



Repair. Reimagine. Rebuild.

Modeling the Future of News for and by
Black, Brown, and Indigenous Communities.

Thriving BPOC Journalism Report



**Racial Equity
in Journalism
Fund**

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Introduction.

Since the founding of the first Black-owned newspaper in the United States, journalism led by Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latine folks has generated more holistic and dynamic stories for communities across the world. For centuries, this reporting has stood in resistance and opposition to mainstream media, which has long muted, distorted, and ignored the narratives and information needs of BIPOC communities, making possible continued acts of harm and oppression that tear at the fabrics of our multi-racial democracy.

The media system of today is deeply inequitable.

Between 2009 and 2015:

Only 6%

of the \$1.2 billion in grants invested in journalism, news, and information in the United States went towards efforts serving non-white racial and ethnic groups,

Only 7%

went towards efforts serving economically disadvantaged populations,

And only 2%

went towards efforts serving immigrants and migrants.

BIPOC journalism serves as an antidote to blatantly destructive narratives and community divisiveness. It fortifies our ability to engage in democracy and deserves more significant investment.

Borealis Philanthropy's **Racial Equity in Journalism (REJ) Fund** exists to nourish and build up the capacity of those who are co-creating a more tender and truthful media sector, in which BIPOC communities can steward our stories from ideation to distribution, and the spaces in between.

To arrive at this place, we must resource the many intersecting limbs of the BIPOC media ecosystem, including efforts to envision—and thus propel us towards—future possibilities.

The Black Future Newsstand

An Imagined Antidote to Anti-Black Harm

“ —

is one expression of a future media-system that Centers Blackness; that loves and cares for Black people, as the antidote to a long history of anti-Black media harm and brought about through media reparations.

- Black Future Newsstand



THE BLACK FUTURE NEWSSTAND



The **Black Future Newsstand** is just one of the intersecting limbs of BIPOC media propelling us toward a new and possible future. It's an expression of a media system that cares for Black people and a living antidote to the deep history of anti-Black media harm. A **narrative concept**, **digital collection**, and live exhibition featuring magazines, newspapers, and other forms of media owned and published by Black folks, the newsstand is an embodied Afrofuturist wondering:

What does a media that loves Black people look, feel, sound, and taste like in a future where reparations are real?

In addition to promoting the work of Black journalists, artists, and futurists, the newsstand's traveling installation also documents the longings of visitors and passersby. A Black Thought Wall invites Black folks to delight in their beauty (asking: What is it about yourself that you love?) and share their visions for a future of journalism (asking: What stories do you long to see of us in the media?).



THE BLACK FUTURE NEWSSTAND

Overwhelmingly across pop-up sites, contributors to these spaces have, thus far, communicated the desire for a media sector driven to tell stories of Black jubilation and abundance, of marronage and other formations of sovereignty, and of art rooted in possibility. Communities shared visions of a journalism committed to featuring Blackness in its multidimensionality—representative of the diaspora, of folks across generations, and of Blackness at the intersections of disabledness, queerness, and transness.

Black folks envision a media landscape existing on the other side of reparations

Black folks envision a media landscape **existing on the other side of reparations** filled with juicy stories and quieter ones, narratives of the lives we might live unburdened by colonization and exploitation. They desire stories of Black cartoons, basketball, space exploration, and profiles of Black ancestors, inventors, and nerds. They long for musings on existentialism, chronicles of Black farms, and tales of speculative fiction. They wish, as one contributor to the wall offered, simply, for stories of “the Black mundane.”



The thing about the offerings collected through the Black Future Newsstand is that they echo throughout a variety of diasporas and communities. This is, in part, because Blackness intersects with a multitude of identities. There are Black Asian people, Black Latine people, Black Middle Eastern people, and Black Indigenous people who carry in them a multitude of other intersections such as Appalachian, rural, queer, trans, and working class.

