IMPACT REPORT 2020
OUR MISSION

To ensure a healthy future for local journalism, which is essential to a strong democracy, by reinventing business models for news.
Dear friends and colleagues in the local media industry,

None of us will ever forget 2020. At our last in-person board meeting on March 8, LMA leaders left Miami with a very uncertain future. We were concerned about our financial health, as in-person events were not likely to return anytime soon and our member companies faced serious revenue declines, layoffs and furloughs.

Little did we know 2020 would end up being the best financial year in LMA’s history. We ended the year with over $17 million in revenue — about four times our previous high. The majority of this revenue went back to the local media industry in the form of relief funds or support for journalism. And instead of facing layoffs and furloughs of our own, we actually grew our team in 2020 and added senior-level talent that wasn’t financially attainable in the past.

This growth was fueled by a number of important initiatives:

- We managed the COVID-19 relief program, distributing $12.4 million to hundreds of media companies through the generosity of the Facebook Journalism Project.
- We helped over 200 local media organizations raise over $2 million to support their COVID-19 reporting efforts and other journalism projects.
- Three industry collaborations — Word in Black, Oklahoma Media Center and Solving for Chicago — generated funding of $1.45 million to help 48 media companies work together to produce great journalism as they also worked on their business transformation goals.
- Tremendous support from Google News Initiative enabled us to fund a significant number of projects including the LMA Lab for Journalism Funding.

We’re proud to share this Impact Report with all of you and we’re excited about our plans for 2021. We hope you will find ways to engage, partner and work with us as we remain intensely focused on reinventing business models for news.

Sincerely,

NANCY M. LANE
CEO
Local Media Association
OUR STRATEGIC PILLARS

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

JOURNALISM FUNDED BY PHILANTHROPY

INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

SUSTAINABILITY FOR PUBLISHERS OF COLOR

STORIES OF IMPACT
March 2020 may seem like years ago, given how much has happened since. That’s when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and communities everywhere faced shutdowns, layoffs and more.

Local media felt the worst impact of the pandemic during this time, with precipitous declines in advertising revenue and costly challenges to running their businesses.

In response, Local Media Foundation initiated its first-ever fundraising campaign on behalf of local news organizations. The COVID-19 Local News Fund was designed to raise money to provide vital news and information to communities all over North America about the emerging pandemic via a crowdfunding platform.

It saved journalism jobs and reduced layoffs/furloughs. By the end of the year, the COVID-19 Local News Fund had raised $1.74 million, helping more than 200 local news organizations keep pandemic coverage at the forefront in their communities.

“The COVID-19 Local News Fund was life-saving as cash flow dried up and the uncertainty of our future confronted us.”
— Sonny Messiah Jiles, CEO, Houston Defender Network

### Impact:

- **Facebook COVID-19 Relief Fund**

  In early April, as the pandemic took hold, a Saturday afternoon phone call from Facebook changed everything.

  The Facebook Journalism Project wanted to provide relief stipends to local media organizations and asked for LMA’s assistance with execution, including judging applications and distributing the funds.

  In the first round, more than 400 newsrooms each received $5,000 in community grants to support their COVID-19 reporting. This provided important short-term relief of $2.1 million.

  In the second round, $10.3 million was distributed to 144 local U.S. newsrooms in May. The project set out to ensure long-term sustainability and business transformation for local news organizations, including many of those hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic’s economic toll. This round saved journalism jobs and increased the amount of news and information that local communities received about the coronavirus. For some publishers, it meant they would stay in business.

  23% of the recipients said it saved their newsrooms from outright extinction.

### Outcome:

- **$1.74 Million Raised for Local Journalism**

- **$12.4 Million Distributed to 550 Local Newsrooms**
Elinor Tatum, publisher/owner of the New York Amsterdam News, called LMA CEO Nancy Lane on the Saturday after the killing of George Floyd with an urgent request: “We need to set up a fund to support Black journalism and it needs to go live by Monday.”

That Sunday, the LMA team worked with Tatum to get the Fund for Black Journalism established and launched. By the next week, donations were pouring in.

“Word in Black” became the first initiative of the Fund for Black Journalism. This collaboration featured 10 of the country’s leading Black publishers covering New York City, Atlanta, Houston, Washington D.C., Dallas, Baltimore, Seattle, Sacramento, St. Louis and Detroit. The group focused on fostering solutions to racial inequities in America.

In just seven months the group raised $750,000 from over 350 individuals plus major gifts from Google News Initiative and Facebook Journalism Project.

The first journalism project, funded by Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and Walton Family Foundation, focused on the impact of COVID-19 on K-12 education in Black communities. Word in Black hosted its first virtual event in October, a nationally broadcast interactive Town Hall on “Voting with Purpose” that drew more than one thousand views.

