

Hawai'i's News Desert

**Overcoming a Threat
to Democracy and
Civic Engagement**

A Public Policy Report Prepared by:

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HIPA

HAWAII INSTITUTE FOR
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

November 2025



**HAWAII INSTITUTE FOR
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Hawai'i's News Desert

Overcoming a Threat to Democracy and Civic Engagement

During the past two decades, Hawai'i has experienced a dramatic decline in the quality and quantity of Hawai'i's local news organizations. Print, television and radio journalists once clamored to report breaking news stories and events, providing Hawai'i readers, listeners and viewers with a wide variety of business, political, cultural, sports and editorial content.

Today, financial pressures and shifts in technology, consumer trends and the workforce have resulted in the weakening and closing of many key news media organizations throughout the state.

For example:

- The two statewide daily newspapers – The Honolulu Advertiser and the Honolulu Star-Bulletin have merged into a single daily – The Honolulu Star-Advertiser. The once resounding “thud” of the home delivery of the two pound Sunday edition of the newspaper is now replaced by a flimsy print edition of the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. It's news and editorial content pales in comparison to the editions of two decades ago.
- Local television affiliates of CBS, ABC, and NBC once had a strong and robust presence in the Hawai'i market, covering a wide range of local television news and events. Of the five major television stations (KHON, KITV, KGMB, KHNL, KFVE), three are owned by the same company.
- Neighbor island print publications like The Garden Island, Hawai'i Tribune-Herald, Lanai Today, Molokai Dispatch, West Hawai'i Today and Maui News are struggling, and have dramatically reduced staff and print publications. Their on-line publications include periodic neighbor island content combined with reprints of national and local wire stories.
- Hawai'i's diverse ethnic publications like the Fil-Am Courier, Hawai'i Filipino Chronicle, Ka Wai Ola, The Korea Times, The Hawaii Times, and the Hawai'i Herald used to provided readers with regular and rich cultural and ethnic news and event coverage. They are now either defunct or a mere shell of the circulation and impact they once had reporting of Hawai'i's ethnic communities.

The impact of the decline in Hawai'i's news organizations has serious implications to society. Known as the "fourth estate" of democracy, the media plays an essential function in:

- Informing the public on what is going on, and providing citizens with accurate information to make informed decisions;
- Serving as a "watch dog" to government, business, and society in uncovering abuse and bad behavior;
- Empowering and educating citizens and communities about important and essential activities, events and issues;
- Encouraging debate and robust discussion about key issues facing society – locally, nationally and globally;
- Promoting citizen engagement and participation which enables persons to fully participate in society and democracy.

Nationally, over 2,100 local print outlets have been lost since 2004; more than 200 counties in the US have no newspaper at all; and of the remaining counties, more than half of them have only one newspaper. More than half of the US newspapers have changed owners in the past decade, and about 25 companies own two-thirds of all daily newspapers.¹

The internet, social media and on-line publications have dramatically replaced and impacted how citizens get their news. Smart phones, computers and tablets have out-paced television, radio and print publications on how Americans get their news. Today, 8 out of 10 Americans get their news on digital devices.² With blogs and the posting of information on social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, X, Instagram and others, it is difficult to decipher what is news, let alone what is accurate news, conjecture or opinion.

¹University of North Carolina, *Hussman School of Journalism and Media, News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive?*, 2020.

²U.S. PIRG Education Fund, *How Misinformation on Social Media has Changed News*, August 14, 2023.

This report relied on various sources to compile a dataset detailing Hawai'i's newspapers from 1960 to the present. The Library of Congress' Directory of U.S. Newspapers in American Libraries provided an initial inventory. The directory is the product of the United States Newspaper Program, a collaborative effort between the Library of Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1982 to 2011. Projects were supported in each state, including Hawai'i, to locate, catalog, and preserve all extant newspapers published in the United States since 1690.

The national database was filtered for newspapers published in Hawai'i from 1960 to the present. However, many of the 257 newspapers that the search produced had incorrect or missing dates for when the newspaper ceased publication or the dates had not been updated, requiring additional research.

Helen Chapin's *A Guide to Newspapers of Hawai'i, 1834-2000*, published by the Hawaiian Historical Society, was invaluable to this work. Her research helped fill in descriptions and end dates for newspapers published in the 20th century.

This report also relied on information from WorldCat (WorldCat.org), the world's largest library catalog, as well as data sources at the Hawai'i State Public Library and the University of Hawai'i libraries.

Various sources were used to collect information on the decline of journalists in Hawai'i, including archival news stories detailing layoffs and mergers, U.S. Department of Labor statistics, data collected by Northwestern University's Local News Initiative and information provided by local journalists and guild representatives.

Newspapers.com, an archive of digitized newspapers, helped compare newspaper editions from before and after the state began experiencing a significant contraction in the news industry. The Alliance for Audited Media and the Audit Bureau of Circulations provided circulation figures for Hawai'i's five long-running daily newspapers, which reflect the declines in readership between 2000 and 2024.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Hussman School of Journalism and Media also provided access to the national databases it created for local newspapers, digital-only news sites, radio and public television, which includes inventories for Hawai'i. The data was collected for its U.S. News Deserts Project.

To guide HIPA's research, a Project Advisory Board was established consisting of seasoned stakeholders and media professionals who assisted in their individual capacities, as follows:

Marc Alexander

Executive Director
Hawaii Medical Association

Chuck Freedman

Former Director of Communications
to Governor John Waihee;
Former Director of Communications,
Hawaiian Electric Company

Burt Lum

Hawai'i State
Broadband Coordinator; Radio Talk
Show Host, Hawai'i Public Radio

Janice Gin

Lecturer, University of Hawai'i;
former News Director, KITV

Robert Pennybacker

Vice President of Business
Development at PBS Hawai'i; former
Executive Producer of HIKI NO on
PBS Hawai'i

Barbara Tanabe

former KHON News Anchor;
Former President/CEO,
Hill & Knowlton Hawai'i

Susan Yim

former PBS Hiki No Managing
Editor; former Managing Editor,
Honolulu Advertiser; *and former*
Feature Editor, Honolulu
Star-Bulletin

The above-referenced titles are for identification purposes only.

Over the past two decades, Hawai'i has experienced a dramatic decline in the quantity and quality of local news. A startling number of newspapers throughout the islands have shuttered, while the number of reporters at surviving outlets has dwindled.

The trend, which has shown no signs of abating, has troubling implications for maintaining civic engagement and an informed public. The loss of a robust, competitive market for journalism has meant fewer reporters competing for stories, less local news being covered, and a decline in watchdog and investigative reporting that has played a central role in uncovering abuses of power, wrongdoing, and the betrayal of public trust by government agencies, political leaders, businesses and other institutions. One bright spot has been Honolulu Civil Beat, which has grown to support a newsroom of about two dozen reporters, editors, and photographers in recent years.

