

# The Ecosystem of Media Outlets Led By and For People of Color

PREPARED BY TRACIE POWELL & JEAN MARIE BROWN

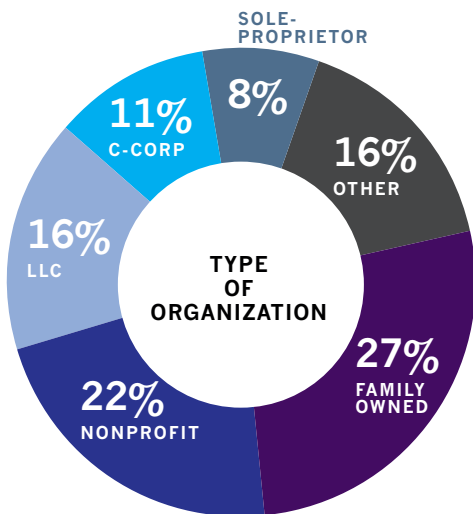
The **Racial Equity in Journalism Fund** seeks to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of news organizations led by people of color and partners in equity to increase civic engagement for communities of color. The Fund is a donor collaborative housed at Borealis Philanthropy.

In order to identify critical opportunities for investment, the Fund commissioned a study in

August 2019 to develop an understanding of the current landscape of news media outlets led by and serving communities of color.

The following insights and recommendations are based upon data from the field, a series of in-depth interviews, and a survey of 114 news media outlets, including nonprofits, for-profits, legacy and digital news entities.

## Characteristics of the Ecosystem



**STRONG ENTREPRENEURIAL  
STREAK**

**61%**

reported they haven't considered ceasing operations

**STABILITY**

**78%**

have no more than five employees

**SMALL  
OPERATIONS**

**39%**

reported annual income of \$100,000 or more, although 21% declined to answer.

**INCOME LEVELS**

**34%**

laid off staff during the past 10 years

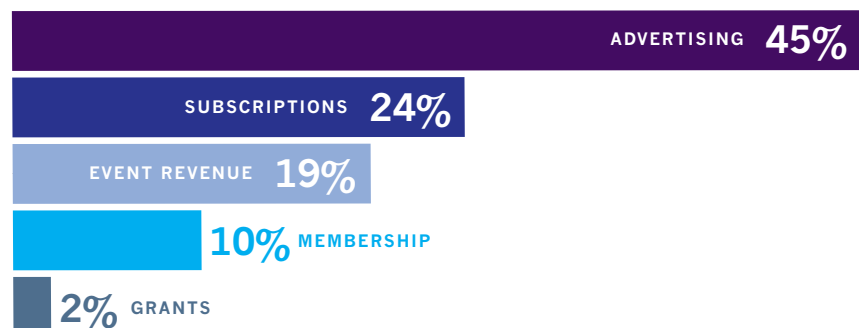
**WORKFORCE  
CHALLENGES**

**63%**

cited limited revenue sources as the greatest challenge to long-term sustainability

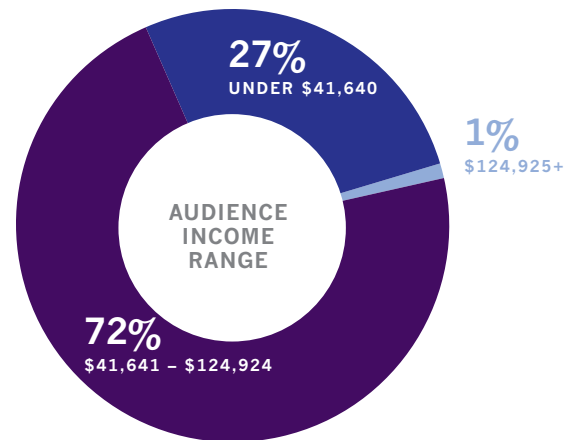
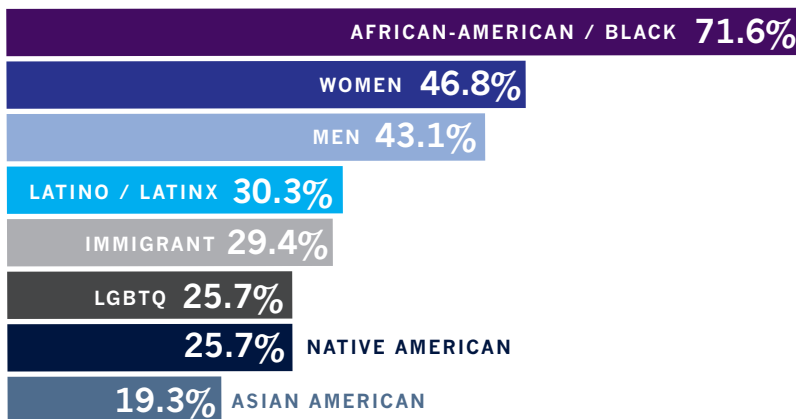
**REVENUE CHALLENGES**

