

North Carolina
Local News Lab
Fund

Six Years of an Ecosystem Approach

*Building a community-centered coalition and
driving transformational change*



Dear Friends,

In 2017, a group of North Carolina and national funders launched the North Carolina Local News Lab Fund. Our goal was clear: to guarantee that all North Carolinians have access to the local news and information they need to make our communities and democracy thrive.

The intervening years have brought ashore powerful hurricanes, a global pandemic, and mounting threats to democracy. During this time, we deployed more than \$4 million in direct grants and advised on nearly as much in aligned grantmaking. Our growing network of news and community organizations have approached these challenges with a collaborative, entrepreneurial spirit, while advancing solutions that meet the everyday information needs of our communities. We've woven a stronger, more connected coalition of trusted messengers who tell the collective stories of North Carolina as our communities, state, and world change.

Since we began this ecosystem work, we've continuously adapted our approach, evolving to pursue our vision more effectively and equitably. These shifts support a more nimble, diverse, and community-centered network. Some of these practices are:

- Providing general operating grants that allow our network to adapt and hire for challenging times and unexpected opportunities.
- Implementing a verbal reporting process that frees up our grant partners' capacity and provides us with rich stories of success and learning.
- Expanding our understanding of the messengers in our ecosystem, and embracing roles across reporting and distributing news and information alongside correcting narratives.
- Framing our grantmaking around the assets and needs of marginalized people and places, leading us to support more leaders of color and close geographic gaps in our funding.

North Carolina's news and information ecosystem is at its best when funders and field organizations work together to make sure that everyone in our state can find, trust, and use the information they need.

Our power, impact, and progress are rooted in our collective, collaborative approach. I have immense gratitude for many people who are at work alongside us. Thank you to the publishers, reporters, community organizers, health workers, and other funders who each have a hand in this shared work.

It has taken, and will take, all of us.

Onward,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Hazeltine".

Lizzy Hazeltine, Director



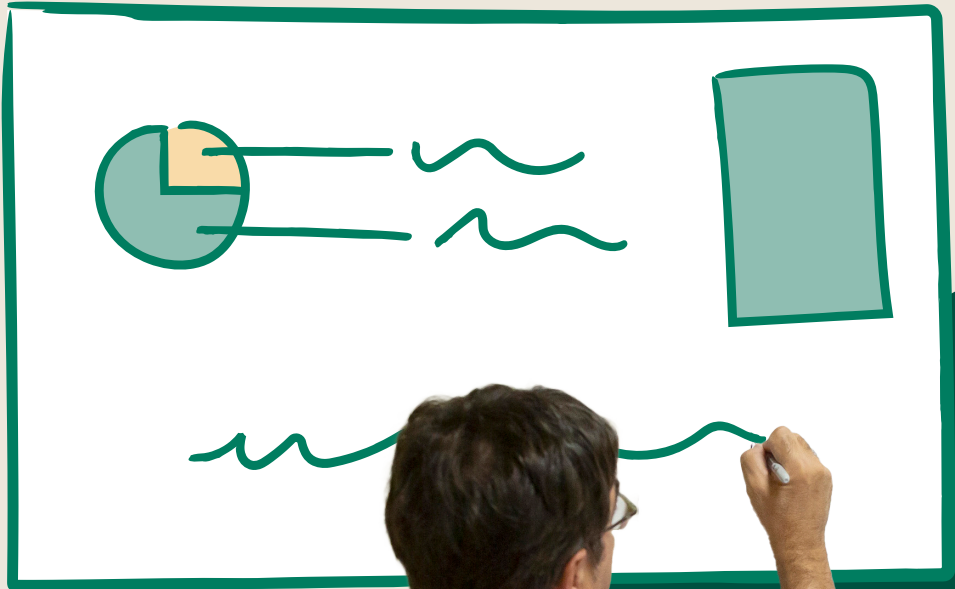
Our Approach

The North Carolina Local News Lab Fund is a pooled fund established in 2017. Our central goal is to build a resilient, sustainable news and information network that deeply serves all of North Carolina. We invest in trusted messengers, facilitate connections among partners and funders, and amplify breakthrough insights within and beyond our network.

News and information, coalitions, and philanthropy all work best when we center community needs and community leadership. In the face of historical inequities that perpetuate information gaps across race, class, and geography, a community-centered approach remedies systems that do not serve everyone. In doing so, we aim to create a media landscape driven by local leaders and built on trust, access, and belonging.

