

Wyoming Local News & Information Ecosystem

November 2024



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The Wyoming Local News Fund envisions a future where all Wyoming residents have access to the local news and information they need and want to thrive. To reach this aim, the Fund supports trustworthy, equitable and solutions-focused projects and organizations that contribute to a vibrant media ecosystem. Launched in November 2023, the Wyoming Local News Fund is a fiscally sponsored project of the Wyoming Community Foundation.



For 35 years the Wyoming Community Foundation (WYCF) has connected people who care with causes that matter to build a better Wyoming. Over the years, WYCF has not only granted over 100 million to charitable causes; we have worked on statewide initiatives that support Wyoming families and communities.

As a local chapter of Press Forward, WYCF is launching a new initiative to support news and information systems across the state and ensure that Wyomingites have the information they need from a place they trust.

A Letter from the Wyoming Local News Fund

Wyoming is often called “a small town with long streets,” a nod to the far flung, but intertwined communities across the state. If you live here, you know that we are both fiercely independent and engaged in our communities. We’re willing to step up to help neighbors, regardless of differences. While being home to more cattle than people, our small population of less than 600,000 is one of the traits that makes Wyoming so unique — and one deserving of local news that accurately reflects this place.

The Wyoming Local News Fund envisions a future where all Wyoming residents have access to the local news and information they need and want to thrive. To reach this aim, the Fund launched in November 2023 to support trustworthy, equitable and solutions-focused projects and organizations that contribute to a vibrant media ecosystem. Our first priority was the study you hold now, the first of its kind for Wyoming. It’s an examination of our media ecosystem, including both its assets and opportunities.

What is clear from the research undertaken for this report is that Wyoming’s media ecosystem has changed, and continues to evolve. Like many states, Wyoming is experiencing a contraction of local news. The past several decades have been difficult for local news outlets. Once locally owned papers have become assets of out-of-state companies. Once thriving organizations have shrunk to staffs that are shells of what they once were, struggling to report on the same coverage areas — be that the vital business of the state capitol or the entire rural and geographically dispersed landscape of Wyoming. Many journalists who establish their careers in Wyoming find they can’t afford to stay in the field or that there are limited opportunities for career growth in the state. This constant churn has created an environment where residents report that if local news coverage is available at all, it is shallow and inconsistent.

But despite these challenges, Wyoming’s media story remains one of possibility. Wyoming still includes many locally owned media outlets, and in the past few decades, has been home to emerging digital resources and budding information channels providing localized content, with new organizations arising to fill gaps to address coverage needs. We may be a drying landscape, but we are not a news desert — and this is one of our greatest opportunities.

Now is our time to tap into our grit and ingenuity to strengthen and revolutionize the news and information channels needed to stay informed and connected as residents and communities, to stoke these new media startups, and to imagine and establish entirely new media that fills the gaps. Now is our time to preserve what keeps our state feeling like “a small town with long streets,” to stay connected to ourselves and each other and to ensure a bright and well-informed future for all of Wyoming.


Director, Wyoming Local News Fund

Wyoming

Wyoming, a vast state with diverse and rugged terrain, is the second least densely populated state in the U.S. Small communities are nestled across the state, and because the terrain and weather create challenges, like frequent highway closures in winter, people are both self-sufficient and build strong networks of local mutual support. Even with strong local communities, Wyoming is a deeply polarized state, with 81% of voters registered as Republicans.¹ The media ecosystem in the state reflects the lived reality of residents: It is a fractured landscape, dominated by small print and digital newspapers serving rural communities, with broadcast media largely coming from neighboring cities in Colorado, Idaho, and Montana and spilling into the four corners of WY. There is also a perception among residents that at least some journalism organizations are themselves ideologically inclined.

Wyoming is hardly a news desert, and there are many local news sources, including not only the print and digital papers but also digital-only outlets, radio, and television. Residents have high levels of trust in their local newspapers, which have long-standing relationships in communities, however, the depth of coverage (or lack thereof) leaves residents feeling like the ecosystem is generally lacking. And there is widespread agreement that the Casper Star-Tribune, once a strong statewide newspaper, no longer serves Wyoming with comprehensive, daily local news. The decline of local and statewide papers is largely a result of ownership changes and consolidations, a common trend across the U.S., which result in dwindling resources for these organizations. In interviews, local residents said that coverage of government at the state, county, and local levels, is superficial and further challenged by the state's restrictive access to information policies.

For some communities in the state, the situation is even more challenging. Native American and Indigenous community members say that they are not covered fairly, with non-tribal media focusing largely on negative stories like crime. And for non-native English speakers, like immigrants from Latin America living and working in Teton County, where they serve a critical role in the service economy, there are no local news sources available in Spanish.

Those in the journalism sector say that there is a fundamental challenge in hiring and retaining reporters, especially in small, rural communities. And while some pointed to a pipeline problem, deeper analysis suggests that the inability to hire local reporters is actually a newsroom resource challenge. As journalism organizations have ever more limited resources, the salaries available for reporters are not competitive with those in other industries, such as public relations, marketing, and communications. As a result, early-career journalists often depart after only a year or two for

¹ Statewide Summary Wyoming Voter Registration, January 2024, WY Secretary of State. https://sos.wyo.gov/Elections/Docs/VRStats/2024/24JanVR_Stats.pdf

more lucrative opportunities out of state, while mid-career professionals might leave the sector in order to find work that pays better, has better benefits, and encourages more work-life balance.

There is also a demand-side challenge in the state. Local residents increasingly prefer to get news and information via digital pathways, but there is a lack of choice in digital statewide news, and more digital local news tends to be either behind a paywall — in the case of print newspapers that are also producing digital content — or in digital-only news sites that have limited capacity to do the kind of in-depth and investigative reporting that can take weeks, months, and even years. While newspapers and public media are working to build their digital products, two organizations, WyoFile and Cowboy State Daily, are set up explicitly to meet the demand for digital news.

Additionally, in interviews and focus groups, we heard that there are low levels of understanding of news organizations' business models, particularly when it comes to philanthropic support. This confusion, paired with a deeply polarized electorate, has resulted in a lack of understanding and skepticism about new media organizations. Specifically, we heard questions about who funds the nonprofit WyoFile. We also heard questions about the changing business model of Cowboy State Daily, the outlet's journalistic practices and operations, and its current ownership by B. Wayne Hughes, Jr., a wealthy Wyoming resident who has donated money to both Libertarian and Republican political causes.^{2,3}

In addition to limited local digital journalism options, residents face challenges with accessing local news, including paywalls and the high cost of local news, the lack of availability of news in languages other than English (e.g., Spanish), and a lack of broadband access in rural areas.

And political ideology and partisanship in Wyoming cannot be divorced from the news and information ecosystem. Wyoming is one of the most conservative states in the country, with the Republican party controlling the state legislature with 90% of the seats, and the proportion of registered voters who are Republicans nearly matching that percentage. We heard in nearly all interviews, focus groups, and through survey data that political ideology plays a role in what news organizations residents trust — or do not trust. And from those involved in news gathering and production, we heard a frustration that people are skeptical of reporting that does not support their political proclivities.

Given the strengths and challenges in Wyoming's local news and information ecosystem, we have identified the following opportunities for local funders and organizations working to ensure that all Wyomingites have access to accurate, trusted information.

2 Jimmy Orr, "Wyoming Businessman, Philanthropist Buys Cowboy State Daily," Cowboy State Daily, published February 11, 2022, <https://cowboystatedaily.com/2022/02/11/wyoming-businessman-philanthropist-buys-cowboy-state-daily/>.

3 "Hughes WY Inc (B Wayne Hughes)," Open Secrets, accessed October 2024, <https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/hughes-wy-inc-b-wayne-hughes/summary?cycle=2020&id=D000109417>.

Opportunities

Backbone institution:

There is not currently a backbone institution working across the state to gather and (re)distribute resources, foster collaboration, or identify shared challenges and work to create common solutions. The Wyoming Local News Fund and the Press Forward chapter, housed at the Wyoming Community Foundation (WYCF), have the potential to serve as this infrastructure for the broader ecosystem. There is opportunity to develop programming and resources to serve the ecosystem as it is, as well as to chart a path forward for local information providers across the state

Spanish-language media:

Nearly 11% of Wyomingites identify as Hispanic or Latino, and yet we identified no consistent local news reported in Spanish in the state. While there are individuals and organizations working to meet information needs, there is significant opportunity to support and resource these individuals and others to create strong, sustainable local news organizations to serve this significant sector.

Youth-serving media:

We identified no youth-oriented news organizations in the state, and while some organizations have a presence on social media, like Instagram, we did not find strategies targeted specifically to reach and engage younger audiences, especially Gen Z and younger, among existing organizations. At the same time, we heard stories about how young people access both accurate and inaccurate information via social networks, especially TikTok. While there is additional information that needs to be gathered about the specific information needs and preferences of youth in the state, it is a clear opportunity area.

Collaboration:

There is already a culture of content sharing across news organizations in the state, and there is opportunity to build on this to engage in more formal editorial collaborations, building upon outlets' and their staffs' expertise, networks, and locations across the state to engage in ambitious, collaborative reporting projects. There is also opportunity to explore business-side collaborations, such as shared or pooled subscriptions across multiple publications in an effort to tackle the fragmentation of the ecosystem.

Pipeline and retention programs:

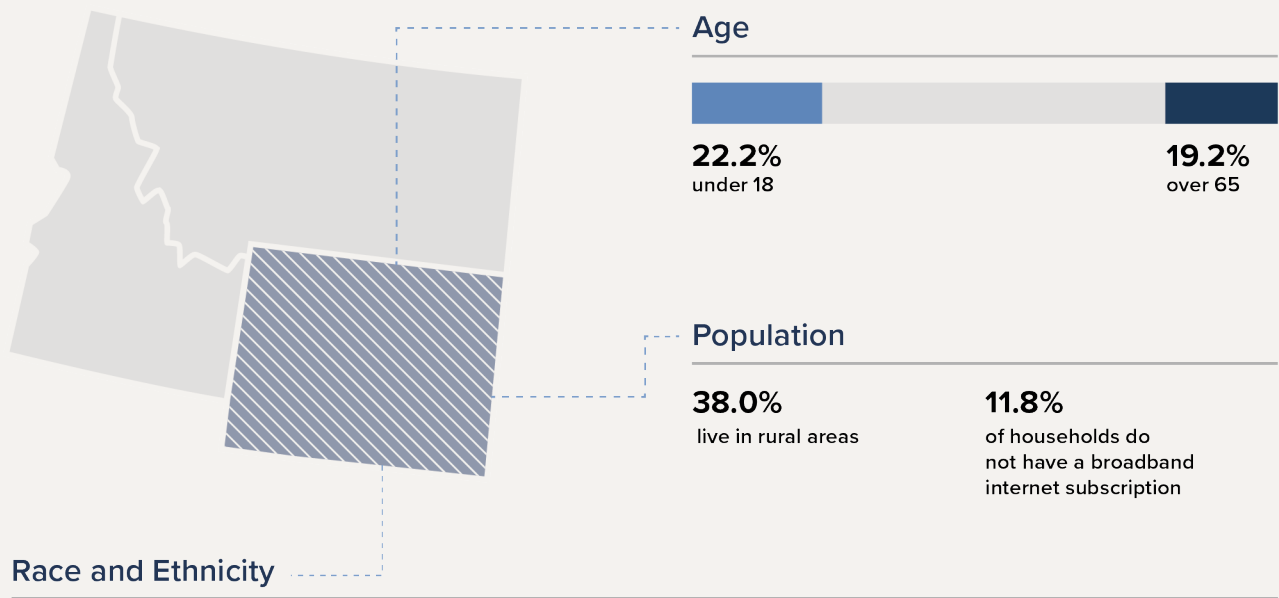
There is reporting talent in Wyoming, but news organizations need the resources to attract and retain this talent, from early-career reporters to mid- and late-career journalists and editors.

Wyoming at a Glance

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

Community Indicators

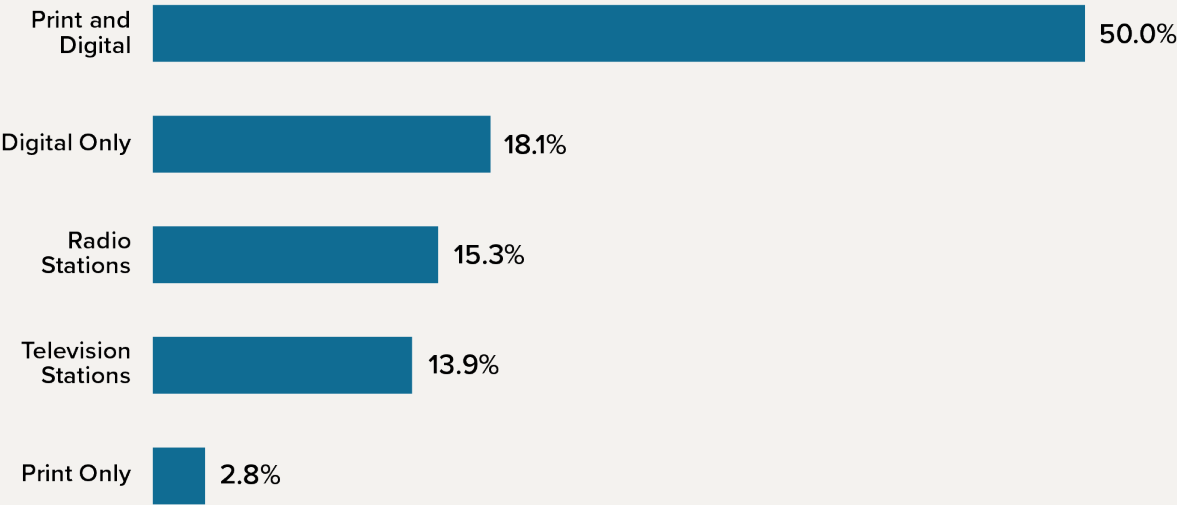
Community indicators are from the state’s U.S. Census Bureau [QuickFacts](#) page and U.S. Census Urban and Rural [data](#), as of July 17, 2024.



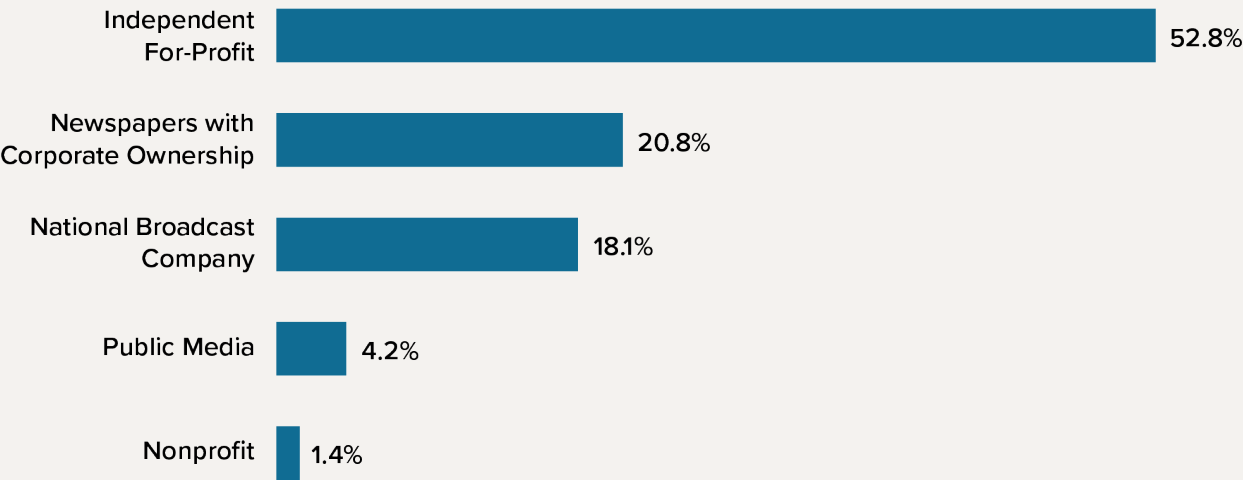
Information Providers

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](#), and local broadcast affiliate lists, based on versions of these data sources accessed in late 2023 and throughout 2024. We also included information providers mentioned in interviews and focus groups with local residents that we conducted in summer 2024.

