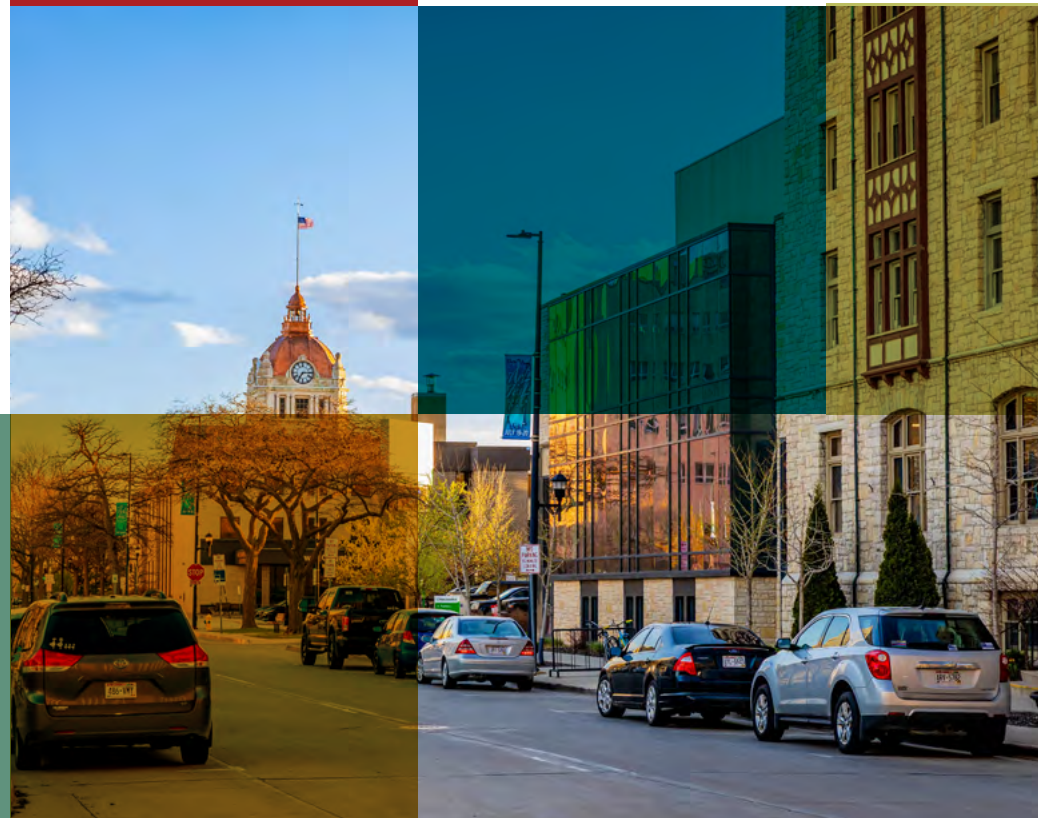


LOCAL NEWS

LANDSCAPE STUDY

NORTHEAST WISCONSIN



A Report to **Press Forward**
NE Wisconsin 

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INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

1



1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Regional Snapshot

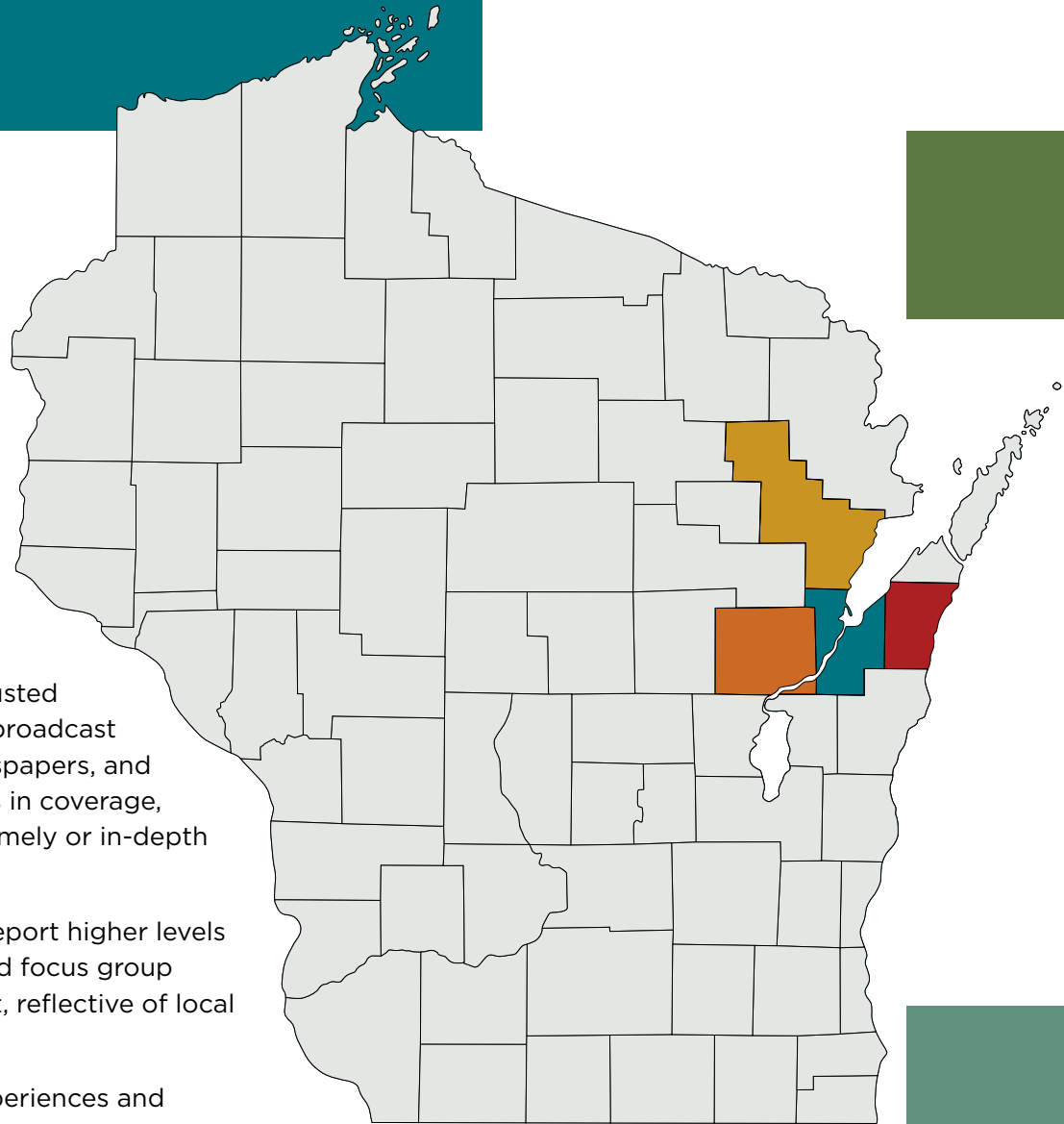
Local news and information systems help residents stay informed about issues that affect their communities. This landscape study offers the first comprehensive look at how residents in **Brown**, **Kewaunee**, **Oconto** and **Outagamie** counties access local news, what information they value, and how they perceive the regional news ecosystem as meeting, or not fully meeting, those needs.

Drawing on a community survey of 251 residents conducted through a regional research panel, two focus groups — one with rural residents and one with young adults — and an inventory of local news outlets, the study describes how information is delivered, consumed, and trusted across the four-county region. Residents rely on a mix of broadcast television, online news, social media, and community newspapers, and many participants express concerns about perceived gaps in coverage, barriers to access, representation, and the availability of timely or in-depth reporting.

Many residents believe local journalism is important and report higher levels of trust in local sources than in national outlets. Survey and focus group findings indicate strong interest in news that feels relevant, reflective of local communities, and accessible throughout the region.

This report provides a baseline assessment of resident experiences and perceptions that can inform future discussion, planning, and collaboration. It highlights areas where information needs align with existing sources, where perceived gaps or barriers appear, and how residents describe their current experiences with local news.

Taken together, these findings highlight both the continued importance of local journalism and the uneven ways residents experience access, relevance, and representation across the four-county region.



1.2 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this landscape study is to:

- Map the current local news and information ecosystem
- Identify community information needs and perceived gaps
- Understand how residents access, trust, and evaluate local news
- Capture perspectives from groups whose experiences may be less visible in local news coverage
- Establish baseline data to guide future learning and discussion

Reliable local news supports informed communities by helping residents understand issues that affect their daily lives, including housing, education, safety, and economic development. It also provides information that can support civic participation and local community connection.

This study was conducted by the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay Center for Civic Engagement at the request of the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation, which convenes the Press Forward Northeast Wisconsin chapter.

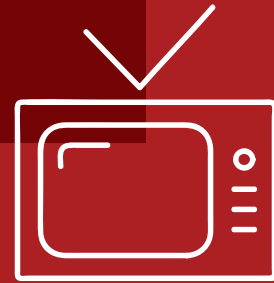
In recent years, the ways people find and engage with local information have been changing. Press Forward Northeast Wisconsin launched this study to better understand how these shifts are experienced within Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto, and Outagamie Counties, and how residents across the four counties navigate their information landscape. While the Green Bay and Appleton media markets serve a broad region, experiences with local news can differ between urban and rural communities, between younger and older adults, and across the four counties included in this study.

By grounding this analysis in the voices and experiences of survey respondents and focus group participants across the four counties, the study seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of how local information circulates within the region and how residents describe their current access to timely and relevant information.

1.3 KEY FINDINGS

Summary of Survey and Focus Group Findings

- **Residents highly value local information, but many report feeling under informed about the issues they consider most important.** Topics such as health care, public safety, the economy, and education consistently rank as top priorities, yet relatively few residents report feeling “very well informed” about these areas. This gap highlights a disconnect between what residents care about most and where they feel confident in their understanding.
- **Digital and social platforms play a central role in daily news access, while broadcast and cable television remain an important source for many residents.** Facebook and online news are the most commonly used daily sources, but broadcast and cable television continue to play a significant role in how residents access local information. Many local news organizations appear to distribute the same content across broadcast, digital, and social platforms, suggesting that local news consumption is spread across multiple platforms, with digital and broadcast sources serving complementary functions rather than replacing one another.
- **Trust in local journalism is relatively strong, though concerns about bias, sensationalism, and repetitive coverage shape satisfaction and perceptions of quality.** Residents place greater trust in traditional local news sources such as print, television, and radio than in social media platforms. At the same time, many express concerns about tone, balance, and depth, indicating that trust and satisfaction are related but distinct dimensions of how residents evaluate local news.



1.3 KEY FINDINGS

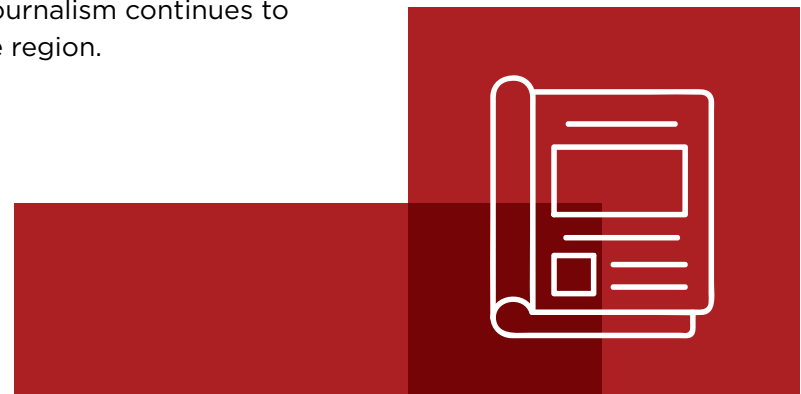
- **Some residents express feeling underrepresented and want more coverage that reflects everyday community life and lived experiences.** Both focus groups describe a desire for news that feels more locally grounded, reflects smaller communities, and goes beyond crisis-driven or one-time stories. These perspectives suggest perceived gaps in representation rather than a lack of interest in local news.



- **Many residents experience barriers to accessing local news, including paywalls, relevance gaps, and uneven geographic coverage.** While most residents report having some access to local news, cost, limited coverage of certain communities or issues, and perceived relevance affect how consistently residents engage with available sources. These barriers contribute to reliance on free or easily shared information, even when those sources are trusted less.



- **Local news plays a role in motivating civic engagement for many residents.** Nearly half of survey respondents report taking some form of civic or community action, such as voting, volunteering, attending events, or donating, based on local news coverage. These findings suggest that local journalism continues to support civic participation and community involvement across the region.



LOCAL NEWS LANDSCAPE

2



2.1 OVERVIEW OF LOCAL OUTLETS

This section explores the types of local information survey respondents consider most important, as well as how survey respondents perceive the accuracy, relevance, and tone of local news coverage. Together, these findings provide insight into what residents want and expect from local news and where respondents feel current coverage aligns with or falls short of those expectations.

The Local Ecosystem

The local news ecosystem across the four counties included in this study (Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto, and Outagamie) includes a range of organizations that produce and distribute local news and information, including newspapers, broadcast television and radio stations, digital news publishers, and nonprofit outlets. As in many regions, these outlets operate within overlapping geographic markets while serving communities that differ in size, population density, and local context.

The tables and visuals in this section translate the outlet inventory into a set of clear, comparable patterns that can be read across the four-county study region. Throughout this section, outlets are considered part of the ecosystem if they serve at least one of the four counties included in this study, regardless of where they are physically based.

ABOUT THE NEWS ECOSYSTEM INVENTORY: SCOPE AND APPROACH

The news ecosystem inventory in this study focuses on formal local news outlets that regularly produce original reporting, including newspapers, broadcast television and radio stations, digital-native publishers, and nonprofit news organizations. This focus supports a clear, comparable description of the region's formal news infrastructure across the four-county study area.

Elsewhere in the report, survey and focus group data provide additional insight into how residents encounter and use local news and information alongside informal or community-based sources.

2.2 MIX OF MEDIA OUTLETS

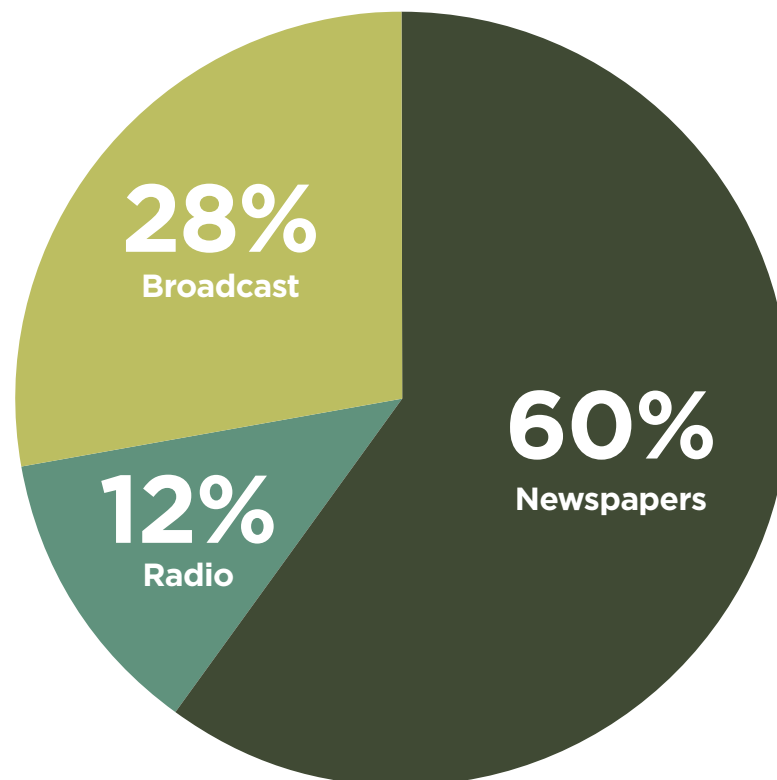
Understanding the Landscape

Across the four-county region, local news is produced through a mix of print, broadcast, and digital formats, supported by both for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Outlets vary widely in publication frequency, ownership structure, and delivery model, reflecting different approaches to serving local and regional audiences.

Figure 1 and Tables A-C summarize the structure of the local news ecosystem at a high level. Rather than listing individual outlets, these visuals focus on the distribution of outlets by medium and publication frequency to illustrate broader patterns in how local news is produced across the region. A complete inventory of identified outlets, including outlet names and detailed attributes, is provided in the Appendix.

Newspapers remain a visible component of the ecosystem, often operating in hybrid print and digital formats. Broadcast television and radio stations serve large portions of the region and frequently reach multiple counties through shared market areas. A smaller number of digital-native and nonprofit outlets contribute additional coverage, typically through online-only formats.

FIGURE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS BY MEDIUM



2.2 MIX OF MEDIA OUTLETS

In addition to differences in format and publication frequency, the region's local news ecosystem reflects a mix of long-established and newer outlets. Many newspapers and broadcast organizations were founded decades ago, while most digital-only outlets with identified founding years emerged more recently (see Table C).

Taken together, these tables and visuals highlight several structural characteristics of the regional news ecosystem. Most identified outlets fall within a small number of dominant formats, with newspapers and broadcast outlets comprising the largest share. Digital-native and nonprofit outlets are present but represent a smaller portion of the overall outlet mix. Two identified newspaper outlets operate as digital-only publications, with no indication of a print edition.

Outlets publish on schedules ranging from daily to monthly. Many long-standing organizations have adapted to digital distribution while maintaining print or broadcast formats, while newer outlets tend to operate primarily online. Together, these outlets form the structural foundation of the local news ecosystem examined in this study.

TABLE A
LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS BY MEDIUM

MEDIUM	NUMBER OF OUTLETS
Newspaper (print and/or digital)	15
Radio	3
Broadcast Television	7
Total	25

TABLE B
PUBLICATION FREQUENCY OF LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

PUBLICATION FREQUENCY	NUMBER OF OUTLETS
Daily	4
Weekly or Biweekly	10
Monthly or less frequent	1
Total	15

TABLE C
LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS BY FOUNDING PERIOD

FOUNDING PERIOD	NUMBER OF OUTLETS
Pre-1980	14
1980-2009	8
2010-present	2
Year unknown	1
Total	25

Founding periods are based on available historical information and are intended to illustrate broad patterns in outlet longevity rather than precise organizational timelines.