Various organizations have been tracking the proliferation of news deserts throughout the country and how this has contributed to the spread of misinformation, rising polarization, and growing threats to democracy. However, an in-depth look at the changing news landscape in Hawai'i had not been undertaken.

This report, produced for the Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs, provides a closer look at how the news crisis has impacted Hawai'i. It tracks the evolution and eventual decline in Hawai'i's newspapers from the 1960s to the present and recent changes in television, radio, and digital news.

This research is the first phase in HIPA's project *Hawai'i's News Desert: Overcoming a Threat to Democracy and Civic Engagement*, which seeks to provide stakeholders with research and data, as well as a forum for discussion and decision-making to address Hawai'i's news crisis.

Hawai'i had a robust newspaper industry in the decades following statehood and a remarkably diverse array of publications, including at least 30 newspapers that were published in Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Hawaiian and Samoan.

There were newspapers supported by labor unions, Hawai'i's plantations and the military. Others were devoted to Hawaiian sovereignty issues, the environment and African-American issues. An array of alternative and underground newspapers covered topics outside of the mainstream, focused on investigative reporting, were expressly countercultural or devoted to certain causes, such as the end of the Vietnam War.

Community newspapers with hyperlocal coverage proliferated, as did some two dozen student newspapers.

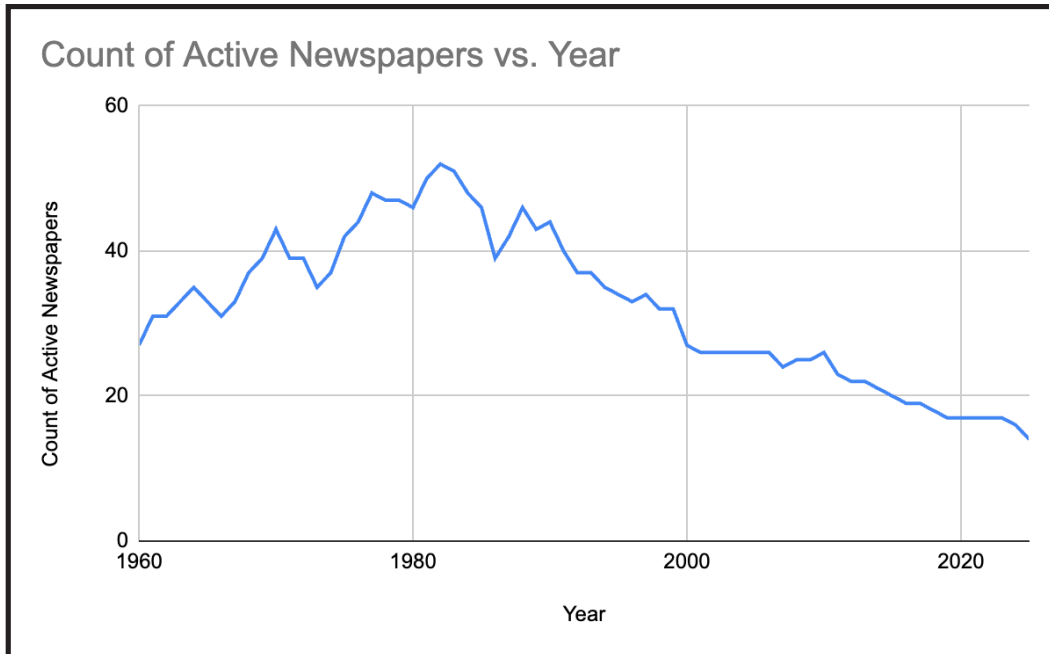
Some newspapers had just a handful of staff or published for less than a year before folding. Throughout those decades, the major daily newspapers, including the Honolulu Advertiser, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, the Hawaii Tribune-Herald, West Hawaii Today, The Garden Island, and The Maui News, provided broad coverage of local issues throughout the islands.

The number of newspapers published in Hawai'i peaked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when as many as 52 newspapers were in circulation before beginning a steady decline. By 2000, the number of newspapers declined to 27; over the past two decades, that number has been reduced by half.

The newspaper count over those decades likely doesn't capture all the newspapers published in Hawai'i. Still, the data reflects the broader trends in Hawai'i's newspaper industry.

Those figures don't include student newspapers, which aren't subject to the same financial pressures. But here, there have also been losses. Just nine of the 24 student newspapers published between 1960 and now are still in existence.





Sources: Compilation of data sets from US Library of Congress Director of US Newspapers in American Libraries; WorldCat; Hawaiian Historical Society, A Guide to Newspapers of Hawai'i, 1834 to 2000; The Alliance for Audited Media, and the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Notable losses since 2010, when newspaper advertising was in a free fall nationally, include the Honolulu Weekly, an alternative weekly newspaper launched in 1991. It was known for its in-depth and investigative reporting before ceasing operations in 2013. Maui Times, another alternative weekly that also contributed investigative reporting and coverage of local political issues, closed in 2023. The Lahaina News, a local community paper published since 1979, closed in August 2024.

In December 2023, The Hawai'i Herald, which for 43 years served the Japanese-American community, closed its doors. However, in a rare instance of a newspaper successfully pivoting to digital, it relaunched as San Times in July 2024 as an online-only news source. Hawaii Hochi, a sister newspaper and the state's last Japanese-language newspaper, also closed in 2024.

The decline in the number of local newspapers provides just one benchmark for tracking the loss of local news coverage. Also devastating is the overall loss of reporting power as newspapers shrink.

Hawai'i's major daily newspapers have largely survived but have become shells of their former selves. The Honolulu Advertiser and Honolulu Star-Bulletin, the two major Honolulu dailies, merged in 2010 to form the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

Since then, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser has undergone continual cuts to its newsroom staff. It reduced its print publication to six days a week in 2020.

The two newspapers combined had 205 newsroom employees, according to a 2010 Associated Press story.³ After the merger, about 117 newsroom employees remained.⁴

As the newsroom of the Honolulu Star-Advertiser has been hollowed out, so has local coverage of the news. The Sunday, Sept. 24, 2000 edition of the Honolulu Advertiser carried 409 pages. By comparison, the Sunday, March 31, 2024 edition of the Honolulu Star-Advertiser was 104 pages. During the years 2001 to 2010, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin also published a Sunday paper.

