

# **Delaware's Local News & Information Ecosystem Assessment**

## **Key Findings and Opportunities**

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for the Local Journalism Initiative of Delaware,  
a fund of the Delaware Community Foundation**

## **Introduction**

Democracies are strongest and communities thrive when residents are informed and engaged.

Research shows that when local news and information diminishes, government gets more expensive and less effective, voter turnout drops, people become less engaged and inequities grow.

After hearing from more than 250 Delawareans, analyzing public data sources, and studying the local news and information ecosystem for six months, we've concluded that Delawareans value local news and information, and they want and need more.

This report presents the findings of our community listening – including direct quotes from hundreds of Delawareans talking about what they want and need – and a set of recommendations for how we can effectively increase the quality and quantity of local news and information in Delaware, as well as our communities' access to that information.

This report highlights how Delawareans prefer to consume local news and information; the websites, news apps, newspapers, radio stations and TV channels they follow; the

social media platforms and grapevines they turn to when those sources aren't adequate; and their perceptions of all of the above.

Yes, this report does include criticism, including many complaints about our local media outlets. While news outlets clearly are not responsible for meeting all of the community's news and information needs, they do play an important role.

People in many geographic communities say they are completely ignored by the media and feel abandoned by the local news outlets they once relied on. People from historically underrepresented groups feel that they are underrepresented by local media – or blatantly misrepresented. Many say all news is overwhelmingly negative, disempowering and depressing. Many complain about inaccuracies, lack of context, shallowness, political bias and more.

But local journalists should take heart because we also heard appreciation for their hard work, sympathy for the economic challenges of the news industry, incredible value for their work, and, ultimately, a deep desire for more local news.

We also note that a lot of good reporting is being done, and a lot of good information is available, and Delawareans often don't take advantage of it for a variety of reasons. This report describes opportunities to better connect people with existing information resources through collaboration, engagement and other strategies.

We offer this report to lay out some of the key challenges of Delaware's local news and information ecosystem and highlight the significant opportunities we have to improve it.

We aim to help our community understand why local journalism matters and the urgency of the need in Delaware. With this report, we hope to foster conversation, collaboration and innovation.

The Local Journalism Initiative of Delaware is working to strengthen the local news and information ecosystem in Delaware, and we will use this report to guide our work. In the coming months, we plan to select several key strategies, work with partners to develop implementation plans and seek resources to execute those plans.

Although we talked with many people to develop this report, there are many more voices we need to hear. Philanthropists, community organizations, journalists, policymakers, business leaders and all who are passionate about helping Delaware thrive – we invite you to build with us. And Delaware residents from Claymont to Delmar, we want your

voices to guide the work to build infrastructure for local news and information that meets your needs.

Learn more about the Local Journalism Initiative of Delaware at [ljidelaware.org](http://ljidelaware.org) or contact Allison Taylor Levine at [allison@ljidelaware.org](mailto:allison@ljidelaware.org).

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# Abstract

## **Delawareans value local news and information, and they want and need more.**

Delawareans are hungry for local news and information. In our conversations, Delawareans up and down the state – regardless of generation, ethnicity, geography, economic status, gender or walk of life – told us they need better local news and information in order to function in daily life, participate in democratic society and engage in their communities.

## **Delawareans lack reliable, formal sources of local news and information.**

Most Delawareans do not have a reliable, formal source of local news and information. Instead, they rely on word of mouth, social media (Facebook groups, Twitter, NextDoor), emails and newsletters from advocacy groups and politicians, and information they get directly from government agencies. Delawareans recognize and worry that these sources provide information that is inaccurate, agenda-driven and/or insufficient, but they feel they have nowhere else to turn.

## **Delawareans are generally aware that the availability of news reporting about the state and about their local communities has declined.**

Throughout the state, DelawareOnline/The News Journal continues to be the most-cited formal local news outlet, but Delawareans point to its decline as central to the loss of local news and information. Residents also noted that many local community outlets that existed a decade or more ago no longer exist, and that other publications have fewer reporters and less content.

While they are frustrated, sad and angry with the cuts in service from DelawareOnline/The News Journal as well as other local media outlets, some Delawareans also acknowledge that 1) individual reporters and editors are doing good work under very serious resource constraints, and 2) these are for-profit businesses in an extremely challenged industry.

Some communities are less aware of and/or sympathetic to the industry's challenges. This is particularly the case in Black and brown communities and more conservative communities. Many people in these communities – for different reasons – feel strongly that news media do not serve them well and often misrepresent their communities. This contributes to a longstanding distrust in media institutions, which they perceive as part of

the power structure.

### **Significant geographic areas of Delaware are uncovered.**

While a few formal news sources exist in Delaware, 1) most of the state has little coverage, and 2) residents say the news that is available is broad and shallow.

DelawareOnline/The News Journal, Delaware Live, WDDE (Delaware Public Media), WHYY and WDEL all say they provide statewide coverage. Delawareans say all of them provide inconsistent and incomplete information in most parts of the state.

Formal news sources do provide coverage of some communities in the state:

DelawareOnline/The News Journal provides moderate coverage of New Castle County above the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal. The Cape Gazette provides moderate coverage of a portion of eastern Sussex County. The Delaware State News provides moderate coverage in greater Dover. The Coastal Point, Milford Live and the Laurel and Seaford Stars provide some coverage in their communities. Southern Delaware TV stations also provide some high-level coverage, mainly in Sussex County.

Little news and information is available in Kent County (especially outside Dover), New Castle County below the canal, much of eastern Sussex and all of western Sussex.

### **Delawareans say local news does not fairly represent historically underrepresented communities, particularly Black communities.<sup>1</sup>**

Many Delawareans said that people from historically underrepresented groups are often presented negatively and/or without nuance or depth, if their stories are told at all.

Hispanic Delawareans generally say they feel their stories are told and they feel well represented by Delaware's Spanish-language outlets, but they are less represented in mainstream local media. This is particularly true in the southern part of the state.

LGBTQ+ Delawareans said their stories are rarely told in mainstream local media.

