



Google News Initiative

# Impact in North America

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# Introduction

The events of the past year have solidified how important news is to all. In fact, I don't think the critical role the news industry plays in our daily lives has ever been more clear. In the U.S. and Canada, it was local news organizations that kept us abreast of critical updates like where to get tested for COVID-19, social justice issues and protests in local communities, senior shopping hours at the grocery store, and more.

Unfortunately, at the same time, these same news organizations have been hit hard by the decrease in advertising spend due to these unsettling times. The Google News Initiative remains committed to supporting news publishers, both small and large, to help build a stronger future for journalism.

— The Google News Initiative Team in North America

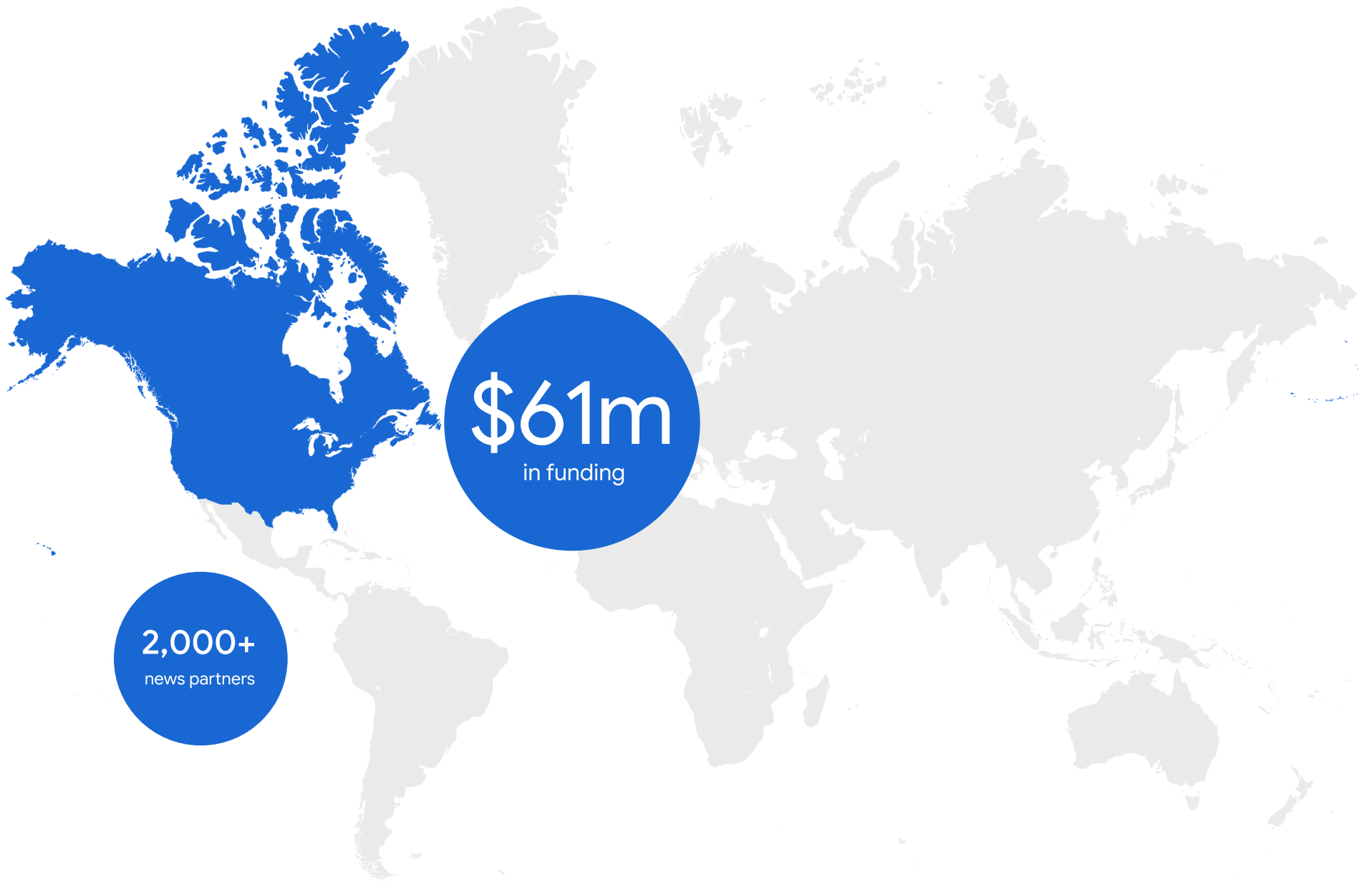


# About this Report

This report is a summary of the activities conducted by the Google News Initiative in North America between March 2018 and June 2020.

