all of Loyola's students have to do some engaged learning—and he's open to more opportunities like those presented by Free Spirit Media and the West Side Writing Project. Loyola has also partnered with WBEZ radio to broadcast its Vocalo show on the school's WLW-FM radio station in trade for WBEZ hosting two students as paid interns each semester.

7) Network Builders and Conveners

As noted in the introduction, organizations that help convene and build networks across Chicago are providing important infrastructure for supporting public interest journalism and community news. These support networks help nonprofits and journalists tell better stories, connect with communities and connect Chicago to other parts of the state.

Illinois Humanities embodies this approach. The inaugural People-Powered Publishing Conference in 2016 was developed in partnership with Harken, GroundSource, City Bureau and the Crowd Powered News Network, but Illinois Humanities led the effort to highlight “innovative projects and practices that build stronger connections between reporters and the publics they cover.” After the 2016 presidential election, Illinois Humanities also worked with the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting (MCIR) to design a fellowship meant to bridge divides between urban and rural parts of the state.

“Making an ecosystem healthy means building bridges. We have to look at assets in rural Illinois and where the areas of need are to identify how those communities could benefit from having public interest reporting done,” Simon Nyi, Illinois Humanities’ program manager for media and business, told us.

The conveners, however, also face challenges. Foundations and sponsors don't always provide enough support for these behind-the-scenes capacity-building efforts. At the same time, nonprofit conveners are often stretched from doing direct service work, with limited capacity leftover. The same segregation we see across the city comes into play in these hub organizations, as well, which occasionally struggle to convene a representative group.

Then, there are the aftershocks these network-building organizations can cause when they collapse. When the Independent Press Association folded in 2007 leaving behind hundreds of thousands in unpaid bills to publishers, local magazines like Punk Planet and Venus Zine folded as well. “Independent media in Chicago isn't networked like it was then, for some reason the web hasn't tried to replicate that model,” Punk Planet Founder and former Director of OpenNews Dan Sinker told us.

PROJECTS REMAKING CHICAGO MEDIA

We've shown that Chicago media is in a moment of flux, and now we want to highlight some of the people and organizations taking advantage of this moment to reshape and rethink local news. Inside future-of-journalism circles these might be called "disruptors." Creative disruption is a concept coined by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen to describe companies that are "uprooting and changing how we think, behave, do business, learn and go about our day-to-day," as Caroline Howard [wrote in Forbes](#).

These organizations are emerging from media's growing pains, turning traditional processes on their heads and looking for ways to better the ecosystem. In this report, that disruption includes both large and small strategies that re-evaluate common practices that are or have become obsolete or harmful.

Using this definition, disruptors are not new to Chicago's ecosystem. The city has a long history of media springing up to fill a void, from the aforementioned Chicago Defender in the 1900s to a boom of web-based publications in the early 2000s that included now-institutions like Pitchfork and shorter-lived experiments like EveryBlock and Gaper's Block. As in a true ecosystem, change is constant. Some disruptors find solutions that are absorbed into mainstream practice, leaving room for the next generation to improve their model. Others fail to gain traction and fizzle out, but leave just as much of an impact on the landscape.

Today, the most promising projects in Chicago go beyond disruption to begin repairing the landscape of local news. [In a separate blog post](#) on this topic on Medium, Andrea Hart, one of the authors of this report, wrote of City Bureau, "For us, disruption is the first step on the way to repair." City Bureau's professional development pipeline includes mentoring youth media makers as well as local freelancers. It's a means of disrupting the lack of diversity in newsrooms, but it's also a means of creating trust in media by empowering people to report on the communities they live in. The list below includes just a sampling of organizations and individuals disrupting the system to make way for a better one.

1) The Disruptors

Urban Broadcast Media

The late Vernon Jarrett, a nationally recognized Chicago journalist, convinced Rev. Dr. Leon Finney to buy a church and adjacent building to act as a home and launching pad for Urban Broadcast Media. Jarrett wanted this new outlet to serve as a place to celebrate the role African American journalists played in the civil rights movement. Finney installed broadcast equipment and opened studios – even creating specific spaces for community youth. He said he does not want this new digital outlet to replicate the mistakes of terrestrial radio.

In a conversation with us, Finney said he believes the way to have a voice in the community is by training a new generation. Failing to do that would be like mortgaging the future. Any local media venture must produce high-quality content that keeps up with the ways consumers get their news today, he told us, or they run the risk of not being able to influence the policies that impact this nation. Urban Broadcast Media is still a fledgling operation, but it is finding its niche and proving its worth. UBM has had some early advertising success, but Finney laments the waning influence of major black advertising agencies such as Burrell, which used to have far bigger budgets to spend on black media.

Jamie Kalven and the Invisible Institute

Jamie Kalven's career is a testament to having an incredible long game. In the early '90s, already an established writer, he and his wife, Patricia, moved into the Stateway Gardens development project on Chicago's underserved South Side. "A lot of our friends, as well as other colleagues, thought we were crazy," Kalven said. While immersed in the community, he designed "a program of 'grassroots public works' aimed at creating alternatives for ex-offenders and gang members." Kalven also became a stringer for media outlets like National Public Radio, which would leverage his community connections to deepen reporting on public housing.

In 2000, he established his own platform, the Invisible Institute. As his relationship with the community grew, so did his understanding of corrupt policing in public housing. [His reporting in the early 2000s began to shape the police reform conversation in Chicago](#) while also drawing harassment from the city. "The city was trying to ruin me at one point by constantly throwing legal battles at me and subpoenaing my notes," he said. But in 2014, Kalven earned a critical legal victory, successfully suing the Chicago Police Department to release misconduct files from 2011 to 2014. From there, Kalven and his colleagues at the Invisible Institute cleaned the data and made it public via the Citizen's Police Data Project. Kalven was successful in obtaining critical information from the city again [in February 2015 with the Laquan McDonald autopsy](#). In 2017, when the Independent

Police Review Authority was replaced with the Civilian Office of Police Accountability, Kalven and Invisible Institute were asked to consult on the transition.

City Bureau

In 2015, four early-career media professionals got together to reimagine what community-centered local news in Chicago could look like by focusing on the city's most misrepresented neighborhoods. City Bureau is a journalism lab that fights against one-note coverage of neighborhoods by mainstream outlets that focus on crime, insufficient diversity in newsrooms, public distrust of journalists and lack of sustainable business models in media. It does this with a three-pronged approach: a fellowship for emerging as well as established reporters, a network known as the Documenters that trains and pays residents to document public meetings, and a weekly public newsroom series that invites communities into the newsmaking process.