The Thriving BIPOC Journalism Project

*Getting Real about Resources,
Networks, and Communities*

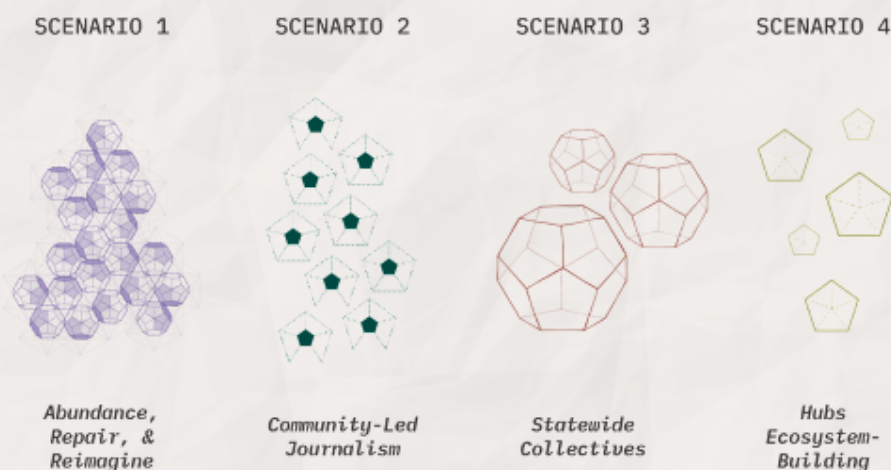


This project aimed to define and develop indicators for a thriving BIPOC media ecosystem and better understand the enabling factors (e.g., resources, networks, communities) necessary for its existence.

THE THRIVING BIPOC JOURNALISM PROJECT

Journalism delivers news and situates it within historical and sociopolitical contexts, profoundly shaping public opinion and discourse. And while mainstream news outlets carry forth America's legacy of racialized violence through the acts of framing, rhetoric, and erasure, community-rooted, BIPOC-led and -serving news outlets uphold—with great care—the dignity, humanity, and voices of the people. It is this practice of journalism that is co-creating futures that hold us all with care.

In 2022, the REJ Fund began exploratory work through The Thriving BIPOC Journalism Project. This project aimed to define and develop indicators for a thriving BIPOC media ecosystem and better understand the enabling factors (e.g., resources, networks, communities) necessary for its existence. We partnered with researcher [Dr. Wilneida Negrón](#) to explore these curiosities and scope out four possible scenarios for the future of journalism.



Interestingly, though unsurprisingly, the visions put forth by the media makers Dr. Negrón interviewed for this work were deeply aligned with those shared by community contributors to the Black Future Newsstand. From communities to the newsrooms that serve us, we agree:

The liberated media system of our future brings us closer to equity, justice, and truth—and building it will require a flowing redirection of resources.

Of the four models that Dr. Negrón has put together for our mulling, the Abundance, Repair, and Reimagine scenario—which prioritizes building localized and robust news ecosystems—is the one that allows for the depth and breadth of storytelling lifted across the Black Future Newsstand's Black Thought Walls.

THE THRIVING BIPOC JOURNALISM PROJECT

It envisions a journalism that can produce long-form, deep-dive narrative reads while meeting community-specific information needs around civic engagement, education, and the environment. This framework grants equal weight to investigative journalism and arts and culture storytelling, recognizing both as essential to community vibrancy and wellness. Above all, it is a scenario of bounty in which community stories are developed and shared with deep care.

And, importantly, it is possible.

To imagine a liberated, reparative future of journalism, we must first ask ourselves:

- + *What do we mean when we say thriving?*
- + *What does it look like for a BIPOC-led and -serving new organization to thrive?*
- + *What will it feel like to arrive at a thriving BIPOC media ecosystem?*
- + *What tangible evidence will we have that we have arrived to this new world?*

Dr. Negrón's conversations with BIPOC journalists across our existing media landscape shared several perspectives and ideas, which we're uplifting here for consumption and meditation:



Indicators of Thriving BIPOC Organizations & Ecosystems



INDICATORS OF THRIVING BIPOC ORGANIZATIONS

Community Engagement and Awareness

- Communities are strongly aware of the brand and its role in the community.
- The organization can balance elevating diversity, debates, tensions, and differences within the communities while not contributing to polarization or resorting to advocacy alone.
- The organization engages community members and encourages their contributions.

Financial Stability and Independence

- The organization:
 - Operates with confidence in the availability of funds to support its vision.
 - Has diverse revenue streams to ensure financial stability.
 - Has multi-year funding ensuring continuity of operations.
 - Has financial independence and is not reliant on any one source for support.

