
Colorado

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We collected quantitative data and interviewed local stakeholders for 10 news and information ecosystems, including eight states (Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan with a focus on Detroit, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Oklahoma) and two cities (Chicago and Washington, D.C.). This report is an analysis of the baseline health of these news and information ecosystems, with a focus on the intersection of media and democracy. This chapter lays out the findings for the Colorado news and information ecosystem. For a detailed explanation of overall research methods and limitations, see the [Introduction](#).

Summary

Colorado's local news ecosystem is characterized by statewide connection across a variety of organization types and strong support networks. It is home to nonprofit and public media organizations that aim to serve the entire state, and news organizations themselves share resources and services, indicating a high level of collaboration among Colorado media. Despite this strong support, newsrooms face capacity and staffing challenges that put the information needs of communities, especially those outside of the Denver metro area, at risk. In particular, the relatively sparsely populated areas in the Rocky Mountain region and the Eastern Plains would benefit from greater connection and mutual support. Civic participation in Colorado is relatively strong, although there are clear opportunities for improvement. Voter turnout in Colorado is regularly higher than the national average, and turnout in the 2022 midterm election was nine percentage points higher.¹ However, other forms of civic participation, such as attending public meetings and contacting public officials, were about even with the U.S.²

Colorado is not as racially or ethnically diverse as the U.S. as a whole. Colorado's white population is 66.5%, about eight percentage points higher than that of the nation.³ The second largest group is the Hispanic or Latino population, which comprise 22.5% of Colorado's overall population, which is three percentage points higher than the U.S.⁴ The

1 "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022," United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>.

2 Brian Schaffner, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Marissa Shih. "Cooperative Election Study Common Content, 2022." Harvard Dataverse, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PR4L8P>.

3 "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Colorado," United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CO/PST045223>.

4 United States Census Bureau, "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Colorado."

American Indian population is also slightly larger than national averages, 1.7% compared to 1.3%.⁵ We identified 10 organizations whose target audience are Hispanic and Latino Coloradans. While this means the large population is being served, the number of organizations is equal to or smaller than other ecosystems in this study that have a smaller Hispanic and Latino population.

The median household income in Colorado is 16.6% higher than the national average; however, there are geographic and population disparities.⁶ Wealth is concentrated in the foothills along the I-25 corridor — which includes the Denver and Colorado Springs metro areas, which hold about two-thirds of Colorado’s population — as well as in the smaller mountain towns in western Colorado.⁷ The median household income is much lower in the less populated rural regions in the southwestern plains. Moreover, median household income for the Hispanic and Latino communities, the state’s largest non-white population, is about 33% lower than the white population.⁸ Overall, there is less income inequality in Colorado than the U.S. The state’s Gini coefficient, which is a measure of income inequality drawn from census data, is lower than the U.S. as a whole. Colorado is also one of two states, Delaware being the other, in which income inequality has decreased from 2008 to 2022.⁹

Colorado’s news ecosystem has undergone dramatic change since the state’s largest paper, The Denver Post, laid off 30 newsroom staffers in early 2018, leading the newspaper’s editorial board to decry the paper’s hedge fund owners, Alden Global Capital, and make a plea to save The Denver Post.¹⁰ While it wasn’t the first round of layoffs at the paper, it was the largest staff reduction. The editorial board’s renouncement garnered national attention, elevating the existential threat hedge fund ownership poses to local news. Several months after the layoffs, former Denver Post staffers formed a new digital news outlet, The Colorado Sun, funded by a blockchain-backed startup. The next year, the Colorado Media Project (CMP) formed as a backbone organization and grantmaker to support the health of the local news ecosystem, with support from the Colorado-based Gates Family Foundation and Democracy Fund, among others. CMP soon catalyzed the creation of the Colorado News Collaborative (COLab), a nonprofit organization that serves as a resource hub for Colorado newsrooms. It also developed a close working relationship between itself, COLab, and the Colorado Press Association (CPA). These three entities have functioned as the core backbone organizations in the state since 2019. The innovative and collaborative spirit evident in the emergence of each of them captures the strength of the local news ecosystem. Philanthropic investment in local news in Colorado is quite high, with the per capita investment from 2020 through 2022 being

5 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Colorado.”

6 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Colorado.”

7 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Colorado.”

8 HDPulse: An Ecosystem of Minority Health and Health Disparities Resources. National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. Created July 10, 2024. <https://hdpulse.nimhd.nih.gov>.

9 Conor Gowder, “Useful Stats: Income Inequality Across the States.” The State Science and Technological Institute, January 24, 2024. <https://ssti.org/blog/useful-stats-income-inequality-across-states>.

10 The Denver Post Editorial Board. “As vulture capitalists circle, the Denver Post must be saved.” The Denver Post, April 15, 2019. <https://www.denverpost.com/2018/04/06/as-vultures-circle-the-denver-post-must-be-saved/>.

\$3.05, the highest among the ecosystems analyzed in this study.¹¹ While much of that investment has come from out of state, CMP's current support and relationships with important local foundations — most notably the Colorado Health Foundation, the Colorado Trust, Gates Family Foundation, and the Rose Community Foundation — have localized the support of journalism in Colorado. The National Trust for Local News also has a presence in Colorado. In 2021, it acquired Colorado Community Media, keeping local ownership of 24 newspapers that serve large regions surrounding the Denver metro area.¹²

Colorado is also notable for its strong public media organizations that seek to provide news to the entire state. Colorado Public Radio and Rocky Mountain PBS carry signals that reach every part of Colorado, although they don't necessarily have a permanent presence in regions other than southern Colorado and the western slope. Both organizations also have working relationships with news outlets throughout Colorado, some of which are facilitated by the state's backbone organizations, while others are independent relationships. Another organization, Rocky Mountain Community Radio (which also operates in New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), shares a reporter for rural climate issues, a managing editor, and a digital editor among its 21 participating stations.

