

# **GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS**

**A snapshot of conditions at small-market  
newspapers in Canada**

**April Lindgren, Brent Jolly, Cara Sabatini and Christina Wong**



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## Executive summary

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We undertook this survey to find out about conditions at small-market newspapers in Canada and to explore the sector's prospects at a time when newspapers in general face major challenges. The [Local News Map](#), a crowd-sourced platform that tracks changes to local news outlets across the country, has documented the closing of 36 local free and subscription daily newspapers and 195 community papers over the past decade ([Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#)).

The survey is a collaborative effort by The Local News Research Project, led by Ryerson University professor April Lindgren, and the non-profit National NewsMedia Council, a voluntary self-regulatory organization that promotes editorial standards, ethics, and news literacy. Together, we sought answers to questions about workload; the use of digital tools; how employees stay up to date with ethical, technological and other changes; and how publications engage with audiences. Respondents were also asked for their views on the future of the industry, including potential challenges and opportunities.

A [similar exercise was conducted in the United States](#) in 2016 (Radcliffe, Ali & Donald, 2017), so we designed the Canadian survey to allow for a comparison of small-market newspapers in the two countries. To be consistent, we adopted the Americans' definition of what constitutes a small-market newspaper, that is, a print publication with a daily/weekly circulation below 50,000 copies.

In Canada, 30 of the 90 daily newspapers have a total weekly print circulation below that threshold. Print-only circulation numbers are unavailable for the country's 1,029 community newspapers (published fewer than four times per week), but 954 have a combined print and digital circulation below 50,000 (Kelly Levson, News Media Canada, personal communication, December 16, 2018). There were 127 eligible responses to the online survey, which was conducted between February 5, 2018, and April 25, 2018. Responses were anonymous.

In addition to asking the same questions included in the American survey, we included supplemental queries related to knowledge of ethics and editorial standards in newsrooms, diversity in staffing, and audience engagement strategies.

The majority (61 per cent) of the feedback received from this survey came from editors and reporters. Most respondents (81 per cent) worked at newspapers with newsrooms staffed by five or fewer editorial employees. Two-thirds worked at weeklies; more than half were employed at papers with a print circulation between 1,000 and 10,000. Almost all of the newspapers rely on advertising as a revenue source.

The survey results point to a sector characterized by shrinking newsrooms deeply divided over the future. While 50 per cent of respondents were "very positive" or "slightly positive" about what is in store for the sector, 41 per cent were "slightly negative" or "very negative." Optimism was much more pronounced among older respondents.

The good news is that the Canadian survey results paint a picture of newspapers that recognize the need to engage with their communities: 43 per cent of respondents said their publication had launched an editorial campaign on an issue that is important to their community, 96 per cent said they had published

contributions from community members, and most use Facebook to connect with readers. Respondents were also steadfast in their belief that a trusted local newspaper providing timely, reliable local news has a significant competitive advantage when it comes to competing for advertising and audiences even in these turbulent times.

Respondents defied stereotypes of smaller newsrooms as reluctant to embrace digital tools: Most have embraced some aspect of “digital.” Three quarters said they actively post to their organizations’ Facebook account and more than half contribute to their newspapers’ Twitter feed. Three quarters reported using some sort of metrics to measure audience engagement with their content.

The responses to our survey questions, however, also highlighted significant challenges facing the sector. Survey participants said their efforts are constantly undermined by the perception that their industry is on its deathbed—a perception that harms their ability to attract new audiences, advertisers, and young journalists. The responses also pointed to other issues, outlined below.

- **Smaller newsrooms:** Fifty-seven per cent of respondents said there are fewer people in their newsrooms now than in 2016. Multiple survey participants linked waves of layoffs to concerns about the quality of journalism in their newspapers.
- **A work culture that is demanding more of its workforce:** About one third of journalists said they are producing more stories and working longer hours compared to two years ago. Forty per cent of respondents reported that they regularly work more than 50 hours per week.
- **A split between employees who feel secure in their jobs and others who are concerned about job security:** About one-third of respondents (35 per cent) said they felt slightly or very insecure in their positions while nearly half (46 per cent) said they felt very secure or slightly secure.
- **Limited technology training/investment in newsroom personnel:** Respondents are learning about new technology and tools related to the industry mostly on their own—only 20 per cent said their employers paid for training courses.
- **Limited employer-sponsored ethics training:** Most respondents said they learn about journalism ethics and best practices on the job from fellow journalists and from published articles. Only about one third (32 per cent) cited employer-sponsored resource guides or ethics training courses.
- **Difficulties attracting and retaining qualified staff.**
- **Intense competition from non-local digital platforms and publications for audiences and advertisers.**

While Canadian and American small-market newspaper sectors are dramatically different in terms of scale, the pool of self-selected survey respondents in both countries turned out to be remarkably similar. Responses to the 23 common questions revealed two notable differences between the two countries. In the first instance, we found that respondents’ use of video reporting, live video and podcasts in the United States was approximately double that of Canadian respondents. The second significant difference had to do with sentiments about the future. Canadians were generally more pessimistic in their outlook. While approximately half of the participants in both surveys felt slightly or very secure in their jobs, more than one third (35 per cent) of the Canadians felt slightly or very insecure in their jobs compared to just 18 per cent of American respondents.

The report concludes with recommendations related to revenue diversification, newsroom collaborations and relationship building with audiences. Given their almost complete reliance upon advertising revenue, for instance, we point to the need for publications to develop supplementary revenue streams. We recommend building relationships with journalism schools to attract new talent, diversify newsroom staff and to publicly demonstrate confidence in the sector's future. Newsroom collaborations are highlighted as a way to bolster limited training resources and produce quality journalism. And where it isn't already the practice, we suggest publications make it a priority to adopt and publicize a code of ethics as a way to build trust with readers.



## Introduction

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We set out with this survey to find out about conditions at small-market newspapers in Canada and to explore the sector's prospects at a time when newspapers in general face major challenges. The survey, which was in the field from February 5, 2018, to April 25, 2018, is a joint initiative by the Local News Research Project run by Ryerson University journalism professor April Lindgren, and the non-profit National NewsMedia Council, a voluntary self-regulatory organization that promotes editorial standards and news literacy. Together, we sought answers to questions about workload; the use of digital tools; how employees stay up to date with ethical, technological and other changes; and how publications engage with audiences. Respondents were also asked for their views on the future and industry challenges and opportunities.

While the strategies, outlook and working conditions at larger Canadian newspapers are subject to regular scrutiny ([Goldfinger, 2017](#); [Popplewell, 2018](#); [Watson, 2017](#)), much less is known about the state of small-market publications. Indeed, journalism scholars have called for a “more nuanced vocabulary to speak about newspapers and local news. Grouping all newspapers into a monolithic industry – as general sector analyses often do – suggests a homogenous experience” (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018, p. 2).

The idea for this survey originated from discussions at [Is no local news bad news? Local Journalism and its Future](#), a June 2017 conference hosted by the Ryerson Journalism Research Centre. Attendees at the Toronto conference included Damian Radcliffe, a professor of journalism at the University of Oregon and co-author, with the University of Virginia's Christopher Ali, of [Life at Small-Market newspapers: Results from a survey of small-market newsrooms](#) (Radcliffe, Ali & Donald, 2017). This U.S. survey, conducted along with a [series of in-depth interviews with industry experts and journalism practitioners](#) (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018; Ali, Radcliffe, Schmidt & Donald, 2018), sought to gather more information about the reality of working at smaller newspapers, which its authors defined as publications that have a daily/weekly print circulation below 50,000. Of the 7,071 newspapers published in the United States in late 2016 when the survey was conducted, 6,851 fit the definition of a small-market newspaper, constituting what the survey authors described as a “silent majority we know little about” (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018, p. 2). There were 420 eligible responses to the U.S. questionnaire.

By adopting the same definition of a small-market newspaper and asking the same questions, the Canadian survey produced data that can be compared to the American results. In Canada, 30 of the country's 90 daily papers have a total weekly print circulation below 50,000. Print-only circulation numbers are unavailable for the country's 1,029 community newspapers (published fewer than four times per week), but 954 have a combined print and digital circulation below 50,000 (Kelly Levson, News Media Canada, personal communication, December 16, 2018).

In addition to posing the same questions as our American counterparts, we also asked about newsroom ethics, diversity and staffing and included more specific queries about audience engagement strategies. There were 127 eligible responses to the Canadian survey.

Our primary motivation in conducting this research was to better understand the reality of working at a small-market Canadian newspaper and the sector's prospects at a time of major disruption. In June 2018, Postmedia Network Canada announced another round of layoffs and buyouts, the closing of six newspapers in Ontario and Alberta, and the cancellation of the print edition of three other publications ([Shufelt, 2018](#)). A deal in late 2017 between Postmedia and Torstar Corp. saw the two corporations exchange a total of 41 newspapers and then close three dozen of them ([Krashinsky Robertson, 2017](#)).

More generally, the [Local News Map](#), a crowd-sourced platform that tracks changes to local news outlets across the country, has documented the closing of 36 local free and subscription daily newspapers and 195 community papers over the past decade ([Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#)).

The losses continue to mount even as Canadians insist they value newspapers as important actors in democratic societies. A recent Vividata survey found that while only about one-third of respondents turned to newspapers in the previous week for news, considerably more saw them as trusted sources: 66 per cent rated the print editions of local newspapers among their most trusted news sources while 70 per cent placed their highest trust in the print edition of national dailies ([Vividata, 2018](#)).

Anecdotal evidence also suggests newspapers have a special place in Canadians' news diets. Local mayors, for instance, fretted about how to keep their electors informed in the aftermath of the 2017 Postmedia/Torstar deal ([Watson, 2018](#)). Residents in Guelph, Ontario, shed tears and thanked reporters when they gathered outside the Guelph Mercury's building the night before the local daily published its final edition on January 29, 2017 ([Bala, 2017](#); [CBC News, 2016](#)). Most obviously, however, the evidence that smaller newspapers matter is evident in the journalism they publish. The list of nominated and award-winning stories includes investigations of everything from the living conditions of marginalized citizens dealing with slum conditions ([Schliesmann, 2016](#)) to local officials' handling of development and land deals ([The Voice, 2018](#)).



## Why focus on small-market newspapers?

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Newspapers have been—and continue to be—significant contributors to vibrant, well-functioning local democracies. They play a role in fulfilling what researchers have identified as the critical information needs of communities, including the need for timely, reliable information about risks and emergencies, health, education, transportation, economic opportunities, the environment and civic and political issues ([Friedland, Napoli, Ognyanova, Weil & Wilson III, 2012](#)). A recent *Scientific American* report offered a concrete illustration of why local health news, for instance, makes that list: It quoted epidemiologists who are worried that the closing of so many local newspapers in the United States means they are losing an important early warning system for the outbreak and spread of infectious diseases ([Branswell, 2018](#)).

More generally, a study of local political reporting in Danish newspapers concluded that although newspapers are no longer the direct source of news for the majority of citizens, they still punch above their weight in terms of their impact on the local news environment. They are often the only source of day-to-day public affairs coverage, they cover political stories ignored by other media, and in many cases their journalism still sets the agenda and informs the reporting of other news organizations (Nielson, 2015).

Newspapers also play a role in constructing a shared a sense of community and place. Benedict Anderson (1991) argued that they are integral to the building of nations, which he characterized as “imagined” political communities: “...imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). The same dynamic, some scholars have suggested, plays out at the local level in that citizens become acquainted with issues and community norms through “the simultaneous consumption or ‘imagining’ of the stories in local newspapers” (Paek, Yoon & Shah, 2005, p. 590). Others have delved more deeply into the role of small newspapers as community builders, suggesting that the coverage they generate is a form of “mediated social capital” that brings ordinary people together and links them to those in power (Hess, 2015).

Studies have linked newspaper readership to civic engagement, including membership in community organizations and participation in community leisure activities (Jeffres, Lee, Neuendorf & Atkin, 2007). The closing of daily newspapers in Seattle and Denver has been associated with a decline in civic engagement as measured by factors such as participation in or leadership of a community group or organization ([Shaker, 2014](#)). An earlier study that examined what happened when the Cincinnati Post shut down at the end of 2007 suggested the short-term effects included fewer candidates running for office in areas that were Post strongholds, an increased chance that incumbents would be re-elected, and declines in voter turnout and campaign spending ([Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2011](#)). More recent research has linked the closing of local newspapers to an increase in U.S. political polarization (Darr, Hitt & Dunaway, 2018).

Reporting by newspapers has also been associated with the performance of public institutions. The decline in government corruption in the United States during the Gilded Age of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers have suggested, coincided with the emergence of independent, less partisan newspapers ([Gentzkow, Glaeser & Goldin, 2004](#)). More recent American research that tracked changes to local news outlets between 1996 and 2015 linked the closing of local newspapers to higher

government borrowing costs that occurred in the absence of media scrutiny of school, hospital and other infrastructure projects ([Capps, 2018](#)).

Understanding what is happening in newsrooms of local newspapers is also important because their contributions aren't always positive: Newspapers have been implicated in the negative stereotyping of neighbourhoods (Lindgren, 2009). Their coverage often excludes individuals and groups, particularly minority groups (Hess, 2015), and they have been shown to under represent and misrepresent diversity and racialized groups (Lindgren, 2011; 2013).

Finally, delving into what is happening to newspapers is about gaining a better understanding of whether newspaper journalists, many of them reeling from multiple rounds of newsroom layoffs, can still do their jobs. A recent U.S. study that identified the net loss of 1,800 local publications in that country since 2004 [pointed to a growing number of "ghost" newspapers](#), where "the editorial mission and staffing have been so significantly diminished that their newsrooms are either nonexistent or lack the resources to adequately cover their communities" (Abernathy, 2018, p. 8).

### **The Canadian context**

Research that explores what is happening to Canadian newspapers and the impact of disruption is relatively limited. It is clear, however, that the challenges facing the sector are significant. Newspaper revenues collapsed to \$2.6 billion in 2017 from a high of \$4.7 billion in 2008 ([Winseck, 2018](#)). The overall percentage of Canadians who rely upon print sources for news continues to decline: it dropped to 31 per cent in 2018 from 36 per cent two years earlier ([Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Nielsen, 2018](#)). Only 22 per cent of Canadians have print or digital newspaper subscriptions ([Earncliffe Strategy Group, 2017, p. 7](#)) and in a mid-2017 survey, 86 per cent of respondents said they will still get the news they need if their local daily newspaper goes out of business. Even respondents who lived in one-newspaper towns were blasé: 84 per cent said they will still stay informed if the local newspaper ceases to exist. The results were consistent across regions, age groups, gender, political affiliation, urban and rural respondents, and homeowners and renters. "Because people consume information using a variety of digital platforms," the pollsters noted, "they may not be as aware as used to be the case of the sources of their news, and the important role of local newspapers in newsgathering. It's also possible that they believe that different media outlets will fill in the gaps..." ([Anderson & Coletto, 2017](#)).

[Data](#) from the [Local News Map](#), a crowd-sourced tool that tracks changes to local news media across Canada, shows that 262 local news outlets have closed since 2008 including 231 newspapers in 180 communities. Thirty-six were dailies and 195 were community papers that published fewer than five times per week (Table 1). By comparison, only 40 newspapers launched over the same decade (Table 2).

Content analyses suggest these newspaper losses have affected the availability of news. A Public Policy Forum study that examined the newspaper content in 20 different communities found that the total number of articles declined by nearly half between 2008 and 2017. Over that same period, coverage of democratic institutions and civic affairs fell by more than one third ([Public Policy Forum, 2018](#)).

Table 1. Breakdown of closings by type of media, January 1, 2008 to December 1, 2018.

Type of media outlet	# of closings
community paper	195
daily paper - free	23
daily paper - paid	13
online	13
radio – private	2
radio – public	6
TV – private	10
TV – public	0

Source: [Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#).

Table 2. Breakdown of newly launched outlets by type of media, January 1, 2008 to December 1, 2018.

Type of media outlet	# of launches
community paper	39
daily paper - free	1
daily paper - paid	0
online	46
radio – private	6
radio – public	3
TV – private	3
TV – public	5

Source: [Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#).

Critics suggest corporate concentration is intimately linked to declines in both the quality and quantity of news coverage in local newspapers. Marc Edge ([2018](#)) argues that Canada’s federal competition bureau has failed to apply antitrust laws to newspaper mergers and takeovers—business deals that sounded the death knell for many smaller publications and led to domination of the sector by a few large players (see Table 3 and Table 4)

Data from the Local News Map show that the large newspaper chains account for most of the newspaper closings (all types of newspapers) and relatively few new titles since 2008 (Table 5 and Table 6). Critics argue that these losses are the result of corporate ownership models that have little or no connection to local newspapers or the communities where they operate. In the extreme case of private equity and hedge fund ownership, these critics say, no effort is made to balance business interests with civic responsibility and the primary allegiance is to earnings (Abernathy, 2016; [Hiltz & Livesey, 2018](#)).

Table 3. Ten largest community newspaper chains in Canada as of December, 2018.

<b>Top 10 community newspaper owners</b>	<b># of titles</b>
Postmedia Network Inc.	86
Black Press Ltd.	85
Metroland Media Group	78
snapd Inc.	72
Glacier Media Inc.	44
SaltWire Network	25
TransMet Logistics/Metropolitan Media	25
TC Media	21
Icimédias inc.	20
Brunswick News Inc.	19

Source: News Media Canada, 2018b.

Table 4. Daily newspaper ownership in Canada as of November, 2018.

<b>Owner</b>	<b># of titles</b>
Postmedia Network Inc./Sun Media	35
TorStar Corp.	12
SaltWire Network Inc.	8
Groupe Capitaux Médias	6
ALTA Newspaper Group/Glacier	3
Black Press	3
Brunswick News Inc.	3
Continental Newspapers Canada Ltd.	3
Quebecor	3
F.P. Canadian Newspapers LP	2
Glacier Media	2
Globe and Mail Inc.	1
Power Corp. of Canada	1
TransMet	1
Independent Titles	7
Total	90

Source: [News Media Canada, 2018a](#).

Table 5. Breakdown of newspaper closings by ownership, January 1, 2008, to December 1, 2018.

Owner	# of titles
Postmedia	31
Transcontinental	30
Black Press	27
Sun Media	25
Independent	19
Glacier Media	16
Torstar	15
Metroland	14
Other	54

Source: [Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#).

*NOTE: An independently owned news outlet is defined as a news outlet that is privately owned by a proprietor with only one or, at most, just a few local media outlets.*

Table 6. Breakdown of newspaper launches by ownership, January 1, 2008, to December 1, 2018.

Owner	# of titles
Independent	15
Metroland	7
Black Press	4
Your Community Voice	4
Transcontinental	2
Other	8

Source: [Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#).

*NOTE: An independently owned news outlet is defined as a news outlet that is privately owned by a proprietor with only one or, at most, just a few local media outlets.*

Canadian researchers have linked chain ownership to compromised local content in newspapers. An analysis of content in Northumberland Today, a small daily that served the community of Port Hope, Ontario, found a significant decline in local coverage following the acquisition of the newspaper by the struggling Postmedia chain in 2014. Local content filled 89 per cent of the newspaper in 2008 (when it had a different name and proprietor). By 2017, the year the publication was shut down, more than three quarters of copy was syndicated wire service content ([Miller, 2017](#)). Another study pointed to a significant reduction in the amount and prominence of local news in the Toronto Star and Ottawa Citizen newspapers after 1970. Growing concerns about national unity likely accounted for some of the increased emphasis on national coverage, but chain ownership that emphasized cost-effective production and the sharing of national stories across the group was also cited as a explanation, particularly in the case of the Ottawa Citizen, where the decline in local reporting was the most notable (Buchanan, 2014).

Research in other jurisdictions, however, suggests chain-owned newspapers benefit in terms of competitiveness because certain costs can be reduced through the centralization of production and distribution (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018). There are also indications that chain-owned operations are more technologically competitive. One U.S. study noted that they are more likely to have adopted digital tools such as podcasting and video (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018). Similarly, a Reuters Institute examination of the transition from print to digital at newspapers in France, Germany, Finland and the United Kingdom concluded that where publications were part of newspaper groups, they benefited in terms of building an online presence from access to relevant expertise and digital tools ([Jenkins & Nielsen, 2018](#)).

Despite the newspaper losses to date, there is evidence that newspapers in Canada remain an essential part of local news ecosystems. Consistent with the Danish research that identified newspapers as anchors for local political coverage (Nielsen, 2015), for instance, a forthcoming study by Ryerson University's [Local News Research Project](#) found that in the month prior to the 2015 federal election, newspapers generated more than half of all the local news media stories (54 per cent) about the races for members of Parliament in eight communities. Other types of local media contributed much less to the coverage, with television and online news sites each producing about 14 per cent of all stories and radio stations generating 18 per cent of news items (April Lindgren, personal communication, December 9, 2018).

## Methodology

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This survey was undertaken to create a snapshot of conditions at small-market Canadian newspapers and to generate data comparable to the results of a similar project undertaken in the United States (Ali, Radcliffe, Schmidt & Donald, 2018). The survey, therefore, included the same 23 questions asked in the American survey as well as 15 additional questions that solicited information on Canadian newsroom demographics, ethics awareness and training and audience engagement strategies. The survey questions and data are available in [Appendix 1](#).

For consistency, this study, like its American counterpart, situates small-market newspapers in the space between online hyperlocal news outlets and publications that report on large metropolitan areas. Survey responses were solicited from newsroom and other employees working at daily or weekly publications with a print circulation below 50,000. In Canada, 30 of the country's 90 daily papers have a total weekly print circulation below 50,000. Of the 1,029 community papers (defined by News Media Canada as papers that publish fewer than four times per week), 954 have a combined print and digital circulation below 50,000. Print-only circulation numbers for community papers are unavailable (Kelly Levson, News Media Canada, personal communication, December 16, 2018).

A total of 127 respondents completed the survey. All respondents answered 34 of the 38 questions. The other four questions required write-in responses and some respondents opted to skip them. Responses were anonymous. Consistent with the design of the American study, respondents were able to skip questions to "ensure the highest possible completion rate (also allowing participants to potentially bypass questions that were not relevant, or possibly unclear)" ([Radcliffe, Ali & Donald, 2017, p. 20](#)). The survey was in the field from February 5 to April 25, 2018. It was available online using the survey design website Survey Monkey and promoted on Twitter and other social media, through direct email to individual newsrooms/journalists and via industry newsletters and direct appeals circulated by the National NewsMedia Council and provincial community newspaper associations.

This report presents all results as percentages and includes the number of respondents to each question at the top of every chart and table.

### Limitations

The conclusions and observations presented in this report should be treated only as indicative of what is happening to small-market newspapers because respondents were self-selecting and the sample, therefore, is not representative ([Bethlehem, 2009](#)). Readers should also be aware of the following limitations.

- 93 per cent of respondents came from Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. There were no responses to the English-only survey from Quebec-based journalists.
- More editors (40 per cent) than reporters (20 per cent) responded to the survey and 28 per cent of respondents self-identified as owners of their publications.
- We had 127 survey responses but this does not mean we heard from 127 different newsrooms. More than one person from a single newsroom may have participated.
- Only two of the 127 respondents said they worked at a daily newspaper.

## Survey respondents and the newspapers where they work

### Key findings:

- Three quarters of respondents worked for publications that have a circulation below 20,000, most of them community papers that appear once or twice per week
- About two-thirds of respondents are editors/reporters
- About two-thirds of respondents have worked in local media for more than 10 years
- A majority of respondents worked in newsrooms with one to five staff editorial staff
- Nearly half of respondents were older than 50 years of age
- Almost all respondents worked at newspapers that were dependent upon advertising as a revenue source

### Working in local media

The majority of respondents (98 per cent) worked for community papers that produce print editions fewer than five times per week; 65 per cent worked for weeklies. When asked about their primary job function (Figure 1), the majority of respondents self-identified as either editors (40 per cent) or reporters (20 per cent). When we broke down the “other” responses, we found that 13 per cent of respondents identified their primary job function as that of publisher while 12 per cent said they performed all job functions.

