

In the summer of 2020, two surveys — one conducted by

University of Denver (DU) with support from The Colorado Trust and the other one by Colorado Press Association (CPA) and Colorado News Collaborative (COLab) of their members and partners — assessed Colorado journalists' views of their own news outlets and coverage, and of the state of the broader news ecosystem in Colorado. In their answers, journalists highlight strengths, identify weaknesses, and propose solutions for improving local journalism in Colorado.

This report presents **10 takeaways** from these two surveys and discusses the implications of the findings. Acting on these lessons will be vitally important for the future of Colorado's local news outlets and their ability to survive, thrive, and continue providing reliable local news as a public service to their communities.

It's worth noting that data for these two surveys were collected at a particularly historic moment: the U.S. was in the midst of both a contentious presidential election and a global pandemic, and many Americans and Coloradans were participating in protests for social justice and against systemic racism. More information about how the surveys were conducted is included at the end of this report.

To learn more about next steps and recommendations for investments and innovations in local news, please visit: www.coloradomediaproject.com/ways-to-support

THE NEWS ABOUT LOCAL NEWS: 10 TAKEAWAYS FROM COLORADO JOURNALISTS



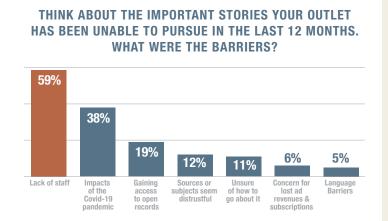


3 in 5 journalists say that "lack of staff" is the biggest reason that important news stories go untold.

RUNNING ON FUMES: Faced with declining local ad revenue that has cut newsroom staffs nearly in half over the past decade, Colorado's remaining local journalists are struggling to serve their communities. But they have ideas to make things better.

Almost 60% of journalists say that "lack of staff" is a barrier that has made it difficult for them to pursue important news stories. "Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic" (for almost 40% of journalists) and "getting access to open records" (for about 20% of journalists) are mentioned as two additional barriers to pursuing news stories.¹

What would improve accountability journalism — defined in the University of Denver survey as journalism that can hold power accountable and highlight inequities — and make it possible for journalists to pursue important and difficult stories? Nearly two-thirds of Colorado journalists say that "adding more funding and more journalists" would be helpful, while about half identified "more access to public records" or "diversifying sources" as useful tools. "More support for investigative journalism" would be beneficial, according to more than one-third of journalists. Those who identify as journalists of color are more likely to say that "diversifying sources" and "building relationships with the community" are tools that can strengthen accountability journalism, compared to journalists who identify as white.²





63%

More funding and more journalists

More access to public records

51%

45%
Diversifying sources

39%
Support for investigative projects

Building relationships with community

35%

17%
Training/workshops

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TOOLS DO YOU THINK COULD STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNALISM?



Diversifying sources Building relationships with community

¹ CPA/COLab survey data, 2020 ² DU survey data, 2020

COLab survey data, 2020 PAGE 2

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TAKEAWAY

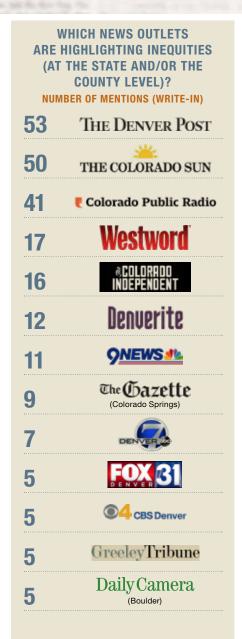
SIZE AND MISSION MATTER: Larger statewide newsrooms with more staff capacity, as well as scrappy, mission-driven digital startups are credited with producing most of Colorado's investigative and watchdog reporting. Regionally, local newspapers also get nods.

According to Colorado journalists, organizations such as The Denver Post, The Colorado Sun, The Colorado Independent (now Colorado News Collaborative), Colorado Public Radio and local TV network affiliates are the news organizations most likely to hold powers accountable and highlight inequities in the state. Local newspapers including The Durango Herald and the Greeley Tribune receive mentions as well, indicating the remaining importance of regional print publications in holding powers accountable, especially in areas outside of the Front Range.³ According to journalists, larger newsrooms — especially statewide outlets — have more resources dedicated to editorial staff (as compared to outlets in other regions of the state), and this factor contributes to bigger newsrooms having more resources to produce accountability journalism.