2.3 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

Coverage by Community

While all four counties are served by local news outlets, the geographic organization of those outlets varies considerably. Some outlets are locally based and primarily oriented toward a single county or community, while others operate within broader multi-county or regional frameworks.

Figure 2 illustrates the geographic distribution of identified outlets, showing primary business locations (or city-level placements for digital-only outlets). Points are symbolized by outlet type, with colors and icons distinguishing formats. The figure provides spatial context for where outlets are based and how they are distributed across the four-county study region.

Many outlets serving the four-county region operate within regional service frameworks that extend beyond county boundaries. For television, this regional structure is defined by the Green Bay–Appleton Designated Market Area (DMA), a federally recognized media market defined by Nielsen used to structure television service across the region.¹

Viewed together, the map and accompanying tables are designed to show:

- Where outlets are physically located
- The extent to which outlets operate within county-specific versus regional frameworks
- How population centers align with outlet concentration

In general, outlet locations correspond to regional population patterns. Brown and Outagamie counties, which include the region's largest population centers, host a greater number of outlets across multiple formats. Kewaunee and Oconto counties have fewer locally based outlets and are more commonly served by regionally based providers.

Table D illustrates how outlets are distributed across the four-county study region.

FIGURE 2
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS BY COUNTY AND OUTLET TYPE

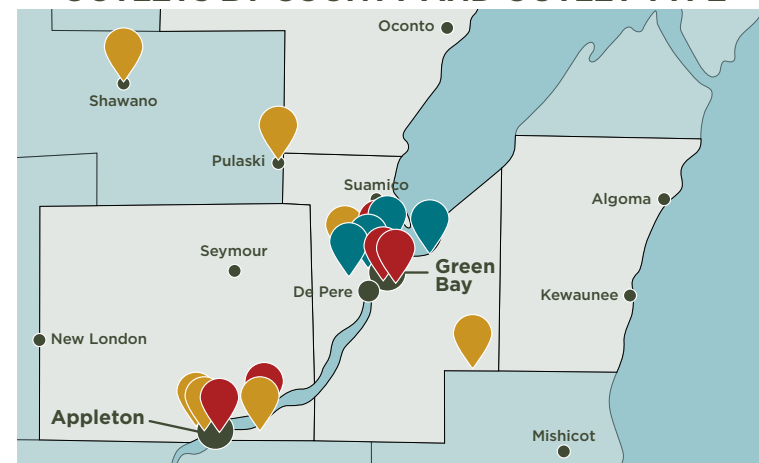


TABLE D
COUNTY POPULATION AND NUMBER OF OUTLETS SERVING EACH COUNTY

Outlets are counted as “serving” a county if they are locally based in the county or provide regular news coverage to the county through print, digital, radio, or broadcast distribution.

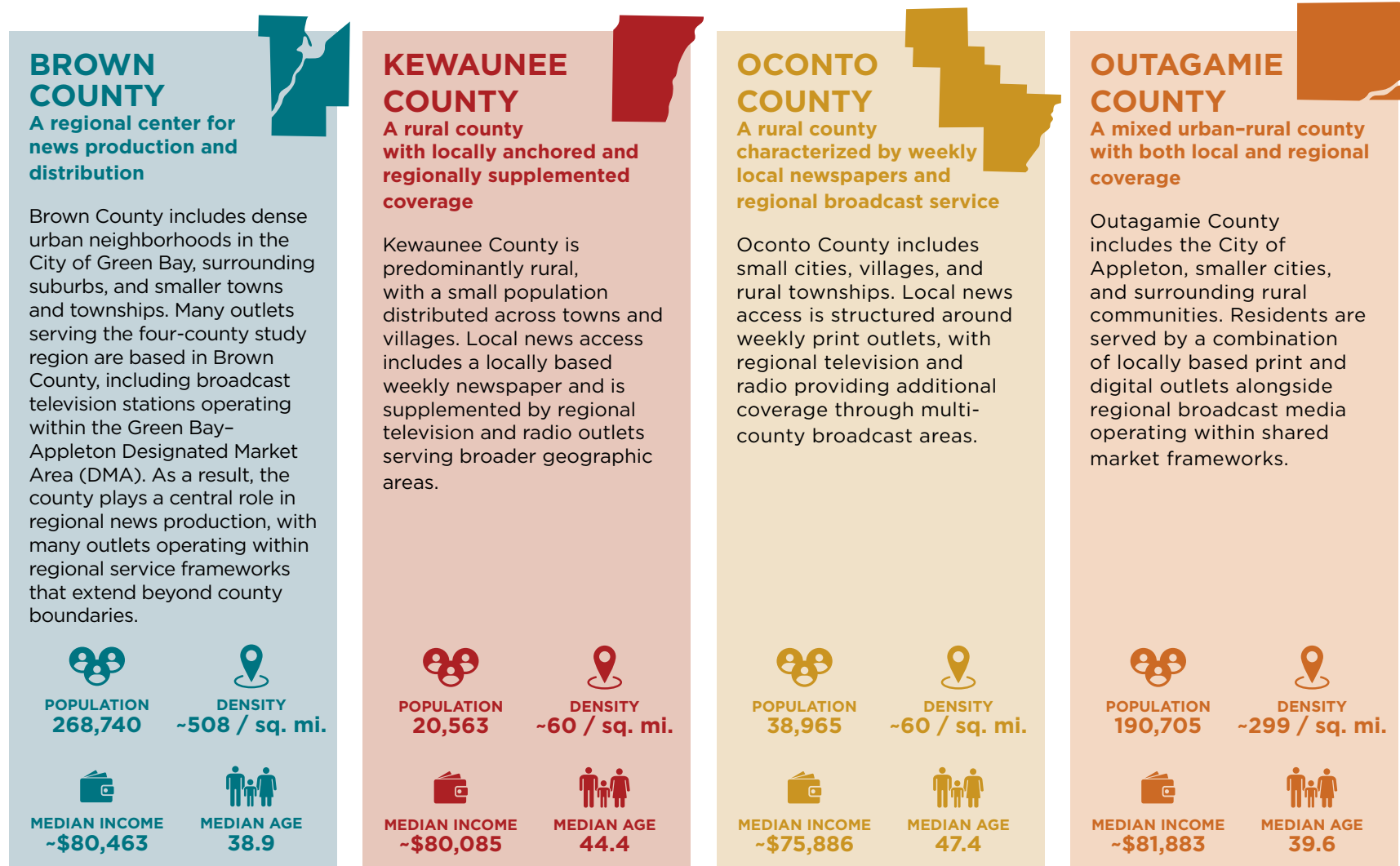
COUNTY	POPULATION (2020 CENSUS)	NUMBER OF LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS SERVING THE COUNTY
Brown	268,740	19
Kewaunee	20,563	12
Oconto	38,965	12
Outagamie	190,705	15

Counts include outlets that serve multiple counties, including regional broadcast television and radio outlets operating across the four-county region.

¹ Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Green Bay–Appleton, WI Designated Market Area Map. https://transition.fcc.gov/dtv/markets/maps_report1/Green_Bay-Appleton_WI.pdf

2.4 COUNTY-LEVEL SNAPSHOTS

To further illustrate variation across the region, county-level snapshots summarize key structural characteristics and demographic context for each county included in this study.



Data Sources / Population figures are drawn from the 2020 U.S. Decennial Census. Population density is calculated using 2020 Census land area estimates. Median household income and median age are from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), using 2024 1-year estimates where available and 2023 5-year estimates for smaller counties.

2.5 SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

These patterns describe how the local news ecosystem is structured across the four-county study region and its surrounding media markets and provide important context for understanding resident experiences with access, representation, and information availability. Subsequent sections of this report examine how residents describe navigating this landscape through survey and focus group findings.

Notable Insights

- Broadcast television stations serving the four-county region operate within the Green Bay–Appleton DMA, with primary facilities located in Brown County and additional bureaus or newsrooms located elsewhere in the region.
- Local radio news and talk stations identified in this inventory are primarily based in more urban areas, though their broadcast signals extend across county boundaries and serve both urban and rural communities.
- Nearly all identified newspapers, radio, and television stations maintain some form of digital presence, reflecting the widespread integration of online distribution across media types.
- The region's local news ecosystem includes a mix of long-standing legacy outlets and newer digital-native organizations operating across a range of formats and publication schedules.
- Newspapers and broadcast outlets make up the largest share of identified providers, while digital-native and nonprofit outlets represent a smaller portion of the overall ecosystem.

SURVEY FINDINGS

3



3.1 ACCESSING NEWS AND INFORMATION

This section examines how residents encounter local news and information, including whether they actively seek it out, which platforms they use most often, and where they typically turn for updates about their communities. Together, these findings offer insight into both the reach of local news and the pathways through which information circulates among survey respondents across the four-county study area.

AGE	
18-24	8%
25-34	12%
35-44	18%
45-54	18%
55-64	17%
65 or older	26%

Survey Respondent Demographics

Below is a summary of key demographic characteristics of survey respondents, provided to offer context for interpreting the findings presented in this section. The community survey reflects responses from 251 adult residents across Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto, and Outagamie counties. While not intended to be statistically representative, these responses offer insight into shared patterns in how residents access and experience local news across the study region.

COUNTY OF RESIDENCE	
Brown	50%
Outagamie	41%
Oconto	6%
Kewaunee	3%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	
Less than high school	2%
High school diploma or equivalent	33%
Some college	26%
Associate degree	10%
Bachelor's degree	22%
Graduate or professional degree	8%

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Less than \$25,000	14%
\$25,000-\$49,999	28%
\$50,000-\$74,999	20%
\$75,000-\$99,999	16%
\$100,000-\$149,999	12%
\$150,000 or more	8%
Prefer not to say	4%

GENDER IDENTITY	
Female	61%
Male	38%
Other	1%

RACE / ETHNICITY ²	
White	90%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	3%
Asian or Asian American	2%
Black or African American	2%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<1%
Another race/ethnicity	<1%
Prefer not to say	<1%
Multiple selections	<1%

² Race and ethnicity were collected using a "select all that apply" format, and percentages sum to more than 100%.

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding and nonresponse.

3.1 ACCESSING NEWS AND INFORMATION

How Residents Stay Informed

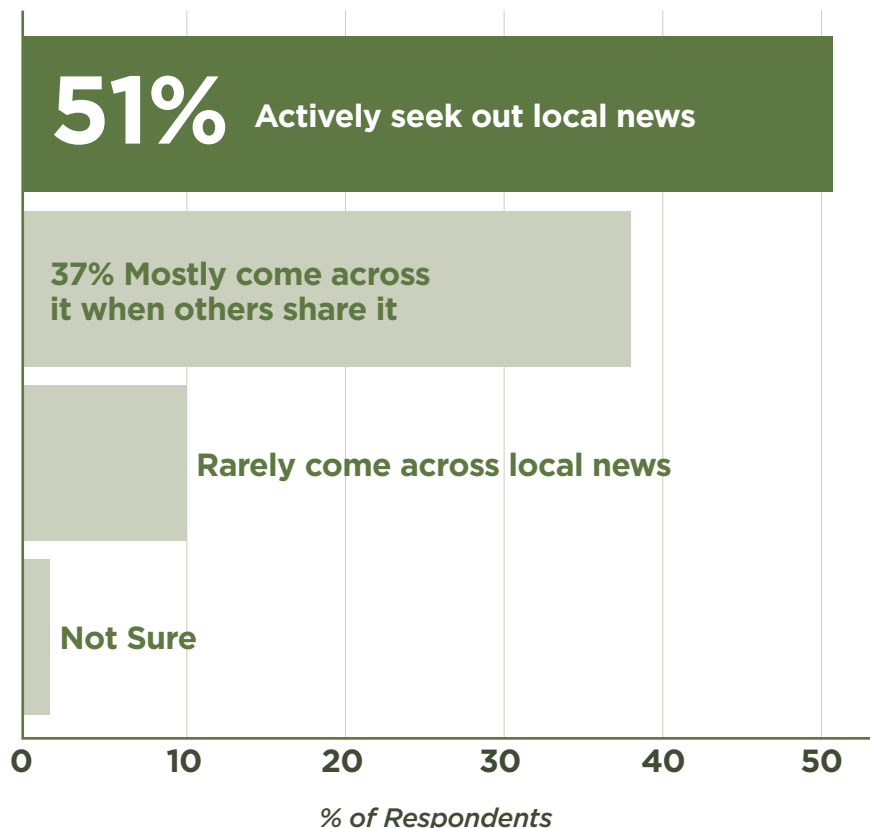
Residents participating in the community survey were asked which statement best describes how they stay informed about their community. Responses reflect a mix of intentional news-seeking and more passive encounters with local information.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while many survey respondents intentionally follow local news, a substantial portion relies on information circulating through personal networks or shared channels rather than direct engagement with news outlets. Rural and youth focus group participants echoed this pattern, describing news discovery as something they often encounter indirectly through Facebook, family members, or community conversations rather than something they seek out. Age-based survey analysis suggests that this pattern is particularly pronounced among younger residents, who are far more likely to encounter local news when it is shared by others, whereas older residents are much more likely to actively seek out local news on their own.

This pattern aligns with national research showing that fewer Americans actively seek out news than in the past, and that many increasingly encounter news incidentally, such as through social media feeds or shared content, rather than through deliberate searching³.

³ Pew Research Center. (2024). *Americans' changing relationship with local news*.

FIGURE 3
HOW RESIDENTS STAY INFORMED
ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITY



3.1 ACCESSING NEWS AND INFORMATION

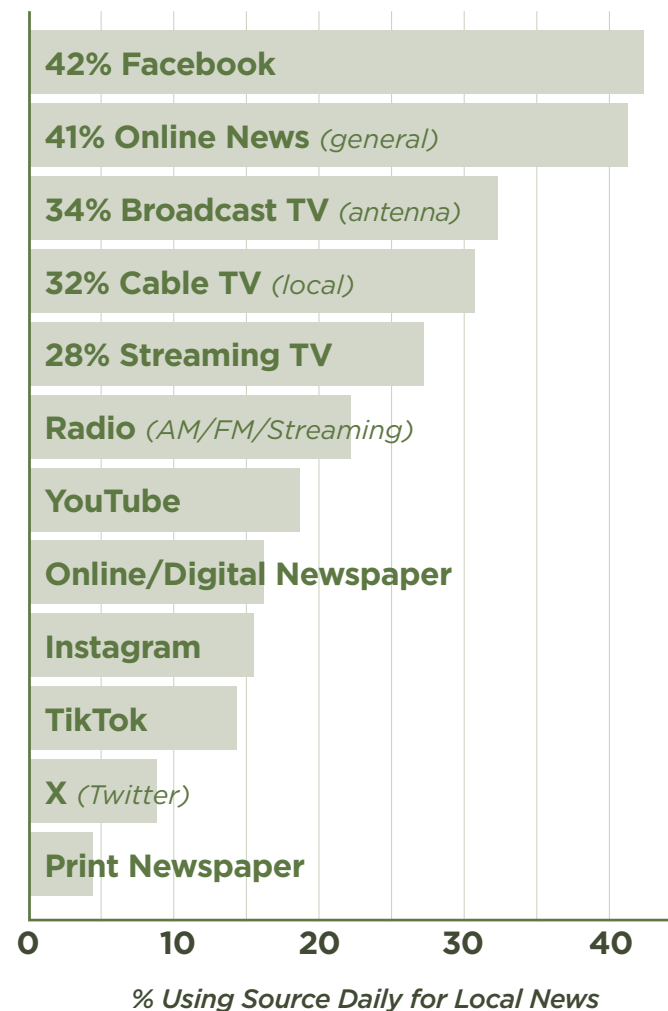
How Often Residents Use Different Sources for Local News

To better understand where residents in the four-county study area encounter local news, respondents were asked how frequently they use different platforms to access local news and information. The results highlight a continued reliance on both digital and broadcast channels, with notable variation by format.

- Facebook (42%) and general online news websites (41%) are the most commonly used daily sources for local news.
- Local television news remains a daily source for many residents, whether accessed via broadcast (34%), cable (32%), or streaming services (28%), underscoring the continued importance of TV news in the local information ecosystem.
- Traditional print newspapers are rarely used on a daily basis (4%), though some residents report using print at weekly or monthly intervals.

These patterns suggest that local news consumption is spread across multiple platforms, with digital and broadcast sources playing complementary roles rather than fully replacing one another. Focus group participants helped clarify this distinction, frequently describing television news as part of a daily routine, while digital sources are more often used in response to specific alerts, shared links, or breaking updates. Participants also noted that many local news organizations share similar content across broadcast, websites, and social media channels, meaning residents may encounter the same reporting through different formats. Analysis further indicates that survey respondents living in rural areas are more likely than non-rural residents to use most local news sources on a daily basis, particularly online news, Facebook, radio, and broadcast television, while cable television is one of the few sources used more frequently by non-rural residents.

FIGURE 4
DAILY USE OF LOCAL NEWS SOURCES



3.1 ACCESSING NEWS AND INFORMATION

How Often Residents Use Different Sources for Local News

In an open-ended question, survey respondents were asked where they typically turn for local information in their day-to-day lives. Responses were coded into categories to capture the range of sources residents rely on most often in their everyday lives. This qualitative data adds texture to the platform-use findings by identifying the specific outlets and information pathways residents name.

