

# The Future of New Jersey Journalism: The Role of Government and Institutions

*Policy and Practice Series*

*New Jersey State Policy Lab and Government Relations, Rutgers University*

NJ Office of Legislative Services – April 29, 2025

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## Introduction

- Purpose: Examine the evolution of NJ journalism from print to digital and implications for public policy.
- Context: Major print closures (e.g., NJ Advance Media) signal an urgent transition.
- Key message: Journalism is evolving, not dying; robust news coverage is vital to society
- See the full report:
  - Search for CUPR NJ Journalism or,
  - [go.rutgers.edu/cupr\\_nj\\_journalism](https://go.rutgers.edu/cupr_nj_journalism)

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# Why State and Local News Matters



- Journalism’s role: “Democracy Dies in Darkness”—news coverage provides transparency and accountability.
- Historic examples: Journalism exposing government incompetence, corruption, and malfeasance.
- Social media’s influence: Younger generations rely on digital and social channels for news.



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## PART I: CURRENT STATE OF NJ MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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## Covering State Government

- **Statehouse reporting trends**
  - 2000: 44 full-time statehouse print reporters
  - 2024: ~20 traditional print reporters, plus by ~18 reporters for digital platforms
- **New digital entrants:**
  - NJ Spotlight News (founded 2010)
  - National outlets with NJ presence: Politico NJ, NJ Monitor, potentially Axios
  - NJ Globe (*née* PoliticsNJ/PolitickerNJ)
  - Insider NJ – Black in Jersey
  - Jersey Vindicator – State Broadcast News



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## Covering Local Government

- **Vibrant mix of traditional and new outlets:**
  - Daily legacy/digital sites: StarLedge/NJAdvance, Gannett-owned papers, Record/NorthJersey, Press of AC, Trentonian
  - Legacy community (weekly) newspaper groups: NJ Hills Media (now nonprofit), Worrall Media, Donnelly Media, Community News Service
  - TAPinto network and Patch outlets as franchise-based hyperlocal coverage
  - Independent hyperlocal websites: Route 40, Route 1 MorristownGreen.com, Jersey City Times, Planet Princeton, 70and73, NJ Pen, and many more
- **Identity-focused outlets**
  - Public Square Amplified, Trenton Journal, Atlantic City Focus



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- Issue-specific coverage:
  - Chalkbeat-Newark, NJ Sustainability Reporting Hub/Civic Story
  - Business news: NJBiz, ROI-NJ, regional
- County-level coverage
  - Jersey Vindicator's County Chroniclers
- Broadcast outlets
  - Role of NJ PBS/NJ Spotlight News (née NJN)
  - Commercial TV news outlets - News 12, ONNJ, terrestrial radio
- Regional, local, and topic-focused cable, podcasts (audio and video), websites
- Social media: all, plus influencers (400+)
  - [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), [TicTok](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#), [Blue Sky](#),



CHALKBEAT NEWARK

NEW JERSEY 101.5

NEWS

news

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## News Gathering Today



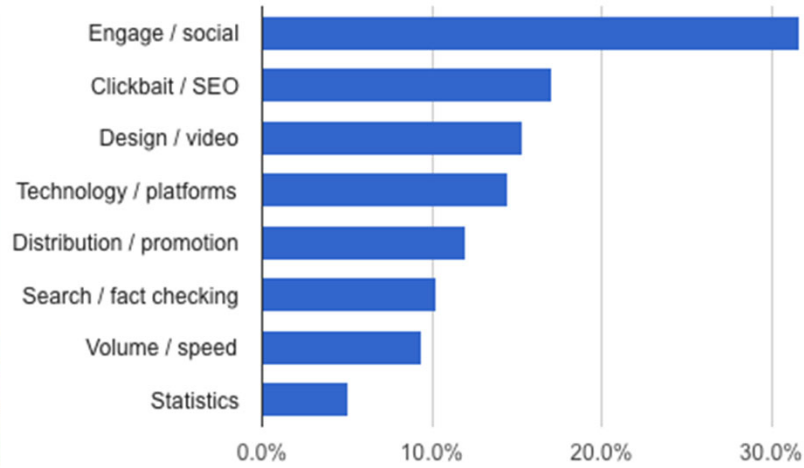
- Pandemic and technology-driven: Shift to remote reporting, virtual interviews, and digital meeting coverage.
- New reporter skills: data analysis, visualization, social media, video editing.
- AI in journalism: summarization tools but risks of errors and lack of nuance.
- Content aggregation: Newsletters, aggregators, and the impact of paywalls and AI-generated summaries.
- Curation and editing: Human reporters and editors essential for prioritizing, contextualizing, and ensuring accuracy.
- Reporting – research vs. event reporting; political vs. government policy and administration.
- Who is the audience? It varies!