Colorado is home to a handful of left and right leaning partisan outlets, although it does not appear to be a defining characteristic of the ecosystem. Partisan journalism has commingled with key elements of journalism in the state. In early 2024, the board president of the Colorado Press Association resigned his post as a result of his role as editor of the conservative Rocky Mountain Voice. This connection came to light from a story by a progressive news outlet, the Colorado Times Recorder, which does not disclose its donors.¹³ The Rocky Mountain Voice was founded by a former Republican candidate for governor with the explicit intent to elect Republicans in Colorado.¹⁴

Voter turnout and registration is higher in Colorado than the national average, and Colorado's Cost of Voting Index (COVI) score of -2.15 is one of the lowest among U.S. states, indicating fewer barriers to voting relative to many other states, according to an analysis of state election laws and policies.¹⁵ The gap between turnout among white voters and the rest of the population, however, is larger than the national average.¹⁶ Colorado was also one of 17 states to see midterm

11 Foundation Maps, by Candid. Media Impact Funders. Accessed 2024.

12 James Anderson, "New Deal: Colorado-national Consortium Buys Community Papers." Associated Press, May 3, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/colorado-business-79cab45456d50238d192240c1a1047f>.

13 Corey Hutchins, "Colorado Press Group's Leader Resigns Following 'Recent Stories.'" Inside the News in Colorado (Substack), March 29, 2024. <https://coloradomedia.substack.com/p/colorado-press-groups-board-leader>.

14 Corey Hutchins, "The Liberal Media in Colorado." Inside the News in Colorado (Substack), March 22, 2024. <https://coloradomedia.substack.com/p/the-liberal-media-in-colorado>.

15 Scot Schraufnagel, Michael J. Pomante, and Quan Li. "Cost of Voting in the American States: 2022*." Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy 21, no. 3 (2022): 220–28. <https://doi.org/10.1089/elj.2022.0041>.

16 Chase Woodruff, "Colorado's Racial Voter-turnout Gap Persists, Census Data Shows." Colorado Newsline, September 15, 2022. <https://coloradonewsline.com/2022/09/15/colorado-racial-voter-turnout-gap/>.

turnout among non-white voters decrease from 2018 to 2022.¹⁷ And based on the other civic participation measures used throughout this report, such as attending public meetings and contacting public officials, civic participation in Colorado is only on par with the rest of the nation. High turnout overall, along with the reported high interest in governance, local stakeholders identified, could be an opportunity to engage residents in other forms of civic participation. A local community journalism

program similar to City Bureau's Documenters Network, which trains and pays residents to attend and write about public meetings, operated for about a year but appears to have flagged. Still, the project, the Citizens Observers Project from the League of Women Voters of Larimer County, was a result of coordinated effort from backbone organizations focused on local media, chiefly CMP. CMP also provided a grant to the Colorado League of Women Voters to iterate on the previous model with other local chapters.

Stakeholders indicate that press freedom is relatively strong in Colorado. The state has a local attorney from the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press local initiative (half of the position is underwritten by CMP and Gates Family Foundation, while the other half is supported by national sources), and Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition is a local resource committed to government transparency and information access. As in other places, however, there have been challenges to the state's open records law. A bill written to curb "abuse" of the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) passed the statehouse but didn't make it past the senate. The bill would have delayed required response times and potentially added costs to the requests.¹⁸

This chapter presents Colorado at a glance with topline information about the state's community, information providers, and civic engagement and voting, then dives deep into each of these areas, pulling on both quantitative data and information gathered through interviews and primary research.

The gap between turnout among white voters and the rest of the population however, is larger than the national average. Colorado was also one of 17 states to see midterm turnout among non-white voters decrease from 2018 to 2022.

¹⁷ William H. Frey, "Commentary: New Voter Turnout Data from 2022 Shows Some Surprises, Including Lower Turnout for Youth, Women, and Black Americans in Some States." Brookings Institution, May 18, 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/new-voter-turnout-data-from-2022-shows-some-surprises-including-lower-turnout-for-youth-women-and-black-americans-in-some-states/>.

¹⁸ Jeffrey A. Roberts, "Colorado Lawmakers Remove 'Vexatious' Requester Provision from Bill That Lengthens CORA Deadlines." Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition, April 20, 2024. <https://coloradofoic.org/colorado-lawmakers-remove-vexatious-requester-provision-from-open-records-bill/>.

Opportunities

Bolstering connection:

The major opportunity is in maximizing the infrastructure and connection that already exists, as Colorado has strong support networks and established institutions that are positioned to take even more advantage of a highly collaborative environment. CMP is currently considering how its support of public media and other organizations, such as Rocky Mountain Community Radio, can be used to strengthen the ecosystem as a whole through shared services and capacity building. This would be particularly needed for getting resources to places outside of Denver, particularly small towns in the Rockies and the less wealthy counties in the Eastern Plains and southern Colorado.

Civic engagement:

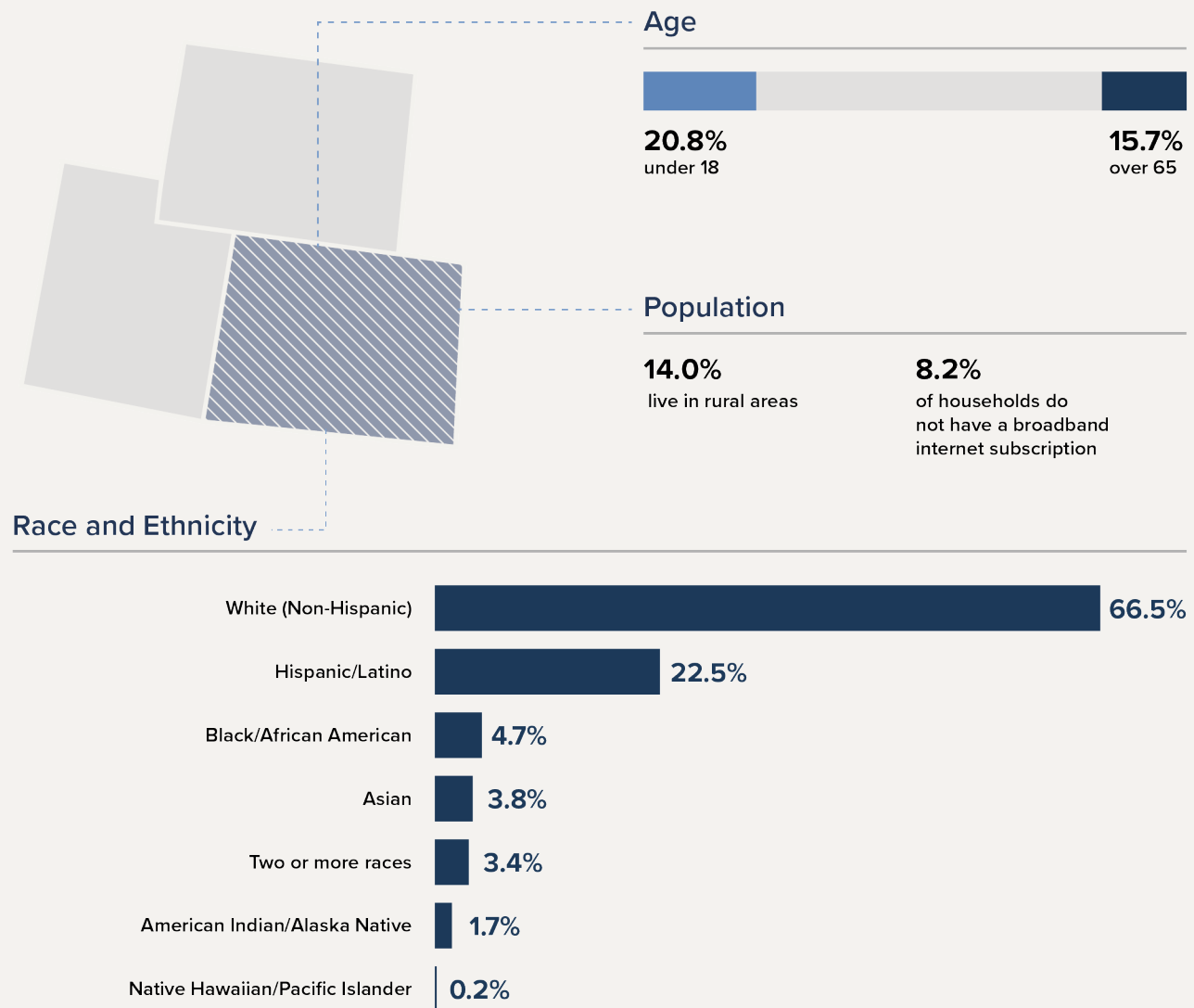
While Colorado had one of the highest voter turnout rates of all U.S. states for the 2020 presidential election, other civic engagement indicators are on par with the U.S. as a whole. An increase in high quality, civically-oriented local news paired with innovative engagement strategies would likely foster increased civic participation beyond voting, particularly outside of the Denver metro area. Moreover, considering that the racial gap in voter turnout was higher in Colorado compared to the national average, civic participation strategies aimed at communities of color that also include providing critical information for voting would also strengthen the ecosystem.

Colorado at a Glance

Topline indicators about Colorado's community, information providers, and civic engagement and voting to provide broad context for its local news and information ecosystem.

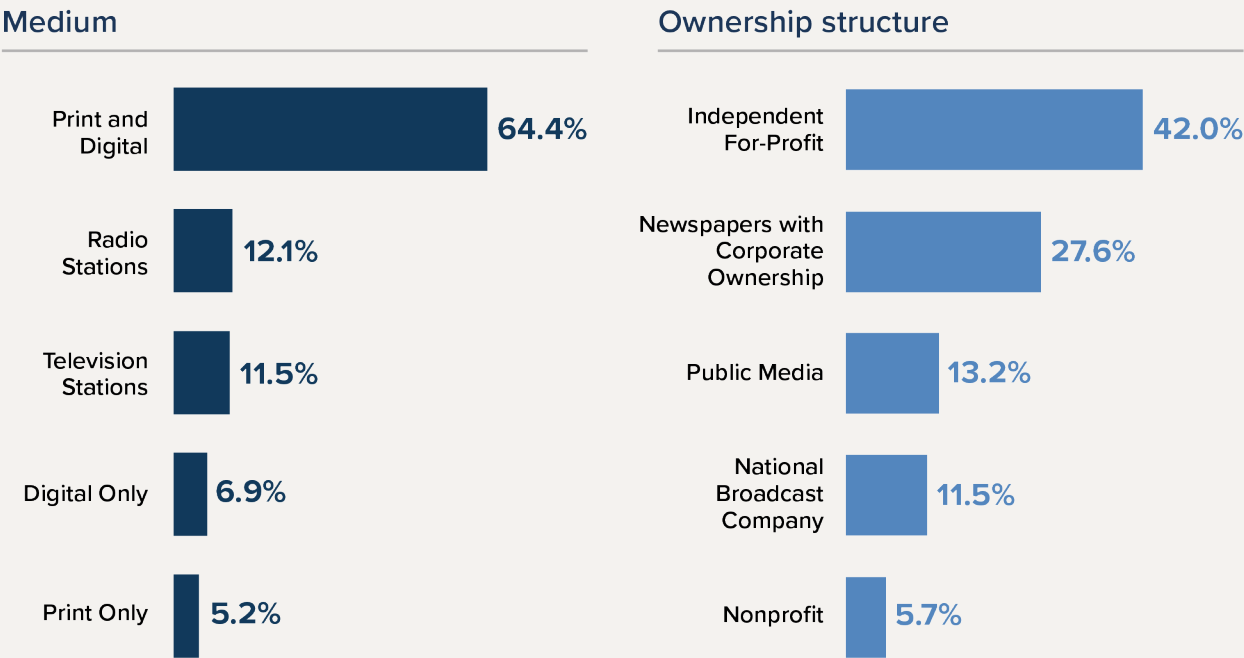
Community Indicators

Community indicators are from the state's U.S. Census Bureau [QuickFacts](#) page and U.S. Census Urban and Rural [data](#).