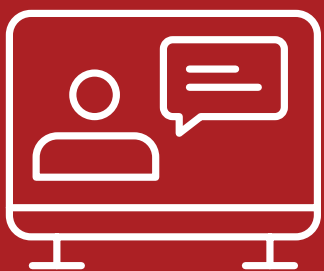
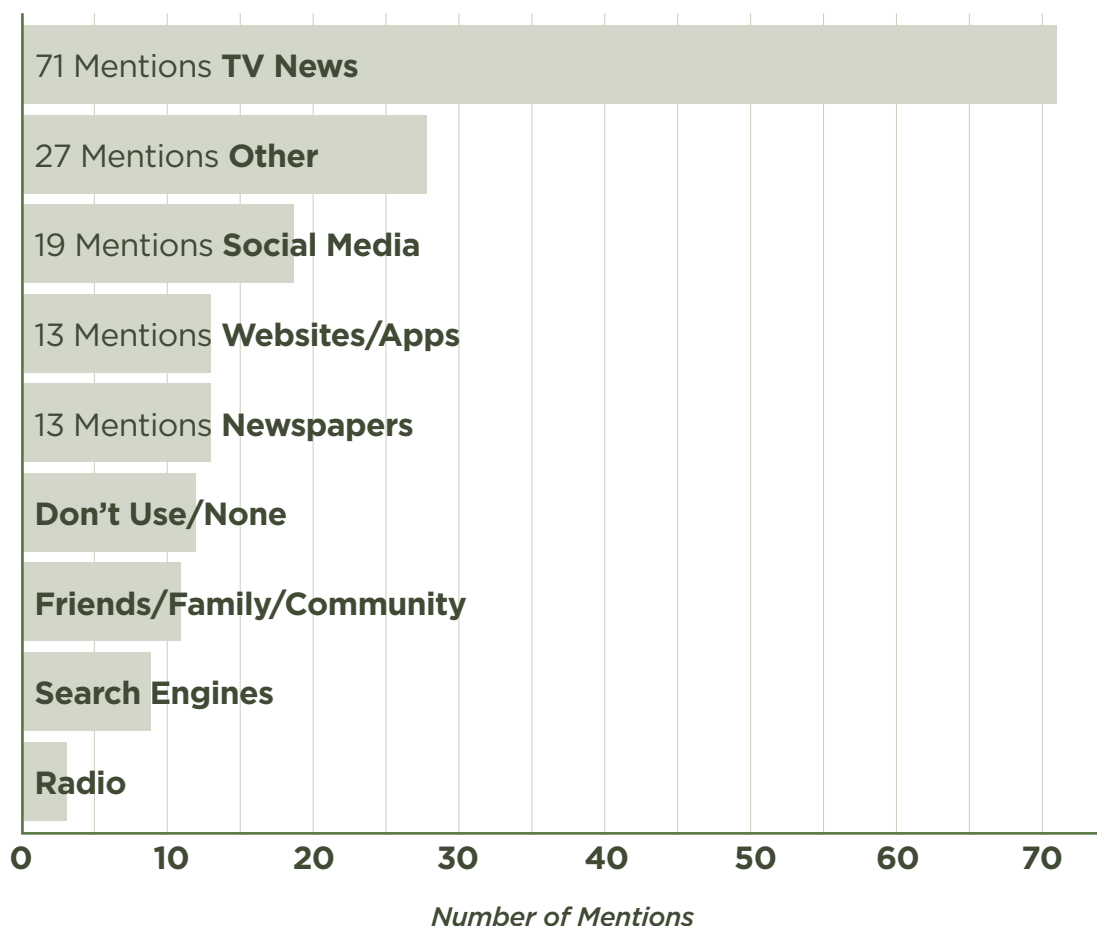


FIGURE 5
WHERE RESIDENTS USUALLY GO FOR LOCAL INFORMATION (Q21)



3.1 ACCESSING NEWS AND INFORMATION



Key Themes

1 Local TV News Dominates as the Primary Source

Local broadcast television stations were by far the most frequently mentioned sources of local information among open-ended survey respondents. Residents regularly cited stations such as WLUK (FOX), WBAY (ABC), WGBA (NBC), and WFRV (CBS), as well as local TV news websites and apps. This category accounted for 71 mentions, making it the most frequently cited source.

Focus group participants echoed this reliance on local broadcast television news, often describing it as a routine part of staying informed.

2 Social Media Plays a Major Role, Especially Facebook

Social media formed the second-largest cluster of responses, with residents most often referencing Facebook, including neighborhood pages and scanner groups. YouTube and TikTok were mentioned less frequently. Social media accounted for 19 mentions.

3 General Websites and Mobile Apps Are Common Sources

Many residents described turning to “online news,” “websites,” or “news apps,” including both newspaper and broadcast outlets’ digital platforms. Together, these responses totaled 13 mentions.

4 Newspapers Still Matter for Some Residents

Both digital and print newspapers were mentioned, including the Appleton Post Crescent, the Green Bay Press-Gazette, and other local paper websites. This category also yielded 13 mentions, indicating that newspapers remain part of the information mix for some residents.

5 Word-of-Mouth and Search Tools Supplement News Use

Some residents rely on friends, family, neighbors, or community gathering spaces for local information (11 mentions). As one respondent shared, “I go to friends to keep up with community news and talk together.” Others described using Google searches to find local updates (9 mentions).

“I usually just turn on the local news at night; that’s how I know what’s going on around here.”

— Rural focus group participant

6 A Segment of Residents Does Not Seek Local Information

A notable group of respondents indicated that they do not actively seek local information at all, with responses such as “nowhere,” “don’t know,” or “I don’t care about local info.” These responses totaled 12 mentions, reflecting disengagement or limited connection to local information for a segment of respondents.

7 Radio Mentioned Only Occasionally

Radio stations or talk radio were mentioned infrequently (3 mentions), suggesting a more limited role compared to other platforms.

3.1 ACCESSING NEWS AND INFORMATION

Likely Future Sources of Community Information

Residents participating in the study were also asked to consider where they expect to get information about their community over the next five years, offering insights into anticipated shifts in local information use. Their responses suggest both continuity and change in how local information may circulate in the future.



These findings point to an increasingly networked local information environment as described by survey respondents, where interpersonal connections and digital platforms coexist alongside traditional news outlets in shaping how information circulates locally.

FIGURE 6
FUTURE SOURCES FOR
COMMUNITY INFORMATION
(NEXT 5 YEARS)

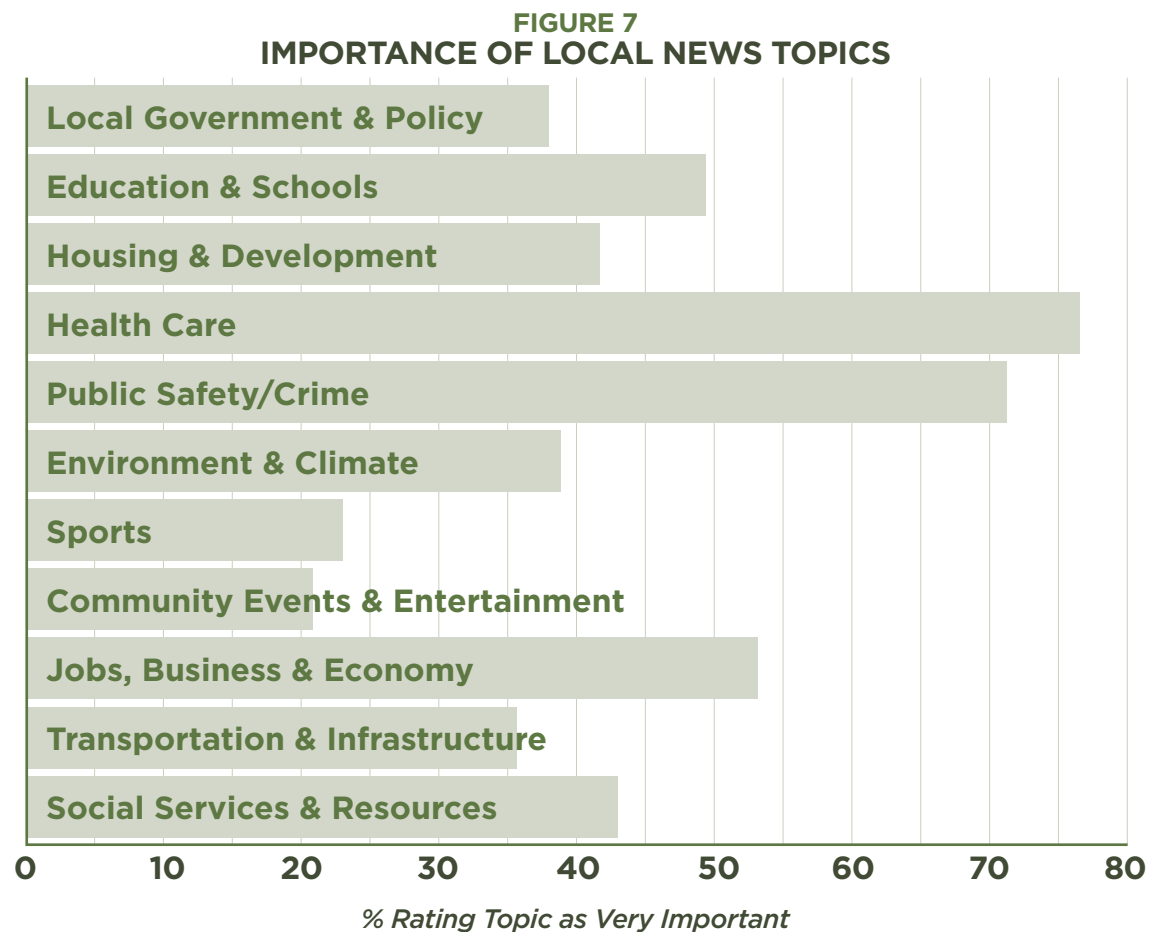


3.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO RESIDENTS

This section explores the types of local information survey respondents consider most important, as well as how survey respondents perceive the accuracy, relevance, and tone of local news coverage. Together, these findings provide insight into what residents want and expect from local news and where respondents feel current coverage aligns with or falls short of those expectations.

Importance of Local News Topics

Residents rated how important different local news topics are to them personally. Figure 7 highlights the percentage of respondents who say each topic is “very important.”



3.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO RESIDENTS



Overall, these results indicate that survey respondents in this study place the greatest importance on news that affects daily well-being, safety, and economic stability, with relatively less emphasis on lifestyle or recreational coverage such as sports or entertainment. National research shows similar patterns, with health care, public safety, and economic conditions consistently ranking among the most important local issues for residents across the United States⁴.

Focus group participants reinforced these study findings, frequently describing local news as most valuable when it helps them understand issues that have immediate impacts on their families, finances, safety, and access to services.

⁴ Pew Research Center. (2019). For local news, Americans embrace digital but want strong community coverage.

3.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO RESIDENTS

Perceptions of Accurate or Inaccurate Local News Coverage

To better understand how residents in this study experience local news coverage, respondents were asked whether they could recall a recent story that portrayed their community accurately or inaccurately, in their view. Their responses reveal not only which types of stories resonate, but also where residents perceive gaps, bias, or imbalance in local coverage.



Key Themes

1 Limited Recall and Disengagement

A significant portion of respondents said they could not recall a recent local news story, responding with “none,” “don’t know,” or noting that they rarely watch or follow the news.

Several residents expressed general disengagement with local news, and some felt their communities, particularly smaller towns, are “almost never covered.”

2 Positive Community Stories Viewed as Accurate

When residents did recall accurate portrayals, they most often involved stories highlighting community life and local pride, including:

- Local festivals and cultural events (e.g., Irish Fest, Mile of Music, parades)
- Charity efforts, food pantries, and volunteer clean-up initiatives
- School events and high school sports
- Packers-related coverage and game-day culture

These stories were frequently described as reflective of community spirit, togetherness, and shared identity. As one respondent explained, “Mile of Music shows my community as one with cultural diversity.”

3 Mixed Reactions to Crime Coverage

Crime-related stories were commonly mentioned and were often seen as factually accurate. However, several respondents also described crime coverage as overly negative or sensationalized, noting that this tone contributed to decreased trust or reduced engagement with local news.



3.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO RESIDENTS



Key Themes

4 Resonance and Tension Around Development and Economic Stories

Residents frequently referenced coverage related to:

- Housing costs and rental prices
- Growth and development in places like Appleton
- Local government decisions, taxes, and service impacts

While these stories were valued when grounded in facts, some respondents felt coverage lacked nuance or failed to reflect lived experiences, particularly around issues like gentrification.

“It feels like they rush to get the story out, and then you find out later that there was a lot more to it.”

— Rural focus group participant

5 Concerns About Sensationalism, Bias, and Incomplete Reporting

Across responses, residents expressed frustration with:

- Perceived sensational coverage of school policies or controversies
- Stories breaking before facts were verified
- National political content overshadowing local issues
- Perceived political bias or lack of contextual depth

Several respondents contrasted national news coverage, which they viewed as more biased, with local news, which they generally perceived as more balanced, though still imperfect. Focus group participants echoed these concerns, particularly around coverage that felt incomplete or overly focused on controversy.

6 Meaningful Coverage of Community Challenges

Residents highlighted stories about homelessness, mental health, school funding shortages, and social service impacts as especially meaningful when they accurately reflected community needs and struggles. As one survey respondent shared, *“The shortfall of funds for the school district showed where we could participate in meetings and better understand the issue.”*

7 Perceived Inaccurate or Unfair Portrayals

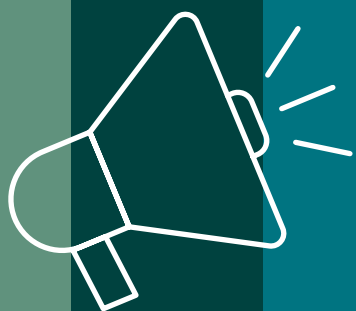
A smaller number of respondents cited examples of coverage they felt was inaccurate or unfair, including stories about protests or incidents involving local police or animal control in their communities. These respondents emphasized concerns about fairness, nuance, and factual clarity.

3.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO RESIDENTS

What Residents Want from Local News

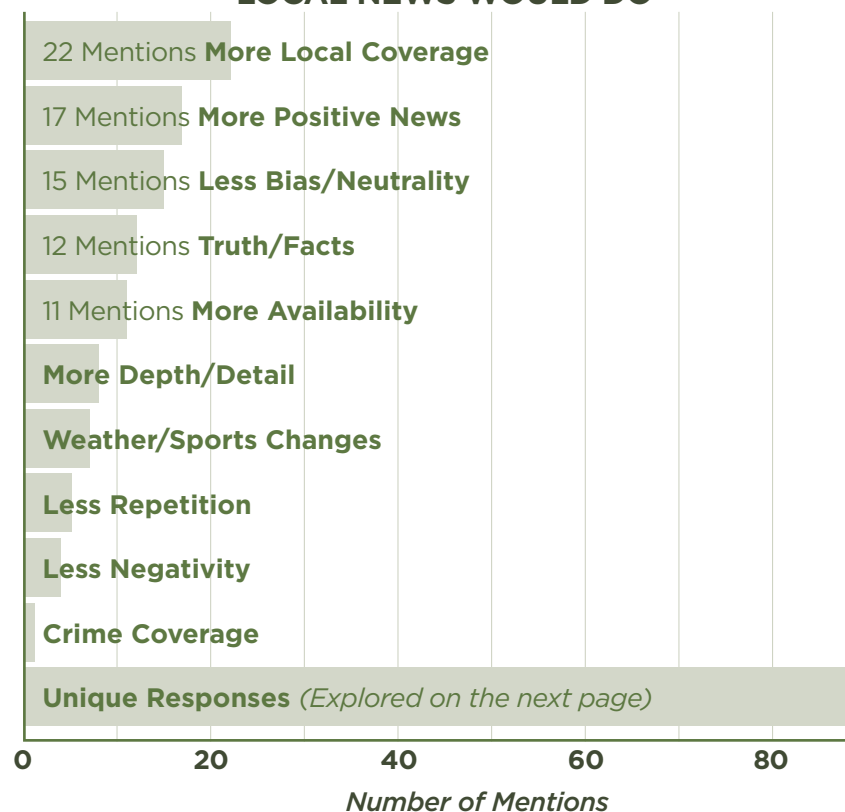
Residents were asked to complete the open-ended statement, “*I wish local news would _____*,” allowing respondents to articulate priorities in their own words. Responses were coded into thematic categories to identify common patterns in what residents want local news to improve, emphasize, or change. Figure 8 summarizes the relative frequency of these themes.

Open-ended survey responses most commonly emphasized a desire for more locally focused coverage, less sensational or perceived biased reporting, and a greater balance between negative and positive stories. Across responses, residents consistently prioritized depth, accuracy, and relevance over volume or speed of coverage.



“I wish local
news would
_____”

FIGURE 8
**Q22 WHAT RESIDENTS WISH
LOCAL NEWS WOULD DO**



3.2 WHAT MATTERS MOST TO RESIDENTS



Key Themes

1 Highly Individualized Requests

The largest share of responses consisted of unique or highly specific requests, reflecting personal interests, critiques of coverage style, or topic-specific concerns that did not cluster into a single shared theme.

Focus group participants echoed these survey responses, emphasizing a desire for coverage that reflects everyday community life and helps people feel informed and connected. “I wish there were more stories about what’s actually going on in our community, not just the bad stuff.”— *Young adult focus group participant*

2 Strong Desire for More Local and Community-Focused Coverage

Residents frequently emphasized that local news should be “actually local,” including greater attention to smaller communities, neighborhood-level issues, topics such as housing, mental health, and homelessness, and less emphasis on national news content. As one respondent explained, “I feel like local news has lost the meaning of the word ‘local.’” Another echoed this sentiment, adding, “Tell us more about what’s going on in the community.”

3 Requests for More Positive and Constructive Stories

Many residents expressed a desire for more uplifting or community-building stories highlighting community strengths, and for greater balance between negative and positive coverage.

4 Calls for Less Bias and More Balanced Reporting

Respondents highlighted the importance of unbiased, neutral reporting, balanced presentation of issues, and avoiding agenda-driven narratives.

“Start showing more positives to help even out all the negative.”