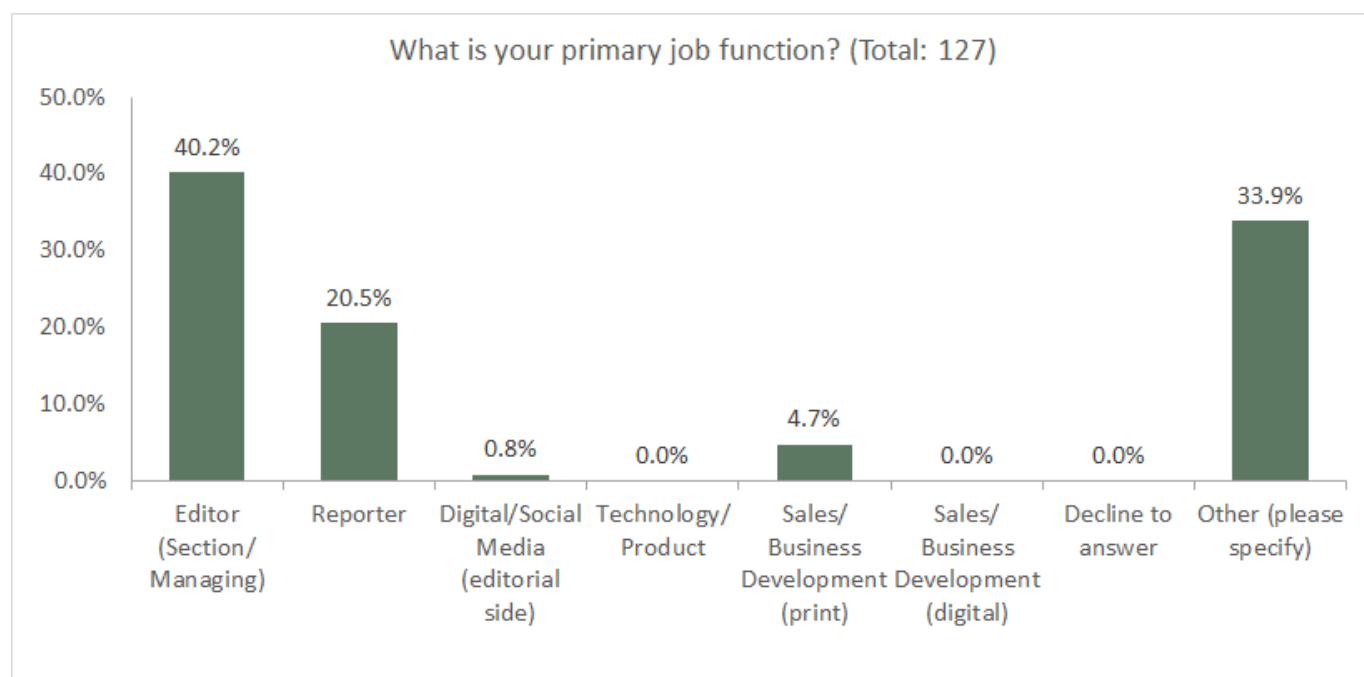
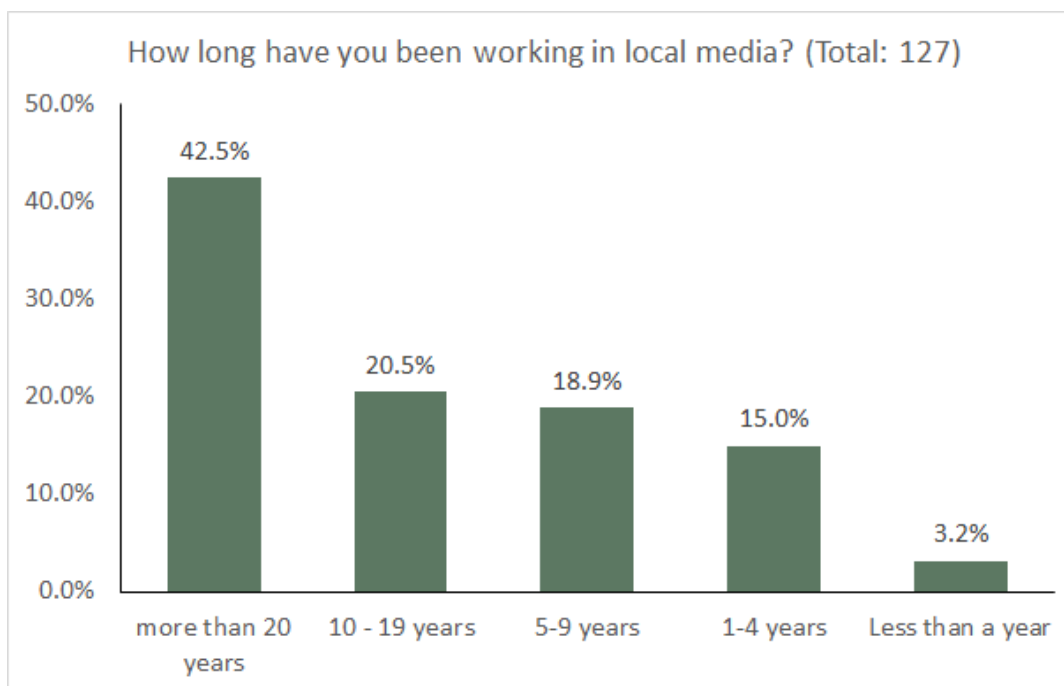


Figure 1. Primary job functions of survey respondents

In response to a separate question asking if the survey participant was the owner of the newspaper, 35 respondents (28 per cent) self-identified as proprietors.

The majority of respondents who participated in the survey (63 per cent) had worked in local media for more than 10 years while only 18 per cent had fewer than five years of experience (Figure 2).





*Figure 2. Experience working in local media*

### **Demographics**

All age groups were represented among respondents: 44 per cent were over 50 years of age, 39 per cent were between 31 and 49, and 17 per cent were between 18 and 30 years old. Only 3 per cent self-identified as a member of a visible minority group and only 4 per cent worked for ethnic media publications.

Almost all respondents (93 per cent) worked in newsrooms located in just four provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. None worked at publications located in New Brunswick, Nunavut or Quebec (where the survey was only available in English). There was only limited representation from other Atlantic provinces and territories.

### **Newsroom characteristics**

Every circulation size category was represented among respondents, with the largest group (28 per cent) associated with publications that have a print circulation between 1,000 and 5,000 copies (Figure 3). The majority of respondents (65 per cent) worked for weekly publications (Figure 4).

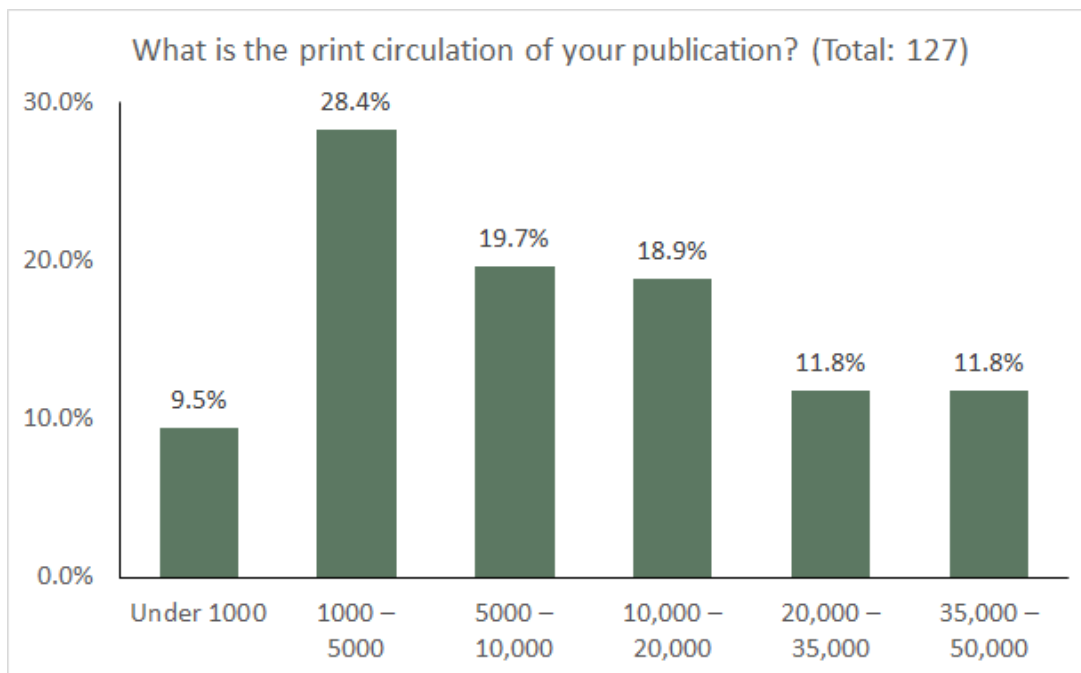


Figure 3. Circulation size of publications

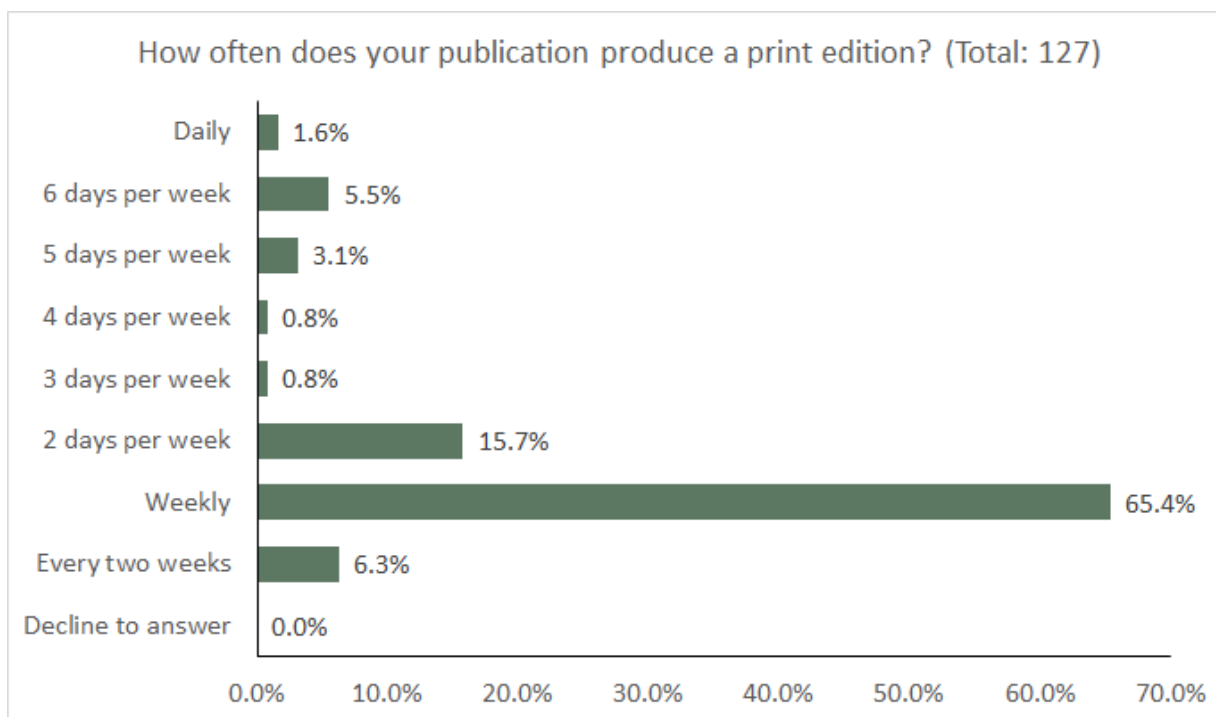


Figure 4. Publication frequency

Fifty per cent of respondents work in a newsroom with only one or two full-time editorial staff (Figure 5).

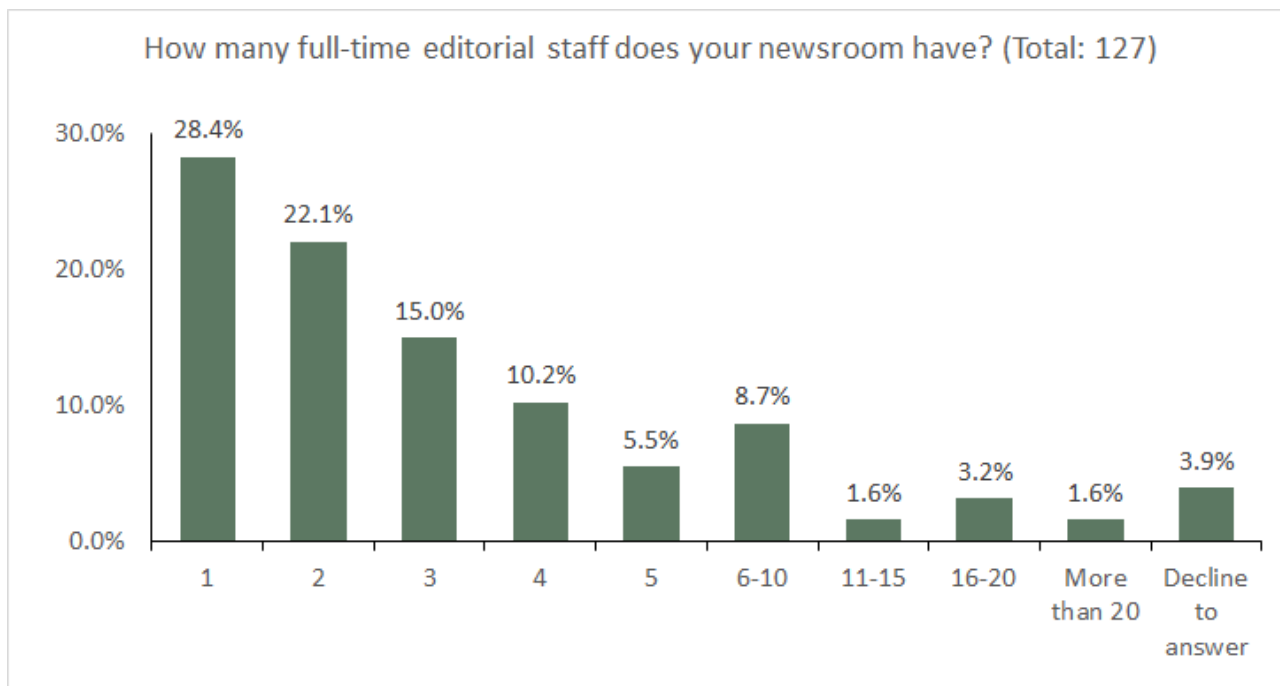


Figure 5. Number of full-time editorial staff

Almost all participants in the survey (94 per cent) said their publications generate revenue through advertising. While 42 per cent said the newspapers where they work raise revenue through print subscriptions, more than half (57 per cent) said the papers are distributed free of charge, which means they are completely reliant upon advertising revenue to survive (Figure 6).

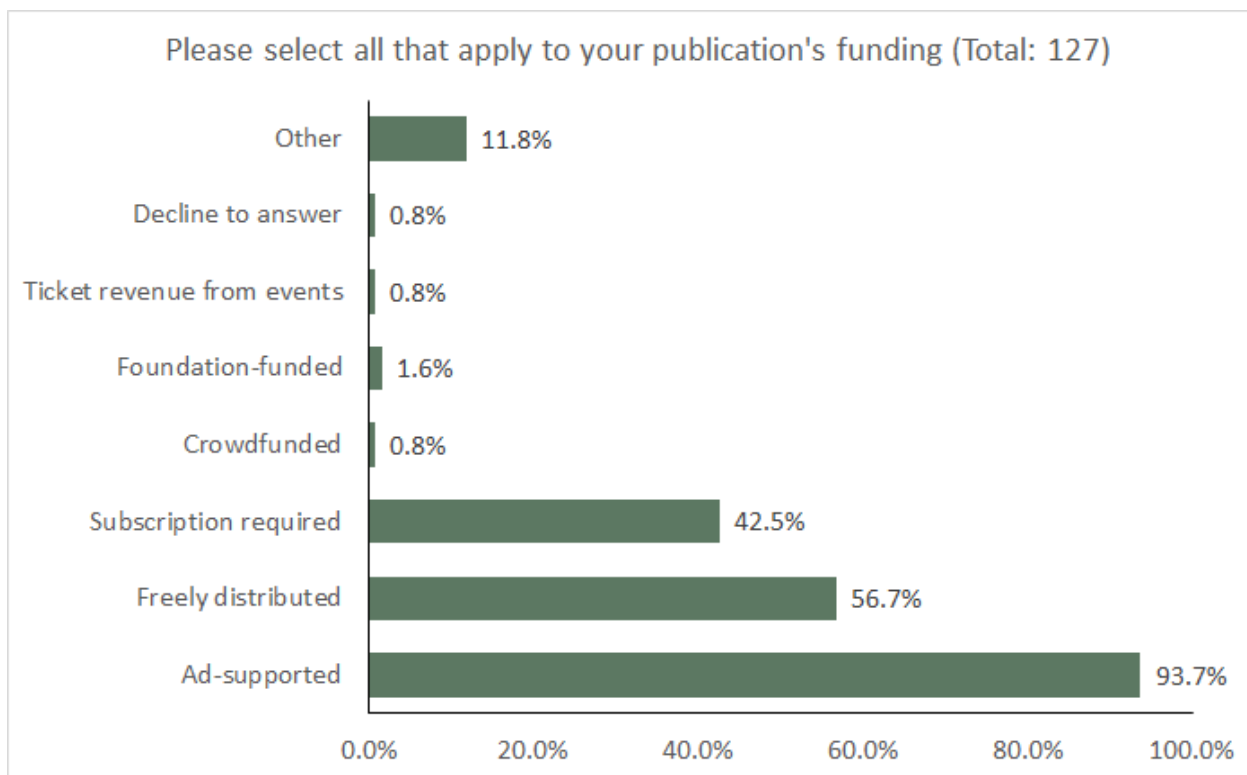


Figure 6. Funding sources

While their newsrooms were small, the majority of respondents (58 per cent) worked for a publication owned by a larger regional or national newspaper chain or a hedge fund/non-journalism company (Figure 7).

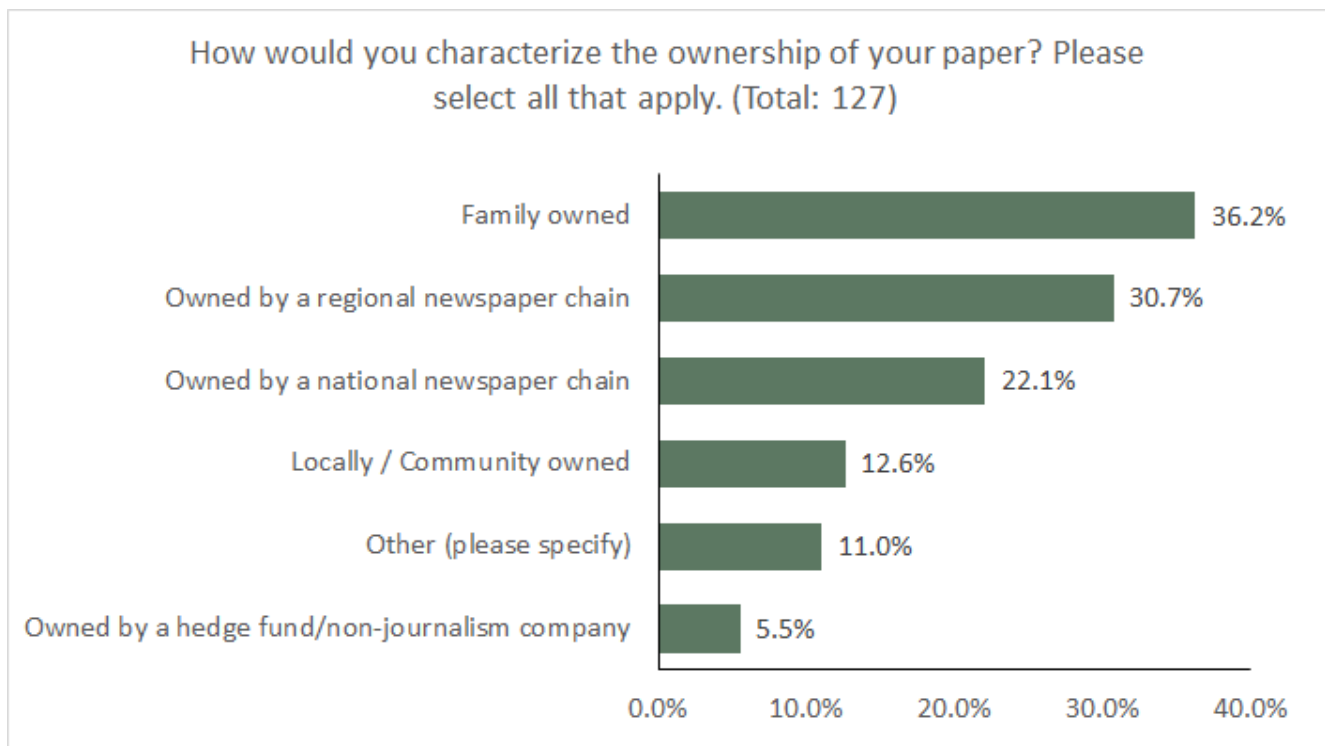


Figure 7. Publication ownership

## Working life at a small-market newspaper

### Key findings:

- The majority of respondents said they are spending more time on digital-related output than they did two years ago
- About a third said they are producing more stories and working longer hours compared to two years ago
- More than half said their newsrooms are smaller than they were in 2016
- 40 per cent of respondents said they worked 50 or more hours per week

Respondents painted a picture of an industry that has become increasingly demanding of its workforce. “We are married business partners that haven’t taken a week off publishing the paper in 10 years. I’m tired and a little burned out,” we were told by one survey participant. “There is no ‘locum’ or temp agency that can do what we do.”

While 47 per cent of respondents said the number of stories they produce is the same compared to two years ago, 37 per cent said their output has increased (Figure 8). “Community journalists are overworked and underpaid,” one survey participant told us. “They are expected to do everything. I personally write copy for a 32-page paper on a weekly basis, usually writing 15-20 stories a week. Because of the time constraints, community journalists have very little time to do more in-depth reporting that could be more important and relevant to residents.”

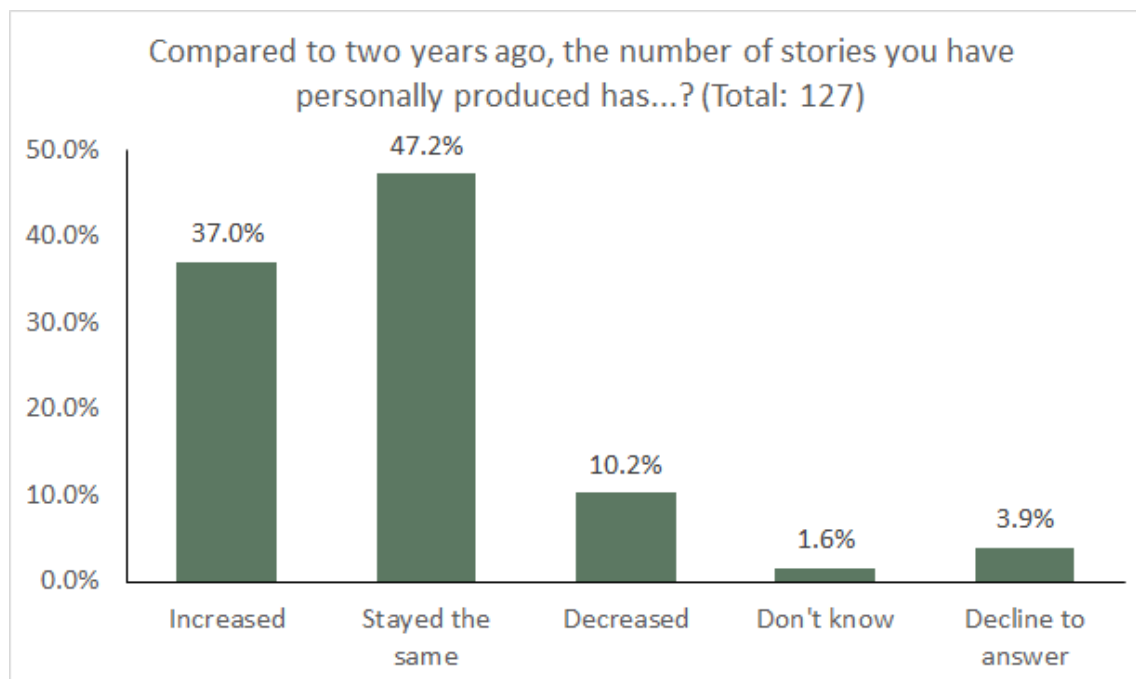


Figure 8. Changes in story output compared to two years ago

Forty per cent of respondents said that on average they are on the job more than 50 hours per week; another 49 per cent said they work 40 to 49 hours per week (Figure 9). About one third said they are working longer hours compared to two years ago (Figure 10). The added work associated with feeding the digital beast is part of the problem, we were told. Companies “make decisions that affect newsroom

workloads without recognizing that they do so,” one respondent said. “A new website needs ‘fresh content,’ for example, but for a weekly newspaper reporter that is more work and responsibility. Managing Facebook and other social media engagement is also a responsibility that does not get considered by those making decisions.”

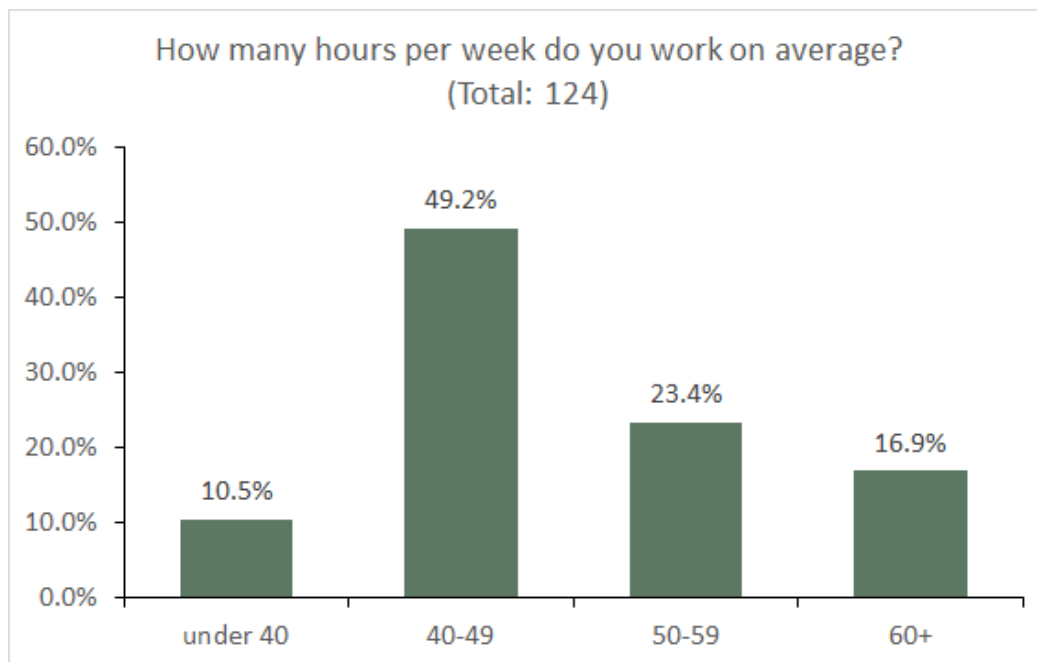


Figure 9. Average working hours

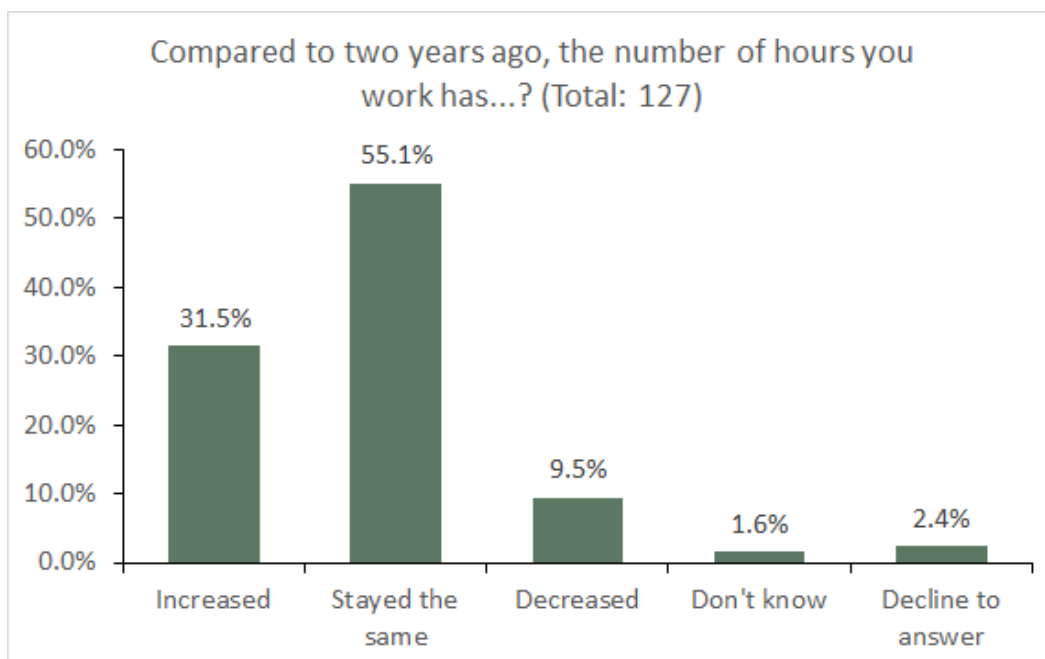


Figure 10. Changes in working hours compared to two years ago

Cuts to newsroom personnel—57 per cent of respondents reported that there were fewer editorial employees at their newspapers compared to two years ago—have also meant more work for the survivors. Complaints about workload and smaller newsrooms were in many cases linked to palpable

concerns about the quality of the newspapers being produced. “It’s harder and harder to put out a quality product when staff cuts keep coming,” one respondent said. Another told us there is a “new generation of reporters who are overworked, underpaid, often so rushed they make mistakes.” Meanwhile, one survey participant told us, companies “claim they’re interested in content but make business decisions based solely on money and numbers.”

