

POLICY PAPER

AN INFORMATION COMMUNITY CASE STUDY: THE RESEARCH TRIANGLE, N.C

A digitally connected region in need of greater capacity to gather news and information

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The Triangle is a complex and varied metropolitan area of 1.6 million people, a place in which local identity and regional identity often exist in tension. Connected by highways and by the institutions that employ, educate and entertain them, Triangle residents tend nevertheless to limit their civic interests to the local communities in which they live. This tension presents challenges to media outlets that cover the Triangle as a metropolitan area. Yet there is high demand for media within this well-educated and rapidly growing population, and many opportunities exist to channel civic impulses and community pride toward the improvement of the local information ecology.



This paper evaluates the quality or "health" of the Triangle region's information environment through a broad qualitative study of new and traditional institutions that provide news and information across four counties in the region. To guide our investigation, we have relied on the report of [The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy](#), *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*.

The report offers a series of [indicators](#) for assessing three important elements of "information health":

- availability of relevant and credible information to all Americans and their communities;
- capacity of individuals to engage with information; and
- individual engagement with information and the public life of the community.

Executive Summary

We find that reliable, accurate, ongoing news coverage is an ever more acute need that local communities in the Triangle face. While the area has weathered the economic downturn better than much of the country, traditional news outlets continue to suffer financially from the economic downturn, reduced advertising revenue, and in many cases heavy debt assumed by their parent companies. As a result, the ranks of professional full-time reporters covering state and local issues are shrinking. Cutbacks at the region's major newspaper, *The News & Observer*, have led to shrinking coverage of suburban and small-town communities despite the continued growth of those communities. Across platforms, the number of boots on the ground providing accountability coverage of local governmental bodies, regional planning issues, and the impact of state politics on local communities has diminished.



As this study documents, many media outlets exist in the area, yet most publish primarily basic information about events, announcements from local organizations, and commentary. Locally owned outlets are more likely to provide local news and information as a way to distinguish their offerings in a competitive marketplace. Digital media outlets proliferate in the Triangle, though they reach mostly affluent and niche audiences that are highly educated and already comfortable with technology. Startup media organizations, even in traditional formats such as print, find greatest success when they focus on one city or local community. Blogs and other digital tools are increasing the public's ability to engage with information and to organize to solve community problems. Yet the supply of relevant and credible information has not kept pace with that engagement. The consistent production of high-quality, substantive content is the greatest challenge for nonprofit and for-profit ventures alike.

The high-tech, university, and creative communities of the Triangle possess ingenuity and resources that may help develop new solutions to the area's problems. The role of universities in local media partnerships, so far limited, is expanding. Local philanthropic organizations are seeking to support the provision of information needs to the Triangle in a way that fits within their missions. Ideologically affiliated groups are fulfilling some of the policy communication functions previously and traditionally assumed by journalistic institutions. Poor policy and governance hinder public media outlets, particularly local PBS affiliate UNC-TV, from fulfilling a greater role. To address these issues a broad range of organizations and publics must engage in conversations about media and technology policy in order to ensure those policies serve the public interest.



The Triangle is poised to develop a media ecology strong in its diversity if it can harness its local talent and channel local resources and creative, civic energy to provide information and context to issues of community concern, thereby increasing the capacity of both mainstream and emergent outlets to report independently verified state and local news.

Previous page: View of downtown Raleigh as seen from the Western Boulevard overpass, October 12, 2008. Photo credit: Mark Turner (<http://www.markturner.net/>); Above: The Lucky Strike water tower and smokestack at the renovated American Tobacco Campus in Durham. Photo credit: Flickr user Toastiest (<http://www.flickr.com/people/toastie97/>); Right: The Old Well at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Photo credit: Ildar Sagdejev

Summary Conclusions

We find that **ownership matters** among media companies in the Triangle. The Triangle media market is unusual in the prominence of locally owned broadcast outlets, notably Capitol Broadcasting Company (which owns WRAL-TV) and Curtis Media (which owns WPTF radio). WRAL-TV has made localism in content and outlook a key aspect of its brand identity as a news organization. WRAL is dominant not only among TV news stations but also online, where it goes head-to-head with the regional newspaper's site to cover breaking local news. When WPTF radio's Clear Channel-owned competitor changed to a talk news format and contracted to run the programming WPTF used to offer, Curtis reconfigured its programming around originally produced state and local news. The financial outcome of that decision is still uncertain. By contrast, the Triangle's daily newspapers *The News & Observer* (owned by McClatchy) and *The Herald-Sun* (owned by Paxton Media) have seen dramatic cutbacks in news staff and other resources following their acquisition by national chains.

Print isn't dead in the Triangle, but local news coverage is suffering. Layoffs and circulation declines at the area's two daily newspapers, *The News & Observer* and *The Herald-Sun*, have resulted in fewer reporters and less municipal, county, and state government coverage. Community newspapers that serve specific geographic communities have seen distribution hold steady or even grow. In small communities, such as Pittsboro, Fuquay-Varina, and Hillsborough, print is effectively the only source of local news. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that neither circulation nor staffing levels at these newspapers have kept pace with population growth in their communities. There are 24 community weekly newspapers serving the Triangle; nine are owned by *The N&O*, some are owned by other chains, and a few are independently owned. Two locally owned startups, *The Carrboro Citizen* and *The Garner Citizen*, have launched in the past five years, and both have won awards for their news coverage. Yet *The Garner Citizen's* demise suggests that quality, hyperlocal print still suffers from the same financial pressures affecting the industry as a whole. Nor does the existence of a community newspaper necessarily translate into significant news coverage or community presence. Advertising-supported news is a dual-product

marketplace, and demand for readers among local advertisers does not necessarily tell us reveal the extent of readers' demand for information, much less the supply of information to them.

The institutional assets enjoyed by traditional media are key to their ability to act as watchdogs. *The News & Observer's* high-impact investigations into North Carolina state government are evidence that wresting public records from a hostile administration requires persistence and legal firepower. The paper's investigative work has been made possible in no small part by the legal support of The N.C. Press Association, which joined *The N&O* and a number of other news organizations in lawsuits over public records. The NCPA also provides on-call legal advice and low-cost journalism trainings for members. As the media ecosystem becomes more fragmented, the power of a mainstream outlet to singlehandedly hold politicians accountable risks being lost. Extending networks of support to smaller, startup outlets, whether nonprofit or for-profit, could prove critical to building capacity for more local accountability journalism.

North Carolina's state and local governments need to become more open. Better access to public records will reduce the legal costs and other resources required to provide accountability coverage and increase the ability of professional reporters, citizen journalists, bloggers, and other members of the community to perform the watchdog function and inform their communities about civic affairs that may not be covered by traditional media.

Public media outlets are beset by poor policy. The Triangle's public media system is in flux. The state's public television station, UNC-TV, faces a crisis in management, governance, and public confidence. The PBS affiliate's problems run deeper than resources. UNC-TV is licensed to the state university and is funded directly by the government through budget appropriations. While UNC-TV produces newscasts about state government, the station's management and board members assert that UNC-TV is not a "news" outlet. If the station is to become a producer of quality journalism, its leadership must consider the station's editorial independence. WUNC radio, the NPR affiliate, remains a dedicated producer of high-quality news and public affairs

information. WUNC's governance appears better insulated from political pressure. Yet WUNC has also seen its news department shrink in recent years.

Public access, education, and government (PEG) channels are struggling to stay on the air following 2006 state video franchise legislation. Those PEG channels that succeed in many ways resemble the kind of disaggregated, local, community-supported media outlets envisioned by supporters of an expanded vision of public media. Public access stations that provide digital literacy and media production training, such as The Peoples Channel in Chapel Hill, are poised to fill information needs in the community. They train young people to become critical and engaged media consumers, as well as producers of media that reflect their own experiences.

Quality blogs and online news sites struggle to be self-sustaining. The Triangle is home to a growing ecosystem of digital media. Awareness exists among online media producers of the interconnectedness of traditional media outlets, blogs, and other emerging outlets. Conventional media, small startups, and bloggers struggle to sustain their endeavors, either financially or in terms of human capital. WRAL.com and newsandobserver.com compete aggressively as go-to sources for local online metro-wide news content. While print publications such as *The News & Observer* and the *Independent Weekly* are placing more resources and emphasis online, doing so entails significant opportunity cost, placing additional burdens on new staff. Many metro outlets express willingness to innovate but are uncertain about the most cost-effective, sustainable, and journalistically appropriate way to do so. NBC 17's MyNC experiment represented a significant investment in hyperlocal newsgathering, yet it did not prove to be financially successful.

Local blogs and online news startups, such as [Bull City Rising](#), [OrangePolitics](#), and [Raleigh Public Record](#), have demonstrated success in building and engaging an audience and making an impact on decision making within their communities. Yet they often center around the labor and initiative of one individual, and there is rarely enough ad revenue to entice their publishers to abandon secure jobs, nor enough to pay freelance contributors more than a token amount. To the extent that online news startups and community blogs demonstrate

longevity, their sustainability will depend not only on the revenue authors receive but also on the personal satisfaction the writers enjoy from providing the service and engaging with the public.

New media fail to reflect the area's diversity. There is a striking absence of minority voices in both traditional and online media, but especially in the latter. While the local digital ecosystem is growing, it fails to reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the Triangle and its communities. In Durham, where the African-American population is equal to that of whites and where black history is a source of civic pride, the lack of a prominent online voice reflecting African-American perspectives on community affairs is evidence of a problem that may be related to broader issues of the digital divide. The demographics of the Triangle, particularly among public school students, suggest the proportion of Spanish-speaking residents will increase dramatically in the coming years. Spanish-language media appear poised for growth. Yet there is little to no local news available in Spanish online. Further research into the information needs, communication habits, and civic engagement of this demographic would be useful both to policy makers and to media producers.

The digital divide is a reality in the Triangle, despite the presence of major technology companies and research universities. The Triangle's universities and schools are well connected by middle-mile infrastructure. Yet access to high-speed Internet is a major problem facing rural communities. Both access and adoption are issues in low-income urban areas. A variety of nonprofit and public sector organizations are seeking solutions to this problem. Time will tell what impact federal stimulus money will have on last-mile access. The fact that nine different local governments submitted applications for Google's fiber pilot initiative suggests that local officials and citizens are seeking greater digital capacity and have the demonstrated ability to propose solutions. Libraries are actively trying to meet the digital needs of their patrons, including basic access to the Internet. But the worsening budget situation in state and local government does not bode well for libraries' ability to meet or to expand their digital programs.

Nonprofit organizations increasingly fill a quasi-journalistic role. Organizations whose mission is to

drive the policy agenda are increasing their investment in media with great success. Both the conservative John Locke Foundation and the liberal Fletcher Foundation have increased their investment in writing and communication. These foundations represent two opposing ends of the political spectrum, and their media investment tends to be tied to their policy priorities.

Z. Smith Reynolds is the most significant philanthropic foundation funding media in a more traditional manner, and even ZSR reported that the organization's engagement with media was limited. The Triangle Community Foundation has expressed interest in funding media, but much of its funds are donor-advised, leaving little room for involvement without donor support. Both foundations are considering whether and how journalism fits their philanthropic mission.

Neighborhood and civic organizing is proving a valuable way to fill information needs and provide a low-cost input to professional journalism. Civic groups are already well organized in many communities of the Triangle. Many neighborhood associations and political groups use listservs and websites to communicate about municipal policy and hyperlocal issues such as crime and public services. The City of Raleigh's Community Advisory Councils are city-supported, citizen-managed groups that link citizens to government. East Raleigh CAC has been a model of innovation in using both online and offline tools to communicate, organize, and channel participation. In Durham, Raleigh, and Chatham County, neighborhood colleges acquaint local residents with the workings of local government and policy, drawing in citizens and future civic leaders who are interested in becoming links between their neighbors and local government.

Institutions such as CACs and neighborhood colleges may be natural avenues for the development of citizen journalism. With training in communication methods and technologies and in law relating to public records, public meetings, and libel, self-selecting community leaders may generate strong civic discourse, closing some gaps formerly filled by traditional news organizations.

Recommendations

1. Media organizations, philanthropists, nonprofits, universities, and anyone interested in strengthening local democracy should find ways to allocate more resources to local news reporting and policy beats.
2. North Carolina's state and local governments should improve digital access to public records. Any municipal, county, or state government document generated for the purpose of public inspection, such as campaign finance reports and financial disclosure statements, should be made available online unless policymakers can identify clear reasons otherwise.
3. Organizations such as the N.C. Press Association and the Sunshine Center that provide institutional support to traditional news organizations should broaden their network to include online media outlets and find ways to expand newsgathering capacity.
4. Triangle media organizations, including metro- and locally oriented commercial and noncommercial broadcast and print outlets, should partner with civic organizations and neighborhood colleges to add journalistic thinking and digital media training to their existing programs in civic engagement.
5. Media organizations with a growing web presence, such as *The News & Observer* and WRAL, should actively cultivate online community. Traditional media outlets should learn from the experience of online communities such as OrangePolitics.org about how to build a culture of accountability and engaged discourse.
6. Media organizations and open government groups such as the N.C. Press Association and the Sunshine Center should collaborate to foster better understanding of public records law among citizens and bloggers.
7. Leaders of the Triangle's high-tech industry, such as Red Hat, should develop open-source tools to increase government transparency and should provide resources to organize public-interest trainings to bring coding skills to professional and amateur journalists.

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8. Media literacy and journalistic thinking should become part of the curricula of middle school, high school, and higher education, and of programs that aim to increase digital participation among low-income and minority residents.
 9. The Federal Communications Commission should encourage broadcasters to make their “issues and programs” reports and other public inspection files available online to facilitate community awareness of broadcasters’ investment in local news and public affairs programming.
 10. UNC-TV should revisit its mission and overhaul its governance and funding structure in order to ensure better insulation from political pressure, especially where news programming is concerned.
 11. North Carolina policy makers and philanthropists interested in expanding the reach of public media should include public access, education, and government (PEG) channels in their consideration.
 12. Local governments that currently operate PEG channels, including Durham, Chapel Hill, Raleigh and communities in eastern Wake County, should continue to develop those channels as platforms for open government and community information access.
 13. Triangle Community groups, such as neighborhood associations and civic clubs, that are interested in using media to give voice to local concerns should consider applying for a low-power FM (LPFM) license.
 14. Colleges and universities particularly those with journalism programs, including UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University, N.C. State University, and North Carolina Central University, should collaborate with local public schools, community groups, and media outlets to produce news and public affairs.
 15. Philanthropists should continue to invest in media, through both unrestricted and programmatic grants, as a way to nurture democracy. Donors should target their support to develop and sustain accountability news reporting at the local, state, and regional level, and to build capacity for grantees, especially small startup operations. Funding should be structured to guarantee editorial freedom from even perceived conflicts of interest.
 16. Philanthropists should help to establish a service program to nurture young people and recent college graduates who wish to serve their communities by producing local news.
 17. Researchers should undertake an ecology study of the arts communities in the Triangle to inform the transition to a more nonprofit-oriented media culture. Journalism has much to learn from the arts about how to channel community support while maintaining integrity, how to collaborate, and how to stretch valuable resources.
 18. Libraries provide essential information access, and those services must be preserved even in the face of state and local budget pressures.
 19. Public policy should encourage last-mile buildout of broadband services. National and state policy makers should encourage better disclosure of data on pricing and speed to improve competition and quality of broadband service.
 20. Policy advocates, especially those working for social justice and civic engagement, should consider media and technology policies within their purview.

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Introduction

The Triangle takes its name from the location of three major research institutions of higher education in the area, the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), [Duke University](#) in Durham, and [North Carolina State University \(NCSU\)](#) in Raleigh. The Triangle name became more widely recognized with the creation of [Research Triangle Park](#) (RTP), a 7,000-acre science and technology park founded in 1959 that is home to 170 companies with 42,000 full-time employees. The Triangle area is often rated by national magazines and surveys as one of the best places to live, work, start a business, and raise a family in the United States. The region is anchored by the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill and covers Wake, Durham, Orange, and Chatham Counties.¹ The area's reputation for a high quality of life has brought explosive growth, with the population in the four major counties of the Triangle having nearly doubled in the past 20 years. (See Triangle population growth chart, below.)¹

The Triangle, however, has grown not as a metropolitan center surrounded by rings of suburbs but rather as a constellation of cities and towns expanding inwardly with in-fill development and outwardly with sprawl. The result is that the Triangle as a single place is a fiction of sorts. It has no single geographic or cultural center but is rather a collection of small towns, suburbs, and mid-sized cities. It is home to the state capital, to multi-billion-dollar companies, and to family farms. Residents tend to identify as citizens of their specific town, city or county. The atomized nature of the Triangle can make media coverage of civic issues a challenge, as broadcast and print outlets that set out to serve the regional market find it difficult to engage a majority of readers on items of local concern. A Durham city budget debate or Orange County school board election is of little interest to readers in Raleigh or Pittsboro. As conventional media organizations struggle to cover the news with fewer reporters, serving this diverse audience becomes ever more challenging.

Triangle residents tend nevertheless to limit their civic interests to the local communities in which they live. This tension presents challenges to media outlets that cover the Triangle as a metropolitan area

¹ For the purposes of this paper, the author will make Triangle-wide calculations using data from only Wake, Durham, Orange and Chatham counties, when available. However, the Triangle media market is defined in different ways within the media industry. Nielsen defines the market as Raleigh-Durham-Fayetteville, with a population of 1.13 million TV households. Therefore, demographic figures cited in this report should not be seen as parallel comparisons.

Yet the Triangle's cultural resources, including its media outlets, also serve to unite the Triangle into a coherent region. It is not unusual for Triangle residents to travel to neighboring cities and towns to attend sporting events or live concerts or to dine at restaurants. Major cultural venues, such as the [RBC Center](#) arena in Raleigh, the [Durham Performing Arts Center](#), the [Koka Booth Amphitheater](#) in Cary, and the [Cat's Cradle](#) rock club in Carrboro, are seen as regional institutions. Most broadcast media, as well as the *News & Observer* and *Independent Weekly* newspapers, cover the Triangle as a region and give their viewers and readers the sense of living in a unified metro area.

Employment and Economic Growth

The Research Triangle Park draws upon academic scholarship at the area's three major research universities: [Duke University](#), the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), and [North Carolina State University](#). RTP itself is located near the geographic mid-point of those institutions. The largest employers in RTP are IBM Corporation, GlaxoSmithKline, Cisco, Nortel, RTI International, the U.S. [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) and Sony Ericsson.² As of September, 2010, the [National Science Foundation](#) had nearly \$474 million active grant awards to 1,000 recipients in the Triangle.³

Cary, the second-largest municipality in Wake County, is the headquarters of SAS, an analytical-software company that employs 4,200 people at its 300-acre campus. *Fortune* ranked SAS No. 1 on its list of "Best Companies to Work For 2010."⁴ The Triangle has also become a hub for the video game development industry, with about 30 companies employing an estimated 1,200 workers.⁵ In 2010, Governor Bev Perdue signed into law an economic development incentives package that gives companies that "develop interactive digital media" a 15% tax credit on payroll costs, in order to compete with Florida and Georgia to attract and retain employers.⁶



Downtown Raleigh at dusk. Photo credit: Photo by Jake Kitchener (<http://www.flickr.com/people/kitch/>)

The top five employers in the Triangle are the State of North Carolina (79,500), Duke University and Medical Center (31,000), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (17,200), the Wake County Public School System (16,800) and IBM (11,500).⁷ Duke is the largest private-sector employer in the state, and IBM is the second largest.⁸ The combination of academic institutions and high-tech employers draws a highly educated workforce: 20% of residents of the Raleigh-Durham designated market area have four-year college degrees or greater, and adults are 6% more likely than all adults nationally to have a post-graduate degree.⁹

In the 1970s through 1990s, as the Triangle suffered the loss of manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs with the shuttering of tobacco and textile factories, technology and biomedical research began to flourish. Today there are approximately 300,000 blue-collar workers in the Raleigh-Durham-Fayetteville area.¹⁰ Many abandoned mills and warehouses have been renovated into residential, retail, and office space.¹¹

[Forbes](#) ranked Raleigh the no. 1 "most wired city" in the nation in 2010 based on broadband penetration and access and Wi-Fi.¹² *Forbes* also ranked Raleigh the no. 3 "most innovative city" in 2010 based on science and technology jobs, "creative" jobs, patents per capita, and venture capital investment per capita.¹³ The business magazine [Portfolio](#) ranked Raleigh no. 1 in "quality of life" for its high-tech jobs, high levels of educational attainment, and economic stability.¹⁴ *Money* magazine recently ranked Cary no. 23 and Chapel Hill no. 40 among 100 "Best Places to Live."¹⁵ Durham is also consistently ranked highly for jobs, cost of living, and quality of life.¹⁶ *Bon Appétit* named Durham America's no. 1 "Foodiest Small Town" in 2008 for its active farm-to-table movement.¹⁷

The Triangle's cultural resources, including its media outlets, also serve to unite the Triangle into a coherent region.

Unlike other areas of the state and the nation, the growth in health care and high tech industries has made the Triangle's economy relatively more resilient during the economic downturn.¹⁸ ¹⁹ While North Carolina's overall unemployment rate was 10% in June 2010, slightly higher than the national rate of 9.5%, Wake County's unemployment rate was 8.2%, Durham's was 7.6%, Orange County's was 6.5%, and Chatham's was 6.9%.

Complicating the challenges to local governments, state lawmakers have had to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for public schools and human services due to shortfalls in state revenue.²⁰ In 2011-2012, North Carolina faces a \$2.4 billion budget deficit, the second year in a row in which deep spending cuts would be likely to

impact public education, health and human services, and other state and local government services.²¹

Growth has taken a toll on the region's infrastructure. The average one-way commute increased 25% from 1990 to 2000, from 20 to 25 minutes, and is significantly greater than the national average.²² Growth has had an impact on the public school systems, particularly that of Wake County, which in 2009 surpassed Charlotte-Mecklenberg County as the largest public school system in the state. With 21 municipal governments in the four counties, planning for regional services such as transportation and watershed preservation is complex.

Demography

There are competing definitions of which counties and municipalities comprise the Triangle. The U.S. Census Bureau defines the Triangle as a six-county region with a 2010 population of 1.6 million.²³ For the purposes of this paper, we will consider the Triangle to consist of Wake, Durham, Orange, and Chatham Counties.²⁴

Triangle population growth, 1990-2010

County	2010	2000	1990
Wake County	900,993	627,846	423,380
Durham County	267,587	223,314	181,835
Orange County	133,801	118,227	93,851
Chatham County	63,505	49,329	38,759
Total population	1,365,886	1,020,716	739,815

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Geographically the state's largest county at 832 square miles, [Wake County](#) has nearly doubled in population over the past 10 years, with a 2010 population second in the state only to [Mecklenberg County including Charlotte](#).²⁵ There are 12 municipalities in Wake County. The largest is the state capital, [Raleigh](#), whose population has also nearly doubled in the past decade, from 276,000 in 2000 to approximately 406,000 in 2009, making it the nation's fastest-growing large municipality. It is now the nation's 45th-largest city.²⁶ Growth in western Wake, with its easy freeway access to RTP, has changed small towns into suburbs. The town of Cary has more than

tripled, from 43,900 in 1990 to 136,600 in 2009; it is now the state's seventh-largest municipality. Cary is home to a growing population of Indian and South Asian immigrants, many of whom have relocated for high-tech jobs. Raleigh-Cary ranked No. 30 in [Bloomberg Businessweek's](#) 2009 "Forty Strongest U.S. Metro Economies."²⁷ Apex is the third-largest municipality in the county, with 34,000 residents in 2009, up from 5,000 in 1990. Apex ranked No. 44 in *Money Magazine's* 2009 list of Best Places to Live.^{28,29} Garner, eight miles south of Raleigh, has nearly doubled, with 27,500 up from 15,000. The county's population is projected to grow another 19% by 2020.³⁰

[Durham](#) is the only municipality in [Durham County](#) and makes up more than 80% of its population. It is diverse—culturally, economically, and racially—and is home to a thriving homegrown arts scene. The [Full Frame Documentary Film Festival](#) and [American Dance Festival](#) draw national and international visitors. Duke University, founded in 1924 by tobacco heir James B. Duke, is the largest employer in the city. Durham bills itself as the "City of Medicine" in reference to [Duke University Medical Center](#) and the pharmaceutical and biotech companies based there. The city, which did not exist prior to the Civil War, took its name from Bull Durham brand tobacco, and the tobacco and textile industries dominated the area throughout the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, when Durham was home to the [American Tobacco Company](#), maker of Lucky Strike cigarettes. In the early part of the 20th century, Durham was known as a

Durham is the most heavily Democratic county in the state, with 76% of voters choosing Barack Obama for president in 2008.

haven for the black middle class, with [Parrish Street, aka "Black Wall Street,"](#) as the home of the first African-American-owned bank and insurance company in the country. In 1910, [North Carolina Central University](#) became the first public liberal arts institution for African-Americans in North Carolina. Durham is the most heavily Democratic county in the state, with 76% of voters choosing Barack Obama for president in 2008.³¹ There is no racial majority in the city of Durham: 44% of residents are African-American, 46% are white, and 9% are Hispanic or Latino. The number of families and individuals living below poverty level is higher than the national average.³² For many years, the city has contended with a bad reputation related to an above-average crime rate, the highest in the Triangle.³³ Grassroots political organizations wield significant political influence in the city. The most active include the [People's Alliance](#)

(progressive) and the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People (founded 1935 and famous for its role in the civil rights movement in 1950s-60s). Durham County is 290 square miles and includes eight unincorporated rural communities. The county's population is projected to grow nearly 11% over the next 10 years.³⁴

The 2009 City of Durham Community Survey offers a rare window on how city residents get, and prefer to get, news and information: 67% of those surveyed get information about the city from TV news, compared to 69% in 2007. Six percent said they receive information from community blogs.³⁵

[Orange County](#) is dominated by [Chapel Hill](#), home to the nation's first public university, and [Carrboro](#), a mill village turned liberal enclave. Both the "People's Republic of Chapel Hill" and Carrboro, dubbed the "Paris of the Piedmont," are known for their liberal politics and alternative culture.³⁶ Both towns in turn are dominated by UNC-Chapel Hill, home to 30,000 students on a 729-acre campus, the flagship of the state's 16-campus public university system. Town-gown relations are a constant source of tension, yet sports fandom unites Chapel Hillians, particularly during basketball season. Chapel Hill was listed as no. 12 in *Forbes Magazine's* "America's Most Educated Small Towns," with more than 46 percent of residents possessing advanced degrees.³⁷ Chapel Hill ranked no. 34 in *Bloomberg Business Week's* 2010 "Best Places to Raise Your Kids" list. While the town played a role in the Civil Rights era, its historically African-American neighborhoods are dwindling due to gentrification, increasing property tax rates, and encroachment by new development that is reducing affordable housing options for lower-income and elderly residents.³⁸ Hillsborough, the county seat, is a historic town, the center of the [Regulator movement](#) during the Revolutionary War, and numerous buildings from that period still stand in the town center. Literati including [Lee Smith](#), [Allan Gurganus](#) and [Frances Mayes](#) live in Hillsborough. While most North Carolina counties have one school district, Orange County has two: one for the county and one for Chapel Hill-Carrboro. Both districts are funded by the county, yet the Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools system receives additional funding derived from property taxes in the district. This disparity has been a source of much contention and has proven to be the third rail of Orange County politics, as advocates of a merger have been voted out of office. The county is 400 square miles and is home to four municipalities.³⁹ Orange County's population is projected to grow 8% by 2020.⁴⁰

[Chatham](#) epitomizes the impact of population growth on a rural, agricultural county. Its 700 square miles are diverse, with fast-growing bedroom communities in the northeast that include a small portion of the town of Cary.

The county seat of [Pittsboro](#), population 2,800, is a small-town bohemia with cafes, a community college, and a thriving arts and music scene. It is home to the [Piedmont Biofuels Cooperative](#), a nationally recognized developer of alternative fuels from renewable resources. The Hispanic community is rapidly expanding in the county, particularly in Siler City, where Latinos make up 39% of the population of 8,700. Farmers, ranchers, truckers, factory workers, and retirees are dispersed all over the county, but more than half of residents work outside the county.⁴¹ Yet Chatham's agricultural sector is adapting to economic change by fostering the locavore food movement.⁴² The county is sparsely populated, with only 85 people per square mile (compared to 1,000 per square mile in Wake County). A lack of broadband Internet access in parts of the county, including some new suburban developments, has become a political issue, influencing the then-Speaker of the N.C. House, Rep. Joe Hackney, who represents Chatham, to make addressing it a legislative priority.⁴³ (In 2010, Hackney was reelected, but Democrats lost their majority, which will likely derail Hackney's efforts on this issue.)