“We seized this incredible moment in time to elevate the Black press and take our rightful place when it comes to fostering solutions to racial inequities in America. Watch out — we’ve only just begun!”
— Elinor Tatum, publisher, New York Amsterdam News

LMA Lab for Journalism Funding

Publishers need to think differently to sustain their businesses. LMA was a leader in recognizing the growing role philanthropy could play as a new pillar for sustaining local news. So in September, LMA seized this opportunity and launched the Lab for Journalism Funding. More than 50 publishers applied and 16 were selected to join the lab, funded with support from Google. The curriculum was created by a team from The Seattle Times, which has been an innovator in funding local reporting with philanthropy. Participants learn from guest expert speakers from the philanthropy community, collaborate and share learnings in small groups, and receive one-on-one coaching from LMA. Participants have each identified community service initiatives that are mission-aligned and address community needs; and are engaged with their funding communities to enable this important reporting.

“Our experience in the Lab has shifted our approach, from ‘asking for a handout’ to taking pride in the value our reporting adds to our community. Using skills learned in LMA’s lab, we’ve been able to fund two additional reporter positions, helping both our business and our service to the Sacramento community.”
— Larry Lee, publisher, Sacramento Observer

OUTCOME:

OVER $750,000 IN FUNDING TO SUPPORT REPORTING ON RACIAL INEQUITIES IN AMERICA

13 REPORTERS FUNDED IN FIRST TWO MONTHS OF LAB
INVESTIGATIVE STIPENDS — FUND FOR LOCAL JOURNALISM

Investigative journalism has decreased in communities large and small as journalism jobs continue to be eliminated across the country. That’s why LMA created The Fund for Local Journalism.

In October, LMA awarded its first round of stipends. The 10 grants of $5,000 helped local publishers pursue a range of important local investigations focused on social justice, education and the unhoused.

In 2021, LMA will expand the number of stipends and the size of grants to ensure local newsrooms can continue their critical work holding the powerful accountable.

IMPACT:

Our stipend will support a project to examine how investors use both legal and legally questionable tools to extract equity from longtime property owners in gentrifying areas in and beyond Charleston, S.C. This grant allows us to obtain important data through Freedom of Information Act requests.

— P.J. Browning, president & publisher, The Post and Courier
As media companies navigate the complicated world of social media, they often need help. The LMA Local News Resource Center was created for that purpose.

Funded by the Facebook Journalism Project since 2018, the Local News Resource Center, led by Emilie Lutostanski, has helped local newsrooms effectively and efficiently use social media and related tools including Facebook, Instagram, and CrowdTangle. The LNRC helps newsrooms succeed with their social media campaigns through individualized coaching, group networking opportunities, educational webinars, and case studies.

From critical information about the pandemic to conversations about social justice to separating fact from fiction for the 2020 election, the Local News Resource Center was a lifeline to newsrooms in their efforts to share essential news and information with their communities in ways that heighten engagement and meet business goals. With this support, publishers have grown not only their aptitude for social media but also their audiences and engagement.

The Local News Resource Center was always available to Torstar for idea sharing, best practices, general knowledge, and market insight. Their deep knowledge of social media, Facebook and CrowdTangle helped us get a foot into each market and grow our brand.”
— Leslie Osborne, regional general manager, Torstar Local

We are thrilled to see newsrooms and funders connecting via NewsFuel to enable more news organizations to seek and receive funding for their most crucial projects.”
— Jay Small, LMA chief operating officer / NewsFuel program manager

What if there were a place where funders and media companies could go to meet and match? That was the simple but powerful idea behind LMA’s launch of NewsFuel (www.newsfuel.org), a web-based platform designed to match funders with journalism projects.

With funding from the Google News Initiative Innovation Challenge, NewsFuel launched in beta in August, and was refined through feedback from both news organizations and funders.

By December, NewsFuel featured more than 200 active funders and related financial opportunities; and more than 200 news organizations and projects in search of funding were listed.
As news collaboratives started to develop across the country over the last few years, one thing seemed to be missing – a focus on the business side.

Solving for Chicago was born out of an assumption. LMA leaders believed that in addition to producing great journalism, collaboratives should also focus on growing revenue and audience for all of the media partners. The Google News Initiative agreed to fund the project after working with the LMA team on a business plan.

In August, a group of 18 publishers and broadcasters started writing stories about essential workers. Since then, the partners have published nearly 50 stories connecting with the most vulnerable workers during the pandemic. At the same time, they began the work to improve business strategies related to reader revenue, journalism funded by philanthropy, branded content and more.

**IMPACT:**

“This is an initiative that honors not only the mission work we do at WBEZ, but it allows us to be an editorial partner for all of Chicago in serving the community during one of the most critical news moments of our lifetime. It’s work we recognize that we can’t do alone, it takes all of us.”