Nearly all Black Delawareans we talked to said Black people are typically highlighted as criminals or otherwise negatively presented. They said positive narratives about Black

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, we are following the AP Stylebook's recommendations for terminology referencing various underrepresented groups and capitalizing or not capitalizing specific terms (e.g., LGBTQ+, Hispanic/Latino/Latinx, Black, brown, white).

people are rare. This was particularly prevalent in the city of Wilmington, but it was a consistent theme statewide.

Most Delawareans we spoke to, including whites, noted that few Delaware reporters and editors are people of color. Black Delawareans almost universally said they believe greater newsroom diversity would help improve narratives about people of color.

**Delawareans want local news and information primarily in digital, on-demand formats, but some still rely on print and TV.**

While digital formats (websites, texts, apps, emails) are most popular, Delawareans want to consume local news and information in a variety of media. No single format or platform meets everyone's needs. Many older Delawareans (65+) continue to consume print and traditional broadcast TV, while younger generations almost universally prefer on-demand digital sources.

**Education and development/land use are among several key issues that are particularly poorly covered in Delaware, and there is strong demand for information about these subjects.**

Delawareans lack basic information about a wide range of issues. They need both basic information to help them navigate their daily lives as well as in-depth reporting to help them understand community issues and engage in meaningful public dialog.

Delawareans say they particularly need more information about education issues, ranging from basic information on how school choice works to more complex analysis about education policy issues. At the time of publication of this report, only one Delaware news outlet, Delaware LIVE, had a full-time education reporter.

Delawareans also are deeply concerned about development, land use and related issues, including environmental impact, housing affordability, transportation and more. They express anxiety, confusion and a sense of being kept in the dark and manipulated by public officials and developers about how their communities are evolving. This is particularly prevalent in fast-growing Sussex County.

**Delawareans feel disconnected and disengaged from local news teams.**

Delawareans report that they don't know which journalists cover their communities and have trouble reaching anyone at the local media outlets.

We also found that many people were unaware of reporting that had been done to address issues they care about; this included both paying news subscribers and those who said they were not willing to pay for news. This speaks to a disconnect in terms of reach and awareness between the hard work of journalists and their would-be audiences.

**Delawareans need better access to information about resources available to help them thrive and engage in our communities.**

Delawareans have difficulty accessing information about government and nonprofit services and resources, such as job training opportunities, emergency food resources, small business supports, etc.

An analysis of public records also showed that many Delawareans are reliant on Delaware 2-1-1, particularly in Kent and Sussex counties, and opportunities may exist to strengthen information available to residents through the call center.

**Access to Delaware government information is very limited.**

Delawareans are concerned about the lack of information available about state and local government activity. They are concerned about this vacuum for many reasons, primarily pointing to it limiting their ability to 1) hold government officials accountable, 2) engage in meaningful dialog about community issues, and 3) influence public policy decisions.

To get information about state and local government, Delawareans say they try to do their own research, visiting government websites and directly contacting government officials. Many report that it is extremely difficult to get public information from government agencies because it is not available online (or they cannot find/access it) and government officials are not able or willing to provide requested information.

Many people specifically cited challenges following the General Assembly. A number of people – even professional lobbyists and government employees – said they're unable to get information through official channels or news sources, so they rely on Twitter or other social media, including posts from advocacy groups, to stay up to date.

Some Delawareans cited difficulties accessing accurate information about how to vote. We particularly heard this from Black Delawareans.

**Delawareans say local news is overly negative and disempowering. They want information that helps empower them to advance solutions in their communities.**

Delawareans say local news is overwhelmingly negative. They say it does not highlight community successes, resources that people could benefit from, possible solutions or efforts to address community problems.

Many Delawareans said they want to have more influence over decisions affecting their communities, but they don't know who to talk to and often find out about decisions after it's too late. They referenced decisions that would be driven at various levels of government, ranging from school boards and zoning committees to county councils and the General Assembly.

# Recommendations

The Local Journalism Initiative is committed to helping the community address the challenges and act on the opportunities described in this report. We cannot do it alone. We will need partners – philanthropic foundations, media outlets, nonprofit organizations, local and state government, advocacy groups, educators, libraries, civic leaders, residents and community-based groups of all kinds.

Everyone needs quality local news and information to thrive, and we all have a part to play in improving our local media ecosystem. We hope these recommendations will spark dialogue, and we are committed to convening those conversations and collaborating on community-driven solutions.

## **Build Reporting Capacity to Address Community Information Gaps.**

Delaware’s philanthropic sector should make targeted investments that will both 1) directly bolster local journalism and 2) increase community support and financial sustainability over the longer term.

We recommend philanthropists act immediately to increase local coverage by building reporting capacity to address the following local news and information gaps.

Topical gaps:

- State government, with a focus on the General Assembly
- Local governments
- K-12 education, from individual schools to public policy and other statewide issues
- Development/land use (including related infrastructure issues around transportation, housing, environmental impacts, public services, etc.)

Geographic gaps:

- Kent County
- Southern New Castle County (MOT-Smyrna area)
- Eastern Sussex County, particularly outside of the Cape Gazette’s current coverage area
- Western Sussex County

Demographic gaps:

- Black communities across the state, with an emphasis on coverage that more accurately reflects peoples’ experiences of their own communities
- Immigrant communities, especially the experiences of people whose primary language is not English and/or those who are undocumented

Funders should focus on initiatives that encourage collaboration, elevate diverse voices, advance solutions and empower community members to engage.

Models for state and local government coverage from across the country include [Spotlight PA](#), [Spotlight NJ](#), [VTDigger](#) and [The Texas Tribune](#). To enhance Delaware's education coverage, [Chalkbeat](#) may be an appropriate partner or model.

### **Increase Access to Public Records and Government Information.**

Many Delawareans cited difficulties accessing public information. This assessment did not include comprehensive research into what information is available, what residents are seeking, current FOIA laws/practices, and/or how Delaware compares to other states for accessibility.

However, it is well known that Delaware consistently gets a failing grade in assessments of government transparency<sup>2</sup>, and it was clear in our conversations that this is an issue for the community. We recommend additional research and community conversations to explore this issue.

Among the ideas we heard that merit further investigation are:

- State and local governments should put more information online – and make what's already there easier to find and use.
- State and local governments should be more responsive to requests for public information, including FOIA requests.
- The state and municipalities should invest in technology, personnel and other infrastructure to facilitate direct access to information and timely and complete responses to information requests.
- State and local governments should make information accessible in Spanish and monitor the need for information in other languages.
- State lawmakers should review and revise FOIA laws.