Medium

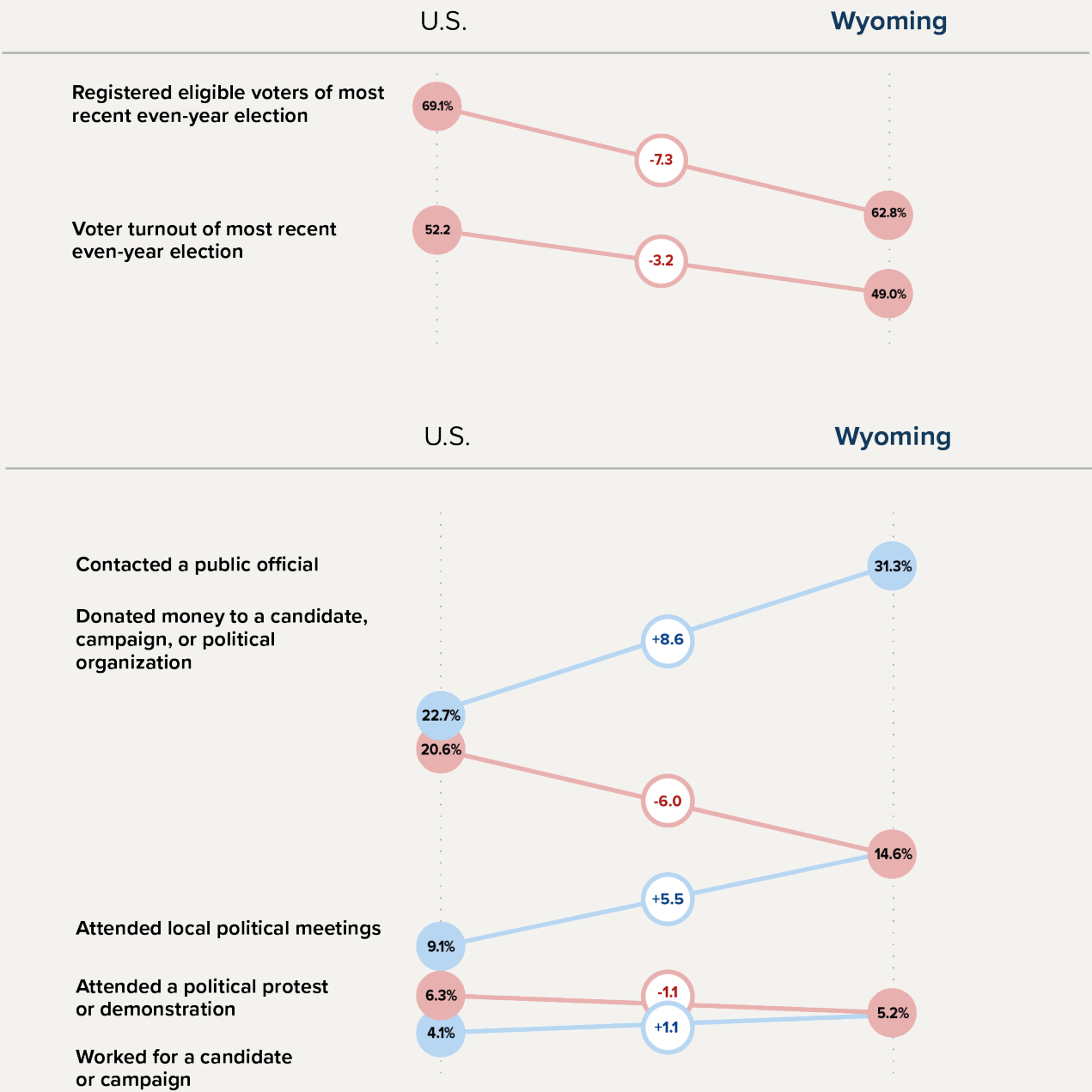


Ownership structure



Civic Engagement and Voting

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



Approach

This report employs Impact Architects' (IA) local news and information ecosystem framework to document the state of the Wyoming news and information ecosystem as of 2024. This approach was originally developed in 2020 with support from Democracy Fund, Knight Foundation, and Google News Initiative and was most recently updated in 2023/2024 in partnership with Democracy Fund.

The framework includes four categories with a total of more than 85 indicators: community characteristics; information providers characteristics; community information needs, access, and trust in news; and civic engagement and democracy. Wherever possible, we use publicly available data and information. We included Census data, data from the 2022 Harvard Cooperative Election Study, and more.

For this assessment, we conducted more interviews and focus groups than in previous reports, which we consider to strengthen the findings and recommendations in this report. In total, we conducted 28 interviews with stakeholders (11 led by IA, four led by the Wyoming Local News Fund director, and 13 led by a WYCF intern) in July and August, and led five focus groups with participants from the six business districts of the state in September 2024. A list of interviewees can be found in Appendix B.

Additionally, IA designed a community information needs, access, and trust in news survey, in partnership with the Wyoming Community Foundation and Wyoming Local News Fund, that was administered by the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC) in July and August 2024. The survey collected responses from 740 Wyomingites. This survey and its results are particularly meaningful because they bring in the perspectives of a representative sample of residents in the state, are a snapshot of a recent moment in time, and answer specific questions about both residents' information needs and their preferences. A full methodology can be found in Appendix A, and the full survey design and questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

Local News & Information Ecosystem Assessment Framework

REPRESENTATION

- Local news has the resources & opportunity to report the news accurately and fairly.
- Local news can be relied on to deliver the information I need.
- Local news cares about how their reporting can affect their community broadly.
- Local news cares about the best interest of their readers, viewers, and listeners.
- Local news does not intend to mislead, misinform, or persuade the public.

INFORMATION NEEDS AND ACCESS

- How often, if at all, do you use each of the following for staying up-to-date on news?
- In which format do you get most of your news?

CHARACTERISTICS

- % under 18 years
- % 65 years and over
- % White alone, not Hispanic or Latino
- % Black or African American alone
- % American Indian and Alaskan native alone
- % Asian alone
- % Native Hawaiian and other pacific islander alone
- % Two or more races
- % Hispanic or latino

COMPUTER & INTERNET USE

- Households with computer
- Broadband access

EDUCATION

- High school graduate or higher
- Bachelor's degree or higher

INCOME & POVERTY

- Median household income
- Per capita income
- Poverty rate

RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE

- Institutions of higher education
- Population per institution
- Libraries
- Population per library

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

- Community well-being
- Prior information needs study
- Prior ecosystem study

DEMOCRACY INDICATORS

INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- Functioning government
- Local government staffing
- Information (public records) access

CIVIC & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Availability of public meeting materials
- Accessibility of public meeting materials
- Availability of information about local leaders
- % Who have donated to charity
- % Of uncontested local or state elections
- % Who attended local political meetings (such as school board or city council)
- % Who donated money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization
- % Who attended a political protest, march or demonstration
- % Who contacted a public official
- % Who worked for a candidate or campaign
- Access to information about candidates

VOTING

- Cost of voting index (CoVI)
- Political efficacy
- Registered eligible voters of most recent even year election
- Voter turnout of most recent even year election
- Voter turnout (local elections)
- Voting access litigation

PRESS FREEDOM

- Physical intimidation
- Access to legal resources for journalists
- Regulatory incidents
- Regulatory policy

COMMUNITY INFORMATION NEEDS & TRUST IN MEDIA

LOCAL NEWS & INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

INFORMATION PROVIDERS

INFORMATION PROVIDERS

- Number of organizations
- Population per organization

DISTRIBUTION MEDIUM

- Print (newspapers, alt weeklies, monthly magazines)
- Television stations
- Radio stations
- Digital only (including email newsletters)

BUSINESS MODEL

- Nonprofit
- Public media
- National broadcast chain
- National newspaper chain
- Independent for profit

COMMUNITY SERVING MEDIA

- African American / Black
- Hispanic / Latino
- Asian / Asian American
- Native American/ Asian American Pacific Islander
- Hyperlocal
- Other

ECOSYSTEM DIVERSITY

- Journalist diversity
- Source diversity
- Collaboration

JOURNALISM FUNDING

- Philanthropic dollars over the 3 previous years
- # Funders
- # Recipients
- Investment per capita



Wyoming Deep Dive

Community

Wyoming, with a population of 576,851 in the 2020 Census, is the second least densely populated state in the United States, following Alaska.⁴ The white population in Wyoming is a significantly higher percentage than that of the U.S. overall, with 83.1% of Wyoming residents identifying as white according to U.S. Census data (compared with 58.4% for the U.S. overall).⁵ Wyoming has a larger proportion of the population that identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native than the U.S. as a whole, at 2.8% (compared with 1.3% for the U.S. overall).⁶ Notably, Wyoming’s Hispanic or Latino population is 10.8% of the overall population of the state, and these communities are serving an important role in areas of the state with service economies associated with national parks and recreation, such as in Teton County, the Jackson Hole area, and the town of Jackson.⁷

Wyoming is also less diverse with respect to political party affiliation and ideology than the U.S. as a whole, with 81.6% of registered voters being affiliated with the Republican Party.⁸ In 2024, the [Associated Press](#) (AP) said that, in some Wyoming counties, “Democrats are flirting with extinction.”⁹ The Republican party controls over 90% of the seats in the Wyoming State Legislature, and in 2023, it passed legislation banning voters from changing their party registration in the three months prior to a primary.¹⁰

While broadband access can be challenging in rural parts of the state, the percentage of households with broadband access (88.2%) and with a computer (94.5%) are in line with averages across the U.S.¹¹ While almost 94% of residents have a high school degree, only 29% have a bachelor’s degree or higher, nearly five percentage points below the national rate.¹² And Wyoming’s poverty rate, at 11.8%, tracks with that of the U.S. overall.¹³

4 “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/WY/PST045223>.
5 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming.”
6 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming.”
7 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming.”
8 “Statewide Summary Wyoming Voter Registration,” published January 2, 2024, https://sos.wyo.gov/Elections/Docs/VRStats/2024/24JanVR_Stats.pdf.
9 Mead Gruver, “Democrats are dwindling in Wyoming. A primary election law further reduces their influence.” AP, published August 18, 2024. <https://apnews.com/article/wyoming-primary-democrats-switching-registration-republi-cans-5954c50500556a36f6664cc0bce2a6d6>.
10 Gruver, “Democrats are dwindling in Wyoming. A primary election law further reduces their influence.”
11 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming.”
12 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming.”
13 United States Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wyoming.”

Wyoming has strong educational infrastructure, with 10 universities and colleges, including trade schools, and 76 public library branches.¹⁴ There were 3,917 nonprofits registered as 501(c)(3)s in the state as of July 2024. Many stakeholders said that libraries are good sources of information in their communities. Sue Sommers, a retired artist, said that the county library system stands out as “a crown jewel,” bringing people together and offering educational activities for all ages.

Information Providers and Community

In general, residents in Wyoming recognize that there are local news sources covering their communities, and these are generally trusted; however, residents also recognize that, for newspapers in particular, changes in ownership and declining revenues have resulted in slimmed down coverage, fewer days of printed papers, and a general lack of deep reporting. Nearly half of respondents to the WYSAC survey (47.3%) feel that their community has a trustworthy and accessible source for local news and information, while 20.8% do not agree and 32% are unsure. And more than one third of respondents (34.4%) said that a barrier to accessing local news is that there aren’t enough local news sources in their area.

Ideology and news

In interviews and focus groups, we heard that trust in local news depends on residents’ political ideology, as well as the perceived political leanings of a publication and topics covered. For example, we heard in interviews that WyoFile is viewed as being “liberal” by some because it covers energy and the environment. Dave Freudenthal, Democratic governor of Wyoming from 2003 through 2011, said in an interview, “Trust in news is influenced by confirmation bias. People tend to choose news sources that align with their own viewpoints.”

And while confirmation bias is not unique to Wyoming residents — indeed people’s preference for news that aligns with their political ideology is a trend noted across the national media landscape — because Wyoming is so dominated by the Republican party, there are significant ripple effects across the information ecosystem. Joshua Wolfson, managing editor of WyoFile and former editor in chief of the Casper Star-Tribune said that while still at the Star-Tribune, he was involved in a [study about trust in media](#) among Casperites conducted by the Society of Professional Journalists,¹⁵ that showed, among other things, that often when people say they trust something, “what they’re really

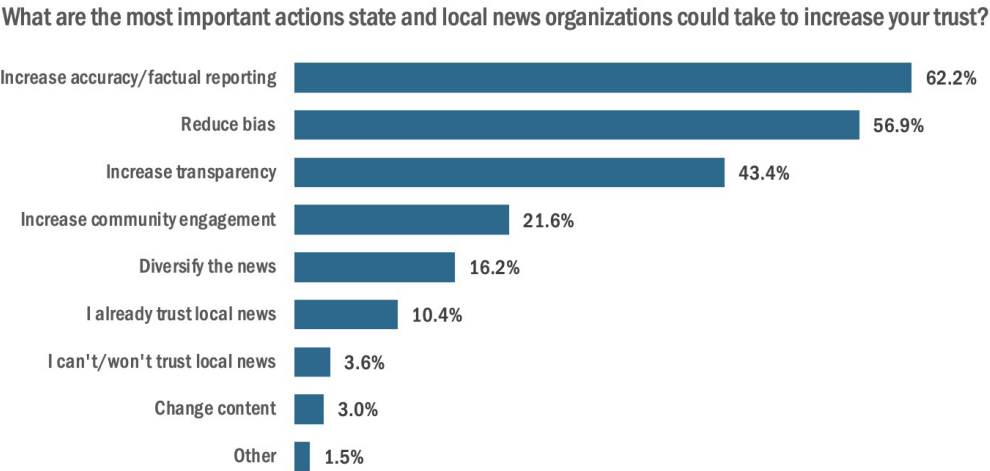
¹⁴ “College Navigator,” IES National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>; “Library Search & Compare,” Institute of Museum and Library Services, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.imls.gov/search-compare>.

¹⁵ <https://www.spj.org/casperproject.asp>

saying is ‘this source validates my views.’”¹⁶ Wolfson said that he would receive audience feedback on stories and, when engaging with people, they would suggest that the Star-Tribune reporting wasn’t “fair,” but, “when pushed, they’d say things like, ‘this is a Republican state and your reporting should reflect that.’”

Among the Indigenous and Native American population of Wyoming, we heard that there is a historical distrust of legacy media. Leslie Shakespeare, an enrolled member of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe who has served in numerous public roles, said there is a need for news organizations to understand the history of the tribes and the injustices they faced throughout legal history. This history has created historical distrust in people wanting to give information and in being willing to receive it, he explained.