Focusing on these areas, City Bureau collaborates with nonprofits and institutions working within the neighborhoods to build relationships and create collaboration, helping reporters identify information sources and new stories. It's building a pipeline for journalists with a community-centered lab that invites people to critique and contribute to various parts of the journalism process. It partners with Chicago Public Libraries to design community engagement events and convene the public to distribute data, get feedback and deepen relationships with the communities they serve.

City Bureau is also serving as a space to generate further solutions. Following their time at City Bureau, three former fellows created immigration and refugee news site ["90 Days, 90 Voices."](#) The website is a human-centered response to President Donald Trump's January 2016 executive order to ban immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries.

Hearken

After seeing the success of her community engagement project "Curious City," former WBEZ reporter Jennifer Brandel created the for-profit Hearken to expand the model around the country. Brandel is great at both imagining solutions for and questioning how to better democratize local media.

The Daily Line

Started in 2007, The Daily Line, known as Aldertrack until 2016, is a newsletter and website that builds a close relationship with its political junkie subscribers. The Daily Line provides in-depth coverage of Chicago and Springfield politics down to the granular details. As of 2016 the site

had subscribers in the “mid-hundreds”, and aimed to grow to no more than a few thousand, according [to a Nieman Report](#).

Smart Chicago Collaborative

The now-defunct civic tech organization Smart Chicago Collaborative pioneered several programs that live on in different forms at other organizations. In Spring 2016, Smart Chicago transitioned its Documenters program to City Bureau, where the journalism lab trains and pays residents to document public meetings, as well as level up into more complicated reporting projects. Meanwhile, the CUT Group, which hired residents to user-test technology, has been absorbed by City Tech Collaborative, the entity that was formed when Smart Chicago merged with City Lab in 2017.

2) Learning From The Past

As we said above, a media organization doesn’t have to have longevity to have a lasting impact on disrupting and repairing the ecosystem. Below we profile a few of the innovative projects that have come and gone in Chicago and consider what they might teach us.

Radio Arte

When Radio Arte was conceived in 1996, having a station run by and for Latinx youth created alternative pathways into media that circumvented racism within the industry. Radio Arte started when the National Museum of Mexican Art acquired a radio license from the Boys and Girls Club and it bloomed into the only bilingual, youth-led radio station addressing social issues through a Latinx lens in the country. “The impact was immeasurable because Radio Arte addressed immigration, women’s and LGBTQ issues at a time before marriage equality or reform was a hot topic,” said Jorge Valdivia, who managed the station for 17 years.

Radio Arte also offered two training programs – one in Spanish and one in English – to get community members on air. “We were an oddball, we were very different,” Valdivia said, “We let ourselves sound rough and we involved youth in every meeting, even funding ones.” It was a space where everyone learned from everyone, he added. But while the station turned into a cultural safe space for one of the fastest growing populations in the city, the museum ended the project when funders shifted priorities.

When the signal was sold to Chicago Public Media, responsibility for continuing Radio Arte’s legacy landed in the hands of its sister organization, Yolocalli Arts Reach. When Yocalli’s Executive Director Vanessa Sanchez moved the program from the building it shared with Radio Arte into a new space in Little Village, she worked with instructor and Radio Arte alum Stephanie Manriquez to revive the station. This revival takes advantage of the internet while also collaborating with Chicago’s newest community

FM station, Lumpen Radio. Youth record and produce in the Yollocalli and Lumpen spaces and do live recordings at community events via the “Your Story Your Way” program.

As noted above, shifts in foundation funding ended Radio Arte, but Valdivia also suggested the museum never had a strategic plan for the station. The lack of structural support and long-term vision caused Radio Arte to be incredibly vulnerable. When costs at the building rose and funders’ interest waned, there was not enough commitment to continue the work. “We were the baby [the museum] never intended to have,” Valdivia told us.

Chicago News Cooperative

In 2009, Jim O’Shea co-founded the Chicago News Cooperative to create news stories about Chicago for various media outlets. He says it was undercapitalized from the start. “We should have raised somewhere between \$3 million to \$5 million before we started, instead of the \$900,000-plus we had when we started publishing journalism for the New York Times,” O’Shea said. “Most of our other problems flowed from that single fact.” O’Shea said they didn’t bring on enough business expertise, focusing instead on journalistic capacity, and so never developed meaningful alternative revenue streams that could have lessened dependence on philanthropy. “We ended up being long on journalism expertise and short on business expertise,” he told us. Those funders who did donate were willing to help get CNC off the ground, but not make a renewed commitment.

The project was complicated by the fact that O’Shea and others involved decided to acquire the Sun-Times, one of the city’s daily papers. “I stopped fundraising about six months before the Sun-Times deal closed,” O’Shea said, “putting us in a cash crunch when things didn’t work out as I had planned.” David Greising, the former deputy editor and now chief executive officer of the Better Government Association, adds the CNC never received its 501(c)(3) status.

“At least one major foundation decided not to continue funding the CNC because the 501(c)(3) designation got hung up in the Cleveland office of the IRS, which never seemed to be convinced that we were a legitimate news organization,” said Greising.

Chicago Matters

For 10 years, the Chicago Community Trust worked with other foundations to fund Chicago Matters, a collaborative investigative project that brought WBEZ, WTTW, The Chicago Defender, The Chicago Reporter, Catalyst and others together to explore a single topic. Outlets would work for a month and publish at various points during that period. At times, participants expressed worries that foundations had too heavy a hand in deciding the

topics that journalists covered. “Now we wonder how it could’ve been more collaborative amongst the outlets and also been more evergreen,” said Cheryl Hughes CCT’s senior director of strategic initiatives. The other issue, according to Hughes, was the disparity in funding between the news outlets. “From a million-dollar budget, there was a bias toward legacy, public interest channels to get three-fourths of it,” she said, leaving community news and hyperlocal outlets like The Chicago Reporter with less.

DNAinfo Chicago

As we described in greater detail above, billionaire publisher Joe Ricketts’ abrupt shuttering of DNAinfo Chicago and Chicagoist after a vote to unionize showed the dangers of individuals funding local news. When DNAinfo reporters found themselves out of a job, a few joined forces to launch Block Club Chicago. The nonprofit neighborhood news site was originally funded with Kickstarter subscriptions and is looking to avoid all DNAinfo’s mistakes, including limited, problematic coverage of the South and West sides.