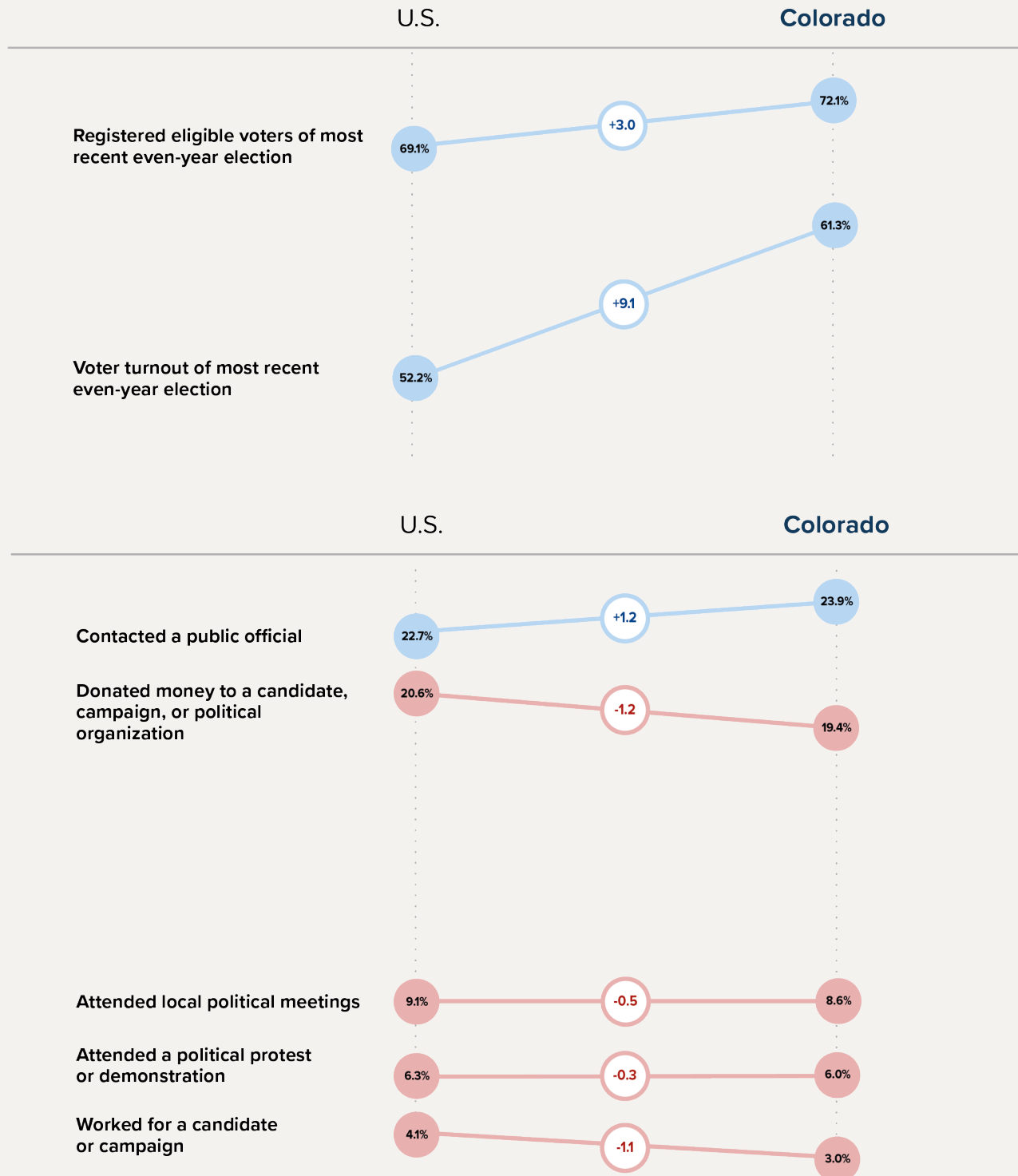
Information Providers

Data for information providers is an aggregation of information from the [State of Local News Project](#), the [Center for Community Media](#), [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#), [National Federation of Community Broadcasters](#), local broadcast affiliate lists, and Media Impact Funders’ Candid [database](#).



Civic Engagement and Voting

Civic engagement data is from the [2022 Harvard Cooperative Election Study](#) and the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).



Colorado Deep Dive

The following sections present quantitative information from a variety of publicly available data sources and qualitative information gathered through primary research and interviews with residents of Colorado to dig deeper into the current state of Colorado’s news and information ecosystem. Our findings are presented by category: civic engagement, media and democracy, information providers and community, community information needs, information providers, and diversity in newsrooms. We also present a case study about the nonprofit weekly newspaper, *The Sopris Sun and El Sol del Valle*.

Civic Engagement

Research shows that civic engagement, including but not limited to voting, is correlated with access to quality local news and information. In this section, we rely on 2022 Harvard CES survey data, the Cost of Voting Index, voting registration and turnout data, and primary research to document the current state of civic engagement in Colorado.

Colorado has higher voter registration and turnout than the national average. Turnout in the 2020 election was nine percentage points higher than the U.S. overall and among the highest in the country.¹⁹ It is not surprising that Colorado is also one of the easiest places to cast a ballot. The Cost of Voting Index (COVI) takes into account election laws and policies to determine accessibility of voting, with lower values indicating higher accessibility. Colorado’s score of -2.15 is the fifth lowest in the U.S.²⁰

Despite these indicators, stakeholders don’t necessarily perceive high levels of engagement among the populace, even in terms of voting. Indeed, while voter turnout overall is regularly high in

Civic and Community Engagement	U.S.	Colorado	Difference from U.S.
% who attended local political meetings (such as school board or city council)	9.1%	8.6%	-0.5 ▼
% who donated money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization	20.6%	19.4%	-1.2 ▼
% who attended a political protest, march or demonstration	6.3%	6.0%	-0.3 ▼
% who contacted a public official	22.7%	23.9%	1.2 ▲
% who worked for a candidate or campaign	4.1%	3.0%	-1.1 ▼

Data is from the 2022 Harvard Cooperative Election Study. n = 1,042

19 “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>.
20 Schraufnagel, Pomante, and Li. “Cost of Voting in the American States: 2022*.”

Colorado, there was a gap of about 19 percentage points between the turnout among white non-Hispanic voters and all other population groups in the 2020 presidential election.²¹ Mike Williams — Executive Director of Citizens Project, a Colorado Springs based nonprofit focused on civic engagement — works to engage communities of color in El Paso County to combat this gap. He describes the state of civic engagement in Colorado as “low, but increasing.” One of Citizens Project’s activities is to distribute voter guides and candidate surveys about local elections, either in the form of pamphlets or digitally through QR codes. The initiative is in response to the community need he and his organization identified to provide reliable election information that people trust, especially for communities of color. It’s also in response to the closing of Colorado Springs’ long-standing alt weekly in 2023, which previously provided a means for freely distributing such information.²²

Beyond voting, Colorado is about average in terms of civic engagement according to the metrics we used for this study, which included activities such as attending public meetings and contacting public officials.²³ This conforms with the perspective we heard from stakeholders. One person said that civic engagement tends to be low because of a generally high quality of life — Colorado ranks ninth in the nation in the Well-Being Index — and state budgets get passed without drama, which has resulted in complacency and the feeling that civic engagement isn’t necessary to improve daily life.²⁴

Corey Hutchins, co-director of the Journalism Institute at Colorado College in Colorado Springs said that “not a lot happens politically that slips under the radar” when it comes to state politics. Other activities such as county commissions and city council meetings, however, receive less attention. Because of that, Colorado could be a good candidate for a Documenters program — a program that trains and pays residents to attend and summarize public meetings for community consumption. Given the state’s high voter registration and turnout, the environment appears ripe to activate a moderately engaged populace in other areas of civic life. CMP supported the League of Women Voters of Larimer County in Northern Colorado to develop a local version of the program called the Colorado Citizen Observers Program (the Documenters program also supported the effort), which covered select public meetings from September 2022 until August 2023, although there has not been any public activity since.

