The Crisis in Local News
Even before COVID-19, the crisis in journalism had become a crisis for our democracy.

Local coverage has been decimated.

Residents no longer get the information they need to understand the critical issues facing their community, to make good decisions for their family, and hold elected officials accountable.
News Deserts Were Spreading...
Denver Post staff in 2013 when they won the Pulitzer prize for coverage of the Aurora high school shooting. The black silhouettes are reporters who no longer work there.

In 2004, 1 in 8 reporters were in just NYC, DC or LA.

In 2017, it was 1 in 5.

1,300

Newspapers have closed in the last 10 years

200

counties in the US have no newspaper at all
Local Reporting Was Declining...
Dramatic Drop In The Number Of Local Reporters

From a peak of nearly 458,000 newspaper reporters in the early 1990s, the number has dropped to about 180,000.
Ad revenue dropping, as more digital spending goes to platforms

Voxeu

Google and Facebook share of digital ads
eMarketer
We were a strong breeze away from the local news system blowing over...
Local news readership is up dramatically

But business Models Are Devastated:

- Local advertising down 50-100% for for-profit newspapers
- Public radio shaken by the impact on their sponsor universities
- Events – the hottest trend in nonprofit revenue – are cancelled
- Foundation support fragile
Right when local reporters are needed most, the cutbacks intensify
Roughly 36,000 workers at news companies have been laid off, been furloughed or had their pay cut.

The predictions: Hundreds of permanent news closures.
We need...

New models
New government policy
New mindset
New “business models”
The positive changes in commercial local news must accelerate

- Greater focus on reader revenue instead of advertising
- Community engagement and events
- Digital proficiency to reach more people and advertisers
The revolution in nonprofit local news must accelerate

- Hundreds of great new local nonprofits like FlintBeat, MLK50 and Chalkbeat
- Need hundreds more
- Public radio needs to continue to push local journalism
- Deeply rooted in communities through civicly important journalism
- Strengthen earned revenue (via AJP and others)
- Better collaboration among nonprofits, national-local models
- $1 billion more from philanthropy
The growth of hybrid models must accelerate

- National service model (focused on boots on the ground, local match, public service)
- Collaborations between commercial and nonprofit media
- Combine the reach of local TV and newspapers, with the reporting heft of watchdog nonprofits
National service program that places journalists into local newsrooms
• half nonprofit, half commercial
• RFA pays half the salary, help local newsroom raise the rest

225 reporters in 162 newsrooms in the field in June.
Goal: 1,000 reporters on the ground in 2024
New government policy
Government policy must help with the crisis -- and facilitate a better local news system

- Ad spending going to local news
- Replanting strategy
- National service model
New mindset: Local journalism as public service
Community journalism will only survive with the support of the community

- Subscriptions
- Much bigger nonprofit sector
- Local journalism as a public service