The financials in the Impact Report reflect total spending for GNI programs, as well as commitments to the Journalism Emergency Relief Fund and [Google.org](https://www.google.org)'s global media literacy programs, in USD from March 2018 to June 2020. Amounts in other currencies are converted to USD when the work is performed. This report excludes Marketing, PR, and Travel overhead as well as payroll, benefit, and compensation to Google full-time and temporary employees who are involved in programming. Spend is assigned by key focus area based on the primary objective of each project.

The tally of news partners supported reflects the number of news organizations, industry associations, academic institutions and nonprofits that have been funded by or participated in GNI programs from March 2018-June 2020, including the Journalism Emergency Relief Fund. The total does not combine news organizations and their parent companies in cases where each has participated in separate GNI programs, and does not include operational partners and vendors, or news organizations reached through trainings.



Since 2018, we've committed \$61 million to support 2,000+ news partners in the U.S. & Canada

# Elevating Quality Journalism

Enabling diverse sources of impactful journalism is critical for our societies and core to Google's mission. To this end, we've delivered regional training programs focused on digital skills for journalism, partnered with industry organizations to combat misinformation, contributed to regional media literacy programs in Asia Pacific, and implemented programs to support a more diverse and inclusive news ecosystem.



## Journalist Trainings

Through both in-person sessions and an online Training Center, we help journalists develop knowledge and skills in digital journalism across a range of topics — from harnessing large datasets to enhance storytelling, to verification of videos and images, to an introduction to machine learning.

Since launching a global journalist training program through the News Lab in 2015, we've trained over 51,200 journalists in-person in North America, and have enabled an additional 396,000 online trainings through the [GNI Training Center](#).

### Training Journalists in all 50 states and D.C.

Starting in November 2019, in partnership with six associations, we've trained 6,500+ journalists [across the U.S.](#) in digital verification, data visualization and Google Trends to assist with their coverage of the 2020 presidential election.

51,200+  
journalists trained  
in-person since 2015



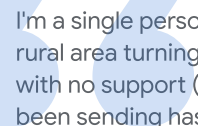
396,000+  
online trainings



## Combating Misinformation

Tackling misinformation is a complex challenge that requires coordinated action with a broad range of experts and organizations. We've worked together with newsrooms, fact-checkers, civil society organizations, and academic researchers in support of initiatives that help curb disinformation and elevate quality journalism.

As part of our \$6.5 million commitment to [combat COVID-19 misinformation](#), we supported [SciLine](#), a free service based at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, to help scale its COVID-19 work to meet the increase in requests for help from journalists – which in the first seven months of 2020 already exceeded the total for 2019.



I'm a single person newsroom in an underserved rural area turning daily content about COVID-19 with no support (at all) and everything SciLine's been sending has been immensely helpful and so, so, very appreciated... I would actually be drowning here without the help SciLine has given so far. From fact sheets to your regular emails, to this [matching service referral] option, it's been invaluable right now as I just don't have the capacity to track everything down myself.

[Shady Grove Oliver](#)

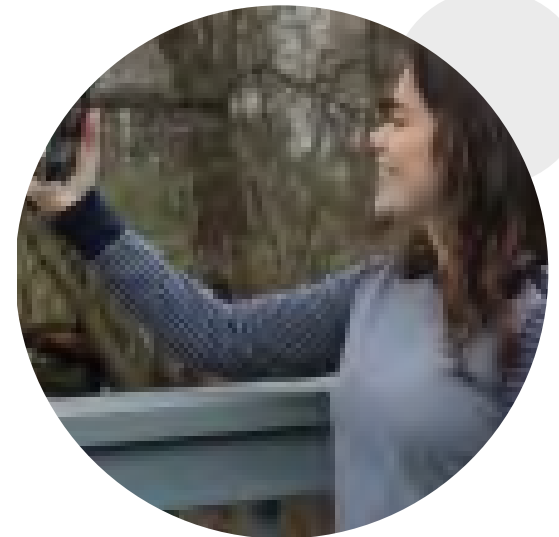
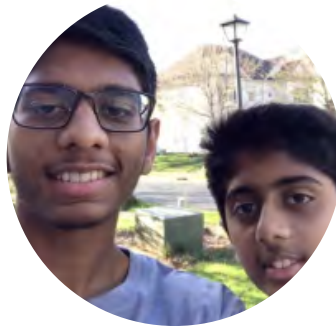
Independent journalist, Arctic Sounder