Given the state’s high voter registration and turnout, the environment appears ripe to activate a moderately engaged populace in other areas of civic life.

21 Woodruff. “Colorado’s Racial Voter-turnout Gap Persists, Census Data Shows.”

22 The alt weekly, The Colorado Springs Independent, re-opened in 2024 under new ownership. Ben Trollinger. “Editor’s Note: The Newspaper of Eternal Return.” Colorado Springs Independent, May 16, 2024. <https://csindy.com/editors-note-the-newspaper-of-eternal-return/>.

23 Schaffner, Ansolabehere, and Shih, “Cooperative Election Study Common Content, 2022.”

24 Community Well-being Index: Colorado. Sharecare, 2024. <https://wellbeingindex.sharecare.com/interactive-map/?default-State=CO>.

Media and Democracy

This section explores the relationship between the media in Colorado and democratic institutions. A key way we explore this is through press freedom in the state, which we define as the press's ability to access government information and to conduct its work without physical harm or intimidation.

Press freedom is strong in Colorado when it comes to government transparency, with the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA), the statute that declares public records available to anyone, journalists and residents alike. Additionally, Colorado has local institutions that support press freedom. The Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition (CFOIC) is an advocacy organization that provides information and resources meant to preserve government transparency. A dedicated attorney from the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press' Local Legal Initiative also supports Colorado newsrooms (CMP supports this attorney).

Still, Hutchins stated that some provisions in Colorado still prevent access, despite relatively strong open records laws. One states that if someone says they believe releasing certain records would be “contrary to the public interest,” they can be withheld.²⁵ The broad provision could be particularly detrimental as state politics becomes more and more defined by one party, reinforcing the need for the local resources noted above.

Two high profile incidents attempting to silence the press have also garnered national interest, both of which required support from Colorado's freedom-of-the-press infrastructure. In January 2024, the Ouray County Plaindealer, a weekly newspaper serving a small community in the San Juan Valley, published a front page story about an investigation into a sexual assault that took place in the chief of police's home. On the day of publication, someone unconnected to the alleged perpetrators stole every issue of the paper because of the story.²⁶ The Plain Dealer printed additional copies of the paper, so the act didn't silence the story. And it in fact received additional donations after the event. Then, in April 2024, the state GOP kicked a Colorado Sun politics reporter out of its assembly “after being told the chairman doesn't like her reporting.”²⁷ Sandra Fish, the reporter, was later reinstated. Both events underscore the need for legal infrastructure and support for local journalism, even in environments where press freedom is not the major source of concern for practicing journalists.

25 “Guide to Colorado's Open Records and Open Meetings Laws.” Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition. <https://coloradofoic.org/open-government-guide/>.

26 Amanda Holpuch, “Newspapers Stolen After Reporting on Rape Investigation at Police Chief's Home.” New York Times, January 21, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/21/us/newspaper-stolen-ouray-colorado.html>.

27 Jennifer Brown, “Colorado Sun Politics Reporter Kicked Out of GOP State Assembly.” Colorado Sun, April 6, 2024. <https://coloradosun.com/2024/04/06/colorado-republican-party-kicks-out-colorado-sun-reporter/>.

Information Providers and Community

In this section, we analyzed survey data and information from interviewees to better understand Coloradans' perception of local news organizations. The 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey "Trust, Media and Democracy" asked a series of questions about perception of media and how respondents access the news. The survey showed that negative views of American media have grown since Gallup/Knight began tracking them in 2017, and assessed trust in local and national media across five dimensions: competency, reliability, benevolence on a societal level, benevolence on an individual-level, and integrity.

According to the Knight/Gallup American Views survey, Colorado residents have a less positive view of journalists and information providers relative to the U.S. as a whole. The perspective of Colorado residents indicates a lack of trust in the news, as well as a lack of perceived relevance. Less than half of Coloradans agreed that "local news can be relied on to deliver the information I need," indicating a perception that local news is not serving communities and is, therefore, not relevant to daily life.²⁸ Only 38.1% of Coloradans agreed that "local news does not intend to mislead, misinform, or persuade the public," revealing a lack of trust. While this result is lower than the national average, it should be noted that the national average is still just 44%.²⁹

Information Providers and Community	U.S	Colorado	Difference from U.S
Local news has the resources & opportunity to report the news accurately and fairly.	65%	64.6%	-0.4 ▼
Local news can be relied on to deliver the information I need.	52%	45.1%	-6.9 ▼
Local news cares about how their reporting can affect their community broadly.	53%	52.2%	-0.8 ▼
Local news cares about the best interest of their readers, viewers, and listeners.	47%	43.4%	-3.6 ▼
Local news does not intend to mislead, misinform, or persuade the public.	44%	38.1%	-5.9 ▼

Data is from the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey. n = 113

In which format do you get most of your news?	U.S	Colorado	Difference from U.S
From a printed newspaper or magazine	3%	1.8%	-1.2 ▼
From TV	31%	24.8%	-6.2 ▼
Online using a computer, smartphone, or app	58%	67.0%	9.0 ▲
From a radio	7%	6.4%	-0.6 ▼

Data is from the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey. n = 113

28 "American Views 2022: Part 2, Trust Media and Democracy," Knight Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, published February 15, 2023, <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-2023-part-2/#:~:text=Only%2026%25%20of%20Americans%20have,53%25%20hold%20an%20unfavorable%20view.>

29 Knight Foundation, "American Views 2022: Part 2, Trust Media and Democracy."

More than 96% of Coloradans own a computer and more than 91% of households have a broadband internet subscription, both higher than the U.S. as a whole.³⁰ Those factors likely contribute to the news consumption habits of Coloradans. About two-thirds of Coloradans primarily get their news online, nine percentage points higher than the U.S., and 75% of Coloradans get their news from a website or app at least monthly.³¹ A smaller portion of Coloradans get their news primarily from television than all surveyed U.S. residents, but it is still easily the second most common medium for getting news. In terms of daily news consumption, Colorado is about on par with the U.S. for use of websites or apps.³²

Colorado newsrooms are successful at generating small donations. The #newsCOneds campaign, led by CMP on a yearly basis since 2018, has been a source of local fundraising for a small subset of Colorado newsrooms. It's a matching campaign that has recently also included fundraising training for participating newsrooms. About 25 newsrooms participate in the campaign each year, and the initiative has raised about \$2.8 million for local newsrooms since its launch. The effort is similar to the national NewsMatch campaign. One notable difference is that #newsCOneds participants don't need to be nonprofits.