One respondent described what the inability to retain experienced reporters means to a small newsroom:

“Many community newsrooms no longer have the veterans who have seen it all and done it all in the community. What happens when a mayor starts talking about an event from five years ago and not even your editor knows what the event was? You have to research and fact check what this was, but when a staff doesn’t even have people from five years ago it’s a problem.”

# Digital Transformation

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## Key findings:

- Facebook was the most popular social media network among respondents for work and also for personal use
- While nearly half of survey participants said they produce video reports, the other half said they did not use any of the specific emerging tech tools (augmented reality, virtual reality (AR/VR), and chat apps) that we asked about in the survey
- Uptake for most digital tools was substantially higher among respondents who worked at chain-owned newspapers and at larger circulation newspapers
- Respondents wanted to know more about video reporting, live video, and podcasts, but were less interested in other emerging formats
- The majority of respondents learned about new technology/tools through online articles and by training themselves

One of the few studies done on digital adaptation at smaller Canadian newspapers raised concerns about the slow pace of change at community (weekly) newspapers in small-town and rural Canada. Even as older, less tech-savvy readers are being outnumbered by people who are more comfortable accessing online content, the study found that publications were slow to reorient from print-first to web-first news production (Nagel, 2015). That survey was conducted in 2011. Seven years later, our survey results show, much has changed.

A majority of respondents reported using some form of metrics to measure audience engagement (see the [Building Audience and Engaging Community](#) section for a more detailed discussion), which suggests an openness to using digital tools for purposes beyond disseminating news stories. It also points to a growing sophistication about the use of digital tools that goes beyond likes, shares and follows.

The survey results also point to a willingness to embrace digital tools: About three quarters of survey respondents said they now spend more time on digital-related output than they did two years ago (Figure 11). More than half of respondents (54 per cent) said they split their working time between their print and digital product.

“It’s not just about releasing a paper one or two times a week,” one survey participant said when asked about opportunities for small-market newspapers. “Papers can have a website where they post breaking stories, with a promise for more information in the next edition. They can use their talents to post videos, photo albums and podcasts.”

Most survey respondents in our sample also embraced some aspect of digital by incorporating major social media platforms into their work. “Social media reach,” as one respondent put it, “provides great advertising for a newspaper company as being the best source of reliable news for a community.”

Facebook remains the most popular platform for personal and professional use with 74 per cent of respondents reporting that they actively post to their organizations’ Facebook account. Twitter is the second most popular for personal and professional reasons, with 57 per cent of respondents actively using their organization’s Twitter account. Nearly 17 per cent of respondents said they used their



organization's YouTube account, and 15 per cent reported using their organization's Instagram and Slack accounts (Figure 12).

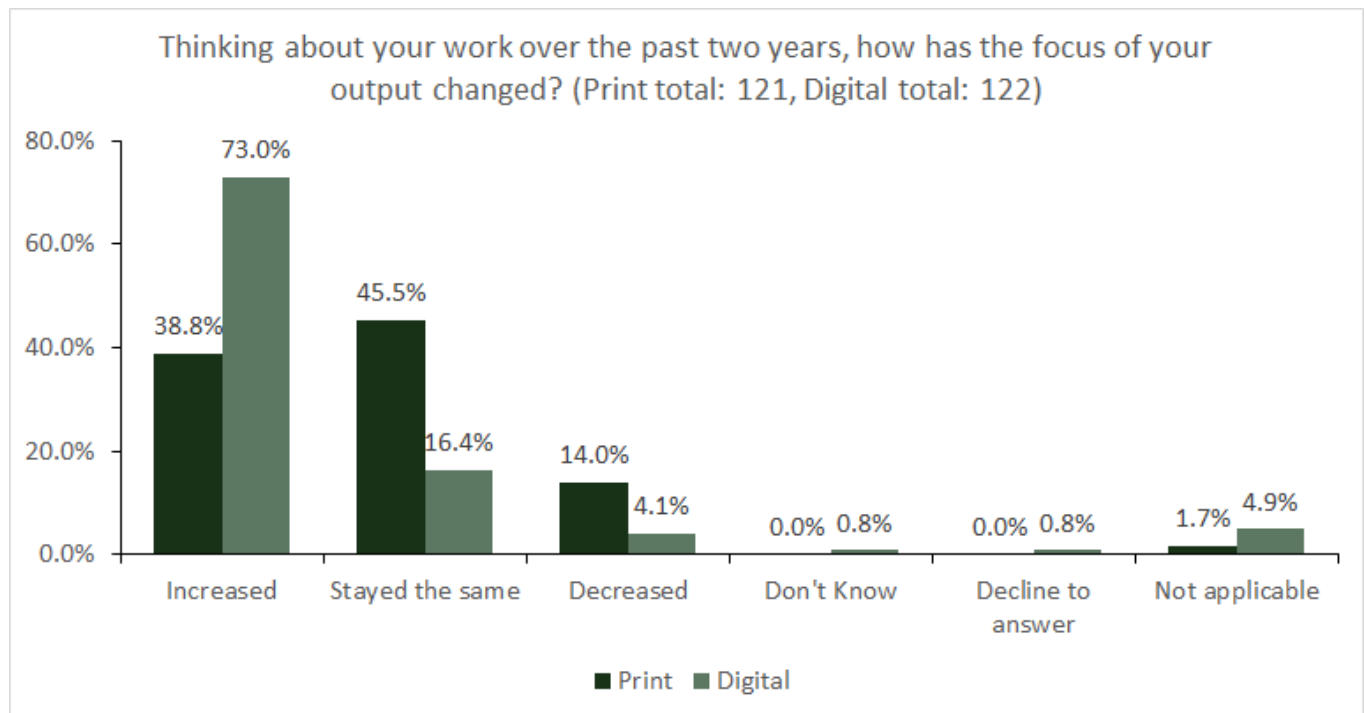


Figure 11. Changes in print and digital output compared to two years ago

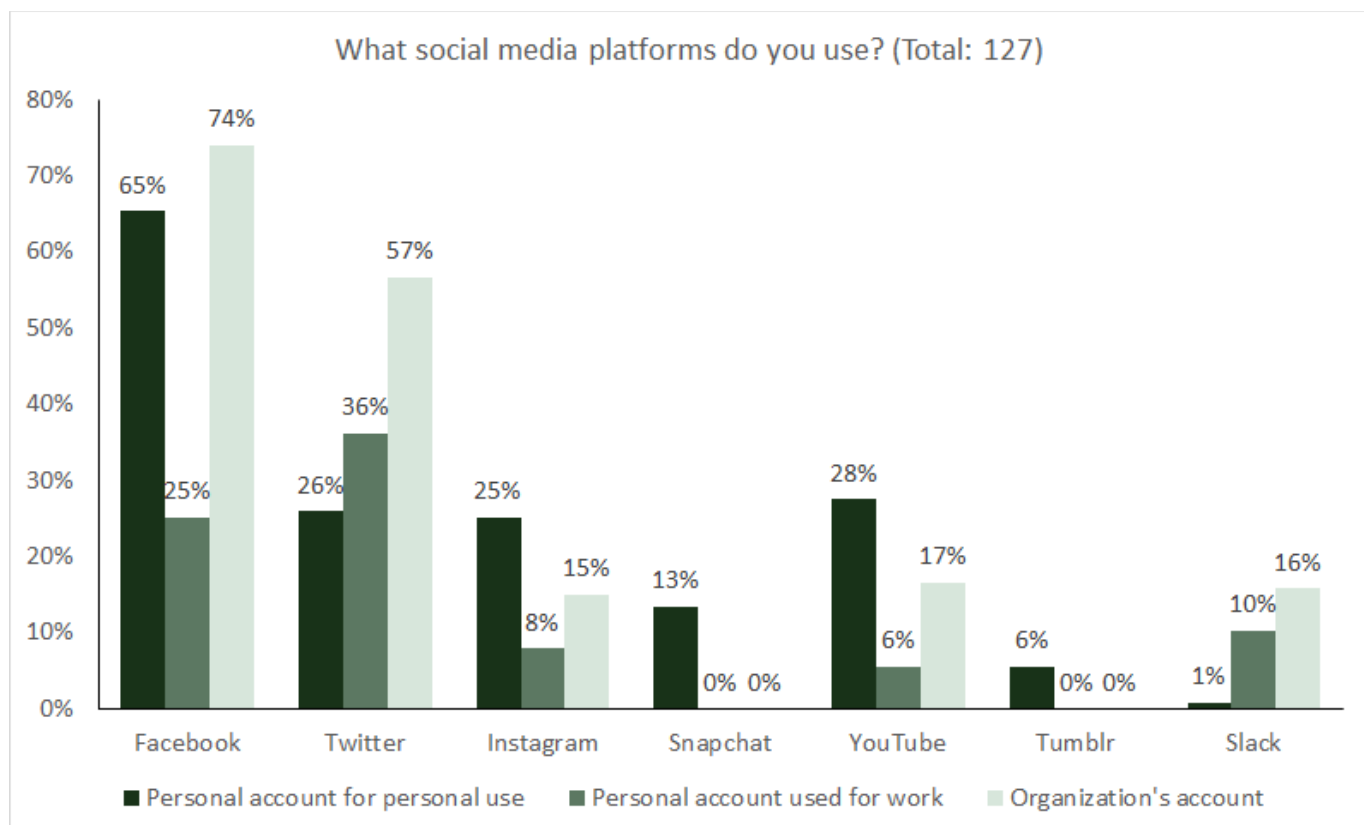


Figure 12. Use of social media platforms

## Emerging technology and reporting

On the reporting front, 46 per cent of respondents reported using video in their newsroom, and 31 per cent reported using live video such as Facebook Live (Figure 13). The fact that video has been embraced over other technology is reflective of Canadian audiences' evolving news consumption habits: 58 per cent of Canadians said they accessed a news video within the previous week, according to an online questionnaire conducted in February of 2018 by the internationally-based data company YouGov ([Newman et al., 2018](#)).

The reality, however, is that nearly half (47 per cent) of respondents said that they did not use any of the emerging technology we listed (Figure 13). We heard from survey participants who suggested there may still be lingering resistance to the new digital reality: "There are those who embrace (change) and adapt and those that refuse," one respondent wrote. "And that has a significant effect on morale in a newsroom when you have those who are keen to engage being crushed by the sticks-in-the-mud that hate social media/digital."

The resistance to video may also be strategic: most videos are consumed outside of the news publisher's platform, and are instead typically viewed on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube ([Newman et al., 2018](#)). Moreover, streaming video content requires fast internet connections, and slower connections in more rural areas may temper audience and publisher interest in video formats ([Radcliffe, Ali & Donald, 2017](#)).

There was limited use of podcasts (10 per cent) and chat apps (4 per cent), and no reported use of augmented or virtual reality (Figure 13). One respondent explained the reluctance to embrace these more advanced digital tools like this: "We don't need the fanciest or newest technologies to tell a good story. Community newspaper reporters are driven and can do a lot with very little. We need to double down on what the community wants to read and see - engaging photos, interesting and informative stories, and occasional videos."

Ownership, meanwhile, is clearly associated with the willingness or ability of small-market newspapers in Canada to embrace almost all categories of digital tools: The uptake for most tools is substantially higher among respondents who said they worked at chain-owned newspapers (Figure 14). This is consistent with European findings ([Jenkins & Nielsen, 2018](#)) and the results of U.S. research that found that while family-owned newspapers exhibit a commitment to place and their local roots, "they tend to be the newspapers with the weakest digital uptake. In contrast, chain ownership brings digital resources, but loses local autonomy" (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018, p. 8).

Larger circulation publications were also much more likely to use digital tools for reporting. Among newspapers with a print circulation below 5,000, 63 per cent used none of the tools on our list (Figure 15).

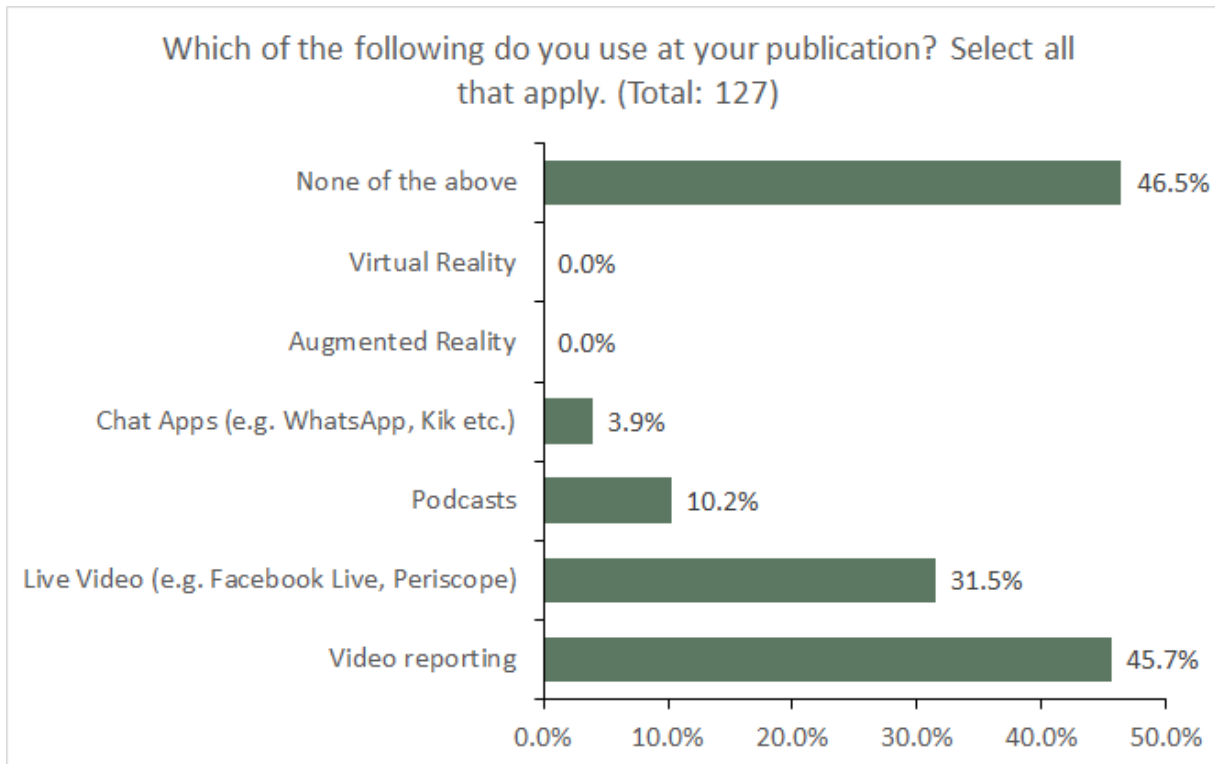


Figure 13. Use of reporting technology

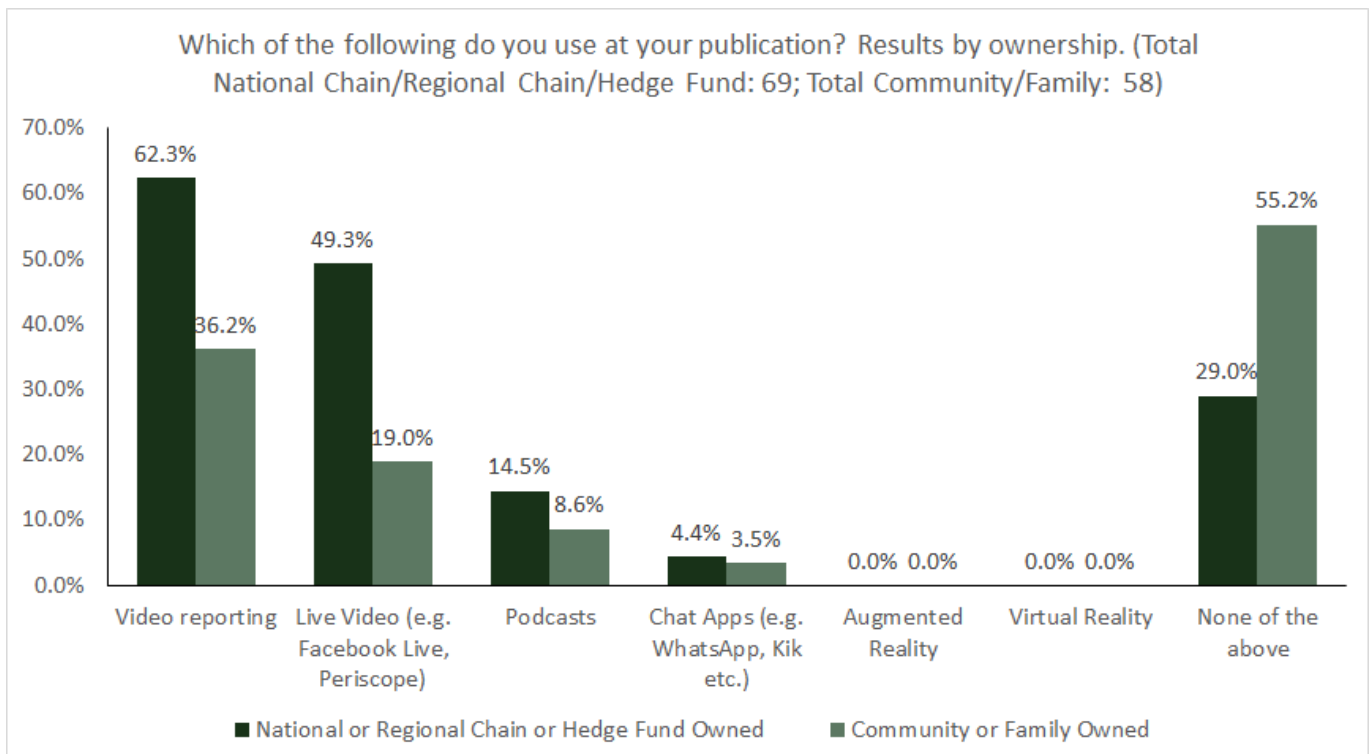


Figure 14. Use of reporting technology by type of ownership

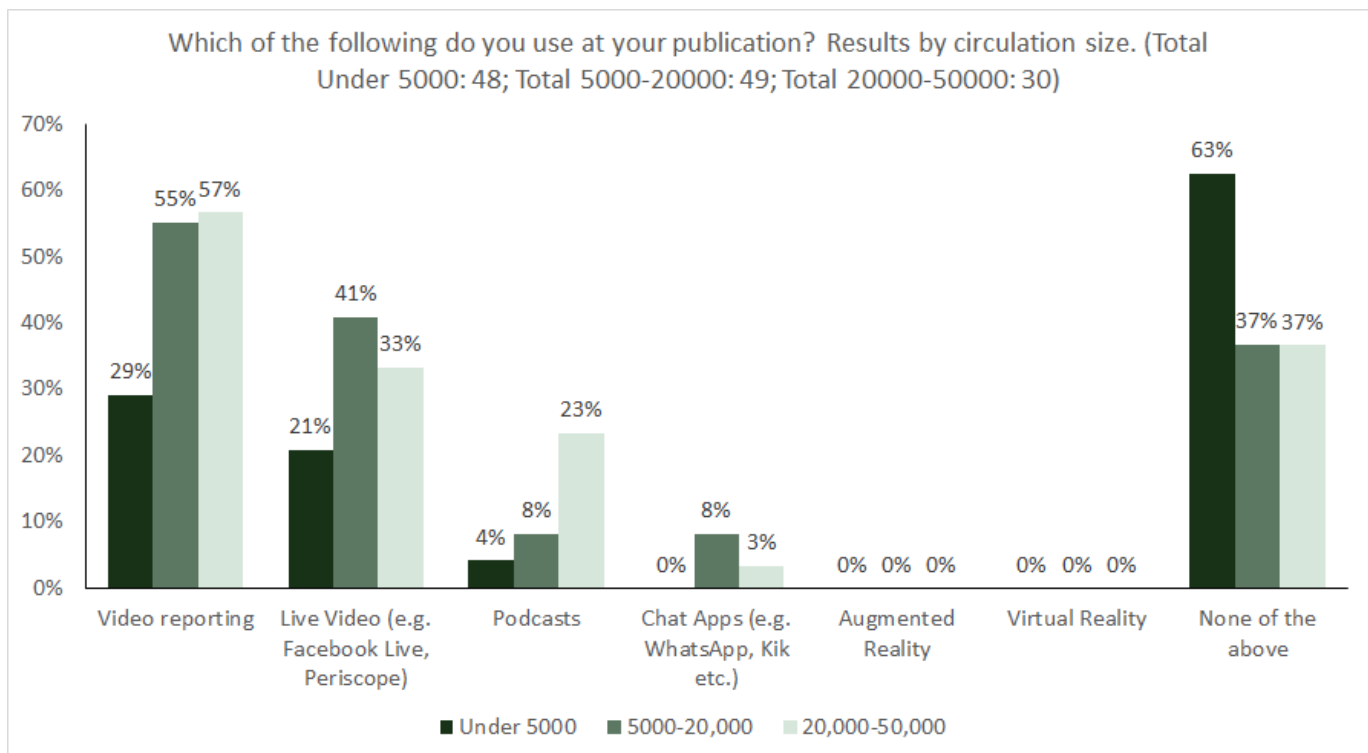


Figure 15. Use of reporting technology by circulation size

Nearly half of respondents expressed significant interest in learning about video (50 per cent) and live video (52 per cent). And while only a small minority of respondents said they used podcasting in their newsroom, more than one third (39 per cent) expressed interest in learning about the format (Table 7). This likely reflects the growing popularity of podcasts and the audio format's ability to attract younger audiences ([Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy & Nielsen, 2018](#)). Having said that, slightly more respondents (43 per cent) indicated that they were not interested in learning about podcasting, which may speak to the high cost in terms of time and money associated with producing quality podcast products and the tough competition for listeners and advertisers that new podcasts face when entering the market ([Beard, 2018](#)).

Table 7. How interested are you in learning about these emerging technologies? (1 = not interested; 5 = very interested)

	1	2	3	4	5	# of Respondents
<b>Video reporting</b>	21.0%	9.2%	19.3%	23.5%	26.9%	119
<b>Live video</b>	18.6%	8.5%	21.2%	27.1%	24.6%	118
<b>Podcasts</b>	28.6%	14.3%	17.7%	21.0%	18.5%	119
<b>Chat apps</b>	52.7%	23.6%	10.0%	8.2%	5.5%	110
<b>Augmented reality</b>	56.8%	13.5%	12.6%	11.7%	5.4%	111
<b>Virtual reality</b>	55.8%	15.0%	13.3%	11.5%	4.4%	113

Source: [Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#).

Beyond podcasting and video formats, respondents were less interested in learning about other emerging technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality (Table 7). This likely reflects how little these technologies are employed even in larger newsrooms.

It is conceivable that the ways in which respondents learn about new technology may impact their levels of interest in learning about it. The vast majority of respondents (86 per cent) said they were “self-taught,” and 64 per cent said they learned about emerging technology through articles, such as those published on Nieman Lab, Poynter, Mediashift or J-Source. In contrast, more formal methods of learning were less prevalent. Less than one third said that they learned about emerging technology by attending conferences, and only 20 per cent indicated that they enrolled in a training course paid for by their employers (Figure 16).

Employers’ lack of investment in training and professional development was noted by respondents. “Lack of mentors/training for reporters,” “learning and keeping up with technology” and “lack of investment by companies into newsroom resources - either technologically, training or staffing” were cited when we asked about challenges facing small-market newspapers. One respondent noted that the hollowing out of newsrooms means it’s even difficult to learn through observation, noting that “as a new journalist starting out in a small market under a young editor, I have found it difficult to learn from existing reporters because there are very few to fall back on in my coverage area.”

Given the fact that most respondents learned about new technology related to their industry through their own initiatives, a larger discussion on learning opportunities in the newsroom is warranted to further explore the role that investment in training plays in digital uptake.