### MAJOR SOURCES OF REVENUE

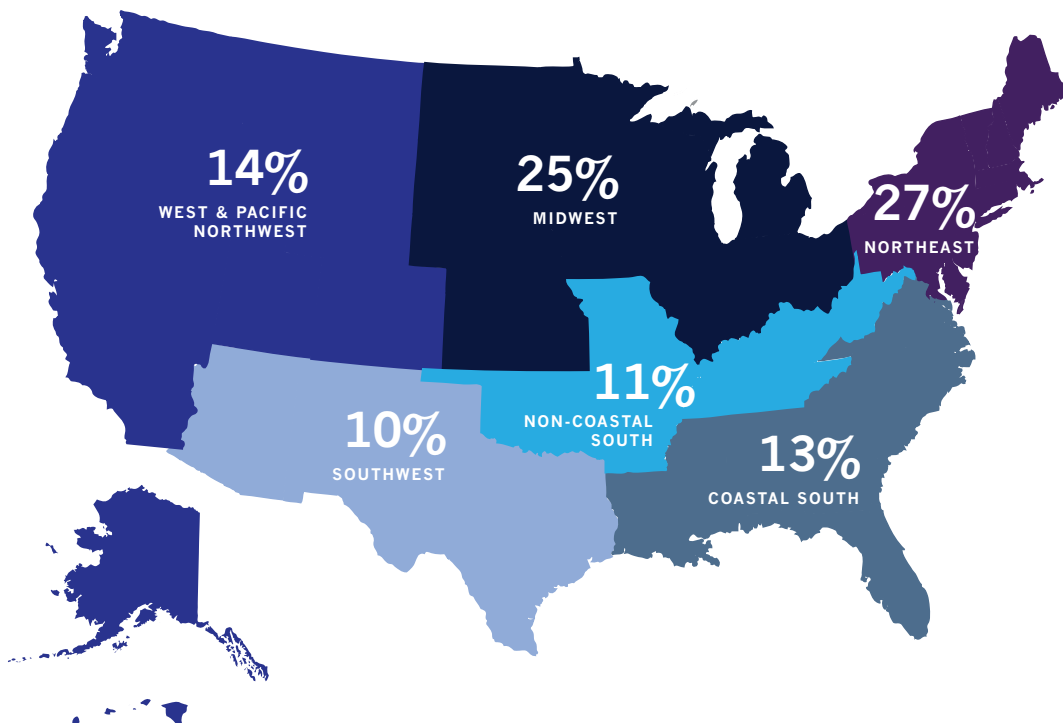


# It's All About the Audience

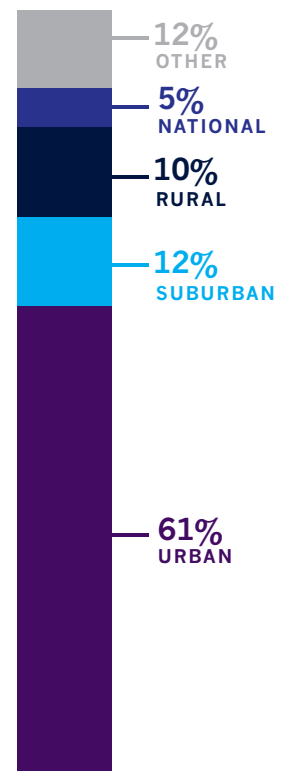
## TARGET AUDIENCES



## REGIONAL LOCATION



## COVERAGE AREA



Addressing audiences that have historically been ignored by mainstream media and giving voice to community issues are some of the most significant contributions of news outlets led by people of color. In areas of the U.S. that have seen major influxes of immigrant populations, ethnic media in particular plays a strong role in diversifying news coverage. For example, MLK50 focuses on social justice issues in Memphis, Tennessee, CTLatinoNews covers Latino issues in Connecticut, and Améredia, a San Francisco-based integrated marketing company, works with Hispanic, East Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Eastern European, South Asian/Indian and Middle Eastern media. Research also shows that these outlets often encourage civic engagement. But because these outlets lack capital and resources to achieve maximum reach and impact, underserved communities continue to face gaps in media coverage.

# Prioritizing Support: News Media Outlets in Need of Greater Investment

---

## New Jacks

New Jacks are the second wave of Black and Brown digital entrepreneurs operating on multiple platforms. These online-first outlets challenge media stereotypes with an understanding of technology and big data. They have married the power of media and digital technology to tell stories that are under-represented in local or national mainstream journalism outlets. New Jacks are typically for-profit entities.