Staffing and Operations

- The organization has strong operational staff alongside the newsroom.
- The organization's staff diversity reflects the communities being served.
- The organization has a reasonable ratio of reporters-to-population served.
- Staff are well-compensated with job stability and living wages.
- Staff feel heard and supported, with a balance of grace and accountability.
- The organization has human resources infrastructure in place, either in-house or shared.
- The organization includes non-white and non-executive staff in its decision-making processes.



Networking and Collaboration

- The organization can engage in mutually beneficial cross-dialogue.
- The organization can network with other independent media makers and experienced journalists.
- The organization can collaborate and debate between mainstream media and independent media personalities.

Community Impact

- The organization can make a measurable and tangible difference in the communities represented.
- The organization can focus on policy change and work that benefit the local community financially.



Global Perspective and Coverage

- Reporting reaches a global audience and ensures the U.S. community is well informed in international affairs.
- Media outlets have stability, breadth, and consistency.



INDICATORS OF A THRIVING BIPOC ECOSYSTEM

Community Engagement and Representation

- Communities feel their stories are told and information needs are met.
- The ecosystem supports robust civic participation and economic health in the BIPOC community.
- The ecosystem includes coverage and inclusion of former colonies (e.g., Guam).
- The ecosystem holds space for multi-generational engagement, embracing all ages and speeds of information consumption.
- The ecosystem can still track traditional indicators, such as subscriber numbers, to independent BIPOC-led news outlets.
- The ecosystem can provide coverage not just in major centers but also in smaller geographic areas.
- The ecosystem has an abundance of BIPOC media outlets in each community.
- This ecosystem is designed to center on the needs of BIPOC-led organizations and serve them with success in mind.

Collaboration and Networking

- The ecosystem has networks and support systems for existing journalists.
- The ecosystem has solid resources and support for new outlets/sources to join and thrive together.
- The coordination across journalists and newsrooms in the ecosystem helps to foster partnership over competition.
- The ecosystem can make space for and support collaboration opportunities, such as sharing talent and services.

Financial Stability and Growth

- There is financial growth and stability across the ecosystem.
- The ecosystem can hold space for and support shared revenue streams and economies of scale.
- The ecosystem includes funds readily available for founders of BIPOC-led and -serving news organizations.
- The ecosystem has financial resources to cover global issues across the diaspora.

Diversity of Organization Structures and Approaches

- The ecosystem can hold and support various organizational structures and approaches (e.g., nonprofit, for-profit, legacy news, emerging media entrepreneurs, accelerators/incubators).
- The ecosystem includes an inclusive definition of journalists and civic news.

Global Perspective and Coverage

- The ecosystem helps elevate national and global diaspora news driven by BIPOC communities' conversations and concerns.
- The ecosystem helps to normalize diaspora reporting.
- The ecosystem supports "bridgers," or translators translating issues between U.S. and non-U.S. contexts.

Inclusivity and Diversity in Reporting

- Retention is higher than the industry average for role/focus area.
- Readership and staffing reflect the reporting focus areas.
- Coverage is more inclusive and more than just catering to a homogenous audience.

The *Reimagining the Future of Journalism* Four Scenarios

These words are our invitation into a new future of journalism and a mapping of the terrain we might traverse to reach there.

Above all, they are our full-throated, rallying call to action for those with positional power and resources whose energies and dedication are critical to making our communities' visions reality.