How often, if at all, do you use each of the following for staying up-to-date on news?	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less than monthly	Never
A newspaper	28.6%	17.9%	4.5%	26.8%	22.3%
A website or app	43.8%	19.6%	10.7%	12.5%	13.4%
A radio station	27.9%	18.0%	6.3%	26.1%	21.6%
A TV station	41.6%	15.9%	12.4%	16.8%	13.3%
Direct communication with people in your area	19.6%	28.6%	20.5%	18.8%	12.5%
A magazine	2.7%	9.8%	8.9%	30.4%	48.2%
A social media platform	28.6%	17.9%	5.4%	21.4%	26.8%

Data is from the 2022 Gallup/Knight American Views survey. n = 113

30 Knight Foundation, "American Views 2022: Part 2, Trust Media and Democracy."

31 Knight Foundation, "American Views 2022: Part 2, Trust Media and Democracy."

32 Knight Foundation, "American Views 2022: Part 2, Trust Media and Democracy."

Community Information Needs

A critical aspect of the health of a local news ecosystem is the degree to which all community members' information needs are being met. Currently, there is not a national or local survey that is repeated regularly to document the degree to which community information needs are being met. Organizations like Outlier Media and the Listening Post Collective, among others, have conducted deep, qualitative community information needs assessments in the communities they serve. In this section, we explore information needs in Colorado, including gaps and opportunities identified in a recent ecosystem assessment.

Backbone organizations in Colorado have worked to create more access to local news for all communities in Colorado, and they've also supported newsrooms in developing community engagement practices. For instance, CMP has supported developing community listening and engagement among Colorado newsrooms. One area of support was focused on elections reporting, with the goal to develop engagement plans for the 2024 election and improve the quality of election coverage in response to community information needs. The project included participation from 13 newsrooms, all but two of which were located outside of the Denver area. Additionally, COLab, Colorado Public Radio, and more than 50 additional Colorado newsrooms are participating in Voter Voices, a project designed by COLab and CPR. The project started in April, 2024 with a survey asking Colorado voters what issues they were most concerned with, and the overall project aims to develop election coverage driven by Colorado communities.³³

The Voices Initiative, a project supported by Free Press based on its work in New Jersey and North Carolina, was developed to identify ways to create more access to local news for more Colorado communities. With the support of CMP, Free Press, and the Colorado Health Foundation, COLab worked with community liaisons from communities of color throughout Colorado to understand their relationship with local news. The work resulted in four reports —

The common recommendations and calls to action were to increase staff diversity and equitable practices in Colorado newsrooms, strengthen and/or build relationships with communities of color, and to build power within communities.

³³ Megan Verlee, "CPR and Other Colorado Newsrooms Need Your Help to Cover This Year's Election." Colorado Public Radio, April 2, 2024. <https://www.cpr.org/2024/04/02/voter-voices-2024-election-survey/>.

one each for Black,³⁴ Hispanic and Latino,³⁵ Indigenous,³⁶ and Asian and Pacific Islander communities.³⁷ The common recommendations and calls to action were to increase staff diversity and equitable practices in Colorado newsrooms, strengthen and/or build relationships with communities of color, and to build power within communities.

Melissa Milios Davis, former Director of the Colorado Media Project, states that in response to the calls to action, CMP has made 73 Advancing Equity grants totaling \$998,090 to strengthen service to Colorado's communities of color, non-English speaking residents, and rural residents.

Information Providers

In this section, we aim to provide an overview of the landscape of information providers in an ecosystem, particularly journalism organizations. We relied on databases from the State of Local News Project, the Center for Community Media, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, National Federation of Community Broadcasters, local broadcast affiliate lists, and interviews to identify journalism organizations in Colorado. We manually identified the platform(s) and business model for each organization. Based on research, we assume that the more diverse an ecosystem is with respect to the number and types of information providers, the more healthy the ecosystem. A full [list of included information providers is in the More Resources section of the report page.](#)

Colorado has a rich and diverse collection of news organizations. Impact Architects' manual research identified 174 organizations that produce local news. Community media has a significant presence as well, with 17 organizations covering Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian American communities, 10 of which are dedicated to Hispanic/Latino communities, the second largest population group in the state.

IA partnered with CMP from late 2023 to early 2024 to research the state of capacity building and shared services in Colorado. Part of the research included gaining a deep understanding of the needs and challenges of information providers throughout the state. Capacity in terms of human resources as well as sustainability

34 "The Time is Right Now: A Call to Action for Antiracist and Just Local News." News Voices: Colorado Black Voices Working Group, September, 2021. <https://colabnews.co/the-time-is-right-now-report/>.

35 "Think Big, Act Now: A Call to Action from Latinx Coloradans for Equitable and Just Local News." Latinx Voices Working Group, November, 2021. https://colabnews.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/latinx_voices_report_final-reduced.pdf.

36 "Reach, Representation, and Respect: Recommendations to Improve Relations between Indigenous Communities and Local News in Colorado." Indigenous Working Group, May, 2023. https://colabnews.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/COLAB-002-Voices-Initiative_Indigenous_screen.pdf.