LJI recommends further exploration of these questions. After clarifying the community's needs, potential national partners for implementing improvements might include [Documenters](#), [Muckrock](#) and [Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#).

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<sup>2</sup> The Center for Public Integrity gave Delaware a grade of F and ranked it 48th out of 50 states in its 2015 State Integrity Investigation. <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/state-politics/state-integrity-investigation/delaware-gets-f-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation/> . Delaware ranked 43rd out of 50 states in the 2008 BGA-Alper Integrity Index produced by the Better Government Association <https://www.bettergov.org/news/2008-bga-alper-integrity-index/> .

### **Increase Access to Accurate Voter Information.**

This assessment did not include comprehensive research into information about voting and elections, but we heard significant community concerns. We recommend additional research and community conversations to explore the following questions:

- Are local boards of election issuing timely and accurate information to voters about their correct polling places and other voter instructions?
- How many voters are turned away at the polls due to inaccurate information?
- Is there racial or economic disparity in the availability of nonpartisan voter information?
- Are there opportunities for nonpartisan organizations or other stakeholders to better inform voters about candidates and logistics of voting?

### **Increase Public's Ability to Influence Public Policy Decisions.**

Government agencies and existing local news outlets should highlight information in a timely way to empower Delawareans to influence public policy. We recommend additional research and community conversations to explore this issue. Among the ideas we heard that merit further investigation are:

- When covering policy issues, local news outlets should include information about how to influence decisions (regardless of one's position on the issue), including names and contact information of decision makers and when decisions are to be made.
- The General Assembly should improve access to legislative agendas, hearings and other activity. The current Legislative Notification Services function is cumbersome and ineffective.
- State and local governments should seek ways to make information accessible in Spanish and monitor the need for information in other languages.

### **Increase Community Access to Information about Government and Charitable Resources.**

We recommend philanthropists, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and news outlets take steps to improve Delawareans' access to information about publicly available resources (food, housing, workforce development, etc.), including:

- Newsrooms should provide up-to-date information about community resources, in addition to traditional news content. This information should be accessible to the general public (as opposed to behind paywalls).
- News organizations should monitor and report on whether public programs and policies are effectively serving the people who need them.

- Entities from all sectors should make information accessible in Spanish and monitor the need for information in other languages.
- Delaware 2-1-1 partners should evaluate whether additional capacity is needed to provide information about accessing resources in Kent and Sussex counties.

Models for local journalism efforts that address serving people's basic needs include [Outlier Media](#) and Resolve Philly's [Equally Informed Philly](#) program.

### **Increase Diversity within Delaware's Newsrooms.**

Journalism should seek to fairly and accurately represent local communities, but lack of racial and ethnic diversity in newsrooms has undermined that mission and undermined community trust in local news. This is a nationwide problem, and we heard in our Delaware conversations that the problem is statewide and local, too. Here are a few concrete ways news organizations can expand their responses to the issue.

- Continue ongoing work to improve hiring, retention, and responsive community coverage through initiatives like [DelawareOnline/The News Journal's work on public safety reporting](#).
- Ensure newsroom staff possess the language abilities necessary to communicate with Hispanic residents and people from immigrant communities.
- Take advantage of support from organizations that address racial and ethnic diversity and diversity of perspective within journalism, including the [Maynard Institute for Journalism Education](#).
- Participate in the [News Leaders Association's newsroom diversity survey](#).
- Conduct source audits to ensure diversity of perspective within the reporting. The American Press Institute's [Source Matters](#) tool is one example.

### **Increase Communities' Connection to Newsrooms.**

Many Delawareans said they feel disconnected from local newsrooms. Some want to help address the crisis in local news in whatever way they can. Other residents see media as part of the power structure and don't (yet) feel invested in journalism's future. Delaware newsrooms should strengthen their connections with residents to repair harm, increase trust, improve the quality and accuracy of news coverage, and generate broad public support for local news.

- Increase the public's level of access to editorial staff. Start by clarifying on news organization websites how to share story ideas with reporters, and ensure editors' and reporters' contact information is up to date on websites. Track internally to ensure public questions receive a response.

- Host opportunities for community members to visit newsrooms, meet reporters and editors, and learn about how to pitch story ideas.
- Reporters and editors should engage in community activities by being present, visible and available to listen to community members. [Pop-up newsrooms](#) are one model local news organizations in Boston, Dallas and elsewhere have used to accomplish this.
- In Black and brown communities, outreach and long-term commitment may be necessary to repair residents' trust in news media. [Reframe](#), a project of Resolve Philly, offers tools and resources to think about human-centered language and equitable coverage.
- Take advantage of the [Trusting News Project](#)'s free training, toolkits and resources for trust-building practices. Their [Road to Pluralism initiative](#) includes resources to better engage conservative and right-leaning audiences.
- Partner with the Local Journalism Initiative on community engagement and outreach, so that we may boost organizational capacity for this work.

Many models, and resources are available from organizations such as [Gather](#), [Hearken](#), the [Local News Lab](#) and the [Membership Puzzle Project](#), to name a few of the organizations that support engaged journalism.

# LJI Initiatives

In devising our own efforts, the Local Journalism Initiative considered the following goals:

- Address local news and information gaps, especially in the geographic areas and among racial and ethnic communities that are most underserved.
- Address gaps in coverage of statewide issues and access to that coverage.
- Work toward economically sustainable models and community support for local journalism.
- Drive collaboration among existing media outlets to improve their impact and reach.
- Provide greater access to independently produced information about local and state government that informs and engenders democratic participation.
- Engage community members to participate in the process of information gathering and government accountability.
- Increase the diversity of voices heard in the news, both those producing it (in the newsroom) and those featured in it (sources and communities covered).
- Increase access to information across digital platforms (website, text messages, social media, audio, video, email newsletters, etc.).

LJI is using this report and subsequent community conversations to develop a strategic plan for 2023 and beyond. Among the initiatives we are currently weighing are:

- Implementing new models for local journalism, including nonprofit, collaborative and hyperlocal news models.
- Initiating journalism fellowships, particularly focusing on building a pipeline of journalists from historically underrepresented communities.
- Hosting community conversations and convenings.
- Bringing national resources/speakers to share lessons learned.