The influx of newcomers has shifted the Triangle's demographic composition, its economic base, its cultural life, and its politics. The Raleigh-based firm [Public Policy Polling](#) reports that while the number of unaffiliated voters has increased, the newcomer vote skews Democratic, a significant contributing factor to the state's "turning blue" in the 2008 general election.⁴⁴ In a 2008 report for the [Triangle Community Foundation](#), [Ferrell Guillory](#), a UNC professor of journalism and public policy, wrote that growth has changed the Triangle from a collection of cities and small towns "into a distinctive metropolitan region, qualifying as one of America's 'city-states.'"⁴⁵ Home to high-tech workers from around the world and immigrants from Latin America, the Triangle is now multiethnic rather than black or white. No longer dependent on textile and cigarette manufacture, employment is generated by startups and businesses of all sizes in an array of sectors. The cost of living continues to rise, and while national philanthropic foundations finance a variety of projects, especially at academic institutions, the Triangle's relatively new economy lacks "indigenous pools of wealth found in older industrial places." As a result, the Triangle lags behind comparable metropolitan regions in corporate philanthropy. Furthermore, the prosperity and technical expertise found among members of the high-tech workforce are not necessarily shared among all segments of the community. Economic and cultural divides produce a digital divide; many rural and inner-city residents lack access to the Internet, either because it is not available or because they cannot afford it.⁴⁶

Education

Public schools in the Triangle's four main counties serve approximately 199,000 students in grades K-12. The [Wake County Public School System](#) serves 140,000 students in 159 schools. It is the largest school district in the state and the 18th-largest in the nation, and it continues to grow significantly each year.⁴⁷ In 2009, a new conservative majority elected to the Wake County School Board implemented a set of highly controversial policy changes, including the elimination of a school assignment policy that took socioeconomic diversity into account, drawing widespread protest and debate. The [Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools](#) serve more than 11,000 students in 19 schools and boasts the state's highest district wide SAT score.⁴⁸ [Orange County Schools](#) serve 7,100 students in 13 schools.⁴⁹ The [Durham Public Schools](#) serve 33,000 students in 52 schools.⁵⁰ Chatham County Schools serve 7,700 students in 17 schools.⁵¹ Approximately 21,000 students attend 108 private schools in the four counties.⁵² There are 24 charter schools in the four counties.⁵³

Duke, UNC-CH, and NCSU have a combined population of 26,800 undergraduates and 28,500 graduate students.⁵⁴ There are three historically black colleges and universities: [North Carolina Central University](#) (NCCU) in Durham, part of the UNC system, and the smaller, private [Shaw University](#) and [St. Augustine's College](#) in Raleigh. [Peace College](#) and [Meredith College](#) are small liberal arts women's colleges in Raleigh. [Campbell University](#) recently opened a law school in downtown Raleigh. [Wake Technical Community College](#) is the second-largest community college in the state. It has seven campuses and learning centers that serve more than 65,000 students annually, 19,000 of whom are enrolled full-time.⁵⁵ [Durham Technical Community College](#), which has campuses in Durham and Orange counties, served 25,800 students in 2008-2009, 4,900 of whom were enrolled full-time.⁵⁶ Pittsboro and Siler City are home to two of the campuses of [Central Carolina Community College](#), which serves Chatham, Harnett, and Lee counties. A 24,000-square-foot joint [CCCC-Chatham Community Library](#) serves both college students and faculty and the community.⁵⁷

Print Media

Newspapers in the Triangle have not been immune to the crisis facing the industry as a whole, nor have they escaped the trend toward corporate ownership and consolidation. Staffing has been cut back dramatically, news holes have shrunk, and circulations have declined. The area's alternative newsweekly remains locally owned and maintains relatively steady staffing levels, but has experienced a circulation decline. Yet the success of locally oriented (rather than Triangle-wide) weekly

newspapers has shown that demand for print news remains for now.

Daily Newspapers

[The News & Observer](#) is the region's major daily metropolitan newspaper and the only daily serving most of the Triangle. Its main competitor in Durham and Orange counties is [The Herald-Sun](#) (and its Orange County edition, [The Chapel Hill Herald](#)). Both were family-owned newspapers for many decades but are currently under corporate ownership. Both newspapers have experienced sharp circulation declines and have lost a significant number of staff in the past five years due to layoffs, buyouts and attrition. As of February 2011, the two newspapers combined employ an estimated 38 news and features reporters, down from 46 in August, 2010.⁵⁸

[The News & Observer](#) has a strong reputation for investigative journalism and accountability reporting. Investigative reporter Pat Stith, who retired in 2008, helped pioneer the use of Computer Assisted Reporting. Stith and his colleagues won a 1996 [Pulitzer for Public Service](#) for their reporting on the effects of large-scale commercial hog farming.⁵⁹ [N&O](#) staff were named [Pulitzer Breaking News finalists in 2000](#) for coverage of Hurricane Floyd.⁶⁰ [N&O](#) literary critic [Michael Skube won a 1989 Pulitzer for Criticism](#); Skube was a finalist in the same category the year before.⁶¹

[Josephus Daniels](#) purchased [The News & Observer](#) in 1894.⁶² In 1955, [The N&O](#) bought its rival, [The Raleigh Times](#), and in 1989 [The N&O](#) absorbed the [Times](#) in a merger.⁶³ The Daniels family sold [The N&O](#) to the



News carriers for the Raleigh Times, Aug 24, 1914. The News & Observer acquired The Raleigh Times, its chief rival, in 1955 and merged the newspapers' editorial operations. The building in the photograph was renovated and reopened in 2006 as the Raleigh Times Bar, a popular watering hole for journalists and politicians. Photo credit: Courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives

Sacramento-based McClatchy Company in 1995 for \$373 million.⁶⁴ Prior to McClatchy's purchase of the Knight-Ridder chain in 2006, the company professed a no-layoffs policy.⁶⁵

In 2007, that policy began to change, and *The News & Observer's* management announced it would cut pages in response to the financial downturn and reorganize the newsroom.⁶⁶ By early 2008, the paper's management was signaling that layoffs may be in store.⁶⁷ The paper offered buyouts to some of its full-time employees in spring of 2008, and most accepted, but not enough to stem losses from the parent company.⁶⁸ In June 2008, *The N&O* cut 70 jobs – 8% of its workforce; 16 of those were newsroom positions. With *The Charlotte Observer*, which is also owned by McClatchy, the paper consolidated state government, sports, and features coverage and new research; the *Observer* had cut 123 jobs, 23 in the newsroom.⁶⁹ *The N&O* laid off another 31 editorial employees in April 2009.⁷⁰ It also eliminated “zoned” editions, which had allowed it to tailor print content to different parts of the Triangle.

The N&O's average weekday circulation was 130,555, and Sunday circulation was 183,051, as of September, 2010.⁷¹ It has the second-highest circulation of any newspaper in the state. According to Scarborough market research data from 2009, the print paper reaches 353,400 readers daily and 712,700 weekly; print and online combined reach 805,200 readers weekly.⁷² Most of its circulation is concentrated in Wake County, where the paper reached 63% percent of adults each week.⁷³ The next-highest circulation numbers are in Johnston (southeast of Wake), Durham, and Orange.⁷⁴ Approximately 80% of its print circulation is home delivered.⁷⁵

McClatchy's revenues continue to decline while the company carries \$1.76 billion in debt.⁷⁶ According to its second quarterly report in 2010, digital advertising was the only revenue source that had grown.⁷⁷ While McClatchy does not disclose the financial details of its individual properties, *N&O* management has consistently stated that the News & Observer Publishing Company itself has managed to turn a profit during each quarter of the economic downturn. It is widely believed that Raleigh's newspaper would be able to withstand the economic downturn with fewer cuts to staff and pages were it still locally owned and therefore able to reinvest its profits in the newspaper rather than commit them to debt repayment of a corporate parent.

After seven rounds of buyouts and layoffs, the August, 2010 newsroom headcount stood at 124, (including editors), less than half of what it was in 2005. There were 37 news and features reporters (not including sports). Of those, three were dedicated investigative reporters; one was a Washington correspondent; three were assigned to cover state government. Other beats have merged:

“banking and technology,” “education / environment / Department of Health and Human Services,” “Duke/UNC/NCCU,” and the three school districts of Durham/Chapel Hill-Carrboro/Orange County.⁷⁸ Among the beats that have been lost is the biotechnology industry beat. Some newsroom staff are assigned to a geographic area; the output of those editors and reporters is repurposed across *The News & Observer* and one or more of the weekly and biweekly community newspapers that are part of The News & Observer Publishing Company.

In January, 2011, *The N&O* began another wave of layoffs and voluntary buyouts. As of this writing, not all anticipated departures have been announced. One prominent departure was film critic and culture writer, Craig Lindsey.⁷⁹ As of Feb. 24, 2011, the number of news and features writers listed on *The N&O's* website stood at 30, and the total newsroom headcount was down to 103.⁸⁰

To counter these staff reductions, Executive Editor John Drescher appears to have explored multiple avenues. He has expressed interest in finding nonprofit or foundation funding to support additional reporting positions. So far, the newspaper has secured sponsorship from Duke Energy to fund a weekly two-page science section, with the stipulation that Duke Energy have no editorial input. (The content of the science section typically includes freelance and wire stories; the newspaper does not employ a reporter to cover science.)

Despite staffing cuts, *The N&O* has continued to undertake investigative projects that have yielded high impact. In April 2009, in the wake of newsroom layoffs, Drescher announced he would assign an additional reporter to the [investigative team](#), increasing the number of dedicated investigative reporters from two to three.⁸¹ The paper also employs a dedicated editor for investigations and a database editor. Reporter Joseph Neff's [series on the state's probation system](#), “Losing



The family of investigative reporter Pat Stith visits The News & Observer to see the presses roll in 2007. Photo credit: Bo Gordy-Stith (<http://www.flickr.com/people/pbogs/>)

Track,” resulted in an overhaul of the system. Neff and Dan Kane partnered on a series called [“The Generous Assembly,”](#) which explored how special interests influence state budget-cut decisions. Kane’s reporting on administrative leaves within the state university system led to a change in the law regarding state employees’ personnel records. Kane’s three-part series “Keeping Secrets,” on the records of public employees, prompted changes in the law to make public their salaries and employment histories and to require the disclosure of all suspensions or demotions.⁸²

The most significant series in recent years was [“Executive Privilege”](#) by Andrew Curliss, which led to federal and state investigations of former Governor [Mike Easley](#) and several other state officials and the resignation of executives within the state university system. In November, 2010, Easley pleaded guilty to violating campaign finance laws and was convicted of a felony.⁸³

The reporting on Easley would not have been possible without the persistence of a coalition of 10 news organizations that sued the Easley administration to turn over the records. *The N&O* first filed a public records request on the matter in 2005, which the Easley administration denied several times. The two-part series appeared in March 2009, revealing that Easley had violated campaign finance laws in accepting flights, real estate, cars, and other perks from campaign contributors and political allies. In a stakeholder meeting convened by the New America Foundation in October, 2010, Drescher estimated that the newspaper had spent the equivalent of more than \$200,000 on the investigation.⁸⁴

Most recently, the paper published [“Agents’ Secrets,”](#) an expose of policies and procedures at the State Bureau of Investigation. The SBI subsequently fired the agent at the center of that series, Duane Deaver.⁸⁵ The reporters behind the series, Joseph Neff and Mandy Locke, were featured prominently in a CNN documentary about the SBI, “Rogue Justice,” which aired nationally in February, 2011.⁸⁶

The Herald-Sun is Durham’s only dedicated daily newspaper. As of September, 2010, its average weekday circulation was 24,000, and Sunday circulation was 27,000.⁸⁷ The E.T. Rollins family owned *The Herald-Sun* for 109 years until selling it in December 2004 to the Paxton Media Group, based in Paducah, Kentucky, for an undisclosed amount. (A report by this author estimated the amount to be between \$100 million and \$125 million.⁸⁸) On the first day of Paxton’s management in 2005, management let go 80 of the newspaper’s 350 employees at every level of the company. The mass firings created ill will in the community. Shortly thereafter, the paper dropped *Nuestro Pueblo*, a bilingual supplement launched in 1998.⁸⁹

Circulation has fallen precipitously under Paxton. At the time of the sale, *The Herald-Sun’s* circulation was approximately 48,000 daily and 52,000 Sunday. In the first year, weekday circulation fell 15% to 42,298 and Sunday circulation fell 15.4% to 45,793.⁹⁰ By March 2009, *The Herald-Sun’s* average daily circulation had declined 45%, to 26,000, and its Sunday circulation was 29,600. (*The News & Observer’s* print circulation declined 7% during that time.⁹¹) An extensive analysis by this author examined the changes one year after the ownership and management transition.⁹² It found that, while the proportion of local news increased significantly, the total number of news stories decreased significantly; spot news and event coverage increased while enterprise stories decreased; the number of sources quoted per story decreased; and the number of stories written per week by the top-producing reporters increased.⁹³

In 2008 and 2009, *The Herald-Sun* laid off more staff, including newsroom employees, and reassigned a number of editorial employees. As of February 2011, the Durham newsroom employed six news reporters (covering Durham city and county government, public safety, higher education, K-12 education, business, and courts/sports), one features reporter, two sports writers who also have copy-editing responsibilities, two photojournalists, and the equivalent of eight full-time editors. The Chapel Hill newsroom has one editor and two full-time reporters. A satellite Hillsborough newsroom closed its doors in 2007.⁹⁴ In 2005, the combined newsroom headcount (including editors, photographers, production and clerk) was 87;⁹⁵ in 2011, it was 24.⁹⁶

Following Paxton’s acquisition of *The Herald-Sun*, *The News & Observer* made moves to take advantage of *The Herald-Sun’s* decline and compete for Durham readers. *The N&O* immediately hired former *Herald-Sun* metro columnist Jim Wise as a reporter and religion reporter Flo Johnston as a correspondent. Metro editor Mark Schultz left the *Herald-Sun* to join the [Chapel Hill News](#). By March 2005, *The N&O* had launched a weekly community paper called [The Durham News](#), which was delivered to Durham subscribers as part of *The N&O* and distributed free as a free-standing publication to the homes of nonsubscribers. At the time of the paper’s launch, *The N&O* had eight metro desk reporters covering news in Durham, compared to seven at *The Herald-Sun*.⁹⁷ *The Durham News* and *Chapel Hill News* now publish twice weekly, with five reporters and two editors total covering both counties from a combined newsroom in Chapel Hill. In addition to writing for both the main newspaper and the twice-weekly community papers, the reporters and editors also maintain blogs.

Today *The Herald-Sun* remains the most thorough source of daily print coverage of Durham. Yet in the 2009 City of

Durham Community Survey, only 41% of respondents said they get information about the city from *The Herald-Sun*, down from 53% in 2007; 31% said they get information from *The N&O* in 2009, compared to 33% in 2007.⁹⁸

The Chapel Hill Herald continues to publish daily as the Orange County edition of *The Herald-Sun*. Its only daily competitor is UNC's student newspaper, *The Daily Tar Heel*, which covers Chapel Hill and Carrboro on weekdays during the academic year.

Weekly and Community Newspapers

The Durham News is one of nine N&O community newspapers, which are distributed with *The N&O* to home-delivery subscribers and as stand-alone publications to nonsubscribers. All nine publish on Wednesday, and five, including *The Durham News*, also publish a Sunday edition. Community paper staffs write for both their own publications and *The N&O*. The papers also publish freelance stories and guest columns from community members and letters to the editor.

Some of the community papers have long histories that pre-date their purchase by *The N&O*. The Smithfield *Herald* celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2007, and the *Chapel Hill News* has been published continuously since 1923. The papers used to be freestanding organizations with their own news staffs, which sometimes competed with the Raleigh staffers on big stories of local interest.

The number of N&O community papers has expanded from six in 2008 to nine in 2010, while staffing and content has remained low and in some cases has been cut. In 2008, publishers at *The Chapel Hill News* and *The Cary News*, Smithfield *Herald* and *Eastern Wake News* were laid off and the positions eliminated in favor of a centralized publisher for all community newspapers, the company's vice president of marketing.⁹⁹

The Cary News no longer maintains a newsroom in downtown Cary. It and *The Southwest Wake News* are produced by a single staff in West Raleigh, comprised of an editor, a sports editor/writer, three reporters, and the equivalent of 1.5 designers/copy editors. *Cary* publishes twice a week; *Southwest Wake* publishes on Wednesdays. *The Herald* and *The Garner-Clayton Record* are produced by staff located in Smithfield, a town in Johnston County.¹⁰⁰ That staff is made up of an editor, a sports editor/writer, three reporters (one of whom works from *The N&O*'s Raleigh newsroom), and a designer/copy editor. Both papers publish on Wednesdays. Staff of *The North Raleigh News* and *Midtown Raleigh News* are based in *The N&O*'s Raleigh newsroom. They include an editor, a sports writer/editor, two reporters, and a part-time news assistant. The launch of these two new papers, which publish twice a week, effectively allowed *The N&O* to add two new reporters to its staff.¹⁰¹ Staff of *The Chapel*

Hill News and *The Durham News* comprise *The N&O*'s western Triangle bureau. They include an editor, an associate editor, a sports editor/writer, three reporters, one intern reporter, and one N&O photographer. Both papers publish twice weekly. *The Eastern Wake News*, based in the small town of Zebulon, employs one editor (who also reports), and two reporters to cover news and sports. It publishes on Wednesdays.¹⁰²

The Independent Weekly is an independently owned free tabloid based in Durham and serving the Triangle.¹⁰³ (Full disclosure: The author of this study was employed at the *Independent* from 2003 to 2009.) It is a member of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies. Steve Schewel founded the newspaper in 1983 in response to the conservative politics of Sen. Jesse Helms. Its mission is to promote social justice. Each week, the newspaper publishes a long-format magazine-style cover story, two to five pages of shorter news coverage, and extensive arts and music coverage, including a comprehensive calendar of events taking place that week throughout the paper's distribution area. Cover stories frequently involve development issues, gay and lesbian issues, and profiles of local musicians.

Schewel remains president and board chair of Carolina Independent Publications, the company that publishes the *Indy*. In 2002, the *Indy* purchased its rival, the Raleigh-focused *Spectator*, from the Creative Loafing chain, which had purchased it from founder Bernie Reeves in 1997. The *Indy* absorbed some advertising staff and content and closed the *Spectator*'s offices. While the majority of copies are distributed in Wake County, the *Indy*'s most concentrated readership is in Durham.

The *Indy*'s press run has dropped from roughly 50,000 to 45,000 in the past five years.¹⁰⁴ As of June 2010, the number picked up was approximately 39,000.¹⁰⁵ There are 12 newsroom employees, including an editor in chief (who frequently reports news) and three dedicated news reporters.¹⁰⁶ One reporter was laid off in 2008, but otherwise editorial staffing levels have remained relatively constant since 2003. Reporters do not have dedicated geographic beats, but tend to write long-format features and explanatory news reporting with a progressive point of view. Arts and culture coverage is a major strength, with robust coverage of the local music and performing-arts scene. The *Indy* publishes an elections endorsement guide, which is consistently one of its most widely read issues. An ad hoc endorsement committee of editorial staffers compiles candidate surveys and uses the responses, along with additional research, to inform their decisions. The paper aims to endorse in every contested race within its circulation area, but limited staffing makes it difficult to endorse in smaller or more distant communities such as Wake Forest.

Former *Indy* managing editor Kirk Ross and veteran newspaper publisher Robert Dickson founded *The Carrboro Citizen* in 2006 as a blog, followed by a hyperlocal print version launched in 2007. As of 2010, it had six newsroom employees,

including two editors who frequently write, a dedicated staff writer, and two contributing writers. In 2009, it began to expand its

In 2009, the *Garner Citizen* hosted a public debate of town council candidates. The newspaper also has a philanthropic division that organizes fundraising events in the community.

coverage to Chapel Hill and portions of Chatham County. The publisher was criticized for accepting a \$50,000 loan from the town of Carrboro's small business loan program to support a planned expansion of the print run to 10,000. Critics felt that the town's direct financial support of the newspaper would create a conflict of interest in coverage of government.¹⁰⁷ The paper is published weekly and available free at 175 locations. In fall 2010, the print run was 7,000 copies, up from 6,000 copies in 2009. The paper briefly experimented with home delivery but found it infeasible. It has a monthly arts supplement called *Mill*.¹⁰⁸

The *Garner Citizen* was an independent weekly newspaper covering the town of Garner. It was started in 2007 and its website launched in 2009. On March 16, the *Citizen* announced it would cease print publication. The announcement came via an online "obituary" that read, in part:

"The Garner Citizen, which strove to be a watchdog of town government, was the first to report on a number of stories, including Southeast Regional Library's possible closing, the missing fire department funds and the controversy over the town's trash contract.

The Garner Citizen was preceded in death by the appreciation of quality print journalism. It leaves behind an entire community and numerous struggling writers, editors and designers. In lieu of flowers, please, for the love of God, buy a newspaper."¹⁰⁹

Despite the tone of this announcement, founding editor and publisher Barry Moore said he planned to continue to publish online.¹¹⁰ Yet a number of staff were let go, including web editor Rachel Healy

Garner Citizen has won 34 editorial awards from the North Carolina Press Association, including first place for online breaking news coverage of an explosion at a ConAgra Foods plant.¹¹¹ In 2009, the *Garner Citizen* hosted a public debate of town council candidates. The

newspaper also has had a philanthropic division that organizes fundraising events in the community.

Founder Barry Moore, a Garner native, is a Navy veteran and former police lieutenant with his own private investigation business, but not a background in journalism. As of September 2010, the paper, employed six editors who also wrote, and the website listed a number of citizen journalists and editorial interns on its staff list. (Only two editorial staffers had professional journalism experience, according to their staff bios.¹¹²) As of March 25, 2011, the site listed only Moore, an editorial assistant and six citizen journalists. In 2010, the paper reported a circulation of 2,000.

Heartland Publications, a Connecticut-based chain that owns 50 community newspapers across the United States, owns five community newspapers in western Wake called the Wake County Community Newspaper Group: the *Fuquay-Varina Independent*, *Apex Herald*, *Garner News*, *Holly Springs Sun*, and *Cleveland Post*. All five newspapers' operations are based at a single office in Fuquay-Varina. The papers run the usual community mix of light features, police, police blotter, high school sports, and community events. A review of website content showed most stories appeared on all five sites, meaning content was not tailored for specific geographical audiences. News coverage of municipal government meetings was sparse. The most prominent content was preview of a scholarship golf tournament, listed as news, and promotions for a cutest pet contest.¹¹³ As of August 2010, the Wake County Newspaper Group employed one managing editor; four editors; seven part-time correspondents who are paid by the week or the month (up to \$600 monthly); and 10 columnists. The group's most significant competition is in Apex, where it competes for advertisers with approximately 10 titles (including the *N&O* community paper and various lifestyle magazines).¹¹⁴ The newspapers' websites do not list Heartland as the owner, nor do they list the contact information for newspaper management or for editors and reporters.

The Wake Weekly covers the town of Wake Forest (which, incidentally, is not the home of Wake Forest University, which is located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina) and surrounding communities. It publishes the familiar community-newspaper mix: municipal government coverage, spot news, sports, education, and community events. As of September 2010, the paper reported a circulation of 10,000¹¹⁵ and claimed to reach 93% of homes in Wake Forest.¹¹⁶ It employed a general manager/managing editor, three general assignment reporters, and one sports reporter.¹¹⁷

Those living in Hillsborough and rural parts of Orange County are served primarily by *The News of Orange County*, a weekly, owned by Womack Publishing, a

family-owned chain based in Chatham, Virginia, that owns 14 newspapers in Virginia and North Carolina. *The News of Orange* has been published since 1893; Womack has owned the paper since 1986.¹¹⁸ The staff includes one editor and one reporter. The website shows the current issue's stories but does not appear to contain an archive. A blog set up by the editorial staffers, *The Newsroom*, consists mostly of summaries of that week's issue.

Chatham County readers are served primarily by two weekly newspapers owned by *the Chatham News & Record*, an independent company. *The Chatham Record* is distributed in Pittsboro and *The Chatham News* is distributed in Siler City, with a combined circulation of 9,000.¹¹⁹ The Pittsboro office employs two news reporters, while the Siler City office employs one. There is also one full-time sports reporter and one part-time sports contributor, one full-time photographer and another full-time staffer who frequently contributes photography. Reporters often take their own pictures.¹²⁰

Monthly papers provide some additional coverage of Chatham. *The Chatham County Line* is a tabloid community newspaper published 10 times a year, with some updates online. Its office is based in Carrboro and it is distributed throughout Chatham and in southern Orange County, with a typical circulation of 4,000 copies distributed on news racks.¹²¹ Editor and publisher Julian Sereno is the only staffer listed on the website. Many of the stories are submitted by community members. There is a Spanish-language feature page. The online edition and archives dating back to 2000 are available free online.

The Chatham Journal is a monthly tabloid community "shopper" newspaper. It has a weekly online edition, *Chatham Journal Weekly*, available for free (see Online Media, below). Prints of *Chatham Journal* photography are available for purchase.¹²²

One print publication stands out for its use of public records as low-cost content. *The Slammer* is a weekly newspaper based in Raleigh that publishes mug shots of local residents with their names and alleged offenses, along with snarky commentary. Priced at one dollar, it is found only in the news racks of convenience stores, but has a circulation of 120,000 across six states.¹²³

Carolina Journal is a monthly paper produced by the conservative John Locke Foundation. It publishes news about state law and policy, education, local government, and opinion columns, as well as some book reviews. The publication claims to have a readership of 20,000 statewide.¹²⁴ *CJ* also has a strong online presence, with featured blogs from all regions of the state. *CJ* is a venue for the John Locke Foundation's policy analysts to communicate the organization's views on current policy issues. Locke Foundation analysts are often invited to appear on statewide public affairs television and radio

programs and frequently write editorials for daily newspapers. (See the section on Philanthropic Investment in Media for more information about JLF.)

Media Serving Minority and Historically Underrepresented Communities

Spanish-language newspapers have a fast-growing audience in the Triangle. *Qué Pasa* promotes itself as "North Carolina's Oldest and Most Widely Read Spanish Language Newspaper," with editions in Raleigh-Durham, Charlotte, and Greensboro/Winston-Salem.¹²⁵ The *Qué Pasa Media Network* also owns a set of radio stations (see *Radio*). The Triangle edition has an average circulation of 28,370, with roughly half distributed in Wake County; Durham County was runner-up in circulation with more than 7,000 copies.¹²⁶ *La Conexión*, "*La Voz de la Comunidad*," is a free weekly Spanish-language newspaper based in Raleigh that has been publishing since 1995. Durham immigration attorney *Ricardo Velásquez* is the newspaper's owner and publisher. The paper covers news throughout the Triangle, with in-depth coverage of local immigration and other legal issues. Its masthead lists one associate editor and one reporter for news and sports, as well as four "collaborators." Its website and online edition are not frequently updated. (*Velásquez Digital Media Communications*, co-owned by Ricardo's sister Monique Velásquez, produces Spanish-language digital multimedia for clients that include local government and nonprofits.)

African-American newspapers have a long history in the area, dating back to Durham's national prominence as the home of "Black Wall Street."¹²⁷ *The Triangle Tribune*, a minority-owned weekly paper targeting African-Americans, has a readership of a 12,000, according to its



The November 6, 2008, issue of Qué Pasa, one of two weekly Spanish-language newspapers that serve the Triangle.
Photo credit: Flickr user Abby Ladybug
(<http://www.flickr.com/people/abbyladybug/>)

website. It employs one editor and one reporter and is owned by the [Charlotte Post Company](#). [The Carolinian](#), “The Voice of the Community,” is a twice-weekly family-owned newspaper founded in 1940 and based in Raleigh. Its staff list includes one editor/photo-journalist.

[The China Star](#) is a weekly newspaper based in Raleigh. It publishes short articles on news, politics, entertainment and leisure in Chinese, with one page in English. In a recent issue, five out of 28 pages contained local content. Advertisers include area Chinese businesses such as restaurants, retail, real estate, financial services, and dentists, as well as churches.

The only print publication serving the growing Indian and South Asian community is the free monthly features magazine [Sathae](#), published out of Charlotte. Local coverage is mostly of community events; it contains local and regional ads. [Sathae's](#) website includes aggregated English-language content about India and South Asia.

Trade, Lifestyle, and Entertainment

The Triangle abounds with niche and lifestyle publications.

The leading business publication is the [Triangle Business Journal](#), which employs 10 reporters in the Triangle. It had a circulation of 9,203 as of September, 2010¹²⁸. [TBJ](#) publishes weekly and posts more than a dozen news stories on its website and [Morning Call blog](#) each day. With cutbacks at the daily newspapers, [TBJ](#) has become the best and in some cases only source for coverage of some local industries, such as media, biotechnology, and health care. Its parent company, [American City Business Journals](#), owns 40 papers across the country. Much of the content on the website is shared across those publications.

[Qnotes](#) is a biweekly gay and lesbian newspaper that publishes stories about arts, entertainment, news and politics. It circulates 10,000 copies in more than 10 cities across the Carolinas, including Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. The publication is based in Charlotte, but in 2006 it merged with [The Front Page](#), a landmark publication of the GLBT movement that began publication in 1979 in Raleigh.¹²⁹ [Qnotes](#) employs two editors and lists six regular contributors on its [masthead](#).

There are a large and growing number of lifestyle magazines in the Triangle. The oldest is [Metro Magazine](#), a glossy monthly owned by former [Spectator](#) publisher Bernie Reeves. Its 40,000 circulation is targeted at businesses and offices. Reeves is the editor-in-chief; 15 additional editorial employees work on a freelance basis.

[The Raleigh Downtowner](#) is a monthly print magazine that publishes stories about restaurants, nightlife, and events in downtown Raleigh.

[Durham Magazine](#) and [Chapel Hill Magazine](#) are features magazines that run articles about food, businesses, and local personalities; both are published bi-monthly.

[Weiss & Hughes Publishing Inc.](#) is a Raleigh-based company that publishes the quarterly lifestyle magazines [Wake Living](#) and [Fifteen501 Magazine](#) (15-501 is the highway that connects Durham to Chapel Hill), as well as [Luxury Homes of the Triangle](#). Weiss and Hughes also publishes [Triad](#) (Greensboro, Winston-Salem, High Point) lifestyle magazine. The company employs one editor for all four publications and no staff writers.¹³⁰

[Cary Magazine](#), a quarterly lifestyle magazine that publishes stories about health, food, travel, and entertainment with some “hometown stories” features, is published six times a year and is owned by [S&A Cherokee Publishing](#), which also publishes [Cary Business Magazine](#), [Garner Business](#), [Triangle East Magazine](#), [NC Magazine](#), and [Healthy Living](#).

The monthly [Carolina Woman](#) has been independently owned since 1993 and publishes lifestyle stories and, personal essays about motherhood, shopping, and other lifestyle topics., [Skirt!](#) is a monthly magazine distributed in 13 markets across the Southeast region. The News & Observer Publishing Company licenses its content for local publication in Raleigh by [Skirt!](#).