CHICAGO'S FUNDING LANDSCAPE

Foundations in Chicago are also in a moment of change. At both the staff and strategic level, local foundations are adjusting how and who they fund in the local media landscape.

McCormick Foundation

Over the last decade, the McCormick Foundation has recentered the majority of its journalism funding on supporting local media efforts in Illinois. In 2014, it re-evaluated and changed its funding structure to move its journalism program within its larger democracy portfolio. McCormick has been especially focused on journalism education, news literacy, audience engagement, and professional development.

MacArthur Foundation

MacArthur is one of the most important national funders of journalism and documentary film in the country. The foundation spent 18 months across 2015 and 2016 conducting a “landscape review and developing strategic plans” around [its national media portfolio](#), according to Journalism and Media Program Officer Lauren Pabst. *[Editor's Note: In June of 2018, after this report was last updated, the MacArthur Foundation announced the Jack Fuller Legacy Initiative with an initial \$2.4 million in grants to Chicago media, including \$1 million to City Bureau, \$650,000 each to Free Spirit Media and Chicago Public Media, and \$100,000 to the Field Foundation.]*

Chicago Community Trust

The Chicago Community Trust (CCT) has taken a more experimental approach to its journalistic funding initiatives by attempting to engage non-traditional outlets and community organizations. For example, in 2011, CCT created the “Local Reporting Awards” which granted 31 small awards to “a mix of traditional and non-traditional information providers, journalists and non-journalists,” according to this [2012 briefing from the Knight Foundation](#). Knight supported the Trust’s “Local Reporting Awards” via one of their information challenge grants. Then, in 2014, CCT created the On The Table initiative to change the culture of philanthropy in Chicago by generating change-making conversations among residents. [In 2016, participation bloomed to 55,000](#) people and featured [an acting up grant](#) from the Trust to turn 64 conversations from On The Table into tangible projects funded with \$1,000 each.

In 2017, CCT collaborated with The Media Consortium to get local grassroots, ethnic and independent media together to cover On The Table and contribute as participants. That helped the event grow to 110,000 participants, but new CCT leadership chose a different approach in 2018. “[In] our first four years of running On The Table, we tried to double our participation and sought to be a social media trend and get traditional earned-media recognition,” said Jean Westrick, project director for On The Table. “With Dr. Helene Gayle as our new CEO, she recognized the limitations in doubling participation and the ability to sustain it. She helped us shift our model from outreach into supporting more actions after the conversations.”

The Reva and David Logan Foundation

The Reva and David Logan Foundation has been an important funder of investigative journalism across the nation. In 2016 the Logan Foundation made a \$350,000 general operating grant to Invisible Institute and a \$100,000 grant to documentarians Kartemquin Films to assist in archiving footage. In the fall of 2016, two of the brothers broke from the family foundation to individually form their own foundations.

The Knight Foundation

The Knight Foundation funded the Invisible Institute and hosts the Knight Lab at Northwestern University, which we wrote about earlier in this report. It was also the Knight-facilitated prototype fund that awarded Democracy Fund money to City Bureau for its Documenters platform. Historically, the Knight Foundation was a consistent funding partner and design partner of the now-defunct Smart Chicago Collaborative, as well as a collaborator with Chicago Community Trust.

Voqal Foundation

The Voqal Foundation announced a \$100,000 commitment to City Bureau, as well as commitments to Black Youth Project 100.

Joyce Foundation

The Joyce Foundation invests in public policies and strategies to advance racial equity and economic mobility for the next generation in the Great Lakes region. It has awarded grants to ProPublica Illinois, Chalkbeat Chicago and City Bureau.

The Field Foundation

The Field Foundation looks to empower communities through grants that fund nonprofits working on issues of justice, art and leadership investment.

Chicago’s philanthropic landscape is robust, but there are a number of factors that influence how these funders shape the media ecosystem. One key issue that came up frequently in our interviews is the seemingly

constant shifts in strategies at foundations. Too often, ground-level staff at these nonprofits feel caught off guard by these shifts, and report that they lead to setbacks growing strong local media. Staff at smaller newsrooms also expressed worry that foundations only seem to fund scalable strategies, when communities need depth and focus, not scale.

While grantees we interviewed were grateful for the support they have received, they also pointed to the challenges of sustaining this kind of funding. Some issues included insufficient funding, internal capacity issues and perpetuation of problematic power dynamics with the foundations. Meanwhile, foundations often demand evidence of alternative revenue streams and sustainable business practices without providing enough funding to support meaningful capacity building, coaching or runway for real transformation. Newsrooms increasingly understand the need to prioritize fundraising efforts, but don't see a path to getting there with their limited resources.

This leads to a sense that foundations don't understand the realities on the ground. This was especially highlighted by some of our interviewees who work with schools. One person who works in news literacy told us foundations "don't seem to understand how slowly schools operate and what working with schools looks like." Foundations need to be aware of the power they have and the way that their make-up, especially their boards and senior staff, separate them from the people they are trying to serve. Foundations should work to share their power and bring organizations together across the boundary lines set by segregation. Foundations should also create incubation spaces or programs where media organizations can have training in grant writing, business development, alternative revenue, and nonprofit management. Field Foundation's Angelique Power embodied these practices [in her 2017 letter](#) outlining what was learned from "asking Chicago's nonprofit community to hold [themselves] accountable and review [their] work".

LOCAL NEWS THROUGH THE EYES OF LOCAL PEOPLE

In order to understand Chicago's local media ecosystem, you have to listen to the people it is meant to serve. We partnered with the Civic User Testing Group (the CUT Group, now a part of City Tech Collaborative) to host eight focus groups discussing people's media habits and concerns. These focus groups were conducted in libraries in underserved communities on the city's south side in Englewood, the near west side in Little Village and near downtown in Little Italy. Each session had an average of six participants

As one would expect, people had a lot to say about local media, but across people's very different responses there were some consistent themes. Most community members didn't name traditional news outlets prominently when discussing where they got their news. Instead, they talked about getting news from social media and digital outlets such as now-defunct DNAInfo Chicago. DNAInfo, which touted itself as covering neighborhoods like no one else in town, tried to put boots on the ground in most of Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. Its fans trusted it to get the stories right because reporters either lived in or spent a lot of time in the neighborhood. Meanwhile, television news such as ABC7 or Fox Chicago came up with equal frequency as something that was often on, although not respected. Participants noted its accessibility as a positive but said that the coverage wasn't accurate or trustworthy.