SCENARIO 1



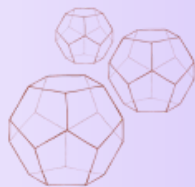
Abundance,
Repair, &
Reimagine

SCENARIO 2



Community-Led
Journalism

SCENARIO 3



Statewide
Collectives

SCENARIO 4



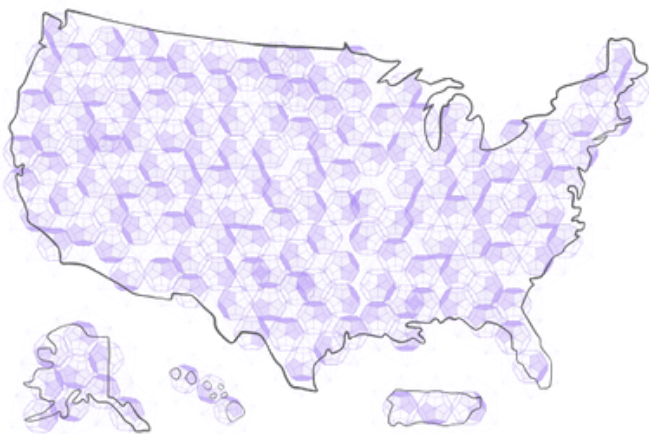
Hubs
Ecosystem-
Building

The scenarios shared below—which we are immensely grateful to Dr. Negrón for producing—are our humble contribution to the deep efforts already underway to build a media system free of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and xenophobia. We invite you to dig into this overview of dreamy journalism frameworks below and **join the REJ Fund in our scheming, visioning, and harvesting of a future of reparative and regenerative media.**

Scenario 01

The Abundance, Repair, and Reimagine scenario and funding estimate allows us to grow fatty fish while also cleaning the pond they live and build in. The outcome of this scenario is a media ecosystem in which local journalism, led by each **target base population**—that is, Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latine folks—is resourced in abundance. We mean not only in fiscal abundance, but also in the number of personnel and the possibilities of stories they can cover. In this scenario, we're making **staffing assumptions** that divide the newsroom roles among editorial, non-editorial, cultural, and arts staff. Such a bountiful structure allows newsrooms to ground themselves in their vision more effectively and sustainably tend to **coverage units** like congressional districts, school systems, special districts, township governments, municipal governments, county governments, and state governments; as well as **government coverage areas** like community services, criminal justice, education, elections, environment, culture and arts, health care, and infrastructure.¹

SCENARIO 1
*Abundance, Repair,
& Reimagine*



SCENARIO 1



Abundance, Repair, & Reimagine

Through such far-reaching, in-depth journalism, BIPOC-led and -serving newsrooms will entirely displace the many harmful narratives that mainstream media perpetuate about our communities. BIPOC media makers will craft stories of thriving communities in abundance.

The Abundance, Repair, and Reimagine model was the most preferred by the media makers who participated in our small-group conversations, and it was the model most aligned with the collective visions shared by community members who contributed to the Black Future Newsstand pop-ups. While the cost is high according to current fundraising expectations for BIPOC journalists, the model also sows the most significant return: Thriving BIPOC journalism begets engaged, healthy, joyful, and thriving BIPOC communities.

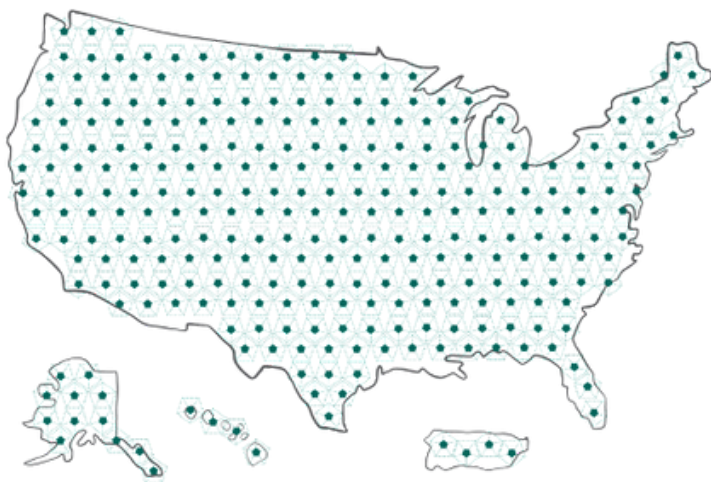
¹For a comprehensive overview of how we developed our various assumptions and small-group discussions, please refer to Appendix A.

Scenario 02

The Community-Led Journalism scenario and funding estimate imagine centralized local newsrooms for the collective non-white population, meaning each newsroom covers all target base populations. The staffing assumptions per newsroom are for work to be delegated among journalists, non-editorial/coordinators, and non-journalists (e.g., community members). This model is assumed for only the coverage units of municipal and county governments, and across the government focus areas previously mentioned.

During our small-group community discussions, some participants expressed concern about the perception of community members as cheaper alternatives to journalists. As we learned from four organizations that use community-led journalism models ([Black by God](#), [Canopy Atlanta](#), [City Bureau](#), and [Shift Press](#)), these models are most effective when they are very local but have centralized staffing that helps build networks of community members who can help inform local news coverage and/or produce it alongside editorial staff.