Our Approach At-A-Glance

- **We fund a diverse range of roles** in our information infrastructure. Newsrooms, community organizations, schools, libraries, and others all have a part to play in ensuring that relevant, reliable information reaches everyone.
- **We award general operating grants** that enable newsrooms and community organizations to experiment with solutions to information problems, engage with their communities, and sustain themselves and their teams.
- **We design processes that reflect our values**, embedding an equity lens into our grantmaking operations and simplifying structures that have long left disconnected people and places out of traditional philanthropy.
- **We weave stronger networks** among grant partners, funders, and other players in our civic infrastructure, resulting in transformative collaborations and unlocking additional philanthropic support for our grant partners.
- **We share emergent lessons learned** about an ecosystem approach, pooled funding, evaluation, and impact that can be scaled across regions and networks.

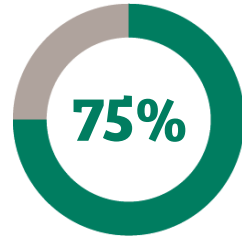
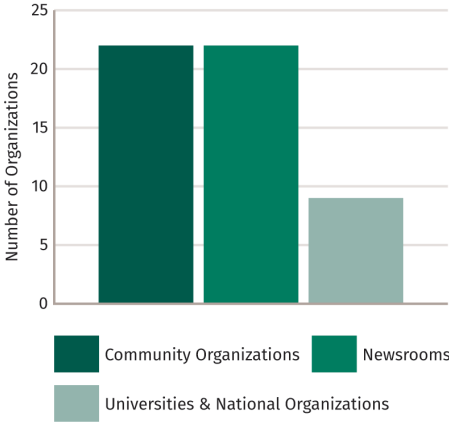


Our Impact

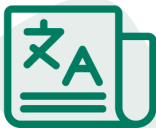
We're working toward a North Carolina where everyone can find, trust, and use the information they need. Take a look at our progress by the numbers.



Our Grant Partners



of grant partners in 2022 are BIPOC-led



Half of grant partners publish or operate in a language other than English



Spanish, Mam, K'iche, Karen, Dari, Pashto, Urdu, Arabic and more

Network Weaving

We're a dot connector. We facilitate collaboration among partners and funders and amplify grantees on the national stage. As a result, our coalition is stronger and more connected. And we have activated additional dollars into North Carolina's news and information ecosystem—nearly dollar for dollar on top of our direct investments.



\$3.8M+

in aligned funding

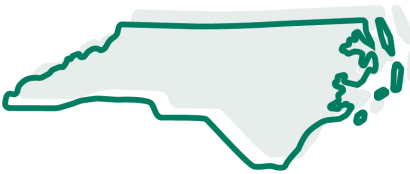
Grants from other funders to organizations in our network, made since 2020, that Fund Director Lizzy Hazeltine advised on.



22+

new collaborations

Content and business collaborations formed among network members—from ad sales partnerships, to long-term solutions reporting initiatives, to ongoing content-sharing.



62 OUT OF 100

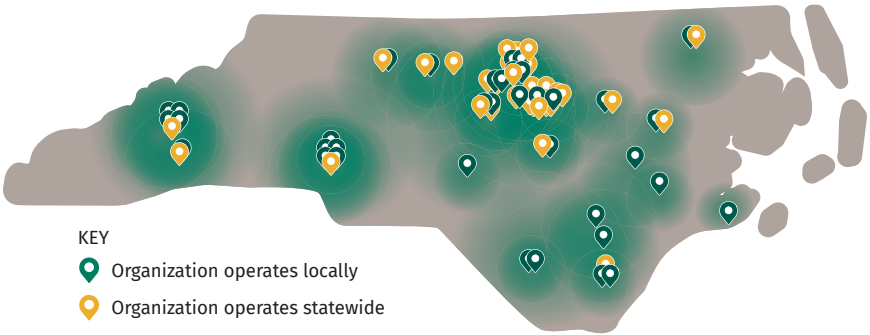
counties in North Carolina reached

Increased funding means we can hire the staff we need to really build relationships and make our communications tools as accessible to farmworkers as possible.

**SYLVIA ZAPATA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
STUDENT ACTION WITH FARMWORKERS**

Connecting North Carolina

From the Qualla Boundary to Corolla, our grant partners are creating a more informed, engaged North Carolina. They represent a [diverse range of roles](#) in our civic infrastructure, from news reporters to information distributors to community organizers. Together, they are connecting communities, innovating access, building trust, disrupting narratives, and activating the stories and storytellers of North Carolina.



Areas Where Our Grant Partners Lead

- Bridging the digital divide
- Challenging dominant narratives
- Community belonging
- Criminal justice reporting
- Democratizing storytelling
- Farmworker health and safety
- Investigative reporting
- Language access
- Newsroom sustainability
- Public accountability
- Public health
- Refugee and immigrant inclusion
- Rural reporting
- Technological innovation
- Training new journalists
- Voter education and civic engagement
- Youth media

“

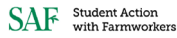
The rise of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in NC amplifies the importance of journalism that's for and by the LGBTQ+ community. With support from the Fund, we hired a new reporter and invested in our audience and revenue strategies.