## Media Literacy

Misinformation is not new, but with the rise of technology, misleading online content can spread rapidly and deceive even savvy users. To help combat this, we've committed to support media literacy programs and help readers discern fact from fiction online.

We've contributed \$3 million to support [MediaWise](#) to help teach students how to discern fact from fiction online in the U.S.; since 2018, MediaWise has reached nearly 9 million people online thanks to social media, trainings at schools, and programs like the [Teen Fact Check Network](#).



\$3 million

grant to support MediaWise

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity in journalism is critical for creating a thriving and representative media ecosystem for everyone, and filling gaps for stories that often don't rise to mainstream media. We have worked to champion

diversity, equity and inclusion in journalism through a combination of efforts: research, pipeline development, talent support, and digital transformation of diverse news organizations.

## GNI Fellowship

Collaborating with various regional partners, we've provided 69 journalism students across [North America](#) with an opportunity to gain practical experience over the last two years.

## Maynard 200 Fellowship

Supported the [Maynard 200 Fellowship](#), which provides for training, mentorship and support for the next generation of journalism entrepreneurs, leaders and storytellers of color.

## GNI Innovation Challenge

[Awarding millions of dollars in GNI Innovation Challenge funding](#) to local media projects focused on elevating underrepresented audiences and promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within their journalism.



## Racial Equity in Journalism Fund

GNI is serving as an anchor funder for the [Racial Equity in Journalism Fund](#), providing grants to news organizations who serve audiences who have been historically underserved by mainstream media.

## Journalism Emergency Relief Fund

In early 2020, the news industry dealt with job cuts, furloughs and cutbacks as a result of the economic downturn prompted by COVID-19. The [Journalism Emergency Relief Fund](#) was created to sustain essential reporting around the world by delivering emergency funding to local newsrooms in this time of need.

\$10.6m

offered to **1,863 local newsrooms** across the U.S. & Canada

### UNITED STATES

[Sahan Journal](#) produced informational videos and translated content about COVID-19 coverage easily accessible in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish for Minnesota's immigrant and refugee communities.

### UNITED STATES

[The Daily Memphian](#) produced 20-30 stories every day, most focused on issues around COVID-19, near daily podcasts and video interviews with health care experts, government officials, and community and business leaders.

This work is particularly relevant at this time because Sahan Journal's mission of providing authentic professional news to immigrants and refugees in Minnesota places our nonprofit organization at the center of a complex matrix of race, class, national origin, and ethnicity that is evolving rapidly in our state.

[Mukhtar M. Ibrahim](#)

Editor and executive director, Sahan Journal

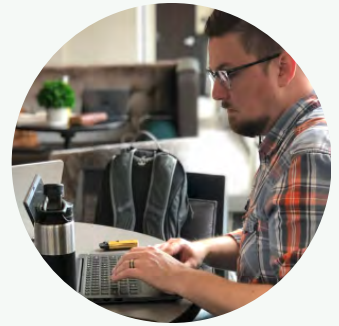
### CANADA

[The Discourse Cowichan](#) bridged the gap in revenue so they could provide coverage for vulnerable communities in a rural region experiencing news poverty through the COVID-19 crisis and recovery.

# Evolving Business Models

As the business of news continues to fundamentally evolve, we've designed programs and resources to address the business challenges at the core of that evolution. We've enabled publishers to grow advertising and reader revenue, increase readership and engagement, and find new models and technology to support local news.

Most recently, we worked with industry experts to combine many of these efforts under the [GNI Digital Growth Program](#) to help news organizations across the world grow their digital businesses.



## Reader Revenue

We're working with news organizations to build and grow reader revenue models, as well as develop technology that can support them along the way.