— *Survey Respondent*

5 Emphasis on Accuracy, Transparency, and Factual Reporting

Residents underscored the need for factual reporting, transparency, clearer context, and avoiding exaggeration or sensationalism. As one respondent put it, “Be truthful and very factual,” while another emphasized the importance of restraint, noting that local news should “avoid sensationalism, fear mongering, and generating outrage.”

6 Availability and Accessibility of News

Some residents focused on access-related improvements, including more frequent updates, real-time information, and easier access to news content.

3.3 AWARENESS OF LOCAL ISSUES

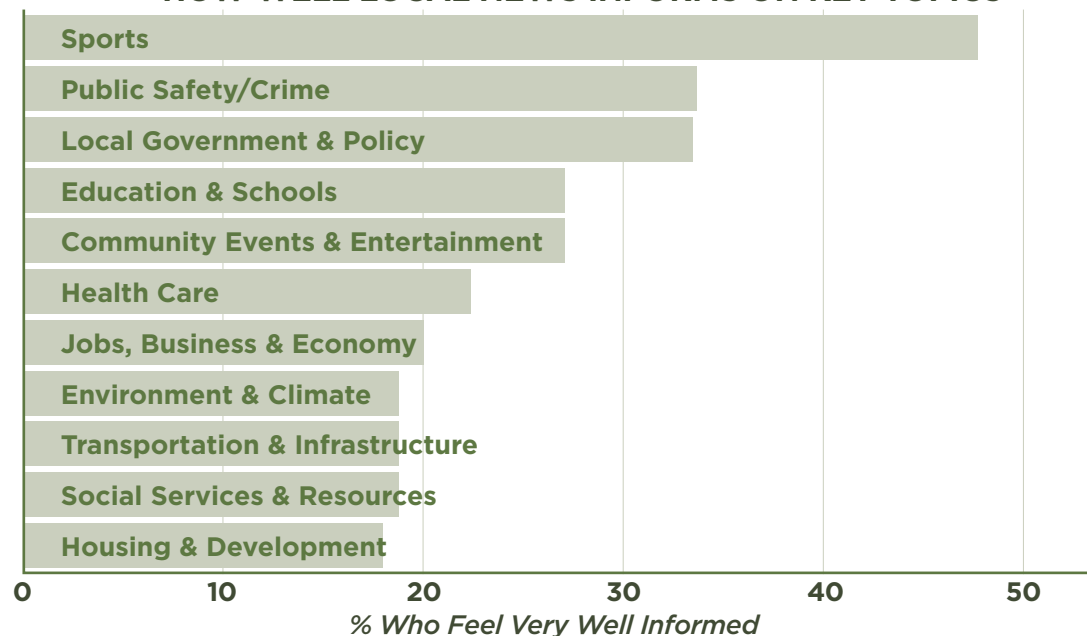
This section examines how survey respondents assess their own level of understanding across key local topics and highlights where perceived knowledge aligns, or does not align, with the issues residents say matter most to them.

How Well Informed Residents Feel by Topic

Residents in the four-county study area rated how well local news keeps them informed on the same set of topics discussed in the previous section. Figure 9 shows the share of respondents who feel “very well informed” about each issue.

Focus group discussions helped contextualize these patterns, with participants often describing local coverage as more frequent and visible for sports and crime than for complex civic issues such as health care, housing, or economic policy.

FIGURE 9
HOW WELL LOCAL NEWS INFORMS ON KEY TOPICS



- Residents feel most well informed about sports (48%) and public safety/crime (34%).
- Fewer residents feel very well informed about housing and development, social services, or transportation and infrastructure, with all of these topics at or below roughly 20%.
- Overall, levels of feeling very well informed vary considerably by topic, suggesting uneven perceived understanding across issue areas among survey respondents.

3.3 AWARENESS OF LOCAL ISSUES

Gaps Between Importance and Feeling Informed

Comparing the issues residents rate as most important (Page 22) with how well informed they feel about those same topics (Page 28) reveals several important perceived gaps among survey respondents.

In particular, health care and the local economy stand out as areas where residents express high importance but lower levels of feeling very well informed. While these issues are among residents' top priorities, fewer respondents report feeling confident in their understanding of related local coverage.

In contrast, sports shows the opposite pattern: Although it is rated as less important by residents overall, it is one of the areas where residents are most likely to feel very well informed. This suggests that coverage levels may be more closely aligned with the frequency or visibility of reporting than with residents' stated priorities.

These gaps highlight areas where participants in this study report that their information needs may not be fully met, setting the stage for later discussion of trust, satisfaction, and opportunities to strengthen local news coverage. In focus groups, participants frequently described feeling aware of these issues but not fully informed based on their experience, noting that coverage often highlights outcomes or events without providing sufficient context to understand underlying causes, tradeoffs, or implications.

National research suggests that this pattern is not unique. Pew Research Center finds that Americans often report lower confidence in their understanding of complex local and public policy issues, such as health care, the economy, and social services, even when those topics are among their top concerns. These gaps reflect broader challenges in how information about complex issues is communicated and understood, rather than a lack of public interest⁵.

⁵ Pew Research Center. (2018). Many Americans say made-up news is a critical problem that needs to be fixed.



3.4 TRUST, SATISFACTION, AND PERCEPTIONS

This section examines how survey respondents and focus group participants assess the trustworthiness of local news sources, how satisfied they are with available coverage, and how they perceive the accuracy and fairness of local reporting in practice. Together, these findings provide insight into the relationship between local news practices and residents' confidence in local information.

Trust in Local News Sources

Survey respondents rated how trustworthy different sources of local news are. Figure 10 shows the share of respondents who consider each source “very trustworthy.”

Overall, survey respondents tend to place greater trust in traditional news formats than in social media-based sources for local information. Focus group participants reinforced this distinction, often describing local television and newspapers as more reliable because they are seen as “checked,” familiar, and less reactive, while social media was widely viewed as faster but more prone to rumor, exaggeration, or incomplete information. Analysis indicates that patterns of trust among respondents vary by age, with younger residents more likely to rate print newspapers and radio as very trustworthy, older residents expressing greater trust in broadcast television and online newspapers, with trust in social media platforms remaining low across both groups.

- Print newspapers (24%), broadcast television (23%), and radio (21%) have the highest shares of residents who rate them as very trustworthy.
- Digital newspapers and general online news receive more modest “very trustworthy” ratings (16% and 12%, respectively), though many respondents still view these sources as at least somewhat trustworthy.
- Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube, are trusted “very much” by only a small minority of residents.

FIGURE 10
TRUST IN LOCAL NEWS SOURCES



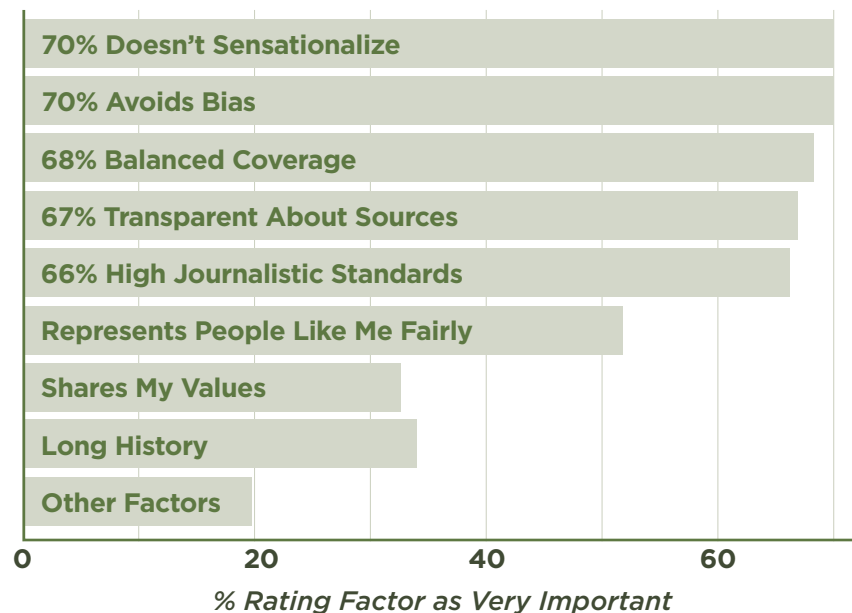
3.4 TRUST, SATISFACTION, AND PERCEPTIONS

What Residents Value in Trustworthy Local News

To better understand what drives trust, survey respondents were also asked to rate how important various qualities are when deciding which outlets to trust for local news. Figure 11 highlights the qualities residents prioritize when determining whether a local news source is trustworthy.

- Avoiding sensationalism (70%), avoiding bias (70%), and providing balanced coverage (68%) emerge as the most important factors residents associate with trust.
- Transparency about sources (67%) and high journalistic standards (66%) are also widely viewed as essential.
- While fair representation (52%) and shared values (34%) matter to some residents, survey respondents overall prioritize accuracy, fairness, and non-sensational reporting over alignment with personal viewpoints.

FIGURE 11
WHAT RESIDENTS LOOK FOR
IN TRUSTED LOCAL NEWS OUTLETS



Together, these findings suggest that participants in this study associate trust in local news with perceptions of professionalism, balance, and credibility.

National research similarly finds that trust in local news is closely tied to perceptions of accuracy, balance, and professionalism, with traditional local outlets generally viewed as more trustworthy than social media-based sources⁶.

⁶ Pew Research Center. (2023). Americans' views of local news and paying for news.

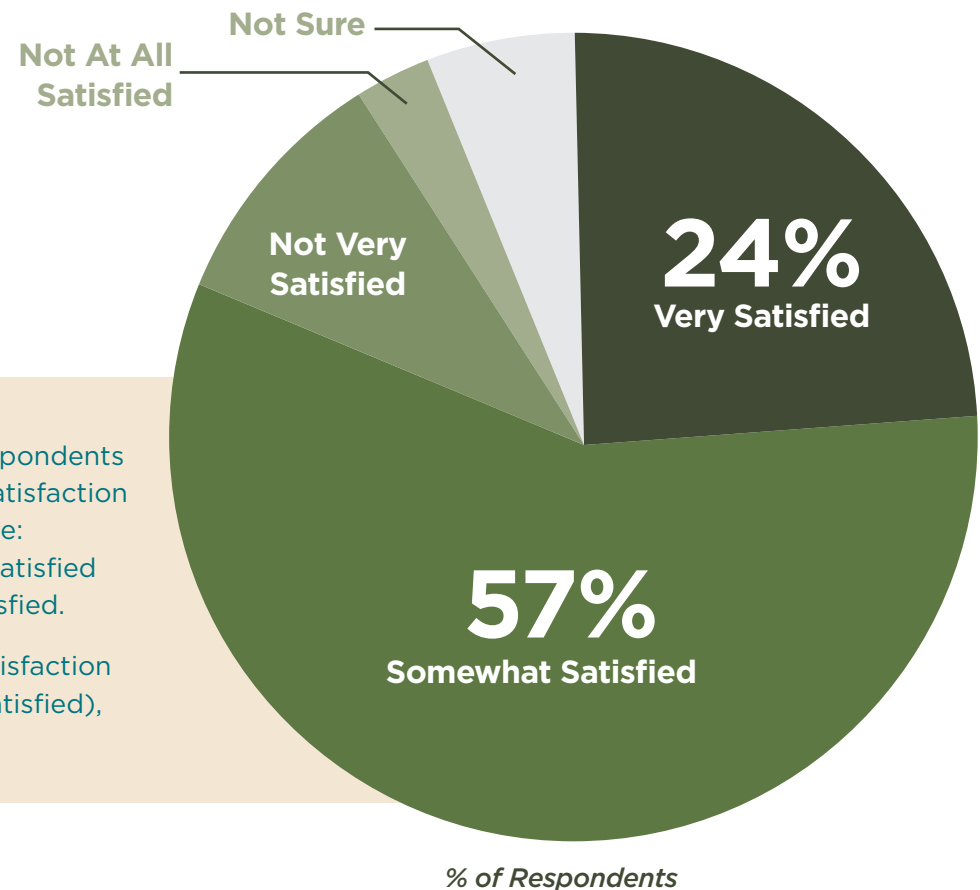
3.4 TRUST, SATISFACTION, AND PERCEPTIONS

Satisfaction and Representation in Local News Coverage

These questions focus on survey respondents' overall satisfaction with local news, as well as whether they feel represented and see their community's priorities reflected in coverage.

Residents were asked to assess their overall satisfaction with the local news available about their community, as well as how well they feel represented in that coverage.

FIGURE 12
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH LOCAL NEWS

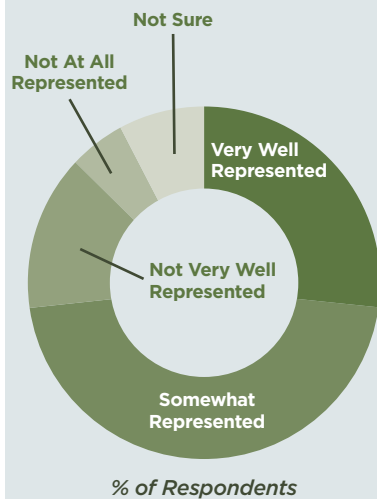


- A strong majority of respondents express at least some satisfaction with local news coverage: 24% report being very satisfied and 57% somewhat satisfied.
- About 13% report dissatisfaction (not very or not at all satisfied), while 6% are unsure.

3.4 TRUST, SATISFACTION, AND PERCEPTIONS

Satisfaction and Representation in Local News Coverage

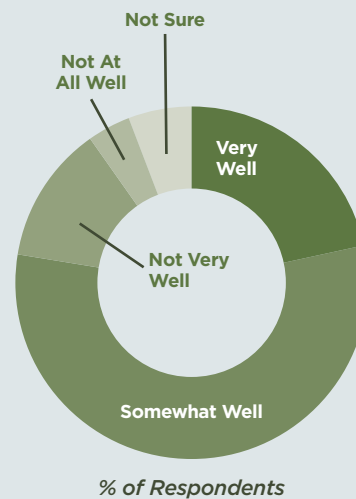
FIGURE 13
DO PEOPLE LIKE YOU FEEL REPRESENTED IN LOCAL NEWS?



Residents were also asked whether people like them are well represented in local news coverage.

- About 28% feel people like them are *very well represented*, and 45% feel *somewhat represented*.
- Roughly 18% feel underrepresented, and about 9% are unsure.

FIGURE 14
HOW WELL LOCAL NEWS REFLECTS WHAT MATTERS MOST



Residents rated how well local news reflects what matters most in their community.

- Most respondents feel local news reflects community priorities at least somewhat well (22% very well, 57% somewhat well).
- About 16% feel local news does not reflect what matters most in their community.



Taken together, these results suggest generally positive levels of satisfaction, alongside clear room for improvement in representation and alignment with community priorities. Focus group discussions helped clarify these mixed perceptions. While many participants

expressed general satisfaction with local news, others—particularly from smaller communities—described feeling overlooked unless a crisis or major event occurred, reinforcing concerns about uneven representation across the four-county study area.

3.5 ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND EQUITY BARRIERS

This section examines survey respondents' perceptions of access to local news, the barriers they encounter, and the role of digital connectivity and affordability in shaping how equitably residents can stay informed across the four-county study area. Together, these findings help illuminate where access is broadly working, and where structural or financial obstacles may limit equitable access to local information.

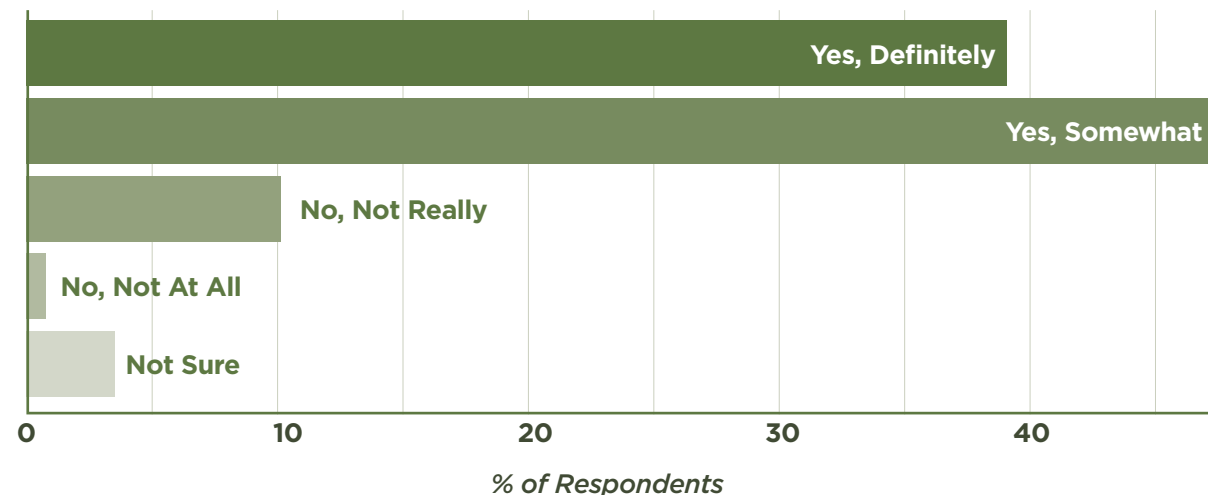
Perceived Access to Local News

Survey respondents were asked whether they feel they have sufficient access to local news about their community. Overall, most respondents report at least some level of access.

These results suggest that while access to local news is widespread among respondents, it is not universal, and some residents experience limitations that may affect their ability to stay informed consistently.

- Nearly nine in ten residents say they have access to local news, with 39% responding “yes, definitely” and 47% responding “yes, somewhat.”
- About 10% of respondents report that they do not feel they have sufficient access to local news, indicating a smaller but meaningful access gap among survey respondents within the four-county study area.

FIGURE 15
PERCEIVED ACCESS TO LOCAL NEWS



3.5 ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND EQUITY BARRIERS



Barriers to Accessing Local News

Survey respondents were asked to identify any barriers they have experienced when trying to access local news, with the option to select multiple responses.