Currently, LJI is engaged in two key initiatives:

## **Delaware Journalism Collaborative (current program)**

LJI is convening and supporting the new [Delaware Journalism Collaborative](#), an emerging group of newsrooms and other community partners committed to combining resources to help inform and engage Delawareans as they explore community challenges and advance solutions.

LJI first convened local print, broadcast and online editors from around the state in the summer of 2021 to discuss creating the Collaborative. Bolstered by newsrooms'

interest, LJI secured a \$200,000 grant for the Collaborative from the [Solutions Journalism Network](#), a national nonprofit that encourages rigorous, regular reporting on solutions as well as problems.

In April 2022, the Collaborative began the process of hiring a project manager to coordinate its work. An initial cohort of 18 local newsrooms and community partners signed on to the launch of the Collaborative. Additional partners are expected to join in the coming months.

The Collaborative has committed to spend two years focusing on the issue of polarization in Delaware – examining the political, racial, geographic and other factors that divide us. Through original reporting and community engagement, the Collaborative will bring to the fore the reasons for our increasing polarization and ways to strengthen our communities by valuing and leveraging our differences.

The Delaware Journalism Collaborative is modeled on other successful statewide and regional collaboratives, including [Philadelphia](#), [Charlotte](#) and [New Hampshire](#). LJI will continue to provide the Collaborative with strategic, fundraising and technical support.

#### **Internship Program (current program)**

LJI is partnering with the Delaware Community Foundation to support the [DCF Journalism Internship Program](#).

Launched in the summer of 2021 with a grant from the DCF's COVID-19 Strategic Response Fund, the internship program was Delaware's first statewide news collaborative initiative.

This program embeds college students who are aspiring journalists as reporting interns in Delaware news outlets. The goals of the DCF Journalism Internship Program are to:

- Increase high-quality local news, which strengthens our democracy and civic engagement.
- Increase coverage of Delaware's Black, brown and other historically underrepresented communities.
- Increase the population of future journalists who have experience with and are committed to covering historically underrepresented communities, including Black and brown communities.

For the summer of 2022, the internship program is funding two college students, both people of color, in two Delaware news outlets. Participating students also receive extensive training and one-on-one mentoring.

The [Maryland Delaware DC Press Association](#) also is a partner in this initiative.

# Background

## Why does local news and information matter?

The loss of local news and information is impeding Delawareans' ability to thrive, undermining our democracy, exacerbating polarization, furthering inequities and diminishing the social fabric of our communities.

The impact is particularly hard on low-income and historically underrepresented communities, where the need for information closely parallels the need for resources.

Research<sup>3</sup> shows that when local news outlets close or diminish:

### **Government becomes less effective and efficient.**

- Municipal bond ratings drop, borrowing becomes more expensive.
- Government hiring, salaries and wage ratios rise.
- Taxes go up.
- Communities are less appealing to businesses.

### **Civic engagement drops.**

- Fewer people run for public office.
- Voter turnout drops.
- Political polarization grows, with split-ticket voting declining as voters turn to party labels in the absence of quality information about candidates.

### **Inequities are magnified.**

- Even in a strong news market, communities comprised primarily of Black and brown people receive the least coverage and access to information and are the least represented. Loss of local news disproportionately affects these communities.

## What happened to Delaware's local news and information ecosystem?

In Delaware, as is the case around the nation, local journalism is in crisis.

While Delaware's local reporters and editors are grappling to provide high-quality local news and information, they are woefully constrained by the limited resources that are the

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<sup>3</sup> [Financing Dies in Darkness? The Impact of Newspaper Closures on Public Finance When Local Newsrooms Shrink. Fewer Candidates Run for Mayor](#)  
[Want to reduce political polarization? Save your local newspaper](#)  
[For BIPOC communities, local news crisis extends beyond major cities](#)

reality of today's journalism economy – plummeting revenue from lost advertising and subscriptions; layoffs, budget cuts, corporate mergers and hedge fund takeovers; pressure for headlines that drive clicks; competition and confusion with political “news” entertainment media; and infinite consumer demand.

As a result of these and other factors, Delaware's local news outlets – print, broadcast and digital – have been forced to gut their editorial staffs in size and experience; cut the quantity, quality and timeliness of their coverage; and, in some cases, shut down completely.

In Delaware, DelawareOnline/The News Journal is down to 32 local reporters and editors from the 110 it had in the 1990s. (DelawareOnline/The News Journal also has some support from editorial staff shared by multiple news outlets owned by Gannett, its parent company.) The News Journal recently cut its Saturday print edition. The Delaware State News is down to an editorial staff of 17 from its height of 46 in 1996. The State News also announced in May that it will cut from printing daily to five days a week, beginning July 1, 2022. The State News' parent company, Independent Newsmedia, Inc., shut down two of its dailies and three of its weeklies in recent years. WDEL is down to eight editorial staff from its peak of 12 in approximately 2010. WILM eliminated all local coverage in 2011. Many of Delaware's other local media outlets have experienced similar dramatic cuts.

This situation only worsened during the pandemic as newsrooms' revenue dropped even further while the public's demand for trustworthy local news and information skyrocketed. In 2020 alone, around the country, more than 60 local newsrooms shut down and 37,000 newsroom employees were laid off, furloughed or had their pay cut.<sup>4</sup>

## **What can we do about it?**

Delaware has the opportunity to strengthen our local news and information ecosystem by leveraging our unique community assets, building up the existing media infrastructure and finding new ways to address the gaps.

The first step in addressing the community's needs for local news and information is to understand what those needs are.

This report, representing six months of research on the local news and information needs of communities throughout Delaware, summarizes our findings, highlights the needs and wants of Delawareans in their own words, and provides a set of recommendations for how we can begin to address those needs.

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<sup>4</sup> [News Media Outlets Have Been Ravaged by the Pandemic](#)

## Who produced this report?

The report was commissioned by the [Local Journalism Initiative of Delaware](#) (LJI) and led by Allison Taylor Levine and Fiona Morgan.