**JIM YARBROUGH, PUBLISHER
OF QNOTESCAROLINAS**



PHOTO: MADELINE GRAY

Our Current Grant Partners



Our Funding Coalition



“*The NC Local News Lab Fund is an indispensable part of building a strong information ecosystem. They keep us connected and inform us about cutting edge developments in the field.*

**ADAM LINKER, VICE PRESIDENT OF PROGRAMS,
KATE B. REYNOLDS CHARITABLE TRUST**



Health solutions powered by reporting and community engagement

When North Carolina's communities can access trustworthy public health news and information, they are better prepared to navigate the public health challenges of our time. Through solutions-oriented investigative health reporting and community programming, Charlotte-based public radio station WFAE unpacks some of the biggest crises in the U.S. healthcare system—from protecting against infectious diseases to recovering from a natural disaster.

The Fund's general operating grants to WFAE support the station's community listening and engagement in Charlotte. With a full-time community engagement producer, WFAE facilitates conversations among community members, civic leaders, reporters, and subject matter experts. In 2022, WFAE hosted a five-part series about mental health. The series answered community questions about accessing care, finding culturally competent providers, and overcoming the mental health stigma that often exists in communities of color. Other recent programming covered mental health in the criminal justice system, the costs of medical care, and local homicide rates.

WFAE's reporting uncovers issues that spur local and state leaders to act. In one investigative series, WFAE examined the fissures in our healthcare system that undermine sexual assault survivors' ability to get care. The reporting revealed that many of the state's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners weren't adequately compensated by the government and had been waiting for reimbursement checks for more than a year. Upon hearing the series, government officials reached out to the station. Soon after, WFAE began hearing from healthcare providers: they finally received their reimbursements.



PHOTO: WFAE/JEFF CRAVOTTA PHOTOGRAPHY

Read more about how WFAE supports a healthy North Carolina.





AMEXCAN provides leadership, coordination, and direct delivery of critical information in rural North Carolina counties. Their partnership with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services ensured easy access of Spanish language health information in the communities they serve. (PHOTO: AMEXCAN)

NC FIELD leverages its partnerships to make medicine, vaccines, and culturally appropriate food accessible and affordable in rural North Carolina. NC FIELD responds to a wide array of health needs. Sometimes, that looks like hosting a heat stress screening at a mobile health event. Others, it's buying flu and TDAP vaccines for community clinics. (PHOTO: NC FIELD)



El Centro Hispano launched a community health worker corps during COVID-19, in response to translation delays and lack of accessible information for Spanish speakers. They helped people navigate visa issues, schedule appointments, and find transportation to vaccination sites. The corps began as a crisis response but is now a core initiative at El Centro. (PHOTO: LINDA STONE/EL CENTRO HISPANO)



Civic engagement powered by community-responsive tech

A healthy democracy requires government transparency. When information about our democratic process is confusing, hard to access, or outright hidden, accountability is difficult to exercise. Code the Dream, a nonprofit committed to equity in technological innovation, has the solution for more sunshine: UpState, North Carolina’s most efficient legislative tracking tool.

Based in Durham, Code the Dream offers free coding classes and mentorship to people underrepresented in the tech industry. It also operates a full-service software development shop, which partners with businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to bring technology solutions to life. In 2020, Code the Dream stepped in as the primary owner of UpState, which shares real-time legislative updates, committee recordings, and transcripts. Through real-time text and email notifications and a customizable dashboard, UpState users can stay in-the-know about the legislative topics they care about most.

UpState adds capacity and drives access for our state’s newsrooms and greater accountability for those in power. Thanks to UpState, reporters can more easily access timely updates from the General Assembly, even if they aren’t based near Raleigh. What’s more, UpState decodes legislative jargon so that everyone can access the information they need to hold North Carolina’s government accountable.

Code the Dream and UpState lay the foundation for accountability reporting and civic engagement in North Carolina. The Fund’s general operating support of Code the Dream enables the organization to maintain a free version of UpState, ensuring that everyone in North Carolina can access public records easily and stay informed.



Read more about how Code the Dream creates a more accountable North Carolina.