Consumers reported feeling like journalists from big newsrooms were just parachuting into a situation. Participants in the focus groups said they don't see themselves – or people like them – when they open up the newspapers or turn on their televisions. The consumers we talked to were worried about the impact of out-of-town journalists, new technology, failing business models and consumers' indifference and distrust in media. We heard many of these same concerns from media producers.

Through these focus groups, we defined two overarching types of media consumers.

Media Diet Group One

These participants frequently read a wide range of sources and were active in local civics. There was a general distrust of TV news, with folks critiquing how superficial the coverage is. They reported somewhat low trust in newspapers. This group offered praise for DNAinfo's consistent coverage as well as general praise for publicly funded media. They were highly engaged with their alderman's office and African Americans within this

media group were especially engaged with their local block clubs. This group valued using people they knew and trusted as either sources of information or fact checkers. They wanted more diverse reporters as well as more direct information, like newsletters, to improve their community coverage.

Media Diet Group Two

These participants were less likely to point to specific outlets they relied on for community news and information and were less formally involved in local civics. It was harder for them to articulate what they consumed and how they did, although they were interested in community information. At times they were more caught up in national topics or national issues. For example, they'd discuss the current outrage over fake news around the national election, but not be able to draw connections locally.

Participants with both diets frequently used the internet to get information about their community, including social media. However, they expressed wanting better tools to discern quality community news from inaccurate information. Also, even when participants identified sources of information they trusted, they said there were occasional stories they still had to fact check. For many participants, the topic of news more immediately brought up stories of violence and negative activity in their neighborhoods.

Distrust was strong and ever-present, both because of the heightened sense of fake news arising from the 2016 election and because media typically only cover negative stories about participants' communities. They reported trusting sources that offered more consistent, comprehensive coverage of their community. Overall consumers said trust could be rebuilt if a reporter showed up and sought to tell more positive and full stories. "If you want us to trust you, come to the neighborhood and cover good things in the community instead of just coming when something bad happens," one participant said. Many consumers said if they saw people like themselves in the media, they believed stories would be more balanced and they would trust the source more.

Access to quality news and information was another challenge that came up frequently. It was clear people wanted news about their neighborhood, but didn't always know how or where to get it. Participants said they had issues finding information about their community and largely circled back to wanting more transparency from their alderman. One participant said "I just recently learned that one of the old IIT buildings is going to be constructed into residential lofts. I wish there was a better way to disseminate that information to the community."

Other participants also expressed concerns around news literacy, both their own and others. They wanted to make sure the information they received was accurate, and they relied on their personal networks to make sense of the news. Twitter, Facebook, and Nextdoor also came up as frequently read sources, but while participants turned to these social networks, they also reported skepticism about the reliability of what they found there.

A WEB OF CHALLENGES

Chicago's content providers face many challenges, but those negative forces are often compounded by the fact that many of Chicago's media companies don't know each other or the work others are doing. Independent organizations may see their mainstream counterparts as being dismissive of the communities and topics they cover, while mainstream newsrooms may remain completely blind to the lessons learned by independent providers. For instance, mainstream newsrooms have only struggled with shrinking resources in the past decade, while independent newsrooms have faced this issue, and found solutions, for far longer. By failing to share resources and innovations, Chicago's fragmented media landscape makes the work of surviving even harder.

1) Segregation

Segregation has a profound impact on both producers and consumers of media in Chicago. It's the foundational problem to address when designing ecosystem solutions, as it informs how all subsequent challenges manifest across the city. According to the [Metropolitan Planning Council's 2017 report titled "The Cost of Segregation,"](#) the Chicago region has the "5th highest combined racial and economic segregation." It adds that "two-thirds of the nation's largest regions reduced their economic segregation more than Chicagoland did between 1990 and 2010" and "if [the city] continues desegregating at our current pace, we will not reach the median level of Latino-white segregation until between 2050 and 2060 and the median level of African American-white segregation until between 2060 and 2070."

Still, there are so many opportunities for improvement. [A survey of 900 Chicagoland residents](#) conducted by the University of Texas-Austin's Center for Media Engagement in partnership with City Bureau underscores much of what we conclude in this report. The survey, released in January 2018, revealed that "even though those on the South and West Sides felt misrepresented, they also were the most eager to get involved. Over six in ten people on the South and West Sides said that they would be likely to volunteer to report on a public meeting for a local news outlet. Just over four in ten North Side and downtown residents said that they would do so." These untapped volunteers are the focus of City Bureau's Documenters program, which trains them how to do exactly that.

The reality of segregation must inform every conversation we have about how to reevaluate the process of media making, sharing and funding across Chicago's journalism landscape. When we talk about diversifying our newsrooms, we must also seek out and support long-term solutions that recognize the real economic disparities in our city. When we talk about representation gaps in the media, we must also discuss how barriers to entry in journalism perpetuate those gaps. Chicago Community Trust CEO Terry Mazany raised this issue at the February 2017 Knight Media Learning Summit, where he publicly critiqued foundations for not doing a better job of centering their work around racial justice and addressing the tension between the power they hold and the mission of their work. It's not just a matter of assessing process, either. The ecosystem also needs to acknowledge that how we measure success and outcomes can perpetuate the problems of segregation and racism as well, especially when these measurements are dictated by powerful institutions like universities or foundations that come with their own internalized, problematic frameworks.

As we design solutions that aim to foster a more connected and sustainable news ecosystem, we must remember what [a March 2016 Chicago Urban League report](#) on racial segregation highlights: "Within a simple, geographic grid lay richly nuanced neighborhoods with sometimes impenetrable borders. Where you grew up has potentially everything to do with your success. And where you grew up in Chicago has a lot to do with the explicit and implicit policies and practices that segregated residents according to the color of their skin. In Chicago, in 2016, race still matters, just as it has for the past hundred years."

2) Trust

While trust in media has become an issue of national concern since the 2016 election, in Chicago, there's a long history of distrusting the media. During our consumer focus groups, some residents talked about having a long-standing skepticism of traditional outlets because they only come to their neighborhood to report on violence, without devoting resources for nuanced and ongoing coverage.

The joint issues of segregation and trust came to a flashpoint in 2015 with the Laquan McDonald case, in which a white Chicago police officer shot a black teenager holding a knife 16 times, killing him. Coverage in Chicago's legacy media largely reflected the narrative of the Chicago Police Department. It took the tireless work of two independent journalists, plus a lawsuit, to get the CPD to release its video of the killing. That video undermined the police and the media's narrative completely, ultimately leading to several government officials resigning or being voted out of office.