[Carolina Parent](#) is a free monthly magazine that publishes stories about children's health, education, a calendar of family activities, and offers seasonal guides to schools, summer camps, and colleges. It has a circulation of 58,000 and an audited readership of more than 120,000 in the Triangle. Its parent company owns publications in Charlotte and the Piedmont.¹³¹

[Boom! Magazine](#) is a free monthly that caters to adults over the age of 45. It runs articles about lifestyle, health, financial planning, and travel. It circulates 35,000 copies to eight counties in the Triangle and has an average audited readership of 58,000. It has a sister publication in the Triad.¹³²

[The Blotter Magazine](#) is a free monthly literary and arts publication. [The Blotter](#) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that may be pursuing a book publishing venture.¹³³

[The Durham Skywriter](#) is a free newspaper published every other month that includes articles about events and neighborhood happenings in Durham. Its publisher, Patricia Murray, hosts a weekly radio show on WNCU (see [Radio](#), below) and is a fixture at community events. It circulates 6,000 copies.

[The Stagger](#) is a free biweekly magazine with a live events calendar and listing of drink specials at music clubs and bars across the Triangle.

[*Z Spotlight*](#) is a free glossy publication with events calendar and restaurant and club listings.

A free monthly in Durham, *The Durham Flyer*, published its last issue in July 2008 with a message from the publishers that, while readership was growing, the economic downturn had made it difficult to build revenue. "[W]ith the large number of publications competing in this area, the advertising dollars were very hard to get."

Conclusions

Print isn't dead; in fact, advertising-based print publication continues to be a viable business model in the Triangle. However, local news coverage, particularly at the municipal and county level, is suffering. While there are dozens of sources of print media in the Triangle, few consistently provide quality local news. Most are vehicles for local advertising that publish light features and events calendars. The area's daily newspapers, *The News & Observer* and *The Herald-Sun*, have both seen significant declines in circulation and cutbacks in staffing over the past five to ten years. These losses are partly the result of declining ad revenues, linked with the economic downturn and the migration of readers to the Internet, which have affected the industry as a whole. Yet cutbacks in resources may also be attributable to the financial conditions of corporate ownership. Particularly among weekly print newspapers, such as the *Independent*, *The Garner Citizen*, and *The Carrboro Citizen*, locally owned outlets have typically maintained a greater investment in newsgathering during the economic downturn.

The metro newspapers' smaller newsgathering capacity has resulted in less coverage of state government and of policy beats such as education, health care, and higher education. Yet *The News & Observer's* recent work demonstrates that the institutional assets traditional daily newspapers possess, particularly their research capacity and the legal support network provided by the North Carolina Press Association, enables even diminished staff at to produce high-impact watchdog reporting. Those print newspapers that see their operations expanding or holding steady tend to be focused on geographically specific audiences within the Triangle. Yet *The Garner Citizen's* ceasing of print publication is a troubling sign for the financial viability of the local print model. *The Carrboro Citizen* is the other locally owned, recent startup newspaper with a local focus. Yet unlike *Garner*, *Carrboro* was founded by, and continues to employ, professionally trained journalists. Time will tell whether *The Carrboro Citizen* can weather the financial conditions affecting the newspaper industry.

Spanish-language media also appear to be thriving in the Triangle, and given the dramatic projected growth of the Hispanic population, seem poised for growth.

Recommendations

Media organizations, philanthropists, nonprofits, universities, and anyone interested in strengthening local democracy should find ways to allocate more resources to local news reporting and policy beats.

North Carolina's state and local governments should improve digital access to public records. Any document generated by any municipal, county, or state government entity for the purpose of public inspection should be made available online unless policymakers can identify clear reasons otherwise.

Organizations such as the N.C. Press Association and the Sunshine Center that provide institutional support to traditional news organizations should broaden their network to include online media outlets and find ways to expand newsgathering capacity.

Internet Media

Given the concentration of high-tech companies in the Triangle, it may come as no surprise that Internet media of all kinds proliferate, from commercial news to personal blogs to a variety of startups that reflect trends in online publishing across the country.

Online Outlets of Print and Broadcast Media Companies

Owned by Capitol Broadcasting Company, [WRAL.com](#) dominates the local online news market. Launched in 1995 as of 2009 it boasts 84.3 million hits and 3.2 million unique visitors per month.¹³⁴ According to a Media Audit report, 56.8% of Raleigh-Durham residents accessed the site on average in a given month between February and April 2010, by far the highest percentage among local news sites and third highest among any website.¹³⁵ In most markets, the local newspaper's website is the dominant news website, but NewsObserver.com reached only 34.2% of residents.¹³⁶

Capitol Broadcasting has embraced new technology as part of its business model. In 1996, with an experimental license from the FCC, WRAL launched the nation's first high definition television (HDTV) station. In 2004, WRAL was the first to provide local TV content to a local wireless carrier, Sprint. In 2008, WRAL launched the first iPhone app for a TV station. The [CBC New Media Group](#) oversees WRAL.com, [Triangle411.com](#) and two enterprises, [News Over Wireless](#) and [DTV Plus](#), which allow local broadcasters to use their spectrum to provide digital content. News Over Wireless works with about 150 local stations across the country.

Given Capitol Broadcasting's focus on technological advancement, its dominance online is not surprising, but it was not always thus.¹³⁷ Back in 1993, when the Daniels

family owned *The News & Observer*, publisher Frank Daniels III undertook an aggressive approach to developing technology and an online media presence in Nando.net. More than an online version of the newspaper, *The Nando Times* updated news every six minutes, posting hundreds of stories per day. Nando.net was even a commercial internet service provider (ISP). After McClatchy bought the newspaper, it sold the ISP business and made Nando Media the central web operation for its newspapers nationwide.¹³⁸ In 2005, the company changed the name to McClatchy Interactive, which is still based in the Research Triangle.

The N&O had formed an alliance with WTVD in 1991, partly in order to increase the newspaper's penetration in Durham County. But in 1997, *The N&O* announced it would abandon WTVD for a deal with WRAL to jointly produce online news content, in order to better exploit its web presence in the face of encroachment by national web ventures such as CitySearch.¹³⁹ That deal apparently fizzled. WRAL.com began to take the lead in 2001.¹⁴⁰

WUNC radio reporter Dave DeWitt noted in his 2008 report on the WRAL/*N&O* rivalry that WRAL dominates online despite publishing many fewer stories per day than NewsObserver.com. "The line between the TV news role and that of a newspaper has been eroded by the unlimited space, constant updates, and multimedia nature of online news." Given the decline in staffing and the significant debt burden carried by its parent company, it's difficult for *The N&O* to compete.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, the kind of coverage that typically draws web traffic, particularly crime and spot news, are strengths of TV stations. WRAL.com has a crime-oriented spinoff site called NCWanted.com with crime news, fugitive alerts, searchable crime maps, the state sex offender database, and a feature called "NC Smoking Gun," which posts mug shots and police reports of particularly lurid cases. WRAL's [Public Records page](#) offers a guide to local government websites; public employees' salaries; crime, education and health statistics; transportation maps; and other records. WRAL has an app for its [GoAskMom](#) content.

N&O Senior Editor of Online Dan Barkin noted that, from a business perspective, traffic is a means to an end, and he believes it's evident from looking at the two sites that NewsObserver.com and its affiliated sites have a greater advertising inventory than does WRAL. "They have 50,000 watts behind them and can plug the hell out of their site. But honestly, I think our site is better from the standpoint of commerce. Page views are nice, but money is what you put in the bank."¹⁴² *The N&O's* website, newsobserver.com, is a partner in Yahoo!'s behavioral advertising platform.¹⁴³

Barkin shared Omniture data about *The N&O's* online traffic for this report. It shows that *N&O* sites received more than 161 million page views in 2009, up from 154 million the year before, with 17% of traffic going to the home page. Unique visitors rose from 18.8 million in 2008 to 23.6 million in 2009. Approximately 39% of visitors come from the Raleigh-Durham DMA. Obituaries, employment classifieds, and sports were the most popular pages. Obit pages garnered more than 9 million views in 2009. Databases with the salaries of [state government employees](#) and [UNC system employees](#) also draw heavy traffic.¹⁴⁴ Barkin said that, in the aggregate, photo galleries are the biggest traffic draws, particularly the user-generated content galleries in Triangle.com.

Barkin estimated that stories on the site generate an average of 12,000 comments per month overall. The volume of comments has created challenges for the newspaper as it adapts to its role as an online public space. The site posts a [comments policy](#) and moderates comments to some extent, deleting comments considered to be abusive, but for the most part comments are unmediated. Barkin believes the *N&O's* online content has helped to build the public space. "In order for that space to thrive, it has to be well-lit, well-designated space." Yet reporters and editors rarely if ever engage in conversations in the comments field.

There are 11 news blogs, six sports blogs, four business blogs, one politics blog ([Under the Dome](#), an online iteration of the long-running daily political column), five lifestyle and entertainment blogs, and one opinion blog. Barkin said that, combined, they draw approximately two million unique visitors per month. Among the most popular is the [WakeEd](#) blog, which focuses on public education in Wake County, where intense controversy



The News & Observer provides free newspapers and free Krispy Kreme donuts to promote the relaunch of its Triangle.com site, June 4, 2010. Photo credit: Wayne Sutton, co-founder of the social media application TriOut.

over the elimination of the district's diversity policy has elicited mass protests and arrests of civil rights leaders, and has generated national media attention. Reporter T. Keung Hui updates the blog multiple times each day. While Hui's posts are straightforward in tone, the frequency of posts (more than one per day) and the contentious debate around Wake County school issues has made it a must-read for followers of the issue. Posts typically receive dozens of comments; some receive hundreds. "We can sort of feel public officials responding to [the blog], and it's definitely taken Hui from being a passive chronicler of what's going on in the schools to being a hub of this debate," Barkin said.¹⁴⁵

How to monetize the growing online discussion continues to elude *The N&O*, Barkin said:

In the traditional media of days gone by, the objective was to create an audience that you could then sell to advertisers. What we now find ourselves doing is providing a place for people to interact with each other in a public space we've created. But there's no advertiser out there who wants to buy an ad every time someone posts a comment.¹⁴⁶

A less popular feature that is nonetheless a priority of *The N&O* is its [online voter's guide](#), which includes information about every candidate in local and state races across the region. Barkin said even providing the most basic information about candidates is an important public service, because often no other objective source is available, especially in years when there are no national races to draw voters' attention:

You talk about something that makes no money and is a major time sink. Every year, people say, "Do we still have to do this? Can't people get this stuff online [from other sources]?" But we do it, because it's part of our mission. And for some of these races, it's the only possible source of information besides the candidate's own website, if they have one. You don't want people searching all over hell and half of Georgia for information about some school board race in Johnston County. Especially in the judicial races, nobody knows who these guys are—even their wives don't know who they are.¹⁴⁷

NBC 17's website [NBC17.com](#) reached 13.7% of those surveyed by the Media Audit in February through April 2010. Its main page focuses on breaking news, overwhelmingly crime stories.

Under former General Manager Barry Leffler, Media General affiliate NBC 17 undertook an ambitious online experiment in hyperlocal, multi-platform journalism called MyNC.com. Leffler came to the Raleigh station in 2005 after a 15-year career with NBC, which then owned

the affiliate. It aired national programming, but had no local news presence. WRAL-5 and ABC 11 competed for the local TV news audience. "The big challenge we had when we got there was, how does a station that's essentially new, with only 10 years in the marketplace, compete with two stations that have 50 years of tenure?" Leffler said. "Being just as good as WRAL wasn't good enough, because we had to be different. We set about trying to figure out how to do something that's meaningful, local and distinctive."¹⁴⁸

He and his staff launched "listening tours" of communities across the Triangle to find out more about what audiences wanted. "Through these conversations, we would get around to questions about how people are consuming local news. They told us, there are thousands and thousands of sources for good international and national news. And there are dozens of sources for regional news. But if you want to know what's going on in your community, there are very, very few sources. There are weekly and biweekly newspapers, but not many daily community newspapers. And the weekly newspapers do a great job, but they end up being more of a week-in-review." Local advertisers, meanwhile, said they lacked venues to reach customers in their communities, but that "the reach of TV was too large" for their needs or their budget, Leffler said. "We were stuck with this question of, how do you do community by community news when you have to broadcast to this larger, broader region?"

As this process unfolded, Media General purchased NBC 17 in 2006. Media General executives signed off on Leffler's business plan.

In 2008, the station launched a hyperlocal online news network called MyNC.com. Journalists for MyNC.com were "embedded" in small local communities within the Triangle market (including Fuquay-Varina, Garner, Apex, Durham, and Clayton) in much the same way a beat print reporter would be. They produced text and multimedia stories for online publication and, sometimes, TV news broadcast. "The idea was that, if our folks lived and worked in those communities, they could get to know people and make contacts and do a better job of reporting," Leffler said. Instead of the old model of repurposing a version of broadcast content for the web, MyNC generated web-first local content, then producers chose to air the stories with the broadest appeal. "We thought we would turn the traditional newsroom model on its head. Instead of the on-air dictating what was online, we were doing the opposite," Leffler said. "We had to keep in mind that something going on in Apex, someone in Smithfield couldn't care less about."

Marketing outreach teams continued to meet with local leaders and encouraged members of MyNC communities

to upload user-generated content to the site. "The secret sauce of what we were doing was hiring community content liaisons," Leffler said.

Simultaneously, Leffner and his team created [30 Threads](#), a human-aggregation site that pulled together blog posts and other online news content and reposted it along with context from 30 Threads bloggers-slash-on-air personalities, former newspaper reporter Ginny Skalski, digital media consultant Wayne Sutton. "We launched 30 Threads to capture the overall community social media blogging world without making the same mistake other broadcasters had done, which was to use bloggers for their content and give them nothing in return," Leffler said.

At its highest point, MyNC included about 20 different community sites and employed between 40 and 50 people, Leffler said. While NBC17 continued to rank third, Leffler said ratings began to rise for the first time in the station's history and that local online advertising became "a significant source of revenue. Our page views and uniques were way beyond expectations."

Media General began mass layoffs in 2008, cutting 750 positions, about 11 percent of its workforce, that May following double-digit drops in revenue across the company.¹⁴⁹ By December 2008, Media General had cut another 400, and layoffs had begun at NBC 17.¹⁵⁰ Those layoffs continued in 2009, with 20 percent of the station's more than 140 employees let go.¹⁵¹

The MyNC network went defunct in 2010, following Leffler's departure to WCHL 1360 AM radio in Chapel Hill.¹⁵²

"I think we were onto something that was somewhat groundbreaking at the time," Leffler said of the MyNC effort. He said he's glad to continue pursuing hyperlocal content at WCHL.

[ABC 11's website](#) is a slightly localized version of the standard ABC affiliate site. Besides some video and photos of breaking news stories, mostly crime related, most links and promotions on the home page are to national network content. The ABC 11 site reached 19.7% of Raleigh-Durham viewers surveyed by Media Audit in February-April 2010.

According to [Quantcast](#), [Indyweek.com](#), the website of the *Independent Weekly*, drew an average of 102,500 unique visitors per month for the six months ending Feb. 24, 2011, of which 90,800 were from the U.S.¹⁵³ Only 44% of visitors were in the Raleigh-Durham DMA.¹⁵⁴ Readers tend to be middle aged, without children in the household, affluent, and educated (half have college degrees, including 23% with graduate-level education), and there are more African-American readers than the web average. Some *Indy* stories have been accompanied

by [slideshows](#) and video. The *Indy* has one main news blog, [Triangulator](#), and specialized blogs on sports ([Triangle Offense](#)), Raleigh politics ([Citizen](#)), arts ([Artery](#)), music ([Scan](#)), and food ([Bit Bite](#)). Posts are written either by the editorial staff or by freelancers who are paid modestly per post. The *Indy's* website uses a publishing platform called [Foundation](#), created by DesertNet and [shared by alt weeklies](#) across the country.

The Herald-Sun's website was redesigned in 2009. It did away with mandatory registration to read stories; now registration is required only to access certain features of the site. A ["Your Herald Sun" section](#) allows users to start their own blog within the site. According to Quantcast, the parent site had 56,200 unique readers per month on average for the six months ending Feb. 24, 2011. The demographic of its readership skews over age 50, female, and African-American, with incomes under \$30,000 annually.¹⁵⁵

The [Chatham Journal Weekly](#) provides an online hub for Chatham County. The website of this monthly community newspaper publishes weekly updates online, pushed out through RSS feeds. The Chatham Chatlist, a Listserv and [BBS site](#) hosted by the *Journal*, is a robust forum for public debate. Highlights from those discussions are posted in the opinion section of the *Journal Weekly* site and at a dedicated [blog](#). The *Journal Weekly* frequently links out to blogs kept by community members and public officials, such as [County Commissioner Mike Cross](#) and school board member [Gerald Totten](#). Online banner advertising is available.¹⁵⁶ The site also runs Google ads.

[TechJournalSouth](#) is a regional business publication based in Research Triangle Park that covers the technology industry in the southeast region. Until early 2010, it had a monthly print edition, but it is now currently online only. The parent company, TechMedia, hosts corporate-sponsored [networking events and conferences](#) as part of its business model.

Neighborhood and Political Blogs

[Endangered Durham](#), a blog maintained by a real estate developer with a passion for historic preservation, is a testament to the web's power to preserve and curate a city's history. Gary Kueber launched the blog in 2005 out of frustration with city and county development policy that he believed would hurt and even physically destroy neighborhoods.¹⁵⁷ Working block by block through the city, Kueber uses records found in the county library, the *Herald-Sun's* photo archive, and other sources to determine what structures once stood where and what happened to them. The juxtaposition of archival photos of street cars and historic houses with modern-day pictures of parking lots and vacant lots is a sobering commentary on land use, zoning, and economic development policy.

More than 1,000 posts are indexed by street address, and locations are linked to Google Maps. Kueber's blog is a must-read in Durham, particularly for neighborhood advocates and local politicians. Endangered Durham does not display advertising and Kueber does not put out calls for donations.

In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, where civic engagement is part of the town ethos, OrangePolitics.org is the must-read community politics forum. It was started by local web developer Ruby Sinreich in September 2003 as "an effort to help local residents get more informed and engaged in the civic life of southern Orange County." The site has a decidedly liberal tone, billing itself as "an online home for progressive perspectives," reflective of the politics of the local community. It accepts anonymous comments but strongly encourages transparency and disclosure through a [set of community guidelines](#) inspired by those created by the Well and the [BlogHer](#) community. Anonymous comments must be approved by Sinreich personally before they are posted, and she verifies the names registrants use by checking voter registration records. She occasionally calls out those who post "snarky" or combative comments under pseudonyms. "If I can't verify their identity, that means either they're not using their real name or they're not registered to vote, and either way, that loses you credibility on OP," she said.

Among OrangePolitics' 577 active registered community members are elected officials, including the mayors of Chapel Hill and Carrboro and members of the Chapel Hill Town Council and Carrboro Board of Aldermen, county commissioners, school boards, and various other boards and committees. About half of the posts are by Sinreich, half by other members. Topics are usually about timely matters of local community interest such as public meetings and elections or about local controversies, and



Blogger Ruby Sinreich, founder of OrangePolitics.org, with her son and former Hillsborough Mayor Joe Phelps at an OrangePolitics happy hour gathering on April 20, 2010. Photo by Lindsay Britt (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/lbritt24/>)

most garner multiple comments. (The site claims 2,655 posts and 40,565 comments since its creation seven years ago.¹⁵⁸) The site links to primary documents when available (e.g., the site plans for a new development at UNC). The site also includes nonscientific polls, a community calendar, occasional live-blogging of public meetings, photos from an [OrangePolitics Flickr group](#), and posts from the [OrangePolitics Twitter feed](#). (All content is licensed using a [Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States](#) license.) Forum participants are also invited to monthly meetups at bars and restaurants. In general, activity on the site ebbs and flows with Sinreich's and other participants' input.

OrangePolitics does not accept advertising. Sinreich pays the hosting costs mostly out of pocket; costs increased from \$10 to \$35 monthly after she moved the site to Drupal. A "Chip In" badge on the site has raised \$210 toward the \$420 in hosting costs for 2009. Sinreich has never applied for a grant. She said she is not opposed to either grants or advertising income in principle, but that accepting such funding would fundamentally change her attitude toward the site. "It's a perennial question whether to take advertising," Sinreich said. "If I did, I feel I would have to be more accountable to the readers of the site and do more research on my posts, rather than writing about whatever interests me. If there were an important meeting coming up, I'd feel like, 'I don't want to go, but I have to go cover it.'" Sinreich has a full-time job as Director of New Media Strategy for [HASTAC](#), an academic technology consortium based at Duke. "I have a job, and it pays much more stably than BlogAds."

A number of other Orange County political blogs have emerged since OrangePolitics began. [Squeeze the Pulp](#) is a blog that posts "controversial, fact-based material flavored with humor," in the anonymous author's words. [Chapel Hill Watch](#), a site launched by a laid-off *Chapel Hill News* copy editor Don Evans and his wife Nancy Oates, provides more straightforward coverage of local issues and media criticism. Citizen groups such as the historically African-American [Rogers Road](#) neighborhood and the citizen group [Neighbors for Responsible Growth](#) use the web to voice positions on issues. There are few, if any, such blogs outside of Chapel Hill-Carrboro, in the rural part of the county.

In Cary, web communications have had a significant impact on local politics. [Cary Politics](#) is an online forum founded in 2002 by local IBM software development manager Don Hyatt. The site features blog posts by Hyatt and other contributors and aggregates news feeds and posts from other blogs, but is mostly a discussion forum in which participants, some anonymous, discuss news and opinion. Most posts have a politically conservative tone. Hyatt himself is a prominent figure in local politics,

having twice run unsuccessfully for local office. The site has raised money through voluntary contributions; it currently has a fundraising goal of \$100 per month.¹⁵⁹

In 2007 a group of citizens frustrated by Cary's pro-business growth policies launched DavisandHighHouse.org as part of their opposition to a development at that intersection. DHH, as it's commonly known, remains active in local politics. Posting campaign finance reports, petitions, and YouTube videos, site administrators helped to organize support for a slate of opposition candidates, including current Cary Mayor Harold Weinbrecht. During the 2009 municipal election cycle, an anonymous supporter of council member Jennifer Robinson created a site called DavisandHighHouse.com, mimicking the DHH site, referring to group members as "NIMBYs," and criticizing the financial records of their political action committee. (Robinson won re-election in a run-off.) After DHH members filed a complaint with the state board of election, Don Hyatt of CaryPolitics came forward as the creator of the site and resigned from the board of the N.C. Center for Voter Education.¹⁶⁰ The incident prompted a call for clearer state regulations for online political campaigns.

Other popular neighborhood and political blogs in Wake County have gone through periods of intense popularity but are no longer updated frequently: RDUWTF, launched in 2007, had five posts in 2010 as of late July. Raleighing, launched in 2005, had only three posts in 2010. The anonymously written Below the Beltline had none. In Durham, Uplift East Durham went through a long, unexplained hiatus until recently.

Sometimes bloggers stop posting consistently because their blogging activity has evolved into other kinds of community involvement. In a recent "meta post" at The Bull in Full, Michael Bacon explained why he had neglected his blog by reflecting on how the process of blogging had helped to transform him from activist to civic leader:

I've had my primary role in Durham community affairs and politics change rather abruptly. When I started this, I saw myself as somewhat of a local gadfly—I'd introduce myself to elected officials as a "local pain in the ass, um, I mean, activist." Without really meaning to, I've found myself as president of the board of a rather ambitious project, meaning that I now have a public face far beyond that of a blogger and guy-who-shows-up-at-government-meetings-to-rant. I have to watch what I say a little bit more, because at some level that reflects on [Durham Community Market, a startup cooperative grocery store]. And, beyond that, whereas the energy that sprung from wanting to "make Durham better" or whatever

now gets channeled into thinking about ways to sell more shares, rather than thinking about how the roads should be re-aligned.

Online News Startups

One of the most popular blogs in the Triangle is Bull City Rising (BCR), which covers news of interest "to those more inclined to say Durham-Raleigh." Kevin Davis is a full-time employee in Duke's IT department. Aside from experience writing for The Harvard Crimson, he has no journalism background but has earned the respect of many area journalists for his work with the site. BCR is a must-read in Durham. The site launched in 2006 as a labor of love for Davis, who moved to Durham with his wife so she could attend graduate school at Duke. He has since begun to approach it as a small business. Davis writes about city politics, municipal and county budget and planning issues, development, local media, retail, and business, and the arts. BCR often explores complex and substantive issues, such as in budget debates and disagreements over land use development proposals, and posts

"The problem is that a lot of the people who comment frequently are very passionate about an issue, but the passion is probably too strong to be able to step back and set aside their bias." – Kevin Davis, "Bull City Rising"

frequently include maps and architectural renderings (rather than stock art). BCR's coverage of local issues tends to be a deeper read, with a more irreverent tone, than daily newspaper accounts. For example, the site posted at 2,800-word blow-by-blow account of a city council debate over whether to amend the city ordinance to allow digital billboards. (*The Herald-Sun's* account of the same debate was just over 600 words; *The N&O's* story was just under 800 words.) A "Daily Fishwrap Report" (which appears most weekdays) summarizes and links out to the top Durham stories in local newspapers.

To the extent that BCR criticizes local media, it is more for a lack of coverage than the substance of that coverage. Davis aspires to provide a professional level of reporting on BCR. "There have definitely been some posts have hit that mark in terms of journalism," Davis said. Yet he sees a greater audience response to stories that are more lifestyle oriented. "I'm always depressed when I look at the Twitter stats and, for a political story, I get 10 to 20 retweets or clicks, but for a food or drink story it's 150 to 200."¹⁶¹

BCR has an average of 1,000 unique readers per day and 10,000 unique visitors per month.¹⁶² Costs to maintain the site are approximately \$45 monthly for Typepad and mobile broadband access. Davis solicits local advertising

through BlogAds and a new “virtual bulletin board” format called Flyerboard, platforms he chose for their accessibility to small businesses and local organizations. His goal for the ad revenue is “to create financial sustainability for the site and to provide a path for future growth in coverage and reach.”¹⁶³ On high-traffic months, ad revenue ranges from \$300 to \$400 monthly; on slow months, it may be \$50 or less.¹⁶⁴ The readership may be steadier than the posts, which fluctuate according to Davis's workload. Davis has recently enlisted two correspondents and invited others to contribute if they are willing to commit to one or two posts per week on topics relating to public meetings, municipal budgeting, and public data. He said he sought out contributor Rob Gillespie because of his frequent and thoughtful comments on the blog. “The problem is that a lot of the people who comment frequently are very passionate about an issue, but the passion is probably too strong to be able to step back and set aside their bias.” Contributors are unpaid, but Davis said he hopes to generate enough ad revenue in the future to compensate them. “It's very rewarding. I feel this constant conflict with the day job—keeping my known, successful career on track—and striking out in this adventure.” For now, he said he's content to have a “stable, engaged readership and a lot of commentators. I'm keeping open the possibility it may evolve into something.”

A nonprofit news startup, [Raleigh Public Record](#) (RPR), places a priority on paying writers to produce hyperlocal journalism, with a financial model that combines advertising and tax-exempt contributions from the public. Its board includes professional journalists and professors at NCSU. RPR received a \$70,000, two-year grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in late 2010, which will allow founding editor, C. Duncan Pardo, to be paid a part-time salary for the first time since he established the organization.¹⁶⁵ Prior to that, Pardo worked without pay and used his own resources to fund the site's hosting costs in its first year.¹⁶⁶ Pardo continues to work as an editor for [Courthouse News Service](#). “We've been kind of plodding along due to the fact that I have a day job, which is good for me but not good for Raleigh Public Record,” he said in a 2009 interview. “We've been focusing on just trying to keep doing what we have been doing consistently.” The site partnered with ProPublica on its stimulus watch project and has an agreement to provide audio and written text to WUNC radio, where Pardo used to work, in exchange for on-air credit. RPR has provided print stories to the Raleigh *Downtowner* and recently allowed a newspaper in Asheville to translate a story about an immigration protest into Spanish.¹⁶⁷

RPR receives an average of 3,000-4,000 unique visitors per month, according to Pardo. The organization took in \$2,400 last fiscal year, including revenue from an election event that had paid sponsors. Pardo says paying

contributors with experience in journalism is a priority for the organization. “Everything that's coming into our general operating fund is going straight to paying freelancers.” RPR currently pays approximately \$50 per standard news story, two to four stories per month. Pardo also plans to apply for grants and host fundraisers this year. [The Citizen Media Law Project](#) at Harvard's Berkman Center has agreed to provide pro bono on-call consultation on libel and related issues and to help secure public records.

A statewide online reporting effort called the [North Carolina Independent News Network](#) launched in August 2010. It was one of 10 sites in the American Independent News Network, a nonpartisan, nationwide network covering state-level politics and policy. Former *News & Observer* reporter Ned Barnett, based in Raleigh, was one of its two staff members. His colleague reported from Asheville. The site suspended operations on Feb. 15, 2011. Barnett posted the following explanation:

Our aim was to see if having a state page with reporters and funders from that state could be a replicable model for producing original investigative political journalism on a statewide basis. While NCIN achieved great success in terms of having support from its readership, it was unable to find continued financial support beyond its trial period....

As the economy and readership trends have pushed the mainstream media to cut back on government and political coverage, the North Carolina Independent News showed how that gap can be addressed by non-profit, online journalism. We are proud of the work that we have done, particularly around the [Wake County School Board](#), a controversial [Buncombe County GOP 9/11 fundraiser](#) and the [nascent session](#) of the [state General Assembly](#).

We end our work here with admiration for the deep interest North Carolinians take in advancing good journalism and responsive government.¹⁶⁸

[New Raleigh](#) is a popular site that focuses on entertainment and city politics. The site features sections on food and music, an events calendar, a city history section, green living tips, and political cartoons. Founding publisher and editor-in-chief [David Millsaps](#) has a background in technology and digital media. The site is elegantly designed. Posts tend to be short and frequently feature photos and video, sometimes linking out to or embedding material produced by other outlets. Other posts may announce news of events, such as concert lineups. According to Millsaps, four contributors are paid a weekly in exchange for a commitment to a certain output. They are also expected to help manage the

volunteers who help run the site itself. The site posts an ethics policy that stipulates a division between advertising revenue and editorial content:¹⁶⁹

Millsaps said he launched the site because there was no single place to go to find out "all the cool stuff going on in Raleigh." He did not consider the nonprofit route. "I don't see the point in building something that is nonprofit. If it can't function in the capitalist system, does it deserve to live?" He said that while he would like to publish good writing, what he looks for in contributors is people who can build relationships in the city.