LJI is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, currently operating its programs through a fiscal sponsorship fund of the Delaware Community Foundation. LJI's mission is to strengthen local journalism as a vehicle for a stronger democracy and thriving communities throughout the First State. LJI is not affiliated with any media organization.

Levine, a Delaware resident since 1998, began her career as a newspaper reporter (including a stint at The News Journal) before transitioning to work in marketing and communications for various Delaware government agencies, nonprofit organizations and private companies. She is now the vice president for marketing and communications at the Delaware Community Foundation and the founder and board president of the Local Journalism Initiative of Delaware.

Morgan is a North Carolina-based journalist, researcher, organizer and engagement specialist. She works with nonprofits, newsrooms, funders and community-based organizations to build stronger local news and information ecosystems. She is particularly committed to understanding and strengthening the intersections between news gathering and civic engagement.

## Our Process

To secure both qualitative and quantitative results and engage a significant number of Delawareans, we employed five key strategies: **one-on-one interviews, focus groups, an open-invitation community conversation, a text message survey and an analysis of public data sources.**

While we deeply value the perspective of working journalists, our goal for this report was to center the perspectives of Delaware residents themselves, who have a broad range of awareness of and familiarity with the field of journalism and the crisis in local news. Therefore, we intentionally limited the involvement of current local journalists in our formal community listening. We interviewed one local news leader because of other roles in the community and one retired national journalist. One local news leader and one national sports journalist participated in focus groups. We also acknowledge that some text survey responses may have included current local journalists, although most responses were anonymous. However, we did discuss the

work throughout the process with dozens of active local journalists, including the leaders of most major Delaware news outlets.

We intentionally oversampled for Black and Hispanic communities to ensure we heard from people who are historically underrepresented in similar studies. We estimate that participants approximately reflect the state's racial mix with some weighting to Black and Hispanic communities.

### **One-on-One Interviews**

We partnered with five local research associates representing Delaware's geographic, ethnic and gender diversity. Between November 2021 and March 2022, the associates worked with us to identify and interview 35 Delawareans – ranging from police officers, bankers and teachers to farmers, realtors and nonprofit employees – who:

- Are deeply engaged and connected in various communities throughout the state.
- Live in different geographic areas of Delaware, ensuring representation from various regions of the city of Wilmington, other communities in New Castle County above and below the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, the city of Dover and other areas of Kent County, and eastern and western Sussex County. We selected individuals living in both urban and rural communities.
- Represent various socioeconomic statuses, ages and historically underrepresented communities, including Black, brown and LGBTQ+. (While not fully aligned with percentage of population, we pointedly included individuals from Delaware's Haitian-Creole and Indigenous/Native American communities.)
- Represent a variety of political points of view, although we attempted to avoid applying a political layer to the conversations. Interviewees included a very small number of politicians representing diverse perspectives.

Most interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and were recorded on Zoom. We transcribed and analyzed the interviews, identifying various themes and quoting representative comments.

### **Focus Groups**

Between December 2021 and March 2022, we conducted eight focus groups in partnership with Delawareans who are deeply engaged and connected to various communities throughout the state.

Our goal was to hear from people in a range of communities. To do this, we sought out co-hosts with different networks. We asked these co-hosts to invite a list of their friends and colleagues to participate in a focus group conducted on Zoom.

Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes, and participants were paid \$40 each. Discussions were led primarily by Fiona Morgan. Focus groups ranged in size from six to 16. Larger focus groups were broken into two groups, with Allison Levine facilitating some conversations.

Participants were asked questions about how they get information about what's happening in their communities, what they like and dislike, and what types of local news and information they want and need more of, if anything.

The co-hosts were selected to represent Delaware's diverse communities. Two were from Kent County; one from western Sussex; one from eastern Sussex; one from Middletown, New Castle County; and three from different areas of Wilmington. Co-hosts identified as Black, Hispanic, white and multiracial. All conversations were in English, although some participants helped translate for others who intermittently preferred Spanish.

We transcribed and analyzed the conversations, identifying various themes and quoting representative comments.

### **Community Conversation**

We conducted one open-call community conversation to invite Delawareans throughout the state to share their thoughts about local news and information. We promoted this Feb. 23, 2022, Zoom conversation through our website, email and social media.

Participants in the community conversation were not paid. The group included many former journalists and other community activists who were interested in this project.

Eighteen Delawareans from up and down the state participated in the 60-minute conversation, led by Fiona Morgan, Allison Levine and Andre Smith, a member of the board of the Local Journalism Initiative. We transcribed and analyzed the conversations, identifying various themes and quoting representative comments.

### **Text Message Survey**

We partnered with the consulting arm of [Outlier Media](#) – a service-journalism nonprofit organization focused on better serving the information needs of low-income news

consumers – to conduct a statewide text message survey of Delawareans in February 2022. We also issued an op-ed and promoted the survey on social media to encourage people to complete it.

Read Outlier’s full report on the text message survey methodology and results at [ljidelaware.org/outlier\\_report](https://ljidelaware.org/outlier_report). A brief overview of the methodology follows:

Outlier’s methodology relies on assessing the need for resources as a proxy for the need for information. Higher-income people and communities have fewer resource and information gaps. News and information sources cater to higher-income individuals and exacerbate these gaps. People who struggle to make ends meet need more and better information to meet their needs (e.g., where and how to access food, housing, job training, government/nonprofit resources).

Outlier issued an easy-to-understand, nine-question survey to a list of purchased phone numbers throughout Delaware. The questions focus mainly on challenges the respondents anticipate, and we identify when those challenges are because of resource gaps. Outlier also asked people to tell us about information preferences. The survey is in English, and a Spanish-language version is available. All questions are open-ended. Individuals who completed the survey received a \$10 Amazon gift card.

Outlier sent the survey on three consecutive days during the first week of February 2022. The survey response rate was high, in Outlier’s experience. Outlier sent 10,485 messages, 795 people responded, and 120 said they were interested, lived in Delaware, and completed the survey. The responses broke down across geography relatively proportionally. Kent County was slightly overrepresented, and Sussex County was slightly underrepresented amongst people who gave their zip codes, but overall the geographic distribution was pretty consistent with the population.

Responses were categorized using a taxonomy developed by 2-1-1 counts, a local call center, an information resource run by the United Way for low-income people looking for resources.