SCENARIO 2
Community-Led Journalism



SCENARIO 2

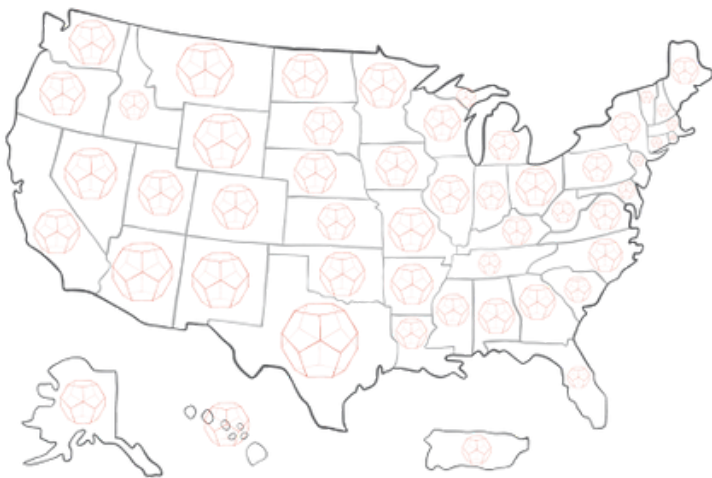


Community-Led Journalism

Scenario 03

The Statewide Collectives scenario and funding estimate imagine a centralized statewide network model with staffing assumptions of various editorial and non-editorial ratios per every 50,000 members of target base populations in a state. The staffing assumption also includes a media entrepreneur/cultural strategist to help fill expected gaps. The model assumes coverage of all government focus areas but with more of a focus on state governments for all coverage units, leaving variability in each state's capacity, resources, and information sharing available to uplift local stories.

SCENARIO 3
*Statewide
Collectives*



SCENARIO 3



Statewide Collectives

Scenario 04

Perhaps the scenario that most represents the current state of the BIPOC journalism ecosystem is the Hubs Ecosystem-Building scenario. This scenario and funding estimate imagine news hubs in the top 26 most multi-ethnic cities in the United States. The staffing assumption includes a mix of multi-ethnic editorial, non-editorial, and cultural strategist/media entrepreneurs per every 50,000 members of the target base populations in only these 26 cities. The model allows for coverage in all government coverage areas. This was the least popular model among our small-group participants, with many feeling that fragmentation and lack of building up the capacity of ethnic-specific news ecosystems were simply a maintenance of the status quo.

SCENARIO 4

Hubs Ecosystem-Building



SCENARIO 4



Hubs Ecosystem-Building

² For the full list of cities, please refer to the financial modeling spreadsheets.

Learnings from Our Conversations in Community



WHO WILL WE POSITION TO SAVE OUR ALREADY
FRAGILE DEMOCRACY:

~~01_CHATGPT AND OTHER GENERATIVE AI PRODUCTS?~~

02_LOCAL BIPOC JOURNALISTS AND NEWS
ORGANIZATIONS?

LEARNINGS FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS IN COMMUNITY

BIPOC journalism ecosystems are richly diverse, encompassing legacy and emerging news organizations, for-profit, non-profit, alternative business models (e.g., cooperatives), and institutions (e.g., accelerators, incubators, colleges); yet, this diversity is underfunded.

Many are no longer satisfied with this status quo; instead, communities appear to be increasingly committed to dreaming and reimagining a different future of journalism.

The findings from this analysis indicate the importance of ongoing community dialogue and consensus-building to support these visions and forecast the financial need to adapt to future and emerging trends.

To support these future efforts, here are three lessons we learned from our small group discussions:

The greatest challenge of this analysis is also the greatest strength of this community: the BIPOC journalism ecosystem represents unique communities and, as noted earlier, is composed of diverse networks, entities, and institutions.

For this reason, it is challenging for financial models to account for this diversity and accurately make projections for a future where more consensus is needed. Even still, the Abundance, Repair, and Reimagine financial scenario resonated with folks most because it is a vision of complete transformation—even if it is a future we must arrive at via incremental steps.

01

Finding a baseline structure/model that works for all is challenging. However, the Abundance, Repair, and Reimagine scenario offers the most significant possibilities for a reparative future of journalism.

