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,

2021 was a transformational year in our organization’s history. The global pandemic forced us to engage in new and different ways, and we learned a lot in the process. From transforming our own business through new funding sources to helping local media companies with their long-term sustainability goals, it was a year of great progress and success.

Our revenue in 2021 exceeded $6.4 million vs. a budget of $3.5 million. We have budgeted nearly $9 million for 2022. Our four pillars continue to serve us and the industry well. Here are the highlights:

Sustainability for publishers of color: Word In Black now has more than $2 million in funding, more than 30,000 newsletter subscribers and a staff of seven.

Journalism funded by philanthropy: Our first cohort of 16 publishers raised more than $5 million for journalism projects during their time in the lab.

Business transformation: Participants in the Meta Branded Content Project, managed by LMA and the Local Media Consortium, sold more than $50 million in branded content since inception.

Industry collaboration: In addition to the six we launched from scratch (including News Is Out: National Queer Media Collaborative), we are now taking on management of several others. In total, the seven groups have raised more than $3.5 million.

We’re proud to share this Impact Report and excited about our plans for 2022. 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
STORIES OF IMPACT
Word In Black

In 2020, after the murder of George Floyd, LMA launched the Fund for Black Journalism, which led to the creation of Word In Black. By Fall 2021, Word In Black had transformed from a collaborative of 10 Black-owned publishers into a true movement: Hundreds of contributions from donors large and small, dedicated resources for education reporting funded by Chan Zuckerberg Foundation, launch of a weekly email newsletter giving voice and context from a Black perspective, and more than $1 million in new revenue. And that’s just the start. In 2022, Word In Black will expand its efforts to highlight solutions that empower and engage Black communities across our country.

What started out as an idea after America’s reckoning on race, has now flourished into a national news brand that has allowed me and the other publishers to look at Word In Black as a place to incubate new ideas, products, and services. Doing this alone would have been impossible but by combining forces with 10 Black-owned publishers, we stand to create a new business model for the future that has attracted the attention and respect of major funders and corporations that our community of Black newspapers has deservedly earned.”

— Denise Rolark Barnes, Publisher, The Washington Informer

IMPACT:

• $2 MILLION RAISED THROUGH A MIX OF INDIVIDUAL DONORS, FOUNDATIONS, AND CORPORATE COMMUNITY SUPPORT SINCE LAUNCHING IN THE FALL OF 2020
• MORE THAN 250 EDUCATION STORIES PUBLISHED AND SHARED, REPORTING ON CRITICAL ISSUES FACING THE BLACK COMMUNITY
• MORE THAN 30,000 SUBSCRIBERS TO THE WORD IN BLACK EMAIL NEWSLETTER

OUTCOMES:

In Fall 2020, LMA launched the Lab for Journalism Funding to answer the question: Could philanthropy become a meaningful additional “pillar” of funding for essential local journalism? With funding from the Google News Initiative, and expertise from Joaquin Alvarado, Kristin Dizon and the team at The Seattle Times, LMA took 16 publishers on a six-month journey to pursue philanthropy-funded projects, culminating with a Pitch Day in front of six judges from national journalism funding organizations. The results were definitive. The 16 publishers raised $5 million in nine months, funding such important projects as a Latino reporting lab, an education lab, a COVID-19 vaccination reporter and robust investigative units.

In Fall 2021, with continued support from Google and additional funding from the Lenfest Institute for Journalism, LMA launched a diverse second, expanded cohort of the funding lab that included 20 publishers. By the end of the year, those publishers had already raised more than $1.7 million to support local journalism projects.

OUTCOMES:

• $5 MILLION RAISED BY 16 PUBLISHERS IN FIRST COHORT
• PATHWAYS TO PHILANTHROPY 42-PAGE FUNDRAISING PLAYBOOK AND NUMEROUS CASE STUDIES PUBLISHED
• $1.7 MILLION RAISED IN FIRST FOUR MONTHS BY 20 NEWSROOMS IN SECOND COHORT
Over the past three years, the Meta Branded Content Project has helped publishers generate more than $50 million via branded content programs, training, guidance and support. In 2021, the Meta Branded Content Project began supporting media outlets by establishing no-cost and low-cost custom content series and sales support, directly generating an additional $3.75 million in revenue. These resources were particularly impactful for publishers who are independently owned, publishers of color and those serving small markets.