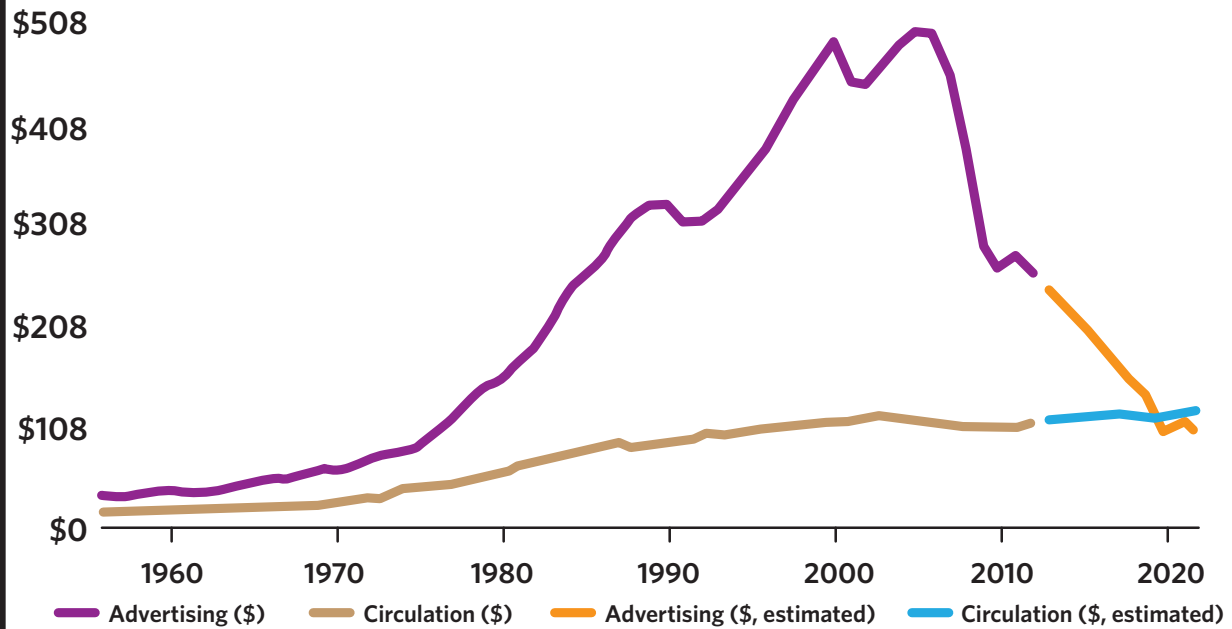
Source: Honolulu Advertiser & Honolulu Star-Bulletin, newspapers.com (September 24, 2000, March 31, 2024).

³Associated Press, *Merger to create Star-Advertiser*, April 30, 2010.

⁴Craig Gima, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, ALOHA!, June 7, 2010.

Estimated advertising and circulation revenue of the newspaper industry

Total revenue of U.S. newspapers (in U.S. dollars)



Source: News Media Alliance, formerly Newspaper Association of America (through 2012); Pew Research Center analysis of year-end SEC filings of publicly traded newspaper companies (2013-2022).

In March 2024, Carpenter Media Group acquired the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and The Garden Island on Kauai, as well as the two long-running newspapers on Hawai'i Island, the Hawaii Tribune-Herald and West Hawaii Today.

The Mississippi-based company has emerged from relative obscurity to become the fourth largest newspaper owner in the country in the span of a year, according to research conducted by the Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University. As of 2024, it owned 138 newspapers across the country.⁵

All of Hawai'i's long-running daily newspapers are now owned by the privately-held company, except for The Maui News, which is owned by Ogden Newspapers, a company based in West Virginia.

Following Carpenter Media's acquisition, layoffs continued. The neighbor island newspapers have become what researchers call "ghost papers," where newsroom staffing is so drastically reduced that employees no longer have the resources to cover their communities adequately. Public service journalism, in particular, suffers as government meetings go unattended and candidates for political office go uncovered, while breaking news is rarely picked up.

Local reporting on Hawai'i Island has dwindled. West Hawaii Today still publishes a daily print newspaper, in addition to publishing content on its website, charging \$16.50 for a monthly subscription to both. But its newspaper and website are filled with national stories and local stories produced by reporters at the other newspapers Carpenter Media Group owns, including the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and the Hawaii Tribune-Herald. As of February 2025, West Hawaii Today recently had just one editor and one reporter listed on its website.

West Hawaii Today, which launched in 1968, used to have wide coverage of local issues, including investigative reporting on local government.

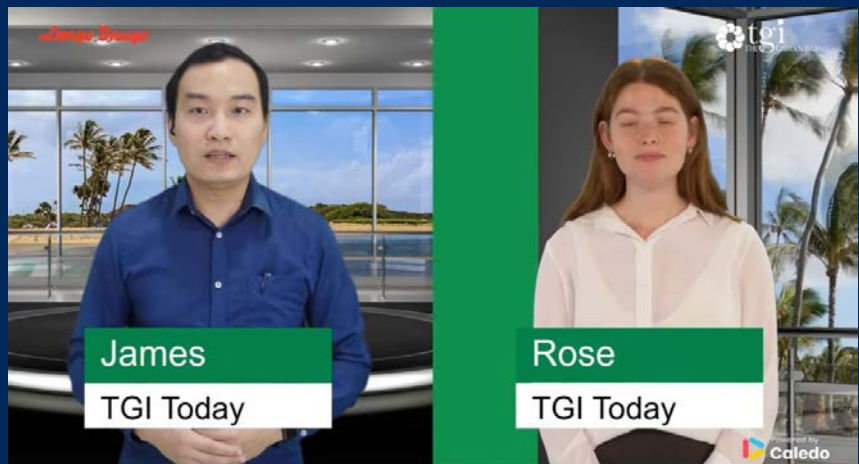
⁵Zach Metzger, Northwestern University, *The State of Local News, The 2025 Report*, 2025.

The Hawaii Tribune-Herald, which describes itself as the “primary news source for Hilo residents and locals, listed two editors and three reporters on their website as of November 2025. It routinely publishes news from staff at the Honolulu Star-Advertiser.

The Garden Island newspaper on Kauai lists just one reporter on its website as of November 2025.

The century-old newspaper, originally published in both Japanese and English, for decades served as the primary news source for Kauai.

In 2024, The Garden Island stunned viewers and media observers when it unveiled James and Rose, AI-generated bots who acted as news broadcasters twice a week for a newscast called “TGI Today.” The fake newscasters, which underscored the loss of real reporters at the newspaper, have since been scrapped.



Source: TGI Today, Volume 1, Episode 4 (2024)

Conditions at The Maui News have been similarly bleak. Founded in 1900, the newspaper was the go-to newspaper for local coverage of Maui County for decades. It now only publishes its print edition once a week.

The newspaper offers subscriptions to the Thursday print newspaper and access to its website for \$20.80 a month as of November 2025. Its subscriptions page promises “local news and information reported in your community,” including breaking news, investigative reporting, statehouse and government watchdog reporting, as well as context and analysis.

As the size and staff of Hawai‘i’s daily newspapers have shrunk, so has readership, adding to the financial strains wrought by losses in advertising revenue.