"You can't be just a writer, because I don't consider [New Raleigh] journalism as much as entertainment. The least important aspect of New Raleigh is the writing and the quality of the writing. . . . I want my writers and producers to highlight the most beautiful things in our city. I don't really care if the grammar's perfect as long as it brings attention to something cool."

According to [Quantcast statistics](#), New Raleigh's average traffic was 42,500 readers per month over the five months ending in July 2010. More than 85% of readers are white, 67% are over age 35, 52% are college educated, 20% have graduate education, and 63% make more than \$60,000, all figures that are greater than the Internet average. In addition to Google AdSense, the site [sells advertising](#) by cost-per-impression and by monthly contract. Leaderboard (banner) ads are available at \$14 CPM, at a minimum of 10,000 impressions. Millsaps is tight-lipped about the site's business development and declined to disclose the exact amount of revenue, but estimated it was "in the low six figures" over 12 months. He said he is using that revenue to grow the business through development of innovative ad products and a mobile application and to pay back debt he took on to launch the site, but is not currently taking a salary.

Millsaps feels a tension between the enthusiasm he felt when launching the site and the impulse to grow it as a business, "It was much more fun when it was all volunteer. But I'm a pretty aggressive businessperson when it comes to business, so if I'm going to do this, it's going to be amazing and cutthroat. I didn't want to be in some middle ground." Millsaps said he is not interested in developing a newsroom or professionalizing his editorial staff to make it resemble a conventional news organization. "I've met with a lot of *N&O* folks and they have a really old-school approach. They keep saying things like, you could get some investors and open a newsroom, and I'm like, that sounds horrible. That's not what I want."

[Cary Citizen](#) is an online news site that publishes the mix of local crime and sports news, features, and events coverage, including many photos and much multimedia

content, common to community newspapers. It has a strong social media presence on [Facebook](#) and Twitter. The site also incorporates photos from the [Cary Flickr Group](#). Cary Citizen was started in July 2009 by [Hal Goodtree](#) of Goodtree & Company, a digital content creation and advertising services firm that produces websites and multimedia for area clients. Goodtree is the editor and publisher, and the site employs three additional editors and 20 regular contributors. Goodtree said the site has had 50,000 unique visitors and averages 17,000 page views per month, with 90% of readers within a five-mile radius of downtown Cary.¹⁷⁰ The site offers a variety of local [advertising](#) products, including banner ads (\$30 to \$50 per week) and video sponsorship (starting at \$2,000). The site also [posts a list](#) of individual sponsors, which includes many small businesses and some elected officials.

The Garner Citizen launched an online edition in 2009, two years after its launch as a weekly print newspaper (See Print, above). In March 2011, the print publication folded and most staff were let go, but founding executive editor Barry Moore said he intended to continue publishing online.¹⁷¹

The [Raleigh Telegram](#) is an online newspaper founded by former community newspaper publisher Randall Gregg. The precursor of the Telegram was RTP TV, the area's first "online TV channel," launched in 2001 (pre-YouTube). Before merging with the Telegram in 2005, RTP TV webcast full-length TV programs, partnering with broadcast stations to run public affairs shows such as [NC Spin](#) (on state politics) and [Carolina Business Review](#). The Telegram began as a daily online news site, but Gregg said he found the daily publishing schedule "unsustainable"; it now updates weekly. The Telegram covers local news, with occasional national and international stories, such as Gregg's trip to Haiti as an embedded reporter with the 82nd Airborne. The main page has headlines that link to local, national, and international stories from all over the web. The Telegram has five paid editorial staff, including Gregg, and 12 reporters, most of whom he describes as volunteers, some of whom are professional freelancers paid on a per-story basis. Gregg said he does not track unique visitors but that the site received about 900,000 page views in the course of one year. Approximately 6,400 subscribe to the weekly email newsletter. The Telegram sells advertising on a per-week or per-month basis rather than by impression.

The Triangle has a robust social media community, with very active presences on Twitter, Facebook and other sites. A local social networking site and mobile application, [TriOut](#), provides a sort of homegrown version of [foursquare](#).¹⁷² TriOut was cofounded by web and mobile app developer [Lawrence Ingraham](#) and social

media consultant [Wayne Sutton](#), both of whom live in the Triangle. TriOut has established partnerships with Triangle.com, an *N&O* website. City-Data.com has an active [Triangle forum](#). Twitter geographical hashtags include #RTP, #NC, #Raleigh, #Durham, #ChapelHill, #CHPL, and #Cary. There is an annual Triangle Tweetup. Aggregators such as Topix and OutsideIn have presences in the Triangle as well.

Niche Sites and Communities

In 2005, UNC-CH hosted a [Triangle Bloggers Conference](#) attended by more than two dozen North Carolina bloggers and national guests such as Dave Winer and Dan Gillmor. [Anton Zuiker](#), its lead organizer, followed up by creating the statewide [Blog Together](#) community. Zuiker has a master's degree in medical journalism from UNC-CH and works in the internal communications department at Duke University Health System. He and fellow science blogger [Bora Zivkovic](#) have helped to nurture and promote a community of science blogging and online journalism. The national [Science Online](#) conference has taken place in the Triangle five years in a row. A major part of the Science Online community is [Science in the Triangle](#), which receives sponsorship support from Research Triangle Park and Durham's N.C. Museum of Life and Science. One of its full-time bloggers, Sabine Vollmer, who writes the [Inside RTP blog](#), was a biomedical reporter laid off from *The N&O*.

[Trianglerock.com](#) is a weekly updated online guide to live music, mostly of the indie rock variety, throughout the Triangle. The site focuses on upcoming and recent shows, but also includes brief descriptions of nearly every band, venue, and independent music label in the Triangle. Not only a useful guide, it provides one of the few historical records of an inherently ephemeral culture. The site is written and maintained by Ross Grady, a longtime gadfly of the local music scene who works at IBM. Grady has also managed the [alt.music.chapel-hill](#) newsgroup since the 1990s. He also hosts a weekly live local music show on [WXDU](#) that is one of the station's longest-running programs. Grady, who writes all Trianglerock entries, is also highly technically capable. He developed a [Facebook application](#) and an [iCal feed](#) of shows, updated nightly, and used the Google Maps API to create an [interactive map of clubs and venues](#).

The Triangle's food scene, including its locavore farm-to-table movement, is also well represented online. [Slow Food Triangle](#) and [Eat Local Triangle](#) are hubs. The group blog [Carpe Durham](#), started by two Duke Law students, is particularly popular, with an average of 65,000 unique visitors per month. It sells advertising, but ad revenue only roughly covers hosting costs.¹⁷³ [ChowHound](#) has active Triangle representation in its forum.

[Philanthropy Journal](#) is a daily online news site covering nonprofits and foundations across the country, with a particular focus on North Carolina. It was originally funded by the A.J. Fletcher Foundation but recently became a project of the [Institute for Nonprofits](#) at N.C. State. Its two staff editors write most of the stories. The organization offers webinars, networking lunches, and an annual conference.

Durham resident Pam Spaulding runs a high-profile blog on gay, lesbian and transgender issues called [Pam's House Blend](#), which reaches more than 50,000 people per month, according to Quantcast.¹⁷⁴ Spaulding is a Duke University Press technologist. A black lesbian, she often blogs about race, politics, and religious fundamentalism, but the blog does not have a local or regional focus.

Conclusions

The Triangle is home to a growing ecosystem of digital media. Moreover, online media producers are aware of the interconnectedness of traditional media outlets, blogs, social media tools, and other emerging outlets. Bloggers and online media entrepreneurs in particular are actively trying to determine their niche. Ruby Sinreich has developed [OrangePolitics.org](#) as a platform for engagement with news and politics, but she recognizes that this platform requires quality journalism in order for that engagement to be meaningful. WRAL.com and newsandobserver.com are competing aggressively to become go-to sources for local online metro-wide news content. Meanwhile, readers are eager for content about their local communities.

Yet demand for online information has not yet translated into financial sustainability for online outlets. NBC 17's MyNC was an experiment that aimed to serve that demand, but it failed for reasons that appear to be tied to financial pressure on its parent company. The failure of the North Carolina Independent News Network after only six months does not bode well for philanthropically backed nonprofit state news coverage. However, the expansion of the Raleigh Public Record may be a more positive indicator for nonprofit news coverage at the local level. Bull City Rising's popularity among Durham residents has not translated into enough revenue for its founder to pay himself or other contributors any significant amount of money. The Triangle's online media entrepreneurs continue to experiment, but all -- conventional media, small startups, and amateur bloggers -- struggle to sustain their endeavors, either financially or in terms of human capital.

Better access to public records would increase the ability of professional reporters, citizen journalists, bloggers, and other members of the community to perform the watchdog function and to inform their communities

about civic affairs that may not be covered by traditional media.

While the local digital ecosystem is growing, it fails to reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the Triangle and its communities. The lack of a blog reflecting African-American perspectives on community affairs in Durham, for instance, or any prominent online Spanish-language forum, are evidence of this problem, which may relate to broader issues of digital access and Internet adoption among minority communities.

Recommendations

North Carolina's state and local governments should improve digital access to public records. Any municipal, county, or state government document generated for the purpose of public inspection, such as campaign finance reports and financial disclosure statements, should be made available online unless policymakers can identify clear reasons otherwise.

Media organizations with a growing web presence, such as *The News & Observer* and WRAL, should actively cultivate online community. Traditional media outlets should learn from the experience of online communities such as OrangePolitics.org about how to build a culture of accountability and engaged discourse.

Media organizations and open government groups such as the N.C. Press Association and the Sunshine Center should collaborate to foster better understanding of public records law among citizens and bloggers.

Leaders of the Triangle's high-tech industry, such as Red Hat, should develop open-source tools to increase government transparency and should provide resources to organize public-interest trainings to bring coding skills to professional and amateur journalists.

Triangle media organizations, including metro- and locally oriented commercial and noncommercial broadcast and print outlets, should partner with civic organizations and neighborhood colleges to add journalistic thinking and digital media training to their existing programs in civic engagement.

Media literacy and journalistic thinking should become part of the curricula of middle school, high school, and higher education, and of programs that aim to increase digital participation among low-income and minority residents.

Television

As of September 2010, Nielsen ranks the Raleigh-Durham-Fayetteville market no. 25 in the country, up one spot from the year before, a trend that may make the area more attractive to national advertisers.¹⁷⁵ Competition among commercial television broadcasters is strong,

though locally owned WRAL-5 consistently dominates in the ratings. The state's public television network, UNC-TV, reaches 4 million viewers across North Carolina. Public access, education, and government (PEG) channels exist across the Triangle, but have suffered due to state cable franchise legislation passed in 2006.

Commercial Television

Nielsen's Raleigh market includes 20 counties and stretches west to the Chatham County line and north to the Virginia border. The Triangle's commercial television news market is unusual in that two of its broadcast network-affiliated stations are locally owned and produce unusually strong local news programming.

Revenue declines in 2009 caused by the economic downturn, the reduction in car dealer advertisements, and the absence of paid political advertising, which had kept revenue coming in the previous year, led several stations to reduce staff and other expenses. The effect on news production is unclear since stations declined to disclose how many staff were laid off, or which positions were terminated.¹⁷⁶ Reports suggest ad revenue may be improving in 2010.¹⁷⁷

In accordance with Section 73.3526(a) of the Federal Communications Commission's rules, each broadcast station is required to make available for public inspection a file containing a variety of specified content. For commercial and Class A TV broadcast stations, these items include an "issues and programs" list, updated quarterly, detailing "the station's most significant treatment of community issues during the preceding three months." The rules indicate that brief narratives should include the issues and the time, date, duration, and title of each program.

As part of the research for edition 2.0 of this report, this author collected and analyzed the programs and issues lists from the first two quarters of 2010 for all licensed broadcast TV stations serving the Raleigh television market. Information from that analysis is interwoven with the descriptions of each station.

The Capitol Broadcasting Company owns the leading station in the market, WRAL, a CBS affiliate. WRAL has a long history in the Triangle¹⁷⁸ and is the leading producer of local news programming, with consistently higher rating than its competitors.¹⁷⁹

WRAL and CBC New Media Group rolled out the first public deployment of mobile digital television (DTV) broadcast signal in the country in 2009, equipping Raleigh city buses with WRAL TV content as well as weather and traffic information.¹⁸⁰

WRAL has a significant cross-platform news operation, which it shares with other Capitol Broadcasting stations. The television news division for WRAL-TV 5 employs 24

news reporters and anchors, 14 producers, and two photojournalists who sometimes, write, shoot, edit and produce a story with the voice of an anchor. (A separate sports department employs an additional six reporters and photographers.)¹⁸¹

WRAL produces an average of 11 hours of local news each week for the station, with newscasts from 4:30-7:00 a.m., 12:00-1:00 p.m., 5:00-6:30 p.m. and 11:00-11:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. On Saturdays, the station airs two hours of news beginning at 6:00 a.m. and half-hours beginning at 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Sundays, it airs news 7:00-9:00 a.m. and half-hours beginning at 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.

The WRAL news staff also produces three and a half hours of newscasts for WRAZ Fox50, which air 7:00-9:00 a.m. and 10:00-10:30 p.m. weekdays and weekends for half and hour beginning at 10:00 p.m. Capitol Broadcasting's Wilmington station WILM, also a CBS affiliate, simulcasts some of WRAL's daily newscasts.

A separate web division of the WRAL news operation employs media producers who often pair up with TV news reporters to produce online content.

In addition to the newscasts, the WRAL-TV news team produces "On the Record," a weekly half-hour public affairs program that airs Saturdays at 7:00 p.m. WRAL-TV news anchor David Crabtree hosts the program, which is usually a talk-show format about current issues and a roundup of the week's news.

In January 2011, WRAL news hired Laura Leslie, former capitol bureau chief of WUNC-FM public radio, as its capitol bureau chief. Leslie reports on state politics and government as a multimedia reporter.¹⁸² Since hiring her, WRAL has aggressively promoted its capitol coverage on the air and online, including its new [NC Capitol blog](#) and [Twitter feed](#). Leslie is the president of [Capitolbeat](#), a national organization for reporters covering state and local government.¹⁸³ In that capacity, she has written public letters and columns criticizing action by government officials that the organization believes encroach on freedom of the press.¹⁸⁴

WRAL's news team includes a separate "Focal Point" division, which produces original documentaries for WRAL, often in cooperation with the TV newscast team. A recent example profiled the U.S. House race between Renee Elmers and Bob Etheridge. During the first two quarters of 2010, WRAL aired two half-hour "Focal Point" features. In March, "The War Within" profiled the case of one of four North Carolina National Guardsmen who committed suicide and the military's efforts to address PTSD. In April, "Where the Bus Stops" looked at the Wake County School System's diversity policy and the politics surrounding efforts to dismantle it. WRAL also produces "Tarheel Traveler," a travel magazine segment

that occasionally puts together half-hour specials.

In addition to its own original programming, WRAL airs "[NC Spin](#)," a long-running Sunday morning half-hour talk show about state politics. Its producer, Tom Campbell, is former Assistant Treasurer of the State of North Carolina and founder of the Family Business Institute. "NC Spin" airs on more than a dozen channels statewide. WRAL also airs CBS network news programs. The station lists "Face the Nation," "60 Minutes," and "48 Hours Mystery" in its "issues and programs" public report.



Top: The WRAL mission statement. Bottom: WRAL television news reporter Adam Owens interviewing a subject in Chapel Hill on April 22, 2009. Photo credit: Photo by Caroline Culler (<http://caroline-culler.com/>)

WRAL's "issues and programs" report lists the following issues: Consumer, Education, Health, Here to Help/Economy, Political, Public Affairs, Special Reports/Investigative, Specials/Documentaries. For the first quarter of 2010, the report lists 53 consumer segments (plus two separate call-in opportunities during live newscasts, one with human resources professionals and another with attorneys); 24 education; 53 health; 43 "Here to Help" (often consumer-oriented advice or news about jobs and advice about getting hired); 21 local political (excluding CBS programs); and 24 special reports/investigative. For the second quarter of 2010, the report lists 46 consumer segments; 68 education; 53 health; 43 "Here to Help"; 21 local political, plus a half-hour U.S. Senate candidate debate and a one-hour U.S.

Senate candidate forum; and 37 special reports.

Weekly "On the Record," "NC Spin," and CBS programs were listed under public affairs, as were "Tarheel Traveler" half-hour specials. Among the targets of WRAL investigation in the first quarter were the state's Alcohol Board of Control (topic of four reports), state budget reform, abandoned construction sites, the state's public pension system, and a repeat DWI offender.

Capitol Broadcasting also owns the local Fox affiliate, [WRAX Fox 50](#). Fox 50's offices are in Durham, adjacent to the Durham Bulls Athletic Park and the American Tobacco Historic District, both CBC properties. Fox 50 does not have its own production studio. WRAL's TV news department produces daily newscasts for Fox 50 (see WRAL news above) and a weekly news wrap-up show, "Rewind News." Freelance producer Sonya Williams uses WRAL's studios to produce "Tarheel Talk," a half-hour public affairs programs that airs at 6:30 a.m. on Sundays. Williams interviews local leaders, heads of charities, ministers, researchers and artists. Fox 50 also airs "NC Spin" (see WRAL, above).

In its "issues and programs" report, Fox 50 also lists "FOX News Sunday" and "America's Most Wanted" as "other programming that addresses issues of community concern." The report does not detail the content of WRAL newscasts that air on Fox 50, so it does not offer a way to compare content across the two stations.

[WTVD ABC 11](#) is owned by the ABC/Walt Disney Company. The newsroom has 70 employees, about 25% of whom are reporters.¹⁸⁵ The station's main studio and offices are in Durham; in 2005 WTVD increased its presence in Raleigh by moving its Raleigh bureau downtown to Fayetteville Street, with a street-level studio that can be seen by passersby.¹⁸⁶ The station airs 10 half-hour local "Eyewitness News" programs each weekday, three and a half hours of local news on Saturdays, and four and a half hours on Sundays, for a total of 33 hours per week. Many of these programs are rebroadcast on its digital channel, DTV 212. The station also features Doppler radar weather updates throughout the day. In addition to these programs, ABC 11 also produces one weekly half-hour local public affairs program, "Heart of Carolina Perspectives," Sundays at 11 a.m. The program is hosted by its news anchor and typically involves one-on-one interviews about community issues.

ABC 11's "issues and programs" files list the following issues: Growth, Education, Health, Crime, Poverty/Jobs/Economy, Troubleshooter (usually consumer-oriented product and safety warnings and reports on private citizens' disputes with retailers), Investigative Reports, and Coverage of Additional Relationships. For the first quarter of 2010, the station's newscasts included 19 programs labeled growth (several

of which seemed miscategorized and only 10 of which seemed directly related to the topic of growth); 45 education; 16 health; 108 crime; five poverty/jobs/economy; 23 troubleshooter; eight investigations; and 94 labeled "community." The last category is a catch-all that includes everything from the Duke men's basketball victory to a Tea Party rally in Raleigh to the state budget crisis to fires and car accidents that might fit better under the crime category. In the second quarter of 2010, ABC 11 listed three growth stories; 33 education; 10 health; 88 crime; four poverty/jobs/economy; 21 troubleshooter; 14 investigations (half of which were crime-related); and 72 "community."

ABC 11 aired 588 public service announcements in the first quarter and 495 in the second. The station also sponsored community events for areas charities, such as the Literacy Council, March of Dimes, and the United Negro College Fund.

[WNCN NBC17](#) is an NBC affiliate owned by Media General. It lists four anchors and six reporters on its staff.¹⁸⁷ It airs newscasts Monday through Friday 4:30-7:00 a.m., 6:00-6:30 p.m., 7:00-7:30 p.m., and 11:00-11:30 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, the station airs half-hour news programs beginning at 6:00 p.m., 7:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m.

NBC 17's "issues and programs" files list the following issues: Public Education, Crime/terrorism, Regional Growth/ Economy, Unemployment/ Employment, Youth Issues, Race Relations, Government & Politics, Health, Affordable Housing/Homelessness, Environment, and Traffic. For the first quarter of 2010, the station's newscasts included 96 reports on education, 163 on crime, 70 on growth and economy, 110 on unemployment and employment, 19 on youth issues, 14 on race, 166 on government and politics, 76 on health, 22 on housing and homelessness, 13 on the environment, and 35 on traffic. In the second quarter, the station aired 81 reports on education, 215 on crime, 92 on growth, 83 on unemployment, 29 on youth, 18 on race, 247 on government and politics, 64 on health, 24 on housing, 133 on environment (including coverage of the BP oil spill), and 47 on traffic.

NBC 17's "issues and programs" report includes no information about public service announcements, national news programs, or any other programs. The report does list speaking engagements by members of the station. There were 11 such engagements in the first quarter and 5 in the second. These included reading books to elementary school students, speaking at school and churches, and emceeding charity fundraisers

[News 14 Carolina](#) is a regional 24-hour TV cable news channel available to Time Warner Cable subscribers. It

has sister stations in Charlotte, the Triad, and the Coast and Sandhills regions of the state. Much content is shared among the five newsrooms, though local content is produced for broadcast and available on-demand online. There are five anchors shared across all stations statewide and seven reporters reporting for the state and Triangle/Foothills newsroom.¹⁸⁸ As a cable station, News 14 Carolina is not required to make public files available for inspection.

WUVC Univision 40 is owned by Univision and broadcasts from Fayetteville. It "offers a Spanish programming format featuring news, talk shows, dramas, movies and other first rate Spanish programming." Univision bought the station in 2003. It was the first Spanish-language TV station in the Triangle market. Its signal is also picked up by cable providers in the Triad. WUVC employs one full-time news reporter, one producer and one photographer, to produce two-minute local news briefs that run up to five times nightly and three times in the morning. The station also airs a 30-minute local public affairs show, "Vida Carolina," each Saturday at 11 a.m. and 30-second public service announcements throughout the day.¹⁸⁹

Univision 40's "issues and programs" reports in 2010 list the following issues: state of the economy, education, the U.S. Census; for the first quarter of 2010, they also include earthquakes, winter storms, and immigration. The reports include national content such as Univision's "Despierta America," "Ultima Hora," and "Primer Impacto." For the first quarter of 2010, the station's local newscasts included 1 segment on education, 13 on the state of the economy, 8 on earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, 3 on immigration, 5 on winter storms, and 1 on the U.S. Census. Of these 31 news briefs, 23 covered state or local subjects. In the second quarter of 2010, the station aired 9 segments on education, 18 on the state of the economy, and 2 on the Census. Of these 29 news briefs, 18 covered state or local topics.

Sinclair Broadcast Group owns two stations in the Triangle: [WRDC MYTV 28](#), the [My Network TV](#) affiliate, and [WLFL CW 22](#), the CW affiliate. Since 2006, WLFL has had a news-sharing agreement with ABC affiliate WTVD to air its "ABC 11 Eyewitness News at 10 O'Clock." According to the station's "issues and programs" file, WTVD "aired an average of 7 hours of local news programs weekly on WB22[sic]." (The station was formerly a WB network affiliate.) It lists the issues of concern as: Growth, Education, Health, Crime, and Poverty.

In the first quarter of 2010, CW 22 aired three stories listed under the growth category; 45 in education; 15 health stories (eight of which were local); 77 crime stories (including one labeled investigative, about the public sale of counterfeit items); and three stories about

poverty/jobs/economy, totaling 2:25 minutes for the quarter. In the second quarter of 2010, CW aired one story labeled growth (about Amtrak service between Raleigh and Charlotte); 25 education stories; 51 crime stories; and three poverty/jobs/economy stories. In many cases, the document failed to include the duration of the stories.

[WRPX Pax/ION 47](#) is owned by ION Media Networks. It employs no news staff and produces no news programming. The station lists the following ten issues in its "issues and programs" file: "1) Health Education 2) Adult Literacy 3) Water Conservation 4) Juvenile Support Services 5) Nutrition 6) State Budget Preparation 7) Child Advocacy Programs 8) Volunteerism 9) Public Education 10) Protecting Our Environment."

The station airs two half-hour local community affairs programs, "For the Record with Eric Brown," Saturdays 6:00-6:30 a.m. and "Tar Heel People," Saturdays 6:30-7:00 a.m. Both programs follow the same basic format, inviting guests from state government agencies or nonprofits in North Carolina to discuss current affairs in the state. Issues from the first and second quarters of 2010 included juvenile crime prevention, road safety, marriage counseling, Social Security, and foster care (on "Eric Brown"); pharmacy education, lawn and yard care, preventing identity theft, cancer care and prevention, and charter schools (on "Tar Heel People"). The station also airs a one-hour program Tuesdays 6:00-7:00 a.m. called "Positive Living Raleigh-Fayetteville," which consists of programming produced by the New York-based Karavida Inc. production company. Topics pertain to health and the environment, such as tips for getting fit and information about donating blood or recycling.

WRPX aired 97 public service announcements in each of the quarters we examined; most aired during the public affairs programming listed above.

[WRAY](#) channel 30 broadcasts religious programming 24 hours a day from Wilson, N.C. Multicultural Broadcasting sold the station to Radiant Life Ministries of Marion, Illinois, in 2009 for \$4.5 million.¹⁹⁰ It is operated as Tri-State Christian Ministries.

Public Television

The Triangle has one public television station, [UNC-TV](#). While the station is technologically well equipped and produces a significant amount of local programming, it is not an important producer of news. In fact, station management has consistently characterized UNC-TV's programming not as news but as "information." The station's leadership has faced significant conflict and criticism for effectively shirking the role of a journalistic institution and its mishandling of pressure from government officials to influence its programming decisions.

UNC-TV reaches 4 million viewers each week in all 100 counties across the state through 12 broadcast stations located across the state.¹⁹¹ Additionally, three digital channels broadcast 24 hours a day: high-def UNC-TV, UNC-KD (a children's service for preschoolers and school-age children), and UNC-EX ("the Explorer Channel"). More than one third of UNC-TV's program schedule is comprised of children's educational programming.



*Volunteers answer pledge calls for UNC-TV's Festival 2010.
Photo by UNC-TV Foundation*

UNC-TV has a \$25.2 million annual budget, with \$12.9 million coming from state appropriation, \$7.1 million in contributions from 65,000 individual viewers, and the rest a combination of federal grants, corporate underwriting, and investment income.¹⁹² The station's headquarters are in Research Triangle Park.

UNC-TV's mission statement is as follows:

Television has the power to change lives. Public Television has the responsibility to change lives for the better: a child far from urban resources is inspired to become a scientist, a high school dropout earns a GED, a homebound senior remains connected to the world of arts and culture, the family of an Alzheimer's patient finds strength and support. UNC-TV's unique programs and public media services provide people of all ages with enriching, life-changing television.¹⁹³

The station license is held by the Board of Governors of UNC-Chapel Hill, whose 32 voting members are elected by the state legislature. UNC-TV has its own Board of Trustees; 11 members are appointed by the Board of Governors, four are appointed by the governor, and the lieutenant governor and speaker of the house each appoint one. Five trustees serve ex officio: the president of the UNC system, the president of community colleges,

the superintendent of public instruction, the secretary of health and human resources, and the secretary of cultural resources.

In fiscal year 2009, UNC-TV produced 426 hours of original local programming, 22 hours more than in the previous year. In the same period, the station distributed 59.5 hours of its programming nationally through PBS and other distributors. An [alphabetical list of all locally produced programs](#) is available online, with on-demand video available of many. In fiscal year 2009, 13,000 adult learners availed themselves of broadcast courses that helped them earn their GEDs, and some 25,000 individuals took advantage of UNC-TV's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs.¹⁹⁴ National news and public affairs programs include *PBS NewsHour*, *Nightly Business Report*, *Washington Week*, *Frontline*, *Tavis Smiley*, *POV*, *Charlie Rose*, and the *BBC World News*. UNC-TV's online and promotions departments are actively pursuing partnerships with national initiatives. UNC-TV is a partner in [Patchwork Nation](#), spotlighting the community of Edgecombe County. The station hosted one of several [Public Media Camps](#) in August 2010.¹⁹⁵

Locally produced public affairs content tends toward either in-studio interviews or lifestyle magazine coverage. *Black Issues Forum* (half an hour, once a week) is a panel discussion program focusing on issues of interest to African-Americans. *North Carolina Weekend* (also half an hour, once a week) is a travel-oriented program underwritten by the state's tourism authority. The nature program *Exploring North Carolina* is underwritten by the state's science museum.

North Carolina People, first aired 40 years ago, is the station's longest-running program and is hosted by William Friday, former president of the UNC system.

Carolina Business Review is a roundtable discussion program coproduced with South Carolina's public television network.¹⁹⁶ [North Carolina Now](#) (half an hour each weekday) is primarily a magazine-style program that profiles communities across the state, with an occasional segment on "newsmakers." Its staff list includes one "news anchor," two correspondents, one legislative correspondent, and a host/director of promotions. On Fridays, *North Carolina Now Legislative Review* surveys news, bills, and topics from the General Assembly. Later on Friday evenings, [Legislative Week in Review](#) provides more in-depth coverage of the legislature, with on-site reports and studio interviews with legislative members and members of the capitol press corps. The program's

As other news outlets reduce their capital news staff, will the state's public television station produce more legislative news, or less?

two co-hosts are legislative correspondents. Its [blog](#) offers some additional updates.

