



# Rebuilding Local News

*in Northeast Wisconsin*



Samantha Madar/Green Bay Press-Gazette

## The local news crisis, and a promising way forward

The local news industry is in crisis. Nationwide, newsroom employment has dropped 60% and 2,100 communities have lost a local newspaper. In line with the national trends, Wisconsin has lost 77 newspapers and newspaper circulation is down by a million over the last 15 years.

Americans increasingly lack sources of trusted information, **but a new project in Northeast Wisconsin offers a promising way forward.** In 2021, with support from Microsoft's Journalism Initiative, a collaborative journalism project was created in Northeast Wisconsin to increase community access to deeply rooted, compelling local news on issues that matter to residents.

The collaboration includes FoxValley365, The Post-Crescent in Appleton, the Green Bay Press-Gazette, The Press Times in Green Bay, Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Watch.

The news partners work in coordination with the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation and an educational partner, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

Known as the NEW (Northeast Wisconsin) News Lab, this project is an impactful model for producing local news that serves the region with solutions-focused reporting. This region includes Appleton, Door County, Fond du Lac, Green Bay, Manitowoc, Oshkosh and Sheboygan.

The News Lab's mission: **“Collaborate to identify and fill information gaps to help residents explore ways to improve their communities and lives — and strengthen democracy.”**

# Our purpose

As the pandemic persists, and disinformation and threats to our democracy intensify, the six news outlets in the NEW News Lab realize that our work has never mattered more. We are proud to join forces to help rebuild the local news ecosystem of Northeast Wisconsin.

The lab includes a mixture of for-profit, nonprofit, local and statewide news operations that have cast aside old ways of working to better serve the public. Instead of competing against one another, we collaborate, sharing story ideas, expertise, reporters, photographers and editors to produce deeper explanatory and investigative reporting. Our reporting documents systems that fail to equitably serve residents, informs the public on a wide range of quality of life issues and explores potential solutions to problems.

We exercise complete independence in our news coverage decisions and are transparent about NEW News Lab funding from Microsoft, the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation and the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. Your support for this effort increases the capacity and sustainability of the local news ecosystem. And as we rebuild local journalism, we seek to form deeper relationships and engagement, particularly with populations that have been historically underserved in local journalism.

**As journalists and as members of the community, we recognize the urgency of this moment.**

Wm. Glasheen/The Post-Crescent



# Our vision

The trends of the last couple of decades have demonstrated the need for a new model of journalism that is diverse and community-focused. To achieve this amid a time of market failure, philanthropy will play a critical role in developing and supporting a bold transformational vision.

A reinvestment in reliable local news has a direct impact on the lives of people throughout the region. It increases civic knowledge and participation in the community, strengthening democracy. And it creates trust in fact-checked news that counters the disinformation that has been negatively affecting civil discourse for the better part of the last decade.

Guided by our core mission, we developed a decision-making matrix that serves as a guide for our work. Our goal is to maximize the impact of our journalism — and the value of funders' investments in that news coverage.

The matrix includes these strategic considerations:

- **Fill one or more information or accountability gaps** in Northeast Wisconsin.
- **Advance our goal to explore solutions to challenges** in the region.
- **Amplify the voices** of traditionally underserved communities.
- **Deliver impact to Northeast Wisconsin or specific audiences** within the region.
- **Strengthen democracy** and promote civil discourse.
- **Ensure that the people who need this information will receive it** and have opportunities to engage with it.

Sarah Kloeping/Green Bay Press-Gazette



## From the community

“The article you wrote made me so emotional, in a good way. I have been longing to experience reading a well written article like this; balanced and courageous. **Thank you for giving us an opportunity to share our voices and feel seen.**”

Stephanie Guzman  
Green Bay community member

“What a wonderful article! Thank you for doing such a strong job of highlighting the growth and diverse experiences taking place in this region. **The thorough methodology of showcasing the data, coupled with the experiences of others throughout the article, is such a robust approach to communicating the changes we are seeing today.** I appreciate your drive and commitment to reporting on diversity and inclusion within this region.”

Raiya Sankari-Diaz  
Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator  
City of Green Bay

# Our work

With the support of Microsoft and the local community foundations, NEW News Lab has been successful in producing in-depth stories of importance to residents of Northeast Wisconsin, serving as the foundation for an engaged, growing community. A trusted local newsroom:

- Provides a **shared understanding** of what is happening around us, in our neighborhoods, city halls, schools, and businesses.
- **Connects us to our community** and our neighbors, and uplifts voices that would otherwise go unheard.
- **Demands accountability** of power structures and challenges them for the good of the public.
- Empowers us with the knowledge needed to **make informed decisions** on issues critical to our democracy.

Below are examples of what the collaboration has produced:

- The **“Open and Shut”** investigative podcast and series shines a light on how prosecutors do their jobs — and the danger of allowing that power to go unchecked.
- The **“Home is Here”** series uses data from the 2020 census to explore the people and forces behind Northeast Wisconsin’s growing racial and ethnic diversity through the personal stories of Black, Asian, Indigenous, Hispanic and multiracial people who call this region home.
- The **“Imperiled Shores”** project exposed the impacts of climate change on the shores of Lake Michigan and the struggles those near water are facing with the rapidly changing landscape.
- The **“Disregarded”** project explored the devastating effects of homelessness in Brown County and the efforts of local organizations to provide lasting solutions.
- **“Unaffordable: No Place to Call Home”** detailed the struggles of many Northeast Wisconsin residents to find affordable housing while highlighting those who are helping to find answers.