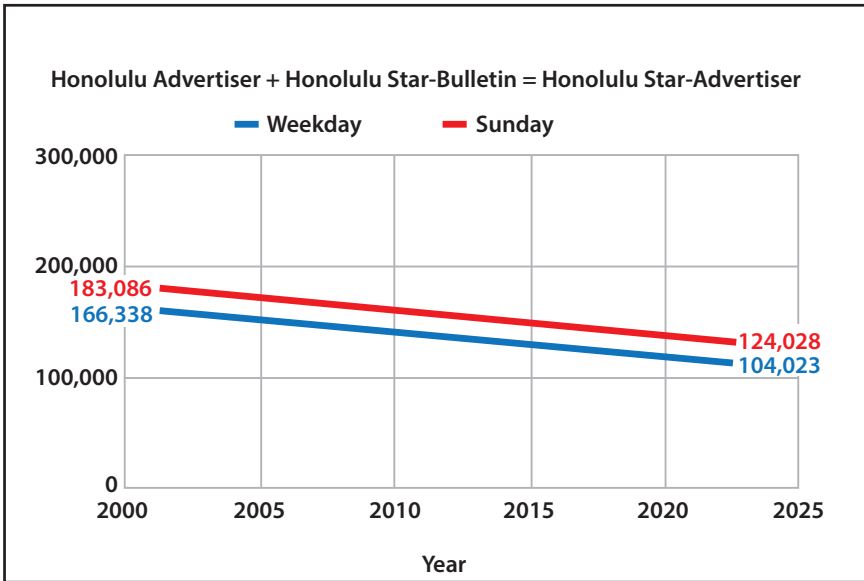
Overall, the combined circulation of Hawai‘i’s five major newspapers (Sunday) declined 41% between 2000 and 2024,

according to an analysis of audited statements provided by the Alliance for Audited Media and the Audit Bureau of Circulations. The 2024 figures include print and digital subscribers. When viewed separately, some of the circulation declines are even steeper. For example, Sunday circulation declined by 72% at The Maui News between 2000 and the first quarter of 2024.

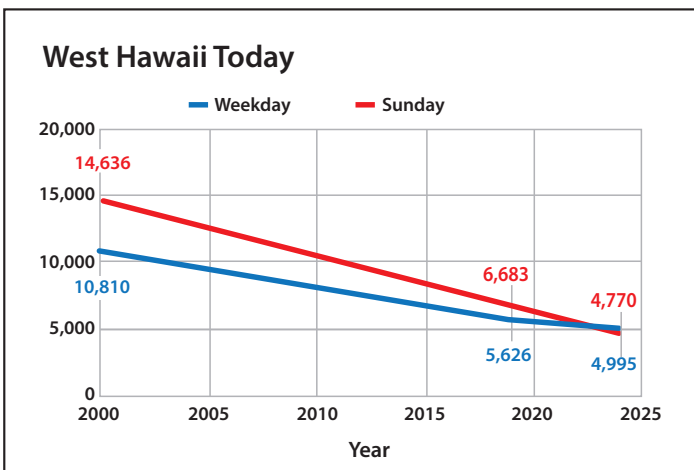
The 2024 circulation numbers reflect averages for six months ending March 31, 2024. Carpenter Media Group bought the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, The Garden-Island, West Hawaii Today and the Hawaii Tribune-Herald in March 2024, so the 2024 figures do not provide insight into how that acquisition, including subsequent staff reductions, may be impacting readership.

Hawai‘i's Top Five Newspaper Publications Period: 2000 to 2024 Summary of Circulation (Sunday)

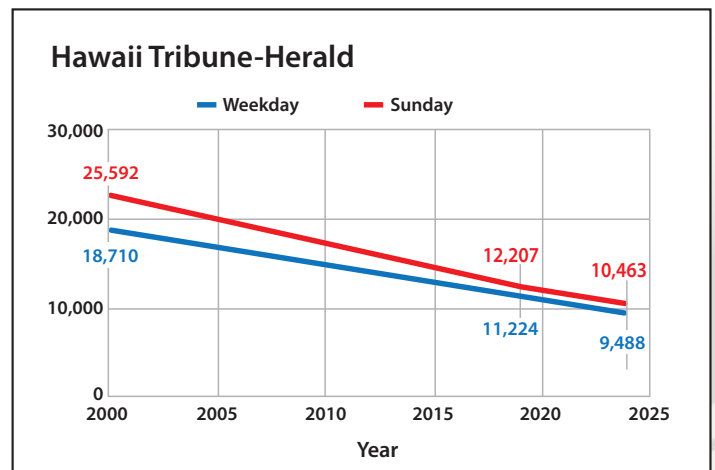
Entity	2000	2024	Difference	%
Honolulu Advertiser/ Honolulu Star-Advertiser (a)	183,086	124,028	(59,058)	-32%
Hawaii Tribune Herald	22,592	10,463	(12,129)	-54%
West Hawai‘i Today	14,636	4,770	(9,866)	-67%
The Maui News	24,035	6,803	(17,232)	-72%
The Garden Island	9,187	2,049	(7,138)	-78%
Total	255,536	150,137	(105,423)	-41%
Note (a): The above-referenced data reflects the Sunday Editions of the Honolulu Advertiser in 2000; and the Honolulu Star-Advertiser in 2024. In 2000, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin did not print a Sunday edition.				
Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2000); Alliance for Audited Media (2024)				



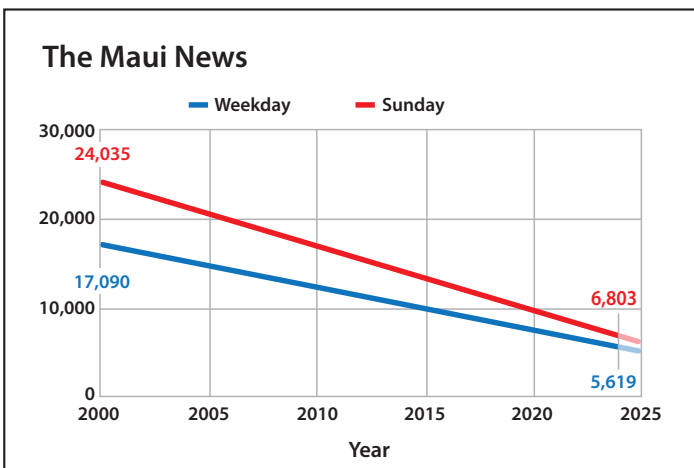
The 2000 numbers reflect the combined circulation of the Honolulu Advertiser and Honolulu Star-Bulletin. The two papers merged in 2010. The 2024 figures reflect the circulation numbers for the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2000); Alliance for Audited Media (2024)



