

# Mapping Your News Ecosystem to Guide Grantmaking

A news ecosystem is the network of people, institutions, and collaborations that local communities rely on for news, information, and engagement. Everything is in relationship to everything else.

All communities are unique landscapes with different organizations that connect and inform people: newsrooms, libraries, churches, social media, university centers, foundations, and more. We believe philanthropy has a key role in supporting the future of local news as a way to support a healthy democracy — but as ecosystems grow in complexity, funders can have a hard time knowing where to begin.

Mapping your unique local ecosystem gives you visibility into how you can fund strategic, systemic change to strengthen communities' access to trusted news and information.

### How democracy suffers when local news declines

Studies show that erosion of local news is tied to:

- Lower voter turnout
- Fewer candidates running for office
- Less responsive elected representatives
- An increase in corruption and government waste

For more information: http://bit.ly/JournalismandDemocracy



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## OK, I want to support my local news ecosystem. How do I get started?

We recommend deep listening and informed action. Starting with an ecosystem assessment can provide you with a comprehensive understanding of how the local news ecosystem is functioning, what its needs are, and how to make it stronger.

#### How do I assess my local news ecosystem?

The field of news and information ecosystem study is relatively new, but growing fast. Democracy Fund has conducted numerous assessments with local funders and is pulling together examples and resources into a "how-to" guide, which will be released soon.

You don't have to do this alone — in fact, partner funders and local organizations can help you build on previous research and deepen your understanding of the ecosystem. Look for the "ecosystem builders" who can be advocates and trusted advisors for this effort.

Your approach should reflect the context of your community. The key is to put a place and its people at the center of the assessment. Start with questions such as:

- Are people's information needs being met and how?
- Are they able to make informed decisions and contribute meaningfully to the community?
- How are they getting and processing information?
- How does this differ across race, gender, income, and age?



Ecosystem builders are leaders in your community who are designing new models for local news. They are innovative, connected deeply to communities, and hold many relationships across the ecosystem.

### How can I learn more about news ecosystems and supporting local news?

We are releasing a guide to assessing local news ecosystems for funders soon. Contact Teresa Gorman, senior program associate for local news at Democracy Fund, at tgorman@democracyfund.org for more information and to receive the guide upon publication. In the meantime, go to localnewslab.org for resources, case studies, and new ideas about sustaining local news, and follow us on @thelocalnewslab for updates.

Portions of this document are excerpted from a forthcoming report on assessing your local news ecosystem by Fiona Morgan, and a series of blog posts on news ecosystems by Nancy Watzman on localnewslab.org. Cover illustration by Joyce Rice.



The Local News Lab is a testing ground for the future of local journalism that supports people and their efforts to experiment with new ways of reporting, engaging communities, and sustaining news organizations of all sizes.