Taken together, these responses suggest that affordability and perceived relevance are more prominent barriers for respondents than technical access

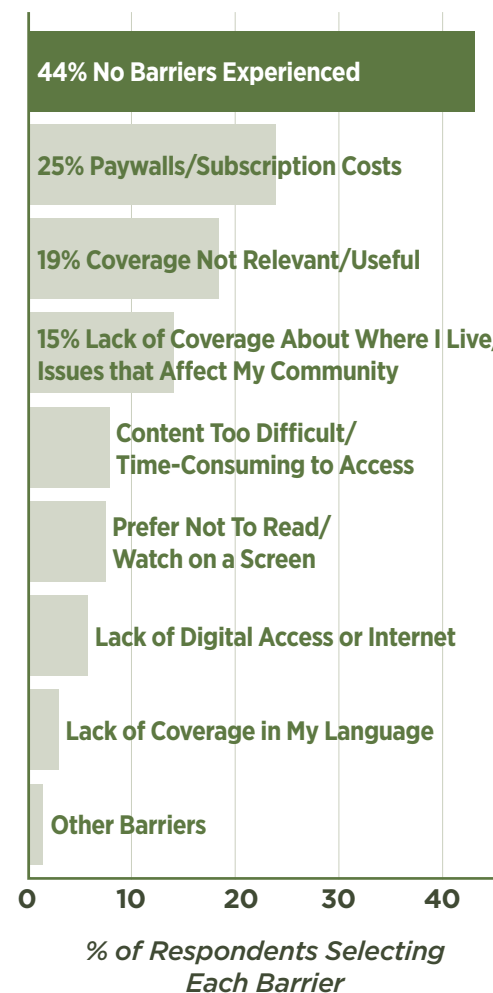
- Nearly half of respondents (44%) report that they do not experience significant barriers to accessing local news.
- Among those who do report barriers, the most common challenges include paywalls or subscription costs (25%), coverage that feels insufficiently relevant (19%), and lack of coverage of their specific area or issues (15%).
- Smaller shares cite digital access challenges, difficulty navigating content, or a preference not to consume news through screens.

alone, highlighting the importance of both cost and content alignment in ensuring meaningful access to local news.

Focus group discussions with rural residents and young adults helped clarify this finding. While many participants did not describe experiencing formal “barriers” to accessing local news, they frequently raised concerns about relevance, depth, and consistency of coverage. Rather than being unable to access news, participants more often described choosing not to engage with coverage they felt did not reflect their community, explain issues clearly, or offer sufficient value for the time or cost involved.

Analysis indicates that younger survey respondents report substantially more barriers overall, particularly related to paywalls, perceived relevance, and the time required to access news, while nearly half of older residents report no barriers. Across both age groups, cost and local relevance emerge as more significant barriers than digital access itself, which remains relatively uncommon.

FIGURE 16
BARRIERS TO ACCESSING LOCAL NEWS



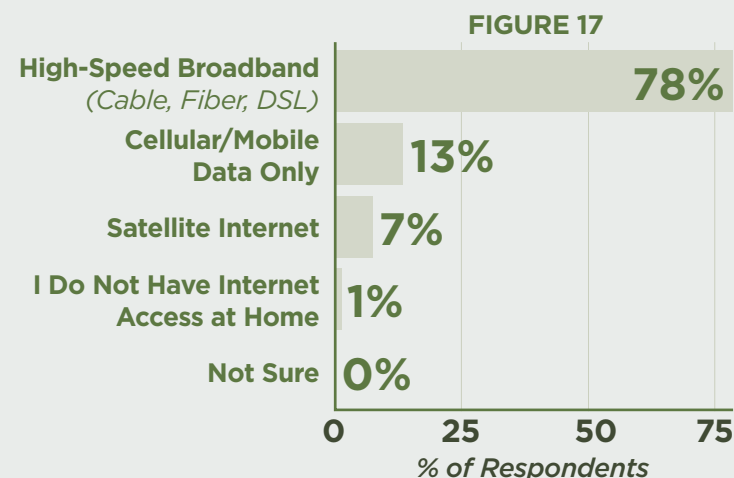
3.5 ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND EQUITY BARRIERS

Digital Access and Reliability

To better understand the role of digital infrastructure in accessing local news, the survey asked about both the type and reliability of internet access.

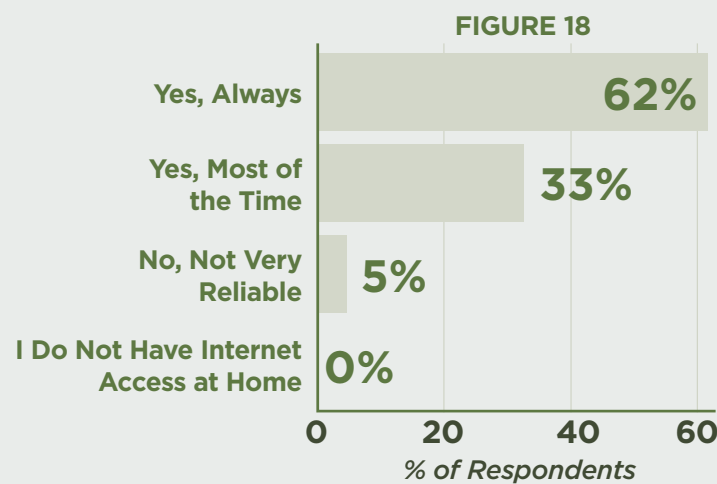
TYPE OF INTERNET CONNECTION AT HOME

- Most respondents report having high-speed broadband at home (78%), while a smaller share rely on cellular or mobile data only (13%).
- Very few respondents indicate uncertainty or lack of internet access, suggesting that basic connectivity is relatively widespread across the sample.



RELIABILITY OF INTERNET FOR ACCESSING LOCAL NEWS

- A large majority of respondents report reliable internet access, with 62% saying their connection is always reliable and 33% saying it is reliable most of the time.
- Very few respondents report unreliable or no internet access.



These findings indicate that while digital infrastructure is generally strong for most respondents, reliance on mobile-only connections for some households may still shape how easily and consistently people can access and engage with local news content.

3.5 ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND EQUITY BARRIERS

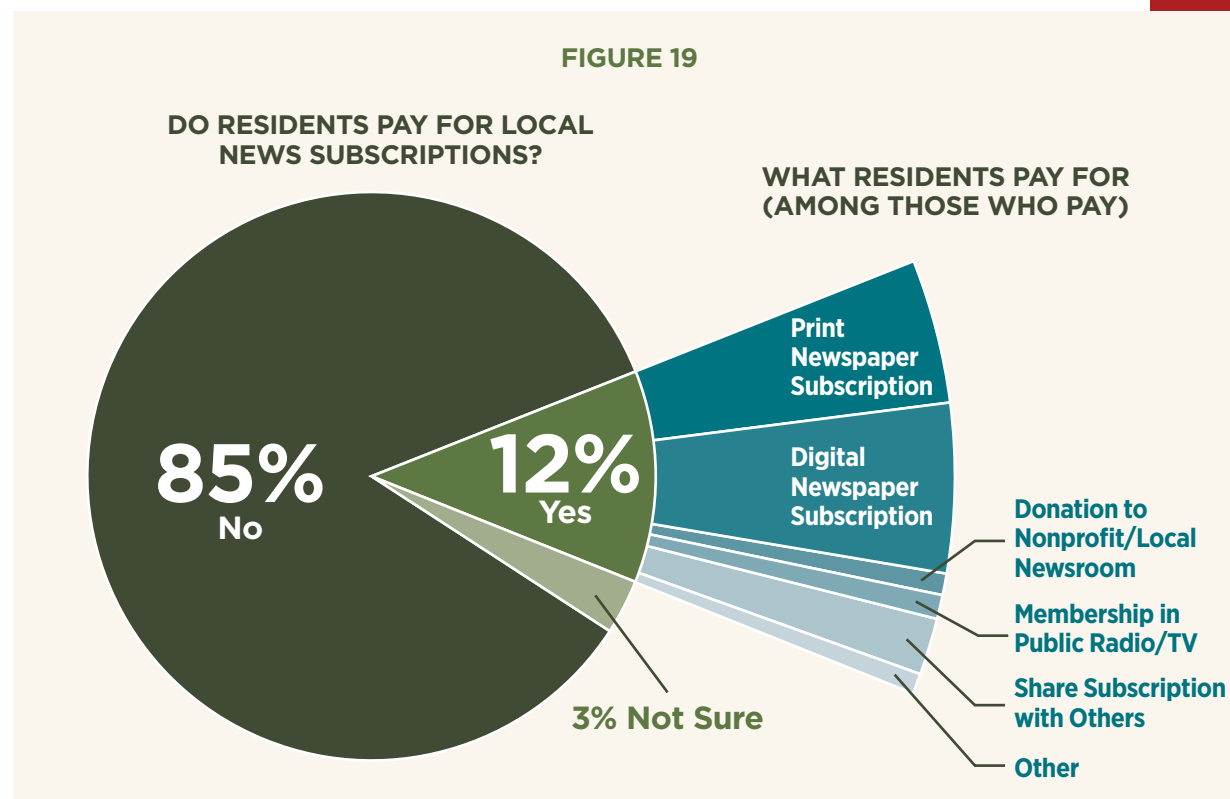
Affordability and Paying for Local News

Residents were also asked about whether they currently pay for local news and, if so, what types of outlets they support.

- Only about 12% of respondents report paying for a local news subscription, while the vast majority (85%) do not.
- Among those who do pay, print and digital newspaper subscriptions are the most common, with fewer residents reporting financial support for nonprofit newsrooms or public media.

These results point to affordability as a key consideration among survey respondents in the local news ecosystem and underscore the challenges news organizations face in sustaining revenue through subscriptions alone.

National research mirrors this pattern, finding that only a small share of Americans pay for local news, even among those who value it. Pew Research



Center reports that cost concerns and competing free alternatives remain major factors limiting paid news subscriptions, particularly at the local level⁷.

Focus group discussions with participants

help explain this tension. Participants often described valuing local journalism while simultaneously expressing hesitation about paying for news, citing cost, uncertainty about value, or dissatisfaction with coverage rather than a lack of interest in staying informed.

⁷ Pew Research Center. (2023). Americans' views of local news and paying for news.

3.6 LOCAL NEWS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This section examines whether and how local news motivates survey respondents and focus group participants to engage in civic and community life across the four-county study area. Together, these findings highlight the role local news plays not only in informing residents, but also in prompting action and participation.

Local News as a Catalyst for Action

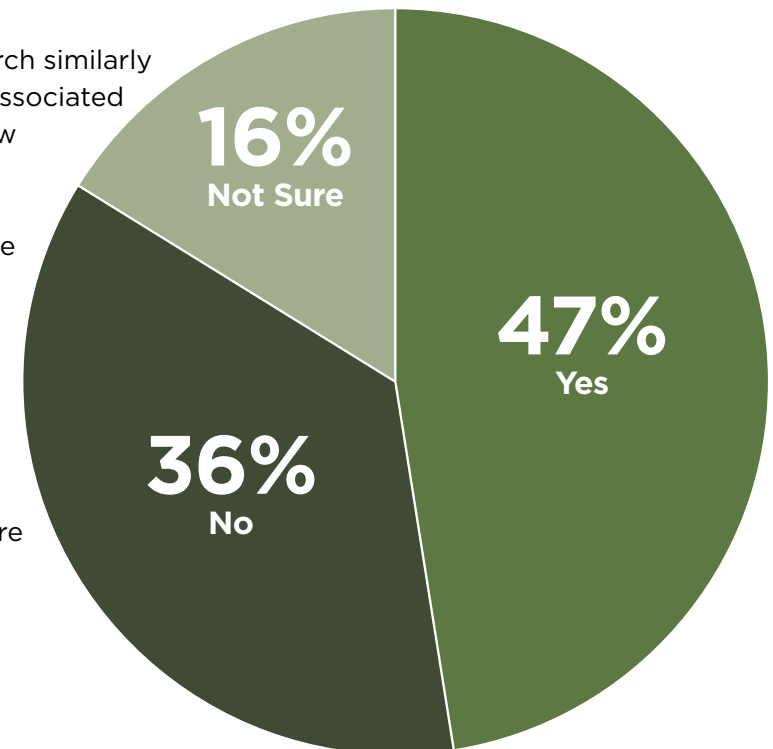
Survey respondents were asked whether local news stories have ever motivated them to take action in their community.

- Nearly half of residents (47%) report that local news has motivated them to take action.
- About one-third (36%) say local news has not prompted action, while 16% are unsure.

These results suggest that for a substantial portion of survey respondents, local news functions as more than an information source, it also serves as a catalyst for civic or community involvement. National research similarly finds that engagement with local news is associated with higher levels of civic participation. Pew Research Center reports that people who follow local news are more likely to feel connected to their communities and to take action on local issues⁸.

Focus group participants helped contextualize these findings, describing how this process often begins with increased awareness or conversation, such as talking with others or paying closer attention to an issue, before leading to more formal civic actions.

FIGURE 20
HAVE LOCAL NEWS STORIES
MOTIVATED YOU TO TAKE ACTION?



⁸ Pew Research Center. (2024). *Americans' changing relationship with local news*.

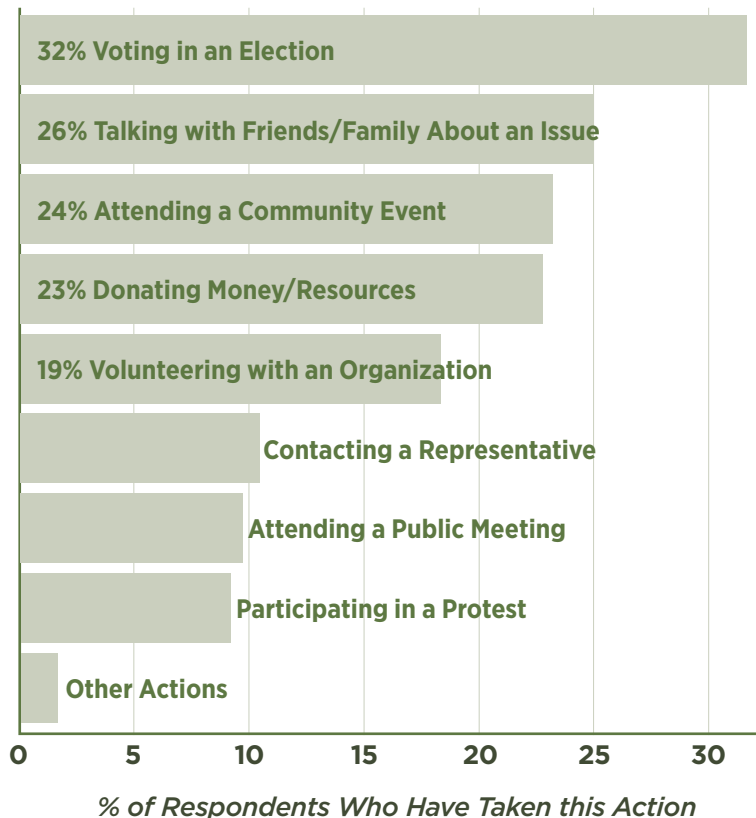
3.6 LOCAL NEWS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Types of Civic and Community Actions Prompted by Local News

Survey respondents who reported taking action were asked to identify the types of actions they have taken as a result of local news stories. Multiple responses were allowed.

FIGURE 21
ACTIONS RESIDENTS HAVE TAKEN
BECAUSE OF LOCAL NEWS



- Local news most commonly motivates residents to vote in an election (32%), talk with friends or family about local issues (26%), and attend community events (24%).
- About one in five residents report donating money or resources (23%) or volunteering with an organization (19%) in response to local news coverage.
- Smaller but notable shares report contacting elected representatives (12%) or participating in protests (10%) as a result of local news stories.

In focus group discussions, participants frequently emphasized conversation and discussion as a primary form of civic response to local news. Many described talking with family members, friends, coworkers, or neighbors as a first step in processing local issues. These informal conversations often preceded more formal actions, such as attending meetings or contacting local officials.

Taken together, these findings indicate that participants in this study describe local news as supporting a wide range of civic behaviors, from formal political participation to interpersonal discussion and community involvement, reinforcing its role not only in informing residents, but also in shaping how they engage with civic and community life.

FOCUS GROUP INSIGHTS

4



4.1 FOCUS GROUP OVERVIEW

The survey findings provide a broad picture of how residents across the four-county study area access, trust, and evaluate local news. To add depth and context to these findings, the research team conducted two focus groups to explore how selected groups of residents describe their experiences with local news in their own words.

Resident Insights & Experiences

The focus groups included rural residents and young adults ages 18–34, groups whose survey responses indicated differences in access, representation, and news habits. The rural focus group also helped supplement survey insights from smaller and more geographically dispersed counties, where panel-based survey participation was more limited.

The focus group findings presented in this section reflect participant perspectives shared at the time of the study and are intended to add context rather than generalize beyond the broader survey results. Additional methodological details appear in Section 6.



4.2 THEMES FROM RURAL RESIDENTS

Where Rural Residents Get Local Information

Rural participants reported relying heavily on the Green Bay–Appleton television stations (including WLUK, WBAY, WFRV, and WGBA) for regional news, weather, school closings, and major events. Television news was frequently described as part of a daily routine and as an accessible source of information.

For more community-specific information, participants frequently turn to weekly community newspapers such as the Oconto County Times Herald, Kewaunee County Star, Pulaski News, and The Denmark News. These papers are valued for their “hometown feel” and local contributors, especially when they highlight student achievements, local nonprofits, and community events.