LEARNINGS FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS IN COMMUNITY

02

While the costs associated with each modeling figure might be perceived as high according to fundraising standards, these figures must be viewed in the context of broader economic and financial realities.

The historical underinvestment in communities of color in the United States is a tradition that continues to the present day. In our current era of rapid technological change—as well as social and political polarization and instability—it feels increasingly critical to reckon with this legacy to ensure that we will all have the ability to co-create our future, particularly as our country faces escalating attacks on democracy, racial and gender justice, bodily sovereignty, and more.

The following images provide a quick snapshot of historical journalism funding figures and current investments in primarily white technology and AI entrepreneurs. It raises a moral question:

Who will we position to save our already fragile democracy: ChatGPT and other generative AI products ... or local BIPOC journalists and news organizations?

The existing disparity in funding between these two ecosystems is a concerning trend that requires our deep and collective interrogation. If we do not regard—and thus invest in—BIPOC media makers as the bearers of cultural capital and nationwide transformational change that they are, we risk carrying forward our country's long and troubled legacy and worsening inequality concerning which people, communities, and frameworks we invest in, and thus who has the power to shape the future.

³ In order to see the scenario charts alongside these comparison funding charts, please refer to Appendix C: Scenarios Alongside Field and Adjacent Funding Realities.

LEARNINGS FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS IN COMMUNITY

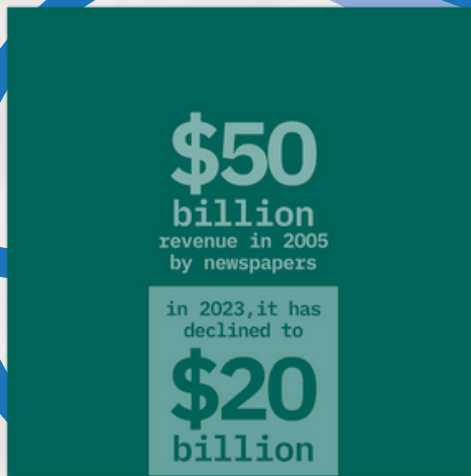
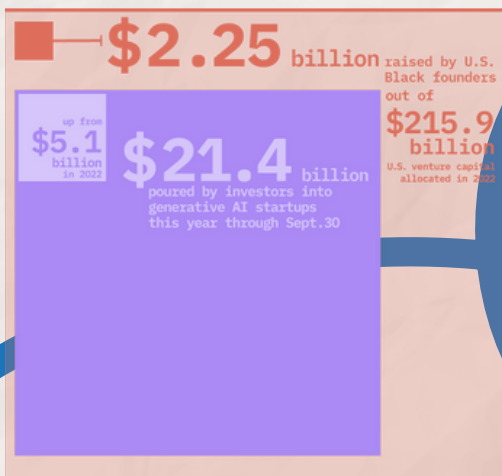
03

Mapping the journalism ecosystem is necessary to support greater collaboration and clarity on future sensing, both of which are essential for more equitable and accurate financial modeling.

Communities need a clear vision of what the future of journalism could look like. An initial step towards this could be to create a map of the existing ecosystem, including types of institutions, approaches, movements, and geographies.

A community assessment would also help identify existing networks and relationships (both explicit and informal) and critical community institutions (e.g. libraries, universities) that can and might serve as information exchange and capacity-building hubs.

As part of this ecosystem mapping process, it will also be essential to identify the broader and various movements that intersect with the BIPOC journalism ecosystem: Solidarity and/or New Economy, Reparations/Racial Equity, Labor Organizing, Economic Development, Impact Investing, Policy Development, and Alternative Business Models, among others.



⁴ Throughout our small-group discussions, we did map out several indicators that participants flagged as indicators of a thriving BIPOC mediascape. Please refer to Appendix D for more.

A Path Forward

Through research that includes both financial modeling and community discussions, this report's content highlights the critical need for **a reimagined approach to BIPOC journalism that transcends traditional sustainability and journalism models.**

The rich diversity within the BIPOC journalism ecosystem—encompassing various organizational structures and journalistic approaches—underscores the challenge of finding a one-size-fits-all model for a future of thriving BIPOC media. However, this diversity also reflects the unique strengths and potentials of these media institutions and the communities they exist to serve.