The Meta Branded Content Project is a strategic partnership among the Meta Journalism Project, Local Media Association and the Local Media Consortium that facilitates growth, engagement and success for more publishers of all shapes and sizes.

With over $393,000 in revenue, the Meta Branded Content Project has not only been a lifeline for our business during the pandemic, but it has also become a revenue stream that we fully expect to be an integral part of our business model moving forward.

— Chris Bennett, Editor and Publisher, The Seattle Medium

Climate change is a “planet-size” problem yet we experience its effects in our communities, so it’s fundamentally a local story, from flooding to drought, from wildfires to wetter and stronger storms. That’s why LMA launched the Covering Climate Collaborative on Earth Day 2021. Twenty-five local newsrooms and six best-in-class science and journalism partners committed to working together to humanize and localize the effects of climate change; and to inform and empower people to take meaningful action in their own communities.

In the first six months, the newsrooms have produced more than 150 localized climate reports, collaborated on joint reporting projects, documented the social justice aspects of climate change, and implemented solutions reporting to focus on responses to climate change. In October, the collaborative was awarded $200,000 from Google News Initiative to partner with Distributed Media Lab to build a climate story-sharing tool to use across the collaborative.

The Covering Climate Collaborative has significantly increased the volume and quality of our climate reporting:

We have discovered climate stories we might have missed, found local angles on climate stories from news partners in other markets, and collaborated with other newsrooms to jointly report on climate.

— Tracey Watkowski, Vice President of News, KGO-TV, San Francisco
Publishers understand that reader revenue strategies are essential to their future. But many news organizations struggle to find and implement effective practices for attracting and retaining members and subscribers. In 2021, LMA served as managing partner for Meta Journalism Project’s Accelerator program on reader revenue helping 30 publishers grow their businesses. The news organizations — half of which are owned or led by Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, or other people of color — were invited to 12 weeks of group sessions led by Blue Engine Collaborative, a consortium of mission-driven consultants and advisors focused on driving digital audience growth and revenue. As part of the program, participants also received customized coaching. Together with their coaches, Accelerator teams created and implemented plans to jump-start or grow their digital subscription/membership businesses. Teams also received grant funds to execute their reader revenue strategies. LMA wrote six case studies from the first cohort and will continue to share learnings with the industry when the second cohort ends in 2022.

**IMPACT:**

“The Facebook Accelerator not only helped us drive subscription growth, it transformed the way our staff interacts with and understands our communities. The impact on rural South Carolina will last for years.”

— Vince Johnson, Publisher, The Sumter Item, Sumter, South Carolina

**OUTCOMES:**

- $957,000 IN CUSTOMER LIFETIME VALUE ─ FROM 3,500 NEW PAYING SUPPORTERS AND 47,000 NEW REGISTERED AUDIENCE MEMBERS ─ GENERATED DURING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF THE PROGRAM
- PARTICIPANTS EXPECT TO GENERATE AS MUCH AS $8 MILLION USING THEIR GRANT SUPPORT

In 2021, the 25 news outlets in Oklahoma Media Center, a collaborative managed by LMA and supported by four funders including Inasmuch Foundation, launched Promised Land. This groundbreaking OMC reporting project covered the landmark 2020 Supreme Court decision on tribal sovereignty. The ruling is considered the most significant court decision affecting tribal boundaries and Indigenous sovereignty in more than a century. OMC members teamed up for a diverse and historic level of collaboration that included all three independent tribal news organizations and produced more than 350 stories across the group. OMC also advanced its goals of supporting and strengthening Oklahoma’s journalism ecosystem by training members on Freedom of Information Act filings, hiring a data journalist to support all member newsrooms, and seeding innovation.

**IMPACT:**

“Oklahoma Media Center is welcoming Indigenous journalists and Indigenous news entities into the fold to work with non-Indigenous ones. That gives everyone on each table a really valuable return on their investment.”