Across all age groups, respondents to the WYSAC survey said that the most important actions state and local news organizations could take to increase trust is to increase accuracy (62.2%), reduce bias (56.9%), and increase transparency (43.4%). Responses were consistent across age groups, political ideology, and regions with two notable exceptions. Respondents identifying as “liberal” were significantly more likely to say that “diversifying the news” would increase their trust (35.4%), compared with a much smaller percentage of moderates (16.5%) and conservatives (9.8%) who said the same. And with respect to “increase community engagement,” nearly a third of those in the central east/southeast quadrant of the state said this would increase their trust in news (30.4%), as did nearly one in five respondents in the southwest and the central west/northwest, while only 8% of respondents in the northeast said community engagement would increase their trust.

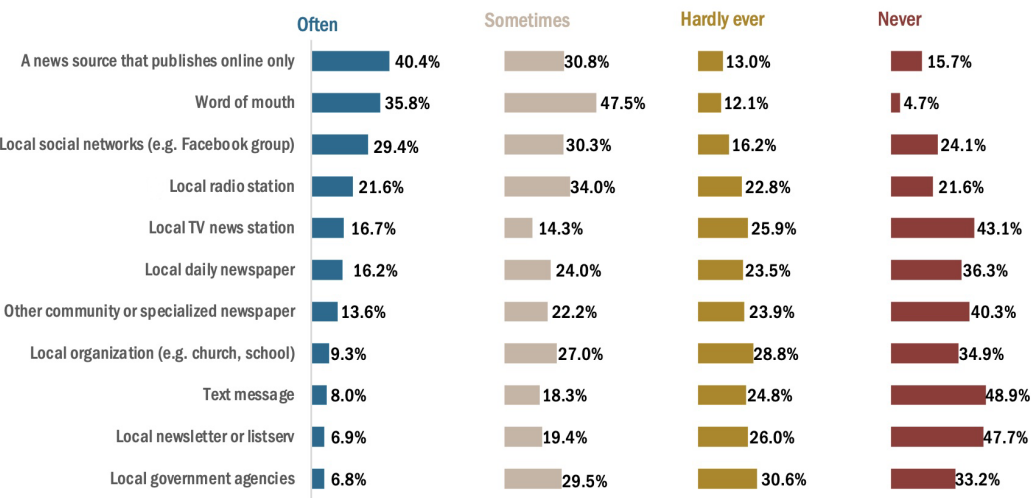


16 WYCF was a sponsor of the Casper Trust in Media project.

Community News Consumption Habits and Information Needs

We found a mismatch in the format in which news is available in Wyoming and in how residents prefer to get news and information. The state’s news ecosystem is dominated by newspapers, most of which have a digital presence, although they tend to be clunky websites with paywalls. However, in our 2024 statewide survey conducted by the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming, respondents cited word of mouth, a news source that publishes online only, and local social networks as their more frequent sources of news and information. It is notable that this order of key sources of news and information holds true across all age groups. And perhaps surprisingly, those under the age of 45 are even more reliant on word of mouth, with 47% of this age group saying they rely on word of mouth “often,” versus 28% of those age 45 and above.

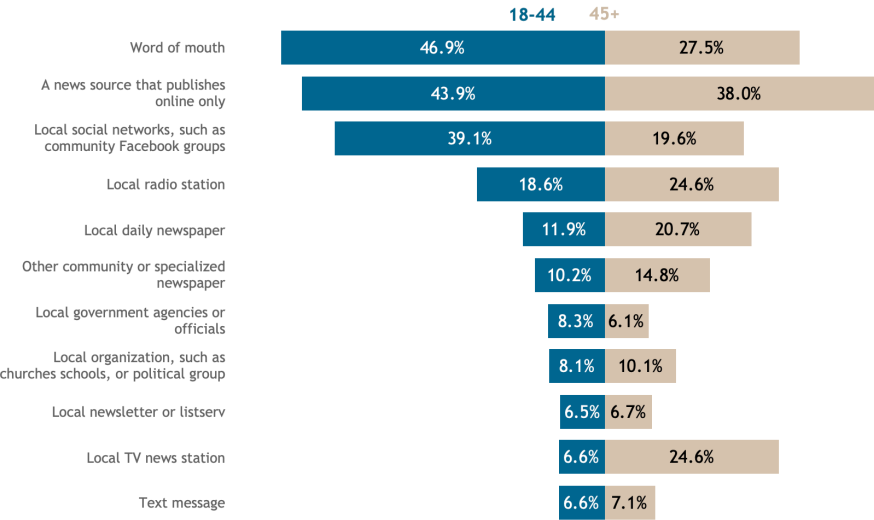
How often do you get local news and information from each of the following types of sources, regardless of whether you access them digitally or not?



In interviews, stakeholders talked about how, in small towns across the state, it is relatively easy for residents to get direct access to elected officials. Because of the small size of communities, people know each other and can get information through these networks of connection. However, for those that are outside of these networks, like immigrant communities in Teton County, it can be hard to break in and get access to critical information. “What I see as one of the biggest weaknesses in the state of Wyoming with the Latino population, which continues to grow in the state, is that there’s really not a statewide radio, TV, film production company for us,” said Dr. Cecelia Aragón, professor of Latino/a Studies and Theater and Dance at the University of Wyoming. “I think it’s just a prime opportunity for a bilingual production company to flourish.”

Freudenthal, the former governor of Wyoming, said that people with more economic power are best served by the current information ecosystem, largely because they have access to more information by word-of-mouth through their networks. “However, these conversations tend to reinforce existing viewpoints and discourage analytical or balanced discussions,” he said. Similarly, Micah Richardson, a Laramie City Council member and associate director of policy at the Wyoming Women's Foundation, said that those “who are already involved and connected to their community are best served by the local news ecosystem, as they are likely to seek out and find the information they need. However, more transient populations, like students or renters, may not feel as connected and thus may not have access to necessary information.”

Those between **18 and 44** are more reliant on word of mouth and say that they “often” use it for local news and information, while those **45 and older** are more reliant on local TV.



Case Study – Information Needs Among Spanish-Speakers in Teton County

Teton County is nestled in the northwest corner of Wyoming, bordering Idaho, and is home to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, as well as resorts such as Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. These attractions bring visitors from across the globe to the area, and residents rely on the service economy. At 14.1%, Teton County has a significant proportion of Hispanic and Latino residents.¹⁷ Additionally, there are native Spanish speakers living across the border in Idaho that work in Teton County, Wyoming.¹⁸

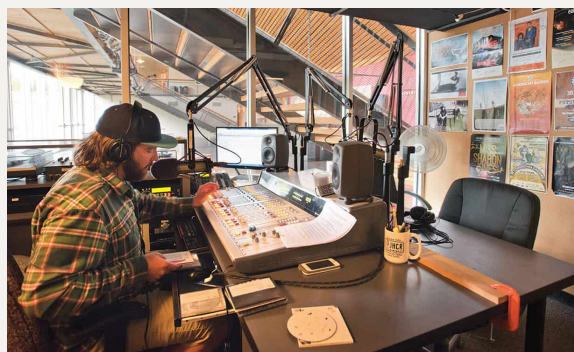


Photo credit : Bradly J. Boner
KHOL 89.1 station manager Zach Zimmerman delivers his biweekly radio show, 7/10 Split, at the station's studio in the Center for the Arts.

This community, which serves as a backbone to the county's service sector, has significant information needs that are largely unmet by news organizations in the area. The local radio station, [89.1 KHOL Jackson Hole Community Radio](#), formerly had a Spanish-language reporter and broadcasts Spanish-language content, but no local reporting. And the digital publication [Buckrail News](#) publishes Spanish-language announcements from local agencies and nonprofits, but does not produce any original reporting in Spanish. In the past four years, two organizations have set out to meet this need.

In 2022, journalist Alicia Unger, a resident of Jackson and formerly a reporter for KHOL, launched Todo TV en Español with Fernando González. Unger has ambitious goals for Todo TV to produce local Spanish-language news programming in Teton County; however, currently Todo TV is limited to daily 30-second news spots that it shares via Instagram. Unger noted that in order to produce more content, Todo TV would require capital to invest in a studio and staff.

¹⁷ "Teton County, Wyoming," United States Census Bureau, https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton_County,_Wyoming?g=050XX00US56039#race-and-ethnicity.

¹⁸ There are also significant Hispanic and Latino populations in Laramie County (15.9%), Carbon County (17.7%), and Sweetwater County (16.8%), many of whom settled in the state for jobs in agriculture, as well as in the railroad, coal, oil, and gas; "QuickFacts

Teton County, Wyoming; Laramie County, Wyoming; Carbon County, Wyoming; Sweetwater County, Wyoming," United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/tetoncountywyoming,laramiecountywyoming,carboncountywyoming,sweetwatercountywyoming/PST045223>.

In 2020, immigrant community leaders recognized that their friends and family were not able to access information and resources about the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response, they came together to form [Voices Jackson Hole](#) to bridge the gap between critical information and their communities. Since then, Voices has grown into an established community organization offering

personalized, first-language communication with immigrant families in the Teton region. Voices used the community health “promotoras” model of trusted one-on-one communication to build out an extensive network of Community Mobilizers from 24 countries who speak 18 languages.¹⁹ These Mobilizers share information with their networks via phone calls, text messaging, and in person, depending on the community members’ preference. And Voices has built revenue streams from government agencies and private companies that want to share information directly with their networks. While not journalism in the traditional sense, Voices is nonetheless providing critical information to immigrant communities in the greater Teton region.

While not journalism in the traditional sense, Voices is nonetheless providing critical information to immigrant communities in the greater Teton region.

¹⁹ “Outreach,” Voices Jackson Hole, <https://www.voicesjh.org/outreach>.

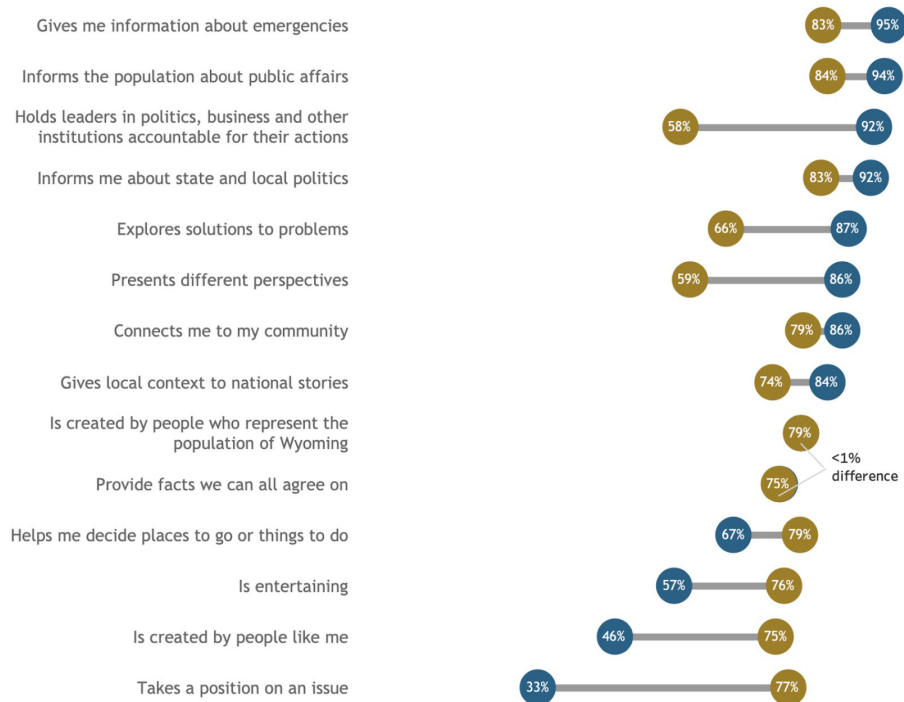


Trust in news

While trust in news is complicated by the political landscape of Wyoming, as discussed in the previous section, residents said that state and local media perform well across a variety of areas. Three quarters of respondents to our WYSAC survey said that local journalists are mostly in touch with their local community. When asked what the most important role of state and local media is, respondents to the WYSAC survey said providing information about emergencies, followed by holding leaders accountable and informing the population about public affairs. Respondents said it is least important that the news take a position on an issue, and this was consistent across all age groups and ideological groups. Respondents also generally agreed it is only slightly important that news is created by people like them or is entertaining.

When asked how well people think the state and local media in Wyoming are doing across a series of roles, respondents generally agreed that the news is doing a poor to fair job of holding leaders accountable, as well as presenting different perspectives or exploring solutions to problems. People agreed state and local media are doing a fair to good job with providing information about emergencies and informing the population about public affairs and about state and local politics. However, respondents were generally tepid with respect to news organizations' fulfillment of their roles, with all roles being ranked somewhere in the general vicinity of “fair” and no roles being ranked very poor or poor, or good or very good, in the aggregate.

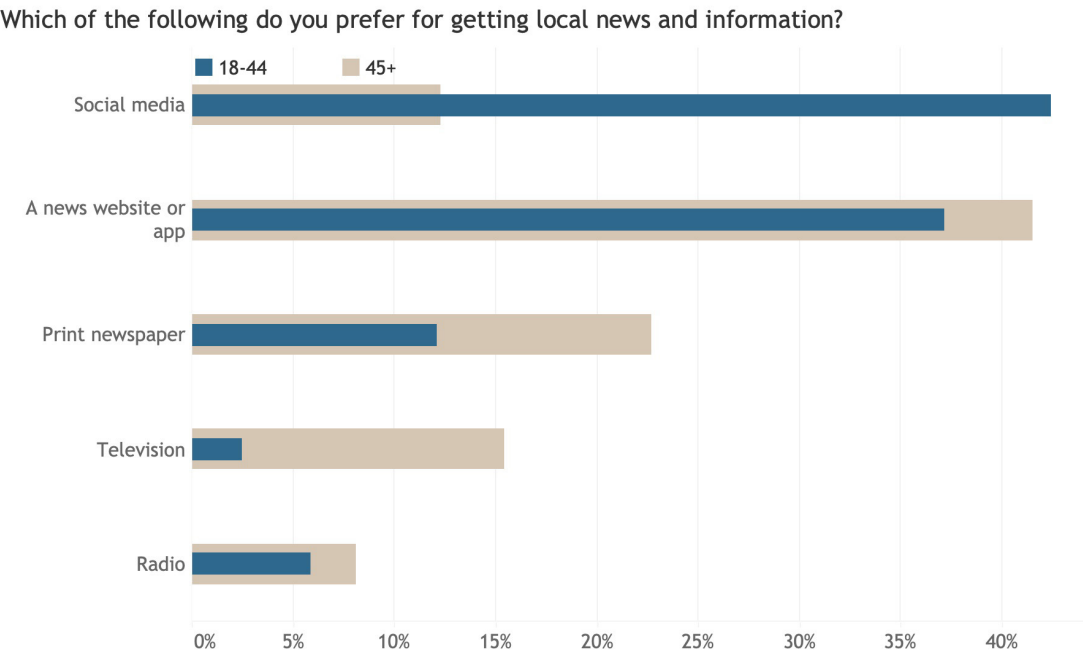
Role of state and local media in Wyoming: Importance to residents compared with perceived performance of media