The words we're putting forward in this report are a call to action, urging a reevaluation of how journalism is funded, particularly in BIPOC communities. They put forward concrete visions of reparation and thriving. They highlight the discrepancy in funding between BIPOC journalism and predominantly white technology sectors, posing a moral question about equity, justice, and the present and future of our multi-racial democracy.

They uplift our collective desire—from community member to media maker—for a future that resembles the Abundance, Repair, and Reimagine scenario: a wholly transformed ecosystem and redress for historical underinvestment in BIPOC communities nationwide.

Above all, **the findings in this report underscore the need for deeper exploration, community dialogue, and consensus-building.** A continued and extensive mapping of the existing BIPOC journalism ecosystem is our critical and immediate next step towards a more reparative, equitable, and representative media landscape.

As a weaver and connector of this ecosystem, the REJ Fund is honored to invite you into continued visioning around a reimagined, non-violent, and tender future of journalism—and, accordingly, into a deepened investment in those leaders and institutions leading the way for us all.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Methodology and Limitations

The goals of this exploratory research work were twofold:

1. **To support forward-thinking and proactive vision** by gaining a deeper insight into the needs and indicators of a thriving BIPOC journalism entity group and a thriving BIPOC journalism ecosystem.
2. **To establish a baseline of costs for sustaining a thriving BIPOC journalism ecosystem** by utilizing financial modeling and developing different potential baseline scenarios.

In order to achieve these goals, we combined the rigid logic of math and finance with the complexity, beauty, diversity, and challenges of this ecosystem. Financial modeling has been used in the past to calculate the sustainability of local journalism. However, previous studies conducted by Boston Consulting Group, Sea Change, and Rutgers Media + The Public Interest have demonstrated that this is a challenging process. Among other factors, data scarcity limits our ability to adapt to a variety of contexts. What constitutes a “*thriving*” BIPOC journalism ecosystem and the indicators of its success are also not well understood. As a result, this analysis recommends that BIPOC journalism ecosystems be landscaped and that clear indicators be defined to conduct any additional modeling.

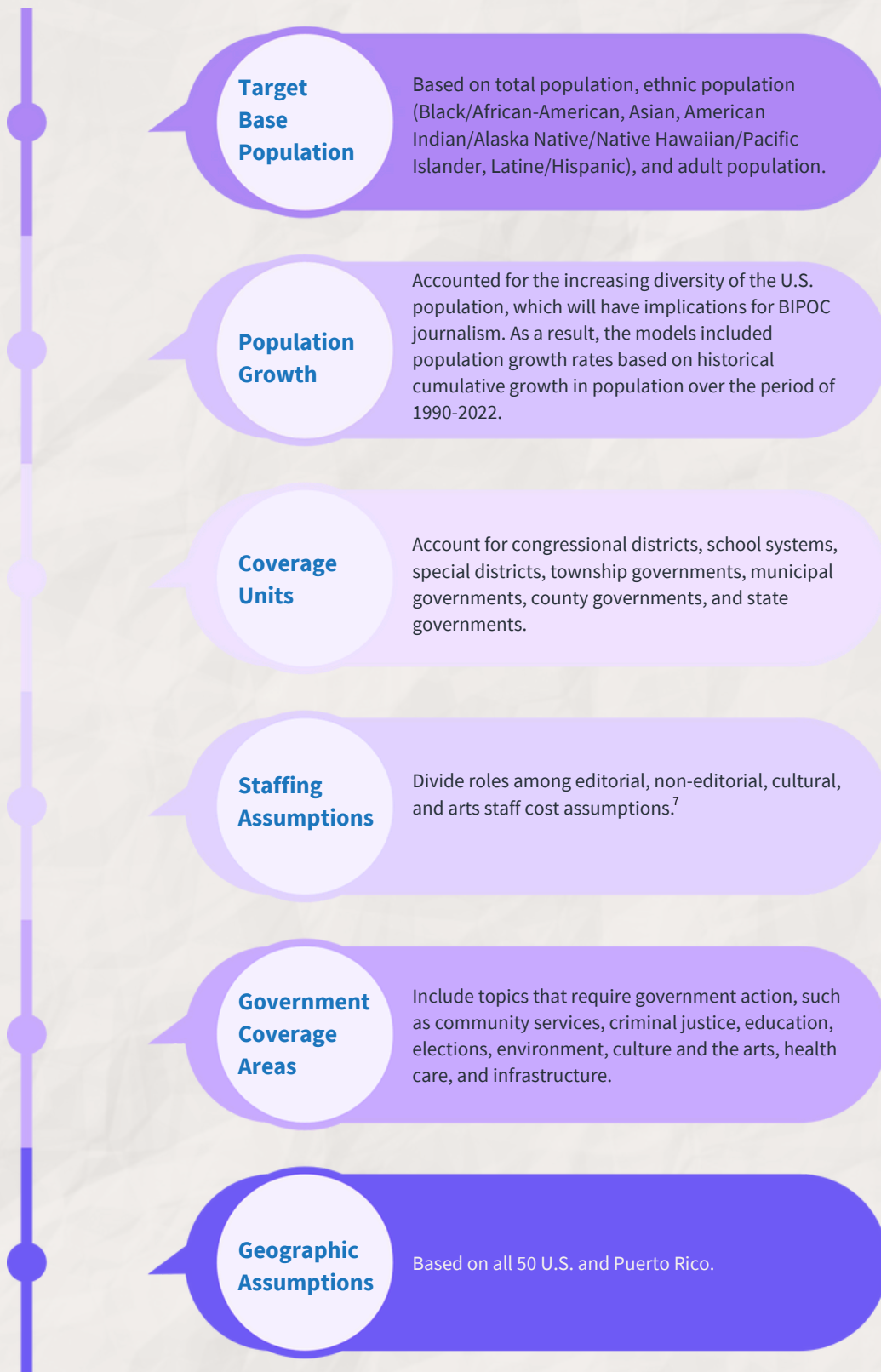
To gain a deeper understanding of what the community thinks about when it comes to sustainability and thriving, we conducted four small-group community discussions in November 2023. A total of 11 people attended these meetings, out of the expected 25.⁵