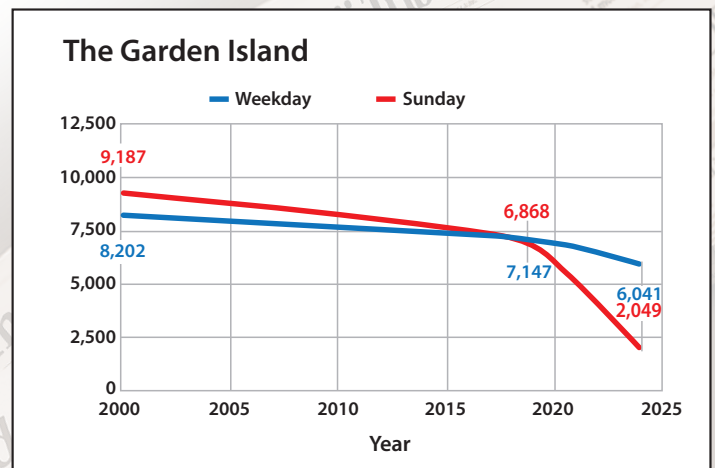
Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2000); Alliance for Audited Media (2019, 2024)



Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2000); Alliance for Audited Media (2019, 2024)



Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2000); Alliance for Audited Media (2019)

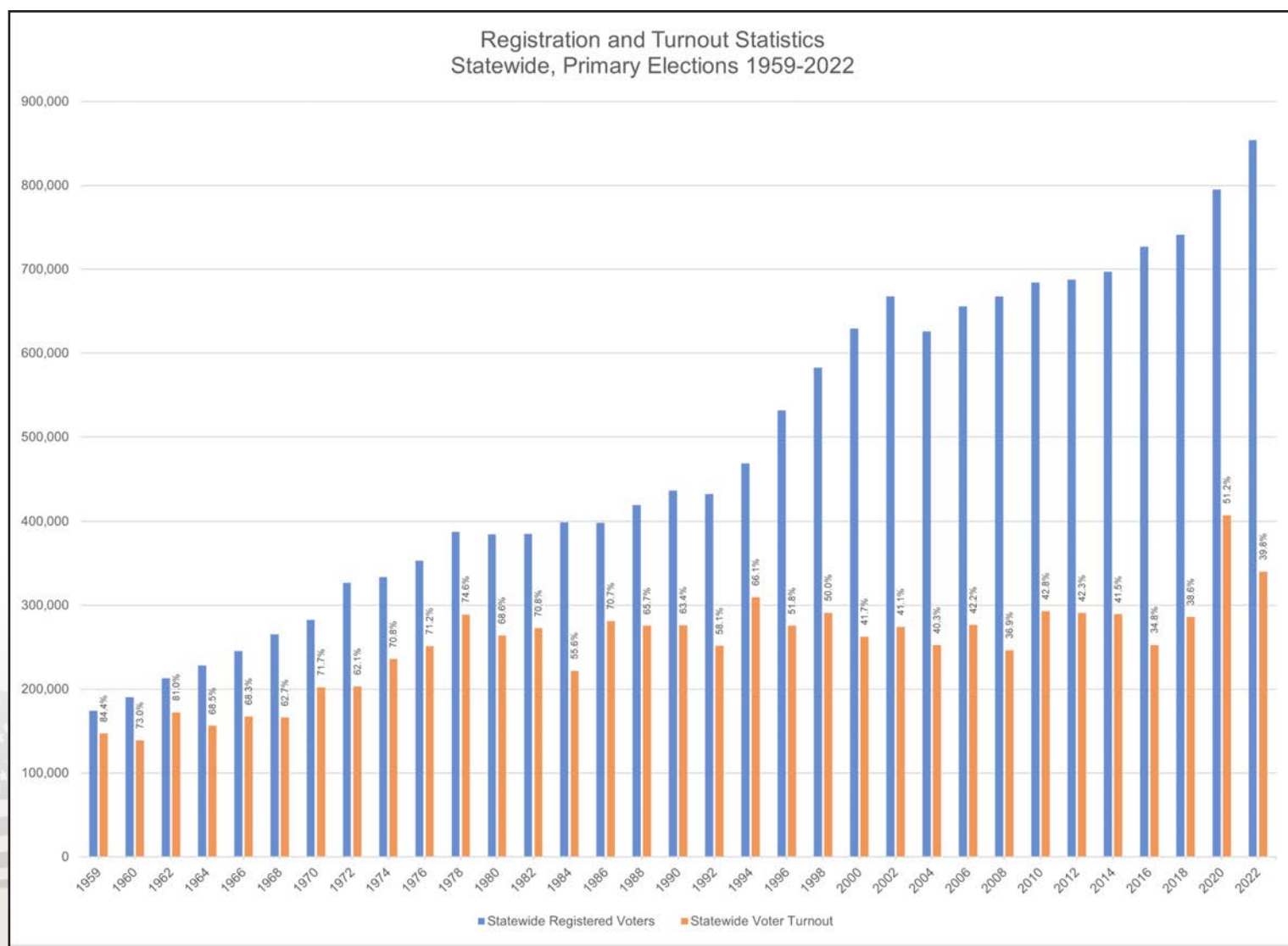


Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations (2000); Alliance for Audited Media (2019, 2024)

Notably, Hawai'i's voter turnout has declined alongside the collapse of local newspapers.

Local journalism has long played a critical role in informing citizens about policies, candidates, and election processes, fostering civic engagement and accountability. As newspapers disappear, communities are left in news deserts, where misinformation can spread unchecked and political apathy deepens.

In 1960, Hawai'i's voter turnout rate stood at 73%, according to the Hawai'i Office of Elections. In 2024, it was 32%.



Source: State of Hawai'i Office of Elections, <https://elections.hawaii.gov/resources/registration-voter-turnout-statistics/>

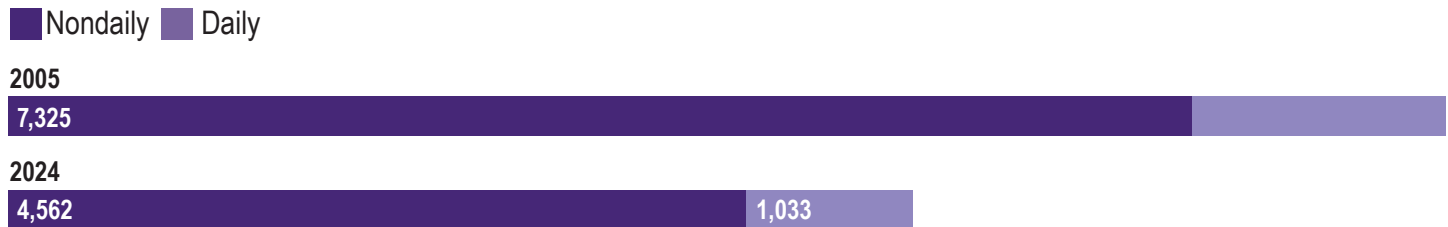
The decline of Hawai'i newspapers mirrors national trends. Between 2005 - 2024, 38% of the country's nondaily newspapers and 34% of its daily newspapers closed, according to the Medill Local News Initiative. From 2005 - 2023, 70% of newspaper jobs nationally were lost. ⁶

In Hawaii, an estimated 41.5% of newspaper jobs have been lost since 2013, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which doesn't include losses in 2024. Medill's research shows that smaller and more rural counties have been hit the hardest. ⁷

It's not clear how many of the remaining newspapers nationally have essentially become ghost newspapers. But the Local News Initiative found that of the 70 smallest newspapers owned by two of the largest newspaper chains, Lee and Gannett, about half had no listing for any journalists on staff.