### GNI Subscriptions Lab

Our GNI Subscriptions Labs bring together publishers, subscriptions experts and industry associations over several months to build roadmaps for long-term success and implement experiments and tactics to improve performance across the funnel.

The US Subscriptions Lab cohort of 10 publishers saw increases across key subscriptions metrics, including 59% average increase in new monthly digital subscribers, and 19% average decrease in digital subscriber churn. Specific publisher results:

- **The Buffalo News:** 79% increase in digital subscribers year-over-year; 2x increase in average monthly net subscribers
- **Southeast Missourian:** 40% increase in average monthly reader revenue; 37% decrease in average monthly churn
- **The Post and Courier:** 45% increase in digital subscribers year on year; 56% in average monthly reader revenue

Prior to the lab we were swimming in a sea of data. The learnings from the Subscription Lab have given us clear direction and more importantly, have provided key benchmarks and given us insight into what should be measured. This lab has been amazing and has allowed us to share with our cohorts and grow together

P.J. Browning,  
President and Publisher, The Post and Courier

59%  
avg. increase in new  
monthly digital  
subscribers



### Subscribe with Google

As part of the original GNI launch, we announced [Subscribe with Google](#), which makes it easy for readers to subscribe, stay logged in and get the most out of their news subscription.

- We've seen a 25% increase in subscriber clicks to publishers' sites when the "From your subscription" module appears in Google Search.
- 11 publishers from the U.S. have signed to implement Subscribe with Google.

25%  
increase in subscriber  
clicks to publishers'  
sites

## Advertising

The digital ad ecosystem continues to rapidly evolve, which can present challenges for news publishers - particularly small, local organizations - to ensure they are set up to optimize monetization of their digital traffic across platforms.

Our efforts aim to help publishers grow their digital ad revenue, from training and consulting support, to projects that test and scale new, innovative advertising solutions.

### Ad Labs

Our GNI Ad Labs across the world have focused on helping groups of publishers grow their digital advertising revenue — by optimizing their programmatic monetization, improving site performance, and using competitive benchmarks. These programs complement the range of advertising products and solutions we develop to help news publishers' manage and grow their digital advertising businesses.

- The [GNI Ad Lab in the US](#) worked with 5 hyperlocal news organizations to audit and grow their ad revenue. As one example, Long Beach Post started [monetizing their journalism programmatically](#), which generated an average \$2,000 incremental revenue per month.

### GNI Audience Lab

The [GNI Audience Lab](#) in North America helped 15 digital native news publishers in the US grow their loyal audiences over 10 months, in partnership with [News Revenue Hub](#). Below are some aggregate improvements experienced by Lab participants (vs. pre-Lab levels):

- +121% average increase in monthly active users
- +30% average increase in newsletter subscribers
- +152% increase in monthly organic search referrals
- [Best in class](#) results were obtained by [Bridge Michigan](#), which saw over 10x growth in monthly active users (vs. previous record), a 870% increase in monthly organic search referrals (vs. previous record), and 4x YoY growth in monthly sustaining members



+121%

avg. increase in monthly active users



## Advertising

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## Research

We partnered with the Local Media Consortium and Magid on a research initiative that analyzed advertiser perceptions of local media to identify ways for these news organizations to strengthen their digital ad sales strategies. Magid interviewed national and local advertisers and agencies in the U.S., and based on the findings, developed recommendations to help local news companies better meet advertiser needs and fuel digital revenue growth.

U.S.

## Concert Local

We partnered with Vox Media to develop and launch Concert Local - an ad marketplace that brings together trusted local news publishers for marketers.

With Concert Local, we are hoping to provide local publishers with revenue opportunities, so they are able to continue building innovative models for the future and further shine a light on the bright spots we are seeing in local journalism.

**Trei Brundrett**

Vox Media's Chief Operating Officer





# Data

More data is available to news organisations today than ever before. This abundance of data can help publishers better understand their readers and identify opportunities for growth in key business areas. But it can also be challenging to harness the potential of this data effectively — to know what

metrics to focus on, and how to use those figures to inform stories, products and business strategies. We aim to help news organisations elevate data-driven thinking, and use insights to develop product offerings and grow digital revenue.