We developed four financial models to accommodate a variety of networked and geographic structures. Since historical and contextual data are limited, we used the same journalist per geographic area and coverage area models as in previous models but adapted them to account for additional assumptions, such as the existence of cultural strategists/media entrepreneurs in each geographical area.

⁵ Please refer to Appendix B to see the full list of participants in these discussions.

APPENDIX

Below is a breakdown of the structure and assumption details⁶:



⁷ To calculate staffing ratios we used the Institute for Nonprofit News's findings in page 10 of their [Index Snapshot 2023](#) report that “the typical nonprofit outlet employs five people, with the split of editorial to non-editorial staffers falling around 70/30. The staffing size of an organization and its ratio of editorial to non-editorial (including revenue-focused) employees is largely dictated by the age and geographic scope of the outlet’s coverage. Local outlets tend to have about four people on staff, whereas national or global organizations have a median staff size of 10, with a range from one to more than 170 FTEs.”

APPENDIX

The Limits of Financial Modeling

6

Reliance on Historical Data

Financial models often depend on historical data, which may not always accurately predict future performance.

Simplification of Realities

Models simplify complex financial systems, which can lead to overlooking critical nuances or misrepresenting real-world complexities.

Assumption-Driven

Models are based on assumptions that might not hold true under all circumstances, leading to inaccurate results.

Risk of Overfitting

Overfitting past data can make models less adaptable to future changes or unforeseen events.

Data Limits

- Either a lack of or limited historical data on BIPOC-led news and media entities.
- Limited consensus on staffing ratios and costs.
- Lack of consensus on assumptions to build models among different ethnic news and media groups.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX B

Acknowledgments

6

We are deeply grateful to the following media makers who participated in our November 2023 small-group conversations:

- Jeff Garcia / [Documented](#)
- Carla Murphy / [Rutgers](#)
- Joe Torres / [Free Press](#)
- Hannah Ajala / [Journalist](#)
- Mazin Sidahmed / [Documented](#)
- Nadia Tchoumi / [Canadian Association of Black Journalists](#)
- Nati Linares / [Art.Coop](#)
- Wendi Thomas / [MLK50](#)
- Uyiosa Elegon / [Shift Press](#)
- MariannMartin / [Canopy Atlanta](#)
- Angelica Das / [Democracy Fund](#)

APPENDIX C

Scenarios Alongside Field and Adjacent Funding Realities