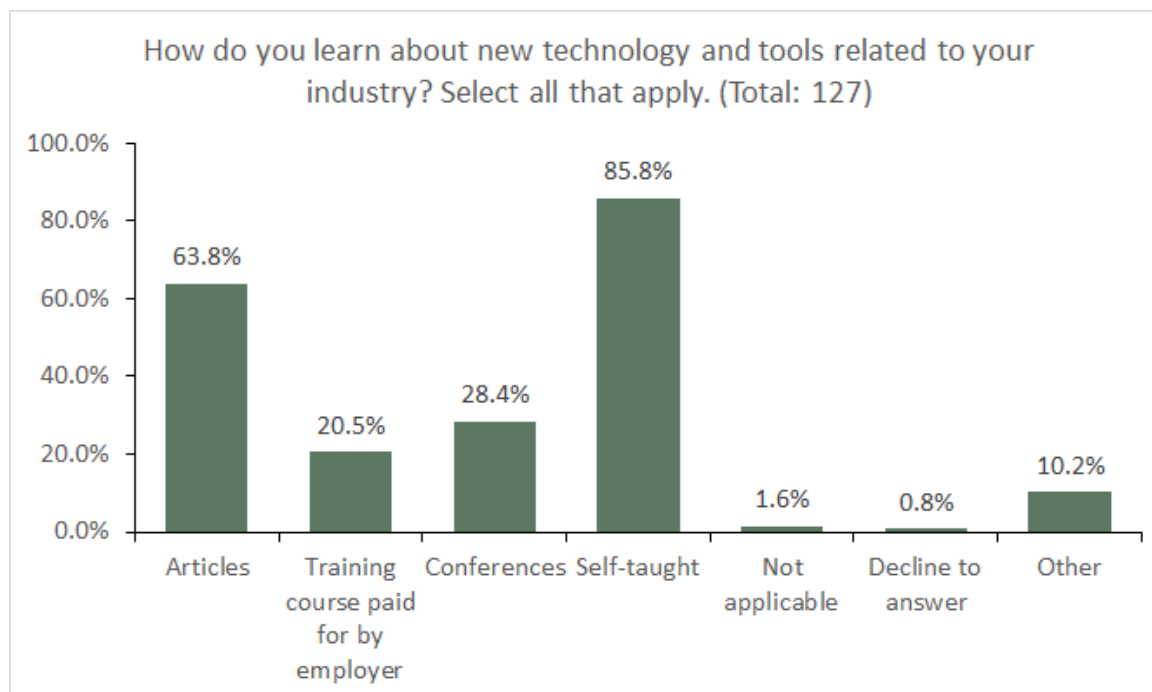


Figure 16. New technology training

## Ethics awareness and training

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### Key findings:

- Most respondents said they learn about journalism ethics and best practices on the job, from fellow journalists and published articles
- Only about 15 per cent of respondents said they obtained ethics training from resource guides and ethics training courses paid for by employers
- The majority said they considered journalism best practices and ethics when posting to both their personal and organization's social media accounts
- Nearly half of respondents said they learned about ethics and best practices from post-secondary programs or courses

Journalism standards and ethics provide reporters and editors with guiding principles on what constitutes proper professional conduct. Although several scholars have expounded on the theoretical implications and limitations of the study of journalism ethics (Ward, 2010, 2013, 2015; McBride & Rosentiel, 2014), for the purposes of this study, ethics are considered chiefly as a professional, applied enterprise (Black, Steele & Barney, 1999).

### Got a beef with your local paper? Take your complaint to the National NewsMedia Council

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The [National NewsMedia Council](#) was established in 2015 with two main aims: to serve as a forum for complaints against its members and to promote ethical practices within the news media industry. The council deals with matters concerning fairness of coverage, relevance, balance and accuracy of news and opinion reporting.

At present, the NNC is composed of more than 600 member news organizations ranging from small community newspapers to large dailies and digital-only news organizations.

[The council is comprised of 17 directors](#) - nine selected as members representing the public and eight representing news organizations that are part of the NNC. The Council's chair is always a public director.

In Canada, the framework of applied journalism ethics has been constructed, and continues to evolve, in conjunction with the work of several national organizations. In English Canada, specifically, this cascading system of practical standards is rooted in a confluence of documents including the [Canadian Association of Journalists ethics guidelines](#); the [Canadian Press Style Guide](#); the [Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Code of Ethics](#); and the [Radio Television Digital News Association's Code of Journalistic Ethics](#).

The survey results provide insight into what Foreman (2015) refers to as 'ethics awareness.' As Figure 17 shows, 54 per cent of survey respondents consider themselves to be 'extremely comfortable' with their knowledge of journalism ethics, while another 37 per cent consider themselves to be 'somewhat comfortable' with their level of ethical expertise.

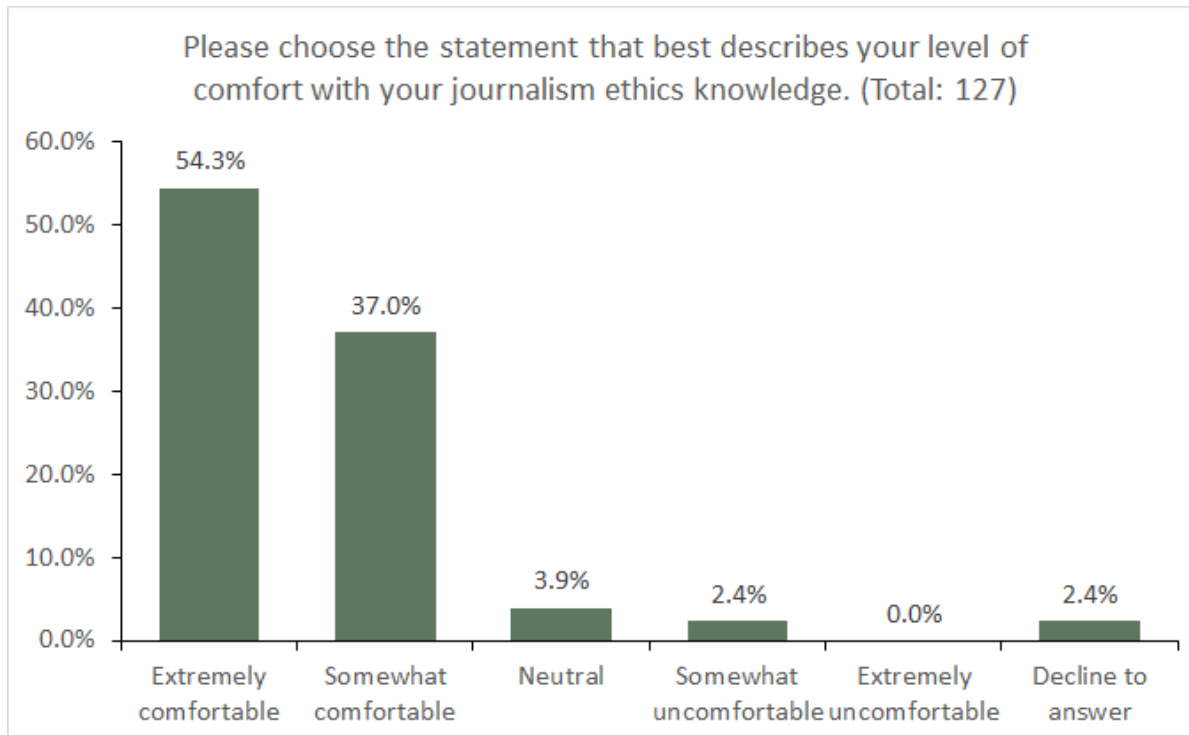


Figure 17. Knowledge of journalism ethics

The majority of respondents also said they considered journalism best practices and ethics when posting to both their personal (59 per cent) and their organization's (84 per cent) social media accounts (Figure 18).

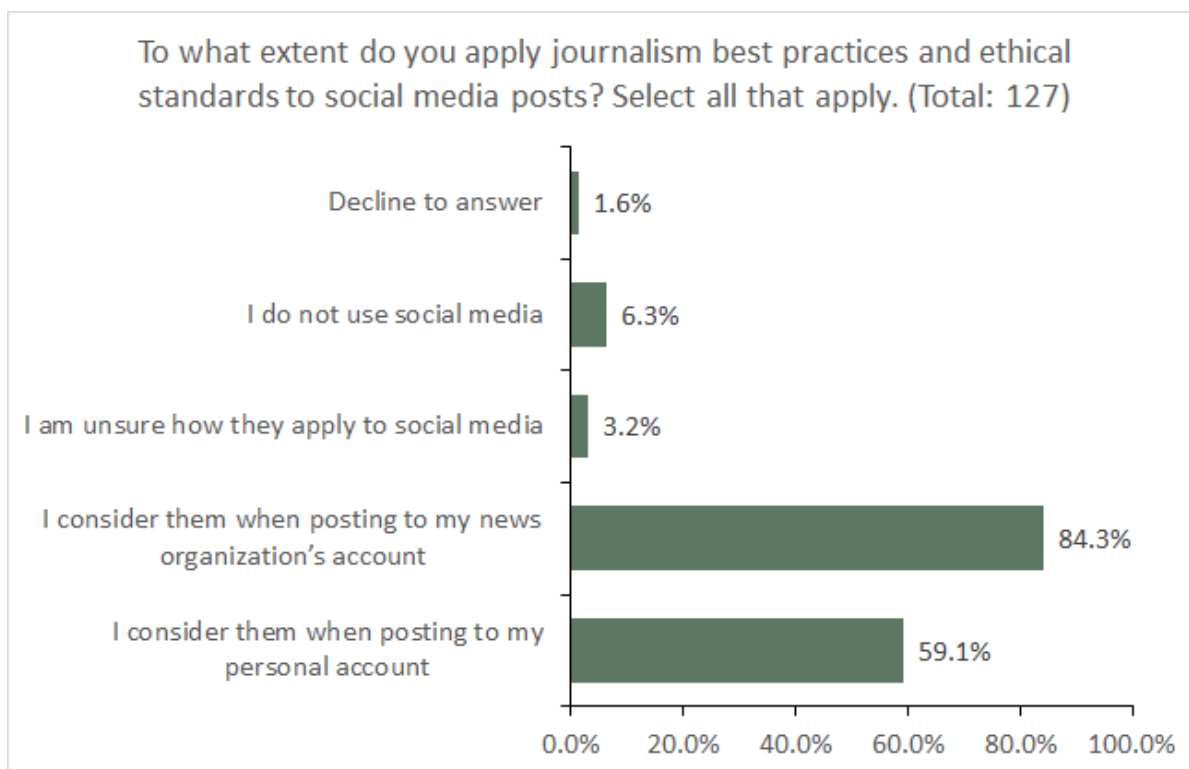


Figure 18. Use of journalism best practices and ethics

On the surface, these results are encouraging. At a time when many news organizations and industry groups are launching trust-building efforts and transparency projects, they underscore that journalists and news organizations are striving for a method of reporting that is transparent, independent and committed to the production of verified, timely, and relevant information. The adherence to shared standards of practice, moreover, helps to nurture the idea of a professional identity among journalists.

A closer look at the data, however, highlights some shortcomings. Respondents at larger newspapers, for instance, tend to be more at ease with media ethics: 73 per cent of respondents at publications with circulation in the 20,000 to 50,000 range said they were “extremely comfortable” with their ethics knowledge. By comparison, only 46 per cent of respondents at the smallest circulation newspapers (below 5,000) categorized themselves as extremely comfortable with their knowledge level (Figure 19).

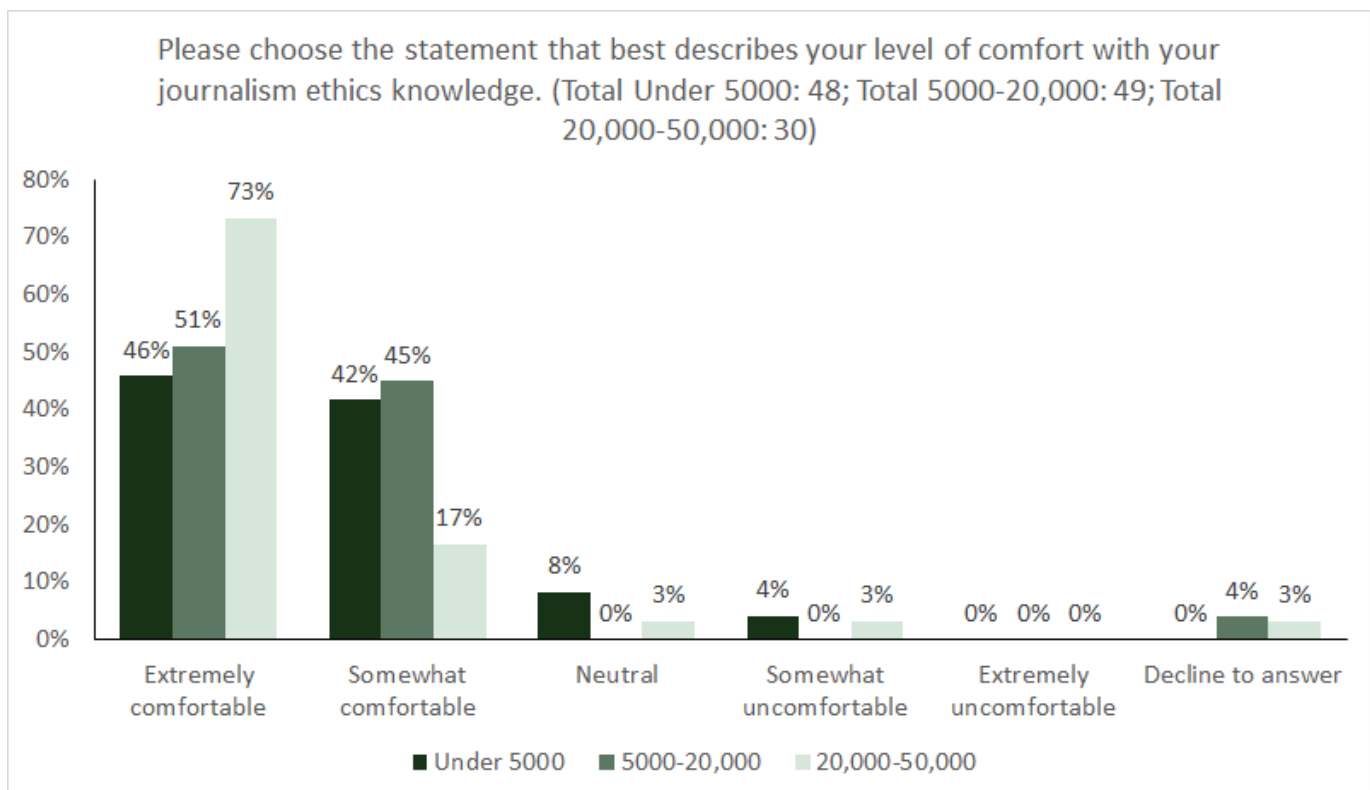


Figure 19. Knowledge of journalism ethics by circulation size

The survey data also suggest employers themselves aren’t investing substantially in ethics training or the development of in-house ethics guides: Just 17 per cent of respondents said they learned from guides provided by their employer and only 16 per cent said they learned from a course paid for by their newspapers (Figure 20). Thirty-one per cent said they learned about journalism ethics and best practices by attending conferences.

Indeed, the data suggest that when it comes to keeping abreast of emerging ethics-related issues, respondents were largely on their own. As Figure 20 shows, 84 per cent of survey respondents said they learn about journalism ethics and best practices from ‘on the job’ experience. Seventy-three per cent also reported learning about ethics, standards and best practices from fellow journalists while 59 per cent reported learning from articles published by [J-Source](#), [MediaShift](#), and the [Nieman Lab](#), amongst others.



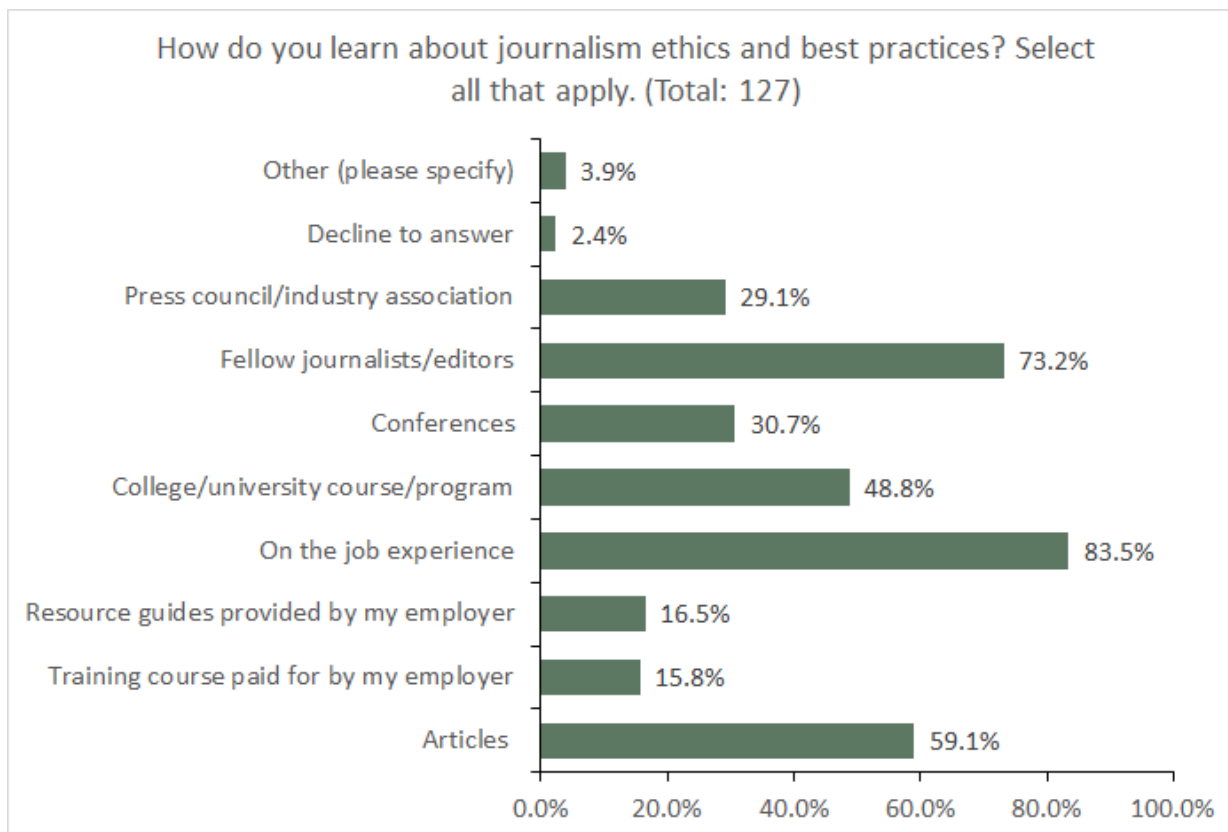


Figure 20. Journalism ethics training

Given that smaller publications may be vulnerable to pressure from large advertisers seeking to influence news coverage, and given the evolution of best practices with respect to reporting effectively on issues such as mental health, suicide, and Indigenous communities, further research exploring the relationship between access to professional development and how it shapes news agendas and reporting would be worthwhile.

The paucity of employer-supported ethics training also highlights the importance of the foundational ethics education offered at post-secondary institutions in Canada: Nearly half of survey respondents (49 per cent) reported they learned about journalism ethics and best practices from courses or programs offered at college or university. Given that nearly half of our respondents relied at least in part upon their post-secondary ethics training to navigate an increasingly complex world, research documenting what is being taught at journalism schools and best practices for teaching in this subject area would be of value. Do courses simply review different codes of practice or do they employ case studies that explore competing interests? Moreover, how are journalism ethical issues framed and presented in courses with respect to the evolving frontiers in data journalism, the use of artificial intelligence, algorithmic transparency, or the practice of de-indexing? Broadly speaking, being able to better understand what journalists consider an 'ethical issue' will help educators, industry groups, and other key stakeholders to address the need and demand for new educational resources in the future.

## Building audience and engaging community

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### Key findings:

- More than three-quarters of respondents work in newsrooms that use some sort of metrics tools/software to measure audience engagement
- More than one third said their publications had launched an editorial campaign on an issue that is important to their community
- Almost all publications represented in the survey had published articles written by community members
- Nearly one third of respondents said their publications had hosted events related to an issue affecting the communities they serve
- While some respondents were skeptical about the term ‘engagement’ and dismissed it as little more than a buzzword, many others saw it as a way to foster conversations with readers and play an active role in local debates

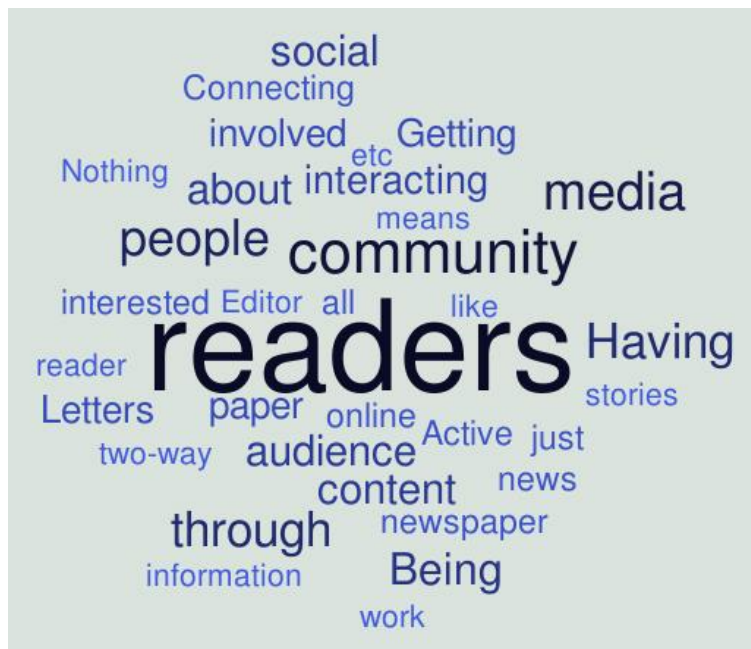


Figure 21. Words mentioned five or more times to describe engagement

Developing relationships with readers—or audience engagement - is increasingly considered integral to building trust and diversifying revenue streams for local news outlets ([Hansen & Goligoski, 2018](#)). The majority of respondents (76 per cent) reported using social media metrics such as likes, shares, and follows to measure audience engagement with their stories. Respondents also reported using a number of other forms of metrics, which Neheli ([2018](#)) defines as “units of measurement that reflect a specific element of audience behavior.” For instance, 78 per cent used the number of unique website visitors, 68 per cent used the number of digital or print subscribers, and 67 per cent used some form of software, such as [Chartbeat](#), to measure audience engagement (Figure 22).

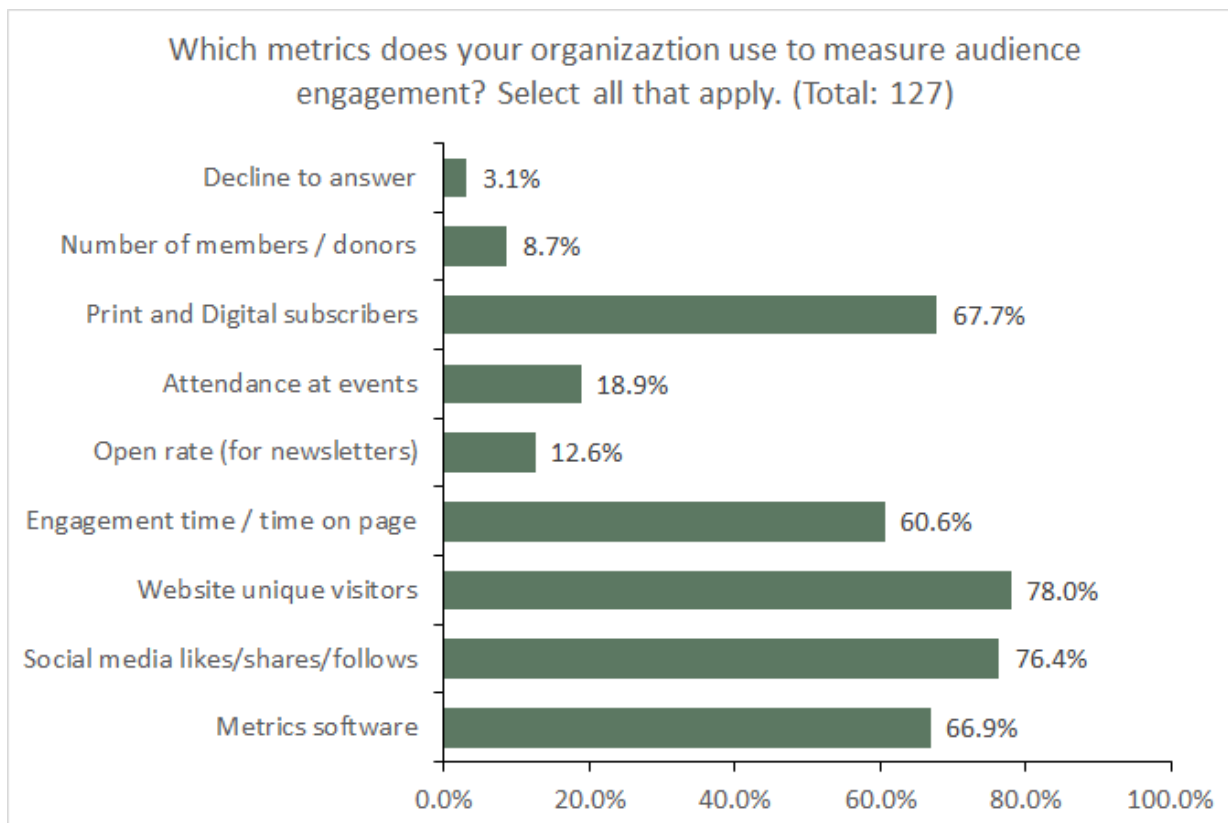


Figure 22. Use of metrics tools to measure audience engagement

The use of metrics, however, was much more common among larger (around 90 per cent) rather than smaller (60 per cent) publications (Figure 23). While the majority of respondents (63 per cent) said metrics influenced how they produced a story at least some of the time, nearly one third said they did not consider metrics at all when producing stories (Figure 24). This may have something to do with the availability - or lack thereof - of such metrics in smaller newsrooms. It might also reflect what scholars have identified as tensions in newsrooms about the use of metrics to shape what stories get told. There are, for instance, journalists who recognize how metrics can be useful in determining what stories to tell. Others, however, are concerned about relying upon what has been read in the past to shape stories produced in the future (Ali, Schmidt, Radcliffe & Donald, 2018; [Neheli, 2018](#)). One survey respondent, for instance, told us that “due to page view bench-marking, finding the time to write important stories that will not perform well online such as mental health, local council, board meetings” is a challenge.

To explore engagement strategies in more depth, we asked respondents what the term engagement meant to them (Figure 21). Some respondents had little use for the term – in one case it was dismissed as a “stupid buzzword for talking and listening to the public, or getting them to follow us on social media.” Others offered specific definitions such as “page views, also likes and shares,” “letters to the editor,” “they come to us for information, answers, promotion and advertising,” “clicks” and “people reading stories, whether in print or online.”