These patterns align with survey findings, which suggest that rural respondents are more likely than younger residents to rely on television and print sources, and less likely to rely on digital-only outlets

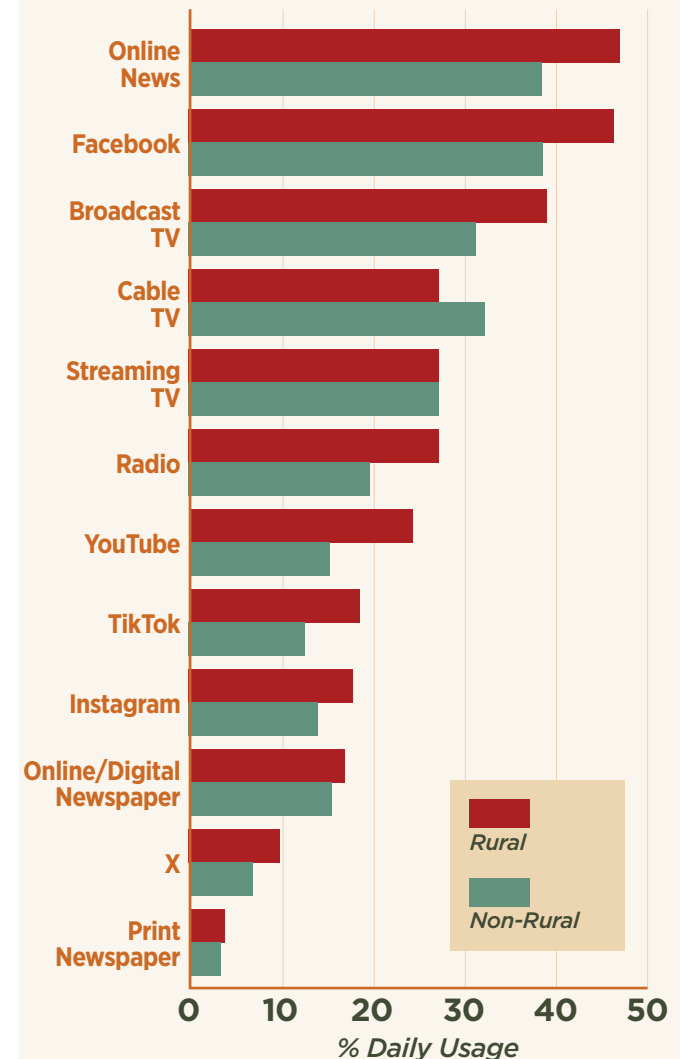
At the same time, participants said that neither television nor newspapers fully meet their information needs. Participants emphasized that while weekly papers remain valued for community-specific

updates, the publication schedule limits their usefulness for timely news. Several participants said they depend on Facebook, scanner pages, and word of mouth from neighbors, family, or coworkers for immediate updates despite concerns about reliability. One participant noted that in rural communities, “you sometimes hear news from neighbors before you see it reported anywhere.”

Radio news was mentioned infrequently by focus group participants in the discussion.

Analysis provides additional context consistent with several of the patterns described by rural focus group participants. Rural residents are more likely than non-rural residents to use most local news sources on a daily basis, particularly online news, Facebook, radio, and broadcast television. Cable television is one of the few sources where non-rural residents report higher daily use. Social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, also play a stronger daily role for rural residents, while print newspapers show very low daily use across both groups.

FIGURE 22
DAILY LOCAL NEWS USAGE
BY SOURCE



4.2 THEMES FROM RURAL RESIDENTS

Perceptions of Local Coverage and Representation

Rural residents expressed appreciation for the potential of local media, particularly community newspapers, to support connection and visibility. Participants praised hometown papers that feature local sports, student recognition, nonprofit activities, and community events. One participant described the Kewaunee County Star as providing a strong sense of local identity, noting, “What I really like about it is that hometown feel... there are a lot of local contributors.”

“When small towns are on the news, it’s usually negative stories.”

— Rural focus group participant

However, participants also described coverage of rural communities by regional television stations as often limited, reactive, and heavily skewed toward negative stories. Participants said smaller towns tend to appear on television news primarily for crime, accidents, or crises, rather than everyday life, local initiatives, or community successes.

Several participants described this pattern as a form of underrepresentation that shapes how rural communities are perceived across the four-county study area. While some acknowledged occasional positive coverage such as features on the Great Lakes, local referenda, or high school sports, these were seen as exceptions rather than the norm.

Participants also described what they perceived as “pay for play” experiences, in which efforts to secure coverage for significant local events were redirected to advertising departments. These experiences reinforced a perception that it can be difficult for rural organizations to get attention for community-focused stories.

Overall, rural residents expressed a desire for more consistent reporting on their communities. Participants described wanting coverage that reflects everyday community life, local organizations, and municipal issues that matter to small towns. These themes connect to survey responses in which rural residents were less likely to report feeling “very well informed” about the issues they care most about and more likely to say that news coverage does not fully reflect their communities.

4.2 THEMES FROM RURAL RESIDENTS

Barriers to Accessing Local News

Rural participants identified multiple barriers that limit their ability to access timely and relevant local news. Participants identified several recurring barriers, including:



Limited timeliness and digital presence of weekly newspapers

Print schedules create information lag, and some residents are unaware of or unsatisfied with existing digital updates.



Sparse and event-driven coverage of small communities on regional television news

Larger cities dominate; rural communities often appear only when something negative happens.



Cost and paywalls

Subscription fees and paywalls are seen as creating information gaps, especially for residents with limited incomes or internet access.



Structural constraints in local newsrooms and “pay for coverage” perceptions

Dwindling staff, difficulty reaching newsroom contacts, and redirection to advertising contribute to frustration.



Reliance on social media and informal networks to fill gaps

Facebook groups, scanner pages, and word of mouth are used to keep up in real time despite concerns about accuracy.

4.2 THEMES FROM RURAL RESIDENTS

Barriers to Accessing Local News

Participants emphasized that weekly community newspapers are highly valued but often too slow to provide real-time updates, particularly when the paper publishes only once a week. One person explained, “When you get a newspaper, especially if it only comes once a week, you’re not getting the most up-to-date information.” As a result, many participants described turning to social media or television for breaking updates, even when they would prefer more detailed coverage from hometown outlets.

Rural residents also described feeling that regional television stations give limited attention to their communities, except in the case of crime, accidents, or other “hard news.” This contributes to a sense that rural life is not fully reflected in the broader media narrative. Some participants said they have stopped watching certain stations because of what they perceive as repetitive, negative coverage:

“You just stop watching... it kind of just becomes a sob story every time the news is on.”

Cost and paywalls were also cited as barriers, particularly for digital access. Participants expressed concern that subscriptions can divide residents by income and limit who can stay informed. As one person put it, “Paywalls divide people by income... people shouldn’t be denied information just because they can’t afford a subscription.” Several participants said they support paying for a physical paper, given printing and delivery costs, but expressed the view that digital access should be free or underwritten because local news is a civic resource.

Participants working with nonprofits or community organizations described difficulty securing coverage for major local events due to shrinking newsroom staff and being redirected to advertising channels. One participant shared, “I reach out every year, and I have not

“Paywalls divide people by income... people shouldn’t be denied information just because they can’t afford a subscription.”

— Rural focus group participant

had success getting any coverage,” describing this as discouraging for rural initiatives seeking visibility.

Because of these barriers, many rural residents described relying on social media and informal networks to stay informed, despite recognizing that these sources can be incomplete or inaccurate.

4.2 THEMES FROM RURAL RESIDENTS

What Rural Participants Want from Local News

Rural residents expressed a desire for news and information that more fully reflects everyday rural life and provides broader context for local issues.

Specifically, participants said they would like to see:

- More consistent coverage of rural communities beyond crises and crime
- Greater visibility for local events, nonprofits, volunteer opportunities, and community resources
- Reporting that explains how state and regional decisions affect rural areas
- A better balance between positive and negative stories
- More accessible, free digital content from local newspapers and other outlets

Participants talked about wanting news that helps them understand broader economic and social trends at the county level, including measures of community well-being, while still highlighting local stories and achievements.

They also emphasized the importance of tone and presentation. Participants described graphic visuals in hard

**“I’d love to have a better understanding of the conditions of our counties—
economic status, well-being,
social connectedness.”**

— Rural focus group participant

news stories as distressing and unnecessary, expressing a preference for being informed about serious events without intrusive images. At the same time, many called for more “good news” segments, community spotlights, and coverage of rural innovation.

Overall, rural participants described local news as an important civic asset and expressed the view that it could play a stronger role in reflecting and connecting their communities if coverage were more timely, balanced, and accessible.

4.3 THEMES FROM YOUNG ADULTS

Where Young Adults Get Local Information

Young adults in the focus group described a mobile-first approach to accessing local news. Most said that Facebook is their primary starting point for hyperlocal information, often through community pages, scanner feeds, or posts shared by family and friends. Several participants explained that they rarely seek out news intentionally; instead, they encounter it incidentally while scrolling. As one young adult summarized, “Social media is where it usually pops up because I don’t follow news apps.”

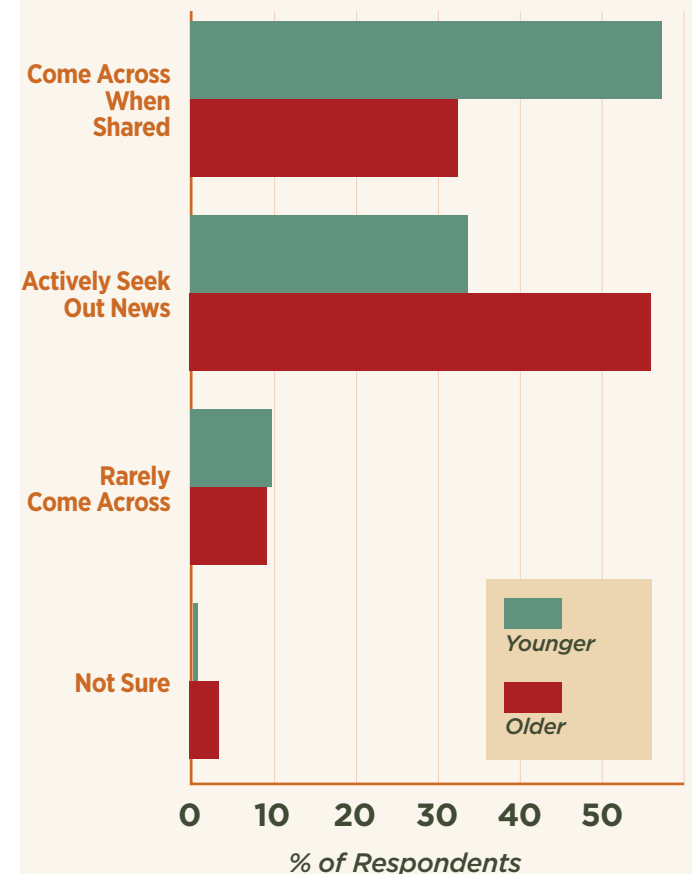
Analysis reinforces this pattern, showing that younger residents are far more likely than older residents to rely on passive exposure to local news when it is shared by others, while older residents are more likely to actively seek out local news. Across both age groups, very few respondents report rarely encountering local news at all.

Many participants rely on local television station accounts on Facebook or push notifications from WBAY or WLUK for breaking news and weather updates. These access points were described as faster and more convenient than viewing full broadcasts or navigating local news websites. One participant noted, “I follow different local news stations on Facebook... their posts feel more up-to-date than going to the website.”

While few participants described regularly watching full local television newscasts, some turn them on briefly in the mornings as background while getting ready for work or school. Participants emphasized that convenience and mobile access often determine whether they encounter local news at all.

These themes align with survey data showing that young adults depend more on social media and digital sources than any other age group. As one participant put it, “If it’s not on my phone, I’m probably not going to see it.”

FIGURE 23
HOW RESIDENTS STAY INFORMED ABOUT THEIR COMMUNITY

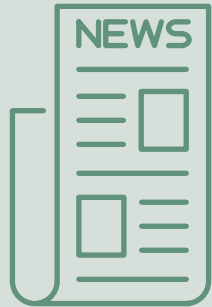


4.3 THEMES FROM YOUNG ADULTS

Barriers to Accessing Local News

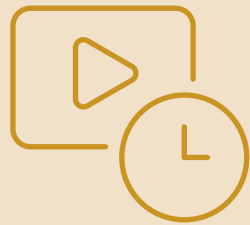
Young adults described several challenges that make it difficult to access or stay consistently engaged with local news. Unlike the barriers described by rural participants, these challenges were not geographic in nature, but instead centered on convenience, cost, format, and content.

Participants identified several recurring barriers, including:



Format and convenience challenges

Legacy formats feel slow; long articles feel overwhelming; news does not fit naturally into routines.



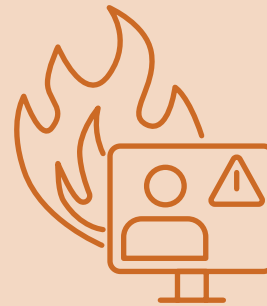
Access limitations

Difficulty accessing local television on their college campus; not knowing broadcast times.



Cost and paywalls

Subscription barriers; strong preference for free alternatives; concerns about equity.



Content concerns

Sensationalized headlines; repetitive or shallow coverage; limited neighborhood-level information.



Reliance on informal sources

Turning to Facebook groups or family members to “piece together” information.

4.3 THEMES FROM YOUNG ADULTS

These themes align with survey findings indicating that younger respondents were more likely to report dissatisfaction with tone, accessibility, and content relevance.

Young adults said that printed newspapers, scheduled television broadcasts, and lengthy online articles rarely fit into their daily routines. Many prefer short summaries or posts they can quickly skim, explaining that longer pieces can feel overwhelming. One participant shared, “When you try to digest a whole newspaper, sometimes you think, ‘What did I even read?’”

Several participants noted that they are more likely to encounter legacy media only when visiting older family members who regularly watch television news or read print newspapers. Some also mentioned practical access challenges, such as not having local stations available on their college campus or not knowing when broadcasts are aired.

Paywalls emerged as a major point of frustration. Participants described starting an article, hitting a subscription wall, and abandoning it or searching for a free alternative. As one stated, “I’ve run into issues with needing a subscription after

reading only part of something.” Others echoed a strong preference for free access: “I definitely don’t want to pay... I know there’s free alternatives.” Analysis reinforces this pattern, showing that younger residents report substantially more barriers overall than older residents, particularly related to paywalls, perceived relevance, and the time required to access news. Nearly half of older residents report no barriers, compared with fewer than one-quarter of younger residents, while digital access barriers remain relatively uncommon across both groups.

Some participants raised broader concerns about equity, noting that paywalls can widen information gaps within the community. One young adult expressed, “If I have to choose between five dollars for news or paying my bills... that’s real for many people.”

Because of these barriers, young adults often rely on informal workarounds such as searching multiple websites, asking family members for updates, or turning to neighborhood Facebook groups to “piece out the gist of the story.” While these approaches help them stay informed, participants acknowledge that they vary in reliability and may limit access to deeper context.

**“I definitely don’t want to pay...
I know there’s free alternatives.”**

— *Young adult focus group participant*

4.3 THEMES FROM YOUNG ADULTS

How Young Adults Think About Trust and Local News

Participants described relatively high levels of trust in local news sources, particularly local television stations, though this trust was often rooted more in familiarity and proximity than in active verification. Many participants described growing up with the same anchors or reporters, which they associated with a sense of credibility. As one participant explained, “These are people you grew up seeing. It’s easier to believe they’re telling the truth because they’re part of your community.”

Participants frequently contrasted local news with national news, which they viewed as more polarized, opinion-driven, or distant from their daily experiences.

Some participants also said that local news feels easier to verify because events take place in their own communities. One participant noted, “If it’s about my village, I can literally go down the street and ask someone.” Others emphasized that mistakes in local reporting would be quickly noticed by residents, which they described as reinforcing perceptions of accountability among local journalists.

Analysis provides additional context, showing that younger residents are more likely to rate print newspapers and radio as very trustworthy, while older residents express greater trust in broadcast television and online newspapers. Trust in social media platforms is low across both age groups, and online

“I’ve just grown up believing the local news is going to be trustworthy... they don’t have the room to be as biased.”

— Young adult focus group participant

news websites and apps receive similar trust ratings from younger and older residents.

While participants acknowledged relying heavily on social media for news discovery, they also recognized its limitations and expressed a desire for local journalism to provide clarity, context, and reliability that social platforms cannot consistently offer.

4.3 THEMES FROM YOUNG ADULTS

What Young Adults Want from Local News

Young adults described interest in local news that is practical, relevant, and easier to understand. Participants said they appreciate short updates but often want additional context to help interpret complex topics. As one participant described, “I like the short blurbs, but sometimes I have follow-up questions—what does this mean though?” Another explained, “Sometimes I’m going back and forth looking up what things mean and what the bigger picture is.”

Participants also described a desire for reporting that is more positive, balanced, and reflective of their lived experiences. Many said they feel overwhelmed by frequent crime stories and would prefer more community-centered information. One participant shared, “My priority is finding out what’s going on in the community—not constant crime.” Others noted that positive stories can be hard to find, even though they believe they are happening.

Across the discussion, participants identified several priorities, including:

- More coverage of local events, activities, and opportunities
- Clear explanations and context for complex issues
- Short, accessible stories with options to explore deeper information
- Content that reflects young adults’ experiences and interests
- More reporting on volunteer opportunities, local initiatives, and community life

“Local news feels like the ideal place to blend what has happened with what’s going to happen.”

— Young adult focus group participant

4.4 THEMES ACROSS GROUPS

The rural and young adult focus groups offered distinct perspectives based on geography, age, and information habits. At the same time, several shared themes emerged across conversations. These cross-group patterns help illuminate information needs and expectations across the four-county study area.

Shared Priorities and Expectations

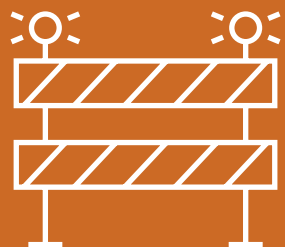
Across both groups, participants described wanting local news that:

- Is relevant to their local communities and everyday lives
- Offers timely updates on local events and issues
- Provides clear context to help interpret complex topics
- Balances difficult news with positive and community-centered stories
- Highlights local organizations, opportunities, and ways to get involved

Participants repeatedly emphasized that they feel most engaged when news helps them navigate their communities, whether through updates about events, local initiatives, or practical information. Both groups described wanting reporting that goes beyond problems and crises to provide a fuller picture of community life. Participants also emphasized the importance of context, especially for issues with broader state or regional implications.