We analyzed the data about respondents’ needs and preferences for receiving information, and we quoted representative comments.

## **Analysis of Public Data Sources**

Outlier completed a demographic analysis of Delaware as part of assessing information needs, again using the need for resources as a proxy for the need for information. Outlier examined the [United States Census Bureau](#), [MIT's Living Wage Calculator](#), [Princeton's Eviction Lab](#), [Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's Fiscally Standardized Cities database](#) and [Delaware 2-1-1 Counts](#).

We combined Outlier's analysis of these sources with our other research to develop our findings and recommendations.

## **By the Numbers**

### **Total Population Engaged in this Study = 269**

- 5 research associates
- 5 LJI board members
- 35 one-on-one interviews
- 85 participants in eight focus groups
- 18 in Community Conversation
- 121 SMS survey responses  
(one known duplicate)

### **By County<sup>5</sup>**

- 52 from Kent (22%)
- 110 New Castle (47%)
- 71 Sussex (30%)
- 2 outside Delaware (<1%)
- 47 of Delaware's 67 residential zip codes represented (70%)

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<sup>5</sup> These percentages are based on the 235 of the 269 study participants for whom we have zip codes. Delaware has 1,003,384 people as of July 2021. Kent County has 184,149 (18%); New Castle County 571,708 (57%); Sussex County 247,527 (25%). We intentionally oversampled in the southern part of the state because of the known lack of news and information resources in that area.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sussexcountydelaware,kentcountydelaware,newcaslecountydelaware,DE/PST045221>

### **By Gender<sup>6</sup>**

132 female (59%)  
91 male (41%)  
1 transgender (<1%)

### **Age<sup>7</sup>**

18-24 – 3 (2%)  
25-44 – 56 (40%)  
45-64 – 40 (29%)  
65+ – 40 (29%)

### **By Race/Ethnicity<sup>8</sup>**

63 African American/Black (42%)  
16 Latinx/Hispanic (11%)  
65 White (44%)  
3 Indigenous/Native American (2%)  
2 Asian (1%)

\*Some indicated multiple races and are in multiple categories.

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<sup>6</sup> These percentages are based on 224 of the 269 study participants. Approximately 100 identified their gender in writing. When not indicated, we inferred gender for those we met face-to-face and for those whose text message survey response suggested a specific gender. We estimate that participants approximately reflect the state's gender mix with a slightly heavier response rate from people identifying as female. Delaware's population is approximately 51.7% female – <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DE>.

<sup>7</sup> These percentages are based on 140 of the 269 study participants. Approximately 100 specifically identified their age range. When not indicated we inferred the age range for those we met face-to-face. We did not attempt to infer the ages of those we did not meet (the text message survey respondents). We estimate that participants approximately reflect the state's age distribution. 59.7% of Delawareans are 19-64 years old and 19.4% are 65 or older. – <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DE>

<sup>8</sup> These percentages are based on 149 of the 269 study participants. Approximately 75 participants identified their race(s) in writing. When not indicated, we inferred race for those we met face-to-face. We did not attempt to infer the races of those we did not meet (the text message survey respondents).

Delaware's population breakdown is as follows: White alone 69.2%, Black/African American alone 23.2%, American Indian/Alaska Native alone 0.7%, Asian alone 4.1%, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander alone 0.1%, Two or more races 2.7%, Hispanic/Latino 9.6%, White alone/not Hispanic or Latino 61.7% – <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DE>.)

# Key Findings

What follows is a summary of what we learned from Delawareans about how they access local news and information, their perceptions about existing resources, and what they want and need.

All quotes are from actual Delawareans who participated in the research. To encourage participants to be as frank as possible, we are not identifying speakers by name.

## Overview of the Gaps

**Most Delawareans do not have a reliable, formal source of local news and information.**

- **There is no Delaware-based flagship news organization in print, broadcast, or online that covers the entire state reliably.**
- **Major media outlets outside Delaware do not cover the state. Philadelphia, Baltimore and Salisbury print, TV and radio stations mention Delaware rarely, typically only in the event of violent crime or other sensational stories.**
- **Many Delawareans statewide point to DelawareOnline/The News Journal as an important source of Delaware news, but they also say it no longer covers their communities effectively.**
- **Existing Delaware outlets only cover a handful of communities (primarily Wilmington, Dover and the beaches). Coverage outside of those communities is very limited.**
- **The local news that exists statewide is broad and very thin, focused on big headlines without depth, consistency or follow through.**

According to the Outlier Media report we commissioned, which surveyed Delawareans about how they access local news and information: "Most of our respondents have an information source they trust by a 6 to 1 margin. Only 65% of those mentioned a legitimate news source as a source of their information. Other sources people listed were 'friends' or 'family' or 'online.'"

"Local news is almost an oxymoron around here in my mind. I don't sense that there is a media presence in Delaware that's dedicated to Delaware and really focused on the real issues of the state, the activity within the state, and keeping people communicated with and up to speed with what's going on." - Wilmington, Black male, 70s

"There is a hole in Delaware, and it hasn't always been that way. I've been in Delaware and Wilmington for most of my life, and I remember when there was an evening broadcast on WHYI every evening that did local Delaware news, (and) when The News Journal was robust enough that they had both a morning journal and an evening journal and had a building filled with reporters. Now, for the last two decades, we've just watched news coverage locally decline to the point where we're one of those places where if it bleeds, it leads, and that's kind of all you hear in the major outlets." - Newark, Black male, 50s

"I live, breathe, and die by DelawareOnline because they do have a huge range of [coverage] from New Castle County, all the way up in Wilmington all the way down to heading into Ocean City, Maryland." - Dover, Asian female, 20s

"I don't want to miss out on anything, I want to get involved and know more about the town. So I belong to every single group on Facebook for Milford. That's how I get my information. We also have Milford Live, an online newspaper, and we have DelawareOnline. But I follow all these pages and I still don't get answers. Not even in the media I follow, and that's what they do, right? That's what they do for a living." - Milford, Hispanic female, 30s

"When I was younger I could read the paper and feel informed whereas right now... I don't feel like I get as much out of the local section (of The News Journal) anymore." - Newark, white female, 30s