This is just one example in a much longer and larger trend. A February 2016 investigation led by City Bureau reporter Yana Kunichoff revealed that from 2012 to 2015, the Fraternal Order of Police released statements on 35 of the 48 police-involved shootings and that 15 of those “were [later proved to be false or misleading](#).” When media prioritize official statements over community reporting, they take a great risk and put their trustworthiness on the line.

3) Financial

In Chicago, as in so many places, the broken business model for journalism is a profound challenge for any effort to reimagine and rebuild the infrastructure for local news. While new models – including foundation grants and individual donations – have emerged as the old models erode, they have not yet caught up. These two forces – the swift decline of the old model and the slow rise of something new – have created a tension that shapes much of the media landscape.

The business struggles in commercial journalism are well documented elsewhere. But the choices of foundations and how they influence the shape of local news have been less fully examined. An ecosystem approach demands that foundations work more closely in coordination to ensure their funding not only supports the well-established players and institutions but also enables new voices, projects, and partnerships to flourish and fill in the widening gaps left by commercial media. There are also local ecosystem organizations which have called for foundations to use their stability to take on intentional research and development around sustainable media models.

This may mean foundations have to change not just who they fund, but how they fund. For example, in the summer of 2016 CCT, Joyce, MacArthur, McCormick, The Woods Fund Chicago, the Polk Bros. and other foundations launched the [Chicago Fund for Safe and Peaceful Communities](#). One of the fund’s major differences was a rapid, low-barrier-of-entry application which was more accessible to a broader range of community members and organizations. “It was the most diverse pool of applicants we’ve ever had in every way,” CCT Chief Marketing Officer Dan Ash told us.

CULTIVATING SHARED OPPORTUNITIES

Our design workshops have shown firsthand what happens when newsroom leaders meet each other. They share story ideas and leads to sources, and develop opportunities for cross-publication. While the challenges are very real, increased collaboration could go a long way toward solving them, or at the very least creating greater stability for the organizations operating today.

1) Desire for Collaboration

We brought together dozens of news providers from across Chicago's media ecosystem for design thinking workshops to discuss the current ecosystem and how it could be improved. In every session, attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to sit down with people from other newsrooms. The potential and the need for new kinds of collaboration was a common theme across these conversations. In fact, new partnerships were forged by the simple act of convening. In our sessions, Marsha Eaglin, founder and director of IMPACT Family Center, a youth media nonprofit on the far south side in Roseland, was able to network with [Urban Broadcast Media](#), while Univision Vice President of Content and News Teri Arvesu began talking with Stephanie Manriquez, who runs the youth pop-up radio program in Little Village, mentioned above, about working together.

This response was a clear sign of pent-up collaborative energy in the ecosystem. It's also important to note that this is not just a call for buzzword-induced activities that help earn funding. Rather, practitioners expressed a sincere desire for collaboration that includes an intentional pooling of resources to ensure work is inclusive and/or resourceful.

We believe that desire for collaboration across outlets and neighborhoods is rooted in the long history of segregation which we've discussed previously. There is a sense that the risks of staying in our silos are too great, and we are seeing a renewed energy around collaboration. It is notable that this openness to partnerships is not just relegated to smaller players. What is exciting and distinct about this moment is that large institutions are also willing to come together. For example, deans at Loyola University and Columbia College have said they want to expand community engagement efforts by partnering more consistently with each other and with media and journalism nonprofits. If institutions with higher

immunity to risks – such as these universities – could develop new methods of research and funding, it could kickstart the transformation Chicago's media ecosystem so desperately needs.

2) Desire for More Diversity

Diversity came up in the design sessions for media producers and the focus groups for media consumers. Both groups asserted that more diverse newsrooms would enhance reporting on certain neighborhoods and help rebuild trust with readers.

These calls for diversity went beyond ethnicity, however. To be truly inclusive, organizations must engage community members who aren't always seen as thought leaders. That means including people with an array of socioeconomic, gender, ability and other backgrounds.

The need for greater diversity, equity and inclusion reaches outside of newsrooms. Foundation staff also articulated a desire to develop more diverse funding portfolios and internal staff to better support the entire ecosystem.

We know that a healthy ecosystem must be diverse, and the broad agreement on prioritizing this work is an important signal for future efforts in the city.

3) Desire for More Experimentation

While there is widespread agreement on the need for greater experimentation across new nonprofits and traditional commercial media, there is also tension around how to make space, time or resources for that work – or how to share the lessons of experiments with the rest of the field. We heard from many of our interviewees that they are hungry for the support and resources that would make experimentation safer and give them a roadmap for how to invest in innovation while maintaining what they already do. There's also a strong desire across the ecosystem to learn from others.

Jamie Kalven, director and founder of Invisible Institute, embodies this experimental spirit and how it can be transformative. He has pioneered new ways of researching and publishing and honed his beat with care and precision. Now Kalven and his organization are working directly with the city to reform the Independent Police Review Authority. They're also being championed for their experiments in media making, including their citywide independent distribution of [40,000 copies of "Code of Silence"](#), an investigation into police corruption. (More on Kalven below)

4) Desire to Rethink Community Engagement

Improving Chicago's local news ecosystem will require media producers to rethink their relationships with audiences. New tools are emerging from experiments in Chicago, like Hearken, which grew out of Curious City from National Public Radio affiliate WBEZ. Through Hearken, citizens can pose questions that get voted up into story ideas for reporters to answer. In addition to opening story pitching to the community, Hearken has also experimented on the funding side, following startups to participate in incubators like [New Media Ventures](#) and [Matter](#).

Then there's City Bureau, which "puts community at the center" of its reporting by opening up every step of production to resident input and collaboration. This includes its Documenters network, where anyone 18 and older can apply to be trained to document public meetings, conduct community interviews or design accountability tools – all of which inform larger public reporting projects.

Even newcomers to the Chicago media ecosystem like ProPublica [are hiring engagement reporters](#) to explore how including the community can translate into more effective journalism and political efficacy.

While these are exciting initiatives, there is concern from creators that "community engagement" could become just another overused buzzword, like "blockchain" and "user-generated content" before it. To prevent that, practitioners at the forefront of community engagement are calling to define the methods that work and those that don't.