## GNI Data Tools

We developed [News Consumer Insights](#) and [Realtime Content Insights](#) to help publishers make data-driven business and editorial decisions. These tools have helped thousands of news organizations in nearly 130 countries achieve digital business growth, including reaching new readers, driving engagement, boosting newsletter signups, and improving subscription performance.

U.S.

### Business Insider

Business Insider was able [to grow their digital subscriptions business](#):

- 150% increase in digital subscription revenue in one quarter
- 40% higher share of long-term digital subscribers in 2 months.



Thanks to News Consumer Insights' recommendations, we managed to accelerate our consumer subscription growth in a very meaningful way. Their insights and benchmarks helped to shape our product strategy and provide our users with a way better experience than before.

Claudius Senst,  
Head of Consumer Subscriptions,  
Business Insider



CONCERT LOCAL:

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TREI BRUNDRETT,  
VOX MEDIA'S CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

## New Models for Local

Enabling a strong future for local news is of vital importance to every one of us, and has been a particular focus for us in the last few years. Our strategy has been to support new models for local news by identifying where we see success, then support the creation of platforms and playbooks that

others could leverage. Our work has spanned launching new local digital sites, conducting in-depth research and benchmarking into the local digital native market, and enabling technology solutions for small, local newsrooms.

### Project Oasis

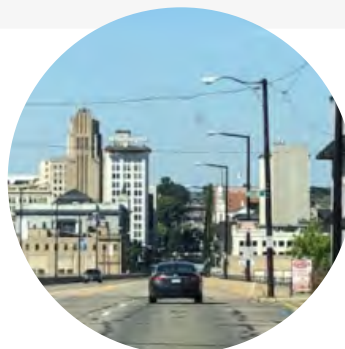
We've partnered with [LION Publishers](#) and [UNC Hussman School of Journalism](#) on [Project Oasis](#), a research effort focused on helping digital journalism entrepreneurs navigate choices and steps they will encounter in establishing a news business.

I believe local news is an essential element of a strong democracy. These information outlets build trust, inspire civic engagement and bring communities together. Through new research and resources, we believe this project has the potential to help shape a bright future for local news.

**Susan Leath**,  
Director, Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media

### Local News Experiments Project

Through the [GNI Local News Experiments Project](#), we've partnered with local news organizations in the US to launch new digital-only community news sites in those markets. So far, we've launched 3 new U.S. digital-only sites: [The Longmont Leader](#) with [McClatchy](#), and [The Oaklandside](#) with Cityside (formerly Berkeleyside).



### GNI Startups Lab

We launched the GNI Startups Lab to support a diverse cohort of 24 aspiring journalism entrepreneurs in designing, launching and accelerating sustainable news products.

Of the 24 projects selected, 17 are led by entrepreneurs of color, while 8 are being launched by entrepreneurs without formal journalism backgrounds. 15 projects will focus on serving geographical local communities, with the remaining 9 focusing on single-subject/niche communities.

The GNI Startups Lab provides critically needed opportunities for passionate news entrepreneurs who care deeply about serving their communities.

**Anika Anand**  
Deputy Director, LION (Local Independent Online News) Publishers

# This is simultaneously a terrible and inspiring time to be working in local news.

We've all learned so much, and also have realized how much we still don't know and can't know until the future gets here. In our first six months, our reporters have uncovered stories that made a big impact, especially for our small size. Looking ahead, there isn't a lot we can plan just yet, so we will keep on adapting.

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MANDY JENKINS

GENERAL MANAGER, THE COMPASS PROJECT

# Empowering Newsrooms Through Innovation

As we work with publishers to navigate challenges for elevating quality journalism and evolving business models, it's clear that innovative thinking and approaches will be vital in developing and scaling solutions for the digital future. We've enabled news organizations around the world to demonstrate and test new ideas by investing in efforts to accelerate innovation in the news ecosystem, and partnering with news organizations to expand their journalism to new formats.



## Innovation Challenge

The GNI Innovation Challenge is an application-based program open to organizations of all sizes that produce original journalism. Each Challenge is designed around a theme that meets that region's unique requirements, enabling diverse approaches that publishers have emphasized are needed to address specific needs in each region.

Through the first North America Challenge, we received over **250 applications**, and **funded 34 projects** in 17 states and provinces, totaling **\$5.8 million**. We to support sustainability through diversity, equity and inclusion.