Total Number of Local U.S. Newspapers: 2005 and 2024

There has been a net loss of over 3,200 papers since 2005

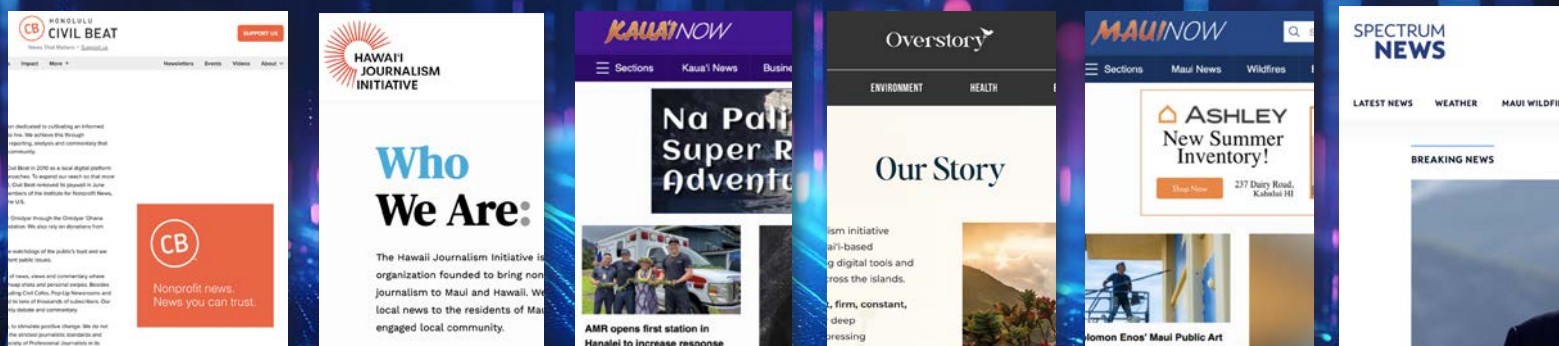


Source: Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, Local News Initiative (2025).

⁶Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, The State of Local News (2025).

⁷Ibid.





Amid the newspaper decline, there have been some bright spots in Hawai'i when it comes to online news, in particular the launch of Honolulu Civil Beat in 2010 by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar.

The digital-only news site was initially launched as a for-profit, subscription-based news outlet dedicated to public service and investigative journalism. In 2016, it switched to a nonprofit and has been able to raise a significant portion of its revenue from individual donors and foundations, according to the Institute for Nonprofit News, though it continues to receive support from Omidyar through the Omidyar Ohana Fund.

Amid the decline in local news in Hawai'i, Honolulu Civil Beat has helped fill the void with investigative and watchdog reporting and in-depth enterprise stories. Its news is also free.

Pacific Media Group has also launched free, online-only news sites, including Maui Now, Big Island Now, and Kauai Now, which provide a source of local news, although their reporting staff is small. Earlier this year, Pacific Media Group also helped launch the Hawai'i Journalism Initiative, a nonprofit that aims to bolster local news.

Just this year, Overstory, which describes itself as a “nonprofit solutions journalism initiative,” launched. Another online startup, Aloha State Daily, also began publishing this year.

In addition to the online-only news sites, all or nearly all of Hawai'i's other news outlets, including newspapers, television and radio, have websites that publish their news stories.

Discussions about expanding news deserts often emphasize the decline of newspapers, while the role of local television and radio news is less frequently highlighted. Part of that may be because the picture is more murky.

While newspapers have been in a decline for years, nationally, staff at local TV news outlets has been quite stable, according to data from the Radio Television Digital News Association and Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications. The average amount of local television news being produced has also increased over the past two decades.

A 2024 report by The Poynter Institute found that local TV broadcasters are transitioning effectively into the digital age, expanding their online presence and engaging with audiences through social media platforms. The report found that while traditional TV news viewership has seen declines, local stations have been successful at diversifying their methods of delivering local news, including using streaming services and mobile apps.⁸

However, how individual markets are faring depends in large part on local conditions and station ownership. In Hawai'i, the local television industry has experienced significant layoffs in recent years.

In 2009, three out of five of Hawai'i's television news stations delivering daily newscasts entered into a shared service agreement. The consolidation, which merged the operations of KGMB (CBS), KHNL (NBC) and KFVE (MyNetwork TV), led to the creation of Hawaii News Now. At the time, there were 198 full-time employees at the three stations, according to local news reports. One-third of them lost their job.⁹

Shared service agreements are arrangements between stations in the same market to share news gathering and operational resources. Companies tout them as a means of creating efficiencies. However, they can also lead to duplicative content and fewer editorial voices.¹⁰

⁸Poynter Institute, *2023-2024 Impact Report*, (2024)

⁹Rick Daysog, Honolulu Advertiser, *68 to Lose Jobs in KGMB, KHNL, K5 Merger; programming will be retained*, August 18, 2009.

¹⁰Civil Beat, *Doing Less with Less*, March 17, 2011.



A 2011 report by a researcher from the University of Delaware found that following the consolidation of KGMB, KHNL and KFVE, there was a reduction in the quantity and quality of local news being produced by the stations as they began airing the same newscasts. The news stations were no longer doing as much in-depth reporting and their segments were shorter.¹¹

In 2006, Blackstone Group and SJL Broadcast Group purchased KHON, and announced it would cut 35 of its 111 employees, according to reporting at the time by the Honolulu Advertiser. KHON is now owned by Nextar Media Group.¹²



Since 2015, KITV has undergone two major ownership changes. In 2015, Hearst Television sold the Honolulu-based ABC affiliate to SJL Broadcasting. Five years later, in 2021, Allen Media Group, led by Byron Allen, acquired KITV from SJL.

Hawai'i Public Radio, by contrast, has been adding to its staff in recent years.¹³

¹¹Danilo Yanich, University of Delaware School of Public Policy & Administration, *Local TV News & Service Agreements: A Critical Look*, October 2011

¹²Michael Tsai, *KHON's New Owners Handed Five Resignations*, Honolulu Advertiser, February 3, 2006.