37 "Fighting to be Seen: A Call from Colorado's AANHPI Communities for Equitable and Just Local News." AANHPI Working Group, February, 2023. https://colabnews.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/COLAB-001-Voices_AANHPI_r9-compressed_1.pdf.

in terms of revenue and organizational resilience are the major challenges facing Colorado newsrooms. Rising printing costs, declining advertising revenue, costly and opaque software as part of digital transformation, staff recruitment and retention, and, ultimately, the ever present danger of burnout were the major, specific concerns. Colorado's strength in collaboration and connection runs through the resources offered by its backbone organizations, as is evident throughout this report. The resources contribute to the overall strength of the ecosystem, but organizations can't always take advantage of the support offered due to a lack of internal resources and capacity. Taking further advantage of the existing connections and collaborative spirit can strengthen the diverse ecosystem further.³⁸

Information Providers	Number	Percentage
Number of organizations	174	
Population per organization	33,182	
Medium		
Digital only (including email newsletters)	12	6.9%
Print and digital (newspapers, alt weeklies, monthly magazines)	112	64.4%
Print only (newspapers, alt weeklies, monthly magazines)	9	5.2%
Radio stations	21	12.1%
Television stations	20	11.5%
Organization Type		
Independent for-profit	73	42%
National broadcast chain	20	11.5%
Newspapers with corporate ownership	48	27.6%
Nonprofit	10	5.7%
Public media	23	13.2%
Community Media		
African American/Black	2	
Hispanic/Latino	10	
Asian/Asian American	5	

See the Methodology in chapter one for information on how this list of providers was compiled.

About 64% of outlets in Colorado are print and digital, and IA identified only 12 digital only outlets. The Gallup/Knight American Views survey cited earlier in this chapter indicates that about half of Coloradans get news from newspapers at least weekly. In 2022, The National Trust for Local News (NTLN) and CMP identified that the lack of accessibility to reliable printing options could be a problem for the Colorado news ecosystem. NTLN, CMP, COLab, and CPA formed a working group to surface options and solutions for addressing the potential problem. While the group was convening, Gannett closed its printing operation in Pueblo, located in southern Colorado, which served more than 50 local news organizations. The working group's report identified three possibilities for reducing short to medium term pressures for Colorado newsrooms, and Colorado's

38 Eric Garcia McKinley, "Assessment of Colorado Media Project's Capacity Building and Resource Sharing Investments." Impact Architects, May, 2024. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b48d905c258b4f9cb79f8d3/t/66466c629a401d-507d7d7cb9/1715891298301/2024+CMP+Impact+Architects+Report+-+Capacity+Building.pdf>.

backbone organizations immediately acted on one of them: They purchased a printing press, with CMP organizing the funding and NTLN making the purchase.³⁹ The facility is located in Denver and will be used by Colorado Community Media newspapers, which serve Denver and adjacent regions, and will be available to others as well.⁴⁰

Colorado is strong in statewide public media, and Rocky Mountain Community Radio supports an array of radio stations that serve small communities in the Rockies. However, communities in the Eastern Plains have fewer local news options, and, in July 2024, three newspapers in the region went out of business.⁴¹

Community media is mostly composed of organizations that serve Hispanic and Latino communities. Colorado has four Spanish-language newspapers (La Voz Colorado, El Sol del Valle, El Comercio de Colorado, and La Prensa de Colorado) and six Spanish language television broadcasters, including two Telemundo stations that serve the state’s two major metro areas in Denver and Colorado Springs.

IA identified only a handful of nonprofit news organizations, comprising 5.7% of all outlets. A notable statewide nonprofit is Chalkbeat, which provides free, high quality journalism about education and the education system in Colorado. There are also signs of nonprofit transition. In December 2023, The Colorado Sun, which launched as a public benefit corporation, attained full nonprofit status.⁴² Other newsrooms that transitioned from a for-profit model to nonprofit since 2022 include the Aurora Sentinel, which is located in the Denver metro area, The Crestone Eagle, Ark Valley Voice, and The Sopris Sun, which all serve small mountain communities.⁴³ Part of The Sopris Sun’s reinvention also included launching El Sol del Valle, the Spanish-language version of its weekly newspaper.

	Independent for-profit	National broadcast chain	Newspapers with corporate ownership	Nonprofit	Public media
Digital only	2.3%	0.6%	0.6%	3.4%	
Print and digital	34.5%	0.6%	27%	2.3%	
Print only	5.2%				
Radio					12.1%
Television		10.3%			1.1%

See the Methodology in chapter one for information on how this list of providers was compiled.

39 “The Future of Printing in Colorado: Working Group Findings and Exploration of Solutions.” Colorado Media Project, Fall 2023. <https://coloradomediaproject.com/latest-news/2023/9/future-of-printing-white-paper>.
40 Corey Hutchins, “The National Trust for Local News Buys a ‘Mission-driven’ Printing Press in Colorado.” Nieman Lab, March 13, 2024. <https://www.niemanlab.org/2024/03/the-national-trust-for-local-news-buys-a-mission-driven-printing-press-in-colorado/>.
41 Corey Hutchins, “‘Heartbreaking’: 3 Eastern Colorado Papers Closing, ‘Things Have Run Their Course.’” Inside the News in Colorado (Substack), July 24, 2024. <https://coloradomedia.substack.com/p/heartbreaking-3-eastern-colorado>.
42 “It’s Official: The Colorado Sun is Nonprofit.” Colorado Sun, December 5, 2023. <https://coloradosun.com/2023/12/05/colorado-sun-nonprofit/>.
43 Corey Hutchins, “Hutchins’ Year in Review: The News Behind the News in Colorado’s Media World in 2022.” Colorado Sun, January 2, 2023. <https://coloradosun.com/2023/01/02/colorado-media-hutchins/>.

Diversity in Newsrooms

In order to effectively meet community information needs and to be trusted by community members, newsrooms must reflect the lived experience and heritage of their audiences. We scanned the Colorado ecosystem to determine whether newsrooms have conducted staff demographic surveys and, if so, published the results. We also consulted with stakeholders to determine the degree to which they observe newsrooms being reflective of the communities they serve.