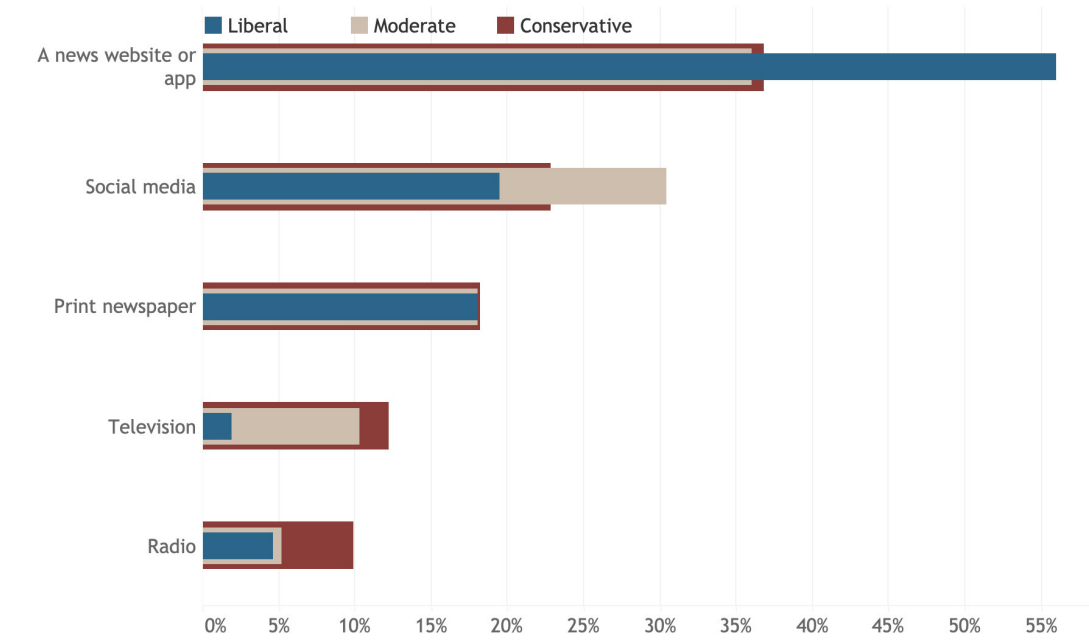


Access to news

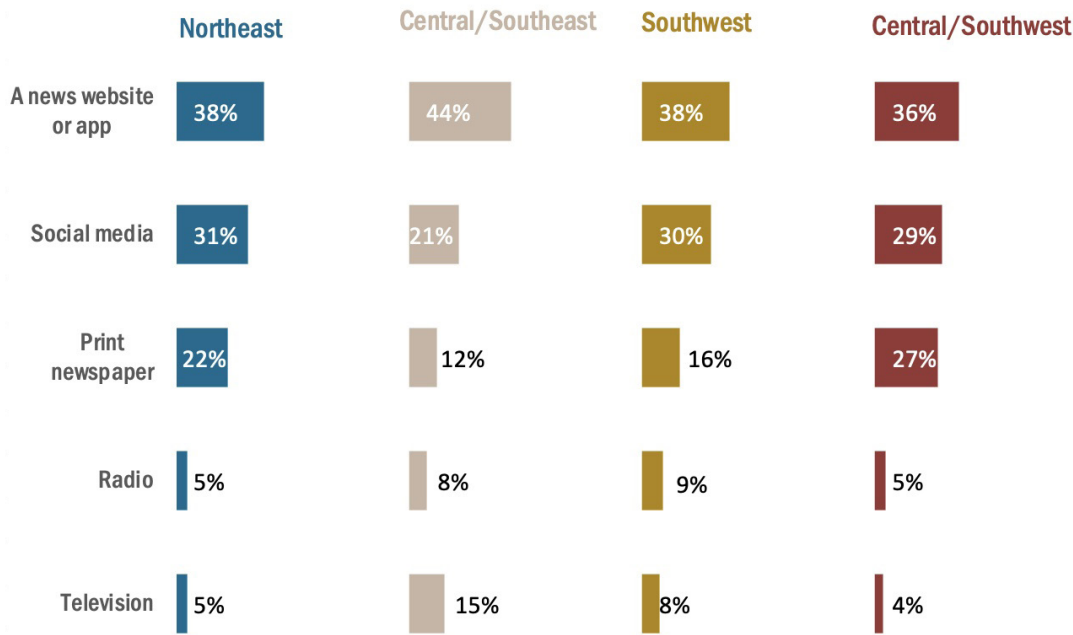
While people across different demographic groups reported getting their news via digital websites, social networks, and more, digital access is still a challenge in Wyoming. Broadband connectivity can be challenging in rural areas. For example, on the Wind River Indian Reservation, there is not a widespread broadband network at this time, according to local stakeholders. Shakespeare also said that “there are places on the [Wind River] Reservation that don’t get cell signal, leaving some people with limited internet access.” And Darcie Hoffland, executive director of the Wyoming Press Association shared that, in addition to broadband challenges, it can be difficult for newspapers to deliver in rural communities, especially during the winter when the highways can be closed.

As suggested in previous sections, there is a mismatch between news consumption habits and preferences, which center on digital content, and news production in the state, which still largely centers on newspapers. Across Wyoming, 40.3% of respondents to our WYSAC survey said they prefer a news website to get local news and information, followed by 25.7% saying social media. Only 17.5% of respondents said they prefer getting local news and information from a print newspaper. People under age 45 were considerably more likely to prefer getting news and information from social media than those over age 45 (42.4% compared with 12.3%), and people 45 and over were considerably more likely to prefer a print newspaper than those 44 and younger.





Which of the following do you prefer for getting local news?

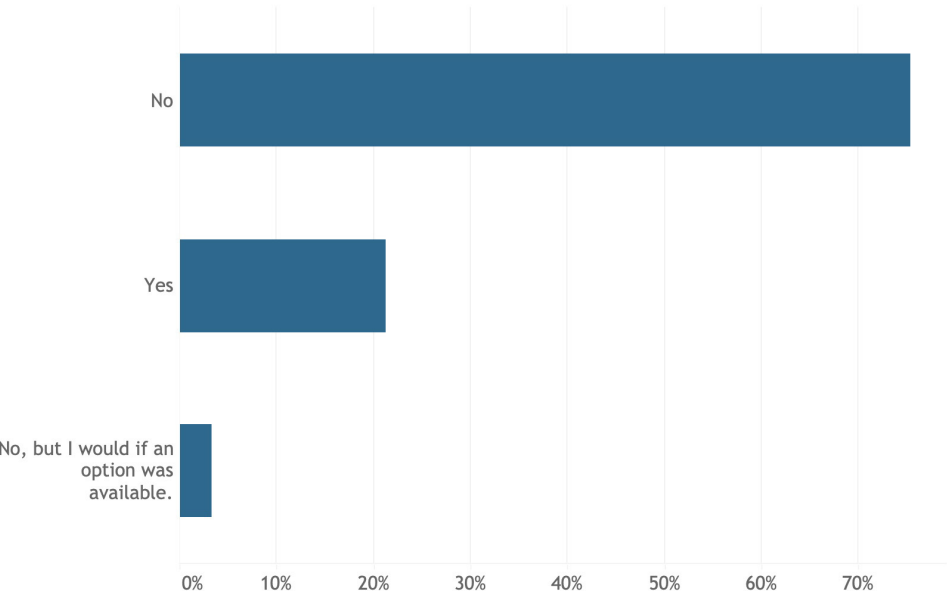


Cost

Three quarters of respondents to the WYSAC survey said they do not pay for access to local news, although this drops to 66.2% for people aged 45 and above. In an interview, Shawn Houck, the publisher of Oil City News, said that he’s noted there is “less willingness to pay for news” than there was in the past.

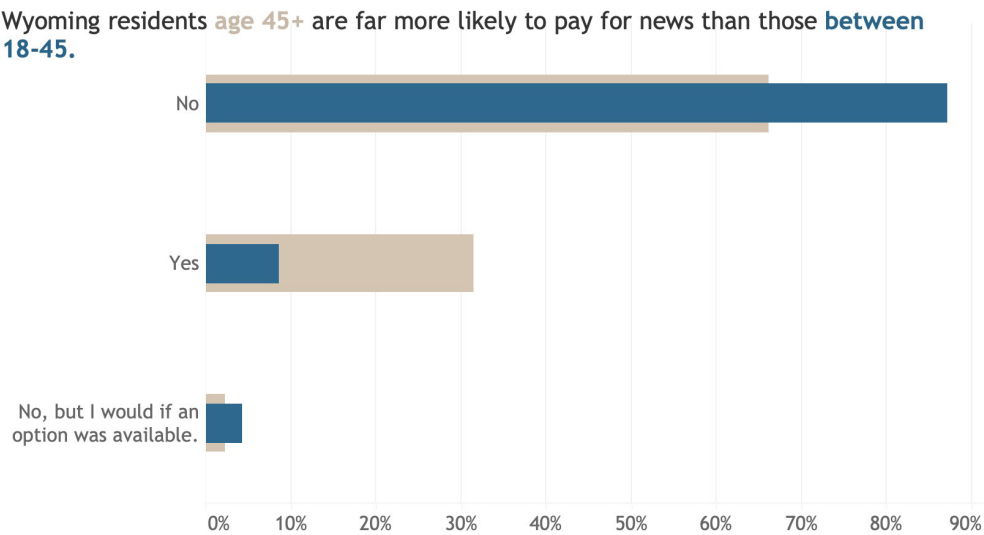
Other stakeholders noted that, regardless of people’s willingness to pay for news, the high cost of local papers can be prohibitively expensive. For example, the Casper Star-Tribune is \$50 per month for three-day-a-week print and full digital subscriptions, or \$20 per month for a digital-only subscription.²⁰ And the local Sheridan Press newspaper is \$150 a year for six-day-a-week print and digital, or \$90 a year for a digital-only subscription.²¹ In the WYSAC survey, nearly one in five respondents (19.2%) said that the cost of local news is too much for their budget. Notably, more than one quarter of respondents aged 44 and below said the cost was a barrier, compared with 16.9% of those 45 and older. “Back some years ago, everyone could afford a subscription,” said Bruce McCormack, former longtime publisher and editor of the Cody Enterprise. “Nowadays, not everybody chooses to spend that \$50 a year or \$300 a year.”

Do you pay for access to local news through a print or digital newspaper subscription?



20 Casper Star-Tribune, accessed October 4, 2024, https://subscriberservices.lee.net/subscriberservices/Content/Payment-PageSingle.aspx?Domain=trib.com&SubscriberLevel=DOP&Return=https%3A%2F%2Ftrib.com%2F&_gl=1*1tz9zm5*_ga*MTA4OD-I3NzAxLjE3MjY3NTkwMTQ.*_ga_097FWBDZCK*MTcyODA3NTQ5MC41LjEuMTcyODA3NTUxNy4wLjAuMTQ3ODU0MDY.&_mather=aad7ea75-9655-400b-9fa8-c56c73118e94&Auth=Y#tracking-source=header&ir=true.

21 “Subscribe,” The Sheridan Press, Accessed October 4, 2024, https://www.thesheridanpress.com/site/forms/subscription_services/.



While sources like WyoFile and Wyoming Public Radio are available for free online, accessing their digital content requires internet connectivity and the ability to navigate the internet, something that can be a challenge for older community members. Houck said that an important barrier to equitable access to news and information is “technology, which can create a digital divide and prevent certain demographic groups from accessing news online.”

Survey results suggest that most residents of Wyoming, across all demographic groups, get significant amounts of their information via local social networks or online groups. In stakeholder conversations, we heard that Facebook is by far the most common social network for news and information. And while many people said they actually wish they could avoid using Facebook, that’s where conversations are happening, and if people aren’t there, they miss out.

Case Study – Meeting residents where they are: Cowboy State Daily’s success with digital news

As cited in this report, both in conversations with Wyomingites and in the results from WYSAC’s survey, we see a shift toward residents increasingly accessing news through digital means. Data also shows that the vast majority of Wyomingites do not pay for a subscription to a local print or digital news source, with stakeholders pointing to unwillingness and/or inability to pay high subscription costs. And many stakeholders expressed to us that they prefer to get news delivered directly to their inboxes.



Cowboy State Daily
Devils tower national monument, Wyoming.

This perhaps explains why Cowboy State Daily, and the outlet’s newsletter in particular, has seen its readership grow over the past few years. For a news outlet a little over five years old, Cowboy State Daily has seen unprecedented growth in readership. The number of subscribers to their daily newsletter, which is delivered to inboxes at 5:15 a.m. every day, ticks up weekly and currently sits at 80,000, according to their website, in a state with roughly 580,000 people.²² In interviews, residents noted that the outlet fills a critical gap in the ecosystem as the only statewide digital daily in Wyoming. In October 2024, Cowboy State Daily launched a daily video broadcast (via its webpage) and a daily radio newscast that it makes available for free to radio stations and for which it sells its own native ads.

In our interviews with residents across the state, Cowboy State Daily came up in nearly every conversation. People commented on the statewide coverage, snappy writing, and catchy headlines, as well as the fact that it is free — in addition to raising concerns that the outlet is biased and does not adhere to standard journalistic practices. The outlet is offering coverage in a format that meets audiences where they are, and interviewees described how the outlet’s features content — such as its Wyoming sunrise photos, Daily Darwin, or Daily Smile content — can serve as an on-ramp for regular readership, even among those who are skeptical of the outlet’s journalistic practices and/or perceived partisanship.

22 “Advertising,” Cowboy State Daily, Accessed Oct. 4, 2024, <https://cowboystatedaily.com/page/advertising/>.

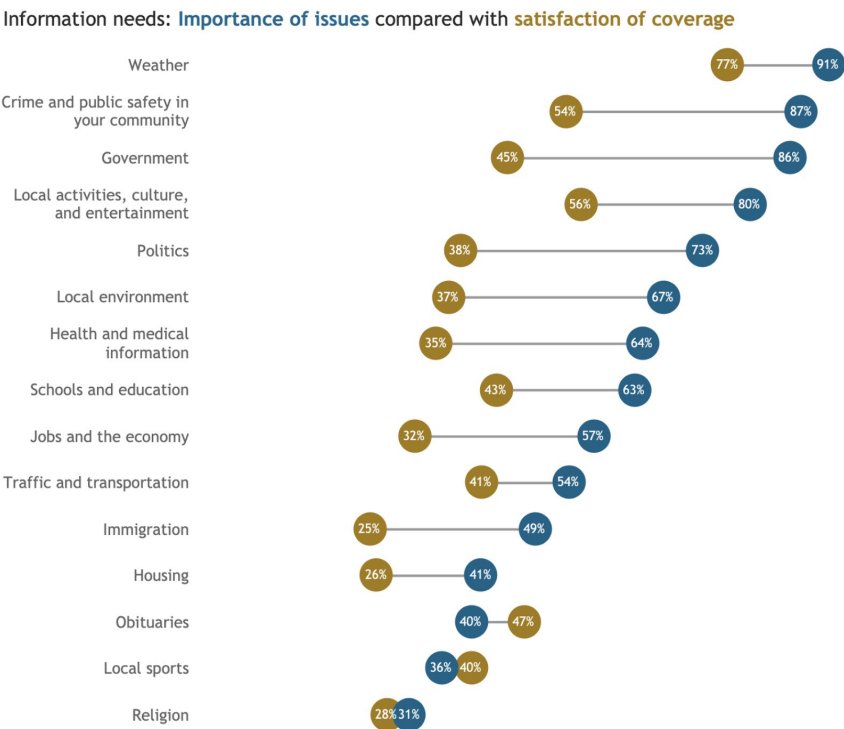
Some interviewees told us that they do not trust Cowboy State Daily's reporting, questioning its journalistic practices. One focus group participant said she thinks they "don't subscribe to the same set of ethics as press association members," but said she still reads the daily newsletter. Others described how content feels designed to maximize clicks. Jimmy Orr, co-founder, minority owner, and editor in chief of Cowboy State Daily, acknowledged that the reporting has been described as clickbait by some but disputed the characterization. "Every one of our stories is well reported, that's a rule," he said.