¹³Hawai'i Public Radio, *Get to know HPR's Newest Additions to the Newsroom*, April 4, 2024.

Hawai'i's news industry has experienced major disruptions over the past two decades that have led to reductions in newsrooms throughout the state. The number of newspapers has declined by half since 2000 and while the major daily newspapers still exist in name, they have largely become ghost newspapers, lacking the staff to report on local issues that are important for maintaining informed communities and democratic engagement. Television newsrooms have also experienced declines in recent years amid consolidation and periods of economic downturn.

There have been signs of innovation and some successes as online-only news outlets try to find revenue models that will support their operations. But their growth has not compensated for the overall loss of reporters in Hawai'i, particularly on the neighbor islands.

As local news outlets diminish, residents lose access to essential information about government, politics, public safety and community events, fostering gaps in civic awareness and making residents more vulnerable to the spread of misinformation.



APPENDIX A

Resources for Supporting Local News

As newspapers throughout the country have shuttered or been reduced to skeleton operations over the past two decades, a growing ecosystem of organizations focused on revitalizing local news has emerged.

There is robust research tracking the ongoing decline of local news outlets throughout the country, the loss of journalism jobs and the spread of what has been termed “news deserts,” areas of the country where residents have limited or no access to credible, local news about their community.

There has also been a growing focus on the phenomenon of “ghost newspapers,” newspapers that still exist, but have no, or so few, journalists on staff that they are ineffective at serving the community that relies upon them for local news.

A variety of start-ups, tech companies, nonprofits and philanthropic foundations have launched programs to support local news through grants, supporting the work of individual journalists and providing operational support to local news outlets. A growing focus has been on providing resources to help local news develop sustainable revenue models.

Following is a roundup of existing resources that can be useful to stakeholders in Hawai‘i seeking to revitalize the local news industry.



I. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Hussman School of Journalism and Media - Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media (CISLM)

UNC's Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media has a mission of growing a "more equitable and sustainable future for local news, the journalists who make it and the communities that need it."

CISLM conducts extensive research and analysis on the media landscape, including the country's expanding news deserts, and seeks to develop sustainable business strategies for local news outlets.

The center has found that the U.S. has lost about one-fourth of its local newspapers since 2004 and many of those that remain are shells of their former selves. Its News Desert Project has produced four major reports that document industry trends:

- News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive? (2020)
- The Expanding News Desert (2018)
- Thwarting the Emergence of News Deserts (2017)
- The Rise of a New Media Baron and the Emerging Thread of News Deserts (2017)

The center has also produced a website - usnewsdeserts.com - that has interactive maps that drill down to the county level to show industry trends. The maps, which include Hawai'i, detail areas in the country that have become news deserts and where digital news and public broadcasting are helping fill the void. The maps also detail ownership trends, including whether a newspaper is owned by an investment group, private company or publicly traded chain.

II. Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications - Local News Initiative

Medill's Local News Initiative is focused on the country's shrinking local news coverage and the effect this is having on civic engagement and democracy. It has extensive resources that look at the economic challenges facing local news and strategies for developing sustainable business models.

The initiative's 2024 State of Local News Report tracks the ongoing loss of newspapers, as well as the emergence of stand-alone digital news sites, public broadcasters and ethnic media outlets. The report found that nearly 55 million people in the U.S. now have limited to no access to local news.

The report also tracked the decline of newspaper employment, circulation, loss of original local content and ownership changes. Notably, the report found that Carpenter Media Group, which this year acquired the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, The Garden Island, the Hawaii Tribune-Herald and West Hawaii Today, has become the fourth largest newspaper owner in the country, owning 138 newspapers.

The report also found that in Hawai'i, the number of people employed at newspapers since 2013 has fallen by 41.5%.

The Local News Initiative recently published research on "ghost newspapers," papers that have no local reporters on staff or so few that its ability to provide local coverage to residents is severely restricted. This is a trend particularly relevant to Hawai'i.

The initiative has done extensive research on audience engagement and what drives consumers to read and pay for local news and has extensive resources relating to different types of business models that support local news, including nonprofit and philanthropic. It also has a section on its website dedicated to the financial and content challenges facing local television media.

III. Pew Research Center

The Pew Research Center has conducted research on the loss of local news, public attitudes toward the media and the impacts that the loss of local news coverage is having on communities.

In 2024, it published three major reports on the state of local news.

In its first report, *Americans' Changing Relationship with Local News*, Pew surveyed adults about the ways they access local news and their attitudes toward local journalism. The report found that Americans increasingly prefer digital mediums for consuming local news, including websites and social media and continue to think local news is important to their community. A majority of those surveyed also had positive attitudes toward the local media, with 71% saying that the news was being reported accurately.

The report found a significant decline in how closely Americans are tracking local news, with just 22% saying that they follow local news very closely, down from 37% in 2016.

The report also surveyed Americans about what local news topics they pay most attention to, and their views on the financial health of the local news, among other topics.

Pew's second report, *How Americans Get Local Political News*, surveyed Americans about their consumption and attitudes toward local government and political news. The survey found that 68% of Americans often or sometimes follow these topics, but that just one-fourth of this group was highly satisfied with the coverage.

The report also found that many Americans were finding it difficult to find news and information that's important to take part in the local political process, including local elections.

In its third report, *Americans' Experiences With Local Crime News*, Pew surveyed Americans about their consumption of local crime news and how they react to it. Among its findings, Pew found that just one-third of those who get local crime news were highly satisfied with the coverage.

More of Pew's research and coverage of issues relating to local news can be found here: <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/news-habits-media/news-media-trends/local-news/>. The research includes valuable information about the current financial condition of television and radio news.

IV. Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School

The Shorenstein Center explores the intersection of press, politics and public policy and seeks to bridge the gap between journalists and scholars. Its Local News initiative studies successful models for raising funds and building sustainable newsrooms and conducts research into what is and is not working in local news.

The Shorenstein Center has published numerous research papers on the state of local news. Some of their notable research includes:

- Solutions to America's Local Journalism Crisis: Consolidated Literature Review
- News Crisis: Can Local Public Radio Help Fill the News Gap Created by the Decline of Local Newspapers?
- The National Trust for Local News
- Can Public Media Help Fix Market Failures in Local News?
- A Landscape Study of Local News Models Across America
- Reinventing Local TV News

V. The American Journalism Project

The American Journalism Project is a venture philanthropy organization launched in 2019 to reinvigorate local journalism. It raises money and makes grants to nonprofit news organizations and supports the launch of new local newsrooms. It aims to help news outlets develop sustainable business operations and scale up successful models.

The venture has raised \$175 million since its founding and invested \$55 million in 44 nonprofit news organizations across 33 states, according to its 2024 impact report.

