

COLORADO MEDIA PROJECT

2023 Colorado Media Project Summit Summary of Participant Discussions



On September 21, 2023, more than 130 Colorado journalists, publishers, civic and business leaders, educators, students, funders, community storytellers, communicators and engaged residents gathered for a half-day session at the 2023 Colorado Media Project (CMP) Summit to actively shape the future of news and information in Colorado. The Summit created a rare opportunity for a diverse and passionate group to think deeply together, consider new perspectives, and collectively construct a shared five-year vision and priorities for the field, by asking: *What does a healthy local news and information ecosystem look like in 2028 — and how do we get there?*

*Sherkiya Wedgeworth-Hollowell
(Colorado Public Radio's Managing Editor for
Accountability and Outreach) and
Todd Chamberlain (Publisher of the Sopris Sun
and el Sol del Valle newspapers)
at the 2023 Colorado Media Project Summit.*

>> [See a 3-minute video recap of the Summit](#)



Conversation at the summit built upon personal and professional insights provided by five media and community innovators through [“Flash Talks”](#), a pre-event survey of participants, and a new white paper from CMP that summarizes the state of Colorado’s local media ecosystem and spotlights dozens of bright spots to date: [Reimagining Colorado’s Public Square](#). The Summit was held as a pre-session of the Colorado Press Association’s 175th Annual Convention in Denver and was facilitated by Lara Jakubowski of La Piana Consulting.

Watch the Flash Talks

- [Kyle Clark, 9NEWS](#): How can journalism remain relevant in a world of clickbait and polarized politicians?
- [Olga González, Cultivando](#): How mainstream newsrooms fail communities of color - and what to do instead.
- [Corey Hutchins, Colorado College Journalism Institute](#): What are the jobs of the future for local news - and how do we fill them?
- [Tiya Trent, Project VOYCE](#): Why journalists & youth advocates need each other, and how they can work better together.
- [Maeve Conran, Rocky Mountain Community Radio Coalition](#): What will it take to fill rural news deserts with healthy civic conversations?



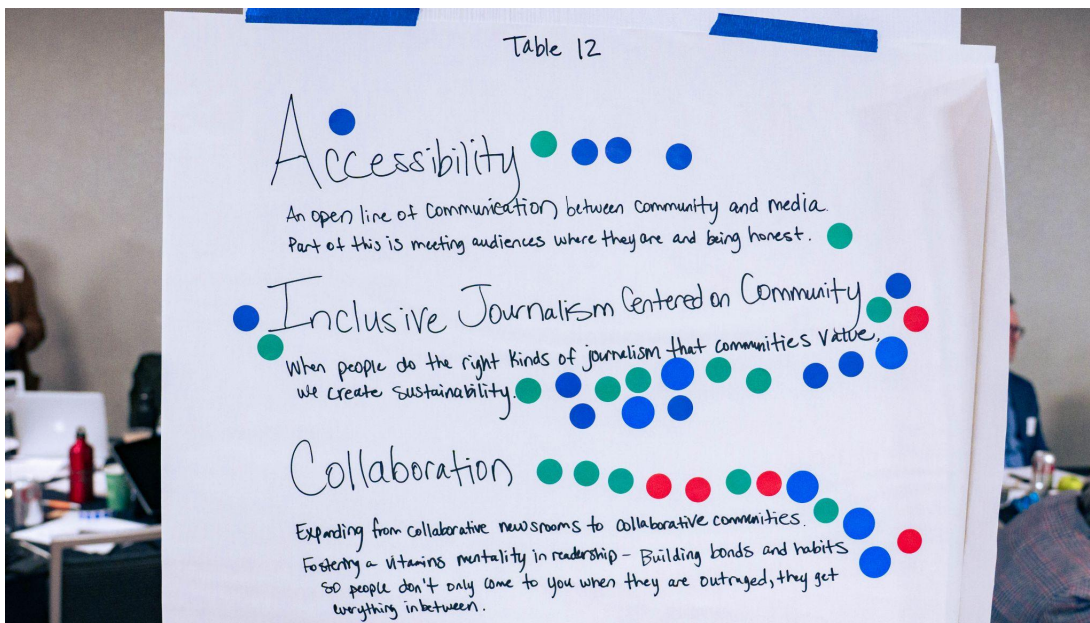
Olga González, Maeve Conran, Melissa Milios Davis, Corey Hutchins and Tiya Trent at the 2023 Colorado Media Project Summit.