— Angel Ellis, Mvskoke Media director, independent tribal news for the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma
As communities across the country struggled with the pandemic, the LMA Local News Resource Center was an invaluable resource in supporting and enabling local newsrooms to meet their audience on their social platforms of choice, with the right information at the right time, in the right place. With LNRC support, publishers improved the ways they served their audiences, and grew engagement essential to sustaining their business.

LNRC was created in 2018 to help media companies navigate the complicated, ever-changing world of social media. Funded by the Meta Journalism Project, the Local News Resource Center helps local newsrooms engage and grow their audiences through training in social media tools including Facebook, Instagram, and CrowdTangle. The LNRC helps newsrooms succeed with their social media campaigns through individualized coaching, educational webinars, and published best practices.

The Local News Resource Center has filled my toolbox with an arsenal of best practices, tips to enhance our reps’ methods of selling, and has influenced how we innovate and elevate all social media opportunities at Observer Media Group. Emilie’s knowledge between platforms has been a huge benefit to our sales team, being up 17% in digital ad sales year-to-year.”

— Emma Burke, Digital Fulfillment Specialist, Observer Media Group, Sarasota, Florida

SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORT, STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS

When the collaborative was created more than 18 months ago, our hope was that we would not just tell great stories about essential workers, but bring about real change for those impacted by our collective work. We’re seeing that manifest in ways bigger than we imagined with local officials committing millions of dollars in resources to those issues and communities in need.”

— Tracy Brown, Chief Content Officer, Chicago Public Media/WBEZ

Many Chicagoans labeled as “essential workers” never got a break during the first year of COVID-19. Solving for Chicago’s 20 newsroom partners worked together to provide these workers with the critical information they needed to stay safe, and to bring these issues to the attention of lawmakers and the public. Those reporting efforts paid dividends. Resources flowed to the communities most affected, and successful programs were quickly replicated as a result of stories done by SFC newsrooms. Coordinated and sustained coverage of the plight of essential workers captured the attention of lawmakers, including officials in the White House. Based on the success of this project, Solving for Chicago’s newsrooms selected “The Path Forward” as a new focus for coordinated reporting in 2022, as a way to empower residents and leaders to shape a better future for Chiagoans.

OUTCOMES:

• Assisted 100+ media partners with social media support
• Helped publishers increase social media followers 22% through growth strategies
• Enabled news publishers to get verified on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and recover lost account access

“$250,000 in early rounds of funding raised to support collaborative journalism in Chicago
• One media partner received an exclusive interview with Kamala Harris because of the topic
• Reporting led to a $10 million expansion in vaccine program that benefited essential workers

OUTCOMES:

• 22% through growth strategies
• Enabled news publishers to get verified on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and recover lost account access

The Local News Resource Center has filed my toolbox with an arsenal of best practices, tips to enhance our reps’ methods of selling, and has influenced how we innovate and elevate all social media opportunities at Observer Media Group. Emilie’s knowledge between platforms has been a huge benefit to our sales team, being up 17% in digital ad sales year-to-year.”

— Emma Burke, Digital Fulfillment Specialist, Observer Media Group, Sarasota, Florida
CROSSTOWN DATA JOURNALISM PILOT

How can data journalism be made affordable to local newsrooms, and make data easily accessible to all reporters in a newsroom, not just the one “data expert”? And is it possible to develop new news products with their own revenue streams built on that data journalism? The Crosstown Data Journalism Pilot, funded with support from the Meta Journalism Project, set out to explore answers to those questions.

LMA partnered with the Crosstown data team at the University of Southern California and news partners WRAL-TV and NOLA.com/The Advocate to set up news datasets and training on how to find the “story in the data.” The grant funded data reporting in each newsroom as well. Over the course of the year, the two newsrooms produced more than 50 stories grounded in Crosstown’s data tools. These stories consistently generated above-average readership and engagement, and the partners have begun the work of launching new, data-driven, hyperlocal email newsletters to create a sustainable news product powered by data.