POSSIBLE PATHS FORWARD

If we believe – as we have heard from so many of our interviews and focus groups – that local news in Chicago needs to become more collaborative, connected to its communities and diverse if it is to be sustainable, then the first step is to work together on a shared vision for the future. We hope this report helps move the field in that direction. And while there are no complete solutions for the problems the ecosystem faces, we do have some specific potential actions funders, journalists and other stakeholders can take. We offer these as ideas for further discussion, not prescriptions:

Fund regular gatherings for local media stakeholders to build future collaborations and share best practices.

Encourage and support local colleges and universities to develop programs in conjunction with news startups, smaller content providers and high schools to put more students out in communities reporting

Fund intern positions with the city's nonprofit and community newsrooms and provide funding for intern professional development.

Fund community training programs and adult education efforts that provide new paths into journalism.

Fund trainings for editors and reporters that teach improved practices, including how to better design work for their audience, how to create more equitable partnerships and how to expand transparency.

Support new models that exhibit potential, including providing resources to document and share their work. A few examples: Yollocalli's collaboration with Lumpen Radio through "Your Story, Your Way," Jackie Serrato who started the La Villita Facebook, Urban Broadcast Media's work with youth of color, Black Youth Project's research, City Bureau's collaborative and engaged programs, the Invisible Institutes accountability data journalism efforts, etc.

Be cautious of investing in shiny new tech or tools that are often Band-Aids for deeper, root issues within the media landscape.

In addition to these individual points of focus, there are also four larger opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem and innovate going forward.

1. Dig Deep, Don't Emphasize Scale

Jamie Kalven and the evolution of the Invisible Institute are a testament to what it means to survive, to outlive the circumstances that try to take you down. By embedding himself in public housing and using the cultural capital from his network, Kalven was able to build incredible trust with his subjects and create a space to raise awareness and spark public action surrounding a failing police accountability system. But instead of hurriedly scaling the organization to capitalize on recent victories, Kalven and company are more concerned with intentionally replicating the success of the Citizens Police Data Project across the country and digging deeper on local policing issues. Audiences told us that this kind of deep commitment – without the click chasing – is what they crave.

2) Create Pipelines

Chicago is one of the most segregated cities in the country, making it that much tougher to build connections. Overcoming these historic barriers requires thinking beyond traditional processes, especially when it comes to journalistic training. For example, if journalism is a public good, why is a four-year college education a barrier to getting a job within the field? And how does that required training perpetuate underrepresentation of certain groups within media outlets? How can these educational institutions build better bridges themselves? These are challenges for journalism across the nation, but Chicago could be a laboratory for alternatives and solutions.

3) Assess Gaps, Build Connections

Chicago's large metro papers simply can't cover everything our city and its neighborhoods need. As they downsize, we have an opportunity to assess gaps in who is being served. Their struggles should worry us, but they can also prompt us to ask questions about what reinvention could look like given the challenges and the assets we currently have.

We would push legacy newsrooms to find ways to harness community media's institutional knowledge and close local ties while still respecting those publications. The Chicago Defender's historic relationship with African American communities alone could support other parts of the ecosystem. Similarly, trusted spaces of information for non-English speakers can collaborate with other local outlets to better serve all of Chicago. News literacy projects working with youth can contribute to neighborhood coverage – as Erika Hobbs formerly of the News Literacy Project told us, “Across the city there are youth in underserved neighborhoods who will collect information they are gathering for news literacy projects but then don't think they have a voice in the media.” We must think about how we can leverage new networks and ready-made

distribution channels – whether it's a church group or the library or the west-side housing authority. The most important thing that all of these new connections should share is an aim to develop new trust between people and journalists.

4) Support and Expand Transparency Efforts

Many of our focus group participants said they wished they knew the reporters who worked in their communities. To build trust and source new kinds of stories, media organizations should open up their process and people to the community wherever possible. This may demand new styles of work and publishing that include feedback loops to create greater accountability. City Bureau, for example, invites community members in once a week for its Public Newsroom series. Gathering community feedback also means admitting when a project misses the mark, or when further work needs to be done, two additional transparency practices that are sorely needed.

Transparency must also extend to finances – organizations need to show where their funding comes from and how it is used. The major metro papers have often received blowback for covering funders' projects without first disclosing the relationship – events that only add to a sense of distrust. An upfront and honest approach to funding can cure that. When Block Club Chicago raised funds via Kickstarter, it explicitly laid out where the money would be going, and what additional funding would cover.

We also know that this report sits in a larger context of important past studies and current research initiatives focused on the city's media and journalism. We recommend better connecting the Chicago studies happening now (Democracy Fund, Engaging News Project, Emerson College Engagement Lab study). Researchers could work together to host workshops designing solutions with communities that help unpack and build on their findings and have regular forums to bring together all the players working on public interest media (including funders, campuses, journalists, consumers, etc.).

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Change seems to be the only constant in the Chicago media ecosystem. Last June, an investment group took over at the Sun-Times, updating the newspaper and the website. The Chicago Tribune is moving out of its historic tower and its editor is restructuring as it looks to produce more robust journalism on digital platforms. The TRiiBE celebrated its one-year anniversary telling stories that offer balance to mainstream reporting still focusing heavily on crime, especially in communities heavily populated with African Americans.

At Loyola University, a veteran journalist and adjunct professor got a grant from the McCormick Foundation for “RogersEdge Reporter,” which will use university and Senn and Sullivan High School students to cover neighborhoods on the north side. And Northwestern University announced it’ll undertake a two-year research and development project, funded with a grant from Lilly Endowment, to help news organizations build new business models to maintain sustainability.

The mission of DNAinfo Chicago, meanwhile, is getting a second chance thanks to its former editors and journalists. Together, they’ve launched a new publication called Block Club Chicago, to tell the neighborhood-level stories that present a more rounded picture of life in this city. So far, the project is supported by subscribers via Kickstarter and by Civil – an organization working to create a new, blockchain-based funding model for journalism.

The changes will continue. Members of Chicago media’s rich and complex ecosystem may come and go, but they have in common a promise to properly serve a diverse public, adapting however they need to along the way.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Because research for this report ended in June of 2018, there are many more changes that we weren't able to fully capture. The Chicago Tribune employees successfully unionized, even after the DNAinfo network was shut down as employees tried to unionize. Meanwhile, the Chicago Sun-Times was bought by businessman Edwin Eisendrath and the Chicago Federation of Labor in July 2017, a group that beat out a bid from corporate media publishing company Tronc, since returned to its original name, Tribune Publishing. The Chicago Reader has been sold to a group led by Chicago Crusader publisher Dorothy Leavell. MacArthur Foundation—through its recently-launched Jack Fuller Legacy Initiative—has awarded \$2.4 million in multi-year grants to City Bureau, Free Spirit Media, Chicago Public Media, and the Field Foundation. The foundation also announced it will host a series of convenings “to encourage greater collaboration, peer learning and professional development for newsroom leaders, reporters, and media makers in Chicago. The Democracy Fund, Public Narrative and Northwestern Medill School of Journalism will be partners in these events.

APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEWEES

Teri Arvesu, [Univision](#)

Daniel Ash, [Chicago Community Trust](#)

Tracy Baim, [Windy City Times](#)

Lee Bey, [Bey Architectural Photography](#)

Niala Boodhoo, [Illinois Public Media](#)

Jennifer Brandel, [Hearken](#)

Brenda Butler, [Columbia Links](#)

Chris Chandler, [United Taxi Drivers Community Council](#)

Luz Chavez, [Gozamos](#)

Bruce Dold, [Chicago Tribune](#)

Marsha Eaglin, [IMPACT Family Center](#)

Eric Freedman, [Columbia College](#)

Dr. Leon Finney, [Urban Broadcast Media](#)

Hermene Hartman, [N'Digo](#)

Tempestt Hazel, [60 Inches from Center](#)

Don Heider, [Loyola University](#)

Erika Hobbs, [The News Literacy Project](#)

Jill Hopkins, [Vocalo](#)

Cheryl Hughes, [Chicago Community Trust](#)

Barb Iverson, [Austin Talks and Chicago Talks](#)

Jamie Kalven, [Invisible Institute](#)

Frank Latin, [Westside Writing Project](#)

Dorothy Leavell, [The Chicago Crusader](#)

Linda Lutton, [WBEZ radio](#)

Suzanne McBride, [Austin Talks and Columbia College](#)

Jeff McCarter, [Free Spirit Media](#)

Charlie Meyerson, [Rivet Smart Audio and Chicago Public Square](#)

Simon Nyi, [Illinois Humanities](#)

Leah Pryor-Lease, [formerly of Voqal Foundation](#)

Joshua Prudowsky, [formerly of Mikva Challenge](#)

James O'Shea, [formerly Chicago News Cooperative](#)

Vanessa Sanchez, [Yollocalli](#)

Susy Schultz, [Public Narrative](#)

Jen Sabella, [formerly DNAInfo](#)

Dan Sinker, [Punk Planet and OpenSource](#)

Ken Smikle, [Target Market News](#)

Melody Spann-Cooper, [WVON radio](#)

Jorge Valdivia, [formerly of Radio Arte](#)

Vivian Valhberg, [media consultant](#)

Jim Warren, [contributing editor with U.S. News and World Report](#)

and more than 20 citizens who participated through City Tech Collaborative user-focused groups.

APPENDIX TWO

CHICAGO MEDIA OUTLETS

NEWSPAPERS

The Austin Voice

weekly neighborhood coverage

Austin Weekly News

weekly neighborhood coverage

The Chicago Chinese News

weekly news for and about the Chinese community

Chicago Citizen Newspaper Group

weeklies covering Chatham, Southend, South Suburbs, Hyde Park

The Chicago Crusader

weekly newspaper covering the African American community

The Chicago Defender

oldest African American newspaper (now weekly)

The Chicago Independent Bulletin

weekly newspaper mostly covering African Americans on the South Side

Chicago Jewish Star

bimonthly paper focusing on all segments of Chicago's Jewish community

Chicago Reader

one of the largest and most successful free alternative weeklies in the country

The Chicago Sun-Times

oldest continuously published daily newspaper in the city

The Chicago Tribune

daily newspaper focusing on news for and about the region

Crain's Chicago Business

weekly business news broadsheet

China Star News

created in 1996 to serve Chicago's Chinese community

The Garfield-Lawndale Voice

weekly neighborhood coverage

The Gate News

covers Back of the Yards, Bridgeport, Canaryville, Brighton Park, Pilsen and parts of Englewood and Little Village neighborhoods

Hoy

free Spanish-language daily newspaper

Hyde Park Herald

weekly neighborhood coverage

India Abroad

Asian Indian publication

Korea Daily Chicago

Korean American newspaper

La Raza

Chicago's leading Spanish-language newspaper

Lawndale News

weekly Hispanic bilingual newspaper

The Mash

biweekly newspaper written for and by teens

N'Digo

weekly that focuses on the black urban agenda

Project Hood Press

periodic nonprofit newspaper lets urban youth write from their perspectives

RedEye

weekly entertainment coverage

Windy City Times

covers gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer communities

MAGAZINES

Ebony

(moved editorial offices in 2017 to Los Angeles)
monthly featuring thinkers, trendsetters, celebrities and next-gen leaders

South Side Weekly

nonprofit dedicated to supporting cultural and civic engagement

Illinois Entertainer

monthly covering independent musicians, films and entertainment

In These Times

Chicago-based national magazine covering political issues with a focus on labor movements

New City

monthly covering Chicago arts and culture

*List not meant to be comprehensive

South Shore Current

monthly covering the South Shore neighborhood

Streetwise

weekly that helps Chicago homeless men and women achieve personal stability and strength by employing them to create and sell the magazine

West of the Ryan

monthly neighborhood coverage from Chinatown to Roseland

NEWSLETTERS**Black Owned Chicago**

resource for citizens and tourists

Chicago Public Square

news and links of interest and importance to the Chicago area

The Publicity Works

media and political commentary

United Taxi Drivers Community Council

aimed at organizing and unifying licensed chauffeurs in the Chicago area

TELEVISION**CAN-TV**

public access

WYCC

public media

WOCH-LP--WOCK-CA

Korean language, local affiliate of KBC

WTTW

public media

Univision

Spanish language

Telemundo

Spanish language

Technology Access Television

weekly show about technology

DIGITAL ONLY**Austin Talks**

nonprofit covers neighborhood news

Black Youth Project

platform for black millennials

Block Club Chicago

hyperlocal coverage of individual neighborhoods

Bronzecommm

news and information by and for African Americans

Capitol Fax

suburban-based political newsletter

Chalkbeat

nonprofit covering education in local communities

Chicago In Arabic

create content and graphics and translate articles about Chicago for Arabic-speaking communities

Chicago Is The World (now defunct)

public affairs program that bridged international and local stories

The Chicago Monitor

offers original coverage of Islam, Muslims and Arab Americans

Chicago Patch

hyper-local news

The Chicago Reporter

investigative news that focuses on race, poverty and income inequality

ChicagoTalks

nonprofit that works with youth to cover various neighborhoods

Contexture Media Network

multimedia for diverse communities of color

Curbed Chicago

covers architecture, transportation, real estate, housing, design and development