Through the Summit, the following vision for the future began to emerge – and is meant to form the basis for further reflection, strategic planning and action. This summary attempts to capture a consensus of Summit participants on the news and information ecosystem that Colorado needs in 2028, the priorities and action items to achieve that vision, and the risks and threats that must be mitigated.

Envisioning the Future: Colorado’s Local News and Information Ecosystem in 2028

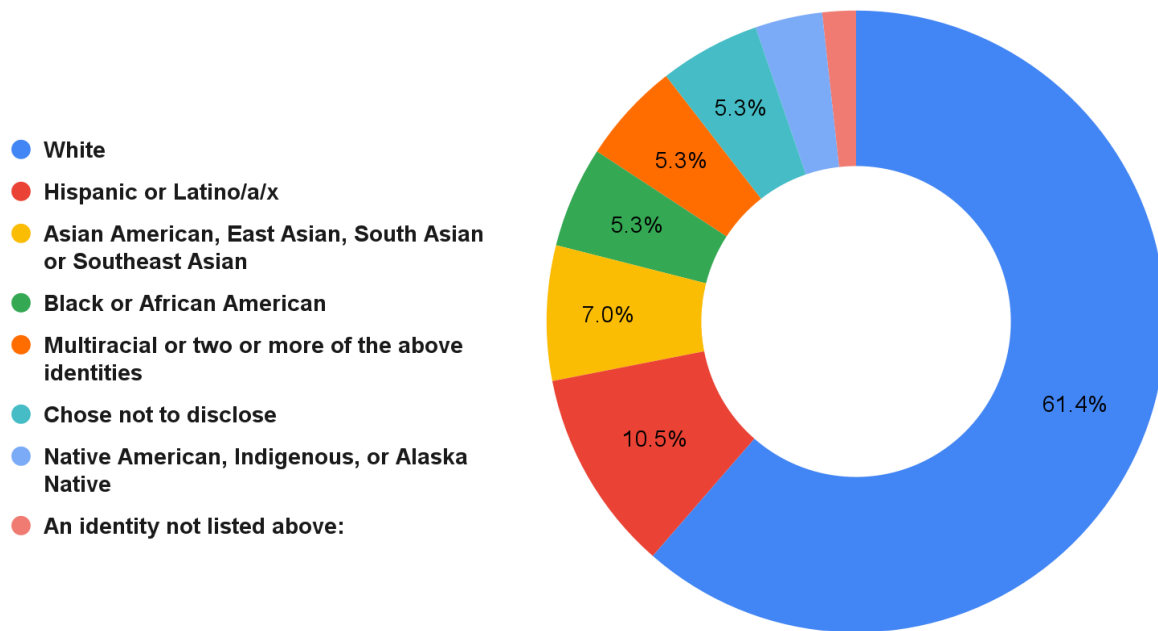
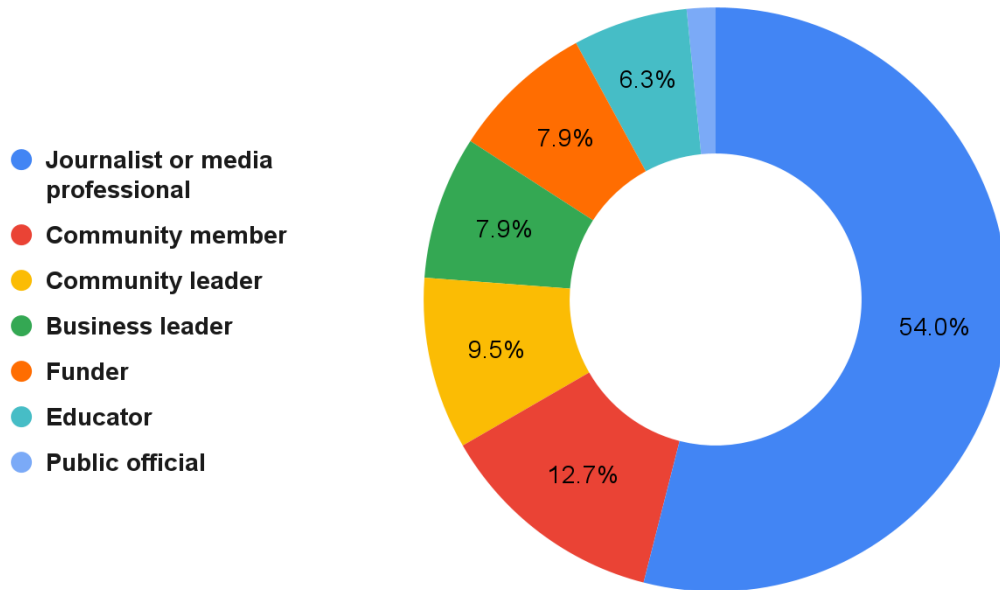
Through a series of conversations facilitated by journalists and community leaders at 13 tables, Summit participants consistently elevated five indicators of a robust news and information ecosystem they would like to see in 2028:

1. **Inclusive:** Coloradans of all communities see themselves and their concerns reflected in local news; amid complexity, journalists strive to build understanding, empathy, and accountability.
2. **Trusted:** Coloradans have strong media literacy, personally know the journalists covering their communities, and have ways to verify that the news they’re receiving is trustworthy.
3. **Relevant and accessible:** Local journalism reports in ways and on topics that are relevant to local communities, and presents in formats that meet audiences where they are, online and in person.
4. **Adaptive:** Local news leaders are clear-eyed about addressing headwinds, and have the skills and resources to adapt to a complex and rapidly changing market and information ecosystem.
5. **Sustainable:** Diversified and stable revenue streams allow local newsrooms to attract and retain a high-quality workforce, protect newsroom independence, and ensure reliable service.



One journalist and one community leader at each table led Summit participants through a series of exercises and conversations, to surface priorities for a healthy local news and information ecosystem.

Who Participated



Key Elements of a Healthy Local News and Civic Information Ecosystem: Details

1. **INCLUSIVE:** Coloradans of all communities see themselves and their concerns reflected in local news; journalists strive to build understanding and empathy, amid complexity.

Journalism that is respectful of and responsive to community was one of the most common themes of the Summit. Many participants noted that the ecosystem in 2028 must have equitable representation and a diverse array of journalists and storytellers. They imagined a future where barriers to diversity in the newsroom are gone. This was seen as particularly key to repairing trust with communities of color who have been harmed by traditional media practices and have felt disconnected from the news and information ecosystem in many ways.

Participants envisioned a future where newsrooms embrace their roles as community-centered institutions that exist to serve all residents and work with more transparency to be accountable to the whole community rather than certain segments.



Benita Duran (National Civic League) summarizes conversations from her table at the 2023 CMP Summit.

What this looks like in 2028:

- *Newsroom leaders foster a culture of inclusion that acknowledges the benefit of the unique perspectives each reporter brings to their journalism coverage, and these efforts help readers see new angles and make sense of complicated issues.*
- *New, inclusive hiring practices have been adopted; there is a reduced dependence on journalism school graduates as a primary strategy for diversifying the newsroom, and we see a wider array of pathways for community members to enter the profession.*
- *Promotoras, citizen observers, diverse opinion writers, and other community-centered models have strengthened connections between community members and newsrooms; an array of credible perspectives and voices enhance the newsroom's curated content stream of trusted sources.*
- *More non-English-speaking reporters are producing more content designed to meet the needs of various non-English-speaking communities, and more English-first reporting that accounts for non-English perspectives is accessible to non-English speakers.*

2. TRUSTED: Coloradans have strong media literacy, know the journalists covering their communities, and have ways to verify that the news they're receiving is trustworthy.

Civics education and improving mass media literacy struck a chord with many Summit attendees. There was agreement around this goal being intertwined with rebuilding trust in journalism. Civil discourse has frayed, and Summit attendees see local media playing a heightened role in repairing it. This was seen as starting in primary and secondary school, but continuing into higher education. It could also involve more active involvement in public policy and politics (see #4 below). This means meeting audiences where they are, addressing and adapting to a digital information ecosystem and the use of artificial intelligence, and being transparent about how journalists and newsrooms are navigating these changes.

What this looks like in 2028:

- *Local newsrooms adopt public-service oriented mission statements, explain the “why” behind editorial decisions, and actively build media literacy through their editorial practices.*
- *Verification organizations and transparency practices help audiences and algorithms establish which content is trustworthy.*
- *Newsrooms engage with digital information spaces and AI in ways that are proactive, public-serving, and transparent.*
- *Primary and secondary schools have media literacy curricula as a part of civic education.*
- *Newsroom ethics policies are revisited, updated and publicized.*



More than 130 people attended the 2023 CMP Summit, including Héctor Paniagua Morales (Entérate Latino), Dave Rosenthal (Mountain West News Bureau) and Kasey Cordell (LOR Foundation).

3. RELEVANT AND ACCESSIBLE: Local journalism reports in ways and on topics that are relevant to local people, and presents in formats and channels that meet audiences where they are, online and in person.