### UNITED STATES

#### Wick

Neighbourhood Assisted Bureau Reporting (NABUR) is taking a different approach to local reporting with changes including the employment of product managers to oversee activities and 'community ambassadors' to run moderated conversations. Launched NABUR in the 1st 3 markets ([Wenatchee](#), [Green Valley](#), [Sierra Vista](#)).

- On target to acquire significant users in Green Valley and Wenatchee markets in one year (roughly 3,000) which means they will have overtaken the main competitor in the space.

### UNITED STATES

#### [California News Partnership](#) (Media News Group)

Created a premium subscription, ad-free tier, available on 13 local websites, which has attracted 3,000 highly-engaged subscribers in under a year

### CANADA

#### [Torstar](#)

Launched a digital-only product that combines quality local news with a community hub in ten markets.

We are learning a lot about the right mix of local news content and the new content formats that we have established in order to help us build a new, sustainable local news content engine.

**Pam Laycock**  
SVP Strategy & Communication

34

projects funded  
totaling \$5.8 million

The [second North America Innovation Challenge](#) will support local media projects focused on elevating underrepresented audiences and promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within their journalism.



INNOVATION CHALLENGE

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While the funding was important, having public acknowledgement that this project was worth pursuing unblocked internal processes and hurdles that existed.

It has helped provide a valuable new revenue stream that can be scaled and aligns with goals of improving the overall user experience for customers.

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**RYAN NAKASHIMA**  
PRODUCT MANAGER, DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS  
BAY AREA NEWS GROUP



## YouTube Innovation Funding

Supported 26 publishers in North America on projects to strengthen their online video capabilities, try out new formats for video journalism, and experiment with new business models.

### UNITED STATES

#### PBS Newshour

Updated digital video workflow and assessed and adapted production strategy, laying a strong foundation for future digital video innovation. Additionally, experimented with new audience engagement strategies, including Live Commentary, to strengthen connection with their online viewers.

>50%

YOY increase in video views

>85%

YOY increase in watch time video views

>60%

YOY increase in YouTube channel subscribers

### UNITED STATES

#### Bloomberg

Created high-performing video formats for popular audit podcasts. Developed a custom tool to automate video podcast creation.

- Tested video adaptations of five Bloomberg podcast series
- 500k+ views for podcast content on YouTube

We are only at the beginning of pioneering this exciting new format, and we expect this to increase awareness of Bloomberg Media's growing podcast offerings by bringing these visual adaptations to video platforms such as YouTube.

#### Tre Shallowhorn

Global Head of Video and Senior Executive Producer, Bloomberg Digital

26

publishers supported

through YouTube Innovation Funding



# Engaging the North American News Community



## Engaging the North American News Community

All of our work can only be accomplished through broad collaboration, through building connections among publishers, journalists, academics, and associations through events, working groups, research, and program support.

### Enhancing collaboration among local news

Launched two local journalism collaboratives in Local Media Association's [Solving for Chicago](#), and Local Media Consortium's [The Matchup](#), to enhance collaboration among local media organizations and spur the development of new, sustainable operating models. We are also partnering with the [Institute for Nonprofit News](#) to help [eight nonprofit newsrooms](#) to understand and exploit key drivers of sponsorship-related revenue.



### GNI Local: Chicago

We brought together 150 U.S. and Canadian news publishers and industry leaders for the first GNI Local event in Chicago, Illinois in December 2019. Over two days, we focused on turning ideas into action, covering revenue sustainability and user engagement. Publishers shared best practices on audience data, inclusive storytelling, and more.



### News & Publishing Summit

Each year, we welcome over 40 partner stakeholders to our NYC office to discuss today's most relevant topics for News & Publishing partners, including Privacy, Innovation, Consumer Revenue, Subscriptions, The Google News Initiative, Audio and changing audiences.



# What's next?

As we continue to learn, we're consolidating insights from the work we've done, and finding ways to scale those learnings to publishers globally through efforts like the [Digital Growth Program](#).

The news industry is still in the midst of a difficult transition. But this period of evolution presents opportunities to rethink the role news plays in people's lives and how it should evolve to meet our changing information needs.

We'll continue to collaborate with organizations around the world working to create a healthy, diverse and sustainable news ecosystem, and we're excited to share more in the coming year.

[View Global Report](#)