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# Modern Journalist Skills



New skills required by journalists



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# THE NEW ECONOMICS OF JOURNALISM



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## News Economics 101



- Historic revenue model collapse:
  - Loss of classified ads to online platforms (e.g., Craigslist)
  - Loss of display advertising to online platforms and websites
  - Decline in print advertising and subscriptions
  - Impact of Amazon and online shopping on local ad revenue
- Private equity and hedge fund impacts on local papers
- Short to medium-term transition from print to digital
- Changes in news cycle costs
- Challenge of “free news” from aggregation sites and AI chatbots

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## Support of News



- Emerging sustainable models:
  - Nonprofit conversions: Philadelphia Inquirer model, NJ Hills Media Group
  - Philanthropic partnerships and grant funding
  - Digital subscription models
  - Franchise-based operations: TAPinto, Patch
- Support groups
  - [New Jersey Civic Information Consortium](#)
  - [Center for Cooperative Journalism/New Jersey News Commons](#)
    - [Daily News Roundup](#)
  - [Rutgers Comlab](#)
  - [Medill @Northwestern's Local News Initiative](#)



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## Some Challenges

- Digital divide challenges and library access initiatives
- Addressing paywalls and the expectation of free news
- Legislative funding/fee/tax initiatives in other places
  - California, Canada, Australia, Europe

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## FUTURE OUTLOOK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Indicators and Outlook



- Evidence that local news decline has bottomed out
- Success stories of evolving digital outlets
- Role of journalism schools and training programs
- What about obstacles?
  - Advertising will not recover unless model changes – Google anti-trust litigation?
  - Impact of social media and platforms
  - Change in consumer habits – “bubble” driven news
  - Politically driven public mistrust

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## Key Recommendations



*Local news is stabilizing, with digital and nonprofit models gaining ground.*

- For publishers:
  - Nurture emerging support systems
  - Convert to nonprofit status where appropriate
  - Develop philanthropic partnerships
- For news organizations:
  - Invest in digital infrastructure while maintaining editorial quality
  - Build community connections and engagement
  - Partner with educational institutions
- For government and institutional leaders:
  - “First Do No Harm”
  - Update legal frameworks for digital transition
  - Support initiatives addressing the digital divide
  - Continue funding groups like the NJ Civic Information Consortium

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## ONE MORE THING BEFORE WE WRAP

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## About Legal Advertising\*

- Legal ads, public notices, official advertising, et al.
  - Required by law and rule; published locally, regionally, and statewide; traditionally in print newspapers (Title 35)
  - Not all legal ads are posted by government agencies
  - ~180 laws require different types of notices by different entities for a wide variety of purposes. Maybe ~50 have regular applicability.
  - Law (rates, approved publications) is influenced by NJ Press Association. A balancing act.
- Crisis: print reduction/cessation forces legal and policy changes
- Changes in technology: statewide aggregation sites, submitter processing services
- Limited knowledge of the field; users, volume, technology, economics
- Importance: third-party publication ensures availability, aggregation, transparency, accountability, and archival integrity.

\* <https://cupr.rutgers.edu/products/about-legal-advertising/>

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## Policy Challenges



- Temporary fix: Allowed digital facsimiles for legal notices. Twice. More to come.
- Risks: Moving notices to government-run sites will create confusion, reduce independence and reliability, and is incomplete
- Recommendations:
  - Long-term: Task force to study and recommend sustainable digital solutions. We have no data or broad knowledge about volume and technology changes. It's out there, but we don't have it.
  - Two-phase solution: short-term digital facsimile transition + task force for permanent reform.
  - Maintain public access, verification, and archiving.

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## Concluding Observations



*"Media that covers state government keeps us informed.  
Local media brings and holds communities together."*

- Journalism in NJ is at a crossroads. It is evolving, not expiring.
- Sustained, quality local news is essential for democracy and civic engagement.
- Sustained policy actions now will shape the future of NJ's information ecosystem.
- Ya gotta have hope.

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# Shall we talk?