Summit participants discussed connections to the audience and how that might look five years from now. They focused on understanding better what people want and need through quality research and making content more accessible - especially through flexibility in format and distribution (e.g., text, audio, video, social media, mass distribution, person-to-person). Direct and innovative engagement with community members to make journalists more approachable and commonplace in the average Coloradan's daily life was a prominent theme.

What this looks like in 2028:

- *Reporters are engaged with community members in new ways, such as “Coffee Hours with a Reporter at your Local Coffee Shop”.*
- *Digital-first news sources provide practical accessibility tools such as “time it takes to read a story” tags, and reminders to finish a story you started later.*
- *Local news is included in state broadband access development plans, via civic information districts.*
- *Colorado’s open records laws are improved.*



Brittany Winkfield (Denver Urban Spectrum) and Bay Edwards (Colorado Press Association) capture vision statements from their table at the 2023 Colorado Media Project Summit.

4. ADAPTIVE: Local news leaders are clear-eyed about addressing headwinds, and current and future journalists have the skills and resources to navigate changing audience expectations and thrive in a complex information ecosystem.

Summit participants want to face challenges head-on, learn from past mistakes, be more action-oriented, and engage in difficult conversations about the news and information ecosystem. There was an awareness that although local news enjoys higher levels of trust compared to other sources, that could be compromised if the urgent takes priority over the important.

Five years from now, attendees envision a field that addresses challenges in stride, and continues to orient itself to the future. This would include addressing sustainability (see #5 below), addressing generational changes to the workforce (see #5 below), building trusting community relationships (#1-#3) a fuller embrace of technology and social media, a strategy for the positive use of AI, and clarity around tackling political polarization.



Summit attendees also envisioned a new and diverse generation of public-service journalists in 2028. To build toward this, given the generational changes the field is experiencing, conversation focused on creating supportive pathways for today's youth to gain experience in local newsrooms, such as with higher ed faculty playing a more central editorial role. Some participants also discussed building a coalition of educational institutions that can offer a range of future-focused programs to equip the journalists of tomorrow with a wider array of business and entrepreneurial skills to ensure journalism is a sustainable career in the future.

What this looks like in 2028:

- *A future-friendly media coalition successfully builds a movement for broad support of the health of our news and civic information ecosystem. Journalists and supporters advocate for the importance of local news and democracy.*
- *Civic leaders proactively care for the health of Colorado's information ecosystem by advancing public policies that support trusted sources of original, local news.*
- *Government agencies dedicate significant portions of their public information budgets to reach local people through independent local news.*
- *Newsroom leaders have addressed the challenges of legacy business models, publication formats, technology platforms, and community relationships, and are adapting their organizations to address the emerging challenges of the future.*
- *More newsrooms have digital products on modern platforms, and have plans for digital growth informed by modern audience data.*
- *Journalism is a sustainable career option, enabling journalists to live in the communities they cover.*
- *Vocational programs and technical tracks are common in Colorado, enabling entry to the field of journalism from many points.*
- *Youth and young adults consider journalism an exciting, worthy, attractive career option.*

5. SUSTAINABLE: Diversified and stable revenue streams allow local newsrooms to attract and retain a high-quality workforce, protect newsroom independence, and ensure reliable service.

Summit participants were uniform in their goal for local journalism in Colorado to be financially viable. Many have personally experienced the ravages of changes in the business model over the years. The ability of journalism to maintain its critical role in American life and democracy will be tied to the level of investment in organizations that have the trust of local audiences, whether for-profit or nonprofit, and their ability to be efficient and effective with that support.



at the 2023 Colorado Media Project Summit.

Collaboration and shared services were commonly mentioned as ways to become more efficient by 2028. It was also noted that sharing back-office resources has been raised for many years, with few demonstrable successes. Many Summit participants are interested in revisiting how to leverage resources in practical ways to build economies of scale among a mission-forward network of affiliated newsrooms, to strengthen operations and community impact for all.

Attracting funding to sustain day-to-day operations was universally seen as crucial. This includes diversifying revenue streams and understanding the economics behind digital and other platforms. Nonprofits and commercial media sources alike envisioned a funding landscape in 2028 that understands the value proposition behind the news and information ecosystem and supports it commensurately.