Other interviewees raised concerns about whether the outlet leans conservative in its coverage. In some cases, interviewees pointed to specific stories or areas of coverage, in others, they expressed concern about the company's ownership structure, with one majority owner who also participates in politics in the state and nationally. However, Orr chalked these critiques up to the organization's success. "What we've noticed is there are attacks, whenever you're successful and you grow and come out of nowhere, you're going to attract a lot of jealousy. That's what we've done. We've been a target," he said. Orr said Cowboy State Daily has been accused of being conservative, and sometimes as liberal, by stakeholders in the state. "What we aim to do is play it straight down the middle, be fair, be a real news organization," he said.

The Casper trust study and our conversations with local stakeholders indicated that news consumers in the state often favor news sources that validate their preexisting beliefs. "People just believe what they want to believe," said Steven Cranfill, the Wyoming Community Foundation's statewide board chair and a retired judge for the Fifth District Court of Big Horn and Park counties, when asked about trust in local media. The state leans conservative — as evidenced by party affiliation, the makeup of the state legislature, and how Wyomingites cast their votes in the 2022 election. Stakeholders described how outlets in the state can sometimes be labeled "liberal," especially for coverage of the environment or natural resources, or even for being a part of the state press association. "Even if 85% of a paper is talking about the fair and the football game, somehow it's still all liberal and therefore can't be trusted," said Rebekah Fitzgerald, executive director of Wyoming Free and a member of the Wyoming Tribune Eagle editorial board.

Information needs

Similar to other national surveys, respondents to WYSAC’s survey said that weather is both the most important or interesting local topic for their daily life and is the one for which they are most satisfied with information available to them. Following weather, the second most important topic for Wyoming residents is crime and public safety in their community, followed by government. And while people feel neutral to satisfied about information on these topics, it's notable that across all topics included in the survey, respondents’ satisfaction with information fell in the range of neutral to somewhat satisfied. This finding supports the hypothesis that across the state there is sufficient, but superficial, information available to residents.



In general, WYSAC survey respondents reported finding local news websites useful in providing information for most topics. Word-of-mouth through friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances was also generally found useful across the board, and local online fora and online search were useful for some topics.

More than half of WYSAC survey respondents (55.7%) said that they find local news websites to be most useful for providing the information they need on crime and public safety in their community, followed by friends, family, colleagues, or acquaintances (40.8%). About half of respondents (49.1%) find local news websites most useful for information on government, followed by online search (43.2%). When it comes to schools and education, more than two-thirds of respondents (67.6%) rely on friends, family, colleagues, or acquaintances, followed by 51.6% who rely on local news websites.

Information Providers

Overview

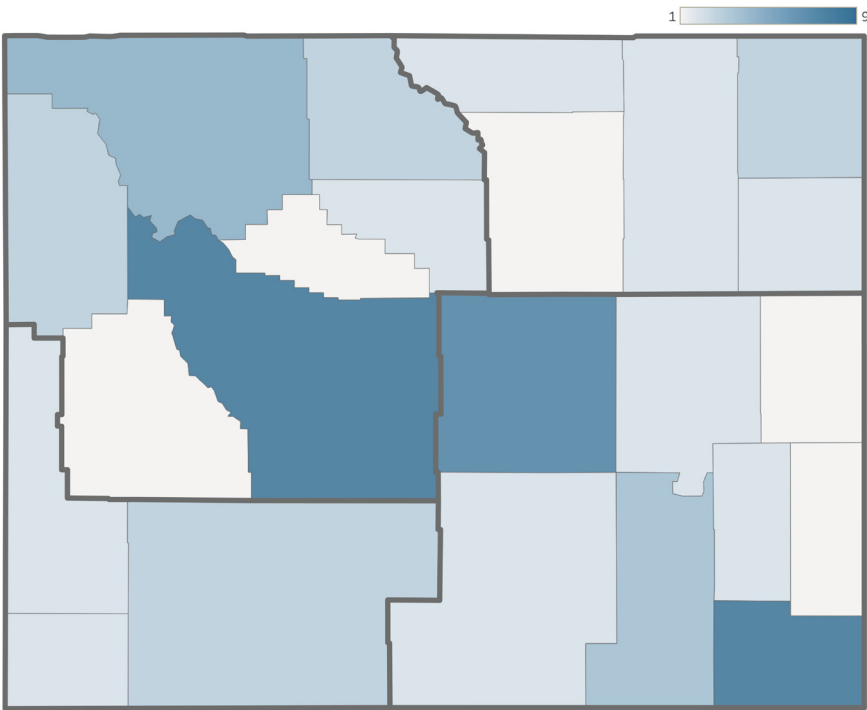
We found 72 news organizations in the state, with a notably large number of publications providing both print and digital products (50.0%), while 18.1% were digital only news sources. We know that we likely did not account for every news source in the state given that the number is in flux — as news providers launch or close — and given that existing lists of news and information providers often do not include non-traditional formats like email newsletters.²³ However, these numbers track with what we heard from local stakeholders. In the WYSAC survey, an incredibly high percentage of respondents said there is local news in their community: at least one local newspaper (97.1%); local radio station (95.6%); local newsletter, blog, or website (95.2%); and local online forum or discussion group (96.8%) in their community. According to Hoffland, executive director of the Wyoming Press

Association, the majority of newspapers in the state are multimedia, putting out a print product in addition to publishing unique content on websites. About half of the organizations we identified are independent for-profit outlets, while 38.9% are owned by companies with media holdings in multiple states or are affiliates of national broadcast chains. The state also has strong public radio stations and the statewide nonprofit outlet WyoFile.

Information Providers	Number	Percentage
Number of Organizations	72	
Population per Organization	8,011	
Medium		
Digital only (including email newsletters)	13	18.1%
Print and digital (newspapers, alt weeklies, monthly magazines)	36	50.0%
Print only (newspapers, alt weeklies, monthly magazines)	2	2.8%
Radio Stations	11	15.3%
Television Stations	10	13.9%
Organization Type		
Independent For-Profit	38	52.8%
National Broadcast Chain	13	18.1%
Newspapers with corporate ownership	15	20.8%
Nonprofit	1	1.4%
Public Media	3	4.2%
Community Media		
African American / Black	0	
Hispanic / Latino	1	
Asian / Asian American	0	
Indigenous / Native American	3	

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

23 We searched databases and resources from the State of Local News Project, the Center for Community Media at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, and local broadcast affiliate lists.



Two organizations provide statewide coverage. Map quadrants correspond to regional groupings used for analysis of the WYSAC survey (clockwise from top left): central west/northwest, northeast, central east/southeast, and southwest.

Over the past year and a half, WyoFile has been moving “more toward a daily news operation,” said Matthew Copeland, chief executive and editor of WyoFile, and they have a six-day-a-week newsletter containing news content and commentary. However, they don’t have a night desk and aren’t necessarily interested in providing the kind of breaking crime and public safety coverage, for example, typical of a traditional daily. In 2022, WyoFile hired Joshua Wolfson, former editor in chief of the Casper Star-Tribune, to serve as managing editor. “WyoFile has made a deliberate decision to do more comprehensive coverage than they would have a few years ago,” Wolfson said. When Wolfson started at the outlet in 2023, they had one or two news items a day, and now they have three to five. Even so, they are not covering things like weather or sports in the way the Casper Star-Tribune did, he said.

WyoFile was founded in 2008, with a mission to recenter facts in Wyoming public discourse and ensure access to critical civic news.²⁴ Another major part of WyoFile’s work is supporting the broader news ecosystem in the state. “There are too few of us as it is,” Copeland said. The outlet thinks about how to be supportive and help organizations that are small or under-resourced throughout the state, he said.

24 “About,” WyoFile, Accessed October 4, 2024, <https://wyofile.com/about/>.

	Independent for-profit	National broadcast chain	Newspapers with corporate ownership	Nonprofit	Public media
Digital only	13.9%			1.4%	
Print and digital	29.2%		20.8%		
Print only	2.8%				
Radio	6.9%	5.6%			2.8%
Television		12.5%			1.4%

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

Wyoming has just one statewide digital daily, Cowboy State Daily, which was founded in 2019 and has grown to be an organization of 10 to 15 full-time employees, plus additional freelancers across the state. Jimmy Orr — co-founder, minority owner, and editor in chief of Cowboy State Daily — credits much of the outlet’s early growth to the pandemic and Wyomingites’ need for breaking news. The paper originally started out as a nonprofit, but the 501(c)(3)’s assets were purchased by a Wyoming investor in 2022, and Cowboy State restarted as a for-profit with a majority owner. The associated influx of cash allowed Cowboy State Daily to ramp up reporting and coverage. Orr says that Cowboy State’s main delivery mechanism is a free daily newsletter that goes out every morning at 5:15 a.m. with ten stories from across the state.

While the Casper Star-Tribune was formerly the statewide daily print paper of record, it no longer plays that role in the ecosystem. The outlet decreased its number of days in print during the pandemic and currently prints only three days a week, and several of the people we spoke with described “atrophy” of the organization over the past few decades. Dale Bohren, former publisher of the Star-Tribune, said that when he started at the paper, they had 137 people on staff. When he left, there were less than 30. And Wolfson, the former editor in chief, said they had a newsroom of around 40 when he started in 2007 and that, to the best of his knowledge, there are now only 11.²⁵ The national newspaper group Lee Enterprises has owned the paper since 2002. Stakeholders outside of the media industry also spoke to challenges. Megan Bratton, the PR and marketing manager for the Natrona County Library, described challenges with figuring out who to reach out to at the Star-Tribune for coverage of events but said they appear to have become more active locally in the last few months. Other interviewees wondered how the paper would continue growing subscribers for its paywalled digital content when other digital news sources covering the area do not have a paywall.

Similarly, the Wyoming Tribune Eagle, based in the capital city of Cheyenne, has faced shrinking resources in the time since managing editor Brian Martin joined the staff in October 1998. Though he started in a newsroom of 26 full-time journalists, including a copy desk, graphic editor, and two photographers, the paper now runs on a staff of nine, one of whom is a part-time worker logging in from Missouri. “My standards of what used to be minimum local content in the paper just continues to slide because I’ve been to the point where I had one news reporter in my newsroom — I had that many openings,” Martin

25 At the time of writing in September 2024, the Casper Star-Tribune’s website lists a newsroom staff of 10. “Contact Staff,” Casper Star-Tribune, Accessed Oct. 4, 2024, <https://trib.com/contact/staff/>.

said. When Martin started at the paper, its circulation hovered around 22,000, he said; today the Wyoming Press Association reports a combined print and digital circulation of just under 4,000 for the outlet based in the state's most populous city. The Tribune Eagle is owned by Adams Publishing Group, which also owns several others along the I-80 corridor.

There are a number of daily, digital-only news organizations covering local communities in Wyoming, such as Oil City News, SweetwaterNow, County 10, County 17, and Buckrail, and according to Houck, publisher of Oil City News, in some counties, they are the most significant sources of information in these communities. "We provide local news that people can't get elsewhere, filling a crucial gap in the local news ecosystem," Houck said. However, Houck said they face a significant challenge in that they cannot join the Wyoming Press Association as full members or the Wyoming Association of Broadcasters, meaning they are unable to participate fully in networks of publishers across the state.²⁶ The state also has some local news in non-traditional formats, like the Substack-based Laramie Reporter. Many interviewees and focus group participants described how they see their communities rely heavily on social media, and Facebook in particular, for news.

Backbone support

In local news ecosystems across the U.S., those that are making strides to meet community information needs and develop new models of sustainability are often bolstered by strong backbone institutions that can acquire and (re) distribute resources, provide capacity building and training as needed, coordinate stakeholders, and catalyze editorial collaboration. In Wyoming, there has not been a backbone organization supporting news and information providers with resources, capacity building, training, funding, and industry research. The Wyoming Local News Fund is poised to play this role in the ecosystem.

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While there is little to no editorial collaboration or backbone support, the ecosystem does have significant cross-publishing, both through the Wyoming Press Association's newswire as well as through direct agreements, like those between Oil City News, County 10, and Buckrail.

²⁶ Digital-only publications can join the Wyoming Press Association as associate members, accessing the newswire and participating in WPA activities.

The Wyoming Press Association has a statewide wire service for members, the Wyoming News Exchange, but others can also apply for exceptions to contribute to and pull from this wire. Monthly fees range from \$75 to \$150, according to Hoffland. WyoFile also works to support the news ecosystem, doing deep reporting and making the content available for free through the Wyoming Press Association, of which it is an associate member. WyoFile also co-reports and co-publishes stories with other publications in the state when those outlets don't have the bandwidth or capacity to report a story alone. Wolfson said they keeps tabs on how many articles other outlets use from WyoFile, and the numbers have gone up substantially. While they might have had 440 to 450 stories republished in a given quarter, the same number of papers are now republishing closer to 650 in a quarter, suggesting local papers are needing a bigger supplement to fill pages, he said.

While the Wyoming Press Association provides support and advocates for the state's 40 legal newspapers,²⁷ full membership is not open to other kinds of news outlets, as interviewees expressed, though digital-only publications can join as associate members. And, according to Copeland, the association's focus on protecting papers' revenue from legals has led them to forsake other important issues, including fighting for free press protections like a state shield law. And while the association's newswire is undoubtedly a benefit to news organizations that need to provide daily content for their audiences, Wyoming residents said in interviews and focus groups that they were skeptical of paying for subscriptions to outlets where a significant portion of content is republishing from sources like the AP or Wyoming Press Association wires.

Press freedom

Wyoming is one of ten states without a shield law protecting reporters' privilege, which stakeholders noted leaves journalists feeling vulnerable.²⁸ The state also lacks legal precedent that could protect reporters' privilege — the state has no “reported case decisions establishing a reporter's privilege under the state constitution or statutory law,” according to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.²⁹

The Wyoming Press Association works on issues of press freedom in the state. Hoffland said that the association often hears from newspapers about issues they're facing, including pressure for journalists to turn over notes from reporting to public officials. She said that requesting access to public records can be prohibitively

27 Legal newspapers publish public notices. In Wyoming, legal newspapers are defined in law as “published at least once a week for a minimum of 52 consecutive weeks and have a paid circulation of at least five hundred (500) and that it be a newspaper of general circulation, and that it must hold and produce a periodical mailing permit.” “About Us,” Wyoming Press Association, WyoPress.org, accessed Oct. 4, 2024, <https://www.wyopress.org/site/about.html>.

28 “Protecting Sources and Materials,” Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, Accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.rcfp.org/category/protecting-sources-and-materials/>.

29 “Wyoming: Reporter's Privilege Compendium,” Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, Accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.rcfp.org/privilege-compendium/wyoming/#:~:text=Wyoming%20has%20no%20state%20shield,information%20in%20a%20civil%20case.>

expensive for newspapers. She also said there have been instances of journalists, and especially women, facing intimidation from people who had obtained press pass credentials and who have a blog or a podcast.