UNC-TV's public affairs productions have generated controversy and criticism. *North Carolina Now* accepted a \$412,000 grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation, formed with the state's federal tobacco settlement money, to profile successful economic development ventures across the state.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, the fact that many of the profiles were of Golden Leaf grantees, and that the foundation admitted sharing "ideas" with producers, prompted criticism that UNC-TV was providing paid, positive coverage of a state agency.¹⁹⁸ A station spokesperson defended the decision by saying the network considers itself "an information provider," not a conventional TV news source.¹⁹⁹

More recently, in June 2010, a state Senate committee subpoenaed more than 200 hours of video that UNC-TV reporter Eszter Vajda recorded as part of an investigative report (rare for the station) on Alcoa's impact on the Yadkin River Valley. The company was (and still is) seeking to renew its license to the hydroelectric dam, a license Gov. Perdue wants to have revert to the state, and the committee was deadlocked over what recommendation to make. Ironically, the subpoena came from an Alcoa foe, N.C. Sen. Fletcher Hartsell, who helped draft the state's press shield law. Hartsell insisted that UNC-TV was not covered by the shield law because, as a state agency, it must comply with state open records laws.^{200,201}

Despite legal support from the North Carolina Press Association, UNC-TV's general manager Tom Howe decided to comply with the request on the advice of university attorneys. Vajda went so far as to prepare a special edit of the material for legislators. Condemnation was widespread.^{202,203} Among the critics was Capitol Broadcasting Chairman Jim Goodmon, a longtime supporter of UNC-TV, who said he had tried unsuccessfully to get UNC system President Erskine Bowles to intervene: "I told him he ought to be in jail" rather than comply with the subpoena, Goodmon told *The News & Observer*. "Public television should not be the investigative arm of the legislature."²⁰⁴ UNC-TV did air the program as 24 minutes of programming spread across three evenings of *North Carolina Now*, each segment preceded by the following disclaimer:

For the first time in its network history, UNC-TV has made the decision to refrain from exercising its customary editorial review over an individual reporter's project. The reason for this unusual step is to alleviate any concerns surrounding unfounded and untrue allegations of the inappropriate suppression by UNC-TV management of the reporter's ability to tell this important story.²⁰⁵

Alcoa then filed a public records request with UNC-TV to acquire the reporter's notes and raw footage.^{206,207}

The incident raised concern over what impact Howe's decision would have on the other broadcast operation licensed to the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Governors, WUNC radio. WUNC capitol bureau chief Laura Leslie was openly critical of Howe's decision, both in her capacity as a state government reporter and as national president of Capitolbeat (the Association of Capitol Reporters and Editors). Leslie worried publicly about the impact on her own ability to report news without fear of her notes being seized by the state.²⁰⁸ WUNC General Manager Connie Walker issued a statement to the station's staff assuring them that WUNC, with backing from its attorneys, will enforce its policy to fight any such request in court. "Seriously, I am ready to go to jail in order to protect the integrity of the journalists at WUNC Radio," Walker wrote.²⁰⁹

Then, in August 2010 came the revelation that Vajda and Martin Sansone, a man she described as her researcher yet who was not employed by UNC-TV, solicited money from former House Speaker Richard Morgan, who was hired as a consultant for the North Carolina Water Rights Committee, an anti-Alcoa group. Morgan paid \$3,000 for travel and living expenses for Sansone. (Vajda lost her job at the station after the payment came to light.²¹⁰) Meanwhile, Morgan, State Commerce Secretary Keith Crisco, and a Republican political strategist—all Alcoa foes—contacted UNC-TV director Tom Howe and production director Shannon Vickery about the story. Reports say rumors were circulating that UNC-TV management, under pressure from Alcoa, was trying to suppress the story, but emails made public revealed that the pressure had come from anti-Alcoa parties to air the program.²¹¹

At about that time, UNC-TV asked faculty at the UNC-Chapel Hill journalism school to review the program and determine if they would have accepted the segments for broadcast. Midway through the review, Howe changed his mind and said he wanted to postpone the report. Then the attorney for Alcoa sought the report as a public record. The university released the report to Alcoa, and Alcoa [publicized the report](#). Its conclusion was scathing: "The series should not have aired in the form it did, and UNC-TV should not have abdicated editorial control over the supervision of the series."²¹²

Leslie and others believed the state's shield law, as written, would have protected the station. Yet station management received no support from UNC President Erskine Bowles, the station's board of trustees, or the state Attorney General's office.²¹³

Worthy of note is the fact that the N.C. General Assembly earmarked \$289,952 to UNC-TV in the 2007-2009 state

budget specifically to support the programming of *North Carolina Now*, *North Carolina Legislative Review*, and *Legislative Week in Review*.²¹⁴ This is a case in which the state directly funded coverage of itself on a publicly licensed broadcast station.

When Republicans took control of the General Assembly in 2011, the political climate for UNC-TV became chillier. A March 13 *News & Observer* story by Mandy Locke chronicled the Alcoa events and noted that N.C. Rep. Mitch Gillespie, a Marion Republican who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, is an Alcoa supporter.²¹⁵ As of March 2011, it is unclear whether the station will receive the \$500,000 increase it requested, or the full \$12 million it usually receives.

PEG Channels

In 2006, North Carolina passed state cable franchise legislation called the [Video Service Competition Act](#) (VSCA), which removed local municipalities' authority to negotiate cable franchise agreements. Public access, education, and government (PEG) channels continue to feel the repercussions of this law, with independent public access operations hardest hit. Chad Johnston, Executive Director of [The Peoples Channel](#) (TPC) in Chapel Hill, has been a major advocate for PEG stations across the state and helped to ensure that VSCA would preserve channel space and a funding stream for PEG. However, his organization's experience illustrates the challenges the law has created for public access producers.

The Peoples Channel is an independent nonprofit created in 1996 to take over production of Chapel Hill's public access television from Time Warner Cable. TPC produces and manages programming for Chapel Hill and Orange County Channel 8, which airs more than 100 hours of programming per week and operates a community media center. TPC offers courses in field and studio production, video editing, Final Cut Pro, and podcasting. Courses cost between \$30 and \$100, with a discount for Orange County residents and a "sweat equity" option available to those who cannot pay. Johnston emphasizes that the channel's broadcasts represent only about a third of TPC's work; the other major components are community media education and advocacy for area nonprofits through media production (such as public service announcements, group trainings, and in-studio interviews).²¹⁶ The station ran a "Make Your Own TV" Youth Camp for children aged 12-17, but it was cancelled in summer 2010 because the economic downturn and the loss of a full-time outreach employee at the station contributed to low enrollment.²¹⁷ TPC reaches approximately 30,000 cable-subscribing households in the Chapel Hill and northern Chatham County area. (Time Warner Cable will not provide the specific number of subscribers in any area.)

Orange County also hires TPC to broadcast its government meetings.

TPC has seen its budget drastically reduced in recent years, and more of its funding has had to be raised from private donors. A large part of the reason lies with the VSCA. Initially, the law did not require local governments to distribute VSCA funding to public access channels. Chapel Hill took advantage of this opportunity to apply the funds to its own government channel. This change cut TPC's expected revenues in half. TPC laid off three of its five full-time staff in 2007.

"We'll never get any cable revenue to fund the station. We can theoretically get new channels across the state, but they'll never have any funding beyond what someone can raise." – Chad Johnston, director of The Peoples Channel, which operates the public access television

Moreover, when legislative staff were drafting the law, they undercounted the number of PEG stations in the state, and supplemental PEG funding intended to cover 80 stations stretched to cover the 276 that applied, meaning that each was entitled to \$7,000 rather than \$25,000. TPC and other PEG allies across the state raised \$30,000 to hire a lobbyist to help clarify the law in 2007. Today, municipalities receive quarterly payments from the state, and the percentage of pre-VSCA funds previously spent on PEG is earmarked for that purpose. Chapel Hill now applies the same proportion of cable revenues to TPC as it did prior to the VSCA.

In Durham, the challenges were even greater. Under the VSCA, local franchising agreements remain in place either until they expire or until a competing video service applies for a new state franchise in that locality (such as AT&T's U-Verse, which has entered some areas in the state; AT&T was the primary instigator of the VSCA). Durham was among the first cities in North Carolina to be affected, when its agreement with Time Warner Cable expired at the end of 2007.²¹⁸ The company closed its studio to public access and cut off technical support until the Durham government negotiated a short-term agreement. TPC worked with the Durham Community Television Association, a group of public access producers, and the [Southern Coalition for Social Justice](#), a Durham-based advocacy group, to host a series of brainstorming and planning sessions in 2008 to involve the community.²¹⁹ [Durham Community Media](#) (DCM), which is operated by TPC, took over operation of the city's public access station channel 18 in May 2009.

DCM reaches an estimated 70,000 households. The city of Durham does not apply VSCA revenues to fund DCM,

but treats the channel the same as any city nonprofit eligible for grant funding.²²⁰ The [Community Reinvestment Association of North Carolina](#) (CRA-NC) rents a space to house the center. In the first year of operation, DCM added 70 new programs.²²¹ Yet the station barely survived deep cuts to city and county funding. After a petition drive ([see blog](#) and [online info](#)²²²), DCM won \$20,000 in grant support each from the city and county and raised \$18,000. It has one full-time staffer and no studio or capital equipment beyond that used to broadcast digital video.

DCM's story illustrates the difficulty of launching a new PEG channel under the new law, even with a base of producer support. "In some ways, TPC has actually turned out to be better under the VSCA. But in Durham, it's all private. We'll never get any cable revenue to fund the station. We can theoretically get new channels across the state, but they'll never have any funding beyond what someone can raise. So starting a new channel is a huge challenge for any municipality."

Durham also has a local government channel, [DTV8](#), available on television and online.

The [Raleigh Television Network](#) (RTN) is part of the city of Raleigh's public affairs department. It includes four channels: Public access channels RTN10 and RTN22; RTN11, a government channel airing meetings of the city council, county commissioners, school board, city planning commission, and Raleigh Citizens Advisory Council; and RTN18, an education channel that airs distance learning classes in cooperation with public and private colleges in the city. As a public access service, [RTN offers training](#) in field and studio production, including teleprompter and digital editing, graphics, lighting, and audio. Residents of Wake County who pay an annual fee and complete training are eligible to produce their own public access TV shows. The station also runs prerecorded programming submitted by community members. RTN has eight full-time employees and an annual budget of \$700,000, up from \$511,000 three years ago.²²³ The city budget does not specify the portion of resources devoted to RTN10.

Chatham County has one government access TV channel.²²⁴

Public access programming varies by station. Durham channel 18 in particular devotes much of its airtime to broadcasting the services of a number of African-American churches, just as the Time Warner Cable-managed station had done, and members of the faith community continue to be active in the Durham Community Television Association.

Some producers submit their programs to multiple public access outlets. One of the longest-running programs on public access stations throughout the area is [Independent](#)

[Voices](#), a collective of media producers who create video segments on news and public affairs. Topics have included the controversy over Tom Tancredo's speech at UNC, Student Action with Farmworkers projects, a Moncure plywood workers strike, and various political protests and public meetings. Many of their programs are available at the [Independent Voices YouTube channel](#).

Durham channel 8 has allowed a youth media program to adapt to changes in administrative support by shifting focus from documentary audio to video. [SpiritHouse](#) is a nonprofit dedicated to community empowerment through storytelling.²²⁵ Nia Wilson, the executive director, has been working with teens to produce art and media for eight years. She works with about 40 kids, including about 30 from the New Horizons alternative school whom she works with during the day.

In 2009, SpiritHouse took over YouthNoiseNetwork, a teen-produced audio program that was produced at the Center for Documentary Studies. YNN used to air weekly on Duke's WXDU radio and was part of the [Public Radio Exchange](#) network.²²⁶ Wilson said CDS approached her about taking on the project when the center decided it no longer fit their mission. She worked with the teens for the first year at the CDS facility, getting trained in audio by the teenagers themselves. Seeking a new home for SpiritHouse and YNN, Wilson found a rent-free space at the Durham Community Media Center, which led to a shift in content from audio to video. A half-hour YNN program now airs weekly on Durham channel 8. The radio version of YNN is on hiatus due to a lack of capacity to produce both the audio and TV programs.

YouthNoiseNetwork has about 10 regular participants ages 14 to 19. Wilson sees the project as leadership development. "They know they are change makers and the future belongs to them," Wilson said of SpiritHouse participants. "They want to make sure people really understand what's going on and what matters to them."²²⁷ She has taken groups of teenagers to the Allied Media Conference and, most recently, the World Social Forum, where they presented a performance art piece about police brutality. SpiritHouse has a \$45,000 annual operating budget, which pays Wilson's salary as well as all expenses. Wilson raises the money through foundation grants, in particular the [Ms. Foundation for Women](#). She has applied unsuccessfully for funding from local foundations and would like to pay teenage participants to produce audio and video. She said teens' family, school, and work commitments make it difficult for them to be consistently involved. She believes that if teen participants could receive income for their work with SpiritHouse,

The volunteers and youth media-makers of SpiritHouse, a Durham nonprofit that produces video programs for public access channel 8. Photo credit: Sed Miles, channel 8 director

they would be able to spend time developing professional skills rather than working at low-wage part-time jobs. "What we're doing with young people is viewed as a hobby, when actually the youngsters I work with are change makers," Wilson said. "They have a work ethic."

Wilson said she understands that competition for grant funding is intense, especially when state and local budget cuts that have affected direct-service providers:

People don't necessarily see the benefits of what we do as tangible as, for instance, funding the food bank and the homeless shelter, all those things that are incredibly important. But what we do for young people is make them literate, globally literate, and help them understand how to function and survive in this work. We want not just media consumers but media makers, so that what they deal with is more reflective of who they are. They don't see themselves in the media, so they are creating that. Hopefully that's going to shift what media looks like in the future.

[East Wake Television](#) is produced through a partnership between the towns of Knightdale, Rolesville, Wendell, and Zebulon in eastern Wake County. It airs local government, educational, and community-produced programs on Time Warner Cable channel 22 and AT&T U-Verse channel 99. Among the regular monthly programs are "East Wake Issues," government meetings, programs hosted by each of the participating towns' mayors, and "The Billy Wilder Show," an interview program by former Knightdale mayor and lifelong resident Bill Wilder.²²⁸

The Town of Knightdale initiated the creation of the channel after a 2003 audit found that cable franchise fees should have been directed to the town but were not.²²⁹ In 2006, EWTN 22 began broadcasting Knightdale Town Council and Planning Board meetings after the town negotiated with Time Warner Cable to make the channel available and used \$15,420 in fees to purchase equipment.

After the state cable franchise act passed later that year, Knightdale Town Manager Gary McConkey reached out to his counterparts in neighboring towns to broaden the channel's reach; by pooling their shares of state cable franchise fees, they were able to increase the station's operating budget. As of 2010, the station receives no funding from the town and is operated as an independent nonprofit.²³⁰

Conclusions

While there are seven local broadcast TV stations, only three – WRAL 5, ABC 11 and NBC 17 – compete in local news. It may be no accident that the dominant station, WRAL, dominates the others in ratings. "Issues and programs" don't offer perfectly comparable data, but they

do suggest WRAL invests more than any other station in news production. WRAL then distributes that news across two television stations, one radio station (Mix 101.5) and WRAL.com. Increasingly, WRAL faces competition from 24-hour local cable news station News 14, owned by Time Warner Cable. It takes advantage of economies of scale on an even greater level, pooling news from across the state.

It is worth noting that our analysis of "issues and programs" reports lacks data about News 14, which, as a cable station, is not required to produce or disclose such a report.

A deeper study of the geographical distribution of story topics and of sources of information in stories would provide additional insight into the coverage TV newscasts provide to local communities within the Triangle. This insight could help inform nonprofit groups, philanthropic funders, or even for-profit competing producers with information about which communities have "holes" that need to be filled.

UNC-TV is an example of a public media station whose problems run much deeper than resources. UNC-TV produces newscasts about state government, directly funded by the government through budget appropriations, and yet its management and board members actively contradict the notion that UNC-TV is a "news" outlet. Given the technological resources the station possesses and its ability to reach 4 million viewers across the state, UNC-TV could be a strong asset to the public if its leadership makes significant changes.

At the time of this writing, the long-term consequences of the Alcoa incident are unclear. Also unclear are the lessons UNC-TV's management and governing board will take from the incident. Will UNC-TV adopt new policies for the supervision of its news content? Will it establish new governance policies to better shield management from political pressure? As other news outlets reduce their capitol news staff, will the state's public television station produce more legislative news, or less? Given the recent critiques of UNC-TV's reporting and its management, there are significant questions to be answered if UNC-TV's reporting is to regain its credibility.

Given the technological resources the station possesses, its reach across the state, and the public support it has historically enjoyed, UNC-TV is uniquely positioned to meet the growing need for news coverage of state-government. But UNC-TV can meet this need only if its leadership embraces the mission to produce quality journalism and institute ethical policies and management changes to ensure journalistic independence.

Public access, education, and government (PEG) TV stations continue to be a significant community asset despite the decline in funding and government support

they have experienced as a result of the state's cable franchising legislation, the 2006 Video Service Competition Act. The Peoples Channel in Chapel Hill and its sister station, the Durham Community Media Center, provide a model of 21st century multimedia skills training, media literacy, and community organizing around information. East Wake Television and Raleigh Television Network are more conventional government-oriented models. The number of PEG stations throughout the Triangle allows independent public access TV producers, such as Independent Voices to distribute their programming to multiple outlets. At a time when local news reporting is declining and minority voices are underrepresented in the emerging digital media sphere, public access television has the potential to become an even more important community information resource.

Recommendations

The Federal Communications Commission should encourage broadcasters to make their “issues and programs” reports and other public inspection files available online to facilitate community awareness of broadcasters’ investment in local news and public affairs programming.

UNC-TV should revisit its mission and overhaul its governance and funding structure in order to ensure better insulation from political pressure, especially where news programming is concerned.

North Carolina policy makers and philanthropists interested in expanding the reach of public media should include public access, education, and government (PEG) channels in their consideration.

Local governments that currently operate PEG channels, including Durham, Chapel Hill, Raleigh and communities in eastern Wake County, should continue to develop those channels as platforms for open government and community information access.

Radio

Raleigh-Durham ranked no. 42 in Arbitron's Radio Market Rankings for Fall 2010.²³¹ It ranked no. 19 in the nation for black audience, with 290,900 black listeners aged 12 and older.²³²

The Triangle radio dial encompasses a rich mix of commercial and noncommercial stations playing a variety of music, news, and talk. [Clear Channel](#) owns four stations; [Radio One](#) owns three, including the highest rated station, urban adult contemporary Foxy 107 WFXC-FM.²³³ However, locally owned stations have a strong presence in the market. Capitol Broadcasting's Mix 101.5 came in a close second in January 2011 Arbitron ratings. Raleigh-based [Curtis Media Group](#), which owns eight stations in the market, has the highest net cumulative

audience, with 34% of listeners tuning in to Curtis stations.²³⁴ Several stations are affiliated with universities and give students the opportunity to learn radio broadcasting skills. However, the signals of most stations do not reach the entire geographic expanse of the Triangle. There have been a variety of ownership and format shifts over the years, with several as recently as 2009 and 2010.

Curtis Media owns and operates a network of 25 stations in North Carolina, boasting more than one million listeners each week.²³⁵ Chairman and CEO Don Curtis has been active in North Carolina radio throughout his adult life. He founded the company in 1968 at the age of 25 and continues to co-host a weekly public affairs program, aired on Curtis stations, called [Carolina News Makers](#).²³⁶ Curtis's [Triangle Traffic Network](#) provides traffic news to 11 area stations. The company launched [State Government Radio](#) in 2004; its website provides streaming coverage of state affairs. In the 1990s, Curtis took advantage of FCC rule changes allowing ownership of multiple stations in a single market and set out to concentrate on owning five or more stations in a single market. To accomplish this goal, he sold stations along the coast and acquired stations in the Triangle and Triad, changing the formats of several.²³⁷ In 1991, he purchased WPTF and WQDR, which today are Curtis's flagship stations.²³⁸

Raleigh-based Curtis Media Group, which owns eight stations in this market, has the highest net cumulative audience in the market, with 34% of listeners tuning into Curtis stations.

News Radio

The strongest news station in the Triangle is non-commercial NPR affiliate [WUNC 91.5 FM](#), “North Carolina Public Radio,” which is licensed to UNC-Chapel Hill.²³⁹ WUNC ranked third among all Triangle radio stations in January 2011 Arbitron ratings, with an 8.2 topline rating.²⁴⁰ According to The Media Audit, more than 17% of adults surveyed listened to the station in a given week, the highest rating of any station in the Triangle.²⁴¹ Broadcasting at 100,000 watts, its coverage extends to the Triad, and low-watt stations in Rocky Mount and Manteo allow its programming to be heard on the coast. Streaming and on-demand content is available at the WUNC website.



The former studio of WPTF, the Triangle's oldest continuously operating radio station. Photo by Jen Watson (<http://www.flickr.com/people/kiwikewlio/>)

The station's news department employs four reporters covering Raleigh/education, health, "changing economy," and state government. In 2007, there were seven reporters at the station; the lost beats are military, environment, and general assignment. In January 2011, WRAL recruited WUNC radio's state capitol bureau chief, Laura Leslie, a prominent figure in North Carolina media. A reporter covering Greensboro has been moved to that position. *The State of Things*, a statewide, weekday public affairs show launched in 1995, employs one host, Frank Stasio, and two part-time producers. *The Story*, a nationally syndicated weekly program with an extended interview format, employs six staffers, including host Dick Gordon.

WUNC began broadcasting in 1976, with NPR content. The locally produced *Back Porch Music* folk music show has been on the air since 1977. *The People's Pharmacy*, a locally produced health program, has been running since 1981. WUNC also airs BBC World Service programming daily. The station has a community advisory board that meets three to four times a year; meetings are open to the public. Governance of the station ultimately rests with the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees.²⁴²

[WPTF News Radio 680 AM](#) is a talk format station owned by Curtis Media since 1991 and is one of its flagships. It broadcasts at 50,000 watts day and night. The call letters, which stand for "We Protect the Family," were chosen in 1927 by the owner at that time, the Durham Life Insurance Company.²⁴³ Until 2010, WPTF was the major conservative talk station in the market, running programs syndicated by [Premiere Radio Networks](#), including Rush Limbaugh and other conservative pundits. Then Clear Channel decided to convert WRDU from a country music format to a conservative talk format station with Premiere content, and WPTF lost the contract to run much of its programming. Don Curtis decided to respond to the change by adjusting WPTF's format to local news and talk. Curtis Media owns [State Government Radio](#) and the [North Carolina News Network](#), which are syndicated statewide (NCNN has 75 affiliates). All three are overseen by News Director Rick Martinez, a longtime opinion columnist for *The News & Observer*. In an interview, Martinez described Curtis's strategy as a decision to "bulk up and go local" by merging the staff of the three news properties and increasing the staff by 20-25 percent. The efficiency allowed them to double the output of local news.²⁴⁴

Today, three Curtis news properties combined produce approximately 11 hours of original programming per day, of which five hours is predominantly commentary. They employ 13 anchors and reporters, with the equivalent of four full-time positions dedicated to news reporting. While station commentary tends toward a conservative perspective, Martinez said the news content produced by State Government Radio and NCNN "have to be straight down the line in order to be commercially viable."²⁴⁵ WPTF also airs national news from CBS Radio News and the Associated Press and syndicated national conservative talk shows hosted by [Dr. Laura Schlesinger](#), [Allen Hunt](#) and [Mark Levin](#). But a significant portion of daytime programming, including morning and evening drive-time, is comprised of original, local content. The loss of Rush Limbaugh has had a dramatic impact on the station's ratings; Arbitron's report since the format change showed WPTF fell from a 6.2 audience share in the fall to a 2.6 in the winter.²⁴⁶ Prior to the change, the station had generated approximately \$6 million per year in revenue.²⁴⁷ Martinez said ad rates continue to hold steady for the time being.

[WRDU 106.1 FM](#), "Rush Radio," is owned by Clear Channel. The format change from classic country music ("The Rooster") to conservative talk in January 2010 caused WRDU's ratings to rise by 124 percent, from a 1.7 share in the fall to a 3.8 in the winter.²⁴⁸ Based on the information posted at the station's website, it appears the station produces two hours of local programming each week.²⁴⁹

[WCHL 1360 AM](#), “Chapel Hill-Carrboro’s News, Talk and Tar Heel Station,” is a locally owned news and talk station with an intensely local focus on Chapel Hill and Carrboro. (WCHL’s call letters stand for “Where Chapel Hill Listens.”) The station broadcasts 5,000 watts during the day and 1,000 watts at night. It produces 25 hours of original local news programming each week plus locally produced public affairs programs *Who’s Talking with D.G. Martin* and *Behind the Headlines with Hampton Dellinger*, hosted by attorneys who are prominent in state politics, and weekly local programs on business, health, food, and the arts.²⁵⁰ There is significant coverage of UNC-Chapel Hill sports, particularly basketball and football. The station also airs national content from CBS Radio News and nationally syndicated progressive talk shows hosted by Stephanie Miller, Ed Schultz, Thom Hartmann, and Norman Goldman. (The station was an Air America affiliate until that network went off the air.) WCHL’s news department employs three and a half full-time equivalent employees.²⁵¹ The station hosts an annual all-day forum on local issues, with archives available online throughout the year.

The intense focus on Chapel Hill allows WCHL to capitalize on local rivalries. A tongue-in-cheek statement on the station’s website sums up founder Jim Heavner’s point of view: “If there’s a shooting in Durham at high noon, WCHL interrupts its programming only if they shoot a Chapel Hillian. If someone slips on a banana peel on Weaver Street that backs up traffic for two blocks, it is cause for a live remote.”²⁵² Except for the ads that run during syndicated programs, the advertising base is equally local. It has been locally owned since its establishment in 1953.

Heavner is owner of Vilcom (formerly the Village Companies), which has included various media and real estate properties. In 1997 he sold WCHL station to Curtis Media, which moved the station’s headquarters and changed it to an oldies music format. In 2003 Heavner bought WCHL back from Curtis. Heavner became involved in the day-to-day operation of the station, hosted the annual community forum, and occasionally conducts interviews with prominent subjects. In 2009, he Heavner sold the station to Barry Leffler, then-General Manager of WNCN-TV station, NBC-17. Leffler became WCHL’s CEO and Managing Partner; Heavner stayed on as Chairman.²⁵³

[WAUG 850 AM](#) is a commercial station licensed to the small, private, historically black Saint Augustine’s College in Raleigh. It broadcasts talk, sports, and gospel music at 500 watts day and night. It reaches 1.5 million listeners and live-streams online and through a mobile application. WAUG airs nationally syndicated programs hosted by the Rev. Al Sharpton and Warren Ballentine, as well as original talk and sports programming such as [Barber](#)

[Shop Talk](#) and the half-hour weekday morning program *The 411*, hosted by the station’s program director and the college’s director of external affairs.²⁵⁴

Capitol Broadcasting owns a pair of sports stations jointly called [ESPN Triangle](#), which include [WCMC 99.9 FM](#), “[The Fan](#),” and WDNC 620 AM, “The Bull Sports Radio” (5,000 watts during the day). The stations air ESPN and other nationally syndicated programming, in addition to coverage of local games.

[FM Talk 101.1 WZTK](#), a 100,000-watt Curtis station broadcasting from Burlington (west of Durham), airs the locally produced 6 to 10 a.m. talk show *Brad & Britt in the Morning* and the 4 to 7 p.m. locally produced *Rock Talk* show hosted by Allan Handelman. WZTK also carries nationally syndicated talk programs hosted by Alan Colmes, Michael Savage, Neal Boortz, Clark Howard, and Phil Hendrie, as well as the *Wall Street Journal This Morning* program.²⁵⁵

Commercial Music Stations

Clear Channel owns three commercial music stations in the Triangle in addition to its conservative talk station.²⁵⁶

The popular country music format is dominated by [WQDR 94.7 FM](#), “[Today’s Best Country](#),” a station owned by Curtis Media Group, broadcasting at 100,000 watts. WQDR was the top-rated radio station in the Triangle in 2010.²⁵⁷ In 2010, Curtis converted its WDOX 570 AM station from a talk format to a country format and changed the call letters to WQDR AM to capitalize on the country brand.²⁵⁸ Curtis owns two additional music stations.²⁵⁹

Radio One owns three Triangle stations, all of which were in the list of top five rated stations in the market in May 2010.²⁶⁰

Capitol Broadcasting owns adult contemporary music station WRAL 101.5 FM, “Mix 101.5,” which airs WRAL-TV news broadcasts.

[WNCA 1570 AM](#) is an independent and locally owned music station located in Siler City. It broadcasts oldies and beach music at 5,000 watts during the day, and broadcasts Spanish-language music at 280 watts at night. Barry Hayes, is the owner and general manager of the station. Hayes’ live morning on-air commentary is often provocative and provides the only source of daily local news in Siler City. There are five minutes of local news every hour from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. in English, and two five-minute newscasts in Spanish at night. There are five-minute locally produced weekday programs on crime prevention (*Cop Talk*, once a day), public schools (twice a day), and public recreation events (twice a day, alternating between Chatham County and Siler City announcements). A 30-minute call-in program called *Dial a Deal*, airing three times a day weekdays and once on

Saturdays, allows callers to announce items they are selling, seeking, or giving away. “There’s nowhere in Chatham County to get daily local news and information,” station manager Renee Kennedy said in an interview, “so our biggest thing is local news.” Kennedy writes news reports for deejays to read on the air and sells ads. They are the only two full-time employees on the staff of seven, none of whom are dedicated reporters. The station broadcasts live 24 hours a day, with hosts reading news, public service announcement, and weather on the air.²⁶¹

[WRTP 88.5 FM](#), “HIS Radio,” is a Christian religious station broadcasting at 24,000 watts. It is simulcast as WCCE FM east of Raleigh. Both stations are owned by the Radio Training Network, a Greenville, South Carolina-based religious nonprofit that owns six other stations across the South and Midwest. The stations air nationally syndicated religious programs including James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family* and Dennis Rainey’s *Family Life Today*. Morning and evening drive times are hosted by the network’s own deejays. “HIS Radio” has a free mobile application for smart phones.