Reinforcing these findings, journalists say that investigative and watchdog journalism (defined in the CPA/COLab survey as "stories based on the reporters' own probing that advance public accountability and serve the public interest") is not the top focus for most Colorado newsrooms, and the amount they are producing hasn't changed much over the past 12 months. Journalists say local newsrooms more often focus on feature stories and explanatory coverage, which "explains the context, relevance and impact of the subject or event."

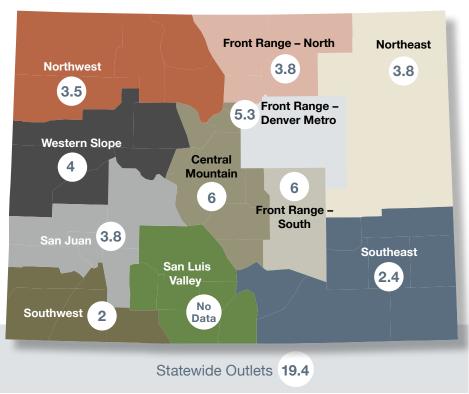
WHICH NEWS OUTLETS		
ARE HOLDING GOVERNMENT		
OFFICIALS, CORPORATIONS,		
	D OTHER ORGANIZATIONS	
	OUNTABLE (AT THE STATE	
AND/OR THE COUNTY LEVEL)?		
NUMBER OF MENTIONS (WRITE-IN)		
65	THE DENVER POST	
=0	**	
59	THE COLORADO SUN	
44	Colorado Public Radio	
25	<u>ONEWS</u>	
23		
16	&COLORADO INDEPENDENT	
10	INUEPENUENI	
45	Weetword	
15	Westword	
-4.4	The (Bazette	
14	(Colorado Springs)	
12	DENVER	
12		
12 11	FOX 31	
	FOX 31	
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	FOX 31	

³ DU survey data, 2020



HOW MANY FULL-TIME EDITORIAL STAFF MEMBERS PRODUCE JOURNALISM IN YOUR NEWSROOM?

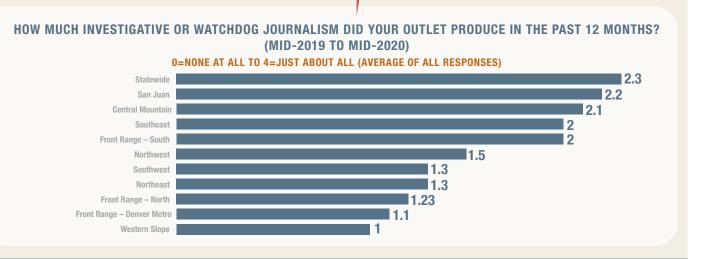
MEAN VALUES - BY REGIONS



HOW MUCH ORIGINAL LOCAL JOURNALISM OF EACH TYPE DID YOUR OUTLET PRODUCE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS? (MID-2019 TO MID-2020)

0=NONE AT ALL TO 4=JUST ABOUT ALL (AVERAGE OF ALL RESPONSES)





THIS IS NEWS COLORADO NEEDS: Politics and education are the issues that local journalists say they cover most, but health care had the biggest increase in media coverage over the past year.



TAKEAWAY

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When considering eight "critical information needs" presented in a <u>Federal Communications</u>

Commission report, politics is the topic to which journalists say newsrooms devote the most attention.

This finding may reflect the public's desire to have government and politics at the center of local media coverage: According to findings from a survey of 2,000+ Coloradans released by the Colorado Media Project in 2018, "government and politics" is the local news topic most important to Coloradans, and also the topic they are most likely to pay for.

Education and economic development are the next most common topics covered by local newsrooms, according to journalists. Not surprisingly, given the COVID-19 crisis, journalists identify health care as the issue that has seen the most significant increase in media coverage over the past year.