— Tracy Brown, managing editor, WBEZ/Chicago Public Media

**OUTCOME:**

$225,000 FROM THE GOOGLE NEWS INITIATIVE AND SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM NETWORK TO SUPPORT ESSENTIAL WORKER COVERAGE, PLUS A FUNDED PROJECT MANAGER

We weren’t sure it was possible to launch a news collaborative during a global pandemic with 20 local media organizations, without the ability to meet in person. But we did.

Inasmuch Foundation contacted us in April with an interest in funding this project, and by early June we had agreements with most of the 20 media partners. As the group was deciding on a first topic, Walton Family Foundation approached us, interested in funding reporting on the impact of COVID-19 on K-12 education in Oklahoma. The goals were aligned, the Oklahoma Media Center accepted the funding, and the group has since published over 30 stories on this important topic.

OMC is a collaboration of print, digital, and broadcast newsrooms working cooperatively to cover pressing issues. The Center also provides business development resources for member organizations with a goal of increasing revenue and audience for all members of the OMC. In late 2020, Democracy Fund also made an investment and Inasmuch renewed its commitment for all of 2021 including the creation of an innovation fund.

**IMPACT:**

Being able to post great journalism from other Oklahoma publishers is win-win for everybody. The value we get in participating with the OMC is all about developing relationships with other newsrooms across the state and the sharing of best practices.”

— Ryan Welton, director of digital content, Griffin Communications

**OUTCOME:**

$475,000 RAISED, FUNDING REPORTING ON COVID-19 IMPACTS ON K-12 EDUCATION IN OKLAHOMA, PLUS A PROJECT MANAGER
In 2021, LMA expects climate change to become an essential focus for newsrooms. This program brings together 25 local news organizations—across digital, print, broadcast and audio—to collaborate on climate reporting. LMA will help participants leverage key learnings from its 2020 initiatives including journalism funded by philanthropy and its three news collaboratives; and through partners will enable these newsrooms to increase the quality and quantity of their climate reporting, and develop new revenue streams to support this critical coverage.

**CROSSTOWN DATA JOURNALISM PILOT**
LMA has partnered with Facebook Journalism Project and Crosstown to launch a pilot project to make data more accessible to local journalists. WRAL-TV and NOLA.com/The Advocate will receive tools and training from the innovative Crosstown data team at USC, and a stipend to fund a dedicated data reporter, to enable their newsrooms to “find the story” in the data and build hyperlocal newsletter products. The pilot project seeks to develop best practices to make data journalism more accessible for small and mid-sized newsrooms.

**AMPLIFY OHIO**
Industry collaboration and sustainability for publishers of color are two of the four core pillars of LMA’s 2021 strategic plan. In 2021, LMA launched its fifth industry collaborative in the past year, Amplify Ohio. This diverse digital media coalition includes three partners, Black Girl Media, The Buckeye Flame, and ColumbusBlack.com. Together, the partners will collaborate to develop a community contribution model for sustainability, and publish stories that focus on health disparities that impact Black and LGBTQ communities, amplifying voices underrepresented by mainstream media outlets.

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“These new initiatives reflect LMA’s commitment to innovation. We’re excited to leverage collaboration, data and contribution models to build sustainable business models for news.” — Frank Mungeam, chief innovation officer, Local Media Association
Local Media Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) charitable trust affiliated with LMA. Programs administered by LMF focus on educating and informing the public on important community issues as well as sustainability for local journalism.
SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM

We welcome support for all of our programs and initiatives. Immediate needs include data journalists for the Covering Climate Collaborative and a newsletter editor for Word in Black. To discuss how you can make a difference, contact Nancy Lane at nancy.lane@localmedia.org.

We are also accepting online donations for the following programs:

**The Fund for Local Journalism** supports local investigative reporting projects in communities all over North America.

**Covering Climate Collaborative**, 25 newsrooms reporting on the local impacts of climate change and empowering meaningful community action.

**Word in Black**, founded by 10 of the leading Black publishers in the U.S., fosters solutions to racial inequities in America.

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ENGAGE WITH LMA

A healthy local news ecosystems needs many players — traditional media, start-ups, funders, technology platforms and more. Local Media Association brings everyone together for the purpose of reinventing business models for news. Have an idea or need help? We’d love to hear from you.

“Whether you represent a large traditional media company, a small digital start-up or something in-between, there is a place for you to learn and grow at LMA. To our friends in the funding community, we are pleased that more and more of you are seeing the value in supporting journalism projects. Together we can ensure a bright future for local news.” — Tom Sly, chair, LMA Board of Directors; vice president, digital revenue, The E.W. Scripps Co.

For more information on LMA, visit [www.localmedia.org](http://www.localmedia.org) or contact Lindsey Estes at Lindsey.Estes@localmedia.org

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“Freedom of the press IS NOT JUST IMPORTANT TO DEMOCRACY, IT IS DEMOCRACY.”
— WALTER CRONKITE
Thank you funding partners.