WNCU trains students at North Carolina Central University, a public, historically Black university in Durham. With hands-on instruction, students produce high-quality, on-demand history and current events podcasts. The public radio station's program helps create the next generation of journalists in North Carolina, ready to inform the public and hold institutions accountable. (PHOTO: GEORGE MILTON)



The Charlotte Journalism Collaborative spearheaded a collaborative reporting project on affordable housing and leveraged the series to engage city and county leaders in policy change. Hand-delivering the reporting to officials and convening stakeholders, CJC helps connect Charlotte leaders with housing solutions that residents need. (PHOTO: JAMES WILLAMOR)

North Carolina Health News makes sense of evolving health policy in North Carolina, including a decade of reporting on Medicaid expansion. Clear, accessible information about our complex health system enables reporters, public health professionals, and everyday North Carolinians to understand the implications of policy change and engage in decisions that affect their health. (PHOTO: TAYLOR KNOPF)





Information access powered by a multi-channel media strategy

As North Carolina's news and information ecosystem flourishes online, the gap between those who have easy access to the digital world, and those who don't grows. JMPRO Community Media bridges this divide with a multi-channel, multilingual distribution strategy tailored to the lives and needs of immigrant communities in Western North Carolina. The Asheville-based community news organization produces print, radio, and online journalism in Spanish, Mam, K'iche, and English.

Print news, especially in Spanish, can be difficult to find. To meet this need, JMPRO developed *boletines*, its monthly Spanish-language bulletin. They include timely and evergreen resources, such as information about tenant rights, where to access essential household items, and when to get a flu shot. JMPRO ensures community members can readily access boletines at central gathering places, like tiendas and flea markets.

Radio also remains a reliable form of information distribution in Western NC, especially for rural communities with limited broadband access. Every morning, JMPRO's Spanish-language radio program shares essential news for listeners with long commutes or those without reliable internet. JMPRO also works with local governments and nonprofits to determine what resources are accessible to people who are undocumented, broadcasting this information on the air and in their other channels.

The Fund's general operating support of JMPRO supports the organization to sustain its operations, adapt information distribution to community needs, and continue to invest in its community organizing. The result is more accessible, trustworthy, relevant information, produced for and by community members.



PHOTO: JMPRO
COMMUNITY MEDIA

Read more about how JMPRO
Community Media expands
information access North Carolina.





Border Belt Independent delivers reliable, relevant local journalism to Bladen, Columbus, Robeson, and Scotland counties, where rural communities have access to fewer outlets and local reporting than NC's metro centers. The Border Belt Independent permits local newspapers to redistribute their original coverage at no cost, further expanding access in the region. (PHOTO: GERRY DINCHER)

RAFI connects North Carolina farmers with essential information from the United States Department of Agriculture. Their resources ensure that farmers can navigate complex USDA funding, especially those who have been excluded from grants in the past. RAFI also builds solidarity and capacity through its Farmers of Color network, working toward more equitable and inclusive agricultural systems. (PHOTO: JOE PELLEGRINO/RAFI)



Enlace Latino NC drives civic engagement and belonging among North Carolina's Latino and immigrant families through Spanish-language journalism. In addition to its online news coverage, podcast, radio show, and newsletter, Enlace Latino NC uses WhatsApp and other direct engagement strategies to reach its audience where they are, build relationships, and fight misinformation. (PHOTO: ENLACE LATINO NC)



Join Us

We're building a sustainable and inclusive news and information ecosystem that benefits all of North Carolina. Whether you're a journalist or trusted messenger serving your North Carolina neighbors, a fellow funder ready to invest in systems change that reinforces your mission, or a civic leader making the connection between a well-resourced news ecosystem and a healthy community, we'd love to connect with you.

Collaboration is essential. Entry points are many.

- **Join our funding coalition.** Invest in an ecosystem approach that's transforming news and information in North Carolina, while accessing emergent lessons learned that can scale across regions. [Contact Fund Director Lizzy Hazeltine](#) to get started.
- **Tell us about your work.** We offer regular office hours to make the Fund and philanthropy more accessible. [Sign up to share your goals](#), get insight on the grantmaking process, and find connections with others who can further support your work.
- **Follow us for the latest.** [Sign up for our newsletter](#) and [keep up with us on LinkedIn](#). We share updates from the Fund, circulate news and insights from the ecosystem, and highlight upcoming opportunities and events.



ZSR has long been funding news and information, but the NC Local News Lab Fund provides us with the expertise, relationships, and support we need to ensure our giving also enhances the broader news ecosystem and more deeply supports news and information in marginalized communities.

**JOY VERMILLION HEINSOHN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
Z. SMITH REYNOLDS FOUNDATION**



U With the Fund's consistent support, we've invested in our sustainability. General operating grants allowed us to hire more reporters and deepen our coverage, while the network has opened doors to capacity-building collaboration.

**ROSE HOBAN, FOUNDER AND EDITOR OF
NC HEALTH NEWS**

North Carolina
Local News Lab
Fund



www.nclocalnews.org



North Carolina Local News Lab Fund