WHICH OF THESE "CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS" DOES YOUR NEWSROOM REPORT ON MOST FREQUENTLY? (UP TO THREE SELECTIONS ALLOWED)

Politics	63.1%
Education	37.5%
Economic Development	31.4%
Emergencies	25%
Civic Information	24.4%
Health care	21.3%
Environmental Issues	13.6%
Other	11.3%
Transportation System	6.8%

Comparing platform types, however, there are significant differences in which critical information needs get the most focus. Journalists say that compared to newsrooms of other platform types:

- **Print newsrooms** (newspapers and magazines) are more likely to report on politics, economic development and civic information.
- Digital-only outlets are more likely to report on the environment and health care.
- TV outlets are more likely to report on education and emergencies.
- Radio outlets are more likely to report on transportation issues.⁵

COMPARED TO LAST YEAR, ABOUT HOW MUCH ORIGINAL LOCAL WORK DID YOUR NEWSROOM PRODUCE ON EACH TOPIC?⁶



TAKEAWAY

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TOPICAL NEWS GAPS PERSIST: Journalists say three big, looming issues that face the state need more local news coverage: the environment, transportation, and societal injustice and inequality.

Journalists identify the environment as one topic that newsrooms don't pay enough attention to. For example, one journalist mentions "climate change and energy issues related to the environment" as issues underreported by Colorado journalists. Another area where journalists don't see enough media coverage is the "transportation system," particularly in more remote communities. "Injustice and inequality" is also often mentioned by journalists as one area where more media coverage is necessary. For example, one journalist mentions the lack of coverage of "stories of marginalized communities, who are frequently the first, and often most severely, impacted by injustice and wrongdoing."

⁵ DU survey data, 2020

⁶ CPA/COLab survey data, 2020

⁷ DU survey data, 2020

TAKEAWAY

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Education, politics and emergencies are the topics most likely to be covered at the local level. LOCAL FOCUS & EXPERTISE MATTER: Local journalists say most original stories they produce are centered on local communities, though they may shy away from topics requiring more specialized knowledge such as health care, transportation and the environment.

Colorado journalists report that their organization's original coverage is mostly focused on stories related to their local communities (neighborhood, town, city) or of one county, and less often covers state and national issues.

There are differences when it comes to how different topics are covered at the local level. Journalists indicate education, politics, and emergencies are the topics most likely to be covered at the local level by their organizations, while topics that require more specialization, such as health care, transportation and environment, are the least likely to be covered at the local level.⁸

HOW OFTEN DOES YOUR NEWSROOM REPORT ON STORIES THAT ADDRESS ISSUES AT EACH LEVEL?

0=NEVER TO 4=VERY OFTEN (AVERAGE OF ALL RESPONSES)



CONTENT PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY: Colorado journalists say that most of the content put out by their newsroom is original (produced by staff) and focused on local issues. Yet a quantitative national study recently found that just 17% of content distributed by local outlets is original and locally focused. Even less is original, locally focused, and addressing critical information needs.

Colorado journalists say that most of their news content is produced by staff or contractors/ freelancers, and that they rarely rely on content from the Associated Press (AP) and other outlets for their reporting. However a national study illustrates that across the U.S., local outlets may be dealing with a reduced journalist force by filling "news holes" in the paper or

broadcast with non-local content: A 2018 content analysis from Duke University found that only 17% of the stories published or broadcast by local news organizations were focused on local municipalities, less than half (45%) were produced by news outlet's staff, and just over half (56%) addressed critical information needs — emergencies and risks, health, education, civic life, political life, transportation, environment and planning or economic development. Just 12% met all three criteria in the study, which examined news outlets serving 100 randomly selected communities with 20,000 to 300,000 residents.

There are regional differences when it comes to the amount of original local coverage that outlets produce, according to journalists. Statewide outlets self-report they are most likely to use their own staff to produce "just about all" of their coverage. Meanwhile, outlets located in northeast Colorado and the Western Slope self-reported that just over half of their content is original, local reporting produced by their staff.⁹

TAKEAWAY

⁸ DU survey data, 2020

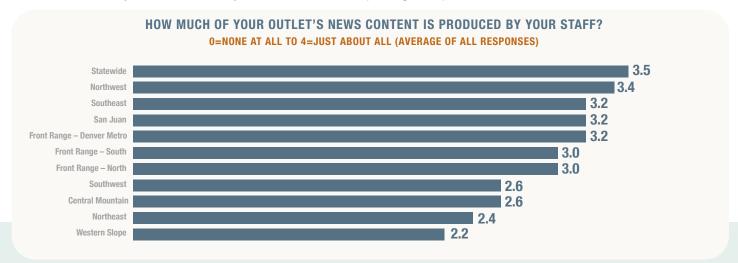
⁹ DU survey data, 2020

HOW MUCH OF YOUR OUTLET'S NEWS CONTENT IS PRODUCED BY ...?