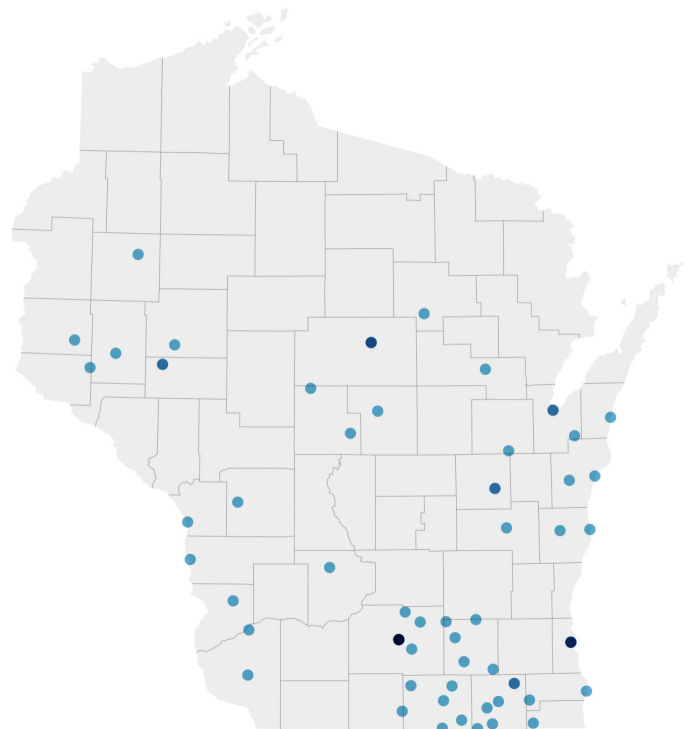
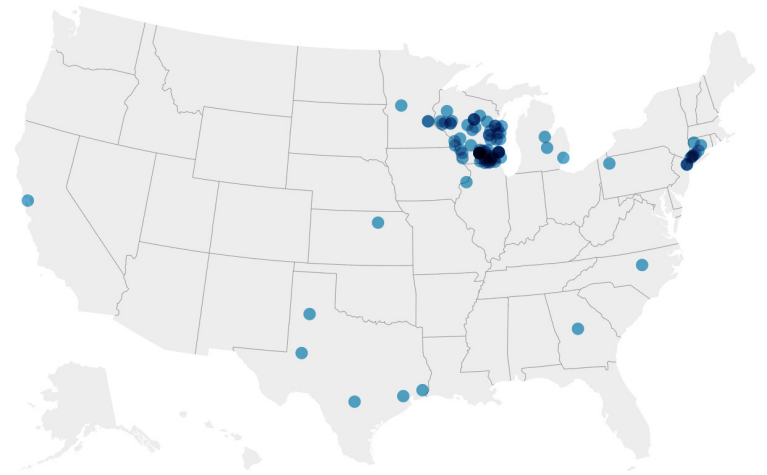
# Our impact

This collaboration has brought new reporting to Northeast Wisconsin, providing important coverage on topics that matter to the community. The six newsrooms have worked together to produce more local news and have followed it up with community conversations that add voices, dig deeper and explore solutions.

**When journalism listens to the community, people's lives are directly impacted.** Our coverage of local Hmong, Black, Indigenous, Spanish speakers and other communities that have historically been underserved by traditional journalism has shown how this new approach to local news can reach people in those communities while also helping the broader community better understand the people and forces that are driving rapid demographic and social change in Northeast Wisconsin.

Early results of this experiment are extraordinary. All six newsrooms have been able to add journalists — and expand their capacity — as a result of increased funding, at a time when other news outlets are forced into staff reductions. Between June 1 and Sept. 30 of last year, NEW News Lab stories reached print and online audiences estimated at more than **6.6** million people in **12** states. Stories produced by the six NEW News Lab partners were picked up by at least **122** news outlets — **70** of them in Wisconsin. And, in its opening weeks, the Open and Shut podcast was downloaded almost **120,000** times.

The news partners recognize the value of conveying reliable information to residents in other parts of the country — to expand the knowledge base nationwide and to allow local news outlets, not just national newsrooms, to frame coverage of problems, and potential solutions, within their communities.



*Darker colors indicated higher numbers of coverage pick-ups.*

Emily Neinfeldt/Wisconsin Watch

# Philanthropy is transforming local news

By growing this collaboration, we are ensuring that Northeast Wisconsin continues to have access to robust local news and a growing local news ecosystem. We have developed the model for philanthropic support for the years to come. Investment in this model is a valuable study in how community-focused journalism and philanthropy can work together in an impactful way for the benefit of our community.

Our in-depth reporting would not have been possible without the generous support of Microsoft and the community foundations. Funding has allowed the news outlets to produce in-depth reports and to expand staff, enriching Wisconsin's news ecosystem to better meet the needs of residents in Northeast Wisconsin.

Our early successes dramatize how an infusion of resources into a local news ecosystem can lead to public-service, collaborative journalism and the development of long-term approaches to increasing and improving the flow of reliable information to residents. As the News Lab acquires additional resources, we will have the capacity to more thoroughly understand information needs — and gaps — and apply our collective power to journalism that engages underserved residents and improves the quality of life in Northeast Wisconsin.

As we grow and the project expands to more fully accomplish its mission, **we invite philanthropy to join us in being the model for collaborative journalism** and a driving force in reporting that supports community and strengthens democracy.

Josh Staloch/Press Times



To learn more about the rebuilding of local news in Northeast Wisconsin, and how you can support it, contact:

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