### EXAMPLES

MLK50, a Memphis-based hyperlocal, and South Fulton, Georgia-based My HomeRule News

### CHALLENGES

New Jacks have limited capital and resources and often use their own personal funds to launch enterprises. For the most part, these outlets are one- or two-person operated endeavors with less than \$20,000 in capital.

## Legacy Media Outlets Making a Digital Transformation

Among legacy news organizations, some have slowly responded to the digital landscape while others are digital pioneers. These outlets are mostly family-owned and older, ranging from 20 to 125 years in operation. They maintain significant brand loyalty and recognition and continue to attract revenue, though in decreasing amounts.

A sub-group of this category includes media outlets led by activists and other non-journalists reaching underserved communities through events, print magazines, and websites.

### EXAMPLES

*The Atlanta Voice, The Dallas Weekly, The Baltimore Afro*

### CHALLENGES

Limited access to necessary capital and resources and declining print advertising and subscription revenue have made it difficult for these organizations to keep up with changes taking place in the digital media landscape.

## Legacy Media Outlets Not Yet Embracing Digital

African American newspapers have a storied history and play a critical role in covering events and issues important to Black Americans. These outlets typically have more static content, and are facing a rapidly changing economy and journalism ecosystem.

### EXAMPLES

*The Jackson Advocate*

### CHALLENGES

Difficulty moving audiences and adapting content from print to digital, and lack of capital and resources.

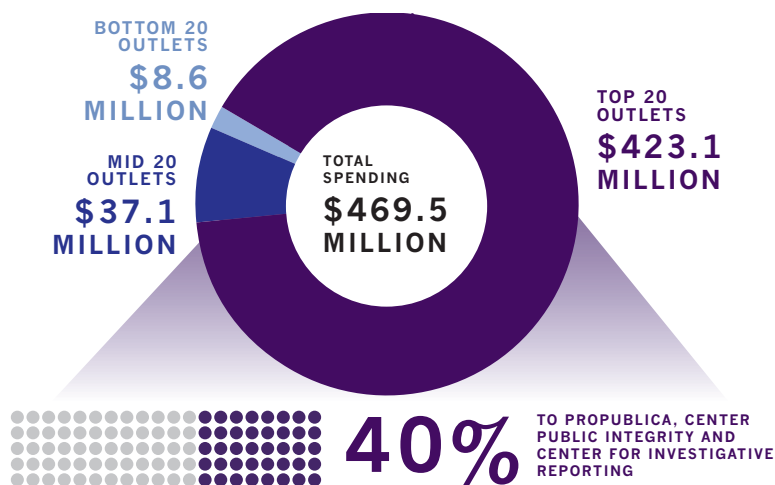
## Disparities in Foundation Support

Among nonprofit newsrooms, foundation giving is a significant source of revenue, however there is a sharp funding disparity between large and small journalism nonprofits.

Between 2009 and 2015, 40 percent of the \$469.5 million that was awarded went to ProPublica, Center Public Integrity and Center for Investigative Reporting.

CHART: *The Conversation*, CC-BY-ND  
SOURCE: *Institute for Nonprofit News*

### THE INEQUALITY OF US NONPROFIT MEDIA SPENDING



## Addressing Funding Gaps: Recommendations for Philanthropic Investment



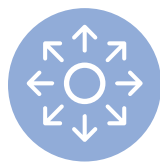
### GENERAL OPERATING GRANT SUPPORT

Grants can support storytelling and reporting on particular issues, as well as encourage collaboration between mainstream news organizations and news outlets led by and for people of color, and among news outlets led by people of color.



### DATABASE CREATION

Capture and catalog sites run by New Jacks and legacy media outlets to keep track of the growing field and opportunities for field investment.



### CAPACITY BUILDING

Support for developing infrastructure to identify new and sustainable revenue sources, journalism training, and training and technological support to assist in digital transitions.



### PEER TO PEER LEARNING

Media outlets led by and for people of color need a space to share ideas, learn from each other, and collaborate. A learning space could serve as a resource for new outlets and a networking opportunity between funders, mainstream media outlets, advertisers, and news outlets led by and for people of color.

Despite their lack of access to capital and resources, news outlets led by and for people of color serve a vital function in the media ecosystem by giving an authentic voice to communities receiving inadequate coverage in mainstream publications.

**Philanthropic investment that is responsive to the needs of these news outlets and their audiences will allow these organizations and the communities they serve to have greater access to real-time, accurate news and information that supports their civic engagement. Ultimately, this will lead to greater health, economic security, safety and opportunities to thrive.**

*The REJ Fund currently includes support from Craig Newmark Philanthropies, the Democracy Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Google News Initiative, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the News Integrity Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY.*

**To learn more, please contact Maya Thornell-Sandifor: [mtsandifor@borealisphilanthropy.org](mailto:mtsandifor@borealisphilanthropy.org)**