0=NONE AT ALL, 4=JUST ABOUT ALL (AVERAGE OF ALL RESPONSES)



Colorado journalists also say that larger newsrooms in urban areas are more likely to use Associated Press content — which requires newsrooms to pay a subscription for use — compared to outlets in suburban and rural areas. Outlets in rural areas are more likely to use community resources for their reporting, compared to outlets in suburban and urban areas.¹⁰



TAKEAWAY

"Small town government often goes unnoticed, even at our local news organization. We're focused on our city's government, but there are two or three towns in our area that nobody is regularly covering."

RURAL COVERAGE GAPS PERSIST: Colorado journalists believe that local newsrooms place too much focus on the Denver metro region in their coverage, while entire areas of the state, especially rural areas, do not have strong news infrastructure and receive scant reporting.

When it comes to coverage gaps by geography, journalists identify specific areas that are lacking in coverage such as the Eastern Plains, Western Slope and southern Colorado. Specific counties and regions that journalists mention as receiving scant media coverage are: Baca, Kiowa, Conejos, Costilla, Rio Blanco counties, the Pueblo area and the San Luis Valley. This data point reflects the lack of strong local news infrastructure in many of these areas, as exemplified by University of North Carolina's data on news deserts (Abernathy, 2020).



"Rural Colorado is left nearly entirely out of the conversation, despite the major financial contributions made by agriculture."

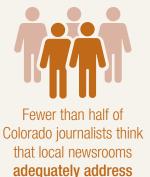
¹⁰ CPA/COLab survey data, 2020

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TAKEAWAY

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INEQUITIES IN COVERAGE PERSIST: Journalists acknowledge that specific communities and populations in the state are marginalized or rarely receive positive coverage in local media.



the needs of diverse communities



Only about 40% of Colorado journalists think that newsrooms adequately address the needs of diverse communities. Journalists identify specific ethnic and racial groups — African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American — and immigrant communities that are underrepresented in media coverage in both rural and urban areas. Journalists say that coverage of these communities is sporadic and not centered on these communities' needs.

In addition, journalists say that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are seldom the focus of media coverage in the state and, according to some journalists, they rarely receive positive coverage.¹²

"There are gaps in media coverage of African-Americans across the state and Native Americans and Latino/ Hispanic affairs, especially in Western and Southern Colorado."

"Lower socio-economic communities are not covered unless it is a negative situation."

WANTED: MORE DIVERSE NEWSROOMS: A significant number of journalists believe that Colorado newsrooms are not representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities they serve. Journalists believe that improving recruitment and other employment practices can help foster diversity and inclusion in their newsrooms.

Colorado journalists recommend three strategies to increase diversity in their workplace: "funding to diversify newsrooms," "diversifying leadership positions," and "enhancing retention of journalists." The top strategies Colorado journalists recommend to increase diversity in their workplace are: "funding to diversify newsrooms," "diversifying leadership positions," and improving recruitment and retention of journalists. "Funding for content in languages other than English", "training" and "networking" also appeal to at least one-third of journalists surveyed.

TAKEAWAY

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1/3

of Colorado journalists say their newsrooms are not racially and ethnically representative of the communities they serve.

¹² DU survey data, 2020 PAGE 8

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In qualitative, open-ended responses, Colorado journalists say that there need to be long-term investments in changing culture in newsrooms and reporting practices for covering communities of color. In the words of one journalist: "I feel local newsrooms only cover these issues within diverse communities when there is a (news) peg. Sadly, these issues exist for marginalized populations 365 days a year, so the coverage needs to better encompass these issues year-round — not only when they shut down downtown Denver for days-on-end because people are pissed about racial disparities being ignored."

The need to increase the number of journalists of color in newsrooms — from entry level to top brass — is a top priority for many journalists. "Hire diverse reporters," said one respondent. "Get POC (people of color) and queer people into the leadership and management level of newsrooms. Interview more POC and queer people."

The importance of diversifying sources also is clear in this journalist's response: "We need reporters and assignment editors to develop more diverse contacts to help break news in these communities and to be able to reach out for reaction on big stories." ¹³



WHICH STRATEGIES WOULD BEST SUPPORT INCREASES IN STAFF DIVERSITY IN COLORADO NEWSROOMS, ACROSS RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, DISABILITY, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS?