The [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#), which maintains a database of press freedom incidents, lists just one in Wyoming from January 2020 through August 2024. In February, a photojournalist on assignment for WyoFile was allegedly threatened and grabbed by a state representative while taking photos of the first day of the legislative session.³⁰

Interviewees also described challenges with public records access. Copeland noted that Wyoming was ranked 50th out of 50 states for public access to information in a 2015 state integrity investigation by The Center for Public Integrity.³¹ It often falls to WyoFile to sue for access to information, Copeland said.

“I appreciate the openness of many elected officials in Laramie who are generally willing to give me interviews and are not overly aggressive when I file records requests,” said Jeff Victor, owner and editor in chief of The Laramie Reporter and part time reporter at WYPR. “Some are better than others. Law enforcement agencies are particularly cagey about what they release. But in general I know I have an easier time accessing elected officials, meetings, records and government communications than some journalists do elsewhere.” Other stakeholders agreed that it can be difficult to access information for reporting across the state.

For those reporting in Native American and Indigenous communities on the reservation, there are added challenges around press freedom. Shakespeare said that law enforcement on the reservation is handled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a federal agency, thus requiring news organizations to make Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for information such as arrest records.

Shrinking resources

While Wyoming still has a significant number of local newspapers and other media outlets across the state, all stakeholders agreed that the resources available for these organizations are shrinking with time. According to interviewees, this is a result of both declining advertising revenue and changes in ownership that result in a shifting incentive structure — where profit for a corporate ownership group outweighs the community service mission that might have ruled under previous periods of individual or family ownership. Stakeholders in the

30 “Photographer grabbed by Wyoming state representative on first day of session,” U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, Published Feb. 12, 2024, <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/all-incidents/photographer-grabbed-by-wyoming-state-representative-on-first-day-of-session/>.

31 The Center does not appear to have conducted a similar, more recent analysis; Brielle Schaeffer, “Wyoming gets F grade in 2015 State Integrity Investigation,” The Center for Public Integrity, Published November 9, 2015, <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/state-politics/state-integrity-investigation/wyoming-gets-f-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation/>.

media sector said that they are stretched thin and unable to cover every story they'd like to. "The biggest pressure is how to make enough money to be profitable for our owners and fund the journalism that we want to do," said Martin, managing editor of the Wyoming Tribune Eagle. Orr said he thinks Wyoming is a news desert, pointing to the impact of national media holding companies buying outlets in the state. News organizations throughout the state aren't what they used to be, said Orr, who grew up in the state. Chains and hedge-fund ownership have decimated the news industry, leading to atrophy of community relationships in service of a company's bottom line, he said.

Scale is a major challenge for news and information providers in Wyoming, both due to the geographic size of the state and its small population. Wyoming is not considered a standalone media market because it is too small, Copeland said, and this issue is magnified at the local level. "What's the model where a working-class, 7,000-person town can support a robust newsroom?" Copeland asked. Furthermore, given the large size of the state, there can be significant distances between

communities, even within the same county, making it difficult for one local reporter to cover stories in more than one town in the same day. Even for statewide outlets like WyoFile or Cowboy State Daily that have reporters distributed across the state, this remains a challenge. "It costs a lot of money to get folks up and down the road to an important story," Copeland said. Similarly, Orr said, "We put a lot of miles on our cars."

"What's the model where a working-class, 7,000-person town can support a robust newsroom?"

Matthew Copeland,
Chief executive and editor, WyoFile

In interviews and focus groups, we consistently heard that there is a lack of understanding of the model of nonprofit journalism. For example, residents said they rely on and respect WyoFile, the only nonprofit outlet in Wyoming, but that in many cases people did significant work to understand the business model after initial skepticism. They also equated WyoFile's business model with that of Cowboy State Daily, a for-profit organization with a single large investor.

Local funders we spoke with value the importance of local news and information; however, their focus tended to be on service delivery and direct access for things like education, food insecurity, housing, environmental issues, and more.

Pipeline

Many interviewees in the journalism industry described how the state does not have a strong pipeline. While young journalists may start their careers in the state, they typically don't stay, resulting in frequent staff turnover, understaffing, and a dearth of experienced reporters in many newsrooms.

Wolfson said when he began his career in the state in 2007, a given newsroom had a more balanced mix of up-and-coming reporters and late-career journalists who had developed institutional knowledge and a deep understanding of the culture of the state over decades of working and living in Wyoming. “Now I think you're going to find you might have one of those people in a newsroom — or sometimes not at all. You might have newsrooms where the most experienced person in the room is 18 months into a career, or 24 months into a career,” Wolfson said. “I think that is really notable when it comes to understanding what's important for a community because, looking back, I would say that I don't know that I would have figured that out a year into my career, as opposed to now being here 17 years, raising a couple children here, all of those sorts of things that go along with it.”

Interviewees described many reasons why the state does not have a robust pipeline. Some explained how many news organizations aren't able to pay competitive salaries, and talented staffers often leave for jobs in other locations where salaries are higher or for other industries, such as public relations. Even when it comes to people from the state, the Wyoming ecosystem struggles to retain early-career reporters, according to interviewees. “People born and raised in Wyoming often don't return to be journalists in Wyoming, either because they choose different career paths or they don't see Wyoming as a place to start their careers,” said Houck, the publisher of Oil City News. Hoffland of the Wyoming Press Association said that, in her experience, journalism graduates are moving out of state to look for more lucrative jobs. In general, she said that journalism is “a work of love, hard work, and people have to be motivated for pure interest and mission.”

“People born and raised in Wyoming often don't return to be journalists in Wyoming, either because they choose different career paths or they don't see Wyoming as a place to start their careers.”

Shawn Houck,
Publisher, Oil City News

Within the state, larger outlets or those based in larger population centers often outcompete smaller, more rural outlets when it comes to attracting talent. Fitzgerald, executive director of Wyoming Free and a member of the Wyoming Tribune Eagle editorial board, described how early-career journalists that do stay sometimes leave jobs at smaller, rural newsrooms in the state in order to move to outlets in an area seen as a more desirable place to live as a young person. And of course, pay is another factor, with larger or statewide outlets often able to offer higher wages. Orr emphasized in our interview that it is critical to treat staff well and pay competitive salaries in order to keep them in the state, on staff, and eager to report stories when the news breaks, even when that's on nights, weekends, and holidays. But as interviewees emphasized, scale is a challenge in the state, and it can be costly for small outlets to provide wide coverage for a relatively small audience.

Interviewees who do not work in the journalism and media industry highlighted ways in which they have noticed issues with the pipeline as news consumers, including a sense that stories are not always deeply reported, in part because local outlets in their area rely heavily on interns or journalists who are new to the job, and that outlets with out-of-state ownership struggle to retain staff because decision-makers at holding companies are not in touch with local Wyoming communities.

Indigenous media and tribal affairs reporting

The Wyoming news ecosystem includes a few news and information providers specifically serving Indigenous and Native American communities in the state. News and information sources for and by Indigenous and Native American communities include the Wind River News, a weekly paper that covers news from the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes on the Wind River Indian Reservation, the Eastern Shoshone Bulletin, and the Northern Arapaho Tribe’s Facebook page. Other news sources throughout Wyoming, and particularly those in Fremont County, cover news on the Wind River Reservation occasionally. [Wyoming Public Media](#) reports that it serves the Greater Wind River Reservation, according to their website. The organization says that “our reporters tell the stories of the Reservation, focusing on issues that affect the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes. We also take stories from our Mountain West Bureau reporters who tell the stories of Native Americans beyond our borders. They reflect the lives of people on the Reservation and beyond, their issues, history, hopes, and ambitions.”³² However, while there is some coverage by general news outlets, Indigenous and Native American communities still identify gaps in what kinds of stories are told and may have low levels of trust in these news sources.

Shakespeare, a resident of Wyoming and an enrolled member of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe who has served in a number of elected and appointed government positions in his career, said that media in Wyoming, but especially national media, tend to report on negative stories within Indigenous and Native American communities, such as crime. Shakespeare said that the Wind River News “tries to get different stories from the local community.” “Other than that, negative stories tend to dominate the headlines,” he said. He also described challenges media outlets face in covering tribal affairs, including describing concepts around laws and governance structures on reservations, tribal sovereignty, nuances around land rights, and how federal, state, and tribal laws intersect. This is difficult for reporters to explain in a simple story, Shakespeare said, and oversimplification in reporting is an issue. “If you don’t report with nuances, you kind of lose aspects of what the story really is,” he said.

32 “Tribal News,” Wyoming Public Media, Accessed Oct. 4, 2024, <https://www.wyomingpublicmedia.org/tribal-news>.

Shakespeare described gaps in reporting on Indigenous and Native American communities, including a lack of reporting on topics that are important to those communities like poverty, access to healthcare, education, and social justice issues.

“If you don’t report with nuances, you kind of lose aspects of what the story really is.”

Leslie Shakespeare,
*Enrolled member of the Eastern
Shoshone Tribe*

Needs

Many interviewees identified a need for more funding in Wyoming’s local news and information ecosystem. Given the challenges around the pipeline — particularly when it comes to attracting and retaining talent — it’s critical that news organizations have the funding to pay competitive wages. Newsrooms also need funding to expand their teams, as interviewees described shrinking staff at many legacy and small outlets and how that has impacted the depth and breadth of coverage across the state. Greater resources for building capacity could also help organizations with long-term sustainability, allowing them to hire staff focused on diversifying revenue or community engagement.

Data from the Media Impact Funders and Candid database shows that news organizations in the state have received \$1.1 million in philanthropic dollars³³ from January 2021 through summer 2024.³⁴ WyoFile was the largest recipient for this time period, with \$622,125,³⁵ according to the database, followed by Wyoming Public Radio (\$233,508), Jackson Hole Community Radio (\$148,724), and Wyoming PBS (\$127,099).³⁶ The Community Foundation of Jackson Hole was the largest grantmaker, with \$688,721 in grants to local news organizations in the state.³⁷

John Freeman, founder and former president and CEO of the Wyoming Community Foundation, suggested that local news organizations adopt a model similar to the Colorado Media Project to “engage reporters in discussions together

33 Foundation Maps, by Candid, Media Impact Funders, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://maps.foundationcenter.org/#/map/?subjects=M5000,M1000&popgroups=all&years=2021,2022,2023,2024&location=5843591&excludeLocation=0&geoScale=ADM2&layer=recip&boundingBox=-114.9-3896484374999,40.58058466412761,-100.17333984375,45.398449976304086&gmOrgs=all&recipOrgs=all&tags=all&keywords=&pathwaysOrg=&pathwaysType=&acct=media&typesOfSupport=all&transactionTypes=all&amtRanges=all&minGrantAmt=0&maxGrantAmt=0&gmTypes=all&recipTypes=all&minAssetsAmt=0&maxAssetsAmt=0&minGivingAmt=0&maxGivingAmt=0&andOr=0&includeGov=1&custom=all&customArea=all&indicator=&dataSource=oecd&chartType=trends&multiSubject=1&listType=g-m&windRoseAnd=undefined&zoom=7>.

34 It should be noted that this data likely does not capture every grant to a news organization in the ecosystem as it is based on Candid’s scraping of organizational 990s and coding of grants. 990s are often delayed and show up in the database years later, the coding is imperfect, and there are often missing organizations, grants, and donations. However, this is the only publicly available source of data.

35 A large portion of WyoFile’s revenue in 2021 is a \$200,000 investment from the American Journalism Project intended specifically to support the organization to develop its operations and revenue generating capacity.

36 Foundation Maps, by Candid, Media Impact Funders.

37 Foundation Maps, by Candid, Media Impact Funders.

with citizens about the issues they report on.” The Wyoming Local News Fund and Press Forward Wyoming have the potential to develop into strong backbone infrastructure for the ecosystem.

The Wyoming ecosystem also has few outlets serving BIPOC communities in the state. Notably, we identified only one Spanish-language effort to offer local coverage based in the state (see the description of Todo TV in the Information Needs section of this report). Additional research on the needs of Hispanic and Latino news consumers could help identify where those communities are getting news, how best to meet them where they are, and how to fill gaps in the local news landscape in the state.

The state also has few outlets dedicated to reporting by and for Indigenous and Native American communities. More research is needed to understand community information needs in tribal communities, as well as what kind of support existing news and information sources need. Interviewees also highlighted a need for greater depth and breadth in stories about Indigenous and Native American communities given a current sense that local and national media is often focused on negative stories, particularly crime.

Stakeholders also identified a need for more reporting geared towards other communities, including LGBTQ+ communities in Wyoming.

Civic Engagement

Research has demonstrated that access to high quality local civic news can lead to increased civic engagement.³⁸ With this in mind, we considered measures of civic engagement in Wyoming and spoke to residents about what they see in their communities and across the state.

Wyoming's percentage of registered eligible voters and voter turnout for the most recent even-year election — the 2022 midterms — both fall below that of the U.S. by several points. While 69.1% of all eligible U.S. voters were registered in 2022, only 62.8% of eligible Wyoming voters were registered.³⁹ And only 49.0% of voting-age Wyoming citizens cast a ballot in the midterm, compared to 52.2% of all voting-age U.S. citizens.⁴⁰ Researchers for the Cost of Voting Index (COVI), which analyzes state election laws and policies and assigns a value to each U.S. state based on ease or difficulty of voting there, gave Wyoming a score of 1.19 in 2022, placing it in the bottom quarter of U.S. states (in the Index, higher scores represent more restrictive voting laws and policies compared to lower scores).⁴¹

Disaggregated data from the 2022 Harvard Cooperative Election Study provides some insight into non-voting metrics for civic engagement in the state. Data shows that participation is mixed across different activities. Notably, the CES is a national survey, and only 96 Wyomingites responded to the CES survey questions we drew on for this report, so a larger sample may be needed to better understand non-voting civic engagement in the state. The proportion of Wyomingites who said they had attended a local political meeting like a school board or city council meeting (14.6%) in the past year and the proportion who had contacted a public official in the past year (31.3%) are much higher than the overall U.S. numbers (9.1% and 22.7%, respectively).⁴² However, the percentage who said they had donated to a candidate, campaign, or political organization in the past year falls several percentage points below the U.S. number — 14.6% of surveyed Wyomingites compared to 20.6% of all surveyed U.S. residents.⁴³ The percentage of surveyed Wyomingites who said they had attended a political protest, march, or demonstration in the past year (5.2%) falls about one percentage point below the U.S. number, and the percentage who said they'd worked for a candidate or campaign in the past year (5.2%) is about one percentage point above the U.S. number.⁴⁴ And while some of these numbers show

38 Impact Architects local news and information literature review, updated January 2024: <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://airtable.com/appwQS8SaNf7e1QZG/shrTwBbz70SScpEA/tblnK848XlkzulvV4&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1729024196567067&usg=AOvVaw2nkhjgfhqLpRSNbhYKILE>

39 "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>.

40 United States Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022."

41 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>.

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

43 Schaffner, Ansolabehere, and Shih, "Cooperative Election Study Common Content, 2022."

44 Schaffner, Ansolabehere, and Shih, "Cooperative Election Study Common Content, 2022."

Wyomingites may be participating at higher rates than U.S. residents overall when it comes to certain forms of civic engagement, the U.S. numbers do not set a high bar in many cases, so surpassing them does not necessarily indicate widespread and robust participation.