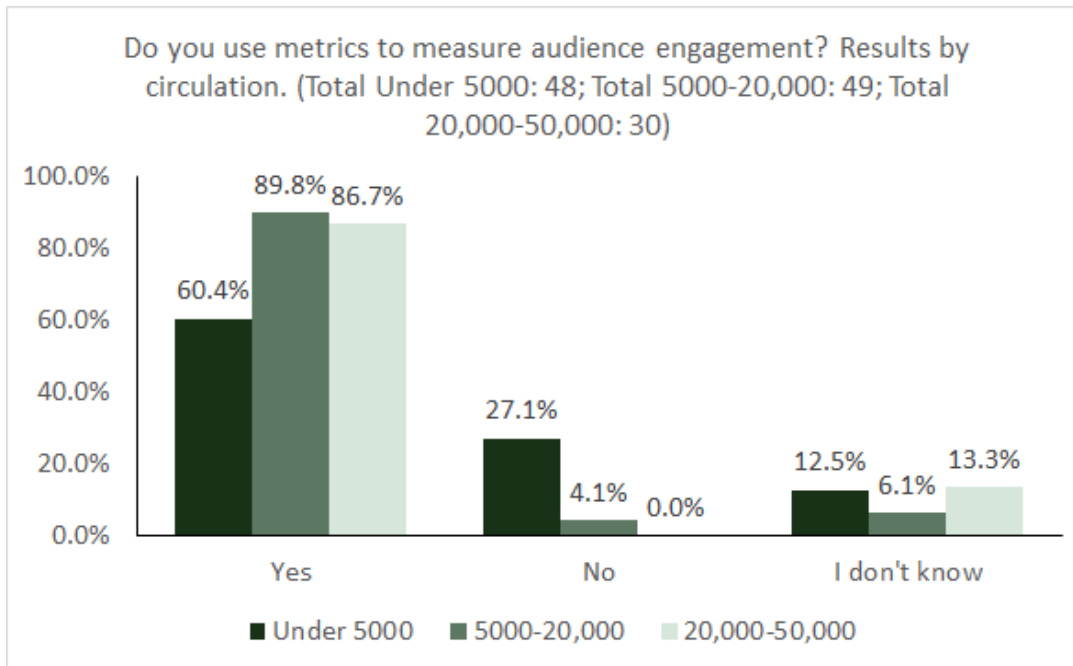


Figure 23. Use of metrics by circulation size

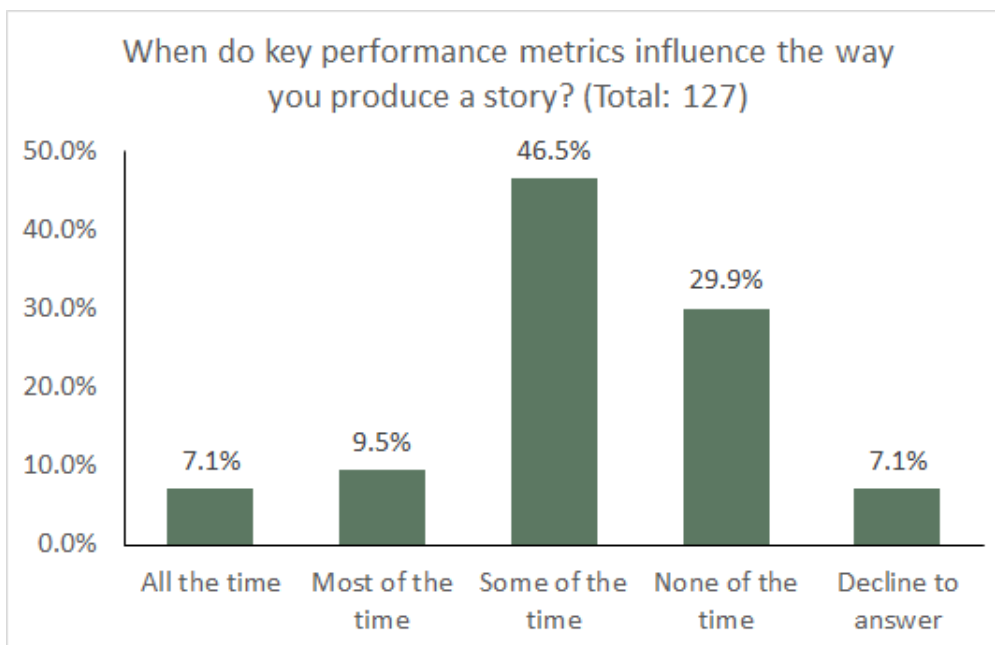


Figure 24. Influence of metrics on story production

A second group of respondents discussed engagement in terms of fostering real conversations with readers. It “is more than metrics from social media—it represents a bona fide relationship with readers whereby we're getting information and reactions from them as much as they're receiving news from us,” one respondent said. Another described engagement as “an active two-way conversation with our audience/readers. Can be in person, online through the comments section, real-time social media conversation... anything that helps readers feel like they are part of the story and not just being given information or told what to think. Help them take ownership of local media and feel like we care what they have to say, rather just looking at them like 'clicks' to sell to advertisers.” One respondent sounded

a cautionary note, defining engagement as “using social media to interact with readers” but also noted that his/her employer still has a way to go to achieve that goal: “I’d like to have more two-way interaction, but at my organization, social media is still being used to broadcast rather than have conversations with readers.”

Finally, a third group talked about engagement in terms of their newspapers’ role as an active participant in local debates. One respondent, for instance, defined engagement as “being involved in the community, not just reporting on what happens,” while another said it is about “being involved in the lives of our readers. Having readers involved in the paper.” Others saw their publication as engaging audiences by providing a public forum for the discussion of topics people considered important. Engagement is about “giving the community an outlet to express ideas and concerns. Demonstrating a unified voice for the town’s residents,” one person commented.

In terms of actual engagement strategies, almost all respondents said their publications print contributions from community members and 43 per cent said their newspapers had launched an editorial campaign on an issue important to people in their coverage area (Figure 25). Smaller publications seemed to be more active in this regard: 37 per cent of respondents from larger circulation newspapers (20,000 to 50,000 copies) said their publication had launched a campaign compared to about 45 per cent of papers with a circulation below 20,000 copies (Figure 26).

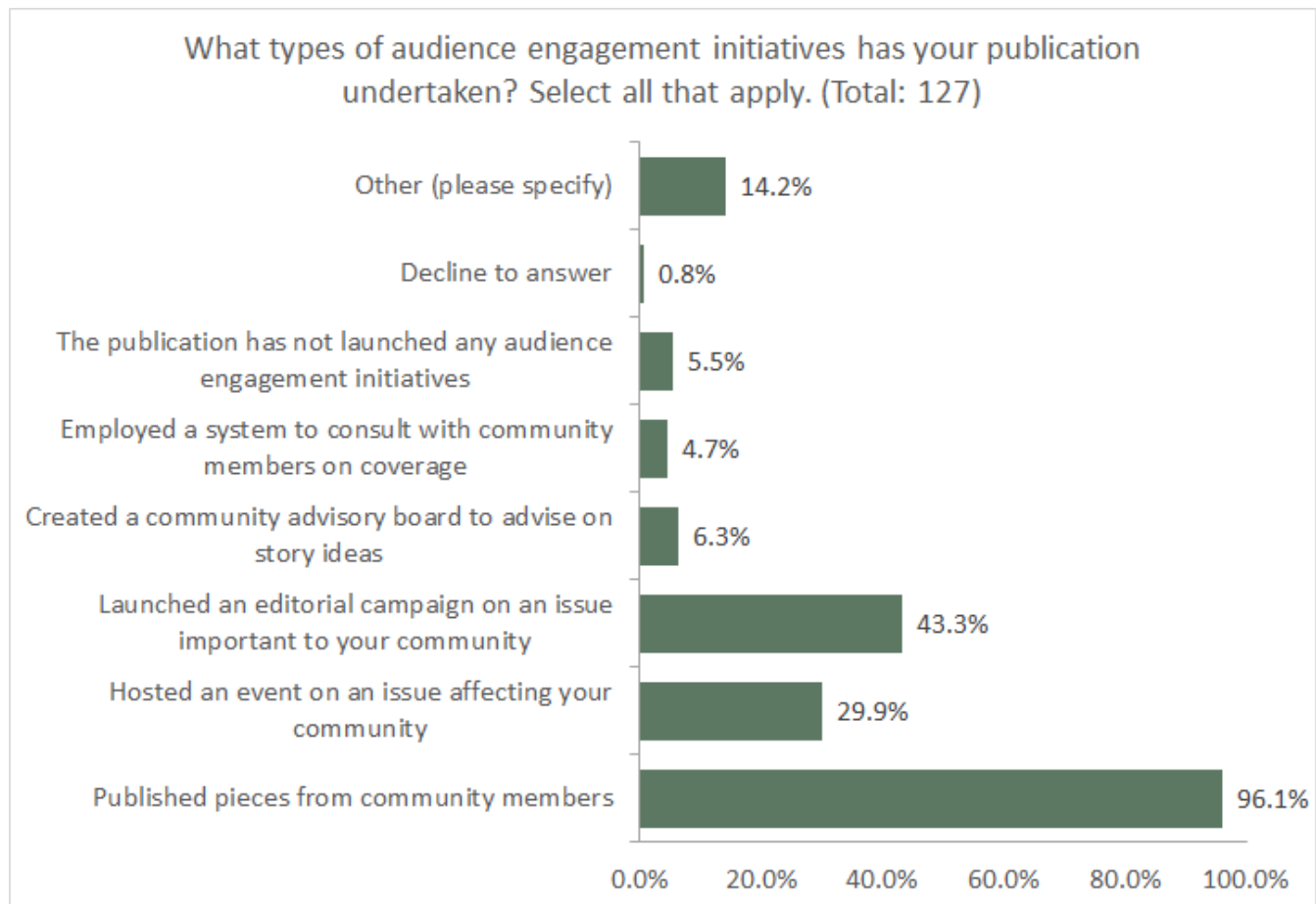


Figure 25. Types of engagement initiatives

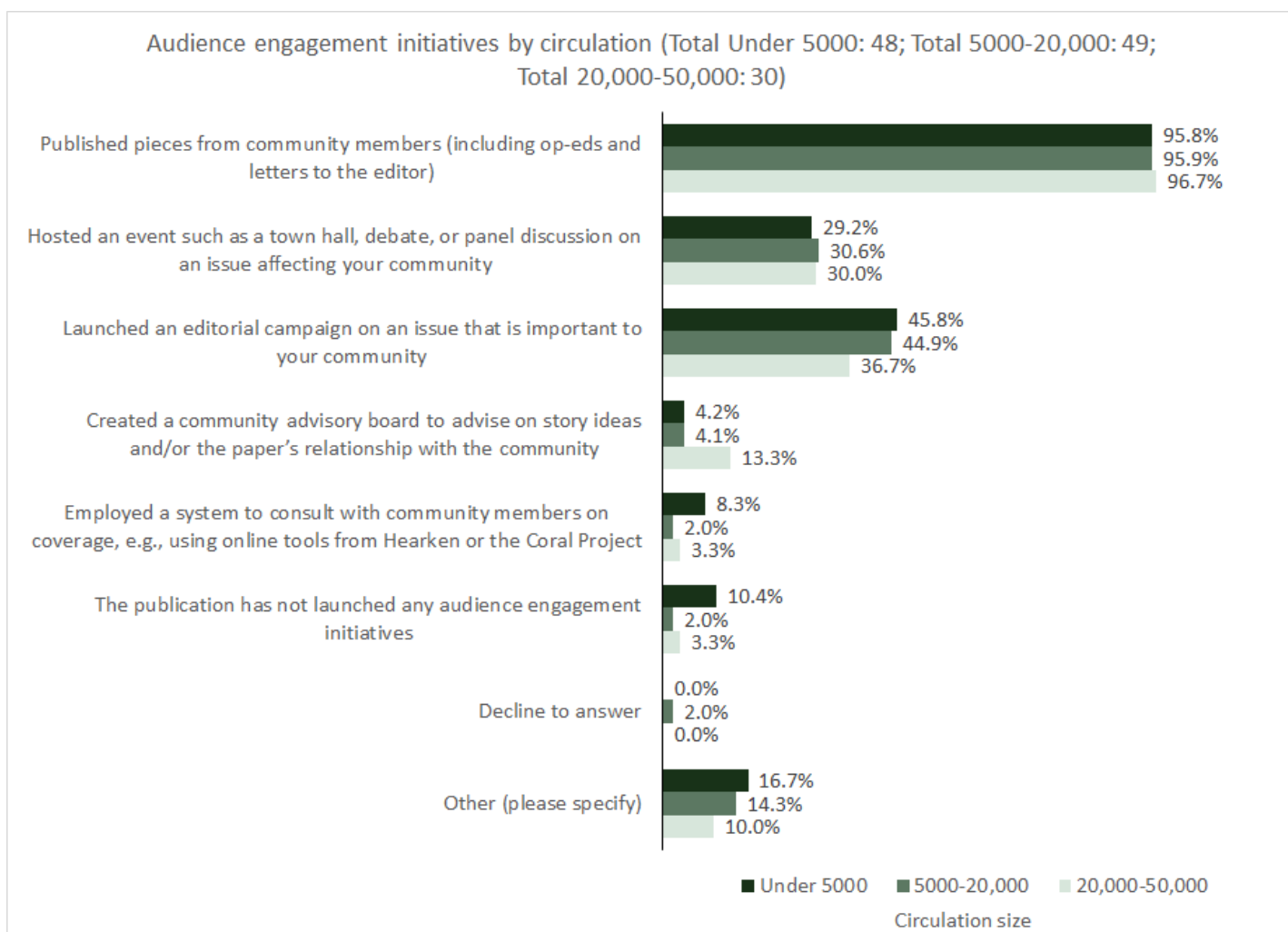


Figure 26. Types of engagement initiatives by circulation size

Only about one third of respondents said their publications had organized an event in the community they cover despite a growing body of evidence that suggests events are a way to connect with readers, collect feedback and generate news content for the publication. [Research from the U.S.-based Local News Lab](#), suggests events are also “a proven way to diversify a publisher’s revenue stream” ([Stearns, 2017, p. 1](#)) because advertisers and event sponsors see them as a guaranteed way to connect with a known pool of potential customers.

The limited uptake on events is partly a resource issue: Most respondents (81 per cent) worked for small newspapers with one to five newsroom staff, which suggests nobody has time to take on jobs beyond getting the paper out on time. Newspapers in small communities of just a few thousand people might also find it a challenge to attract audiences to multiple events over time.

## News reporting and relationship building: A two-way street

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Newsrooms in Canada and elsewhere are adopting and experimenting with strategies that build relationships with their audiences. Examples include:

- **free email newsletters:** Newsletters have emerged as a [potent form of communication](#) that puts news outlets in touch with loyal audience members (Breiner, 2018).
- **initiatives designed to attract younger readers:** One chain-owned Danish newspaper in a community of 15,000 [set out to attract younger readers](#) by working with a local teacher to develop curriculum for a seven-week journalism course in a local high school. More than 100 people subsequently attended a final event, sponsored by a local bank, to discuss proposed solutions to issues the students covered during their course (Lichterman, 2018).
- **story circles that build trust, identify community concerns, propose solutions and shape the news agenda:** In 2018, The Discourse, a Vancouver-based digital news outlet, held its [first story-circle in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough in the city's east end](#). Sixteen people showed up for a conversation with Discourse journalists about how the news organization could tap into a broader range of sources and better cover Scarborough stories in a way that challenges stereotypes and more accurately reflects what is happening in the community (Bhandari, 2018).

While events were not top of mind, some respondents volunteered specific information on other engagement activities. Here's what some of them told us they were doing to build relationships with their audiences.

## Engagement initiatives at newspapers with print circulation below 5,000

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- Sponsorship of community events, donation of prizes, staff members volunteering at events, and with community organizations.
- We have been interviewing local people who have had interesting lives or have done interesting things.
- Marketing opportunities ie: sidewalk sale.
- Developed a Web platform to facilitate flow of information between community organizations.
- Readers' survey conducted in 2017.
- On our most controversial issues, we have at times sought guest columns from those on both sides of the issue. We have also asked for comments via Facebook.
- I have elementary (school) students in a newspaper club writing articles for our paper as well as regular columns by knowledgeable community members and some who write for fun.
- We've done some work with local schools helping students get their stories published in our weekly paper.

### **Engagement initiatives at newspapers with print circulation between 5,000 and 20,000**

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- Solicit questions through social media to ask of interviewees; ask for story tips and feedback on coverage; have staff attend community functions and speak with people there.
- A few yearly print format contests.
- Hosts community events (i.e. Easter Egg Hunt) and supports community events (i.e. Summer Festival).
- Constant social media engagement.
- Created various features, including our Community Leaders Awards, where we ask readers to nominate individuals, based on their leadership in the community, within different categories.
- By creating a newspaper with local news, week in and week out.
- Inviting people to comment on articles.

### **Engagement initiatives at newspapers with print circulation between 20,000 and 50,000**

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- We do community projects every month, whether it's helping to hand out hotdogs at the firehall during the Halloween bonfire or talking to a high school writing class.
- Worked with other local media on an advisory council (which includes members of the public) on issues of discrimination and representation in the local media.
- Having reporters and editors go to community events to actively ask opinions on matters of public interest.



## The outlook

### Key findings:

- Nearly half of respondents said they feel very secure or slightly secure in their positions, while slightly more than one third said they feel slightly or very insecure
- Respondents were divided about the future of small-market newspapers—younger people were much less optimistic than older survey participants
- Respondents who self-identified as owners were overall more positive than negative about the outlook
- Respondents were concerned with increasing competition for advertisers and audiences from digital platforms and non-local news sources
- The perception that print is no longer relevant was identified as a significant hurdle that adds to the challenge of attracting readers, advertisers, and young journalists
- Attracting and retaining qualified, trained staff is a major challenge
- Maintaining a local focus and producing unique, local content were cited as the biggest opportunities/advantages for small-market newspapers
- Respondents said they are a trusted source of information in their communities and that this gives them a competitive advantage

Concerns about disruption in the newspaper sector were reflected in the survey results. About one third of respondents (35 per cent) said they feel slightly or very insecure in their positions while 46 per cent of respondents said they feel very secure or slightly secure (Figure 27).

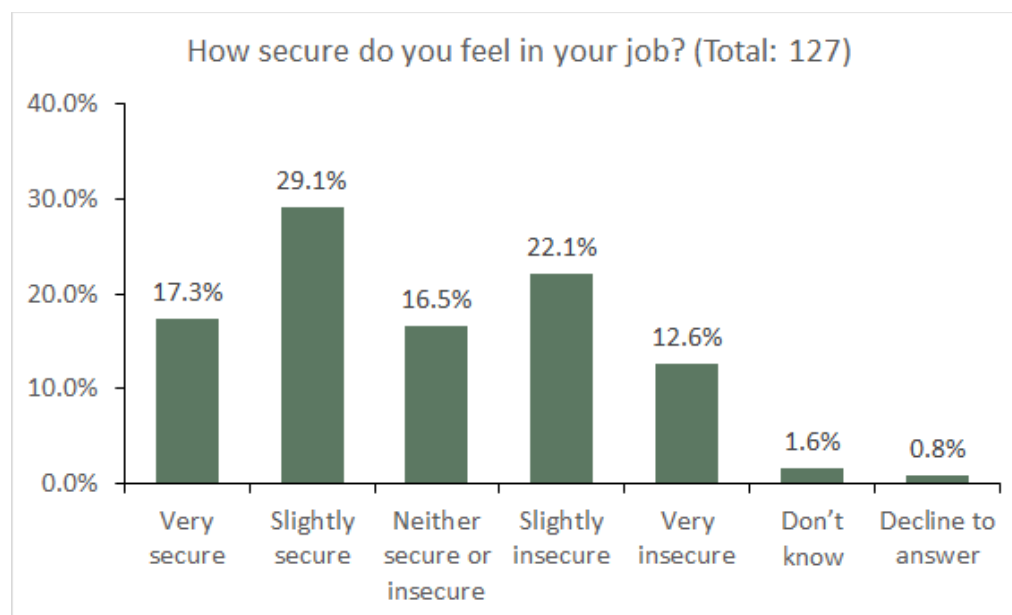


Figure 27. Job security

Respondents were also divided about the future of local newspapers: 50 per cent were “very positive” or “slightly positive” while 41 per cent said they were “slightly negative” or “very negative” (Figure 28).

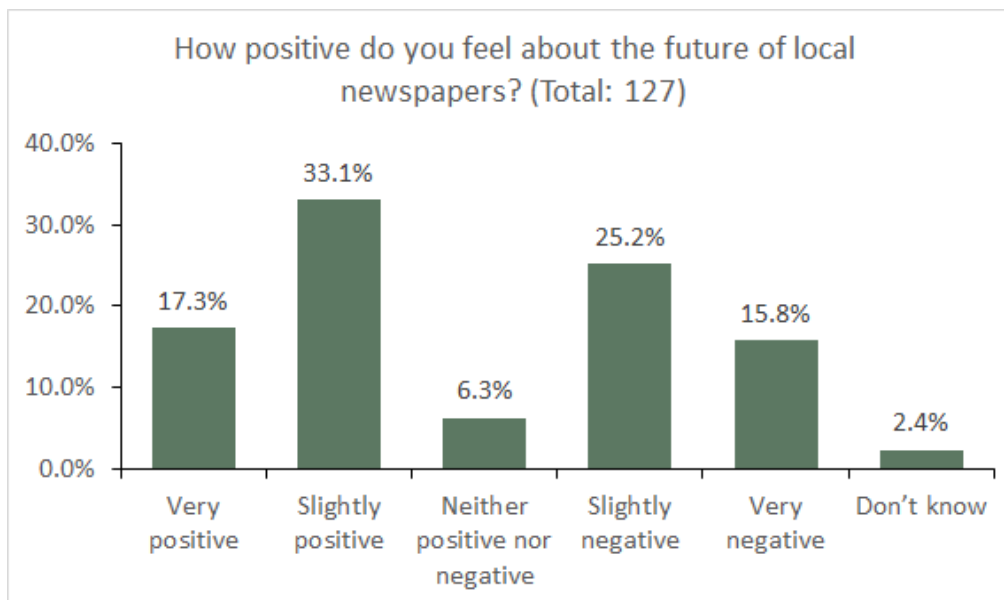


Figure 28. The future of local newspapers

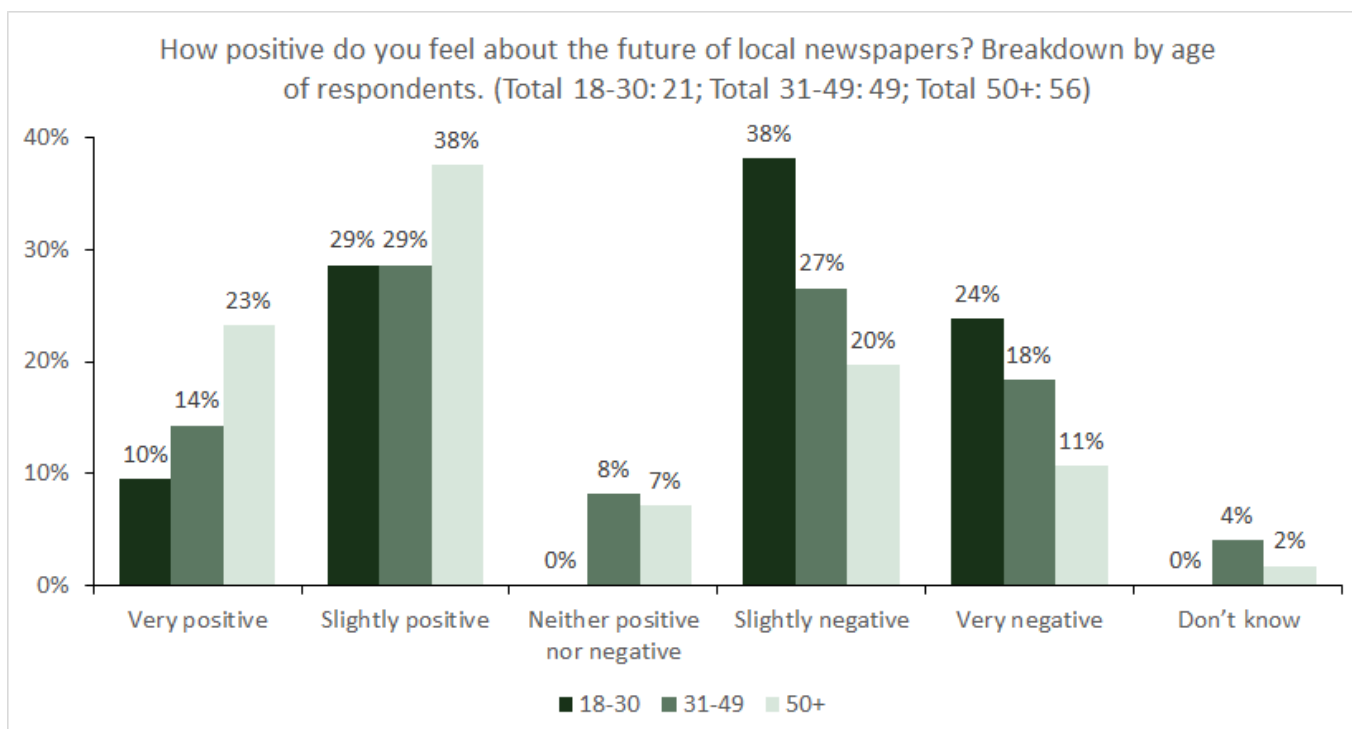
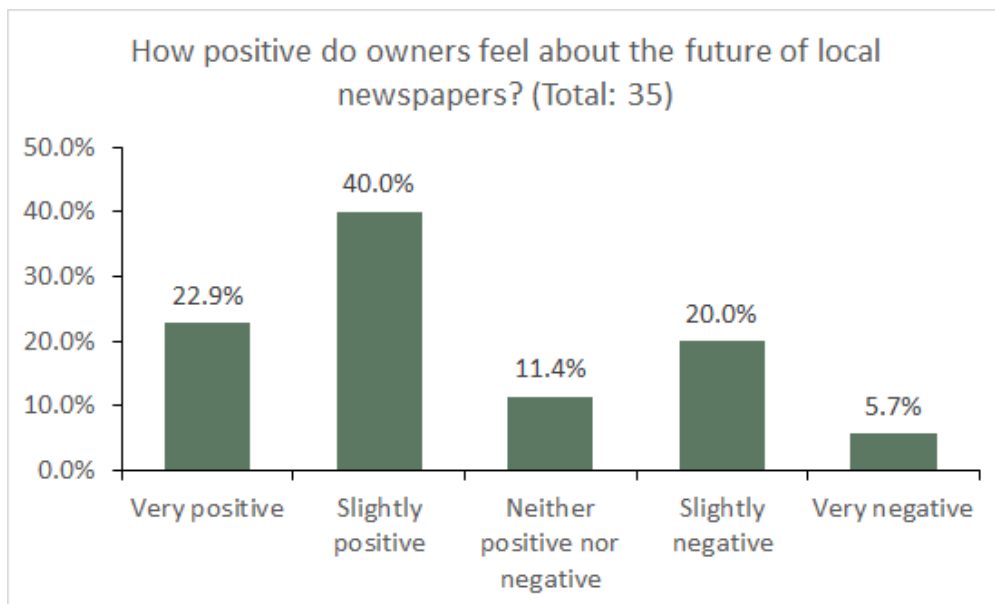


Figure 29. The future of local newspapers by age

Among respondents 50 years and older, 60 per cent were slightly or very positive, while a clear majority of younger respondents (18-30) were slightly or very negative about the future (61 per cent) (Figure 29). Respondents who identified as owners tended to more positive than negative about the future (Figure 30).