DNAInfo Chicago (now defunct)

covered entertainment, education, politics, crime, sports and dining news in each of Chicago's neighborhoods

EI BeiSman

Pilsen-based nonprofit collective produces a bilingual online monthly magazine and short documentaries

Gozamos

independent online platform for Latino arts and activism

Hearken

audience-driven framework and platform allows journalists and the public to partner throughout the reporting process

The Hegewisch Times

nonprofit covering its neighborhood

JetMag.com

aimed at an African American audience

The NorthStar News & Analysis

biweekly newspaper reporting on issues affecting men in the black diaspora

Open TV

platform for independent artists women, queer and trans people of color

Our Story Chi

urban youth covering stories from their own perspectives

ProPublica Illinois

nonprofit producing investigative journalism

The Public League

In-depth coverage of Chicago Public League football and basketball

Remezcla

emerging Latin music, culture and entertainment

Rivet Radio

smart audio creation and distribution company creates national and global news

The Sip

weekly two-hour LGBTQ radio talk show

Target Market News

corporate marketing news targeting African Americans and other people of color

TBTNews

news and views focused on informing African Americans

The TRiiBE

online platform for black millennials in Chicago

RADIO**Lumpen Radio**

project of Public Media Institute, a nonprofit arts and culture organization

Radio Islam

first daily English-language Muslim radio program produced in the U.S.

The 21st

building an Illinois-wide public radio talk show audience in a virtual space

Urban Broadcast Media (UBM)

nonprofit multimedia center and 24-7 internet radio station

Vocalo

trains citizens and community partners to craft radio stories featured on shows

WBEZ

public radio station

WCEV

ethnic programming in various languages

WVON

African American owned station with urban talk format

JOURNALISM NONPROFITS**AAJA Chicago**

local chapter of national affinity organization for Asian Americans

Association of Health Care Journalists

local chapter of national affinity organization

Association for Women Journalists

local chapter supporting women in journalism

Better Government Association

watchdog journalism organization

Black Youth Project

researching attitudes, resources and culture of urban blacks ages 18 to 35

Chicago Headline Club

local chapter of Society of Professional Journalists

City Bureau

civic journalism lab putting journalists and citizens together to produce media and encourage civic engagement

Columbia Links (now defunct)

journalism skills-building, leadership development program for youth, teachers

The Daily Line

reporting on Chicago and Cook County politics and policy

Free Spirit Media

providing education, access and opportunity in media production to underserved youth

Global Girl Media

media, leadership and journalism training for high school age girls from underserved communities

Impact Family Center

using digital media and mentoring to transform lives of youth

Invisible Institute

journalistic production company

Journalism & Women Symposium

local group of national affinity organization for female journalists

NABJ Chicago

local chapter of national affinity organization for African Americans

Center for Investigative Journalism

national nonprofit organization doing work locally

NAHJ Chicago

local chapter of national affinity organization for Hispanic Americans

The News Literacy Project

national education nonprofit working with Chicago educators and journalists to teach students how to sort fact from fiction

StoryCorps

recording, sharing and preserving stories of communities in partnership with the Chicago Cultural Center and WBEZ radio

Street Level Youth Media

nonprofit media arts literacy organization

Truestar Foundation

nonprofit multimedia organization for youth

Westside Media Project

providing youth development using digital media and journalism as tools for civic engagement

UNIVERSITIES & COLLEGES**Chicago State University**

Department of Communications, Media Arts and Theatre; WSCU radio run by alumni and students

Columbia College Chicago

just announced it's offering a master's degree in Civic Media in January 2019

DePaul University

launched the Public Newsroom for journalists and students to discuss issues in 2018

Dominican University

digital journalism program

Illinois Institute of Technology

students in the Bachelor of Science in Communication program can choose from three specializations: professional and technical communication, journalism of science, and journalism of technology and business

Kennedy-King College

non-commercial radio station WKKC offers real-world training

Lake Forest College

classes combine practical courses concerning news-making with academic courses

Loyola University Chicago

student-run news bureau reports on Rogers Park and Edgewater neighborhoods

Malcolm X College

offers associates of arts degree in journalism

Robert Morris University

students can build professional portfolios in publishing and production

Roosevelt University

students can get a degree in either journalism or media studies

School of the Art Institute

journalism students work closely and collaborate with artists, art historians, cultural theorists and art critics

Northeastern Illinois University

students learn to write, report, and produce stories

Northwestern University

Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications offers undergraduate and graduate degrees

University of Chicago

careers in journalism, arts, and media (UCIJAM) provide students with professional development opportunities

University of Illinois Chicago

degrees available in social media, mass media, journalism studies and social networks

FUNDERS**Alphawood Fund****The Chicago Community Trust****Driehaus Foundation****Howard and Ursula Dubin Foundation****Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation****Joyce Foundation****MacArthur Foundation****McCormick Foundation****Pritzker Foundation****Voqal Foundation****Woods Fund****Field Foundation****OTHER CIVIC AND TECH GROUPS****EveryBlock Chicago**

now-defunct data-driven website for neighborhood discussions and block-level news

First Tuesdays

monthly political talk show hosted by reporters at Chicago Reader and Chicago Sun-Times

Girl Talk

monthly talk show co-hosted by former DNAInfo journalist and Block Club Chicago featuring prominent women

Illinois Press Association

state newspaper association representing more than 450 daily and weekly newspapers.

Knight Lab at Northwestern University

designers, developers, students and educators working on journalism experiments

The Mad Mamluks

local podcast discussing issues of the day with Muslims in English-speaking countries

Medill News Service

journalism by students in Northwestern University's graduate program

Nextdoor

social network for neighborhoods

OpEd Project

based at Northwestern University and working to increase number of women thought leaders

People Powered Publishing Conference

annual gathering aims at strengthening connections between journalists and the public

ProPublica Chicago

plans to publish investigative journalism on key issues across in Chicago and Illinois

Public Narrative

helps journalists and nonprofits tell better stories

Sixty Inches from Center

nonprofit organization documenting and engaging visual arts

Smart Chicago CUTGroup

free focus groups; citizens paid to test civic websites and apps, now part of the City Tech Collaborative

Social Justice News Nexus

Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications' news initiative

Teen Nation Inc.

nonprofit providing outlet for teens via professional development activities