It has also launched the Local News Incubator to support entrepreneurs who are working to launch new, local, nonprofit news organizations. In July 2023 the project announced funding for four teams that are developing news organizations in Miami, greater Boston, Phoenix and Oregon.

The project has received funding from a wide variety of sources, including philanthropic individuals, family foundations, institutional funders and corporate partners. Among its largest donors, those giving more than \$5 million, are the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Emerson Collective, Arnold Ventures, Abrams Foundation, OpenAI and Quadrivium Foundation.

It also partners with local philanthropy organizations to help identify and address information gaps in their communities.

VI. Google News Initiative

The Google News Initiative was launched by Google in 2018 to support journalism and help counteract the spread of misinformation.

It offers resources such as the “Reader Revenue Playbook,” which helps news organizations develop and strengthen digital reader revenue models, in which some or all of a news outlet’s revenue comes from the direct financial support of readers. The models can be based on subscriptions, contributions, memberships, donations or micro-payments.

Its Digital Growth Program is designed to help small and mid-sized news organizations be successful. The program offers free workshops that are led by industry experts.

The Google News Initiative also offers a range of products that can help newsrooms increase traffic to their websites and expand their audiences

VII. LION Publishers

LION Publishers' mission is to strengthen the local news industry by helping independent news publishers improve their business skills.

The organization offers several programs to help aspiring news entrepreneurs, as well as existing independent news publishers. Its Sustainability Audits provide publishers with a detailed analysis of their business's strengths and weaknesses, as well as recommendations and funding. Launched in 2021, it has completed more than 200 audits, according to its website.

It also partners with the Google News Initiative's Startups Program on a number of training programs to help publishers develop more sustainable business models and help aspiring founders launch a new business.

LION Publishers also offers a News Entrepreneur Academy that has courses that teach essential small business skills, such as preparing a budget and creating a revenue growth plan.

VIII. Institute for Nonprofit News

The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) supports nonprofit, nonpartisan news organizations dedicated to public service journalism. Its programs help news organizations develop their revenue and business models.

INN has a News Startup Hub, which provides information on how to create audience development plans and a Fundraising Hub, which assists nonprofit news organizations with fundraising. The institute provides assistance to entrepreneurs looking to launch a nonprofit news outlet, as well as existing nonprofit newsrooms. It also assists for-profit news organizations seeking to transition to a nonprofit model.

Members of the Institute for Nonprofit News can also take advantage of NewsMatch, a grassroots fundraising campaign to support nonprofit news. The campaign has helped raise \$330 million to support startup newsrooms and independent news outlets since 2017, according to its website. NewsMatch provides matching gifts to inspire individual giving.

IX. Knight Foundation

In 2019, the Knight Foundation announced it would be contributing \$300 million over five years to support scalable local news organizations.

The foundation's focus has been on supporting sustainable and scalable growth. Its investment strategy currently includes four key focus areas: sustainability and revenue development, strengthening talent and leadership, technology and product innovation and First Amendment and journalist safety.

The foundation is particularly interested in supporting the infrastructure of local news organizations, such as legal support, content management systems and revenue development.

Some of the foundation's grants have gone toward supporting existing local news initiatives, including the American Journalism Project, NewsMatch and Report for America.

X. Press Forward

In September 2023, a coalition of 22 donors, announced they were investing \$500 million in revitalizing local journalism through a program called Press Forward. The Knight Foundation is among the donors, and provided a \$150 million anchor investment.

Press Forward stated that it would “enhance local journalism at an unprecedented level to re-center local news as a force for community cohesion; support new models and solutions that are ready to scale; and close longstanding inequities in journalism coverage and practice,” in announcing the initiative.

Press Forward launched Press Forward Locals, which is a network of chapters across the country aimed at bringing new donors and foundations together to expand resources for local news organizations. Currently, 31 communities have formed, or are forming local chapters, according to Press Forward's website. Hawai'i is not listed among them.

Each chapter gets support from Press Forward, including access to as much as \$250,000 in Catalyst Funds. These grants can be used for a variety of needs, such as supporting a chapter's operating costs, helping to raise funds and attract donors and can be regranted to local media organizations in the community.

The majority of Press Forward's funding is awarded through its Aligned Grantmaking program, in which individual funders give directly to local news initiatives.

XI. Report for America

[Report for America](#) places early career journalists in local newsrooms across the country to cover issues that are going underreported.

The program works by holding two competitions. In the first competition, news organizations pitch a plan for how they will use a Report for America journalist to fill a gap in coverage. In the second, emerging journalists apply to serve those communities.

Report for America covers 50% of the reporter's salary for a two-year term. The newsroom has the option to extend for a third year.

Since the program launched in 2017, it has placed 658 reporters in newsrooms throughout the country, including Hawai'i, and partnered with 371 newsrooms, according to its [website](#). It's also raised \$30 million locally to support newsrooms.

XII. ProPublica Local Reporting Network

ProPublica's Local Reporting Network began in 2018 to help boost investigative reporting at the local level. Local news organizations, under increasing financial strain, have cut back on in-depth, accountability reporting. ProPublica has stepped in to help fill that void.

The nonprofit news outlet has so far partnered with more than 70 local newsrooms across the country. The nonprofit, investigative news organization pays the annual salaries of local reporters up to \$75,000 and provides robust resources for reporting and editing their projects. The projects are co-published with the local news outlet and ProPublica.

This year, ProPublica launched the 50 State Initiative, in which it has committed to supporting accountability projects in every state by the end of 2029. ProPublica has partnered with both the Honolulu Star-Advertiser and Honolulu Civil Beat on local reporting projects in recent years.

XIII. New York Times Local Investigations Fellowship

The New York Times recently launched a fellowship program that supports investigative projects by local journalists. Headed by Dean Baquet, who retired as editor-in-chief of the newspaper in 2022, the one-year fellowships are designed to develop the next generation of reporters dedicated to accountability journalism at the local level.

Reporters from local outlets are employed by the New York Times for a year and then return to their local newsrooms. Their work is published by the New York Times and can be published by the local news outlet free of charge. Honolulu Civil Beat has participated in the program.

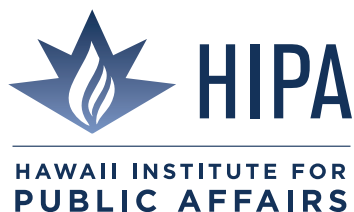
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About the Hawai'i Institute for Public Affairs

Established in 2000, the Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs (HIPA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan and independent research and educational organization whose mission is to provide research, analysis and recommendations on public policy issues facing Hawai'i, and to provide opportunities for individuals to develop as productive leaders and citizens in society. HIPA's research briefs, issue papers and publications provide fact, data, and analysis that enable decision-makers to make sound policy decisions that benefit Hawai'i. Public policy reports address a wide spectrum of issues relating to economic development, education, labor & management, health care, environment, land use, science & technology, social justice, media and governance.



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