These shared expectations are consistent with survey findings showing that residents across demographic groups value relevance, accuracy, and a local focus.

4.4 THEMES ACROSS GROUPS



Shared Barriers

Despite differences in how they access news, both groups identified several similar obstacles, including:

- Paywalls that block access to needed information
- Limited hyperlocal coverage, especially for smaller communities and younger residents
- Coverage that feels repetitive or overly negative
- Difficulty finding trusted, timely information in one place
- Reliance on social media, despite concerns about accuracy

“I want to be informed, but I don’t want to fight through barriers to get the basics.”

— Young adult focus group participant

Participants described challenges staying fully informed, even when they engage with multiple sources. While young adults focused on digital frustrations (paywalls, lengthy articles, and slow legacy formats), rural participants emphasized structural gaps in coverage and a lack of timely updates. Both groups said they often turn to social media or informal networks as a workaround, even though they do not see these sources as fully reliable. While the specific challenges differed, these shared themes suggest that concerns about access and representation cut across demographic groups.

4.4 THEMES ACROSS GROUPS

Key Differences Between Groups

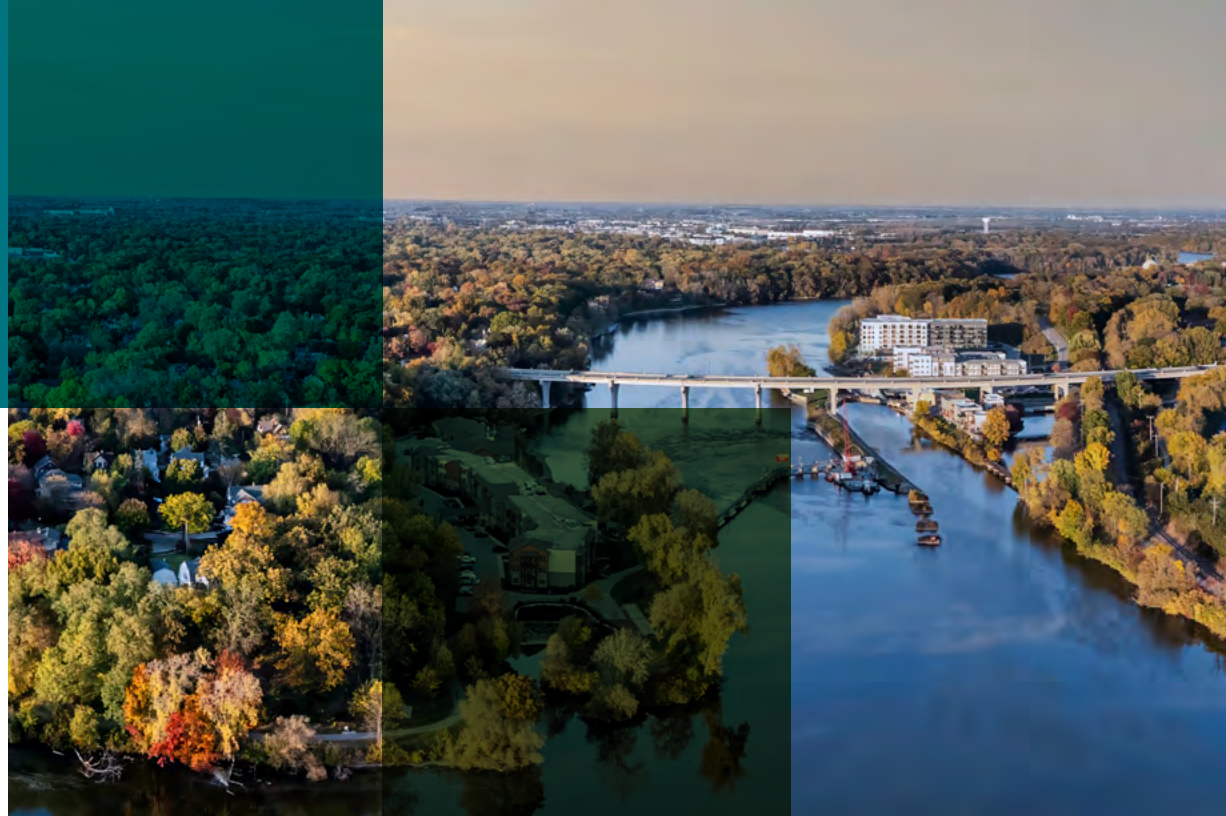
While many themes overlapped, participants also described several clear differences between groups:

DIMENSION	RURAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	YOUNG ADULT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS (AGES 18–34)
Primary information sources	Rely more heavily on television news and weekly community newspapers	Rely primarily on social media and mobile apps
Primary barriers	Emphasized structural constraints, including limited local coverage, staffing challenges, and paywalls affecting lower-income residents	Focused on convenience barriers, including format, length, speed, and digital access issues
Representation concerns	Described underrepresentation of geographic communities	Described underrepresentation related to demographic identity and interests
Tone and content needs	Wanted more coverage of local achievements, civic issues, and broader community conditions	Preferred short, clear updates with optional deeper context

These distinctions highlight the importance of designing information strategies that reflect the diverse ways residents across the four-county study area seek, evaluate, and use local news. They also parallel survey findings showing differences in feelings of being informed among rural residents and differences in trust and satisfaction among younger adults. Both groups expressed a desire for more meaningful coverage, but the types of stories and formats they prefer differ in ways that matter for future news and information efforts.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5



5.1 KEY TAKEAWAYS

In this section, findings from across the study are considered together to highlight broader patterns in how survey respondents and focus group participants in **Brown**, **Kewaunee**, **Oconto**, and **Outagamie** counties experience and engage with local news.

Several cross-cutting patterns emerge:



1 Local news remains highly valued, even as many residents feel under-informed about the issues they care about most.

Across counties and demographic groups, participants in both the survey and focus groups described local news as important to community well-being and civic awareness. At the same time, many survey respondents report feeling only somewhat informed about topics they consider most important, including health care, housing, the economy, education, and local government. Focus group participants echoed this gap, often describing awareness without a sense of clarity or depth. Together, these findings highlight a disconnect between the value residents place on local information and their confidence in understanding complex local issues.

2 News consumption spans multiple platforms, with digital and television-based sources serving complementary roles.

Across data sources, participants describe using a mix of digital, broadcast, and social platforms to stay informed, rather than relying on a single outlet. Digital platforms, particularly Facebook and online news sites, play a central role in daily news use for many survey respondents, while local television news, accessed through broadcast, cable, or streaming services, remains an important way participants encounter local information across counties. Rather than replacing one another, these sources often function alongside one another, with digital platforms supporting frequent updates and sharing and television news continuing to provide scheduled coverage and broader community reach.

3 Trust in local journalism is comparatively strong, though satisfaction is shaped by tone, depth, and relevance.

Survey respondents report greater trust in traditional local news sources such as print, television, and radio than in social media platforms. Across both survey responses and focus group discussions, participants raised concerns about sensationalism, perceived bias, repetitive or limited coverage, and lack of context. Taken together, these findings suggest that trust in local news and satisfaction with day-to-day coverage are related but distinct, with residents differentiating between the credibility of outlets and the quality or usefulness of specific reporting.

5.1 KEY TAKEAWAYS

4 Experiences with local news vary by geography and age.

Differences by geography and age appear consistently across the study. Rural and young adult focus group participants, in particular, described navigating a fragmented mix of sources rather than relying on a single, consistent local outlet. Survey findings align with these perspectives, showing variation in access patterns, trust, and perceived representation by age and location. Across methods, participants in these groups expressed a desire for news that better reflects everyday community life and lived experiences, rather than appearing primarily during moments of crisis.

5 Barriers to access shape how residents engage with local information.

While most survey respondents report having some access to local news, barriers such as paywalls, uneven geographic coverage, and perceived relevance gaps affect how consistently participants engage with available sources. Focus group discussions helped contextualize these patterns, with participants describing pragmatic choices to rely on free or easily shared information, even when those sources are trusted less. Across data sources, barriers appear to shape engagement more than outright lack of access.

6 Local news continues to support civic participation and community involvement.

Nearly half of survey respondents (sample size=251) report taking some form of civic or community action—such as voting, volunteering, attending events, or donating—based on local news coverage. Focus group participants reinforced this connection, often describing local news as helping them understand how to engage, not just what is happening. Together, these findings underscore the continued role of local journalism in supporting civic awareness and participation among study participants.



5.2 ALIGNMENT WITH RESIDENT PRIORITIES

Where Local News Aligns and Where it Falls Short

In several respects, the existing news ecosystem aligns with what residents say they need. Broadcast television plays a prominent role in how residents access local information, particularly during breaking news events and emergencies. Many residents described local TV stations as reliable and widely accessible, especially in rural areas where other forms of local coverage may be limited.

Community weekly newspapers also continue to serve an important function, particularly in smaller towns and rural counties. Focus group participants expressed appreciation for weeklies that document school activities, local events, and community milestones, noting their role in maintaining a sense of local identity and connection.

At the same time, the findings point to areas where alignment is less consistent. Residents across demographic groups identified health care, housing, the economy, education, and local government as high-priority topics, yet many reported feeling less informed about these issues. This suggests that while these topics are covered, residents may be seeking greater depth, clarity, or continuity in reporting.

Representation and visibility further shape perceptions of alignment. Rural residents and young adults described feeling overlooked or encountering stories about their communities primarily during moments of crisis. Some residents noted that coverage can feel disconnected from everyday community life or overly focused on negative events, affecting how relevant and trustworthy it feels.

In some cases, perceptions of alignment are also influenced by awareness of available local news options. Focus group discussions suggest that some rural residents and young adults were not fully aware of the range of local news options available to them, including digital offerings from print outlets and television coverage that regularly features smaller or rural communities. For these participants, perceptions of limited coverage appeared to reflect differences in awareness, rather than the complete absence of relevant reporting.

Format and accessibility also influence alignment.

Younger residents emphasized a preference for concise, mobile-friendly formats, while rural residents expressed frustration with inconsistent coverage and digital barriers such as paywalls.

Across groups, residents described relying on social media for timely updates despite expressing lower levels of trust in those platforms, highlighting a tension between immediacy and credibility.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT

Patterns of Access

Taken together, the findings suggest that access to local information in Northeast Wisconsin is shaped not only by the presence of news outlets, but by how information is distributed, contextualized, and experienced by residents across different communities. These implications draw on patterns that appear consistently across the community survey, focus group discussions, and the regional outlet inventory, rather than on any single data source alone.

Access varies by geography, platform, and format.

The outlet inventory shows that news production is concentrated in population centers, while surrounding counties rely more heavily on regional or externally produced coverage. Survey and focus group data reinforce this pattern: rural residents, in particular, described difficulty finding consistent, locally specific reporting about government, schools, and community issues. Younger residents emphasized challenges related to format and delivery, noting that news often feels inaccessible or disconnected from how they consume information.

Perceived relevance and clarity appear to influence trust and engagement more than platform alone.

While residents use a mix of digital, broadcast, and print sources, trust is shaped less by where news appears and more by how it is presented. Survey findings show relatively strong trust in local journalism overall, while focus group participants articulated concerns about sensationalism, repetitive or uneven coverage, and lack of context. These patterns suggest that residents differentiate between trust in a news source and satisfaction with day-to-day coverage.

Barriers to access contribute to reliance on lower-trust information pathways.

Paywalls, uneven coverage, and perceived relevance gaps lead many residents to rely on free or easily shared information, including social media, despite expressing lower levels of trust in those platforms. This reliance reflects pragmatic information-seeking behavior rather than preference, particularly when residents are seeking timely updates or local context.

Feeling informed is closely associated with civic confidence and participation.

In survey responses, residents reported that being informed about local issues encouraged them to take civic or community action, such as voting, volunteering, attending events, or donating. Focus group participants similarly described local news as helping them understand how to engage, rather than simply serving as a source of awareness. Participants who described feeling under-informed also expressed greater uncertainty about how to participate or where to seek reliable guidance.

5.4 LOOKING AHEAD

A Foundation for Ongoing Learning

This study provides a snapshot of how the local news ecosystem currently aligns with community needs across **Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto** and **Outagamie** counties, informed by study participants' perspectives and a descriptive overview of the region's news landscape. By combining an inventory of news outlets with survey and focus group findings, **the report establishes a shared baseline for understanding patterns of access, trust, and engagement within these communities.**

As a baseline, the findings enable comparison over time. Repeating selected survey questions or focus group prompts in the future could help track changes in how residents across the four counties access local news, how trust and satisfaction evolve, and whether perceived gaps in coverage narrow or persist as the local news environment continues to change. In this way, the study supports continuity and learning rather than one-time assessment.

The findings also offer a foundation for applying this approach in additional communities. The counties included in this study reflect a mix of urban, suburban, and rural contexts and a range of local media environments, but they were selected as part of the study design rather than to represent all possible community configurations. Replicating a similar mixed-methods approach in other regions or county groupings could help clarify which patterns observed in **Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto** and **Outagamie** counties are shaped by local conditions and which may be more broadly shared.

At the same time, this study highlights the value of pairing community-centered research with complementary approaches. While the focus here is on how residents experience local news and how outlets are distributed across the region, future efforts could incorporate systematic examination of news content or newsroom practices to add additional context, particularly when considered alongside new consumers' perceptions. Examining the types of stories produced, the depth and framing of coverage, or how editorial decisions vary across settings could further clarify where resident perceptions and news production align, where they differ, and how those differences shape understanding of local news supply and community needs.

Ultimately, this report is grounded in the experiences of the people who rely on local news to stay informed, connected, and engaged in their communities. By centering community perspectives alongside an overview of the region's news landscape, the study provides a shared point of reference for understanding how local information systems function today. **In this way, the report can support informed dialogue among news organizations, community partners, educators, researchers, and funders.** Grounded in community experience, the findings offer a starting point for shared understanding as stakeholders consider how local information systems function and change over time.

METHODOLOGY AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

6



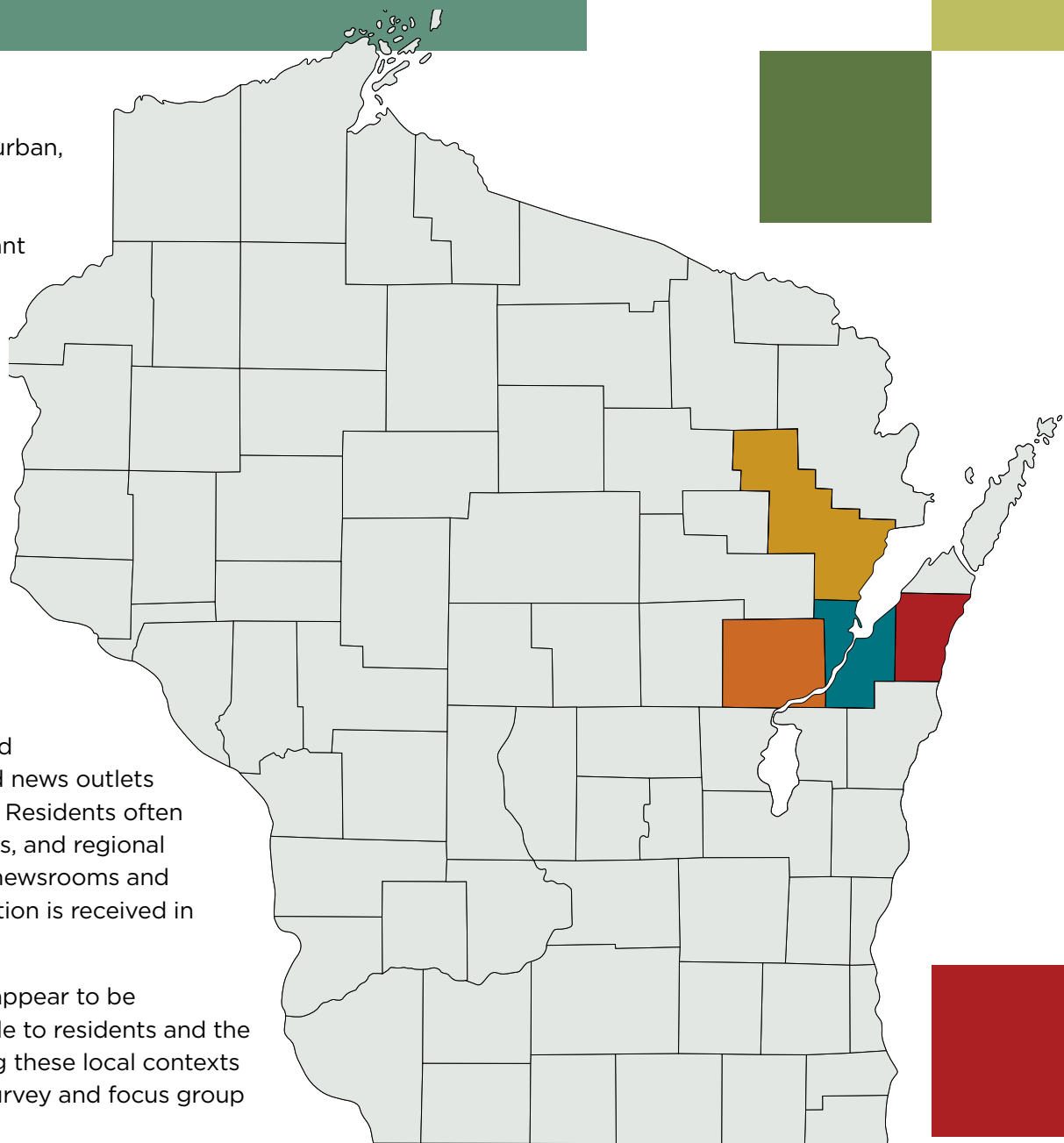
6.1 REGION OVERVIEW

Northeast Wisconsin includes a mix of urban, suburban, and rural communities across **Brown**, **Kewaunee**, **Oconto** and **Outagamie** counties. Understanding the geography and local context provides important background for interpreting patterns of information access and how study participants engage with local news.