[WVRD 90.5 FM](#), “Victory FM,” is a Christian religious station purchased by Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University in 2009.²⁶²

Despite the vibrancy of the commercial radio dial, many popular local music acts receive little to no airplay on commercial stations, even those that are locally owned. While the reasons for this are uncertain, it may be due to the lack of an Adult Album Alternative (“triple-A”) format station in the Triangle, which could air the indie rock and alternative country music popular in the local music scene.²⁶³ It may also be the case that airplay of these genres on several college radio stations crowds out commercial airplay.

Spanish-Language Stations

[WYMY 96.9 FM](#), “La Ley,” is a Spanish-language music station owned by the Curtis Media Group. WYMY is based in Raleigh and broadcasts at 100,000 watts. Launched in 2003, it was the first Spanish-formatted station in the market.

[WLLQ 1530 AM](#) and [WRTG 1000 AM](#) (both “La Rebelde de Qué Pasa”) are part of the Qué Pasa Media Network, which includes five more AM stations in the Triad market. WLLQ plays Spanish-language music and broadcasts at 10,000 watts during the day from Chapel Hill. WRTG is a Spanish contemporary format and broadcasts at 1,000 watts from Garner.²⁶⁴ Qué Pasa boasts that it is the only Hispanic radio station network in the state with local news reporters who produce local and state news not available elsewhere, as well as national and international news “packaged to meet the needs of N.C. Hispanics.” It also provides extensive coverage of sports.²⁶⁵ The stations were purchased from the HIS

Radio network by Estuardo Valdemar Rodriguez and Leonor Rodriguez in 2005 and have been broadcasting in Spanish since.

Capital Broadcasting Group also includes Spanish-language WCLY 1550 AM, “[ESPN Deportes](#),” which airs continuous national sports programming and broadcasts at 1,000 watts during the day.²⁶⁶

Noncommercial Music and Educational Stations

Noncommercial radio stations broadcast a wide variety of musical genres and carry news programs, both local and national, that are not available on commercial stations.

Downtown Carrboro boasts one of only 32 low-power FM (LPFM) stations in the state. [WCOM 103.5 FM](#) is an intensely local community-oriented station that was launched by Weaver Street Market entrepreneur Ruffin Slater and a group of community members in 2004.²⁶⁷ It broadcasts 24 hours a day at 100 watts and also live-streams online. The programming is a diverse mix of music (blues, bluegrass, classical, etc.), talk, and public affairs. More than 40 hours per week are Spanish-language music and talk programming. Locally produced Spanish-language content includes “[La Salud Familiar](#),” a



weekly one-hour health show, and “[Radio Latijam](#),” a weekly one-hour program produced by UNC journalism Prof. Lucila Vargas in collaboration with UNC and local Latino high school students. Radio Latijam is a public service and engagement component of [Latino Journalism and Media \(Latijam\)](#), a project of the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication.²⁶⁸ WCOM carries several hours per day of content from nationally syndicated nonprofit [Radio Bilingue](#). While the station airs 12 hours per week of nationally syndicated English-language programs like Democracy Now!, Free Speech Radio News (both daily), and CounterSpin (weekly), most programming is local. There are programs on African-American issues, local books, sustainable energy, ethics, and spirituality. A program on the Triangle science community is called “[Radio in Vivo](#).” “The West End Report” is a hyperlocal community news program that airs for one hour each weekday at 6 p.m. Its rotating hosts include a university professor and a high school student.

The Triangle has three very strong college radio stations, which play an eclectic mix of music and offer students the opportunity to learn about radio in a noncommercial environment. [WXDU 88.7 FM](#) is a student-run noncommercial music station at Duke. It has a strong commitment to local music. Unlike other campus stations in the area, WXDU allows non-students and community members with no formal Duke affiliation to apply to become deejays, a policy that has generated long-term, high quality niche programs such as Ross Grady's weekly two-hour live local music program. There is one weekly public affairs show, "Shooting the Bull," as well as a half-hour talk show hosted by two Durham bloggers, Kevin Davis of [Bull City Rising](#) and Barry Ragin of [Dependable Erection](#) (see *Online Media*, above). WXDU broadcasts at 2,150 watts.

[WXYC 89.3 FM](#) is student-run noncommercial music station at UNC-Chapel Hill. All deejays are students of the university. There are two public affairs shows, a news show produced by *Daily Tar Heel* (campus newspaper) staff, and a show hosted by the student body president. Each show runs for one hour every other week during the academic year. WXYC was the first radio station in the world to webcast its programming. It broadcasts at 400 watts.²⁶⁹

[WKNC 88.1 FM](#) is a student-run music station at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. It broadcasts little public affairs programming, but maintains a commitment to local music, especially in recent years with live broadcasts of local bands, the daily "local lunch" program. WKNC's website, describes its mission thusly: "Our aim is to provide NCSU students with the knowledge needed for a career in the broadcast industry and listeners with music that doesn't suck." WKNC broadcasts at 25,000 watts and live streams its programming online. It is part of the [N.C. State Student Media](#) organization.

Other noncommercial stations in the Triangle carry the torch for musical genres that tend not to thrive in a commercial environment. [WNCU 90.7 FM](#) is a non-commercial station at historically black [North Carolina Central University](#) that broadcasts at 50,000 watts. WNCU is a world-renowned jazz station connected with the jazz music conservatory program at the university. Professional staff work alongside students. Public affairs programming includes some NPR and PRI programs, [Democracy Now!](#), and locally produced programs such as "Inside NCCU" and "Radio Skywriter," hosted by Patricia Murray, publisher of the [Durham Skywriter](#) community newspaper. [WSHA 88.9 FM](#) is a professionally staffed station of historically black Shaw University. It plays jazz, blues, and gospel. There is public affairs programming for one hour each Monday at noon, hosted by a member of the station's community advisory board. The program

is built around interviews with city and university officials such as Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker, the Raleigh police chief, the state insurance commissioner, and the Wake County manager. WSHA also provides education and training to local schools and community groups.

[WCPE 89.7 FM](#) is a nonprofit station that broadcasts classical music 24 hours a day at 100,000 watts. WCPE's director was at the forefront of the effort among nonprofit and educational stations to oppose the U.S. Copyright Office's webcasting royalties scheme supported by the music industry in 2007 and 2002.²⁷⁰

WVDJ (107.9 FM) is a low-power FM station broadcasting at 100 watts from the northwest Raleigh home of its licensee, Steven White, an electrical engineer who runs the station as a hobby. The station broadcasts only music at present, and White said he broadcasts only about 50% of the time. He first applied for the LPFM license in 2001 and in 2005 purchased a house within the range of the construction permit.

White wants the station's programming to be local. He originally hoped to broadcast local school sports events and make partnerships with schools in the neighborhood, but during his initial trips to visit classrooms, he got the impression that teenagers might say things live on the air that he would find inappropriate or that would violate FCC rules. "Within five minutes, there's something I would not consider 'family,'" he said. White has struggled since to produce content, relying mostly on consumer-grade servers and computer audio equipment that is unreliable. He estimates he has spent approximately \$15,000 to date on all equipment for the station, including its transmitter. He fears FCC enforcement action and said that, while the application process was simple, he believes policies surrounding acceptable noncommercial content are too vague. "The rules are not written for the average person to get involved. You really have to be a lawyer to get through it." White said he would be open to transferring the license to a good community group, but the location of the tower on his house would make that process complicated.

Conclusions

Radio is arguably the most robust strata of the Triangle media ecosystem. Music listeners can choose among high-wattage commercial stations, college radio, classical, jazz, and Spanish stations. WUNC-FM, the NPR affiliate, provides consistently high-quality news and public affairs information to the Triangle community.

Commercial news stations, especially locally owned WPTF and WCHL, also provide all-talk formats that combine commentary with original local news content. Hyperlocal news and public affairs have succeeded at WCHL, Chapel Hill's "news, talk, and Tar Heel station." It is still unclear whether WPTF's experiment with state

and local content, which was prompted by Clear Channel's decision to discontinue WPTF's access to nationally syndicated talk programming, will succeed in the marketplace.

The noncommercial LPFM station WCOM in Carrboro has proven successful in terms of longevity, even without earned income, WCOM will always face challenges finding the resources to continue, but community support around programming and civic identity demonstrates the potential for LPFM radio. The passage of the Local Community Radio Act in 2010 makes it possible for many more groups to apply than have been able to in the past. Details about LPFM licenses are available on the [FCC's website](#) and through the [Prometheus Radio Project](#).

Radio stations are an important asset to Triangle colleges and universities, and a number of college stations that provide a mix of music are also experimenting with, or in the case of WNCU have an established commitment to, providing local news or public affairs programs. Radio stations such as WXDU and WNCU, that allow both students and community members to host programs, provide valuable training in media production.

Recommendations

Triangle Community groups, such as neighborhood associations and civic clubs, that are interested in using media to give voice to local concerns should consider applying for a low-power FM (LPFM) license.

Student Media

The Triangle has an impressive number of student-run and student-focused media outlets. UNC-Chapel Hill's [School of Journalism and Mass Communication](#) offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees and offers professional development and distance learning programs. Approximately 800 undergraduates and 100 graduate students are enrolled in the school full-time. [The Daily Tar Heel](#) (DTH), an independent weekday student newspaper, circulates 18,000 copies and has a readership of approximately 38,000.²⁷¹ *The DTH* recently moved its newsroom to downtown Chapel Hill.

The UNC Board of Governors holds the license for [WUNC](#) public radio and [WXYC](#) student radio (see *Radio*, above). Student television station [STV](#) is available in residence halls and to cable subscribers in Chapel Hill. [The Carolina Community Media Project](#) was launched in 2001 to strengthen community journalism. Director Jock Lauterer's students produce two "lab" publications, [Carrboro Commons](#) (online only, with contributions to the *Carrboro Citizen* newspaper) and the [Northeast Central Durham](#) Community VOICE (details below). In 2010, UNC journalism professor Ryan Thornburg assigned students in his public affairs writing for new media class to work with four community partners on



Local band Lost in the Trees during an interview at WNCU radio on the campus of North Carolina State University, April 10, 2009. Photo by Mike Gray (http://www.flickr.com/people/not_a_photographer/).

their website; one of those was local political blog and discussion forum [OrangePolitics](#) (see *Online Media*, above).²⁷² It was the site's first formal collaboration with the journalism school. In 2010, UNC hired former *Baltimore Sun* editor and senior vice president [Monty Cook](#) to lead The Reese Felts Digital News Project, a digital newsroom housed at the journalism school that would study how audiences and communities respond to and engage with experimental news products.²⁷³ Cook resigned in November, 2010, following allegations of improper conduct with a female student.²⁷⁴ As of February, 2011, the journalism school was actively searching for a new director for the initiative. [Latino Journalism and Media \(Latijam\)](#) is a project at the UNC journalism school dedicated to promoting fair and competent local reporting about Latino life in North Carolina through news, research, curriculum, and public service. Stories that students produce through Latijam are sometimes placed with area media outlets, such as the *Independent*

[The School of Government](#) at UNC provides training and on-call expertise to journalists, local and state government officials, and elected officials. The school's [Legislative Reporting Service](#) produces daily and weekly digests of actions in the N.C. General Assembly for weekly subscription fees of \$50 and \$20, respectively.

At NCSU, [The Technician](#) is a weekday student newspaper with a circulation of 11,500 during the academic year.²⁷⁵ The paper has had trouble recently recruiting enough writers and editors to sustain it, and was forced to put out a plea for volunteers after it initially failed to hire an editor-in-chief for the 2010-2011 academic year.²⁷⁶ *The Technician* is part of [N.C. State Student Media](#), a student-run organization supported by professional university staff and advised by a board that includes students as well as academic and professional

advisors. The organization sets policy for all campus media, including [WKNC](#), the campus radio station (see *Radio*, above); *The Nubian Message*, an African American weekly newspaper; *Windhover*, a literary magazine; and the student yearbook. NCSU's English and Communications departments offer a [minor in journalism](#) in which the curriculum stresses writing and editing skills.



*UNC journalism instructor Jock Lauterer, far left, with the student staff of the Northeast Central Durham Community VOICE newspaper in 2010.
Photo credit: Courtesy of Jock Lauterer.*

Duke's student newspaper, *The Chronicle*, publishes five days a week during the school year and has a circulation of 14,500. Students also produce a weekly entertainment magazine, *Recess*, and a monthly features magazine, *Towerview*. Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy offers a [Policy Journalism and Media Studies Certificate](#) to undergraduates through the [DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy](#). The center has three main areas of research: economic models of journalism, including nonprofit and hybrid models; computational journalism, led by former *Washington Post* database editor Sarah Cohen; and ways to protect and preserve investigative and accountability coverage.²⁷⁷ [WXDU](#) is a community radio station run by the student union (see *Radio*, above). Duke's [Center for Documentary Studies](#) provides undergraduate courses, a continuing education certificate program, and summer institutes in photography, video, audio, and narrative writing.

NCCU's [Campus Echo](#) is among the top student newspapers at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) nationwide. It circulates approximately 10,000 copies, six issues per semester. [AudioNet](#) is a campus-wide radio station, and [WNCU](#) is a nationally renowned jazz radio station (see *Radio*, above). NCCU's English and Mass Communication/Philosophy department offers an [undergraduate degree in journalism](#).

A startup community newspaper in Northeast Central Durham is reaching out to one of Durham's most

challenged neighborhoods through media and youth engagement.²⁷⁸ The *Northeast Central Durham Community VOICE*, a printed newspaper produced monthly during the academic year, is a project run by UNC journalism instructor Jock Lauterer, who partnered with NCCU professors Bruce dePyssler and Lisa Paulin to bring journalism students from both universities to work with neighborhood high-school and middle-school students. Lauterer had received a \$25,000 grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for computers, cameras, and other equipment, which he hoped to use to establish an online community publication in Durham, as he had in Carrboro. But his initial efforts in the Durham did not take root, as high school students and their overworked teachers showed no interest in participating in a newspaper. The equipment went unused until a UNC undergraduate expressed interest in using idle digital equipment to start a [photovoice](#) project at the [John Avery Boys & Girls Club of Durham](#):

I follow her over there to the Boys and Girls Club and what I witness is transformational. I see inner-city kids, teens, hardened, those dead-eyed looks you get, completely change when they've got cameras in their hands. They're taking pictures, having fun, learning, doing something new, being mentored by UNC students. And I had this transformation, too, because I realized, "Holy cow, this is how we recruit." This kid showed me the way. They don't want a newspaper; they want free photo lessons.

Lauterer spent the summer of 2009 teaching photography to small groups of African-American and Latino teenagers involved in community groups such inner-city gardening group [SEEDS](#) and arts organization [SeeSaw Studio](#). He also worked with SpiritHouse and a Baha'i youth group. When he met children who expressed interest in writing, he enlisted them to contribute stories.

In the fall of 2009 Lauterer, dePyssler, and Paulin launched an online publication written mostly by their undergraduate students with photography by high-school and middle-school students. In February 2010

"I realized, 'Holy cow, this is how we recruit.' This kid showed me the way. They don't want a newspaper; they want free photo lessons." – UNC journalism instructor Jock Lauterer

they published the first print edition, 16 full-color pages. The three instructors delivered 7,000 copies to 50 drop spots in Northeast Central Durham. The *Daily Tar Heel* agreed to donate the first year's printing costs of \$7,000.

Lauterer observed that the print edition received a far greater reception in the community than the online edition did:

I'd heard about the digital divide, but it wasn't until I actually experienced it that I realized how deep and wide it is. I thought the online editions were pretty cool, but when I spoke to NECD citizens and people about, "Have you see the VOICE? Have you gone online?" I'd get these painful comments like "I don't have a computer" or "It's busted" or "I can't afford online." It was just evident that where I was, as a Chapel Hillian, a university academic, thinking everybody's online, I was just woefully off target. And then the print edition started and I, physically being one of the delivery boys, saw the reaction people had to so-called legacy media. I'd walk into Joe's Hot Dog Diner, on the corner of Angier and Driver, with my papers and people at the counter say, "What's that? I know that guy!" It's daunting, because I know we have to do both and doing an online newspaper and a print newspaper requires different skill sets and different staffs. The people putting out the newspaper are actually different people from the kids putting out the online. That's just another layer of work. But it's so worth it.²⁷⁹

Early Phillips, executive director of the city's Northeast Central Durham initiative, negotiated with Scientific Properties commercial real estate company to lease newsroom space in the renovated Golden Belt warehouse for free, which helped build teen involvement by providing a meeting place within the neighborhood. Lauterer said he does not plan to pursue advertising revenue. "I have no illusions about a commercial newspaper, online, print, or otherwise. We are a *lab*

newspaper, completely dependent on student production," he said. He is optimistic that grants will continue to provide financial sustainability"

The thing that's the hardest thing to keep going is the human side. When you start something, people are excited. The genius is keeping on. This whole community organizing dynamic is what newspaper publishers and editors have not been good at, or haven't had to do before. But if we're not partnering, we're dead. We have to be constantly seeking out new partners to be sustainable.

Conclusions

College students and faculty in the Triangle are important assets to the area's media ecosystem. Over time, UNC-Chapel Hill's journalism school is developing an array of local news experiments that have the potential to become important parts of the Triangle media ecosystem. One of the most significant accomplishments so far of the Carrboro Commons, the Northeast Central Durham VOICE, and other student work is the establishment of relationships between UNC-CH, NCCU, their students, and other community institutions and campuses.

Recommendations

Media literacy and journalistic thinking should be integrated in higher education curricula.

Colleges and universities, particularly those with journalism programs, should collaborate with local public schools, community groups, and media outlets to produce news and public affairs.

Government

State open government policies

All local governments in North Carolina must uphold public records law as laid out in [North Carolina General Statute Chapter 132](#) and the provisions of the *North Carolina Records Retention and Disposition Schedule* issued by the [Government Records Division](#) of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. Local governments must also comply with open meetings law as laid out in [North Carolina General Statute Chapter 143, Article 33C](#). Complaints about the violation of open records and open meetings laws are often referred to the state's [Office of the Attorney General](#). The extent to which local governments follow those laws depends on the level of training and awareness of staff, and on the attitude of elected officials.

As of March 2011, the North Carolina General Assembly was considering a bill that would allow voters to amend the state's constitution to make access to public meetings and the right to inspect and copy government records a



The North Carolina State Capitol in downtown Raleigh Photo credit: Jim Bowen (<http://www.flickr.com/people/jamiedfw/>)

constitutional right. [House Bill 87](#) proposes a statewide ballot measure for 2012, but first the bill itself will require a two-thirds supermajority to pass. The North Carolina Press Association backs the measure, which is similar to others passed in California and Florida.²⁸⁰

In 2010 the North Carolina General Assembly passed an ethics reform law that makes public local and state government employees' pay and employment histories, as well as any record of their firings or demotions. The bill appropriates funding for databases that will link campaign contributions to contributors' government contracts.²⁸¹ The bill also entitles citizens who are wrongly denied access to public records to recover their attorneys' fees after they win their cases. This change was inspired by a case in Chatham County in which a woman named Gretchen Lothrop sued the Chatham County Board of Elections over illegal meetings and denials of draft minutes from board meetings. A judge sided in her favor, but awarded her only 10% of her \$35,000 in legal fees; she had to fundraise to cover the rest.²⁸²

Open government organizations

A number of nonprofit and professional organizations act as watchdogs of open government. Arguably the most significant is the [North Carolina Press Association](#) (NCPA), which offers significant resources to its members through the provision of on-call legal advice and extensive information about public records.²⁸³ The NCPA's website features a [summary of bills and issues](#) with the organization's positions on bills before the state legislature. These include everything from open government, ethics and public records laws to requirements for publishing public notices and other policies that affect the business interests of NCPA members. NCPA employs two attorneys who are experts in open records and open government: Amanda Martin, who is on retainer to the organization and provides information about state government, and John Bussian a FOIA expert and one of three registered lobbyists for the NCPA in Raleigh. Both attorneys are often quoted in the press as representatives of the NCPA and are often hired by its members as counsel in specific cases. The NCPA frequently assists in open records lawsuits by filing *amicus curiae* briefs and occasionally joining as a plaintiff. The NCPA was one of 10 plaintiffs on the Easley case, for which it allotted \$10,000 in legal fees.²⁸⁴

More than 200 daily and community newspapers statewide belong to the NCPA statewide. The NCPA currently does not offer membership to online publications, but its board and staff are developing an associate membership level that will resemble that used by the Associated Press: online associate members would have to be in publication for at least a year and a certain proportion of their content would have to be original; once admitted, they would be allowed to participate in

committees but not have the right to vote. Executive Director Beth Grace expected the board of directors to vote on the proposal by February. She said the board wants to include online news producers in the association in a way that ensures that they subscribe to quality and ethical standards that existing members must uphold:

I don't see any reason why a legitimate online news operation should not have a collegial organization to turn to, just like print pubs do, and we're happy to provide that. I don't see any problem finding strong, reliable, accurate news organizations to become part of our organization. We welcome them.²⁸⁵

The North Carolina Open Government Coalition is an alliance of approximately 40 media, government, and academic institutions across the state. Its academic arm, [the Sunshine Center at Elon University](#) (located outside Greensboro), was launched in 2007 to convene media and academic stakeholders to raise awareness about the law. The coalition recently secured a \$500,000 endowment, which will provide approximately \$25,000 annually to employ a part-time paid staffer.²⁸⁶ Connie Book, founding head of the center, was recently promoted to Associate Provost of the university. Associate Professor of Communications Brooke Barnett was executive director of the center as of 2011. Out of 16 board members, eight are media professionals; the rest are teachers, librarians, lawyers (including Raleigh attorney Mark Prak, who lobbies for broadcasters and cable companies), a representative from the League of Women Voters, and a town clerk.²⁸⁷ Book said the impetus for the coalition came from former *N&O* Executive Editor Melanie Sill, in response to her frustration with obtaining public records for the newspaper's Pulitzer Prize-winning report on hog lagoons.²⁸⁸ The center receives funding from the Knight Foundation, the National Freedom of Information Coalition, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the N.C. Press Association, and the N.C. Cable Television Association.

In March, Elon's Sunshine Center coordinates local aspects of the Sunshine Week, a national annual event sponsored by the National Freedom of Information Coalition. [The 2011 event in Salisbury](#) will feature UNC System President Tom Ross as keynote speaker. The center also provides a hotline for advice and information about open government. Barnett estimated the hotline generated about 12 significant questions per month.²⁸⁹

The Sunshine Center partnered with the N.C. Press Association and N.C. Attorney General Roy Cooper's office to produce a [12-page document](#) explaining public records and public meetings law in a clear, frequently-asked-questions format, to better inform government officials, reporters, and the public. The organization also partnered with the Elon Poll to gauge citizen awareness of

open government laws in North Carolina, finding that the lowest awareness was in young people and the elderly. In response, the center developed and tested an open government curriculum for use in high school civics classes, which is recently received grant funding to implement through K-12 outreach and workshops.²⁹⁰

[North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections](#) advocates for campaign finance reform and government transparency statewide. Among its accomplishments are a “stand by your ad” law, public financing option for judicial candidates and some Council of State races, and a pilot public financing option for municipal candidates in Chapel Hill. The NCVCE is part of a campaign finance coalition that includes [Democracy North Carolina](#) and the [North Carolina Center for Voter Education](#).

The [UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government](#) trains elected officials and government employees in local governments across the state through in-person and online training sessions and seminars and provides on-call advice on how to comply with state and federal law and how to implement state and federal policy. There appears to be no collaboration currently between the School of Government and the more citizen- or journalism-oriented organizations profiled above.²⁹¹

Local government

Local election results and voter registration information are archived and searchable for all 100 counties in the state at the [North Carolina Board of Elections site](#), allowing easy live tracking on election nights.

The city of Raleigh launched a new [online portal](#) in August 2010.²⁹² The site allows residents to pay utility bills and parking tickets and to find information about transit schedules, public hearings and parks and recreation services, as well as the city budget, municipal codes, loans, grants, business licenses, permits, bids and RFPs, and city demographics. The site also provides on-demand access to video of city council meetings and updates on city improvement projects. The site is easy to navigate and includes social media sharing features, RSS feeds, maps, calendars and images. A [Spanish-language version](#) of the site is also available. Raleigh's [public affairs department](#) oversees the website, as well as the Raleigh Television Network (see *Public Television*, above). The site lists the contact information of a city staffer who handles public records requests. The site redesign was a project of Raleigh's first chief information officer, Gail Roper, who was appointed in 2008.²⁹³ Also in 2010, Raleigh City Councilor Bonner Gaylord launched a web and smartphone application using [SeeClickFix](#) on his [personal website](#) to allow residents in his district to report non emergency problems.²⁹⁴ He is paying for the service out of pocket for now but has said that he hopes the city

will choose to spend the \$4,800 annually to contract for a city-wide site.²⁹⁵

The [Durham County Government](#) site has a great deal of easily accessible news and information, including prominent links to the county manager's recommended budget, a map of proposed zoning changes, and information about federal, state, and local stimulus funds. A link from the home page lists the county's [public records databases](#), which include public health grades for restaurants and lodging; city and county GIS maps; [calls for service](#) reports to the Durham County sheriff; the [inmate population search](#) at the Durham County Jail; [property tax records](#); a [public records search](#) at the Register of Deeds; and [voter registration](#).²⁹⁶ Similarly, the [City of Durham website](#) has news and event updates on its home page, as well as “quick access” links to online payment for services such as water and sewer and to permit and licensing applications; [Durham One-Call](#), a centralized information system for routing calls about city services (designed to reduce the burden on the local 911 system); fiscal year budget information; “Operation Green Light,” which entails ongoing updates about street repaving; Durham government TV channel 8; and proposed fee changes. The [DTV8](#) link provides access to live-streaming city council meetings. In the 2009 City of Durham Community Survey, 49% of respondents said they got information about the city from the city's print newsletter, up from 46% in 2007, and 42% said they got information from the city website, up from 32%.

[Chapel Hill](#) and [Orange County](#) portals are similarly easy to navigate, as is [Chatham County's](#) website.

Information about the state's court system can be very frustrating to track down, as the [North Carolina Court System](#) website is confusing to navigate and provides no information about pending cases beyond a difficult-to-find court calendar.

Neighborhood organizing online

Neighborhood college programs are available in [Durham](#), [Raleigh](#), and Cary (where the program is called the [School of Government](#)) to train citizens to better understand how local government functions and develop citizens' interest in becoming members of boards and commissions.

In Chatham County, the [Chatham Citizens for Effective Government](#) acts as a watchdog of growth and development policy. It was formed as part of a grassroots response county to commissioners' pro-growth policies and noncompliance with open meetings law.²⁹⁷ The group organizes a “[Citizens' College](#)” that teaches residents how municipal and county government function.

The city of Raleigh also runs a [Neighborhood Leadership Academy](#) to train future community leaders, including

those who may be interested in running for municipal office.

In Raleigh, the most active institutions are the [Citizen Advisory Councils](#), or CACs, which host monthly public meetings. There are 18 CACs across the city, and each is made up of a number of distinct neighborhoods. Among the most active online is [East CAC](#), an area in East Raleigh that is home to about 10,000 residents. East CAC president [Mark Turner](#) is an IT professional, active blogger, and advocate for municipal broadband. Turner set up two Listservs for the group, one for announcements and one for discussions. There is a blog and an active public [Facebook group](#). Most CACs do not have a comparable online presence.

Mindful that not all residents knew about or could attend CAC monthly meetings, Turner used a free ad-supported streaming video service called [Livestream](#) and \$300 worth of video equipment to broadcast the meetings online. Archives of old meetings are available online. Turner pays the \$20 monthly hosting fee for the [EastRaleigh.org](#) site and mailing lists out of pocket. Not only is the investment useful to residents, it has become a useful input for journalists as well. Just as reporters often lurk on community Listservs for news tips and blog fodder, Turner said, "I'll get reporters calling me up and asking to see [video of CAC meetings], and of course it's an open meeting, so I just point them online." In June 2010, Mayor Charles Meeker came to the East CAC to speak about nearby development projects. His response to a citizen's question about the controversial Wake County Schools diversity policy ended up making the news. "That became fodder for about three weeks of news stories," Turner said. "It didn't strike me at the time just how newsworthy that was, but because I made it available for reporters, it was the best PR we ever got it."

Turner would like to find other technologies to reach out



The Chatham County Courthouse in Pittsboro, which burned nearly to the ground in 2010. Photo credit: Vincent T. Case (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/netdog1103/>)

to neighbors who, for whatever reason, choose not to go online. He is developing a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone-tree system modeled after the service called [FindToto](#) (designed to help locate lost pets) to create an announcement system that would automatically call all subscribed residents to inform them of emergencies, crime alerts, and community meetings. He has also used CAC grant money to buy durable yard signs to alert neighbors about meetings.

In Durham, the most active city government-sponsored organizing mechanism is [Partners Against Crime](#), which hosts monthly meetings at five designated districts. Each district has a Listserv, a common venue for the neighborhood-level exchange of information about suspicious behavior and other safety concerns. In the 2009 City of Durham Community Survey, 19% of respondents said they received news about the city from PAC Listservs.

Many neighborhood associations organize via Listserv or other email distributors such as Yahoo! or Google groups. [Old West Durham Neighborhood Association](#), which encompasses historic Ninth Street, has an especially active website that includes policy advocacy (such as for a landlord registry) as well as neighborhood histories and oral history from residents.

That a neighborhood organization has a weak online presence doesn't necessarily mean it's a weak or ineffective group. For example, [Durham InterNeighborhood Council](#) is a coalition of 31 neighborhood and homeowners' associations. The organization meets monthly and works cooperatively with the city and county governments. While its website includes links to resources such as a neighborhood association toolkit and sample bylaws, the Council's meeting minutes have not been updated since October 2009.

It is clear that while neighborhood-level organizing plays a significant role in local politics across the Triangle, community groups' use of media and communication tools varies widely by neighborhood. While more careful study would be helpful, a preliminary overview finds that those neighborhood groups that are most active online tend to be in older parts of the city that are economically and ethnically diverse, but which benefit from the expertise and resources of residents who are employed in technological and academic fields. Recognition and support of these efforts from government varies by city.