What this looks like in 2028:

- *Independent, original local news and civic information is viewed as a public service or utility, and is a critical component of the state's broadband access and digitization efforts.*
- *Newsroom business models are built on varied and sustainable revenue streams, including local individuals, local businesses, philanthropic funding, public dollars, and more.*
- *Networked collaborations and resource sharing models support back-end services, content development, and organizational infrastructure to create efficiencies for independent Colorado newsrooms.*
- *Strong unions and professional organizations represent the needs of workers in the field.*
- *Impact investments bring new innovation capital to the local news and civic information ecosystem.*
- *Local banks and revolving loan funds for small businesses support investments in infrastructure, and help newsrooms weather crises.*

Threats and Mitigation

Threat	Mitigation Approach
Failure to follow through. Too much talk and too little action.	Create a mechanism for accountability and a transparent agenda of action items and communication on progress. Follow up on items like legal and other shared services that have had little follow-through.
Pessimism in the ranks	Strengthen the network to inspire and support each other.
Detached audiences	Listen, learn, engage and design new local news products and services to meet the expectations of a wider range of local audiences.
Revenue instability	Work together to refine the case for support. Find new ways to stimulate demand and buy-in from local individuals and businesses. Examine opportunities for collective action for system change via public policy.
Mis- and disinformation	Advocate for ethical AI and algorithms that elevate information and local news from trusted sources. Support digital verification efforts for journalism.
Keeping up with changes in technology and digital presence	Increase training and access to resources for digital adoption. Work together to address AI threats with transparency and honesty.

	Other Actions Suggested by Participants
Inclusive: Coloradans of all communities see themselves and their concerns reflected in local news; amid complexity, journalists strive to build understanding, empathy, and accountability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating and sharing data on what people want and need between news sources - Work with DEI educators in the newsroom to learn how to change the makeup of newsrooms and genuinely listen to and reflect the communities we cover
Trusted: Coloradans have strong media literacy, know the journalists covering their communities, and have ways to verify that the news they're receiving is trustworthy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More school visits, speaking to classes and students - Develop content/training/curriculum to engage and educate young people - Refreshed business rules and policies - Adopt source audits as a practice - Advocate for policy to better regulate social media
Relevant and accessible: Local journalism reports in ways and on topics that are relevant to local people, and presents in formats and channels that meet audiences where they are, online and in person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Never stop building new relationships with community - Get out of our bubble and listen to the perspective of non-journalists - Format news for where readers/listeners are at (audio, text) - More audience data parsing, collecting, and fluency - More emphasis on useful digital products for local audiences

<p>Adaptive: Local news leaders are clear-eyed about addressing headwinds, and current and future journalists have the skills and resources to navigate changing audience expectations and thrive in a complex information ecosystem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue dialogue in the field, peer networking - Make changes where things are stagnant and are not working - Reinvest in student journalism programs that attract and prepare a new generation of reporters, editors AND business side leaders - Welcome local news entrepreneurs with new ideas into the field, and create onramps to join collaborative efforts - Be creative about collaborating with youth and engaging them
<p>Sustainable: Diversified and stable revenue streams allow local newsrooms to attract and retain a high-quality workforce, protect newsroom independence, and ensure reliable service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve transparency in funding to promote trust - More education and case-making to increase allies - Transparency about what’s at stake and how important we are - Create more infrastructure for shared services - Advocate for public policies that support and sustain local news

Conclusion and Next Steps

Participants left the Summit reporting renewed optimism for their role in the local news and information ecosystem. Individual and collective commitments were made to advance the work started at the Summit.

In late October, as part of the **Denver Democracy Summit**, Colorado newsroom leaders who were present at the CMP Summit reviewed the first draft of the vision statement and this document to provide feedback on any omissions or errors. All CMP Summit attendees were invited to provide feedback, pre-publication.

CMP is using these conversations to shape our grant opportunities in 2024 and beyond — beginning with our third round of **Advancing Equity in Local News** funding. Applications for the open-call grant opportunity opened on October 25 and applications are due by 5 p.m. on November 27, 2023. CMP expects to allocate approximately \$1.2 million in grants to Colorado newsrooms and projects in 2024, through the AELN fund, the Watchdog Fund for Accountability Journalism, and the Community Innovation and Sustainability Fund.

Finally, the 2023 CMP Summit was held against the backdrop of a historic **\$500 million 5-year commitment** and ongoing **Press Forward fundraising campaign** to engage more national and place-based philanthropic leaders in supporting the fields of journalism and civic engagement. These conversations are also a part of CMP’s goal to keep Colorado — its newsrooms and its communities — on the forefront of the national conversation. More to come!

CMP Summit Summary: Credits

Original Draft by [Lara Jakubowski](#), Partner, La Piana Consulting, October 6, 2023
 Second Draft by [Sam Moody](#), Learning and Grants Manager, Colorado Media Project, October 16, 2023
 Final Edit and Layout by [Melissa Milios Davis](#), Director, Colorado Media Project, October 30, 2023