"I do listen to WHYI, but that tends to do more Philly news than Delaware news. I don't really listen to the Delaware (public radio station). I don't even know the name of it. ... I don't watch Channel 28. I don't even know if I've got a cable to watch Channel 28 - or if I *need* cable to watch it. So I don't have that either. So basically, no, I don't do TV news. ... I have to go to the city (government) to find out what's going on in the city. It is very much a combination of phone calls to individuals." - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"My dad and my mom watch in the mornings Fox 19 and NBC for the weather and the news, but those are mostly from Philadelphia. They're not from here, from Dover." - Dover, Hispanic male, 20s

"I don't seek out news on it because I don't know where to go. I get most of my information by calling former associates, friends, close associates, and from the gossip about what is going on. ... There used to be local talk shows that I would listen to while I'm in the car going around and now most of the talk shows are national ... and not what is happening locally. I do watch the news, but it's very little about Delaware on the regional news in Philadelphia, New Jersey and Maryland. I do watch the Delaware-specific shows, but they're once a week on public television and I do enjoy that." - Newark, Black male, 70s

"I live in west Dover, so I don't get the Dover Post for whatever reason... I mainly absorb just based on my work, and I mainly absorb a lot of national news. Although I'm interested in local news, I don't really hear much about it or know where the best place is to go." - Dover, Black male, 30s

"I don't listen to no news. What I do is, let's say an election is coming up. I'll talk to those individuals that I trust, that I know are plugged in. I'll have conversations. And then I'll spend probably about a few hours doing some research, and I'll make a decision." - Rehoboth Beach, Hispanic male, 50s

"The lack of local news for me has been a real challenge. I'm really not happy with where I live, as far as being able to get local news, because Middletown, our station for the TV news is the Philadelphia news. My sister lives in Kent County. She gets Delmarva news, but I don't really know what's going on in Delaware unless I go online. Every now and then, they may give us the weather, or they may mention a story or two, but it's not consistent... Sometimes I feel really disconnected locally. There really is a need in this region for that." - Middletown-area, Black female, 60s

"I want and need information about what state and local governments are doing – stuff that's actually important, not just (A) parachuting in when there's a scandal like TNJ [The News Journal] or (B) covering every last boring detail of a city council meeting like DSN [Delaware State News]. Neither does a really good job covering the news that's important. Neither also has the resources to cover the many small towns and communities. People in Hartly, Laurel, Millsboro, Smyrna, etc, are being completely ignored by the bigger outlets. (And if you live in unincorporated areas, forget it.)" - Text survey response, Dover

"No one in Delaware is doing investigative journalism that really dives deep into some of the things that are really plaguing this place. And that includes a combination of the

governmental affairs and... investigative journalism on things that really matter. That just doesn't exist here in Delaware." - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"In all the platforms, they don't necessarily investigate, and if they do, they don't necessarily track the story and stay with it. And across the board, there's a strong reluctance from the news media I think to point out lies. It is okay for someone to say something in print, or on television, or on the radio and they don't necessarily get confronted if the facts are different. I think that's a huge threat to our common life together as a community and it's a huge threat to our democracy." - Lewes, white male, 60s

"I get my news through DelawareOnline, which is The News Journal online edition. I'll give you a good example of what I was dismayed by. I tried to follow the news, and I found out there was a Christina [School District] board decision on the new charter school. I would've expected Delaware News Journal to cover that. I heard about this word of mouth, and then I did a Google search. Then, I got a reference to the Newark Post. So that's kind of alarming, because here I thought I bought The News Journal, thinking I'll be clued in." - Newark, Black male, 50s

"I'm not critical of the Cape Gazette. I think they do a great job but it's not serious news like we're talking about reentry or access to business opportunities. I'm interested in that in the Latino community. You don't see articles of this nature, really." - Lewes, white female, 60s

"The local papers are all basically owned by one company, so even though local news is covered, it's never covered in a way that feels, to me, substantial. I feel like I have to go elsewhere... I mean, there's a lot of charitable stuff that goes on here, but everybody gets their picture in the paper doing it. And that's what the papers cover. So if the big builders are doing all this charity event, then they get the good coverage, and then where's the story? ... I don't know, are reporters afraid? Do their employers encourage intrepid, investigative journalism that might somehow reflect badly on their advertisers or their supporters? I don't see enough of it." - Lewes, white female, 70s

"That's one of the areas that I think our papers need to work on is to have, I don't know if they would need more or, but at least someone that's willing to get out there and scratch and dig for the information that should be brought out to the public." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 70s

"I do not like it as much since (The News Journal) went more with the USA Today because I thought you're just reverberating what I'm getting everywhere else. They lost the Delaware focus. Most people that I know look at The News Journal for the obituaries and that's about it. And people even stopped in Sussex putting obituaries and because they were charging so much, they just said, 'Forget it.'" - Sussex County, white female, 60s

**Delawareans want local news and information across a variety of media. While digital formats are most popular, no single format or platform meets everyone's needs.**

- **86% of survey respondents said they prefer to get news and information in a digital format – 41% want information online, 26% prefer text messages and 19% prefer email. 3% prefer print and 2% prefer TV. This tracks with what we heard in focus groups and interviews, as well as national news trends.**
- **Older Delawareans continue to prefer print and traditional TV news while younger generations want to access information on demand, primarily through smartphones.**
- **Some Delawareans say they want TV to be their primary local news source (whether live or on demand), but Delaware lacks a dedicated local TV news broadcast.**
  - **Like New Jersey, Delaware is situated between the major media television markets of Philadelphia and Baltimore.**
  - **DETV is highly regarded for producing positive, client-funded information, primarily about the city of Wilmington. Delawareans say they like DETV's positive shows (cooking, education, etc.) and its less commercial "DETV News Brief," which runs about once every week or two, but they observe that it has limited capacity and reach.**

"Everything I consume, I consume online, or on the screen that's in my pocket at all times." - Newark, Black male, 50s

"Need more DE local news alerts (text alerts or phone notifications)." - Text survey response, Wilmington

"Don't give me news in video form; takes too long to consume and captions are usually nonexistent." - Text survey response, Dover

"We don't have a local TV station. We don't have a state TV station, which I think is huge. ... It's kind of a desert we're living in." - Wilmington, Black male, 70s