Social Service and Health Information

The [United Way of the Greater Triangle](#) coordinates a service called 2-1-1 ([NC211.org](#)). This is a 24-hour, multilingual hotline for finding community health and human service resources through government agencies and nonprofits. According to United Way 2-1-1 Manager

Lula Johnson, the number of calls “increased considerably” in 2009 compared to 2008 due to the slumping economy, and this has been reflected in the types of services that callers request most often: “basic needs,” as Johnson put it, such as mortgage assistance, food, and shelter. However, she is not aware of a marked difference between the 2-1-1 requests in the Triangle and those in other areas of the country.

2-1-1 is linked to prominently on the [Durham County Government home page](#) with text that says, “Get Connected, Get Answers.” On the other hand, the city of Durham site does not include easily accessible links to social services. Similar situations obtain in the other three Triangle counties. Because most social services are administered through county governments, individual city websites tend not to provide information about those services. In fact, local governments’ websites are surprisingly sparse in providing information on all available medical options especially given the concentration of medical resources in the area.

Indeed, the concentration of medical services in the Triangle has created intense competition among hospitals and medical centers, every one of which offers information online about health. To get a broader sense of the availability of information about health and social services, the author of this report analyzed the official government websites of the four Triangle counties. The analysis considered the accessibility and detail of information provided on the following examples of key government services: driver’s licenses and vehicle registration; contact information for government officials; taxes; and social services, including mental health, child protection, hospitals, transportation, the elderly, and the disabled. Each area’s local government was considered to have covered a category if it was possible to access pertinent information (that reached a certain standard of detail, or linked to more detail) on either the city or county website. As can be seen in the chart below, local governments in the Triangle seem to convey vital social service information well overall. However, it should be noted that while several counties have adequate amounts of information available on certain subjects, many of those references have only the minimum amount of necessary information and would need to be supplemented with the coverage of local media. Transportation is one of the categories in which all four county governments succeed in providing information to the public. Transportation information is also available on a regional platform, [GoTriangle](#), which seeks to make regional trip planning and commuting easier by coordinating the maps and schedules of participating systems in the area. Nevertheless, Triangle governments are inconsistent in providing information on obtaining driver’s licenses and vehicle registration.

Nonprofits are also a main source of information about and access to a wide variety of social services. Typical nonprofits include the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); the North Carolina Justice Center, a provider of immigration and other legal services and advocacy group for progressive social policy; and [El Centro Hispano](#) in Durham, which provides services and information for Spanish-speaking residents and emphasizes providing uninsured members of the Latino community with access to health care.²⁹⁸ One promising trend is the willingness of local governments in the Triangle to reach out to minorities, particularly Latino residents who might have more difficulty accessing information because of the language barrier. On the Wake County website, [social service](#) and [government](#) information is accessible in Spanish. In Orange County, the Health Department website is also available in [Spanish](#) and also offers [Immigrant and Refugee Health Resources](#), while Chatham County’s Health Department provides [health reports and documents](#) in both English and Spanish.

Indicators of the Online Availability of Government Information and Services:

Type of Info.	Durham / Durham County	Raleigh / Wake County	Chapel Hill and Carrboro / Orange County	Pittsboro / Chatham County
Driver’s license and vehicle registration	N ²⁹⁹	N ³⁰⁰	Y ³⁰¹	N
Officials’ contact information	Y ³⁰²	Y ³⁰³	Y ³⁰⁴	Y ³⁰⁵
Taxes: Procedural info and tools	Y ³⁰⁶	Y ³⁰⁷	Y ³⁰⁸	Y ³⁰⁹
Mental health	Y ³¹⁰	Y ³¹¹	N	Y ³¹²
Child protection	Y ³¹³	Y ³¹⁴	Y ³¹⁵	Y ³¹⁶
Hospitals	Y ³¹⁷	Y ³¹⁸	N ³¹⁹	Y ³²⁰
Transport.	Y ³²¹	Y ³²²	Y ³²³	Y ³²⁴
Elderly and Disabled	Y ³²⁵	Y ³²⁶	Y ³²⁷	Y ³²⁸

Providing additional outreach in Spanish is [El Pueblo](#), a statewide nonprofit public policy and advocacy

organization based in Raleigh. Much of its service to the community consists of media outreach and the provision of information to the Latino community. El Pueblo runs programs in public safety, health, and youth advocacy and civic engagement. It used a \$35,000 grant from State Farm Insurance to hire a Hispanic marketing firm to create 60-second Spanish language public service announcements about driving safety for broadcast on radio stations. "Radio is the best way to reach the Hispanic community," El Pueblo's public safety director was quoted as saying. "It is the easiest way to reach the most people at the same time."³²⁹

Conclusions

Journalists and citizens require reliable, timely access to information about state and local government. Local governments vary widely in their provision of public information and their awareness of the information needs of their citizens. These needs include information about public meetings, pending decisions, planning and zoning, campaign finance, property records, and basic services. In many cases, these records may be available for public inspection, but they are not available online, which increases the resources reporters and citizens must expend to access them.

The North Carolina Press Association and the Sunshine Center at Elon University are the leading advocacy groups working toward greater government transparency and stronger open records laws. Democracy North Carolina has historically been a vital advocate for campaign finance reform and an asset to investigative journalism. The group's alliance with the North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections and the North Carolina Center for Voter Education has helped to establish crucial victories for government transparency in North Carolina.

The Triangle's high-tech industry, which includes a large contingent of open-source advocates that center around Red Hat, could provide valuable expertise in the arena of open government. Municipal governments may be eligible for assistance via [Code for America](#) or a similar public service program.

Some local political groups, nonprofits, and neighborhood organizations have discovered the power of online media to organize and share vital information on timely issues, including those that may be ignored by the media. East Raleigh Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) provides a model for using both digital and traditional communications techniques, from blog posts to online video to yard signs, to bring together local community members. By sharing a record of their meetings online, East Raleigh CAC helps to inform the broader community.

Neighborhood Colleges, some organized by municipal governments and some by political groups, provide an

opportunity for self-selecting community leaders to find out how government services and decision making processes work, so that they may become better liaisons between their neighbors and themselves.

Recommendations

Better access to public records will increase the ability of professional reporters, citizen journalists, bloggers, and other members of the community to perform the watchdog function and to inform their communities about civic affairs that may not be covered by traditional media. As we recommended earlier in the document, North Carolina's state and local governments should improve digital access to public records. Any municipal, county, or state government document generated for the purpose of public inspection, such as campaign finance reports and financial disclosure statements, should be made available online unless policymakers can identify clear reasons otherwise.

Media organizations should partner with civic organizations and neighborhood colleges to add journalistic thinking and digital media training to their existing programs in civic engagement.

Media organizations and open government groups should foster better understanding of public records law among citizens and bloggers. This approach will increase support for open government and make better government watchdogs of both mainstream and nontraditional media.

Open government advocates should call upon the Triangle's high-tech industry to develop open-source tools to increase government transparency.

Philanthropic Investment in Media

Few local philanthropic organizations fund media-related projects. Those that do tend to look at media as a means to accomplishing a broader strategy of social change or policy objective.

[Triangle Community Foundation](#) (TCF) manages assets of \$135 million in 750 different funds, distributing more than 10% each year to nonprofits, schools, and community projects primarily in Wake, Durham, Orange, and Chatham counties.³³⁰ TCF President [Andrea Bazán](#) recently served as chair of the National Council of La Raza and was appointed by President Obama to the Department of Homeland Security's Southwest Border Taskforce. TCF was founded in 1983 by Nobel Laureate in Medicine George H. Hitchings. Most of the foundations assets are comprised of donor-advised funds. A substantial portion of these assets—\$25 million—was donated in 1995 by the family of Frank Daniels, Jr., prior to the sale of *The News & Observer* to the McClatchy Company.³³¹

TCF is unusual among community foundations in that it has a program officer, Robyn Schryer Fehrman, who works on questions of civic engagement. However, because most of the endowment is donor advised, discretionary grant making, including the Community Grant making program (within which the civic engagement program falls), is highly competitive. Each year the foundation receives between 75 and 100 applications to the program, out of which it funds between 12 and 20 projects. Out of \$14.6 million in grants TCF awarded in 2008-2009, \$149,000 was awarded within the Community Grant making Program's Civic Engagement Focus Area.

TCF posts a [rubric](#) describing how it scores Community Grants.³³² "The most

successful civic engagement proposals are focused on a specific issue," Fehrman said. "So the most successful media proposals would be focused on using media to achieve X and talking about how that work brings more people, and more diverse voices, to the policy decision-making table." The most directly media-related recipient is the Institute for Southern Studies, which publishes investigative journalism about the region. (Full disclosure: This author is a member of the ISS Board of Directors.) Other recipients in the Civic Engagement Focus Area have included the N.C. Center for Voter Education, Democracy North Carolina, Common Cause, Community Reinvestment Association of N.C. (CRA-NC), North Carolina Public Interest Research Group (NCPIRG), Netcorps, and ACORN. TCF has received applications from community newspapers and public access television producers, but it has funded few media projects. In Spring 2010, TCF awarded \$14,350 to the Institute for Southern Studies for news reporting.³³³ Fehrman said donor-advised funds have not been used to fund media-related projects. "In general, it can be difficult to make the case to donors to fund projects for which the impact may be indirect or hard to measure," Fehrman said, particularly when the economic downturn has led to state and local budget cuts that require nonprofits to pick up the slack in serving immediate community needs.³³⁴

The [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#), based in Winston-Salem, has made some grants to media organizations as part of its Democracy and Civic Engagement program. That program distributed nearly \$1.9 million in 2009 (down from \$4.5 million in 2008). The only media project included in 2009 was a grant of \$80,000 to a Census and Redistricting Project at the Institute for Southern Studies.

Duke Law Professor Richard Schmalbeck has advocated that the Internal Revenue Service clarify the legitimacy of journalistic organizations as charitable enterprises contributing to public welfare.

Z. Smith Reynolds's Director of Programs Joy Vermillion Heinsohn said the foundation's board recently revised the language of its focus area description, removing media as part of its focus due to a lack of applicants. She estimates the foundation funded fewer than 10 media-related grants over the past five years. "What's funny is that since we have removed that language, I've gotten more calls from these startup groups than in the past five or six years," she said in August 2010. "It's not that we won't fund it, but it is not listed as an area of interest for the foundation." Any applicant is still welcome to apply for the foundation's small grant program (under \$35,000), but the foundation is not currently soliciting any media projects for its by-invitation strategic grants.

Heinsohn noted that the Reynolds board is interested in building the communications capacity of nonprofits. For instance, it launched a project called [Blueprint NC](#), a partnership of more than 50 nonprofits in the state:

As a piece of that, [the board members] see investigative journalism as something worth investing in. From that perspective, they are still very open to funding media work, but it would need to be geared in the direction of building the capacity of other organizations in the nonprofit sector to do communication work well.

One millionaire businessman in Raleigh has illustrated that philanthropic investment in media can be a powerful means of influencing public policy. James Arthur "Art" Pope is the son and heir of John Pope, owner of Variety Wholesalers, a chain of discount stores.³³⁵ Art Pope is a Duke Law graduate and former N.C. representative with ties to national conservative groups such as [Americans for Prosperity](#). He was dubbed "Knight of the Right" by *The News & Observer* for his profound influence on state politics.³³⁶ In an email prior to the 2009 election, the Wake County Republican Party chairman told school board chairman Ron Margiotta that "Art will be the architect" of what turned out to be a highly contentious conservative takeover of the board.³³⁷

The John William Pope Foundation has \$190 million in assets and paid out \$10.8 million in 2008; Art Pope is its president and director.³³⁸ While the foundation donates money to a wide variety of organizations, two of its most significant grantees are Raleigh think tanks that produce some of the most influential state-level policy analysis and political commentary. A 2011 investigation by the Institute for Southern Studies found that 90 percent of the funding for the state's leading conservative think tanks and advocacy groups comes from the Pope family foundation.³³⁹

The [John Locke Foundation](#) (JLF) is a nonprofit think tank with a mission to promote principles of the free market economy and limited government through

influence on policy issues affecting North Carolina. JFL receives \$3.2 million in annual revenue, approximately 80% from the Pope Foundation. JFL publishes [Carolina Journal](#), a monthly newspaper, and daily online news site covering state government from a conservative point of view, with blogs covering five regions across the state. [CJ TV](#) posts video segments produced by the foundation, and [Carolina Journal Radio](#) is a weekly hour-long public affairs program that airs on stations across the state. JFL President John Hood, a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill's journalism school, writes a widely syndicated newspaper column and is often quoted in the media or called upon to debate. He is a frequent panelist on the political TV program [N.C. Spin](#). JFL employs six people in its research division and 12 to work on *Carolina Journal* and JFL communications.³⁴⁰

Pope's other major grantee is the [John W. Pope Civitas Institute](#), a conservative policy analysis think tank that aims to inform state lawmakers and citizens on more than 20 issue areas. Civitas conducts polls, analyzes state budgets, and produces issue guides aimed at legislators. The website also posts [visual data and maps](#). Civitas also hosts a luncheon series, campaign training, and leadership conference. The organization has a staff of 12. It reported \$1.7 million in revenue in 2009, almost entirely from the Pope Foundation.³⁴¹

On the other end of the political spectrum, [The A.J. Fletcher Foundation](#), headed by Barbara and Jim Goodmon, is dedicated to the support of an independent grade school for children with learning disabilities and to the support of organizations that promote education, communication, the arts, faith, and care of the elderly, infirm, or indigent. Fletcher reported \$4.5 million in revenue and paid out nearly \$3 million in grants in 2008.³⁴²

The Fletcher Foundation funds the [North Carolina Justice Center](#), a progressive advocacy and research organization that produces policy analysis of statewide issues. The N.C. Justice Center reported \$4.3 million in revenue in 2009. The organization provided \$1.2 million for legal advocacy for low-income and working poor people, including immigrants. Approximately \$1.3 million was spent on policy advocacy and communication. Among its projects is [N.C. Policy Watch](#), a public policy organization that produces daily blog posts and commentaries for print and broadcast media, and hosts ongoing lectures and events with a staff of two analysts, Executive Director Chris Fitzsimon and Director of Research and Policy Development Rob Schofield. N.C. Policy Watch recently hired a new media director and hired former News & Observer reporter Sarah Ovaska as an investigative reporter.³⁴³

The Fletcher Foundation also funds [Democracy North Carolina](#), a nonpartisan government watchdog group that

has uncovered corruption through the dogged pursuit of campaign finance records; [North Carolina Common Cause](#), the state chapter of the national nonpartisan government reform group; and the [NCSU Institute for Nonprofits](#), which publishes [Philanthropy Journal](#), an online publication, with two writer/editors, that produces daily news for the national and statewide foundation and nonprofit communities..

The [Community Reinvestment Association of North Carolina](#) (CRA-NC) is nonprofit based in Durham that advocates for asset building, financial literacy, and economic justice throughout the state. The association practices [media advocacy](#), with a focus on video production, as part of its work. Most notably, CRA-NC produces an educational Spanish language television *telenovela* (soap opera) called [Nuestro Barrio](#), which conveys financial literacy messages about home ownership, credit, and predatory lending within the context of an entertaining story. A study by UNC-Chapel Hill's Kenan Flagler Business School found the program to be effective in attaining its educational goals.³⁴⁴ CRA-NC also assisted in the establishment of the Durham Community Media Center through the low-cost rental of a building that houses the center. CRA-NC has a blog at [BankTalk.org](#) and has had a Twitter presence ([@CRAofNC](#)) since March 2009. The organization uses [paper.li](#) to turn links shared on Twitter into a daily-updated website.

In 2010, North Carolina's legislature passed a [bill](#) that permits the incorporation of Low-profit Limited Liability Corporations, or L3Cs, in the state.³⁴⁵ Several national proposals to reinvigorate journalism have advocated the L3C model for journalism outlets. Duke Law Professor Richard Schmalbeck has advocated that the Internal Revenue Service clarify the legitimacy of journalistic organizations as charitable enterprises contributing to public welfare.³⁴⁶

Conclusions

Foundations provide essential funding to media organizations in the Triangle, even as they continue to grapple with how media projects align with their missions. While Z. Smith Reynolds is a significant philanthropic funder of independent media, and even ZSR reported that the organization's engagement with media was limited. The Triangle Community Foundation has expressed interest in funding media, but much of its funds are donor-advised, leaving little room for involvement without donor support.

While media training is valuable, young people and minorities often cannot participate in media because of a lack of income. Paying jobs help to build intellectual capital to produce quality news and information by and for underserved audiences.

Some foundations and nonprofit organizations that invest significantly in media use those outlets to advance specific policy objectives. Traditional journalistic principles of objectivity may run counter to the notion of pursuing specific policy objectives, a concern both grant seekers and funders must grapple with. The public is better served when nonprofits consider the community information needs that go underprovided in the marketplace, rather than tailoring media messages that reinforce their groups' policy priorities.

Notably absent from the above list of philanthropic investment into media is any of the Triangle's prominent technology firms. These firms have an opportunity to contribute significantly to local community needs by bringing their financial support, expertise, and human capital to bear on local information needs.,

Recommendations

Philanthropists should continue to invest in media, through both unrestricted and programmatic grants, as a way to nurture democracy. Donors should target their support to develop and sustain accountability news reporting at the local, state, and regional level, and to build capacity for grantees, especially small startup operations. Funding should be structured to guarantee editorial freedom from even perceived conflicts of interest.

Philanthropists should help to establish a service program to nurture young people and recent college graduates who wish to serve their communities by producing local news.

Arts and Entertainment

Throughout the Triangle, the arts community is dynamic, inventive, and deeply tied to a sense of civic pride and engagement. In fact, an arts ecology study of this length would be a great asset to the area and could be instructive for emerging media partnerships as well.

Richard Florida ranked the Raleigh-Durham area No. 6 in his first Creative Class rankings, ahead of New York, in his 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*.^{347,348} “Creativity” has been a buzzword of economic development in the Triangle ever since. In 2010, NCSU's [Institute for Emerging Issues](#) held its annual forum on “[Creativity, Inc.](#)” to explore how the state's creative sector can generate jobs and economic growth.

In Durham, the documentary film scene extends beyond the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. For example, [Southern Documentary Fund](#), a nonprofit that offers financial support to local filmmakers, sponsored [Durham: A Self-Portrait](#) and [Tobacco Money Feeds My Family](#).

[SparkCon](#) is a creative festival launched in 2006 on a [BarCamp](#) model, with an open call for participants to take part in events they organize themselves relating to

everything from poetry to graffiti to fashion to video gaming to circus performance. It is based in Raleigh but events take place throughout the Triangle and invites the participation of public officials.

[Hidden Voices](#) is a nonprofit that uses an ethnographic, documentary approach to tell the stories of “underrepresented populations” through performances and multimedia visual art. Hidden Voices has collected and performed stories from local survivors of domestic violence and homelessness, exonerated death row inmates, and Hispanic teenagers, among others.

[The Georges Rousse Project](#) was a great example of how people in the local community can come together to collaborate and lend expertise in the service of a civic-oriented creative project. The project was the brainchild of two Durham architects who learned about the work of Rousse, a French *trompe l'oeil* installation artist, and invited him to come to Durham to produce original work in historic mostly tobacco-related downtown buildings. The project brought out hundreds of volunteers from the local community and was a smashing success. Entry to the installation was free to the public.³⁴⁹

Some large-scale events, such as [SparkCon](#), manage to secure corporate sponsorship. Others sustain themselves as nonprofit enterprises with public and philanthropic grants.

Conclusions

Arts and cultural institutions already fill some information needs neglected by news media, particularly in the form of long-format documentary films about local issues. The networked, collaborative nature of the Triangle arts community could be a model for future journalistic collaboration. Unfortunately, since many arts organizations rely on public money for their sustainability, the development more more nonprofit and publicly supported media organizations puts journalism projects and arts groups in head-to-head competition for funding.

Recommendations

Researchers should undertake an ecology study of the arts communities in the Triangle to inform the transition to a more nonprofit-oriented media culture. Journalism has much to learn from the arts about how to channel community support while maintaining integrity, how to collaborate, and how to stretch valuable resources.

Libraries

[The State Library of North Carolina](#) considers itself to be a “catalyst for exceptional library services in North Carolina.” In 2008, the state's public library directors identified the goal of “making affordable and accessible bandwidth across the entire state.”³⁵⁰ They identified

those served through library Internet access as children with no computer at home, who use library access to do homework and build computer literacy skills. The library directors offer [NC MOSAIC](#) (Managing, Organizing, and Strengthening Access to Institutional Collections), which allows individuals to find collections of government-related information held by local, county, and state agencies, and public and private academic institutions throughout North Carolina.

By our count, there are at least 37 public libraries in Durham, Wake, Orange, and Chatham counties. However, budget cuts across the board, some counties have had to close library branches, while others have managed to add branches.



Two young residents use new computers at Durham County's South Regional Library grand opening, July 28, 2010. Photo credit: Patricia Murray, editor and publisher of the Durham Skywriter (<http://durhamskywriter.blogspot.com/>)

As a result of North Carolina's investment in libraries, the residents of the Triangle and the rest of the state have access to innovative programs such as [NC LIVE](#), a statewide collaboration among the nearly 200 public and academic libraries in North Carolina; The program gathers content from more than 50,000 newspapers, journals, magazines, encyclopedias, e-books, e-audio, and streaming video titles.

[Durham County Library](#) has eight branches within the city of Durham, all but three of which are open 7 days a week.³⁵¹ The [Durham Main Library](#) has 466,000 books (25% children's books), 900 magazine titles, and LIFT (Learning Information For Today).³⁵² LIFT is an area of the library specifically for people who are interested in applying to college, with a rack of books on topics such as applying for financial aid; the other branches have the same books, but do not group them in the way that the main branch's LIFT section does.

The main branch also houses the [North Carolina Collection](#), whose primary mission is to collect and preserve the history of the city and county of Durham and

make it available to the people of Durham County. The main library is downtown, while Durham recently added two new branches: [South Regional Library](#), which opened July 28, 2010, and the [Southwest Regional Library](#), which opened May 24, 2010. Southwest Regional opened with more than 100,000 books and 30 public Internet access workstations (20 for adults, 10 for children). East Regional and North Regional Libraries also have 30 Internet access workstations, wireless Internet, adult programs, and a children's story time.³⁵³

The [Stanford L. Warren Library](#) branch near NCCU was originally established in 1916 as the Durham Colored Library, the result of a library organized by community leader Dr. Aaron Moore in the basement of the old White Rock Baptist Church. "Stanford L. Warren Library has been an important community resource and a gathering place for civic and service organizations throughout its history, especially during the civil rights era. The black and white library systems merged in 1966. The branch retains the name of its benefactor, Dr. Stanford L. Warren, who gave \$4,000 during the Great Depression to secure the site for the new building. The annex was added in 1949-1950; renovations occurred in 1968, 1984-1985 and 2004-2006."³⁵⁴ In addition to standard library amenities, such as wireless Internet, children and adult programs and 12 public computer terminals, the branch houses the Selena Warren Wheeler Collection of African-American literature, culture and history, regarded as one of the best collections in the South."³⁵⁵

The [Wake County Public Library](#) system operates 20 branches throughout the county. There are 10 facilities in Raleigh,³⁵⁶ though two of them (Express Library Fayetteville Street and North Regional Library) are closed temporarily. Cary has 2 facilities: Cary Public Library, West Regional Library. Apex, Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, Garner, Wake Forest, Zebulon, Knightdale, and Wendell each have one library facility.³⁵⁷ Garner's branch, Southeast Regional Library, faced possible closure in January 2010 due to county budget pressure.³⁵⁸ It remains open as of March 2011.

The [Orange County Public Library](#) system operates three facilities, with computer access and wireless Internet: the Main Library in Hillsborough, Carrboro Branch Library in Chapel Hill and Carrboro Cybrary (partnered with McDougale Middle School) in Carrboro,³⁵⁹ the latter of which has reduced its hours to 30 per week, though recent funding allocations allowed the library to increase its hours from the previous total of 20. The main branch is closed on Sundays during the summer; it operates from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. during the school year; Carrboro Branch Library holds these hours, while Carrboro Cybrary is closed Saturday and Sunday year-round. The biggest effect of the most recent budget cuts was that the Cedar Grove branch was closed on August 1, 2010; one of the

contributing factors was the branch's high customer service cost of \$214/customer/year.³⁶⁰ In addition, the [Hyconeechee Regional Library System](#) operates the Orange County Public Library in Hillsborough (see Orange County Public Library system above).³⁶¹

The [Town of Chapel Hill Public Library](#) is open 68 hours per week and staffs the reference desk an average of 61 hours per week. It has 13 public Internet terminals. The library has seen an increasing ratio of total circulation to town population in recent years.³⁶² The usage by others outside of the town population accounts for a small piece of that increase. Its "Dial a story" program allows children to hear a different taped story (three minutes long) each week via telephone.

In addition, UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Sciences hosts [ibiblio](#), a digital archive of multimedia content and host of websites and discussion groups.

Extending its reach beyond print, audiovisual, and reference materials in a similar way, [Chatham County Public Library](#) provides several services, including on-site Internet access and wireless Internet connections, children's reading programs for various age groups, including preschool and school groups, and access to NCLive. There are branches in Goldston, Pittsboro (Pittsboro Memorial Library), and Siler City (Wren Memorial Library). All three branches are closed on Sundays.³⁶³

Chatham County and Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) are now building a joint-use library, [Chatham Community Library](#), on the CCCC campus in Pittsboro. With \$8.1 million allocated for the project by county commissioners, this branch will replace both the current CCCC branch library and the Pittsboro Memorial Library and serve as headquarters for the Chatham County Public Library.³⁶⁴ The Chatham County Public Library also operates a Bookmobile, which carries over 5,000 books to various locations in the county throughout the year.³⁶⁵

[Triangle Radio Reading Service](#) is a nonprofit that provides news, information, and entertainment from to approximately 20,000 reading-impaired listeners. Volunteers read from print media, including local newspapers, and the recordings are broadcast to special radio receivers in area hospitals and nursing homes, and are also made available online.

Conclusions

Libraries across the Triangle continue to meet the information needs of their patrons, needs that include basic access to the Internet. The worsening budget situation facing state and local government does not bode

well for libraries' ability to expand their digital programs. In fact, some branches risk closure.

Recommendations

Libraries provide essential information access, and those services much be preserved even in the face of state and local budget pressures.

Broadband Connectivity

While the Triangle is among the most Internet-oriented communities in the nation, residents of the counties that comprise the Triangle illustrate the twin challenges of broadband access: Those in rural areas left behind by lack of broadband availability, and those in densely populated areas for whom broadband service is too expensive.

Broadband stimulus projects

North Carolina won more than \$250 million from the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program to serve 81 counties. While only two of those projects are in the Triangle, organizations based in the Triangle are responsible for planning and executing the lion's share of federal broadband stimulus projects statewide.

One Economy Corporation won a \$1.5 million BTOP Round 1 grant for a sustainable broadband adoption program reaching public housing communities across Raleigh.³⁶⁶ The Raleigh Connected program started as a city-led program, in partnership with AT&T, in the Chavis Heights community just south of downtown. Raleigh Connected, the brainchild of Raleigh CIO Gail Roper, is designed to provide free Wi-Fi to 1,877 units in 27 different multi-family developments. Volunteers between the ages of 14 and 21 will provide one-hour training courses to residents to teach them how to use the Internet.³⁶⁷

North Carolina Central University Law School won a \$2 million Round 2 BTOP grant to upgrade broadband service while expanding access to legal education programs.³⁶⁸

MCNC is a nonprofit based in Research Triangle Park that operates the N.C. Research and Education Network (NCREN), which provides telecommunications services to the state's public schools, community colleges, and universities. The organization won \$28.2 million in the first round of Broadband Technology Opportunities Program stimulus grants to build 494-miles of middle-mile network in 37 counties.³⁶⁹ (None of those counties is in the Triangle; NCREN currently serves Triangle schools and universities.) MCNC then won a \$75.75 million Round 2 BTOP grant to build 1,300 miles of new middle-mile fiber throughout the state, including Wake and Chatham counties. The Golden Leaf Foundation pledged \$24 million in matching funds for the Round 2 project, which is called the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband

Initiative (GLRBI).³⁷⁰ While MCNC does not provide last-mile services, the organization's public statements emphasize that its network "will serve as a wholesale-priced conduit for private broadband service providers to reach and serve consumers and small businesses in underserved areas of North Carolina."³⁷¹

[The e-NC Authority](#) is a state entity charged with bringing broadband access to the state's most economically distressed counties, none of which is in the Triangle. E-NC secured \$8.3 million federal money and matching funds to develop broadband planning, mapping, and capacity building.³⁷²

Founded by Jane Smith Patterson in 2001, e-NC is widely considered to be the first state government entity to provide a GIS map of service availability.³⁷³ Until federal broadband policy gave them the authority to gather data, E-NC had been unable to update its [100 County Report](#) since 2007, due to the unwillingness of cable and phone companies to provide the organization with data. E-NC's [searchable Internet-based GIS map](#) of broadband availability that should allow North Carolina residents to search for what is available to their neighborhoods, but in practice, the accuracy of the map and its level of detail is hindered by a lack of information from providers. E-NC staff regularly field complaints and requests for information from would-be customers, which the organization passes along to providers. North Carolina designated e-NC as the mapping entity that was to receive funds from the federal American Recovering and

Many Triangle residents have looked on with great interest at the municipal fiber-to-the-home project undertaken by Wilson, N.C.