(MULTIPLE SELECTIONS ALLOWED)

Funding to diversify newsrooms	60%
Diversifying leadership positions	58%
Retention of journalists	56%
Improving recruitment practices	54%
Funding for content in languages other than Er	nglish 42%
Training	39%
Networking	38%
Other	10%

¹³ DU survey data, 2020 PAGE 9

TAKEAWAY 10

"We just completed a series about how the Hispanic community was disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Coverage of racism — particularly as it has to do with immigration status — has been tricky, because people don't want to talk on the record."

WANTED: MORE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Colorado journalists recognize that more two-way involvement with community members is key to their work and the survival of local news, but lack of time, staff, and cultural fluency are creating roadblocks.

Journalists say they have used several tools to strengthen relationships with their communities. Journalists identify "conversations with community members via email," "public callouts" and "conversations on organization's online platforms" as the most common community engagement practices. Journalists say that "lack of staff," "COVID-19" and "language barriers" are the biggest roadblocks to engaging with community members, including underrepresented populations. In open-ended questions, journalists also mention specific areas where they could do better in terms of building relationships with specific populations, such as Hispanic/Latino communities, Spanish speakers and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁴



"We would like to engage more with low-income parents and Spanish-speakers. We have a Spanish-language email newsletter, translate our callouts and some articles into Spanish, and work with community groups to reach more parents in each category. We have also done public events specifically aimed at this audience."

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TOOLS HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION USED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS TO ENGAGE WITH MEMBERS OF YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY?

(MULTIPLE SELECTIONS ALLOWED)

Conversations with community members via email	
Public callouts	24%
Conversations on your organization's platform	20%
Online newsletters	18%
Surveys	17%
Online Voting on story topics	17%
Live public forum on a particular news issue	12%
Editorial meetings and events open to community	12%
Engaging community members in working with data	10%
Other	5%
Media literacy trainings	4%
Collaborating with community members on Whatsapp	1%

WHAT ARE SOME
ROADBLOCKS AND
CHALLENGES YOUR OUTLET
HAS EXPERIENCED WHEN IT
COMES TO ENGAGING WITH
COMMUNITY MEMBERS,
INCLUDING
UNDERREPRESENTED
POPULATIONS?

43% Lack of Staff

21% COVID-19

21% Language barriers

16% Unsure of how to go about it

8% Lack of sources or strong community connections

● 6% Lack of trust from the community

¹⁴ CPA/COLab survey data, 2020 PAGE 10

Moving Forward

This report highlights challenges and strengths of the Colorado news ecosystem and gives us a framework to address the core needs of newsrooms across the state. Journalists echo many of the findings from recent research studies about local news: newsrooms are struggling to find sustainable business models and, consequently, the role of local journalism to hold powers accountable and highlight inequities is in peril.

However, journalists also identify solutions and possible ways forward for a brighter future of local news, in a moment when the rise of online misinformation has made the role of trusted local news sources more important than ever.

In the eyes of journalists, most newsrooms are suffering from a lack of funding and staff, which has negative implications for the types of stories they pursue, the type of journalism they produce, and the local topics they feel prepared to cover. In this landscape, journalists see large, statewide newsrooms as having the most resources and doing most of the work when it comes to highlighting inequities and holding powers accountable in Colorado.

Overall, Colorado journalists focus most time and coverage on topics most important to local audiences, such as politics, education and, increasingly, health care. They also identify some important critical information needs that could use more media coverage, such as the environment and social justice. These perceptions point to core needs for funding of specific beats and possibly for collaboration between larger and smaller outlets across the state.

Journalists believe that Colorado newsrooms place too much focus on the Denver metro in their coverage, while entire areas of the state, mostly rural regions, do not have strong news infrastructure and receive scant reporting. These findings highlight the need for developing creative solutions that can help fill the geographical gaps in reporting. Journalists also identify gaps in coverage of specific ethnic and racial communities across the state. In order to address these gaps, journalists propose a few solutions, such as improving diversity hiring practices and developing long-term relationships with communities that are underrepresented in media coverage.

The findings also suggest that journalists' perceptions may not always match the perceptions of readers, listeners, or viewers — or in some cases, objective research. For example, Colorado journalists report their newsrooms are mostly focused on producing original content at the local level. However a detailed content analysis of local media outlets nationwide found a relatively small percentage of content published or broadcast locally is original journalism about local communities and critical information needs and topics. More research in this area is necessary to understand the degree and root of these types of discrepancies.