Stakeholders had diverse perspectives on civic engagement in their communities. In general, people tended to agree that those who have the strongest positions, ideologically speaking, are often the most outspoken in community fora. They suggested that this seemingly polarized public debate to push out those with more moderate views.

Many of the Wyoming residents we spoke to described how civic engagement is generally low in their communities, but people engage with specific issues or controversial topics. Richardson, the Laramie City Council member and the associate director of policy at the Wyoming Women's Foundation, said that, more often than not, there are no members of the public at council meetings. When there is engagement, it's usually centered around controversial issues, such as downtown housing and parking, she said. Even so, these kinds of issues typically draw the attention of directly impacted parties, like downtown business owners, rather than attracting wider engagement, she explained. Freeman, founder and former president and CEO of the Wyoming Community Foundation, similarly described engagement only among those impacted. "I think there's relatively little of that, except by special interest groups," he said. "I don't think plain citizens — we are so satisfied with life, that we are not taking any responsibility for making sure that life is that satisfactory for everybody." Shakespeare said civic engagement was highly issue-based and often driven by news coverage and information about the topic. "The more people know about an issue, the more they're willing to engage with it," he said.

Many of the Wyoming residents we spoke to described how civic engagement is generally low in their communities, but people engage with specific issues or controversial topics.

Regarding state government, Jim Cowser, executive director of the Central Wyoming Counseling Center, described good access to officials, indicating that there may be opportunities and systems in place for local communities to get more involved on that level. The legislature has open forums and holds meetings with time for public comment, he said. He's testified during public comment and had follow-up meetings to help redraft legislation related to behavioral health. "I've never lived or worked in a state where you can walk into the capital building and just ask to talk to the governor, and it really happens," he said.

However, many interviewees described how a lack of clear information about how to get involved, the existence of information bubbles or echo chambers, and the importance of meeting basic needs first often inhibits participation.

Victor of The Laramie Reporter said he's seen participation increase since the pandemic, but local governing bodies have persistent issues with effective communication. He described how — despite multiple notices about preceding meetings — residents will sometimes only show up to the final meeting about an issue and will then accuse the governing body of rushing to a decision. One of the main barriers to civic engagement in his community is a lack of knowledge on how to follow local government bodies or bills as they move through the legislature, he explained, and he is working on a series to educate people on how to follow and get involved with major government bodies like the school board and the city council.

Houck of Oil City News pointed to a lack of awareness about meetings as a barrier to participation in civic issues and local decision-making, and attributed this in part to social media algorithms, saying they do not prioritize content like city council coverage. And while he often sees engagement with issues on social media, this does not necessarily translate to participation in public meetings or other community fora.

Kathy Tomassi, board member of the Wyoming Business Council, said she thinks people often form opinions based on incomplete information and do not seek out all the facts about an issue. In focus groups, many Wyomingites expressed how they see issues with misinformation and echo chambers, particularly on social media, where people are presented with or seek out information that validates their existing views. Copeland highlighted how he feels a dearth of information at the local level has led to increased nationalization and “nationalized sloganeering” in local races. When we spoke the day before Wyoming’s primary on August 20, he said that, for many of the races, much of the conversation had nothing to do with local issues, and many local candidates were running on issues over which they had no influence or control. “You can’t have engagement at the local level without factual, verifiable information about what’s going on,” Copeland said.

In focus groups, many Wyomingites expressed how they see issues with misinformation and echo chambers, particularly on social media, where people are presented with or seek out information that validates their existing views.

Shakespeare noted that many people are working to meet their basic needs, so civic engagement is not a priority. Attending public meetings can be low on the priority list when people are trying to get to medical appointments, work, or school, he said, and transportation to meetings or events can be another challenge.

Wyoming's geography can serve as a barrier for some. Given that counties can range more than a thousand square miles, it might be difficult for residents to get to public meetings or other events. While some interviewees said access to meetings has improved since the pandemic given the greater prevalence of virtual options, this is still not universal for all municipalities and for all public meetings. We reviewed the county government websites for each of Wyoming's 23 counties, assessing ease of access to information about local government. While nearly every county listed dates and times for at least county commissioners meetings, 10 did not offer a virtual means of attendance or recordings of previous meetings on their websites. Four counties do not appear to post agendas on their websites ahead of commissioners meetings, meaning residents may not know what issues are on the table ahead of time.⁴⁵ While we know some counties might stream meetings and share other important information on Facebook, we heard from many focus group attendees that they or their friends are not on Facebook and miss information shared on that platform.

While information availability and access can be inconsistent on the county and local level, we did hear of some ways municipal governments have invested in meeting community information needs. Angela Johnson, clerk treasurer for the Town of Meeteetse in Park County, described how Meeteetse has worked to ensure that the community has information about the local government. When she started in 2000, they had a community TV station that provided an easy way for residents to tune into local meetings. While they no longer have the station, she works to promote events on social media and sends out a newsletter, which now includes videos of local meetings. Still, it can be challenging for municipalities to invest in more robust communication, she explained, since it takes time, money, and training on how to best use new technologies. Regarding what resources local governments might need to serve as stronger information providers, Johnson said that training on how to use new technology effectively and efficiently was key. This is especially critical for reaching young people on the platforms they already frequent, she explained.

⁴⁵ This assessment was conducted in July 2024.

Appendix A

Methodology

Impact Architects' Local News and Information Ecosystem Framework was originally developed in 2020, with the goal of creating a freely available toolkit to assess the health of local news and information ecosystems. The original framework relied upon freely available public data in three categories: community, information providers, and the relationship among community and information providers.

This framework was updated in 2023 and 2024, in partnership with the Democracy Fund, with the addition of a fourth category of indicators to assess local civic engagement and democracy, recognizing the importance of accurate local news and information for residents' ability to engage civically and support thriving local democracy.

For this project, we applied this framework to the state of Wyoming. In total, we documented 86 indicators for the ecosystem.

A. Community indicators

In order to document the characteristics of an ecosystem's population, we rely on [U.S. Census Bureau data](#).^{46, 47} We also use the [National Institute for Education Statistics](#)⁴⁸ for both cities and states, as well the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#).⁴⁹

B. Information providers

In order to create an accurate accounting of journalism organizations in an ecosystem, we developed a multistep process to access different databases of local news organizations. Even with this five-part search for local media, there are surely outlets that we did not encounter in our search. Specifically, we could not systematically identify local podcasts, community newsletters, or community oriented social media, such as Facebook groups. And given the dynamic nature of local news, the lists will likely have changed from the time of compilation to the time of publication.

46 "QuickFacts United States," United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>.

47 We include indicators such as population size, age, race and ethnicity, households with a computer, broadband access, formal education levels, median household income, per capita income, and poverty rate.

48 "Search for Schools and Colleges," National Institute for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/>.

49 "Library Search & Compare," Institute of Museum and Library Sciences, <https://www.ims.gov/search-compare>.

For each ecosystem, our search included:

1. [State of Local News Project](#): The State of Local News Project generously shared their lists of information providers for the ten ecosystems included in this research.⁵⁰
2. Broadcast TV: We did a manual search for all statewide [ABC](#), [CBS](#), [NBC](#), [PBS](#), and [Fox](#) affiliate stations, but not their local satellite stations (can also be found using FCC search for cities). We also included local Univision and Telemundo stations when available.
3. Broadcast radio: We manually searched [CPB](#) and [NFCB](#)'s maps and included local broadcast stations.
4. [Center for Community Media](#): We searched CCM's [Asian](#), [Black](#), and [Latino](#) Media Maps and Directories and included outlets in those databases.
5. Stakeholder contributions: We added any outlets mentioned in stakeholder interviews that had not already surfaced through one of the above lists/databases.

We categorized every publication based on three dimensions. First, we noted the primary distribution medium (print only, digital only, print and digital, broadcast television, or radio). Next, we classified outlets by business model (nonprofit, public media, national broadcast chain, newspaper with corporate ownership, or independent for-profit). While we know there are differences between newspaper holding companies — which can include hedge fund ownership, ownership by a large media company like Gannett, or ownership by a smaller regional company — we considered a paper to be a “newspaper with corporate ownership” if the company that owned them had media holdings in multiple states. Finally, we determined if the outlet was community-serving, and if so, which community (African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Asian American, Native American, Hyperlocal, or other specific to the ecosystem).

In order to determine the amount of philanthropic investment in an ecosystem, we relied on the Media Impact Funders and Candid database. This database pulls from foundations' 990's, and as such tends to lag at least one year behind. Given the challenges with this dataset, we looked at philanthropic dollars invested over the previous four years (2021, 2022, 2023, and January through August 2024), as well as the total number of funders and recipients of grants. Finally, we calculated the investment per capita based on the number of residents in an ecosystem.

We also include indicators about press freedom — drawn from [The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#) — assessed according

⁵⁰ We went through the lists of news organizations for each state, checking that listed newsrooms were still operating and removing entries for newsrooms that appeared to have closed permanently since the data was originally collected by the State of Local News Project Team.

to instances of physical intimidation and regulatory incidents, access to legal resources for journalists, and regulatory policy, as well as local institutional accountability.⁵¹

C. Community information needs and trust in media

For this report, in order to document the degree to which residents' information needs are being met by the ecosystem's news and information providers, as well as levels of trust in media, we partnered with the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming.⁵² We drafted questions, making use of previous surveys conducted by Pew, Gallup, and others, and team members from the Wyoming Local Media Fund and Wyoming Community Foundation provided feedback. WYSAC fielded the survey in August 2024. The full survey instrument can be found in Appendix C. Because the survey successfully garnered a representative sample of WY residents, we were able to compare responses among different demographic groups, such as by age, political ideology, and geography, yielding deep insights into trends and differences among residents across WY.

D. Civic engagement and democracy

We use standard civic engagement indicators, such as voter turnout in the most recent even-year election and the percentage of registered eligible voters. To this we added the [Cost of Voting Index \(COVI\)](#),⁵³ which scores the ease or burden of voting by state.

In addition to voter turnout, there is evidence that access to quality local information influences other forms of civic engagement, such as participation in local political meetings or contacting a public official, which we include in this assessment.⁵⁴

II. Community perspectives

We conducted a total 28 interviews with stakeholders (11 led by IA, 4 led by the Wyoming Local News Fund director, and 13 led by a WYCF intern) in July and August, and led five focus groups with participants from the six business districts of the state in September 2024. A full list of interviewees is in Appendix B.

While interviews and focus groups were crucial in providing broader context to the quantitative and qualitative data we collected, as well as in providing a deeper view into some of the trends found in the data, we recognize that they still represent only a small number of perspectives and experiences in each ecosystem.

⁵¹ "The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker," U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/>.

⁵² In previous ecosystem assessments, we relied on the 2019 Pew State of Local News survey results and/or the Knight/Gallup American Views survey. <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/feature/local-news-habits/>.

⁵³ 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>.

⁵⁴ We relied heavily on Harvard's Cooperative Election Study (CES) survey to document local civic engagement. Cooperative Election Study: <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/>.

Appendix B

Interviewees and Focus Group Participants

Interviewees

CC Aragon, Executive Director for the Wyoming Latina Youth Conference and Center at the University of Wyoming; Associate Professor of Latina/o Studies & Theatre and Dance

Dale Bohren, former publisher of Casper Star Tribune

Chris Boswell, former Wyoming state Legislator, former VP for government and community affairs at University of Wyoming

Matthew Copeland, Chief Executive and Editor, WyoFile

Jim Cowser, Central Wyoming Counseling Center, Executive Director

Jenny Craft, Director of Scott Foundation

John Freeman, President and Founder of Wyoming Community Foundation

Dave Freudenthal, Former 31st Gov. of Wyoming

Keith Geis, Former President of Platte Valley Bank

Laura Grott, President, Wyoming Association of Broadcasters

Darcie Hoffland, Executive Director, Wyoming Press Association

Trudi Holthouse, Director of the McMurry Foundation

Shawn Houck, Publisher at Oil City News

Angela Johnson, Meeteetse Clerk/Treasurer

Kim Love, former owner and general manager of Sheridan Media

Brian Martin, Managing Editor, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Bruce McCormack, Retired Editor/Publisher of the Cody Enterprise, Newsroom Coach

Jimmy Orr, Co-founder, minority owner, and executive editor of Cowboy State Daily

Steve Peck, Senior Producer, Wyoming PBS

Micah Richardson, City Council Member, Associate Director of Policy at the Wyoming Women's Foundation

Leslie Shakespeare, Enrolled member, Eastern Shoshone Tribe

Bekah Smith, Director, Wyoming Women's Foundation

Sue Sommers, Artist

Kathy Tomassi, Board Member of the Wyoming Business Council, former WYCF State Board Member

Alicia Unger, Co-founder, Todo TV

Jeff Victor, Owner and editor in chief of The Laramie Reporter, part time reporter at WYPR, Lecturer at UWYO

Jennifer Wilmetti, Public School Educator

Beth Worthen, CEO Natrona Collective Health Trust

Focus group participants

Amy Albrecht

Kathryn Boswell

Megan Bratton

Kellie Clausen

Steven Cranfill

Carl Fisher

Rebekah Fitzgerald

Mary Greene

Scott Henkel

Kayla Mannikko

Rylan O'Bryan

Katie Parrish

Jill Stillwagon

Joshua Wolfson

Isabel Zumel

Appendix C

Wyoming Resident Survey

A survey of Wyoming residents

This survey of Wyoming residents was fielded from July 9, 2024, through August 7, 2024. The survey was designed to gauge public opinion and knowledge on several topics related to local news and journalism.

Questionnaire development

The survey instrument was developed in coordination with the Wyoming Community Foundation and Impact Architects. Once questions were decided upon, the questionnaire was programmed for web administration with Qualtrics, a leading platform for creating and distributing web-based surveys.

Sampling frame, sample design, and sample size

The sampling frame for this survey consisted of all Wyoming residents above the age of 18.

Anticipating a response rate of about 10%, to meet the target number of completed surveys, WYSAC obtained a disproportionately stratified probability sample of 12,000 mailable addresses sufficient to obtain completions from each of the six Wyoming Business Council Regions (East Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and West Central). The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group (Genesys), a leading national vendor specializing in the generation of scientific samples. The sample drew from the U.S. Postal Service delivery sequence file, which included all mailable addresses in Wyoming (both physical and post office boxes).

This sampling frame provided the most complete coverage available, as every household that receives mail had an opportunity to be included in the survey sample. There was no random selection of respondents within households; any adult household member who agreed to participate could complete the survey. Valid email addresses were obtained by MSG and appended to 7,566 sample records during the sampling process.

Mode of data collection

The online (or web) mode was the only option for completing the survey. Each potential respondent was assigned a unique passcode for accessing the survey. The passcode was entered manually upon reaching the login page of the survey, or automatically by clicking a link directly from an email invitation.

The survey administration protocols included the following steps:

- First, an invite message was emailed to all 7,566 individuals with a valid email (resulting in 672 failed/bounced messages). These email invitations explained the purpose and importance of the survey and solicited participation via a personal link. These individuals received their first email invitations on July 9th, 2024. A second reminder email was sent on July 22nd, 2024, to 6,814 individuals who had not yet responded, a third reminder email was sent on July 30th, 2024, to 6,608 individuals who had not yet responded, and a final reminder email was sent on August 5th, 2024 to 6,528 individuals who had not yet responded.
- Second, an invite letter was mailed to all households without a valid email address as well as those who did not respond to initial email invites. A total of 11,786 individuals received one invitation letter (537 individuals who had “bad addresses” did not receive this letter, resulting in 11,249 individuals receiving the letter). This letter was authored and signed by WYSAC on Wyoming Community Foundation letterhead and was sent in stamped first-class envelopes via USPS. It explained the purpose and importance of the survey and solicited participation. The URL address of the online version of the survey and a unique access code were provided, as well as a QR code for direct access through a mobile device. This invite letter went out on July 19, 2024.