Brown and **Outagamie** counties include the region's largest population centers such as Green Bay, De Pere, and the Fox Cities. These counties have a higher concentration of media outlets, including major broadcast television stations, multiple newspapers, and digital news platforms. Residents in these counties generally have access to a wider range of information sources, along with relatively more robust broadband infrastructure.

Kewaunee and **Oconto** counties are more rural and geographically dispersed, with fewer locally based news outlets and less consistent coverage from regional media. Residents often rely on weekly newspapers, interpersonal networks, and regional television stations for information. Distance from newsrooms and variation in digital access may shape how information is received in these areas.

Across the four counties, geographic differences appear to be associated with the types of news sources available to residents and the ways people access local information. Recognizing these local contexts provides useful background for interpreting the survey and focus group findings presented later in the report.



6.2 DESIGN AND METHODS

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to understand how residents in the four-county study area access and experience local news. By combining **survey data**, **qualitative insights**, and **secondary research** on the structure of the regional news ecosystem, the project provides a descriptive, baseline view of information access across the four counties.

COMMUNITY SURVEY (sample size = 251)

The community survey was conducted online using a third-party research panel (West Group Research) to reach adult residents across Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto, and Outagamie Counties. Panel-based recruitment was used to support geographic coverage across the four-county region and to collect responses from a range of demographic groups. While demographic balance was an intended goal of recruitment, the final sample reflects a best-effort panel approach and should be interpreted as descriptive of survey respondents rather than statistically representative of the full four-county population. Consistent with similar studies, the sample size supports analysis of common perspectives and patterns in local news access and experience.

FOCUS GROUPS (Young Adults and Rural Residents)

Two focus groups were conducted to deepen understanding of patterns emerging from the survey, one with rural residents and one with young adults. Groups were structured intentionally around populations that survey responses suggested may experience information access differently: young adults (ages 18–34) and rural residents, based on participant self-identification and ZIP code information used to confirm rural context. The rural focus group also helped supplement survey insights from smaller and more geographically dispersed counties, where panel-based survey participation was more limited.

Participants in both focus groups were recruited from across the four counties included in the study, independent of the community survey, and received a modest incentive for their time. The groups were conducted virtually and facilitated by members of the UW–Green Bay research team using a semi-structured discussion guide. Discussions explored perceptions of representation, tone, and trust; barriers such as paywalls and format challenges; and the types of stories and delivery methods participants find most useful. These qualitative conversations provide nuance, lived experience, and illustrative examples that help contextualize and interpret patterns observed in survey data.

NEWS ECOSYSTEM INVENTORY

A secondary review mapped the region's news and information landscape, including newspapers, broadcast stations, digital publishers, nonprofit media outlets, and other professionally produced local news sources operating in the four-county region at the time of data collection. Inventory data included ownership, founding date, publication frequency, format, staffing, and digital presence. This landscape scan provides a structural view of where residents may encounter information and helps contextualize survey and focus group findings within the broader local news ecosystem.

Taken together, these data sources provide complementary perspectives that help build a baseline understanding of how residents access and experience local news across the four counties.

6.3 LIMITATIONS

The study offers a baseline understanding of Northeast Wisconsin's news ecosystem and reflects a snapshot in time of the perspectives and experiences shared by survey respondents and focus group participants.

SURVEY CONSIDERATIONS

The community survey was conducted using an online research panel to collect responses across multiple counties. While this approach supports efficient regional data collection, findings reflect the perspectives of residents who participate in online panels and may under-represent individuals with limited internet access or those less likely to engage in online research.

Survey responses are self-reported and may be influenced by recall or differing interpretations of terms such as "local news," "trust," or "being informed." The survey is intended to describe broad patterns in information use and perceptions among respondents in the four-county region, rather than to represent the full range of experiences across all residents.

INVENTORY AND SECONDARY DATA CONSIDERATIONS

The local news ecosystem inventory reflects a structured review of local journalistic outlets that regularly produce news operating within the four-county region at the time of data collection. For the purposes of this study, the inventory focused on these outlets, including newspapers, broadcast television and radio stations, and digital news organizations. Informal or volunteer-run community information sources were not systematically included in this inventory.

The inventory should be interpreted as a snapshot rather than a comprehensive or static directory.

FOCUS GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

Focus groups provide depth and contextual understanding and are not intended to be generalizable to all residents. The focus groups were designed as a follow-up to the community survey, with participant groups selected to explore patterns that emerged in the survey findings. In particular, rural residents and young adults were invited to participate based on survey responses indicating differences in perceived access, representation, and confidence in local news.

Discussions reflect the perspectives of participants who were able and willing to attend and may differ from those who did not participate. Participants occasionally blended "news," "information," and "community updates," which is consistent with national research on local information use and shapes how specific comments should be interpreted. The focus groups were intended to add depth to survey findings by exploring how residents describe their experiences with local news, rather than to quantify the prevalence across the population.

Some participants were unaware of digital offerings provided by local outlets, such as online editions of newspapers or television coverage relevant to smaller or rural communities. These knowledge gaps may have influenced how participants described access, representation, or perceived coverage. Focus groups with rural residents and young adults were not intended to represent all rural residents or all young adults in the region but to surface shared themes and perspectives.

6.4 STUDY TEAM AND PROJECT PARTNERS

This project was conducted by the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay Center for Civic Engagement. The UW–Green Bay research team led the survey development, focus group facilitation, outlet inventory research, and data analysis.

RESEARCH TEAM

The study was conducted by the following University of Wisconsin–Green Bay research team members, whose institutional roles and project responsibilities are noted below.

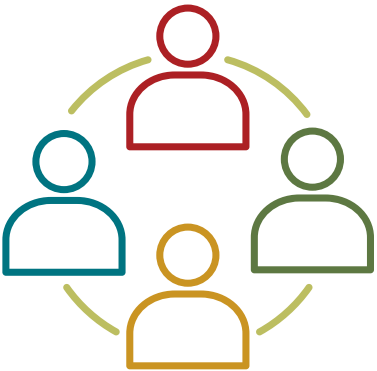
Name	University of Wisconsin–Green Bay	Role in This Study
Ashley Heath, M.A.	Director, Center for Civic Engagement; Assistant Teaching Professor, Public & Environmental Affairs	Project Manager
Georjeanna Wilson-Doenges, PhD	Professor of Psychology	Faculty Research Advisor
Danielle Bina	Teaching Professor of Communication	Faculty Subject Matter Expert
Moises Bahena-Martinez	Graduate Student, Master of Public Administration Program	Graduate Research Assistant

NATIONAL CONSULTANT

National consultant Fiona Morgan, founder of Branchhead Consulting, provided guidance at key points in the project, including feedback on the survey instrument, focus group approach, landscape study framework, and aspects of the report development process.

FUNDING PARTNERS

The study was commissioned by the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation as part of its role convening the Press Forward Northeast Wisconsin chapter.



APPENDICES



A LOCAL NEWS ECOSYSTEM INVENTORY

This table contains the full inventory of local news outlets included in the study.

OUTLET NAME	MEDIUM	ADDRESS	COUNTY
Green Bay Reporter	Digital	N/A	Brown
Kaukauna Community News	Digital	N/A	Outagamie
Business News NE	Digital/Print	PO Box 1325 Green Bay, WI 54305	Brown
Denmark News	Digital/Print	116 W Main St, Denmark WI	Brown
Green Bay Press-Gazette	Digital/Print	520 N. Broadway, Suite 390, Green Bay, WI 54303	Brown
Green Bay Press Times	Digital/Print	310 W Walnut St Fourth Floor, Green Bay WI 54303	Brown
Kalihwisaks-She Looks for News	Digital/Print	2701 W. Mason St Green Bay, WI 54303	Brown
Kewaunee County Star News	Digital/Print	310 W Walnut St Fourth Floor, Green Bay WI 54303	Kewaunee
Oconto County Times Herald	Digital/Print	1464 E Green Bay St Shawano, WI 54166	Oconto
Pulaski News	Digital/Print	1040 S. Augustine St. Pulaski, WI 54162	Brown
The Lawrentian	Digital/Print	711 E Boldt Way, Appleton WI 54911	Outagamie
The Post-Crescent	Digital/Print	122 E College Ave, Suite 1C, Appleton WI 54911	Outagamie
Times-Villager	Digital/Print	1900 Crooks Ave Kaukauna, WI 54130	Outagamie
Wisconsin Watch	Digital/Print	118 S Adams St, Green Bay WI 54301	Brown
Wrightstown Area Spirit	Digital/Print	1900 Crooks Ave Kaukauna, WI 54130	Outagamie
WGBW-1590 AM/97.9 FM	Radio	401 N. Washington St #111, Green Bay, WI 54301	Brown
WHBY-AM 1150/FM103.5	Radio	2800 E. College Ave, Appleton WI 54915	Outagamie
WPNE 89.3 FM	Radio	2420 Nicolet Drive, Wood Hall, Room 107, Green Bay, WI 54311	Brown
WTAQ 1360 AM/97.5 FM	Radio	1420 Bellevue Street, Green Bay WI 54311	Brown
WACY-TV	Television	230 S Madison St, Green Bay, WI 54301	Brown
WBAY-TV	Television	115 S Jefferson St, Green Bay, WI 54301	Brown
WCWF-TV	Television	787 Lombardi Avenue, Green Bay, WI 54304	Brown
WFRV-TV	Television	1181 E Mason St, Green Bay, WI 54301	Brown
WGBA-TV	Television	1391 North Rd, Ashwaubenon WI 54313	Brown
WLUK-TV	Television	787 Lombardi Avenue, Green Bay, WI 54304	Brown
WPNE-TV	Television	2420 Nicolet Ave, Green Bay WI 54311	Brown

B SURVEY INSTRUMENT



Screener Block

This survey seeks to hear from people in NE Wisconsin about how local news media can meet your needs. **Please define local news as news produced in and about your community, city or county**

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
☐ 18 - 24
☐ 25 - 34
☐ 35 - 44
☐ 45 - 54
☐ 55 - 64
☐ 65 or older

What state do you live in?

What county do you live in?

Default Question Block

How important are the following topics to you personally?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
Local government and policy decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education and schools	☐	☐	☐	☐
Housing and community development	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health care	☐	☐	☐	☐
Public safety/crime	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
Environment and climate	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sports	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community events and entertainment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Jobs, local businesses, and the local economy	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transportation and infrastructure	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social services and community resources	☐	☐	☐	☐

How well does local news keep you informed about the following topics?

	Very well informed	Somewhat informed	Not very well informed	Not at all informed	Not sure
Local government and policy decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education and schools	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Housing and community development	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health care	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Public safety/crime	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Environment and climate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community events and entertainment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Jobs, local businesses, and the local economy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transportation and infrastructure	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social services and community resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

When you think about how you stay informed about your community, which of the following best describes you?

- ☐ I actively seek out local news and information.
☐ I mostly come across it when others share it.
☐ I rarely come across local news or information.
☐ I'm not sure.

How often do you get local news from the following sources

	Never	Only when there is breaking news	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
Broadcast TV (via antenna)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cable TV (local news channels)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming TV (on-demand platforms)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Newspaper in print	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Newspaper online/digital	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online news	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio (AM/FM, streaming)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Instagram	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
X (formerly Twitter)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
TikTok	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How trustworthy is each source of local news?

	Very trustworthy	Somewhat trustworthy	Not very trustworthy	Not at all trustworthy	Don't consume this source
Broadcast TV (via antenna)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cable TV (local news channels)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming TV (on-demand platforms)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Newspaper in print	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Newspaper online/digital	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online news	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio (AM/FM, streaming)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Instagram	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
X (formerly Twitter)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

B SURVEY INSTRUMENT



TikTok

Very trustworthy Somewhat trustworthy Not very trustworthy Not at all trustworthy Don't consume this source

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

How important are each of the following in deciding which outlets you trust for local news

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
They have a long history	☐	☐	☐	☐
They have high journalistic standards	☐	☐	☐	☐
They provide balanced coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐
They work to avoid bias	☐	☐	☐	☐
They don't exaggerate or sensationalize	☐	☐	☐	☐
They are transparent about their sources of information	☐	☐	☐	☐
Their values are the same as mine	☐	☐	☐	☐
They represent people like me fairly	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Have local news stories ever motivated you to take action in your community?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

What kind of action? (Select all that apply)

☐ Voting in an election
☐ Contacting a representative
☐ Attending a public meeting
☐ Volunteering with an organization
☐ Donating money/resources
☐ Participating in a protest or demonstration
☐ Attending a community event
☐ Talking with friends or family about a local issue
☐ Other (please specify)

Overall, how satisfied are you with the local news available about your community?

☐ Very satisfied
☐ Somewhat satisfied
☐ Not very satisfied
☐ Not at all satisfied
☐ Not sure

Do you feel you have sufficient access to local news about your community?

☐ Yes, definitely
☐ Yes, somewhat
☐ No, not really
☐ No, not at all
☐ Not sure

Have you ever experienced barriers to accessing local news? (Select all that apply)

☐ Paywalls/subscription costs that prevent me from accessing local news
☐ Lack of coverage in my language
☐ Lack of coverage about where I live or issues that affect my community
☐ Coverage is not relevant or useful to my daily life
☐ Lack of digital access or internet
☐ Content is too difficult or time-consuming to access
☐ I don't want to read/watch news on a screen
☐ Other (please specify)
☐ No, I haven't experienced barriers

What type of internet connection do you usually have at home?

☐ High-speed broadband (cable, fiber, DSL)
☐ Cellular/mobile data only
☐ Satellite internet
☐ Dial-up
☐ I do not have internet access at home
☐ Not sure

Do you feel your internet access at home is reliable enough for keeping up with local news?

☐ Yes, always
☐ Yes, most of the time
☐ No, not very reliable
☐ I do not have internet access at home

Are people like you well represented in local news coverage?

☐ Yes, very well represented
☐ Yes, somewhat represented
☐ No, not very well represented
☐ No, not at all represented
☐ Not sure

How well does local news reflect what matters most in your community?

☐ Very well
☐ Somewhat well
☐ Not very well
☐ Not at all well
☐ Not sure

Can you recall a recent local news story that portrayed your community accurately or inaccurately? What made it that way?

Do you currently pay for any local news subscriptions (print or digital)?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

What do you currently pay for? (Select all that apply)

☐ Print newspaper subscription
☐ Digital newspaper subscription (website or app)
☐ Donation to nonprofit/local newsroom
☐ Membership in public radio or public TV
☐ I share a subscription with family/friends
☐ Other (please specify)

B SURVEY INSTRUMENT

In the next five years, how likely are you to access information about your community through the following sources?

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely
Broadcast TV (via antenna)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cable TV (local news channels)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Streaming TV (on-demand platforms)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Newspaper in print	☐	☐	☐	☐
Newspaper online/digital	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online news	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio (AM/FM, streaming)	☐	☐	☐	☐
YouTube	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Media	☐	☐	☐	☐
Podcasts	☐	☐	☐	☐
Email newsletters	☐	☐	☐	☐
Text alerts or push notifications	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends, family, or neighbors	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community organizations	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Where do you usually go (specific sources, pages, or people) for local information?

Complete this sentence: I wish local news would _____.

How do you identify your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian/Asian American
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino/a/x

- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Another race/ethnicity (please specify)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your gender identity?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe (please specify)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school diploma or equivalent
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor degree
- ☐ Graduate or Professional degree

What is your annual household income?

- ☐ Less than \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000–49,999
- ☐ \$50,000–74,999
- ☐ \$75,000–99,999
- ☐ \$100,000–149,999
- ☐ \$150,000+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How would you describe your overall political viewpoint?

- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your zip code?

Do you consider your primary residence to be:

- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Urban

What language do you most often speak at home?

- ☐ English
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Hmong
- ☐ Somali
- ☐ Another language (please specify)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What language would you prefer to consume local news?

- ☐ English
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Hmong
- ☐ Somali
- ☐ Another language (please specify)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

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C FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Focus groups were conducted to better understand how community members access, evaluate, and experience local news and information.



SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- How do you get information about what's happening in your community?
- What types of information are you currently receiving?
- Do you feel the information you receive is reliable? Why or why not?
- What information do you wish you had more access to?
- How do you prefer to receive local news (e.g., social media, print, radio, etc.)?
- Do you feel your community is accurately represented in local media?
- What challenges do you face in accessing reliable information?
- Finish this sentence: *I wish local news would...*

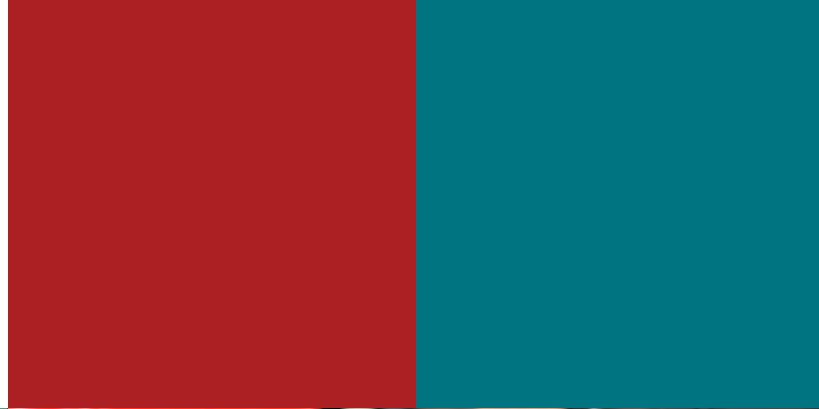
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