Some Colorado newsrooms have undertaken efforts to publicize diversity of staff and news sources, and backbone organizations have provided resources to improve equity in Colorado. Since 2022, CMP's Advancing Equity in Local News (AELN) has made \$1.8 million in grants to Colorado newsrooms to improve diversity in newsrooms and equitable reporting. Many of the grants are meant to provide funds for paid internships for young journalists of color, while others are designed to strengthen relationship building. For example, the purpose of an AELN grant to Chalkbeat was to support Chalkbeat's relationship-building efforts with its Spanish-speaking audience and to build internal capacity to create more resources for that audience.⁴⁴

Colorado Public Radio tracks the diversity of its sources and publishes its results. The most recent report, from December 2023, showed some progress from its early reports — the percentage of white sources quoted fell from 76% to 68% — but the organization still identified a need to include more Hispanic and Latino voices.⁴⁵ All newsrooms in the Chalkbeat network use a source diversity tracking tool, although their results are not public.⁴⁶ To assist in source diversity, COLab keeps a public source directory called Amplify. Journalists can search for potential sources by location and area of expertise, among other categories.⁴⁷

Anecdotally, stakeholders said that newsrooms in Colorado are not as diverse as they should be. The little public information available about the actual breakdown compared to the population appears to support that position. The Denver Newspaper Guild wrote that in 2020, 11% of non-management staff at The Denver Post identified as Hispanic or Latino, about 10 percentage points lower than the population of the state. The disclosure was part of a commitment from staff in 2021 to diversify the newsroom and coverage, although it is not clear what progress has been made.⁴⁸

44 "Announcing \$350,000+ in Grants to Advance Equity and Inclusion in Local Newsrooms Across Colorado." Colorado Media Project, January 24, 2023. <https://coloradomediaproject.com/latest-news/2023/1/24/announcing-advancing-equity-in-local-news-grantees-2023>.

45 "Colorado Public Radio Diversity Source Report for 2023." Colorado Public Radio, n.d. <https://www.cpr.org/colorado-public-radio-diversity-source-report-for-2023/>.

46 Source Diversity Tracking Tool. Chalkbeat, n.d. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/source-diversity-tracking-tool/>.

47 Amplify Colorado: An Online Guide to Help Newsrooms Find Diverse Sources and Community Members to Find Local Reporters. Colorado News Collaborative. <https://colabnews.co/amplify-colorado/>.

48 "Long Overdue: Denver Post Union Commits to Diversifying Newsroom, Coverage. Denver Newspaper Guild, March 31,

Finally, a 2023 working group coordinated by Colorado's backbone organizations yielded a report about workforce pathways meant to diversify the pipeline of journalists in Colorado.⁴⁹ The report includes an analysis of a pilot project about supporting a diversified pipeline through a summer internship program, as well as a variety of models that have worked in other parts of the country.

2021. <https://denvernewspaperguild.org/long-overdue-denver-post-union-commits-to-diversifying-newsroom-coverage/>.

49 Corey Hutchins, "Workforce Pathways for Local Journalism in Colorado: Working Group Findings and Exploration of Solutions." Colorado Media Project, April 2024. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b48d905c258b4f9cb79f8d3/t/6621a3b67d589b36bbfa3341/1713480632772/2024-04+CMP+Colorado+Journalism+Workforce+Pathways.pdf>.

Case Study – The Sopris Sun and El Sol del Valle

How a community worked to fill the gaps after the closure of their local paper.

In 2008, the Carbondale Valley Journal closed its doors after 34 years in operation, leaving the roughly 6,000 residents of the high-altitude Rocky Mountain town of Carbondale without a newspaper. However, just months after this closure, a group of residents including former journalists and board members at the Carbondale Valley Journal founded a new nonprofit weekly newspaper to serve Carbondale and the greater Roaring Fork Valley, The Sopris Sun. The founding of the paper in 2009 was described as an “experiment” designed to succeed by “its ultra-local focus and powerful community support.”⁵⁰ Relying mostly on freelancers, The Sopris Sun has consistently produced weekly journalism for communities in the Roaring Fork Valley, a mountain region that in addition to Carbondale includes Aspen, Rifle, and Glenwood Springs. The Sopris Sun reports that it distributes 3,500 copies of the paper to 80 locations.

In 2021, The Sopris Sun announced that future editions of the newspaper would include a Spanish-language section, under the name El Sol del Valle.



Eleanor Bennett / Aspen Public Radio

...the project was meant to both translate some articles from The Sopris Sun into Spanish, but also to produce original reporting in Spanish that might or might not be translated into English in turn. This meant that El Sol del Valle was not just a replication of The Sopris Sun, but rather had its own editorial priorities.

⁵⁰ “The (Sopris) Sun also rises: small town Carbondale, Colorado, loses one newspaper only to have residents join together to launch their own,” Mackenzie Cotters. *American Journalism Review* 31.3, June-July 2009. https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA202350146&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&link-access=abs&issn=10678654&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=nysl_oweb&isGeoAuthType=true&aty=geo.

Editor-in-Chief Raleigh Burleigh wrote that the addition was meant to further the organization’s mission to “inform, inspire, and connect” community members in its coverage area.⁵¹

Notably, the project was meant to both translate some articles from The Sopris Sun into Spanish, but also to produce original reporting in Spanish that might or might not be translated into English in turn. This meant that El Sol del Valle was not just a replication of The Sopris Sun, but rather had its own editorial priorities.

Collaboration is one of the hallmarks of the Colorado news and information ecosystem. And, indeed, collaborative efforts greatly contributed to the evolution of El Sol del Valle. In early 2022, The Sopris Sun developed a relationship with the Aspen Daily News to distribute El Sol del Valle as an insert in its pages and complement already existing Spanish-language journalism at the paper. The Colorado Media Project then supported a broader regional partnership that included eight organizations to further develop El Sol del Valle as a source for Spanish-speakers in the Roaring Fork Valley. An additional 2023 grant from CMP’s Advancing Equity in Local News initiative allowed El Sol del Valle to hire its first full-time editor. And as of June 2024, El Sol del Valle began operating as a standalone weekly product. It remains under The Sopris Sun nonprofit.⁵²

The Sopris Sun and El Sol del Valle encapsulate many of the movements, and challenges, of local journalism over the past 15 years. The nonprofit was born out of a newspaper closure, and its community-centered journalism has allowed it to maintain a strong presence in multiple small communities in Colorado’s western slope. Community listening informed the launch of a Spanish-speaking product, and support from statewide backbone organizations such as the Colorado Media Project and the Colorado News Collaborative have helped it grow.

51 Raleigh Burleigh, “Introducing: el Sol del Valle.” The Sopris Sun, March 3, 2021. <https://soprissun.com/introducing-el-sol-del-valle/>.

52 Raleigh Burleigh, “A New Sol Rises.” Sopris Sun, June 7, 2024. <https://soprissun.com/a-new-sol-rises/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20with%20support%20from,Fork%20Valley’s%20Spanish%2Dspeaking%20residents.>

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