A total of 671 respondents completed the survey. When accounting for failed/bounced email addresses and returned USPS mail (672 total bounced email addresses, 537 total “bad addresses”), the resulting response rate was 6.2%.

Frequencies

These frequency tables display a breakdown of region and demographic information for the collected responses. For all questions, “no answer” responses are excluded from the valid percent calculations (where applicable).

Table 1: Wyoming Business Council Region

	Frequency	Valid Percent
East Central	99	14.8%
Northeast	104	15.5%
Northwest	103	15.4%
Southeast	134	20.0%
Southwest	103	15.4%
West Central	128	19.1%
Total Valid	671	100.0%

Table 2: Age Categories

	Frequency	Valid Percent
15-24	39	5.9%
25-34	65	9.9%
35-44	99	15.0%

45-54	90	13.7%
55-64	107	16.2%
65 and older	259	39.3%
Total Valid	659	100.0%
No answer	12	
Total	671	

Table 3: Gender

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	272	42.0%
Female	373	57.6%
Non-binary / third gender	3	0.5%
Total Valid	648	100.0%
No answer	23	
Total	671	

Table 4: Income

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under \$25,000	60	9.9%
\$25,000 to \$50,000	126	20.9%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	217	35.9%
\$100,000 to \$150,000	119	19.7%
\$150,000 to \$200,000	52	8.6%
More than \$250,000	30	5.0%
Total Valid	604	100.0%
No answer	67	
Total	671	

Table 5: Race

	Frequency	Valid Percent
American Indian or Native Alaskan	15	2.3%
Asian	7	1.1%
Black or African American	4	0.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.2%

White	600	91.3%
Multi-racial	12	1.8%
Other	18	2.7%
Total Valid	657	100.0%
No answer	14	
Total	671	

Table 5: Political Leanings

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Very conservative	66	10.2%
Conservative	199	30.8%
Moderate	259	40.0%
Liberal	106	16.4%
Very liberal	17	2.6%
Total Valid	647	100.0%
No answer	24	3.6%
Total	671	

Table 6: Preferred Language

	Frequency	Valid Percent
English	658	99.2%
Spanish	2	0.3%
Other	3	0.5%
Total Valid	663	100.0%
No answer	8	
Total	671	

Wyoming News Survey

Intro: Wyoming Local News Survey

The Wyoming Community Foundation is interested in conducting a survey of Wyoming residents regarding local news and journalism. Survey question topics will include access to news, sources of news, and trust in media.

In this survey, we are going to ask you some questions about local news and information. By this we mean information about events and issues in your local area that involve more than just your friends or family.

The survey should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can end the survey at any time by closing your web browser.

At the survey's end, you may opt to be included in the raffle drawing for one of two new iPads.

There are no foreseeable risks to this study beyond feeling uncomfortable with answering survey questions about news in Wyoming, which would only result in minimal discomfort that is no greater than everyday conversations and interactions with others. There are no direct or indirect benefits beyond critical reflection and self-assessment about own's feelings, experiences, and opinions about news and journalism in Wyoming.

We thank you in advance for your participation. Your participation and response to any survey questions is voluntary. Completing this survey indicates you have given your consent to participate. We value your help with this project. If you have questions or would like more information about the survey, please contact Mike Dorssom at 307-760-3132 or by email (mdorssom@uwo.edu). Thank you in advance for taking part in the survey.

Q2 Overall, would you say that local journalists in your area are mostly in touch or out of touch with your local community?

- ☐ In touch (1)
- ☐ Out of touch (2)
- ☐ There are no local journalists in my area (3)

Q3 Which of the following do you prefer for getting local news and information?

- ☐ Print newspaper (1)
- ☐ Radio (2)
- ☐ Television (3)
- ☐ Social media site (such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.) (4)
- ☐ A news website or app (5)

Q4 How often do you get local news and information from each of the following types of sources, regardless of whether you access them digitally or not?

- ☐ Often (1) ☐ Sometimes (2) ☐ Hardly ever (3) ☐ Never (4)
- Local TV news station (1)
- Local daily newspaper (2)
- Other community or specialized newspaper (beyond the daily newspaper) (3)
- Local radio station (4)
- A news source that publishes online ONLY (5)
- Local newsletter or listserv (6)
- Local government agencies or officials, such as city council offices or libraries (7)
- Local organizations, such as churches, school groups or political groups (8)
- Local social networks, such as community Facebook groups or Nextdoor (9)
- Text message (SMS, iMessage, WhatsApp) (10)
- Word of mouth (11)

Q5 What are the main reasons you get news and information from these sources? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ The information is trustworthy. (1)
- ☐ It offers information relevant to my community. (2)
- ☐ It covers topic/issue I care about. (3)
- ☐ It helps me find places to see or things to do. (4)
- ☐ My friend or family uses it. (5)
- ☐ It has content I enjoy. (6)
- ☐ It helps me talk to my friends and family about news. (7)
- ☐ I noticed it on social media. (8)
- ☐ Other (please describe) (9) _____
- ☐ None of the above. (10)

Q6 Do you pay for access to local news through a print or digital newspaper subscription?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ No, but I would if an option was available. (3)
- ☐ Unsure (4)

Q7 How important or interesting is information about each of the following local topics for your daily life?

- ☐ Important for my daily life (1)
 - ☐ Important to know about, but I don't need to keep up with it daily (2)
 - ☐ Interesting, but not important to me (3)
 - ☐ Neither important nor interesting (4)
-
- Weather (1)
 - Crime and public safety in your community (2)
 - Traffic and transportation (3)
 - Schools and education (4)
 - Government (incl. government services, elections, voting) (5)
 - Politics (15)
 - Local activities, culture, and entertainment (6)
 - Local sports (7)
 - Health and medical information (incl. finding and paying for care) (8)
 - Housing (incl. for finding and paying for housing) (9)
 - Jobs and the economy (incl. for finding jobs, financial decisions and support) (10)
 - Local environment (incl. sanitation services, climate) (11)
 - Obituaries (12)
 - Religion (13)
 - Immigration (14)

Q8 What sources do you find most useful in providing the information you need on TOPIC, whether in-person, online, over the phone, or in printed materials?

- ☐ Friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances (1)
- ☐ A government agency (2)
- ☐ Local community center (3)
- ☐ Religious leader or congregation (4)
- ☐ Local newspaper (print) (5)

- ☐ Local news website (6)
- ☐ Local TV station, including its website (7)
- ☐ Local radio station, including its website (8)
- ☐ Local podcast (9)
- ☐ Local online forum or discussion group, such as a community Facebook group, Nextdoor group, or Listserv (10)
- ☐ Online search (11)
- ☐ Other (please specify / write-in) (12) _____

Q23 How unsatisfied or satisfied are you with the information you are able to get for each of the following topics?

- ☐ Very unsatisfied (1)
 - ☐ Dissatisfied (2)
 - ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
 - ☐ Satisfied (4)
 - ☐ Very satisfied (8)
-
- Weather (1)
 - Crime and public safety in your community (2)
 - Traffic and transportation (3)
 - Schools and education (4)
 - Government (incl. government services, elections, voting) (5)
 - Politics (15)
 - Local activities, culture, and entertainment (6)
 - Local sports (7)
 - Health and medical information (incl. finding and paying for care) (8)
 - Housing (incl. for finding and paying for housing) (9)
 - Jobs and the economy (incl. for finding jobs, financial decisions and support) (10)
 - Local environment (incl. sanitation services, climate) (11)
 - Obituaries (12)
 - Religion (13)
 - Immigration (14)

Q24 As far as you know, in your local community, is there at least one...?

- ☐ Yes (1) ☐ No, there isn't (2) ☐ Not sure (3) ☐ No answer (4)

- Local TV news station (1)
- Local newspaper (2)
- Local radio station (4)
- Local newsletter, blog, or website (5)
- Local online forum or discussion group, such as a community Facebook group, Nextdoor group, or Listserv (6)

Q25 What news source do you turn to most often for local news? Please list the name of the specific news organization or source.

Q26 What is your most trusted source or sources for local news and information? Please list the name of the specific news organization or source.

Q27 Thinking about the role of local journalists, how important do you think it is for local journalists to do each of the following?

- ☐ Not important (1)
- ☐ Slightly important (2)
- ☐ Important (3)
- ☐ Somewhat important (4)
- ☐ Very important (5)
- ☐ Be personally engaged in the local community (1)
- ☐ Understand the history of the community (2)
- ☐ Be active on social media (3)

Q28 In your opinion, how can local news organizations improve their coverage of local issues that matter to you?

Q29 Thinking specifically about the role of news in Wyoming and your local community, how important is it that state and local media...?

- ☐ Not important (1)
- ☐ Slightly important (2)
- ☐ Important (3)

- ☐ Somewhat important (4)
- ☐ Very important (5)

- Provides facts that we all can agree on (1)
- Gives local context to national stories (2)
- Informs me about state and local politics (3)
- Informs the population about public affairs (4)
- Connects me to my community (5)
- Gives me information about emergencies (6)
- Helps me decide places to go or things to do (7)
- Is entertaining (8)
- Is created by people like me (9)
- Is created by people who represent the population of Wyoming (10)
- Takes a position on an issue (11)
- Presents different perspectives (12)
- Holds leaders in politics, business and other institutions accountable for their actions (13)
- Explores solutions to problems (14)

Q30 How well do you think the media in Wyoming and your community performs in the following areas?

- ☐ Very poor (1)
- ☐ Poor (2)
- ☐ Fair (3)
- ☐ Good (4)
- ☐ Very good (5)
- Provides facts that we all can agree on (1)
- Gives local context to national stories (2)
- Informs me about state and local politics (3)
- Informs the population about public affairs (4)
- Connects me to my community (5)
- Gives me information about emergencies (6)
- Helps me to decide places to go or things to do (7)
- Is entertaining (8)
- Is created by people like me (9)
- Is created by people who represent the population of Wyoming (10)
- Takes a position on an issue (11)

- Presents different perspectives (12)
- Holds leaders in politics, business, and other institutions accountable for their actions (13)
- Explores solutions to problems (14)

Q31 Do you feel your community in Wyoming has a trustworthy and accessible source for local news and information?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
- ☐ Unsure (3)

Q32 What are the most important actions state and local news organizations could take to increase your trust?

- ☐ Increase accuracy/factual reporting (1)
- ☐ Reduce bias (2)
- ☐ Increase transparency (3)
- ☐ Increase community engagement (4)
- ☐ Change content (5)
- ☐ Diversify the news (6)
- ☐ I can't/won't trust local news (7)
- ☐ I already trust local news (8)
- ☐ Other (9)
- ☐ Don't know (10)

Q33 Do you feel you have any barriers to accessing local news? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Yes, there aren't enough local news sources in my area (1)
- ☐ Yes, there aren't enough local news sources in my preferred language (2)
- ☐ Yes, the cost of a subscription to local news is too much for my budget (3)
- ☐ Yes, technological barriers (no internet connection, don't own a device, etc.) (4)
- ☐ Yes, other (please specify) (6) _____
- ☐ No (7)

Start of Block : Demographics

Q34 What year were you born?

Q35 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (4)

Q36 What is your zip code?

Q37 What is your profession?

Q38 What is your current annual household income?

- ☐ Under \$25,000 (1)
- ☐ \$25,000 to \$50,000 (2)
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$100,000 (3)
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$150,000 (4)
- ☐ \$150,000 to \$200,000 (5)
- ☐ More than \$250,000 (6)

Q39 What is your preferred language?

- ☐ English (1)
- ☐ Spanish (2)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (3) _____

Q40 Which of the following best describes your race?

- ☐ American Indian or Native Alaskan (1)
- ☐ Asian (2)
- ☐ Black or African American (3)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)
- ☐ White (5)
- ☐ Multi-racial (please specify) (6) _____
- ☐ Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q41 In general, how would you describe your political views?

- ☐ Very conservative (1)
- ☐ Conservative (2)
- ☐ Moderate (3)
- ☐ Liberal (4)
- ☐ Very liberal (5)

Q42 Would you like to be entered in a raffle for one of two iPads?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Appendix D

Information Providers List

Organization name	Medium	Organization type
Basin Republican Rustler	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Bridger Valley Pioneer	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Buckrail	Digital only	Independent for profit
Buffalo Bulletin	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Cap City News	Digital only	Independent for profit
Casper Star-Tribune	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Cody Enterprise	Print and digital	Independent for profit
County 10	Digital only	Independent for profit
County 17	Digital only	Independent for profit
Cowboy State Daily	Digital only	Independent for profit
Douglas Budget	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Dubois Frontier	Print only	Independent for profit
Eastern Shoshone Bulletin	Digital only	
Gillette News-Record	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Glenrock Independent	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Green River Star	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Greybull Standard & Tribune	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Guernsey Gazette	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Jackson Hole Daily	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Jackson Hole News & Guide	Print and digital	Independent for profit
KCHY	Television	National broadcast chain
KCWY	Television	National broadcast chain
Kemmerer Gazette	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
KFBC*	Radio	Independent for profit
KFNB	Television	National broadcast chain
KGWN	Television	National broadcast chain
KHOL	Radio	Public media
KKTQ	Television	National broadcast chain
KLWY	Television	National broadcast chain
KODI*	Radio	Independent for profit
KOWB*	Radio	National broadcast chain
KPOW*	Radio	Independent for profit
KROE*	Radio	Independent for profit
KTWO*	Radio	National broadcast chain
KVOW*	Radio	National broadcast chain
KWOR*	Radio	Independent for profit
KYDT*	Radio	National broadcast chain
KGWC*	Television	National broadcast chain
KTWO-TV*	Television	National broadcast chain

Organization name	Medium	Organization type
KUWR	Radio	Public media
KWYF*	Television	National broadcast chain
Lander Journal	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Laramie Boomerang	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Lovell Chronicle	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Lusk Herald	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Moorcroft Leader	Print and digital	Independent for profit
News Letter Journal	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Northern Arapaho Tribe	Digital only	
Northern Wyoming Daily News	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Oil City News	Digital only	Independent for profit
Pine Bluffs Post	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Pinedale Roundup	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Powell Tribune	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Rawlins Daily Times	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Riverton Ranger	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Rocket-Miner	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Saratoga Sun	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Sheridan Press	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Star Valley Independent	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Sundance Times	Print and digital	Independent for profit
SweetwaterNow	Digital only	Independent for profit
The Laramie Reporter	Digital only	Independent for profit
The Platte County Record-Times	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Thermopolis Independent Record	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Todo TV	Digital only	Independent for profit
Torrington Telegram	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Uinta County Herald	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Weston County Gazette	Print and digital	Independent for profit
Wind River News	Print only	Independent for profit
WyoFile	Digital only	Nonprofit
Wyoming PBS	Television	Public media
Wyoming Tribune-Eagle	Print and digital	Newspaper with corporate ownership
Yellowstone Gate	Digital only	Independent for profit

*On the Wyoming Broadcasters Association list but not found in our search. See the Methodology section for more on the resources and databases used to compile this list of information providers.

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