## Challenges

We asked survey participants to cite the challenges they face beyond time and money issues but many of their responses nonetheless were linked in some way to constraints in these two areas (Figure 31). A number of respondents, for instance, identified diminishing government advertising as an issue given that so much of it has been moved online. Others pointed to corrosive competition as problematic: “Cheapskating of resources by (a) competitor has undermined print in our region,” observed one respondent who was concerned that cost-saving initiatives by a competitor had paved the way for similar cuts at other publications.



The most widely cited concern we heard had to do with securing advertising revenue. Specific issues included “convincing advertisers we’re still relevant and helping them understand people who get our paper want it AND read it,” “advertisers splitting their marketing budget between so many mediums,” and the “misrepresentation of digital ad benefits.”

Respondents identified competing with Facebook and Google for ad revenue as a major difficulty. The two digital giants, one respondent said, “have swallowed the web and are not subject to the same taxes, cost structure and legal obligations of real news generators.”

Others pointed to the pressure that an increasingly digital world is putting on print publications. One respondent explained a recurring dilemma: “The decision (is) whether to be ‘first’ with the news, given this digital age and the speed of social media and online publishing, or to hold back and do a better job of reporting the story before posting or printing the article.”

Still others cited difficulties convincing audiences that local news matters especially when competing with nonlocal news sources. One respondent said, “The digital push in small communities is difficult because they're getting all of their information nationally and internationally somewhere else.” Being “as fast, as foolproof, as newsrooms that are 10 times our size,” was also cited as a challenge.

A small group of respondents linked digital competition and online competitors that “go for clicks above all else” to eroding public trust and journalism standards. This is bad for local newspapers, one respondent explained, “not only because they siphon off what little ad money is left after Google and Facebook, but because they force us (to) emulate them...in order to retain our audience online and thus our advertisers. It's a slippery slope.”

In addition to competing with digital platforms and larger publications, some respondents cited their publication’s difficulties with monetizing their own digital products. “Digital revenue is nickels and dimes—at the local level there isn't enough CPMs [cost per thousand, a marketing metric] to generate enough revenue to afford providing a quality product,” one respondent said. Another observed that “getting people to pay for the news, instead of getting it for free online” was a major challenge, a sentiment echoed by other respondents.

One of the most common challenges cited was the need to defend the relevance and viability of small-market newspapers to both advertisers and audiences. The perception that their print product is in its death throes was identified as a major hurdle in and of itself. As one respondent put it:

“The biggest challenge is showing people that we have a future. People hear messages about how the newspaper industry is in big trouble, and it filters down. Advertisers hear this message and they're less willing to advertise. Students coming out of journalism schools hear about papers that are closing. They don't hear about the opportunities that exist with weekly and small-city newspapers. And people don't see how many community newspapers are diversifying, through their websites and through podcasts.”

Other oft-repeated challenges that make it difficult to put out a quality product related to understaffing and a shortage of sufficiently trained personnel. Respondents pointed to layoffs and the difficulty of attracting qualified applicants as a problem. While the survey sample is not representative, the age distribution of our respondents—44 per cent were older than 50—does raise a red flag about potential

problems down the road. If indeed the majority of editors, journalists and proprietors are older, what happens when they all start to retire in a decade or so? This question is particularly relevant if younger people, discouraged by low pay and few opportunities for advancement, aren't waiting in the wings to take over.

In addition to recruitment challenges, respondents also identified a lack of training for existing staff and potential candidates, pointing specifically to issues such as "long-time reporters lacking digital skills" and the "quality of graduates from journalism programs."

Some respondents, most of them employees of major newspaper chains, cited poor decision-making 'from above' and "inept moves" by the chains as a drag on growth. Staff cuts, lack of newsroom investment and the additional work associated with social media and other digital tools were offered as concrete illustrations. "We're the ones on the ground," one respondent said. "We know what our readers want, but owners continue to chase pie-in-the-sky ideas looking for quick wins they can turn into immediate profits. Local media is changing. We should be playing the long game. Management, companies and owners just aren't listening."

### **Taking the pulse of small-market newspapers across Canada**

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*Freelance journalist [Angela Long](#) recently completed a cross-Canada tour visiting more than 20 towns, most of them small communities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. Her mission, [chronicled in a series of stories published by J-Source.ca](#), was to meet the people covering local news in rural and small-town Canada. What follows is an edited interview.*

**What did you do in each community you visited?** I tried to spend at least a few days in each place to get to know it. I interviewed publishers, reporters, locals - whoever would talk to me. All the papers I visited were weekly, or bi-monthly. Initially my plan was to focus on independently-owned papers (or "indies" as some call them), but in some parts of the country this option just didn't exist. While on the road, my rule was to stop in every small town and, if there was one, buy the local paper. I collected dozens.

**What did you learn about the financial situation of small newspapers?** Everyone, almost without exception, had less revenue than in the past, but publishers said they were still making a profit. One reason for less profit, the biggest reason for most publishers, was the loss of government advertising. But many said the small town paper was still a good way to make a living. Less revenue often resulted in fewer newsroom staff and fewer stories, however, and publishers are therefore trying to branch out into other business ventures, such as stationery sales, printing services, specialty publications. Usually family members were keeping the boat afloat by reporting, editing and generally getting the newspaper out on deadline each week.

**Are smaller papers embracing digital news?** Digital was often a challenge because many areas I visited lacked connectivity, or had very slow and/or expensive internet service. Sometimes when I was driving, there would be no cell coverage for thousands of kilometres. Most publishers were interested in improving their digital presence but said their readers and advertisers still preferred print. Many said the money was still in print. Some expressed a need/desire for more training and

improved infrastructure so they could branch out into digital, but they still worried about how to monetize digital. That said, most had some sort of digital presence--Twitter, Facebook, a website. Many offered digital subscriptions.

**What role are these newspapers playing in their communities?** The papers seem well loved, or at least supported, by their communities and are read by young and old alike. From what I discovered, newspapers—or any form of local news media - play a critical role in rural Canada. They act as information providers, storytellers, and watchdogs in remote places where few other options exist. They are the experts of their community, their geography. They play an important role in community building and democracy. Some of the papers also play a role in reconciliation, either by reporting on First Nation communities in a manner adhering to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, or by providing a forum for First Nation communities to tell their own stories.

**How did the journalists/newspaper proprietors you met view the future?** In general, everyone involved in rural journalism was passionate about their paper and their community, but they said they are also struggling to deal with the ubiquitous “newspapers are dead” mantra. Sources, subscribers, and advertisers keep asking them if they will be going out of business soon. They said this was bad for morale. Some seemed to think the newspaper industry crisis was more of an urban issue—the result of big media companies’ flawed business strategies.

Regardless of who’s to blame, rural Canadians have few alternatives if their local paper goes out of business. They are isolated and depend on this one thread to hold them together. Staying positive in an atmosphere of doom and gloom, they told me, thus became essential to their survival in the community, and their survival, some would argue, became an indicator of a community’s health.

While trying to stay positive, however, many worried about the future: who would take over when they died, for example. And in the many towns with declining populations, who would be left to read the paper?

Many had witnessed monumental changes in journalism over the span of their careers; they remembered the “hot lead” days. They saw what was happening today as part of a natural evolution, and had no fear that, in one form or another, the news would survive.

## **Opportunities**

About a third of respondents cited ‘focusing on local’ as the biggest opportunity for small-market newspapers (Figure 32). One respondent explained why this is an advantage: “We are the only ones covering the topics that we cover. Remaining local is key.” Another made the point that “community newspapers are still breaking stories. From the heart-felt community interest stories, to the city council meetings we cover, these small papers are still where news is born.”

Respondents noted that a big part of their advantage stems from small-market newspapers’ position, in many cases, as the only publication covering the issues in the geographical region. “The big provincial and national outlets don’t tend to cover the local issues that our readers care about,” one respondent





A group of respondents also identified opportunities related to the “reliability” of small-market newspapers. Although recent research suggests that Canadian consumers place more trust in national than local newspapers, printed local papers remain more trusted than all forms of online news, including national newspaper websites ([Vividata, 2018](#)). The same research shows that Canadian consumers are twice as likely to trust a printed local newspaper as an online-only news outlet ([Vividata, 2018](#)). It is not surprising, therefore, that respondents in our survey identified their credibility as one of their biggest assets. One respondent said the local newspapers is trusted because of its “front-line coverage (done) with more responsibility than the 'parachute-in' larger media.” Another cited newspapers’ potential to “make a difference in their host community by providing timely, accurate and unbiased information to diffuse drama caused by misinformation and misunderstanding.”

A small segment of respondents cited their print product as their biggest competitive advantage: “If we stopped printing our newspaper there would be riots in the streets.”



## International comparison: United States and Canada

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### Key findings:

- The survey results for both countries were similar in terms of the percentage of respondents who reported working in smaller newsrooms and working longer hours compared to two years ago
- Respondents in both countries said that the perception of local newspapers as a dying industry deters advertisers and makes it challenging to recruit new staff
- Use of metrics to measure engagement and shape the production of stories is about the same in both countries
- Respondents in Canada and the United States both reported that few employers provided training courses to assist with learning about new technologies
- While approximately half of the participants in both surveys felt slightly or very secure in their jobs, almost twice as many Canadians felt slightly or very insecure in their jobs
- American respondents overall tended to be more positive about the future of local newspapers
- Respondents from American newspapers were more likely to use video reporting, live video and podcasts than their Canadian counterparts

Researchers who compare the state of local journalism across nations have identified similarities, but there are also significant differences that arise as a result of unique histories and variations in national political, economic, cultural and technological systems ([Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017](#)). More generally, scholars value comparative research because it is “indispensable for generalizing theories and findings” ([Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017, p. 525](#)). In a globalizing world, cross-national comparisons are also useful for developing a better understanding of what works and what doesn’t in terms of government and industry responses to disruption. One study that analyzed public discussions about the challenges faced by newspapers in western democracies, for instance, noted that the sector has suffered more in the United States and the United Kingdom than in places like Germany and Finland (Bruggemann, Humprecht, Nielsen, Karppinen, Cornia & Esser, 2016). The researchers also found that debate about the newspaper sector’s future in all the jurisdictions they examined tended to be dominated by American skepticism about state intervention even as concerns mount that the disruption represents a threat to democracy in the United States.

Canadians, living as we do next door to a behemoth, are rightly cautious about assuming the situation of small-market newspapers south of the border is directly applicable in this country: we need our own research on our own news industry. With this survey we sought to compare what is happening to small-market newspapers in Canada to the results of similar survey undertaken in the United States (Radcliffe, Ali & Donald, 2017). The most obvious difference is one of scale: When the [U.S. survey](#) was done in 2016, there were 6,851 daily and community papers in that country with a print circulation below 50,000. In Canada, [News Media Canada](#), which represents the newspaper industry, says there are 984. Despite the differences in scale, the pool of self-selected respondents in both countries turned out to be remarkably similar. The largest group of respondents in each case were people older than 50 and respondents who reported having more than 20 years of experience in local media. The largest group of participants for both surveys worked as editors (40 per cent of Canadian and 34 per cent of American respondents).

Responses to the 23 common questions revealed two notable differences between the countries. The first had to do with sentiments about the future. Canadians were generally more pessimistic in their

outlook. While approximately half of the participants in both surveys felt slightly or very secure in their jobs, more than one third (35 per cent) of the Canadians felt slightly or very insecure in their jobs compared to just 18 per cent of American respondents (Figure 33).

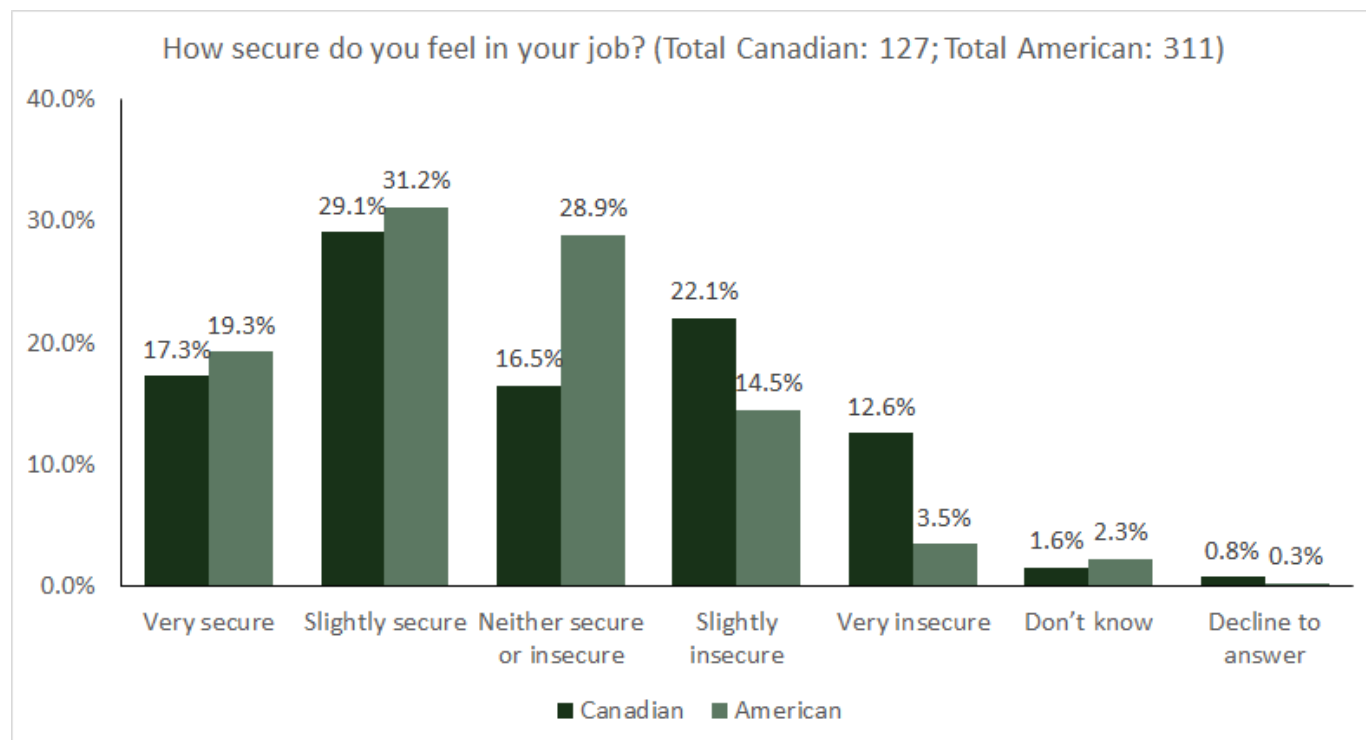


Figure 33. International comparison of job security

When asked about the future of local newspapers, 60 per cent of American respondents were very or slightly positive compared to 50 per cent of the Canadians. Data from the same question shows that 41 per cent of Canadian respondents had negative outlooks for the sector, a perspective shared by only 33 per cent of Americans (Figure 34).

The second notable difference had to do with the adoption of video and podcasting technologies. American respondents made more use of new technologies at their publication than Canadian respondents. Use of video reporting, live video and podcasts in the U.S. was approximately double that of Canadian respondents (Figure 35). While it is outside the scope of this study, it would be worth investigating whether newsroom innovation in Canada is handicapped by the cost of data on mobile devices. The incentive for news outlets to publish videos, for instance, is undermined by data limits that make Canadians reluctant to watch video on mobile devices that aren't connected to wireless networks. The spotty, slow Internet service available in many rural areas and small towns compounds the problem in that downloading a news video on a desktop computer or mobile device becomes an exercise in frustration.

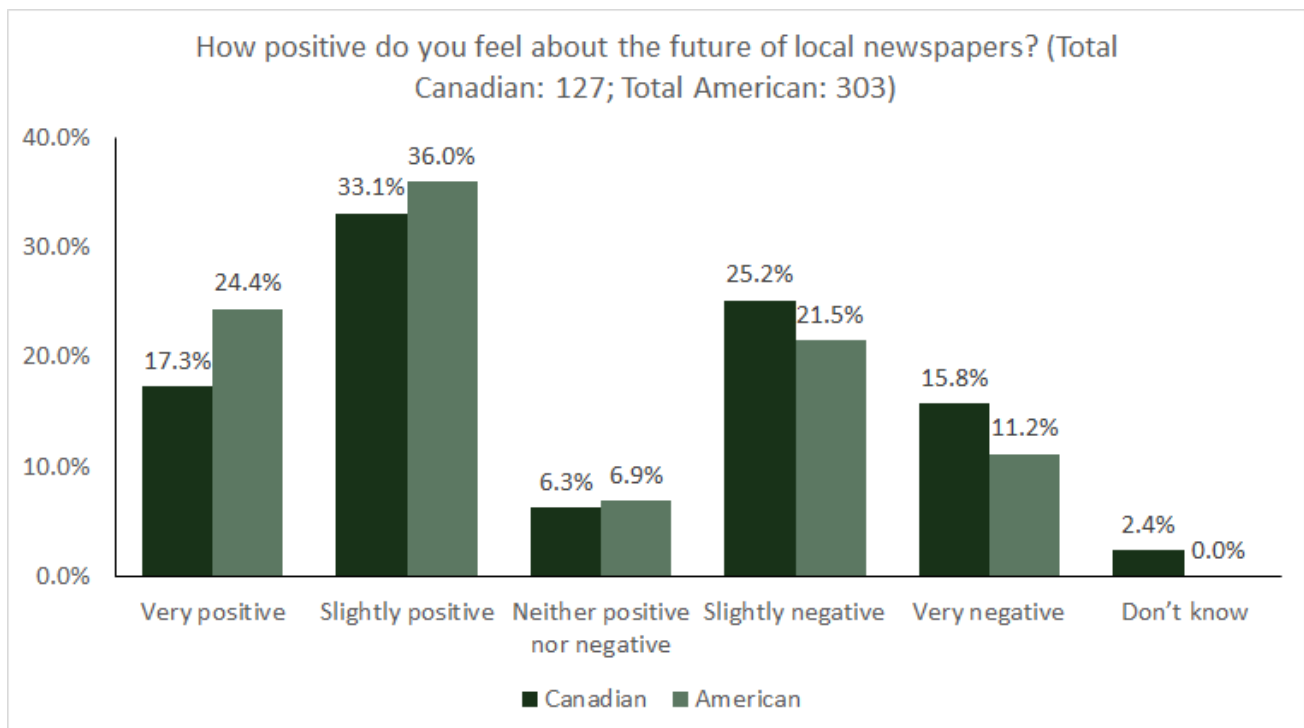


Figure 34. International comparison of feelings about the future of local newspapers

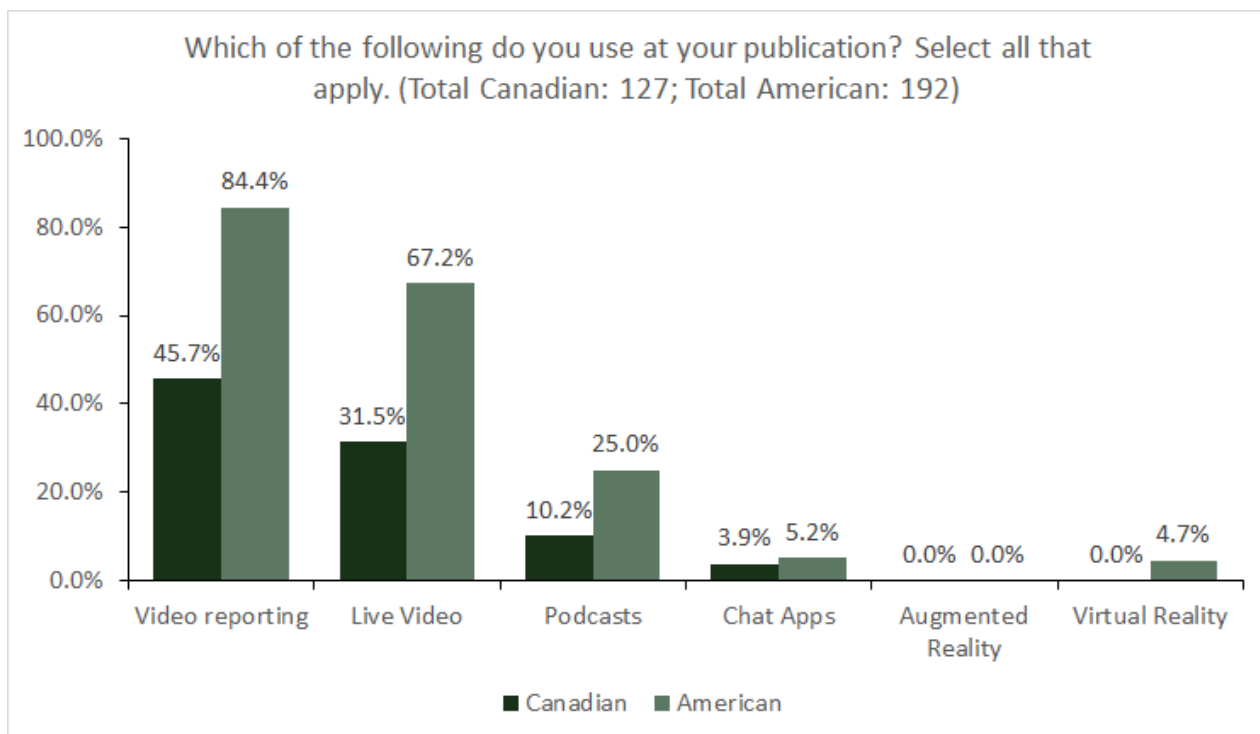


Figure 35. International comparison of use of reporting technologies

Overall, however, we found that small-market newspapers on both sides of the border had much in common. The results of the two surveys generally aligned when it came to working conditions, use of metrics and social media, and feelings about the most pressing challenges and opportunities for local news operations.

The majority of Canadian (57 per cent) and American (59 per cent) participants reported that their publications have fewer employees compared to two years ago. More than 30 per cent of respondents from both countries said they have increased the number of hours they work while more than 70 per cent indicated they are spending more time on digital output.

Facebook is the most used social media platform, followed by Twitter, for respondents from both countries. The third most commonly used platform is YouTube for Canadian respondents and Instagram for American respondents. More than 70 per cent of both groups reported that their publications use metrics to measure audience engagement. These metrics influenced the way stories were produced for 75 per cent of American respondents and 63 per cent of Canadian survey participants.

Respondents from both countries also indicated they learn about new technology primarily on their own (either self-taught or by reading articles). Only 21 per cent of Canadian respondents and 27 per cent of American respondents have participated in a training course paid for by their employer.

The list of opportunities and challenges offered up by survey participants in the two countries also looks remarkably similar. In both cases respondents identified local newspapers' ability to build relationships with readers and advertisers, and their ability to generate quality local content that readers trust as opportunities. Being the only game in town in terms of local reporting is also an oft-cited advantage.

Respondents also identified common challenges including competition from digital news and non-local newspapers, staffing issues and lack of understanding/awareness of local news. There was strong and unambiguous agreement among Canadian and American respondents when it came to the difficulties caused by the perception of local newspapers as a dying industry. It makes staff recruitment more difficult and it puts off advertisers. Respondents also cited common concerns about the stiff competition local newspapers face from digital news websites that deliver news at a faster pace and non-local newspapers that have larger newsrooms and more resources.

Other concerns were variations upon a common theme. American respondents, for instance, stressed the difficulties of recruiting and retaining young journalists, while Canadian respondents were somewhat more concerned with understaffing and training of staff, particularly with digital technology. While American respondents said that it was difficult to raise awareness about their local newspaper within their community, Canadian respondents pointed out that audiences did not understand the relevance of local media and how it differs from non-local media.

## Conclusion and recommendations

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Small-market newspapers in Canada face plenty of challenges. Facebook and Google have ravaged newspaper industry advertising revenues. Revenue losses have led to cost-saving cuts in newsrooms. Fewer journalists mean less local coverage—the effects are felt in both the quantity and quality of reporting. Over time, readers notice their local publication is less relevant, less informative, less of a “must-read.” Fewer eyes on the paper mean advertising space becomes more difficult to sell to local businesses. That results in less revenue to keep newsrooms going and new rounds of cost-saving cuts.

There are signs this dynamic is well underway: Fifty-seven per cent of respondents in this survey reported that there were fewer editorial employees in their newsrooms than there were two years ago. [The Local News Map](#), meanwhile, shows that of the 262 local news outlets that have closed across Canada since 2008, 36 have been dailies (free and subscription) and 195 have been community newspapers ([Lindgren & Corbett, 2018](#)). That’s the bad news.

The good news is that many survey participants remain bullish about their built-in competitive advantages. They are telling local stories that in many cases no other news outlet is providing. They are keeping in touch with readers and believe they are still trusted. These are all valuable assets.

A growing body of research points to best practices for building on these assets. We acknowledge that taking on new projects will be a challenge for pared-to-the-bone newsrooms working flat out just to get the newspaper out the door. But increasingly there are doubts that advertising—still a key revenue source for 94 per cent of the newsrooms where our respondents worked—can be relied upon in the medium to long term. Small-market newspapers need to offer readers relevant, timely, accurate news to retain and build audiences for the advertisers they do have. Alternative revenue streams, such as the following options, should also be explored.