*Town of Chapel Hill Wi-Fi insignia on a Chapel Hill sidewalk.
Photo credit: Justin Grimes
(<http://www.flickr.com/people/notbrucelee/>)*

Reinvestment Act.³⁷⁴

In 2009, telecommunications companies hired Connected Nation to produce a searchable GIS map similar to that provided by e-NC; the companies told lawmakers that, because Connected Nation was not an entity of the state, they would feel more comfortable sharing their data with Connected Nation.³⁷⁵ The [Connect North Carolina interactive map](#) provides a list of providers that ostensibly serve a given address, along with links to those providers' websites, but pricing and speed information are not available. A solicitation to report inaccurate information is the only check on the map's accuracy. (When this author mapped her own address, the map suggested Verizon DSL was available to her home, but Verizon's website and call center said the service was not available there.)

According to Connected Nation's county-level composite maps of North Carolina, County is the Triangle county most lacking in broadband access. Even some fairly densely populated areas surrounding Pittsboro, along Interstate-40, are currently unserved even by DSL. Orange County has a number of unserved Census Blocks north of Hillsborough. Durham's unserved areas are at the furthest north portion of the county, adjacent to Person County. Nearly all of Wake County is served, according to Connected Nation maps.³⁷⁶

Cost and speed of broadband service

The broadband Internet market is dominated by Time Warner Cable, the cable provider to most people living in the Triangle, and DSL providers Verizon, AT&T, and CenturyLink (formerly Embarq), the incumbent telephone providers. For the most part, these companies do not make public the number or location of their customers. Nearly 77% of all respondents to The Media Audit's August-September 2009 survey had broadband access at home. Among all respondents, 39% were cable broadband subscribers, 37% had DSL, and 4% had dial-up. Nearly 54% of respondents were Time Warner Cable TV customers, 28% were satellite TV customers, fewer than 2% subscribed to Cablevision, and 1% subscribed to A&T U-verse. Given that each of those companies provides triple-play bundled services, it's unclear how many of those subscribers receive broadband service.

U-verse is reportedly available to "more than a dozen" Triangle communities, but AT&T will not disclose which communities or how many households. The company claims to have 13,000 U-verse customers statewide, as of May 2010.³⁷⁷ AT&T, Time Warner Cable and DirectTV all raised rates in 2009.³⁷⁸ The companies are not required to disclose the amount of the rate increases in any centralized fashion statewide. Mobile 4G Internet service is available in the Triangle through Clearwire, Sprint

Nextel and Time Warner Cable's Road Runner Mobile. All three services run over Clearwire's network.³⁷⁹

It can be extremely difficult to determine exactly what broadband services are available and what the long-term (non-promotional) prices are for service. Comparison shopping is highly labor-intensive, and information available through providers' websites is often incomplete or inaccurate.

As of 2008, the cheapest broadband option available to Triangle residents was DSL from AT&T or Verizon at \$20-\$25 per month for speeds up to 768 Kbps.³⁸⁰ Yet these low-cost DSL options are not available in all parts of the Triangle. Satellite service from HughesNet and WildBlue, with advertised speeds up to 1.5 Mbps, cost \$80 per month. Time Warner's Road Runner started at \$47 up to 7 Mbps. The "Turbo" version of Road Runner, up to 10 Mbps, cost \$57 per month.³⁸¹

Despite the widespread availability of broadband service in the Triangle, compared to other areas of the state, there is enough frustration among consumers over cost, speed, and quality of service to generate an interest in municipal broadband and other alternatives.

Municipal broadband and Google Fiber

Many Triangle residents have looked on with great interest at the municipal fiber-to-the-home project undertaken by Wilson, N.C., and by the battles in the North Carolina General Assembly over an industry-supported bill that would ban municipalities from undertaking broadband projects.³⁸² That bill was reintroduced in 2011 with the backing of Time Warner Cable.³⁸³ As of this writing, it had passed the state House. Given that Republicans took control of both houses of the legislature in 2011, the bill appears to have a good chance of passage.

Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill/Carrboro, Orange County, Cary, Apex, Morrisville, Holly Springs (in Wake County), and Pittsboro each applied for the [Google Fiber](#) initiative; theirs were among 36 applications statewide. The process generated significant buzz throughout the Triangle, as it did elsewhere in the country, with Facebook groups and promotional YouTube videos featuring prominent locals.³⁸⁴ Durham residents converged on the Durham Bulls Athletic Park to spell out the word "Google" for an aerial photograph. Raleigh City Council member Bonner Gaylord offered to name his unborn twins Sergey and Larry in honor of the company's founders. If nothing else, the process of applying provided community members with an opportunity to discuss how improvements to municipal technology infrastructure would impact local businesses and residents' needs. In some cases, the application documents have been made public online and provide useful snapshots of community needs and resources. [Durham's application](#), for instance, makes

particular note of the potential for a fiber connection to bolster cloud computing capacity that could increase access to Virtual Computer Lab (VCL) technology in development at NCSU, technology already being used to increase the utility of older workstations at NCCU. [Chapel Hill's application](#) involved soliciting extensive input from residents.

Even prior to the Google pilot announcement, towns and cities across the Triangle had implemented public Wi-Fi access, with varying degrees of coverage.³⁸⁵ Carrboro's [tocwireless.net](#) was among the first in the area. Chapel Hill has been operating a [wireless pilot project downtown](#) for many years; it includes a hotspot at the Hargraves Center in the historically African-American Northside neighborhood. In Raleigh, the Washington-based nonprofit A Raleigh nonprofit called [NC Connected](#) offers education and training in computer skills, web development, and multimedia for girls ages 12 through 17.³⁸⁶

Broadband penetration

According to a 2008 report by Scarborough Research, 53% of Raleigh adults have a broadband connection in their household, 22% spend 10 or more hours on the Internet in an average week, 11% read or contributed to a blog in a given month, and 8% owned a PDA device in their household.³⁸⁷

While direct data on the topic is not available, the mobile web is likely a significant aspect of the Triangle Internet market. According to a 2008 Scarborough report, 78% of the designated market area (DMA) uses a cellular phone or wireless device, compared to 73% nationally.³⁸⁸ Arbitron found that 17-20% of households in the radio DMA had cell phones but no land-line telephone service.³⁸⁹ This may be significant when one considers the demographics of the area: 26% of the DMA is African American, compared to the U.S. average of 12%.³⁹⁰ And while Hispanics currently make up only 9% of the DMA, compared to the national average of 14%, Hispanic children make up 15% of those enrolled in public schools in the four counties.³⁹¹ A recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found African-Americans and English-speaking Latinos to be among the most active users of the mobile web.³⁹² Yet a national survey by Pew Hispanic Center found there is a significant gap between foreign-born and U.S.-born Hispanic children in both cell phone use and Internet use.³⁹³

Conclusions

The Triangle's universities and schools are well connected by middle-mile infrastructure, thanks to forward-thinking policy makers and the efforts of groups such as the e-NC Authority and MCNC. Yet the digital divide is a reality in the Triangle, despite the presence of major technology companies and research universities. Access to high-

speed Internet is the major problem facing rural communities, including those at the Triangle's periphery. Both access and adoption are issues in low-income urban areas. There are a variety of nonprofit and public sector organizations seeking solutions to this problem. Time will tell what impact federal stimulus money will have on last-mile access. The fact that nine different local governments submitted applications for Google's fiber pilot initiative suggests there is an awareness of these issues among local officials and citizens and a capacity to propose solutions.

Recommendations

Public policy should encourage last-mile buildout of broadband services. National and state policy makers should encourage better disclosure of data on pricing and speed to improve competition and quality of broadband service.

Media Policy Engagement

While the Triangle may be a significant distance from Washington, D.C., and even further from the media mothership of New York, the metropolitan area's growth in population, its corresponding ascension into the top 25 media markets, and the presence of research universities that examine issues relating to media and technology make the Triangle a significant laboratory of media policy.

One of the most engaged local watchers of media policy is Jim Goodman, CEO of Capitol Broadcasting. Goodman has testified before Congress and the FCC to support ownership rules that limit the number of media outlets that may be owned by any one entity. He has also advocated for minimum public interest standards and clear disclosure requirements for digital broadcasters.³⁹⁴

Goodmon is also critical of the FCC's proposals regarding "incentive auctions," the FCC's plan to auction spectrum currently licensed to TV broadcasters for use by wireless broadband providers. In a keynote address to the Media Access Project's March 11, 2011 "[Mapping Change](#)" forum, Goodman proposed an alternative solution in which broadcasters could keep their spectrum and provide ancillary service, handling video distribution when wireless broadband providers lack capacity.³⁹⁵

At an FCC hearing at Stanford University on "The Impact of New Media on Broadcast Stations" in May 2010, Sam Matheny, General Manager of News Over Wireless, said digital TV increases the capacity of television news to respond quickly to natural disasters. He said that DTV stations in Nashville produced almost 80 hours of local flood coverage for the local community.

Free, over the air, local television broadcasting is the most important public communications resource in the United States. . . .The scalability

and immediacy of local broadcasting is also what makes it such a valuable resource. It is the only medium that can truly reach an infinite number of users with vital information in real time.

Jim Heavner of WCHL and Don Curtis of Curtis Media joined Jim Goodmon at a 2003 FCC hearing on ownership rules held at Duke University.³⁹⁶

Free Press held one of its national Internet for Everyone events [in Durham](#) in March 2009. It drew 150 participants, including state and local elected officials and the chairman of the state's NAACP chapter, marking that awareness of the digital divide as a civil rights issue has taken root among the state's leadership.³⁹⁷

In 2004, the UNC School of Law and School of Journalism and Mass Communications launched the [Center for Media Law and Policy](#). The Center hosted a lecture in 2007 by Carolina law graduate Kevin Martin, then Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.³⁹⁸ (The center is affiliated with UNC's joint M.A./J.D. program.)

Localism in content and outlook is part of the brand identity of Capitol Broadcasting Company (which owns WRAL) and Curtis Media (which owns WPTF).

In May 2009, the DeWitt Wallace Center hosted the Duke Nonprofit Media Conference. Attendees included Duke and UNC-CH faculty, nationally prominent heads of foundations, media entrepreneurs, journalists and local leaders, *N&O* Executive Editor John Drescher, *Independent Weekly* founder Steve Schewel, and Andrea Bazán of the Triangle Community Foundation.³⁹⁹ Following the conference, the DeWitt Wallace Center issued a letter to the Internal Revenue Service making policy recommendations to strengthen the financial prospects for newspapers and nonprofit news outlets.⁴⁰⁰

In February 2011, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski spoke at the Duke Law School at a symposium on administrative law. He was joined by Duke Law professor and FCC advisor Stuart Benjamin, Rick Whitt of Google, Columbia Law professor and Federal Trade Commission advisor Tim Wu, and other academics.⁴⁰¹

Conclusions

The most visible engagement in media and technology policy in the Triangle is that of university academics and media owners. A broader range of organizations and publics must engage in conversations about media and technology policy in order to ensure those policies serve the public interest.

Recommendations

Policy advocates, especially those working for social justice and civic engagement, should consider media and technology policies within their purview.

Collaborations

The recommendations in this report came about as the result of sustained engagement with stakeholders from diverse sectors and geographical areas within the Triangle.

On October 8, 2010, the New America Foundation, in partnership with the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy at Duke and the Triangle Community Foundation, convened a meeting of Triangle media stakeholders. The meeting was held at the offices of the Triangle Community Foundation, in the American Tobacco Historic District in Durham. In attendance were:

- Andrea Bazán, President, Triangle Community Foundation
- Damon Circosta, Executive Director, North Carolina Center for Voter Education
- Kevin Davis, Editor, Bull City Rising
- Bruce DePyssler, Assistant Professor of English and Mass Communication, NCCU
- John Drescher, Executive Editor, The News & Observer
- Robyn Schryer Fehrman, Community Program Officer, Triangle Community Foundation
- Ferrel Guillory, Director, Program on Public Life, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Jay Hamilton, Director, DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy, Duke University
- Chad Johnston, Director, The Peoples Channel
- Paul Jones, Director, ibiblio.org
- Barry Moore, Executive Editor, Garner Citizen
- Lisa Paulin, Assistant Professor of English and Mass Communication, NCCU
- Gail Roper, CIO, City of Raleigh
- Steve Schewel, President and Board Chair, Independent Weekly
- Ryan Thornburg, Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Mark Turner, Chair, East Citizens Advisory Council, Raleigh
- Ricardo Velasquez, Publisher, La Conexión
- Connie Walker, General Manager, WUNC

Tom Glaisyer and Fiona Morgan of the New America Foundation facilitated the meeting. Kim Krzywy of the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy at Duke provided support.

The objective of this meeting was to discuss the future of citizen access and engagement and emerging challenges

and opportunities for informed community in the Triangle. We presented background about the Media Policy Initiative, and findings from the case study, asking those assembled to consider trends in local news and information and initiatives by private and public entities to provide quality information to the Triangle community. Opening the floor to discussion, we asked participants to consider three questions: 1) How healthy do we consider the Triangle's "information community"? 2) What are the challenges for the Triangle as we move into an increasingly digital age? 3) What are the opportunities for the Triangle and its communities?

John Drescher of *The News & Observer* noted that the Triangle has historically been a "competitive news market," and he viewed emerging outlets as adding to that competition. Yet he stated his primary concern as the need for more professional reporters, noting that, according to the newspaper industry metric of number of reporters per thousand residents, "I suspect we're substantially lower."

Ferrel Guillory, himself a former *News & Observer* writer and editor, noted that over the past 15 years, his involvement in policy work made him aware that much research and debate in that realm goes unreported in the mainstream media. "I've become sobered by this disconnect that there's a lot of stuff that really flies under the media radar," he said.

Ryan Thornburg noted that supply-and-demand for news affected information health. He framed the concern this way: "How interested are people to contribute money, time and talent to the community?" He asked John Drescher how much money the newspaper had spent on its series on former Gov. Mike Easley. Drescher responded that "a major investigative series can easily cost \$200,000" when accounting for staff time and attorney fees.

Garner Citizen founder Barry Moore, a former police officer with no background in journalism, said he founded the venture because "I just didn't like my local newspaper." He noted that the Citizen has already won awards for its reporting and its website.

Ricardo Velásquez, publisher of the Spanish language newspaper *La Conexión*, also has no background in journalism. He founded his paper out of frustration with the lack of local news reporting at Spanish-language broadcast stations, who convey the sense that they "just want to take our advertising money and give nothing back to the community." Velasquez expressed his openness to partnerships with local and national outlets seeking reporting by and about Spanish speakers.

Barry Moore, Paul Jones, and Kevin Davis discussed the failed experiment in hyperlocal journalism that NBC 17 undertook, noting its admirable attempt to cover

communities that are typically not covered in any depth. Jones interpreted the outcome as a lack of commitment to the experiment on the part of the station's parent company, Media General.

Damon Circosta noted the "interesting tension between metro and hyperlocal" news, the challenge of focusing on specifics of local communities while considering the regional and statewide implications, to "stay hyperlocal but reach beyond our boundaries."

Connie Walker of WUNC radio noted that her station has the largest reporting staff among public radio stations in the Southeast. Yet even with that staff, it's difficult to produce truly local news. "Public radio listeners expect a global perspective," she said. "hyperlocal is the opposite."

Chad Johnston, of public access television, said "We've been doing citizen journalism for 30 years with public access." He noted the need for "cross collaboration," to network content producers with each other and with outlets seeking to engage the audience in the process of newsgathering. "What we're missing is a big little media army [...] a collective force."

Gail Roper, CIO of the City of Raleigh, talked about her work on digital inclusion, particularly on providing free WiFi to residents of the Chavis Heights public housing community. She spoke of the need for greater digital literacy in the Raleigh community. "Digital literacy is about more than access to the Internet, she said.

Andrea Bazán of the Triangle Community Foundation noted, "We're ready to help play a role" for providing information needs. She said she recently had a conversation with a media organization who said they needed \$60,000 annually to cover a beat. "That's nothing," she said. The challenge was to determine an appropriate way to channel that money, with the proper "firewall" between the funder or funders and the news organization.

Her colleague, Robyn Schryer Fehrman, noted that even when information is available it's a challenge for many people to "make sense of it." "Not everyone needs to be a blogger, but everyone needs to engage with it," she said.

Participants then considered on the "sense-making" concern. Paul Jones noted work going on to use digital tools such as GIS to map raw data "for quick use and reuse," a potentially powerful tool for reporters and citizens.

Thornburg said, "I don't know that we need more professional journalists as much as we need more people who think journalistically." By way of example, he said, he assigns his students to link to sources in their stories, to make their reporting more transparent and independently verifiable.

Durham blogger Kevin Davis said the challenge of "sense-making" affects the demand for news about complex issues. "Food blogs have taken off because everyone has a frame of reference. But ask them about Falls Lake and who should do cleanup, and you don't have the frame of reference," he said.

In considering organizational models, Ferrel Guillory praised the work of New America Foundation and noted the need for think tanks at the state and local level. "We've got to find a way to get some of that money from these big funders fighting over the turf in Washington and get them down in the nitty gritty of our metro areas, because that's where the economic engines of the country are humming."

Following the meeting, Ryan Thornburg wrote a blog post in which he offered his impressions of and reactions to of the discussion.⁴⁰² A portion of that writing evolved into an opinion piece, jointly authored by Thornburg and Morgan, which was published in December 2010 in *The News & Observer*.⁴⁰³ In that article, the authors propose the following solutions:

- Public records produced at every level of government should be made available quickly online in a format that can be easily digested by computer programs that can detect early trends or newsworthy oddities by automatically combing fields of data.
- Every news organization should hire at least one person to actively cultivate online community. Like broken windows in an abandoned neighborhood, the uninformed anger and irrelevant rants of article comments on news websites have given visitors the impression that it's OK to behave badly in those places. Proper moderation rewards civil discourse.
- Similarly, the mainstream media need to help anyone who is already blogging on current events learn how to dig deeper into a story by requesting public records, identifying larger trends and verifying everything they see and hear.
- Community foundations should establish and fund a volunteer program similar to AmeriCorps that financially supports recent college graduates who want to spend two years reporting news from communities that have no professional reporters dedicated to them.
- Journalistic thinking and digital publishing should become a part of any civic leadership or volunteer training effort. "Neighborhood colleges" and public access television already help to develop community leaders and media producers. Each of those programs should add journalistic thinking and digital publishing to their agendas.
- Leaders of the high-tech industry in the Triangle should organize public-interest "code camps" during which computer programmers spend intensive

weekends focused on developing free and open-source digital tools that can be used by professional and amateur journalists.

- Media literacy should be added to the state middle and high school curricula. Journalistic thinking can help North Carolina's students learn about writing, math and the scientific method. Teaching them to produce digital media can increase the fluency with information technology that will help them find jobs and develop rural and urban economies.⁴⁰⁴

On Dec. 10, 2010, the N.C. Center for Voter Education convened a meeting of more than 20 stakeholders to discuss journalism and public policy relating to state-level government and policy. Many of the attendees from NAF's Durham meeting attended the NCCVE discussion, which was led by Damon Circosta and Ryan Thornburg. Attendees brainstormed ideas and concrete proposals for increasing access to information and improving government transparency.

A Note on Version 2.0

This version of the case includes a newly expanded section on commercial television (page 24), an account of NBC17's MyNC.com experiment in hyperlocal multi-platform news (page 17), a summary of New America Foundation's convening of Triangle stakeholders in October 2010 (page 53) and contains correction and updates throughout.

Acknowledgements

The New America Foundation's Media Policy Initiative is grateful for the opportunity to engage diverse stakeholders in discussion and action in the Triangle and across North Carolina. We wish to thank all those interviewed for the case and those who have contributed to the discussion. We thank James Hamilton, Shelley Stonecipher, Sarah Cohen, Laurie Bley, and Kimberly Krzywy at the DeWitt Wallace Center for Media Democracy at Duke University; Ryan Thornburg, Ferrel Guillory, Penny Muse Abernathy, Andy Bechtel, and Stephanie Willen Brown at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at UNC-Chapel Hill; Andrea Bazán and Robyn Schryer Fehrman at the Triangle Community Foundation; Damon Circosta at the N.C. Center for Voter Education; Kara Hadge for her work at the New America Foundation; and Barry Varela for editing **assistance** and editorial feedback. We thank the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for its support of the New America Foundation.

A Note on Scope and Methodology

This case study was developed by a researcher in Durham, N.C., with support from a small team in Washington,

D.C. Many of the initial data were collected via a scan of local websites and media archives, subsequent to which a targeted set of interviews were conducted. Our intent has been to be inclusive and to acknowledge and identify the role of all information producers, well beyond those considered to be traditional journalism outlets, such that the analysis provides the best understanding possible of the Triangle information ecosystem.

The goal of this study is to provide a qualitative overview of the context in which various media outlets operate. In gathering data on each outlet, we have kept in mind the economic framework of information demand.⁴⁰⁵ We accept the premise that market failure exists for voter demand information (i.e., information that informs civic participation), a market failure sometimes remedied through the bundling of content for which there is entertainment, consumer, or producer demand. Therefore, in addition to providing information about content, we have provided information about advertising revenue, audience share, and ownership. Our hope is that this global approach may inform more specific content analyses or quantitative research on the area.

In some cases we have also attempted to calculate the number of journalists working in the area, an undertaking fraught with multiple complications. First, it should be noted that our calculations of working journalists may include unpaid reporters, particularly those contributing to Internet media. Second, our research sought those listed on outlets' websites as staff contributors in editorial roles; such calculations may exclude freelance contributors and may include others who are not explicitly involved in newsgathering. Because not all media outlets make this information public, some may have been left out of the calculations entirely.

We are eager to expand our preliminary research and welcome further feedback regarding additions, omissions, or corrections. Please send suggestions to Fiona Morgan at mediapolicy@newamerica.net.

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- 277 Disclosure: This author is a graduate student at the Sanford School of Public Policy. DeWitt Wallace Center director James T. Hamilton is her academic advisor.
- 278 Northeast Central Durham is a former mill village neighborhood that was badly affected by urban renewal projects in the 1960s. It has become a major focus of city government, with "Operation Bull's Eye" concentrating police presence on a 2-square-mile radius where 20% of the city's crime was taking place.¹ The initiative has led to a reduction in violent crime, drug

arrests and prostitution.² A \$35 million Federal HOPE VI grant allowed the city to replace Few Gardens, a large public housing project, with affordably-priced single-family detached homes and townhomes; Few Gardens residents were involved in planning the renovation. With so many changes underway, city officials were interested in finding a way to spread positive news about the area. Earl Phillips, assistant director for community engagement in the City of Durham's Department of Neighborhood Improvement Services, supported the *Voice* by asking Scientific Properties, which owns the renovated Golden Belt mill complex, to donate a "newsroom" space. The city's web site includes a link to a description of the *Voice* as an aspect of neighborhood improvement initiatives.

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The full list of Triangle members follows (note that a "D" after the name indicates the paper is daily, and a "C" indicates it is a community newspaper). Wake County: The Apex Herald (C), The Cary News (C), The Fuquay-Varina Independent (C), Garner News (C), The Garner Citizen News & Times (C), News & Observer (D), North Carolina Lawyers Weekly (C), The Raleigh Telegram Online Newspaper (D), Triangle Business Journal (C), The Wake Weekly (C), Eastern Wake News (C). Orange County: The Carrboro Citizen (C), The News of Orange County (C), The Chapel Hill News (C), The Daily Tar Heel (D). Durham: The Duke Chronicle (D), The Herald-Sun (D), Independent Weekly (C). Chatham: The Chatham Record (C), The Chatham News (C).

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Board member Mark J. Prak, an attorney with Brooks Pearce law firm in Raleigh, is a registered lobbyist at the North Carolina General Assembly for the North Carolina Association of

Broadcasters, the North Carolina Cable Telecommunications Association, the North Carolina Press Association and Time Warner Cable. <http://www.secretary.state.nc.us/lobbyists/Lobbyist.aspx?Pid=8059211>

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290 Author conversation with Brooke Barnett, Feb. 25, 2011.

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300 Information can be found on the Wake County website on vehicle registration in terms of vehicle taxes. No direct reference to information on performing vehicle registration or acquiring

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305 Contact information available for Chatham County Board of Commissioners.

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311 Administered by Wake County Human Services. Wake County also has a Crisis Intervention Team, a unit of the police founded in 2005, to prevent extreme situations involving those in crisis/mentally ill.

312 Chatham County's OPC Area Program site gives information on area programs for those with disability or mental health issues, as well as contact information to seek help.

313 Durham County Child Protective Services links to community resources on its home page.

314 Report Child or Elder Abuse contact info listed on Wake County website. Also, see section on Child Support Enforcement.

315 Orange County Child Protective Services offers information on how to recognize and report child abuse.

316 Chatham County Child Protective Services gives information on family preservation, foster care, and adoption services.

317 Durham County Public Health website explains health services for children and adults.

318 Section on System Hospitals under EMS-Emergency Medical Services on Wake County homepage. Gives basic information on hospitals and links to their website. Also special section of Wake County Health and Human Services website on Health Clinics: Human Services building at 10 Sunnybrook Road (main clinic), Southern Regional Center, Eastern Regional Center, Western Wake Human Services Center (mental health services only), and North Regional Center.

319 Orange County Health Department offers many services, including community health programs and several clinics. The

website even offers Health e-Radio services, with audio health public service announcements. However, there are no references or links to area hospitals. Chapel Hill's website has one reference to the UNC hospital system, but it is only a link buried in the site's table of contents.

320 Chatham County's website has detailed information on area hospitals under Resident Information/Service Providers/Medical Facilities. In addition, see Chatham County Clinical Services.

321 The Durham Area Transit Authority site lists public transportation schedules and a trip planner.

322 Administered on local level (Raleigh): Transit department (dealing with mass transit) and Transportation Service department for other transportation programs, like bicycles.

323 Chapel Hill Transit gives information on mass transit, the bus, in Chapel Hill. Also available on Orange County website under Transportation.

324 Transportation in or near Chatham County is listed under the headings of "Visitors" and "Information," detailing transportation issues from public (roads and the Chatham Transit Network) to private (carpools and bicycling).

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326 The Raleigh website provides information and links on aiding the elderly and the disabled. Report Child or Elder Abuse contact info listed on Wake County website.

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Appendix: Listing of Media Outlets

Print media

Daily

The News & Observer
The Herald-Sun

Print media, monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly

Boom! Magazine
The Blotter Magazine
Carolina Journal
Carolina Parent
Carolina Woman
Cary Magazine
Chapel Hill Magazine
The Chatham County Line
Durham Magazine
The Durham Skywriter
Fifteen501 Magazine
Metro Magazine
Qnotes
Sathee
The Stagger
TechJournal South
Wake Living
Z Spotlight

Online media

Online presence of print and broadcast outlets

Indyweek.com
MyNC.com
NewsObserver.com
State Government Radio
Triangle.com
WRAL.comz

Print media, weekly and twice-weekly

The Apex Herald
The Carolinian
The Carrboro Citizen
The Cary News*
The Chatham News
The Chatham Record
The China Star
Cleveland Post (Garner)
La Conexión
The Durham News*
The Eastern Wake News*
Fuquay-Varina Independent
The Garner Citizen
The Garner-Clayton Record*
Garner News
Holly Springs Sun
The Independent Weekly
Midtown Raleigh News*
North Raleigh News*
The News of Orange
Qué Pasa
The Slammer
Southwest Wake News*
Triangle Business Journal
Triangle Tribune
The Wake Weekly (Wake Forest)
(*community newspapers of The News & Observer)

Blogs and online-only outlets

Bull City Rising
Carpe Durham
Cary Politics
Cary Citizen
Chatham Chatlist
Endangered Durham
New Raleigh
North Carolina Independent News Network
OrangePolitics
Philanthropy Journal
Raleigh Public Record
Raleigh Telegram
Science in the Triangle
Trianglerock.com
TriOut

Television

Public television

UNC-TV
Durham Community Media
The Peoples Channel (Chapel Hill)
Raleigh Television Network

Commercial television

News 14 Carolina (Time Warner Cable)
WLFL (CW)
WNCN (NBC)
WTVD (ABC)
WRAL (CBS)
WRAZ (Fox)
WRDC (MYTV)
WRPX (PAX/ION)
WUVC (Univision)

Radio

Non-commercial radio **student media

WCPE (89.7 FM)
WCOM (103.5 FM)
WKNC (88.1 FM)**
WNCU (90.7 FM)
WUNC (91.5 FM), "North Carolina Public Radio"
WXDU (88.7 FM)**
WSHA (88.9 FM)
WVDJ (107.9 FM)
WXYC (89.3 FM)**

Commercial radio - News radio

WAUG (850 AM)
WCHL (1360 AM)
WCMC 99.9 FM "The Fan"
WDNC(620 AM "The Bull Sports Radio"
WPTF (680 AM)
WRDU (106.1 FM) "Rush Radio"
WZTK FM Talk (101.1FM)

Commercial radio - Music radio

WBBB 96.1 "96 Rock"
WDCG (105.1 FM) "G105"
WFXC (107.1 FM "Foxy")
WKIX (850 AM) "KIX"
WKSL (93.9 FM) KISS-FM
WNCA, (1570 AM)
WNNL (103.9 FM "The Light")
WQOK (97.5 "K97.5")
WQDR (94.7 FM) "Today's Best Country"
WRAL (101.5 FM "Mix 101.5").
WRTP (88.5 FM) "HIS Radio,"
WRVA (100.7 FM) "The River"
WVRD (90.5 FM "Victory FM")
WWMY (102.9 FM) "Carolina's Greatest Hits"

Commercial radio - Spanish-language radio

WCLY 1550AM "ESPN Deportes,"
WLLQ (1530 AM) and WRTG (1000 AM) (both "La Rebelde de QuéPasa")
WYMY (96.9 FM) "La Ley"

Student media

AudioNet (radio, North Carolina Central University)
Campus Echo (North Carolina Central University)
Carrboro Commons (online, UNC-Chapel Hill)
The Chronicle (Duke University)
The Daily Tar Heel (print and online, UNC-Chapel Hill)
Northeast Central Durham Community VOICE (print and online, UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina Central University)

The Nubian Message (print, North Carolina State University)
Reese Felts Digital Newsroom (online, UNC-Chapel Hill)
STV (campus television, UNC-Chapel Hill)
The Technician (print and online, North Carolina State University)

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