Colorado Media Project, The Colorado Trust, Colorado News Collaborative, Colorado Press Association and the University of Denver research team send a special thanks to all of the journalists who shared their thoughts with us for these surveys. We deeply appreciate your time, your introspection, and your ideas.

To learn more about next steps and recommendations for investments and innovations in local news, please visit: www.coloradomediaproject.com/ways-to-support

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Methodology

Colorado Press Association/Colorado News Collaborative Survey

- During the summer of 2020, CPA and COLab sent a recruitment email with the link to the survey to the 130 members of the Colorado Press Association and to journalists from another 330 organizations in the state.
- 84 journalists responded on behalf of 81 organizations. In this survey, each journalist was asked to reply on behalf of their organization.
- Journalists responded to a 15-minute-long online survey that included questions about their newsrooms, journalism practices, and diversity and inclusion.
- Characteristics of organizations that responded to the survey:
 - Location and regions: Organizations are located in 38 different counties across Colorado, representing all the different geographical regions of the state, with this distribution: 8 outlets are classified as statewide, 14 are in Front Range Denver Metro, 16 in Front Range North, 3 in Front Range South, 5 in Central Mountain, 9 in Northeast, 4 in Northwest, 4 in San Juan, 4 in Southeast, 7 in Southwest, and 7 in Western Slope. Regional classification is shown in the map below; Front Range communities were further divided into Front Range North (counties: Boulder, Larimer and Weld), Front Rage Denver Metro (counties: Denver, Arapahoe, Jefferson, Adams, Douglas, Broomfield, Elbert) and Front Range South (counties: El Paso and Pueblo).
 - Type of community: 38 organizations are located in rural communities, 17 in the Denver metro area, 11 in other urban areas, 7 in suburban communities and 8 in resort/touristic areas.
 - Content delivery: 52% mixed print/online, 14% radio, 12% print only, 8% online only, 4% TV
 - Size of editorial staff: Average of 5.47 full-time staff, 1.36 part-time staff, 2.89 significant contractors and 4.55 freelancers.
 - Size of non-editorial staff: Average of 4.27 full-time staff, 0.94 part-time staff, 0.96 significant contractors, 0.41 freelancers.

Regional classification from Colorado Non-Profit Association Front Range – North Northwest Front Range – Denver Metro Western Slope Central Mountain Front Range – South San Luis Valley Southwest

University of Denver Survey

- A recruitment email with the survey was sent to 1,837 journalists in the summer of 2020.
- A total of 153 individual journalists responded to the questionnaire. In this survey, journalists reported their individual perceptions and did not respond on behalf of their organization. Therefore, this survey may include responses from multiple journalists from the same organization.
- Journalists responded to a 15-minute-long online survey that included questions on accountability journalism, journalism practices, and diversity and inclusion in the Colorado media landscape.
- Demographics and other characteristics of survey respondents:
 - Gender identification: 49% women, 46% men, 1% non binary, 1% other, 3% did not disclose
 - Race and ethnicity: 79% White, 8% Hispanic or Latino 1% Black or African American, 2% Asian, 1% Middle Eastern or North African, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4% other, 4% did not disclose
 - Sexual orientation: 83% straight, 7% selected one of the identities comprising the LGBT community, 4% other, 6% did not disclose
 - Age: average of 44.5 years old
 - Years working as a journalist: average of 18 years
 - Education: 9% of respondents have some college education, 70% have a 4-year college degree, 21% have a Master's degree
 - Long term disability: 90.5% no, 9.5% yes
 - Languages:
 - First language: 95% English, 2% Spanish, 3% other
 - Languages spoken other than first language: Spanish is at 10%
 - Political ideology: 13% conservative, 41% moderate, 46% liberal
 - Type of organization: 40% print newspaper, 19% radio, 16% TV, 14% online only, 11% print magazine (51% total for print)
 - Role: 40% reporter, 37% leadership, 10% other non leadership role, 6% radio/tv presenter, 5% producer, 2% video journalist (Total of 63% not leadership)
 - Size of the organization: 72% 0-25 employees, 8% 25-50 employees, 13% 51-75 employees, 7% 76-100, 3% more than 100 employees
 - Reach of the organization: 51% state level, 31% two to five counties, 12% one single county, 6% local community

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