- **Organizing events:** [Research](#) suggests events have the potential to diversify revenue streams because they attract advertisers seeking to reach a known pool of potential customers ([Stearns, 2017](#)). A panel or round-table discussion about responses to the local opioid crisis or strategies for keeping young people from leaving an aging community are examples of how a newspaper might connect with readers, gather feedback and story ideas, and generate news content.
- **Crowdfunding journalism:** Crowdfunding a news outlet or a journalism project is a way to raise money and recruit members who believe in the mission of the news organization. Kickstarter listed 213 Canadian projects in its journalism category at the end of 2018 and a [recent Nieman Lab](#) report noted that Kickstarter is undertaking to provide more specific advice on how news organizations can run more effective campaigns ([Schmidt, 2018](#)). The same report also cites statistics showing that seven of the [10 most-funded journalism projects in Kickstarter’s history](#) have taken place in the last year. That said, running an effective campaign requires an investment of time to research best practices and a journalism Kickstarter has on average a one-in-five chance of reaching the funding minimum required to get any of the cash ([Schmidt, 2018](#)).

Small-market newspapers need to attract a new generation of young reporters with energy and digital skills. Journalism schools at colleges and universities and student campus newspapers are natural recruiting grounds. Small-market newspapers should consider the following option.

- **Building a relationship with a local journalism school:** In the past, newspapers would send a recruiting editor to journalism schools to conduct interviews and hire young reporters for summer reporting/editing jobs. The visits caused a buzz on campus—students knew the opportunity would come up each year and built their portfolios in anticipation of the event. Small-market newspapers having difficulty recruiting quality staff should consider reviving this practice on their own or in collaboration with other area news media in search of talent. It's a way to spot young journalists with potential, improve newsroom diversity, sell junior reporters on the virtues of gaining experience in a smaller newsroom, and build a newspaper's reputation as a publication with a future. Many journalism schools also arrange for students to complete internships (work placements) as part of their degree. Taking on a student for six or 12 weeks means the young reporter gets the necessary course credit and newsroom experience. Newsroom managers get to see the intern in action. Whether hiring for summer reporting positions or taking on an intern, newspaper managers need to recognize that student reporters also need to eat. In the case of an [unpaid internship \(legal only in situations where students are earning a course credit\)](#), providing temporary accommodation for the duration of an out-of-town placement would make the position more feasible for students. Providing interns with a salary or equivalent honorarium will attract more candidates.

Collaborations in various forms are becoming increasingly common as a way to pool limited resources and produce quality journalism. There is collaborative potential in partnerships and regional networks.

- **Forming newsroom partnerships:** One [study of collaborative models](#) noted that a project “may or may not involve a formal agreement, but always seeks to produce content that is greater than what any individual journalist, newsroom, or organization could produce on its own” ([Stonbely, 2017, p. 14](#)). As a starting point, a level of trust and goodwill among the partners is essential. Collaborations can be short or long term, involve various levels of integration when it comes to the reporting of stories, and occur between for-profit newsrooms or between non-profits and for-profit operations. There is also growing momentum to build partnerships among journalism schools and news organizations ([Institute for Investigative Journalism, 2018](#)). A local radio station, a publication serving an Indigenous community in the same area, and the local newspaper could combine forces to tell under-reported stories and build new audiences. Newspapers from several communities in a region might consider working together to hold regional politicians accountable on an issue such as community safety and then each produce a local version of the story.
- **Building a regional training network:** It's more financially manageable to run a workshop or training seminar for journalists if the cost is underwritten by a regional alliance of local news outlets of all kinds. This sort of shared-cost investment in newsrooms makes them more attractive to young journalists, improves content, enhances digital skills, and is a way to demonstrate to communities that newspapers are in it for the long-term.

Given the concerns that small-market newspapers have about the perception of their industry, it is essential that they build trust and strengthen their relationships with readers. The following initiatives may help build relationships and dispel the notion that newspapers have no future.

- **Introducing free email newsletters:** Newsletters have emerged as a potent form of communication. In addition to keeping news outlets in touch with loyal audience members, they are a way to attract new readers ([Breiner, 2018](#)).

- **Using story circles to build trust, identify community concerns, propose solutions and shape the news agenda:** Story circles are also being used by news outlets to show readers that publications are committed to their community and willing to listen to residents concerns and suggestions ([Lichterman, 2018](#)).
- **Reaching out to more diverse communities:** Small-market newspapers could regularly publish some stories in a language other than English/French if there is a significant minority group in the coverage area. Publishers in a community with a significant Indigenous population or ethnic group could reach out to that group by translating a few stories in each issue into the language of the group. Issues related to the quality and cost of the translation may arise, but this initiative presents an opportunity to build a relationship with an untapped group of readers.
- **Developing a code of ethics and making sure that it is readily available to the public:** Newspapers need to explain—and demonstrate—to readers that their newsgathering is built on a foundation of strong ethical practices. One way to do this is to adopt and publicize a newsroom code of ethics. Membership in the [National NewsMedia Council](#) is also a way to demonstrate a news organization’s commitment to fostering trust, transparency, and accountability, particularly as it relates to addressing reader complaints about editorial issues.

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## Appendix 1: Survey questions and results

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Before we start, please tell us a little bit about yourself and your publication.

### What is the print circulation of your publication?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Under 1000	9.5%	12
1000 – 5000	28.4%	36
5000 – 10,000	19.7%	25
10,000 – 20,000	18.9%	24
20,000 – 35,000	11.8%	15
35,000 – 50,000	11.8%	15
More than 50,000	0.0%	0
Don't know	0.0%	0
Decline to answer	0.0%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

### How often does your publication produce a print edition?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Not applicable - online only	0.00%	0
Daily	1.57%	2
6 days per week	5.51%	7
5 days per week	3.15%	4
4 days per week	0.79%	1
3 days per week	0.79%	1
2 days per week	15.75%	20
Weekly	65.35%	83
Every two weeks	6.30%	8
Decline to answer	0.79%	1
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

### What is your primary job function?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Editor (Section/Managing)	40.16%	51
Reporter	20.47%	26
Digital/Social Media (editorial side)	0.79%	1
Technology/Product	0.00%	0
Sales/Business Development (print)	4.72%	6
Sales/Business Development (digital)	0.00%	0
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	33.86%	43

	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
As owner operator I do all the work... editor, reporter, sales, technology etc.
Design/Production/Managment
Publisher
sales manager
All of the above including Publisher/Owner
All hats above
Everything
Publisher/Sales - print & digital
Publisher
Publisher
nearly all of the above
Working with one other person to get a newspaper ready to print and distributing it.
Owner/Publisher
Publisher - all of the above
publisher/sales/production
publisher
Publisher
General Manager
Editor/reporter
all of the above
Publisher/editor/sales/business development
Publisher
Production Manager
owner operator (ie all of the above except the last one
Publisher, editor in chief
journalist, editor, publisher, owner
Publisher
Publisher
Publisher
publisher
Reporter-photographer
Graphic Designer/Accounts Receivable/Paper Layout/Design
Editor and Publisher
The first six above - only full time worker
Editor and Publisher
assistant editor
Reporter AND social media/digital AND pagination/proofing print edition
Also editor when editor is away.
Managing editor (entails all the above plus distribution)

PUBLISHER
All of the above as publisher & independent owner
Owner-operator
publisher

### How old are you?

Answer Choices	Responses	
18-30	17%	21
31-49	39%	49
50+	44%	56
Decline to answer	1%	1
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

### Topic 1: Experience and Role

#### 1a. How long have you been working in local media?

Answer Choices	Responses	
more than 20 years	42.5%	54
10 - 19 years	20.5%	26
5-9 years	18.9%	24
1-4 years	15.0%	19
Less than a year	3.2%	4
Decline to answer	0.0%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### 1b. On which of the following do you mostly work?

Answer Choices	Responses	
On the print product (i.e. physical newspaper)	44.09%	56
On the digital product (e.g. social, website etc.)	1.57%	2
I split my time between the two	54.33%	69
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

### Topic 2: Changes in output

#### 2a. Thinking about your work over the past two years, how has the focus of your output changed?

Consider the hours, demands, tasks and expectations for your role.

	Increased		Stayed the same		Decreased		Don't Know		Decline to answer		Not applicable		Total	Weighted Average
Print	38.8%	47	45.5%	55	14.1%	17	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	1.7%	2	121	4.18
Digital	73.0%	89	16.4%	20	4.1%	5	0.8%	1	0.8%	1	4.9%	6	122	4.43



												Answered	127
												Skipped	0

**2b. Please complete the following statement. Compared to two years ago, the number of stories you have personally produced has:**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Increased	37.0%	47
Stayed the same	47.2%	60
Decreased	10.2%	13
Don't know	1.6%	2
Decline to answer	3.9%	5
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

### **Topic 3: Working hours**

**3a. How many hours per week do you work on average?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Decline to answer	2.36%	3
Hours/week:	97.64%	124
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

Hours/week	Responses
4	1
20	2
25	2
28	1
32	2
35	2
36	1
38	2
40	25
42	4
43	1
44	3
45	24
46	1
47	2
48	1
50	23
52	1
55	5
60	15

70	5
80	1
Total	124

**3b. Please complete the following statement. Compared to two years ago, the number of hours you work has:**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Increased	31.5%	40
Stayed the same	55.1%	70
Decreased	9.5%	12
Don't know	1.6%	2
Decline to answer	2.4%	3
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### **Topic 4: Job security**

**4a. Please complete the following statement. Compared to two years ago, the number of people at your publication has:**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Increased	10.24%	13
Stayed the same	30.71%	39
Decreased	56.69%	72
Don't know	2.36%	3
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**4b. How secure do you feel in your job?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very secure	17.3%	22
Slightly secure	29.1%	37
Neither secure or insecure	16.5%	21
Slightly insecure	22.1%	28
Very insecure	12.6%	16
Don't know	1.6%	2
Decline to answer	0.8%	1
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### **Topic 5: Business strategy**

**5. Local journalism is going through a period of change and facing a number of challenges. To what extent do you feel you understand your organization's business strategy?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Fully understand	55.91%	71
Understand a little	33.07%	42
Don't understand	11.02%	14
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### **Topic 6: Social media**

**6a. What social media platforms do you use? [\*Use means actively post to the account not simply have administrative access to] (Please select all that apply)**

	Personal account - mainly not used for work purposes		Personal account - used mainly for work purposes		Your news organization's account		Total
Facebook	69.17%	83	26.67%	32	78.33%	94	120
Twitter	34.02%	33	47.42%	46	74.23%	72	97
Instagram	69.57%	32	21.74%	10	41.30%	19	46
Snapchat	100.00%	17	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	17
YouTube	59.32%	35	11.86%	7	35.59%	21	59
Tumblr	100.00%	7	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	7
Slack	3.33%	1	43.33%	13	66.67%	20	30
Decline to answer	50.00%	3	66.67%	4	100.00%	6	6
Other (please specify)							8
						Answered	127
						Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
Website
There is a huge difference between not used for work and used mainly for work. I use Facebook mainly for personal but sometimes for work purposes.
Web Page
Pinterest
Tweetdeck, for news organization's account
none
Do not use personally and not my function
issuu

**6b. To what extent do you apply journalism best practices and ethical standards to social media posts? (Please select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses
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I consider them when posting to my personal account	59.1%	75
I consider them when posting to my news organization's account	84.3%	107
I am unsure how they apply to social media	3.2%	4
I do not use social media	6.3%	8
Decline to answer	1.6%	2
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

## **Topic 7: Innovation, Skills and Professional Development**

### **7a. Which of the following do you use at your publication? (Select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Video reporting	45.7%	58
Live Video (e.g. Facebook Live, Periscope)	31.5%	40
Podcasts	10.2%	13
Chat Apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Kik etc.)	3.9%	5
Augmented Reality	0.0%	0
Virtual Reality	0.0%	0
None of the above	46.5%	59
Decline to answer	0.0%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

### **7b. How interested are you in learning about these emerging technologies? (1 = not interested; 5 = very interested)**

	1		2		3		4		5		Total	Weighted Average
Video reporting	21.0%	25	9.2%	11	19.3%	23	23.5%	28	26.9%	32	119	3.26
Live video (e.g. Facebook Live, Periscope)	18.6%	22	8.5%	10	21.2%	25	27.1%	32	24.6%	29	118	3.31
Podcasts	28.6%	34	14.3%	17	17.7%	21	21.0%	25	18.5%	22	119	2.87
Chat apps	52.7%	58	23.6%	26	10.0%	11	8.2%	9	5.5%	6	110	1.9
Augmented reality	56.8%	63	13.5%	15	12.6%	14	11.7%	13	5.4%	6	111	1.95
Virtual reality	55.8%	63	15.0%	17	13.3%	15	11.5%	13	4.4%	5	113	1.94
Decline to answer	50.00	3	0.0%	0	16.7%	1	0.0%	0	33.3%	2	6	2.67
											Answered	127
											Skipped	0

**7c. How do you learn about new technology and tools related to your industry? (Select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Articles	63.78%	81
Training course paid for by employer	20.47%	26
Conferences	28.35%	36
Self-taught	85.83%	109
Not applicable	1.57%	2
Decline to answer	0.79%	1
Other	10.24%	13
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
Seminars with provincial association
Through people who are more familiar with technology than I am. We sometimes barter for services and assistance.
From a younger staff member
In past years, our company held annual training seminars. These are less common now, but those of us at various small papers keep in touch online and by phone to keep updated about what is happening in our industry.
newspapers and other publications
The knowledge of others in the office who are more familiar with the tools
not much time to look at new tools
Meetings with company's digital team
Training through co-workers (no cost to employer)
Local community members seeking new ways to interact with our news organization
Professional association membership services
Talking with other journalists
From colleagues and conferences

**7d. How do you learn about journalism ethics and best practices? (Select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Articles	59.1%	75
Training course paid for by my employer	15.8%	20
Resource guides provided by my employer	16.5%	21
On the job experience	83.5%	106
College/university course/program	48.8%	62
Conferences	30.7%	39
Fellow journalists/editors	73.2%	93
Press council/industry association	29.1%	37
Decline to answer	2.4%	3
Other (please specify)	3.9%	5
	Answered	127

	Skipped	0
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Other (please specify)
Being an ethical person, I do not use material that I believe to be unethical.
I am a 40 year journalist
i dont do journalism
Got scholarship to attend one-week course at American Press Institute about 15 years ago.
Common sense. Whatever feels wrong usually is

**7e. Please choose the statement that best describes your level of comfort with your journalism ethics knowledge.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Extremely comfortable	54.3%	69
Somewhat comfortable	37.0%	47
Neutral	3.9%	5
Somewhat uncomfortable	2.4%	3
Extremely uncomfortable	0.0%	0
Decline to answer	2.4%	3
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**Topic 8: Engagement**

**8a. Engagement is a big buzzword these days. What does engagement mean to you?**

Answered	113
Skipped	14

Responses
Making the audience understand why an issue is important and that their views on it will be heard.
It is more than metrics from social media - it represents a bona fide relationship with readers whereby we're getting information and reactions from them as much as they're receiving news from us.
Readership and community response.
Nothing new. We engage with our public all the time. Internet kids use it to mean how they jump from one platform to the other.
inclusion of community in the process of delivering the news
Having people interested and talking about the subject
becoming involved in something
Being involved in the community, not just reporting on what happens.
Connecting with community. Ensuring our publications are a reflection of our readers. Covering our community warts and all.

being an active participant in my organization for change
Producing content that's relevant and interesting to our readers.
It means nothing to me as far as being a buzzword. We are a community newspaper and as such are not a part of a large group of journalists competing for news. Buzzwords are not necessary in our work day.
Being relevant to readers
actively taking part in/understanding of a certain issue or event
readers who view the paper as "their" paper
attracting attention while interacting
Letters to the editor
Having people interested and wanting to learn more, ask questions and start their own conversations about topics I write on.
Getting the trust of a person of interest
Working with readers to reflect the community
writing for the easily distracted
I'm already married (Haha).
Being involved in the lives of our readers. Having readers involved in the paper
THEY COME TO US for information, answers, promotion and advertising
n/a
Informing the community through our stories, reaching out to them for their opinions, and giving them a platform to share their ideas.
An active two-way conversation with our audience/readers. Can be in person, online through the comments section, real-time social media conversation (be it video or typing)... anything that helps readers feel like they are part of the story and not just being given information or told what to think. Help them take ownership of local media and feel like we care what they have to say, rather just looking at them like 'clicks' to sell to advertisers.
How our audience is interacting with our content
Ensuring readers in our circulation area hear and share real, truthful news and information from our media outlet first
Having those that read our paper interact with us whether it's Letters to the Editor, a note, a Facebook post, etc...
Interesting content that starts conversations
The extent to which our audience identifies with and relies on our product to help them make informed choices about their community.
Striving to get all entities to understand that the community newspaper is the "communities" and they make the newspaper what it is by their involvement.
Engagement means back-and-forth conversations with our readers/users/customers.
hitting the readership in all aspects possible
Connecting with readers
Truly interested and actively working towards a successful newspaper organization.
Active participation by all parties
Providing content that elicits reaction from readers.
Getting the digital community actively involved with stories
Better understanding the market to maximize impact

clicks
Getting readers to talk about subjects covered by our outlet.
People reading stories, whether in print or online.
I see it as having readers participate with us — commenting, writing letters, submitting guest columns, providing story tips, etc. — rather than simply reading our content.
Interacting with our readers through a variety of means, online, social media and in person.
people caring about the issues of the day
engaging my customers (readers and advertisers)
when someone is directly or indirectly interacting (thinking, responding, recommending, etc) with your brand/product/service
feedback and participation from readers on content through Letters to the Editor and submissions.
What we've always been doing — talking to our readers about what's important to them and using it to design our coverage.
Giving the community an outlet to express ideas and concerns. Demonstrating a unified voice for the towns residents.
tracking reader responses through letters/facebook and twitter responses
amount of time reading/viewing/listening and degree of interest
Active participation by users on a piece of content. Liking, Sharing, Commenting.
Haven't heard of it
Being involved
Active interaction between providers and consumers
Comments, shares, likes etc. as well as people coming up to me in the grocery store, coffee shop, emailing us or coming into the office to provide feedback on our work.
Interactive dialogue online with readers, publishing of their opinions online and in print
Focusing on news items of highest significance to our readers in order to engage them as much as possible.
An active relationship with readers
Nothing - just a buzzword
That the user's trying to make it sound as though s/he is really into something that nobody quite understands about online media yet. Or that it's involving the audience in our work.
The ability to make readers aware of what's happening, whether they have a good understanding of the matters or not
Meaningful connections with other humans
Making a connection. Having someone pickup and read our paper and then doing something about what they saw read.
Nothing
Connecting, communicating with readers directly and indirectly.
Connecting with your readers
Social media, email and direct contact with readers
The extremely stupid practice of chasing internet clicks and likes
Ensuring our content reaches as many people from as wide a demographic as possible and elicits a response through letters, comments, etc.
Essentially, it means creating stories that draw readers to our page and to our site, and improving how we interact with them.



Creating and participating in discussions.
Page views. Also, likes and shares.
To have people actively interested in seeking out news, clicking like or reacting to posts on FB
Having a rapport with your audience so you have a healthy two-way exchange of information that reflects many viewpoints.
Engagement is government-speak for, "we're not going to pay any traditional media organization for advertising to promote a consultation process."
Keeping the reader interested
Using all platforms to reach readers
Having direct communication to our readership in real time
Two-way communication with audiences
It's a bullshit word. Just give people good stuff to read.
For our print publication it means creating a newspaper each week that reflects the community we serve. We have a diverse community, and want people to see themselves on our pages. We engage with people through interviews, photos and the opportunity to submit stories or letters to the editor. On-line, we want people to share and comment on our work through Facebook.
Being involved in the community
That the world is going to hell at the hands of marketing nitwits.
Using social media to interact with readers. I'd like to have more two-way interaction, but at my organization, social media is still being used to broadcast rather than have conversations with readers.
Getting and keeping readers.
Ensuring that readers are reading, interested and interacting with what we do. The mission hasn't changed since I started in the pre-digital era; the way of carrying it out has.
Connecting with readers through captivating, well researched and written works of journalism.
having readers invested in our paper, and our paper being invested in readers
Engaging and entertaining your work-related followers through social media, mostly Twitter.
audience engagement
Readers actually clicking through on a story instead of reading a headline on Facebook and firing off. (Unrealistic dream, I know.)
That it's always been important and some people are just realizing that now.
Reader feedback and involvement
Readers interacting with your work in a meaningful way, whether that be through Letters to the Editor, Facebook comments and shares, Twitter interactions or in-person interactions
Interacting with your readers and advertisers
Having our readers respond in any way, via any platform; positive or negative.
Stupid buzzword for talking and listening to the public, or getting them to follow us on social media.
Responding to readers whenever possible both on social media and in personal messages; brainstorming new ways to reach communities we don't pay enough attention to.
Getting readers talking about what has been written
How our audience connects with what we produce and interacts with our staff.
Connecting with your readership

A two-way conversation between the newspaper and its readers
Making sure your audience is interacting with your content
Hits/page views. Nothing that actually benefits the reader or me.
Responsive audience
To occupy, attract, or involve our community.
engaged
Capturing a reader's interest in a topic and keeping it, having him or her interact with the story in some way, and react to it.
Reader reaction

**8b. What, if any, types of audience engagement initiatives has your publication undertaken? (Select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Published pieces from community members (including op-eds and letters to the editor)	96.1%	122
Hosted an event such as a town hall, debate, or panel discussion on an issue affecting your community	29.9%	38
Launched an editorial campaign on an issue that is important to your community	43.3%	55
Created a community advisory board to advise on story ideas and/or the paper's relationship with the community	6.3%	8
Employed a system to consult with community members on coverage, e.g., using online tools from Hearken or the Coral Project	4.7%	6
The publication has not launched any audience engagement initiatives	5.5%	7
Decline to answer	0.8%	1
Other (please specify)	14.2%	18
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
Sponsorship of community events, donation of prizes, staff members volunteering at events, and with community organizations.
We have been interviewing local people who have had interesting lives or have done interesting things.
marketing opportunities ie: sidewalk sale
Developed a Web platform to facilitate flow of information between community organizations
Solicit questions through social media to ask of interviewees; ask for story tips and feedback on coverage; have staff attend community functions and speak with people there.
We do community projects every month whether its helping to hand out hotdogs at the firehall during the halloween bonfire or talking to the high school writing class
Readers' survey conducted in 2017.
On our most controversial issues, we have at times sought guest columns from those on both sides of the issue. We have also asked for comments via Facebook.

A few yearly, in print format, contests.
Worked with other local media on an advisory council (which includes members of the public) on issues of discrimination and representation in the local media.
I have elementary students in a newspaper club writing articles for our paper as well as regular columns by knowledgeable community members and some who write for fun.
Hosts community events (i.e. Easter Egg Hunt) and supports community events (i.e. Summer Festival)
Constant social media engagement
Created various features, including our Community Leaders Awards, where we ask readers to nominate individuals, based on their leadership in the community, within different categories.
We've done some work with local schools helping students get their stories published in our weekly paper.
Having reporters and editors go to community events to actively ask opinions on matters of public interest.
By creating a newspaper with local news, week in and week out.
Inviting people to comment on articles

### **Topic 9: Engagement metrics and measurement**

#### **9a. Do you - or your newspaper - use metrics to measure audience engagement?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	77.95%	99
No	11.81%	15
I don't know	10.24%	13
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### **9b. Please select all metrics that apply.**

	Personally use/measure		Organization uses/measures		Don't know		Total
Metrics software, e.g. Chartbeat, Google Analytics, Metrics for News.	27.45%	28	83.33%	85	11.76%	12	102
Social media likes/shares/follows	40.35%	46	85.09%	97	7.89%	9	114
Website unique visitors	23.42%	26	89.19%	99	6.31%	7	111
Engagement time / time on page	25.77%	25	79.38%	77	17.53%	17	97
Open rate (for newsletters)	8.51%	4	34.04%	16	65.96%	31	47
Attendance at events	25.93%	14	44.44%	24	44.44%	24	54
Print and Digital	21.21%	21	86.87%	86	10.10%	10	99

subscribers							
Number of members / donors	15.91%	7	25.00%	11	65.91%	29	44
Decline to answer	38.46%	5	30.77%	4	92.31%	12	13
Other (please specify)							5
						Answered	127
						Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
Do not have the time to engage in metrics
We don't have access to or money to get these tools.
Phone call, email and in-person interaction or invitations to events.
Facebook hits
Contest entries and surveys

### 9c. When do key performance metrics influence the way you produce a story?

Answer Choices	Responses	
All the time	7.1%	9
Most of the time	9.5%	12
Some of the time	46.5%	59
None of the time	29.9%	38
Decline to answer	7.1%	9
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

## Topic 10. Future of Journalism

### 10a. How positive do you feel about the future of local newspapers?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very positive	17.3%	22
Slightly positive	33.1%	42
Neither positive nor negative	6.3%	8
Slightly negative	25.2%	32
Very negative	15.8%	20
Don't know	2.4%	3
Decline to answer	0.0%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**10b. We recognize that money and time are scarce resources for newspapers in the digital age. Aside from these two factors, what is the biggest challenge facing small-market newspapers? (In our study, we're defining this as publications with a print circulation under 50,000)**

Answered	121
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Skipped	6
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Responses
Keeping audience attention on local news and finding the best ways to do that.
Competition for eyes and time - so many sources of information and it feels as though people are increasingly less focused on local matters - even when it does or should involve them directly.
Lack of mentors/training for reporters, lack of interest from readership
Rural depopulation. Government policies designed to remove all services from rural communities. Without services we lose our businesses who provide the advertising revenue.
advertising revenue
Declining readership
Economy and facebook
Getting people to realize the importance of supporting local businesses, who can then, in turn support our business with their advertising.
Maintaining relevance, ensuring that the community still views us as a needed and trusted source. We must do this by leading on the news side and not following others.
Lack of government advertising
Online news sources; people moving away from a newspaper subscription.
The reliance of government and others on Facebook and other "free" advertising on the internet as opposed to using subscription based local papers to advertise.
Declining ad revenue due to online sources
Learning and keeping up with technology. My readers have said if we cut out print they will not subscribe - they do not want digital.
convincing advertisers we're still relevant & helping them understand people who get our paper want it AND read it
Time & money are about it
Advertisers splitting their marketing budget between so many mediums
Reader fatigue and cynicism.
Cost of production
Engaging with younger readers.
Millennial Attitudes - that digital news comes magically
Negative attitude in people created by large market newspapers.
Monetizing the digital edition
The quality of graduates from journalism programs. Poor candidates, ill-prepared first time reporters. THAT is more of a detriment to our industry than digital. If the content is crap, the reader will not engage — on any platform.
Qualified community journalists who can walk the fine line between community reporting and objective reporting
The biggest challenge is showing people that we have a future. People hear messages about how the newspaper industry is in big trouble, and it filters down. Advertisers hear this message and they're less willing to advertise. Students coming out of journalism schools hear about papers that are closing. They don't hear about the opportunities that exist with weekly and small-city newspapers. And people don't see how many community newspapers are diversifying, through their websites and through podcasts.