IMPACT:

“LMA’s Crosstown Data Pilot helped fund a dedicated data journalist for our newsroom, enabled us to produce more than two dozen data-driven stories that earned high audience engagement, and ultimately resulted in us expanding the use of data across our newsroom.”

— John Conway, Vice President, WRAL Digital

OUTCOMES:

- DATA JOURNALIST FUNDED FOR EACH NEWSROOM
- MORE THAN 50 DATA-DRIVEN STORIES PUBLISHED BY THE PARTNER NEWSROOMS
- DATA-POWERED STORIES OUTPERFORMED ON BOTH READERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT
- PILOT DATA-DRIVEN NEWSLETTERS LAUNCHED BY EACH NEWSROOM
The path forward

Here are three innovative initiatives LMA plans to pursue in 2022 to advance its mission of transforming business models for local news.

**KNIGHT X LMA BLOOM LAB: SUSTAINABILITY FOR BLACK LOCALLY OWNED & OPERATED MEDIA**

This exciting three-year industry initiative will focus on technology to accelerate business transformation for Black publishers, thanks to an initial $3.2 million investment from the Knight Foundation. Eighteen publishers will participate in Year One with another eight to be added in Year Two. Three full-time specialists focused on business, sales/marketing and technology will be hired to work with the publishers on a daily basis. Publishers will receive $50,000 stipends to upgrade technology and LMA will negotiate group contracts and preferred pricing.

**NEWS IS OUT: NATIONAL QUEER MEDIA COLLABORATIVE**

With an initial round of funding from the Google News Initiative Innovation Challenge, the LMF launched its sixth industry collaboration. News Is Out: National Queer Media Collaborative brings seven LGBTQ+ publishers together. The group will focus on business sustainability along with producing great journalism. The group is in the early stages of mission- and vision-setting, but plans to launch a website and newsletter in the first half of 2022. The funding also covers extensive audience listening and research, which will guide strategy for the launch of the site and newsletter.

**LMA TECHNOLOGY RESOURCE CENTER**

Technology can accelerate a news organization’s transformation, but lack of technical expertise is often a roadblock to sustainability and growth for smaller local news outlets. To help them achieve the best possible outcomes from investments in enabling platforms, Local Media Association will launch a Technology Resource Center in early 2022, with support from Google News Initiative. The Center will assist media organizations of all types and sizes with strategies and consulting to improve selection, implementation, optimization and long-term success of enabling technologies.

“This combination of new initiatives by Local Media Association ensures we’ll be able to support a diverse range of news organizations and help them develop and implement both strategies and technologies to sustain their journalism.” — Andrew Ramsammy, Chief Content and Collaboration Officer, Local Media Association
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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.
ENGAGE WITH LMA

A healthy local news ecosystem 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.

LMA is proud to support the full diversity of local media, from large and traditional media companies, to small and digital start-up organizations and collaboratives. We are heartened by the increased support from our friends in the funding community as well. We are confident that, working together, we can ensure the sustainability of a vibrant local news ecosystem and the essential benefits it provides our communities.” — Catherine Badalamente, chair, LMA Board of Directors; incoming CEO, Graham Media Group

For more information on LMA, visit www.localmedia.org or contact Lindsey Estes at Lindsey.Estes@localmedia.org

SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM

We welcome support for all our programs and initiatives. Immediate needs include data journalists for the Covering Climate Collaborative and additional funding for the Knight x LMA BloomLab focused on sustainability for Black publishers. To discuss how you can make a difference, contact Nancy Lane at nancy.lane@localmedia.org.

We also accept donations through these programs:

The Fund for Local Journalism supports essential journalism through a range of initiatives designed to create sustainable business models for local news.

givebutter.com/LMF

Covering Climate Collaborative, 25 newsrooms working together to report on the local impacts of climate change and to empower residents to take meaningful action in their communities.

givebutter.com/coveringclimate

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

givebutter.com/journalismfund
blacknewspapers

“The people must know before they can act, and there is no educator to compare with the press.”
— IDA B. WELLS
Thank you funding partners.