Competition from online publications that may or not adhere to journalistic ethics and best practices and go for clicks above all else. Not only because they siphon off what little ad money is left after Google and Facebook, but because they force us emulate them (so varying extents) in order to retain our audience online and thus our advertisers. It's a slippery slope...
24 hour news cycle
Trying to explain the difference between a community newspaper and a daily newspaper with advertisers who keep insisting "print is dead".
The digital push in small communities is difficult because they're getting all of their information nationally and internationally somewhere else; they want our paper to hear about local news and to cut out the photo of their kid winning an award, so the digital transition has been difficult as it doesn't necessarily seem to be what a reader of a local newspaper in a small community really wants.
The biggest challenge today for small-market newspaper staff is finding the time and resources to engage multiple audiences (and demographics) on a variety of platforms.
It falls under resources, but it's the biggest threat: loss of staff. Our market is a very secure print product market, and that will likely not change in the next 15-20 years (based on demographics). The biggest threat is our staff (an editorial staff of one full-time reporter, and a shared editor with sister publications). It's harder and harder to put out a quality product when staff cuts keep coming.
Convincing people to pick up and read a newspaper.
trained staff
print media is dead is the biggest problem
The theft of news by online aggregators without penalty. The abandonment of local newspapers for provincial and federal government advertising. Digital revenue is nickels and dimes - at the local level there isn't enough cpm's to generate enough revenue to afford providing a quality product.
Competition for marketing dollars from socialmedia platforms
A corporate focus of monetizing online stories and advertising comes at a cost to our print editions, which clearly make the most money.
Businesses that resist print.
Aging readership, lifelong subscribers are generally 65+ younger audience doesn't want to pay for new or ads
Declining circulation and ad revenue
People find 'news' everywhere
The expectation to produce too many stories without going deep enough into them.
The biggest challenge I see is in showing our readers a print-primary, paid circulation newspaper is the best, most comprehensive source for local news.
Competing with larger newsrooms working within the same region. Being as fast, as foolproof as a newsrooms that are 10 times our size.
Advertising is going to be tough going forward, but we're also facing issues with bloggers trying to do our jobs and taking eyeballs from our site, regardless of the standard employed by the upstarts.
Advertising dollars.
Misrepresentation of digital ad benefits, loss of provincial and local government advertising, loss of national/regional ads, aging population with lack of interest in Under 35 group in local

news
that Facebook and Google have swallowed the web and are not subject to the same taxes, cost structure and legal obligations of real news generators
Keeping the unique identity of a community newspaper separate from other forms of media. It is very unique in its content and responsibility to readers, yet too often judged in its importance while lumped in with all media.
Getting the respect of academics and other media when it comes to that quality of work we do. I'm sick of being told that when a poorly-read, money-losing daily closes that the community is now in a "news desert" when there is a high-quality, well-read and profitable community newspapers serving that market (and usually producing more local news than the daily was). Also, stop lauding the online opportunist who comes to town to start a website as the saviour of local journalism. Local journalism is alive and well without dailies and website. Weekly newspapers ARE Local Journalism.
Staffing replacement. The experience needed for ads sales, editors etc., makes it difficult to replace outbound staff
ad revenue decrease
For us, it would be declining subscriptions, as older subscribers die and aren't replaced by as many young people, who don't see as much value in paid newspapers.
advertising revenue
People not reading news.
Getting advertising
Finding people who are interested in writing- it is a declining skill
Distribution
Public perception that print is dead despite readership never being higher
Relying on Facebook (an advertising competitor) for website traffic, long-time reporters lacking digital skills, balancing all content being available for free online with subscriptions
Erosion of the market by inept moves made from newspaper chains. Cheapskating of resources by competitor has undermined print in our region
Doing more with less
Canada Post competition for flyer business
Balancing online versus print... and how to make money online
Lack of staff. Companies that claim they're interested in content but make business decisions based solely on money & numbers. Lack of media literacy - what/why/how we do our jobs and why news reports are the way they are.
Lack of engagement from advertisers,
The demand for the print product and reputation that the paper is associated with old people/a past age.
More investigative journalists, beat reporters
Large corporate newspapers taking what we can not ever offer in the way of cost of advertising to keep our paper competitive and free
Starting the conversation with defending our relevance. Time off - we are a married business partners that haven't taken a week off publishing the paper in 10 years. I'm tired and a little burned out. There is no "locum" or temp agency that can do what we do. Declining advertising purchases. Cost of delivery (Canada Post)
Lack of reporters

Stemming the steep, steady decline of ad revenues and readership in the shift to new media. This results in a downward spiral that forces downsizing and economizing to the point where these gradually drive down the residual audience.
Understaffing makes it almost impossible to do good journalism anymore
Being taken for granted
Steady cuts to the newsroom in the chase for ever bigger profits for the bigwigs.
Public perception and understanding, newspapers and journalists sacrificing standards for click, activist journalism casting the industry in a negative light as being biased.
The decision whether to be "first" with the news, given this digital age and the speed of social media and online publishing, or to hold back and do a better job of reporting the story before posting or printing the article.
Getting people to pay for the news, instead of getting it for free online.
Transforming a 158-year-old print edition business model into the digital space. Also—due to page view bench-marking—finding time to write important stories that will not perform well online such as mental health, local council, board meetings etc.
disinterest in local news, competition from larger news orgs.
Tackling big questions/investigation in the face of public's expectations to 'sweat the small stuff' too.
Our own coverage of the difficulties facing our industry. No one does stories on the rise and fall of pubs in our communities. If a pub closes, we don't say there's a problem with the business model of all pubs. The industry is shifting, but if we continually tell the public we're dead, they're going to start believing it. There are issues, no question, but the message needs to get out that we're not dead yet.
Lack of resources and reinvestment from our parent companies. We produce a product. It has declined in quality. We should be focused on reestablishing the quality of our product across all markets. Reads and engagement have not declined. Revenues have. So lets reinvest in the product, like any great R+D company would, and give our sales people something to sell.
Access to technology
Community journalists are overworked and underpaid. They are expected to do everything. I personally write copy for a 32-page paper on a weekly basis, usually writing 15–20 stories a week. Because of the time constraints, community journalists have very little time to do more in-depth reporting that could be more important and relevant to residents. Community papers are also filled with older male journalists with no training aside from work experience, which although that may be important, means they often have little adaptability or desire to change with the times.
A lack of investment by companies into newsroom resources - either technologically, training or staffing. There is a prevalence to make decisions that affect newsroom workloads without recognizing they do so. A new website needs "fresh content" for example, but for a weekly newspaper reporter that is more work and responsibility. Managing Facebook and other social media engagement is also a responsibility that does not get considered by those making decisions. I realize I am referencing money and time issues and that was not the question. Perhaps the other biggest challenge is change - there are those that embrace it and adapt and those that refuse and that has a significant effect on morale in a newsroom when you have those who are keen to engage being crushed by the sticks in the mud that hate social media/digital. The other biggest challenge is that newsrooms are not included in



strategy discussions around the future - these are isolated conversations of middle management types and by not considering what reporters/editors can contribute their strategies fall flat and success is impossible.
Economic reality of transition to digital platform; shrinking resources
Chain ownership appears to have no idea how to grow readership. They continue to cut editorial costs and assume readers will magically materialize out of nowhere. They're perpetually behind the times, e.g. still trying to "pivot to video" even after that's been shown to destroy audience numbers.
Selling advertising
Learning how to implement new techniques - websites, social media
The loss of advertising revenue to digital platforms.
Getting people to pick up an actual print paper, even when they are free, and read and care about local issues. I'd like to see young people come back to print, and I think they might.
Competition from social media such as Facebook for news and advertising
Owners who aren't interested in producing quality journalism and who don't understand what it takes to do so.
Companies that continue to ignore the concerns of its editorial staff. We're the ones on the ground. We know what our readers want, but owners continue to chase pie-in-the-sky ideas looking for quick wins they can turn into immediate profits. Local media is changing. We should be playing the long game. Management, companies and owners just aren't listening.
Publishers believing in their product so that they will invest in it.
I can only speak from my experience with Postmedia and they're the biggest challenge facing small-market newspapers. In fact, they're the biggest threat to journalism in Canada.
Media illiteracy (ie: Mass-hysteria over "fake news")
advertisement
Media consolidation -- if a major company trades you away so another major company can close you down that's... pretty hard to come back from.
A new generation of reporters who are overworked, underpaid, often so rushed they make mistakes.
Maintaining reader trust
A lack of industry experience. As a new journalist starting out in a small market under a young editor, I have found it difficult to learn from existing reporters, because there are very few to fall back on in my coverage area. There is one other paper that covers my municipality, but they cover the south end while I cover the North. Only rarely do we interact.
High profile competition unreasonably under selling our ad prices.
Maintaining and growing national advertising; particularly provincial and federal government advertising.
Retaining long-term staff. Many community newsrooms no longer have the veterans who have seen it all and done it all in the community. What happens when a mayor starts talking about an event from five years ago and not even your editor knows what the event was? You have to research and fact check what this was, but when a staff doesn't even have people from five years ago it's a problem. Also many small newspapers have websites that are terrible or selling ads online. Others have advertising staff that are from an older generation and don't understand what they can do with social media and web advertising. I know this doesn't apply to everyone, but it's incredibly frustrating when your advertising staff don't

even have a Facebook account and you have to explain to them terms like viral, engagement, unique visitors, etc.
Concentrated ownership. Central pagination/layout done by people who have never been to our city, and make errors due to lack of local knowledge. Toronto-centric decisions that assume readers in all cities want the same things.
Bigger market competitor newspapers
I'd say the biggest challenge is the corporate ownership of Postmedia. Specifically, their debt has crippled the ability to grow with decisions being made to placate shareholders until their eventual bankruptcy. For example, if Postmedia has a bad quarter, the immediate reaction is to layoff employees, which puts more stress on existing staff by increasing workloads as the community loses more faith in a product that's being diminished. Little time or money is also spent on innovation and both small- and long-term goals are rarely communicated or properly developed.
Lack of focus on whether we're digital or print.
Convincing small/medium sized businesses that newspaper advertising is still affective and people still read the newspaper
Inability to access big provincial/national stories, even when focusing locally, we don't always have a way to get the background reporting we need or quotes, etc.
The decision between hyper local and provincial/audience based appeal. Our organization has opted for a provincial/national appeal approach which makes it harder to find local news on our website, but gives it a broader appeal
Management who are only interested in quantity, not quality.
Educating and engaging a new generation of readers, communicators and advertisers is our biggest challenge. People under a certain age really do not think of print media or their local ``newspaper`` and all its services (including editorial coverage and advertising) as an outreach tool. We are seeing this as local businesses change generations and the media people get younger and younger.
ability to manage both print & digital products
legislated advertising disappearing & ad contracts being siphoned off by corporate newspaper chains & their partner papers
Reader engagement - having them believe that print media and its accompanying journalistic talent is still vital and viable in today's communities.
retaining editorial/reporters
Public perception that quality journalism is dying

#### 10c. What is the biggest opportunity for small-market newspapers?

Answered	119
Skipped	8

Responses
Being able to worry less about national/international news and focus on truly local reporting.
Re-emerge as beacons of democracy and truth in reporting amidst an era of large scale media frenzy and trust issues with corporate media. There is a chance to remind audiences that small-market newspapers deliver a scale of news that can't be found on social media OR larger dailies.

They are still producing most of the traditional journalism in any market. There needs to be more work done to get community/local government involved.
Small newspapers still have a lot of influence. They have to be very focussed on local issues and raise hell.
new resources
New generation of potential readers
adjusting to the economy and focus on local
Local news! No one outside our community cares about the art awards won by our grade 3 student, etc.
To grow a partnership with our community that builds on the past but embraces the future.
Digital
Covering stories no one else does/will.
To attract attention to the advantages of rural life and tell the stories of local people and events that nobody else covers in a reliable way.
Staying local
local coverage
The decline of daily newspapers. Source for local news
focus on local
We have the opportunity to engage people like never before, if we actually make the effort.
Only paper in vicinity
digital
I don't know
the demise of facebook
Distance ourselves from big media by offering a local flavour.
No one else serves - or understands - our town the way we do.
Hyper-local content. We are the closest to the community, the people and events. Front line coverage with more responsibility than the 'parachute-in' larger media.
Flexibility and the ability to offer expertise in communication. For example, we have sponsored a communication workshop for employees of community organizations who deal with communications.
The biggest opportunity comes through diversity. It's not just about releasing a paper one or two times a week. Papers can have a website where they post breaking stories, with a promise for more information in the next edition. They can use their talents to post videos, photo albums and podcasts. And they can use their websites to increase their revenues through advertising.
The big provincial and national outlets don't tend to cover the local issues that our readers care about. So long as those outlets keep ignoring our audience, we remain relevant. Digital outlets similarly tend to skew towards big-city issues, "cute cat vidoeos" and listicles, again leaving us with a niche to fill. The key, of course, is to market our industry so people think to look to us rather than the bigger outlets so they don't feel that "the media" is ignoring them and biased towards whatever is happening in the major urban centres. Say what you will about those online shops (Daily Hive, for example), but they're very good at engaging their audience and marketing themselves to potential readers. Small-market papers could learn a thing or two from their success.
More opportunity to interact with the community

Working to retain and gain new advertisers who want to be aligned with a truth-speaking, independently-owned community newspaper both in print and online.
We live in a rural area where competitors are closing which is making us more relevant to a larger area for "local news," which opens up more advertising potential. We also live in an area where people travel to the city for bulk items like groceries and more meaning it would benefit them to advertise in a small-town paper to attract those that travel to the cities to shop.
Small-market newspapers often have a dedicated readership. In our case, our newspaper is over 110 years old. If we stopped printing our newspaper there would be riots in the streets (good for news, not so good for our reputation).
Reinvesting in local, community-driven news. We don't need the fanciest or newest technologies to tell a good story. Community newspaper reporters are driven and can do a lot with very little. We need to double down on what the community wants to read and see - engaging photos, interesting and informative stories, and occasional videos.
Social media reach provides great advertising for a newspaper company as being the best source of reliable news for a community.
There is no one else but community newspapers that covers small markets
Teaching our clients about how we're not dead and our new digital marketing
Getting advertisers to realize that big numbers does not equal interested readers. Advertisers should be made aware that small #s mean you have a committed and focused readership.
Our overheads are relatively manageable. If we can get past this digital shiny ball attitude and people realize the value of supporting local journalism we will have a good future.
Digital revenue
Focusing on unique stories that large media ignore. (Sadly, by posting everything for free online, unique stories are often poached by competition.)
Continue to focus on what they do well in being the only tangible source of hyper-local news in their communities
Only we can write the stories that mean something, that people care about - because we are part of the community.
Looking at alternative revenue streams - advertising on Facebook. Small, cheap adverts with big reach.
Digital revenue
Continuing to produce hyper-local content that speaks to readers in small markets.
We know our community better than anyone else, so we can address complex local stories in more depth than anyone else.
No news resource knows a community like its community newspaper. When push comes to shove, folks turn to us to tell them what's going on in their neighbourhood. We are reliable and we are familiar.
We can do local better than anyone else.
Reporting the local news.
Local news = Niche product
continuing in print
To represent its community in a way that no other media format can. In doing so, proving its irreplaceable value to readers and advertisers.
To leverage the targeted access we have to our communities in a volume that no other media

(including Google and Facebook) can offer.
Small town news can not be obtained online. We still have a service to provide to the community that they can not get online
reader support opportunities
We're truly local, and have coverage that no other newspapers/radio/TV organizations have.
provision of unique, curated content
Covering communities that larger publications don't cover.
I think we have to keep news stories community focused and hope that by doing so, we'll get advertising back in return..
To make a difference in their host community by providing timely, accurate and unbiased information to diffuse drama caused by misinformation and misunderstanding.
Government participation in advertising
To capitalize and a whole new group of digital consumers
Not willing to discuss this anonymously, would want a formal discussion setting
Hyper local news: material people can't get anywhere else
We have the on the ground relationship to the community.
Growth of digital audience and advertising revenue
We're local and people trust us
To do local, exclusive journalism that matters.
Community still supports local journalism
Trust and the local knowledge of newsrooms. People here consistently ask the reporters questions.
Local, deeper relationships with readership, most small communities are heavily digitally connected.
That no one else is doing what we are doing. No one knows their community better, with the trust and reliability that we have. Ask a farmer local doesn't need to be fast, we get it done right - without sensationalizing the story.
Engaging community as best they can while building their online reach, but digital advertising alone cannot sustain them.
They've got to try. Endless cutting isn't going to make anything better.
Philanthropy
We are the only ones covering the topics that we cover. Remaining local is key.
Remaining hyperlocal and offering quality unique content that can't be obtained elsewhere.
The fact that we are needed - there are very few other online resources in small markets that can fill the void left by the demise of a local newspaper.
There is lots of things happening in rural areas, if only we can stay on top of it all.
It's an uphill battle demanding an incredible amount of hard work. If we survive the next two years, all of that hard work will be evident within the community and solidify our brand for a long time to come.
Interest in local news
Having a close relationship with its readers, so you know the landscape better than bigger competitors.
Independently owned small-market newspapers need to make their move. Every community has potential to support a local paper, but might not be able to support one that has to pass money up the 'chain'. When a chain-owned paper shuts down, there's maybe a three to four

month (tops) window where someone, perhaps the former staff, should be making a move to fill the void left in the public hearts. Advertisers and readers have short memories. The longer anyone takes to fill those gaps, the more people will adapt or shrug their shoulders and move on, never remembering that they used to have a local news source.
The advancement of the "fake news" narrative. Attack it. Reinvest in your product and increase training opportunities for employees. Make us better, more informed journalists, and more of your community newspapers will have the confidence to attack key and relevant issues. Visit a community newsroom and one of the biggest headaches for the small town politics reporter, the regional politics reporter, is a lack of knowledge, or confidence in their knowledge to face down the arguments and skilled communicators they will face. And we do not have the knowledge base within our management to support our reporters. Instead of shrugged shoulders from editors, it would be nice to get, "It is like this, don't let them tell you that, go get em..."
Niche content
Younger journalists.
Small market newspapers are where grassroots journalism lives and this is where the big markets look to for things to cover. Breaking news and doing good journalism is the biggest opportunity but if you keep it isolated inside the pages of a print product you lose out on new ways of telling stories and sharing those stories to even larger audiences.
Intense engagement with local audiences; earn loyalty
There's an opportunity to do more longform and investigative work, plus value-added products like podcasts, if (it's a big if) ownership was willing to invest in content.
Concentrate on local news
To learn, move forward and hang in there
The legitimacy of providing authoritative, independent news.
Community newspapers are still breaking stories. From the heart-felt community interest stories, to the city council meetings we cover, these small papers are still where news is born. I think community news needs to really dig in and break the stories, dig deep in investigative journalism, and prove to readers in a shrinking market that we are worth their investment. There needs to be a focus on quality, because we can't keep up with a small workforce in the ever-changing and growing internet marketplace.
People recognizing that it matters where they get their news from.
The chance to create the kind of "hyper-local" content that will keep people loyal to us, interested in us and engaged with us.
Producing quality hyper local news stories. This means the stories that larger outlets won't go for. The ones that take time and resources. In the end that's what will keep our readers engaged.
Providing reliable local coverage that readers can trust and count on, unlike Facebook.
I can only speak in personal terms here. The town where I am has only one newspaper. So, there's, literally, opportunity at every corner but, in my opinion, Postmedia only puts time, money and resources into its daily newspapers.
do not know
Major digital publishers will never care that much about what's going on in the Prince Georges and Tabers of the world -- local media are still putting out information that communities need to function for which there are not going to be a lot of sources. That

remains valuable, even if the economics are mostly ??? right now.
To tell the community the stories within it.
Hyper-local coverage
Local news. Although hyper-local is a ridiculous buzzword in some senses, there is a strong opportunity for community papers to become hyper-local. We can't compete with Global or CKNW or other big-city newsrooms. But we can remember to use our local connections to bring forward stories that people in our community really care about: sports features, local profiles, etc.
Local connection and long term relationships with readers and clients
I like to say we are not selling newspapers, we are selling content. Whether that content is available on newsprint or online, people will continue to pay to read it, providing it a) is fresh, local and accurate, and b) can't be found anywhere else.
Just report the news. People in small markets are DESPERATE to know what's going on in their home town. I know this sounds like a "no shit" answer, but I see a lot of local papers trying to get "engagement" with gimmicks (let's send a reporter to belly dance and write about it instead of writing about the belly dancer herself). PEOPLE. DON'T. CARE. They want to know what happened and is happening. Many of these communities are rife with potential stories of even national interest that end up lost.
Emphasizing hyper-local issues. We still have the biggest newsroom in our market, and readers really love it when we do dedicate time to projects with a strong local focus.
Growth of the industry
I feel the biggest opportunity is a possible return of local ownership. With Postmedia's significant financial problems, the chance for local ownership seems likelier than in the past decade. I find readers feel disconnected to their local or regional papers with more emphasis being placed on national stories as staffing levels decline. The crux of local newspapers is the ability to cover local stories no one else is reporting on. If local ownership were to return, I feel it'd be the first important step in regaining trust from the community with increased staffing and the ability to cover more stories also helping.
The strength of our connection to our communities.
Working with small and medium sized businesses with limited marketing dollars...same goes for non-profits
A focus on community and knoweldge to dig deeper. Newspapers are one of the only media that lets you really put a lot of work and present a 2000-word piece with multiple sources. It just doesn't read well on the web.
Capitalizing on locality - we are often the only people reporting on this market consistantly and having that local background and knowledge makes our news appealing. Not to mention we're the only place you can go to find news that is local.
Social media presence.
We are always looking for new opportunities - we have, in the past three years added events, successfully undertaken subscriptions drives for our controlled circulation paper and looked (unsuccessfully) to our online presence to generate revenue (not enough volume). Winning the hearts and souls of a new generation is our biggest challenge/opportunity.
Combining resources to take on corporate competition for advertising \$\$
Lean start-ups focussed on hyper-local
Going bigger on digital platforms - costly and difficult to find manpower.

covering local news events
Online video

### **About your publication**

#### **In which province/territory is your publication located?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Ontario	31.50%	40
British Columbia	30.71%	39
Alberta	18.11%	23
Saskatchewan	12.60%	16
Manitoba	2.36%	3
Nova Scotia	1.57%	2
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.79%	1
Northwest Territories	0.79%	1
Prince Edward Island	0.79%	1
Yukon	0.79%	1
New Brunswick	0.00%	0
Nunavut	0.00%	0
Quebec	0.00%	0
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### **What geographic region or city/town is served by your publication? (If you choose to answer this question, the information will not be linked in the final research report to any other answers)**

Answered	116
Skipped	11

Responses
Answers withheld for privacy reasons.

#### **Do you identify as Indigenous?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	1.57%	2
No	94.49%	120
Decline to answer	3.94%	5
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

#### **Do you identify as a member of a visible (racialized) minority group?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	3.15%	4
No	92.91%	118



Decline to answer	3.94%	5
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**Do you consider your publication to be part of the ethnic media in Canada?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	3.94%	5
No	91.34%	116
Decline to answer	4.72%	6
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**What language does your publication print in? (Please select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses	
English	98.43%	125
French	3.15%	4
Language spoken by an Indigenous group in Canada	0.00%	0
Arabic	0.00%	0
Chinese simplified/Chinese traditional	0.00%	0
Farsi	0.79%	1
German	0.00%	0
Hindi	0.00%	0
Italian	0.00%	0
Korean	0.00%	0
Polish	0.00%	0
Portuguese	0.00%	0
Punjabi	0.00%	0
Russian	0.00%	0
Spanish	0.00%	0
Tagalog	0.00%	0
Tamil	0.00%	0
Urdu	0.00%	0
Vietnamese	0.00%	0
Decline to answer	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	2.36%	3
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
We run a Gaelic column once a month
French on occasion in Advertising
Small amount of provided French copy

**Please select all that apply to your publication's funding.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Ad-supported	93.7%	119
Freely distributed	56.7%	72
Subscription required	42.5%	54
Crowdfunded	0.8%	1
Foundation-funded	1.6%	2
Ticket revenue from events	0.8%	1
Decline to answer	0.8%	1
Other	11.8%	15
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

Other (please specify)
some counter sales plus grants
Canadian Periodical Fund
Federal government aid to publishers
Government programs
self-funded
Student fees
Our news is available for free online and part of the print product is freely distributed but we also have print and digital subscriptions
Daily is paid subscription; weeklies are free
It's a Postmedia paper
Voluntary subscriptions
optional subscriber program
Voluntary subscriptions available
Our Thursday paper is wide-circulation. Other four are paid. Circ. on the Thursday is 26,200, daily is about 3,000
volunteer subscription program in place.
Mix of subscriptions, newsstand sales and ad revenue

**How many full-time editorial staff does your newsroom have?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
1	28%	36
2	22%	28
3	15%	19
4	10%	13
5	6%	7
6-10	9%	11
11-15	2%	2
16-20	3%	4
More than 20	2%	2
Decline to answer	4%	5

	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**Are you the owner/proprietor of your publication?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	27.56%	35
No	70.87%	90
Decline to answer	1.57%	2
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0

**How would you characterize the ownership of your paper? (Please select all that apply)**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Owned by a national newspaper chain	22.1%	28
Owned by a regional newspaper chain	30.7%	39
Owned by a hedge fund/non-journalism company	5.5%	7
Government owned	0.0%	0
Locally / Community owned	12.6%	16
Family owned	36.2%	46
Don't know	0.0%	0
Decline to answer	0.0%	0
Other (please specify)	11.0%	14
	Answered	127
	Skipped	0