"If I'm not getting it through my smartphone, I'm probably not seeing it as much." - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"I'll get my news from channel six, which is usually in Philadelphia. Only if something majorly happens – that's if somebody died, fire, or severe, severe, severe news, that's the only time Delaware is typically mentioned. And then for MOT (Middletown-Odessa-Townsend) to be mentioned, it had to be like life-limb had to be lost." - Middletown, Black female, 40s

"Ivan Thomas and the DETV folks... they might do some vignettes but it's not real time. When we had... the Wilmington riots – although I've seen a riot and that wasn't it – that activity that was underway, he and a few others were rolling live... That was the closest thing we've seen to real Delaware journalism. We are not there yet, but I think our feet are pointed in the right direction." - Newark, Black male, 50s

"I don't know if the future of news is television-based for people who are busy and out in the world. My parents might sometimes watch the news, but at six or five o'clock, who can sit down and watch that? I know not one single person who sits down and watches the news at the time it's delivered. They might watch a clip that texted to them, but usually that's because someone's kid was on the news." - Wilmington, white female, 40s

"I'm a millennial, so I do follow news sources on social media. So Facebook, it's big. A lot of my news that I get from social media is coming from either the Snapchat news features or Twitter, because Twitter is really where media is right now. (Also) I subscribe to DelawareOnline, Washington Post, New York Times, Politico, CNN, Fox, ABC. I have all the apps on my phone. WDEL." - Wilmington, Black male, 30s

"I'm 73. So people my age generally do what I do. Hoy en Delaware is the newspaper to go to. The younger you are, the more you listen to that Facebook or whatever it is that they get their news from." – Wilmington, Hispanic female, 70s

“Call it that I'm lazy or too busy, whichever one you pick, I don't have time or desire to go to four or five different locations to get my information. I think we're lacking a central place that I can go. When I get my national news, I go to one place. I have an app. I go to that major news network. That's where I get all my national news, one place. That's where I trust.” - Dover, Black male, 30s

“I know we receive here in Dover every day, I think it's a newsletter. It comes inside of a little bag, but to be honest, I've never even opened it... I don't even know the name of the newsletter.” – Dover, Hispanic male, 20s, referencing The Dover Post

“I want to sit down and read some really in-depth stories about Delaware, like a Vanity Fair-style of writing, where they give you the whole plot from the start to the finish. Frankly, I'm kind of tired of all the pushing of all the headlines. All day long, I get notifications, like everyone else, and I'd just like to sit down and read a really good, well-written story. I want good content that informs and enlightens me. That's what I'm looking for, whatever medium it is. I'm not a TikToker or I'm not an Instagramer, because I like complete news, and that's probably because of my age. I'm almost 67, so I want a different type of news.” - Middletown-area, Black female, 60s

**Delawareans point to DelawareOnline/The News Journal's decline and the Gannett-GateHouse merger as central to the loss of local news and information statewide.**

- **Many Delawareans acknowledge that DelawareOnline/The News Journal has limited resources, and they bemoan its decline.**
- **Delawareans observe that The News Journal's localized coverage initially declined when it eliminated zoned local sections about 10-15 years ago.**
- **They also observe that, in 2019, when Gannett/DelawareOnline/The News Journal absorbed GateHouse's Community Publications (monthly Hockessin Community News and weekly Dover Post, Sussex Countian, Middletown Transcript, Milford Beacon and Smyrna-Clayton Sun Times), it dramatically diminished local news in those previously covered areas.**
- **Many also pointed to DelawareOnline/The News Journal largely eliminating business news over the years, a gap which has been partially addressed by other outlets.**

"I think journalism in the United States as a whole – not just in Delaware – (is) getting the short end of the stick. I think for the most part, the Wilmington News Journal and the other stations, they try. It just doesn't work. ... You have to give credit where credit is due, and yet there's a gap... They don't have the money. They can't be comprehensive. In the seventies, eighties, even nineties, The News Journal was still a heavy hitter." –  
Wilmington, Hispanic female, 70s

"There's just been a gradual decline in the quality of what's been presented in The News Journal and the coverage it provides. ... I think some publications have tried to fill some of the void for some social issues, political issues and even environmental justice kind of issues, but the distribution's not very broad. And again, the staffing becomes an issue, so how deep can it go? How much effort can they put into any particular issue?" -  
Wilmington, Black male, 70s

"The News Journal, Gannett news, the downsizing of that has definitely affected news coverage and availability and access to information... The staff has shrunk, and... the new reporters that – if they bring anybody in to replace people who've left – they don't have the depth and breadth of knowledge." - Milton, white male, 60s

"The News Journal used to have a whole middle section when you got the print edition, it was local, it was called 'Local.' If you were in New Castle, you got the New Castle Local. If you were in Kent, you got the Kent Local. If you were in Sussex, you got the Sussex Local. They completely eliminated that. I think The News Journal change has been the most significant loss of information." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"Our Middletown Transcript doesn't seem to be focused on a lot of our (Middletown) stuff anymore. It kind of pulls from all over. I don't know if it's just that they want to keep – the Smyrna-Clayton Sun Times and even there's some (former GateHouse publications) down the beach – probably they want to keep all those papers going, but it just doesn't seem like there's a lot of relevant information for the area in those publications. There's really not a lot of content. There may be one or two stories that are actually relevant or germane to our area." - Middletown-area, white female, 50s

"I've been here for three years, and I didn't even know that we had a (Middletown) Transcript, so that's something new that I can look into." - Middletown, Black female, 40s

"I grew up in the Wilmington area, so I've gotten The News Journal forever... The Dover Post now is written by The News Journal, so it's not like it's giving me anything new. I would say generally there's some information, but it's like what occurs in The News Journal about Dover will occur a week later in the Dover Post." - Dover, white female, 60s

"The business journalists have not cracked the code, but they've at least figured out how to do local journalism in terms of Delaware Business Now, Delaware Business Times. At least that vacuum got filled when the destruction of The News Journal happened. I don't even go to DelawareOnline anymore." - Claymont, white male, 50s

"Of course you need to read The News Journal, but I get most of the business news and resources are the Delaware Business Times, WDEL and also WHY?." - Wilmington, Black female, 60s

### **Delawareans are concerned by the lack of coverage of state and municipal government.**

"It's fewer reporters sitting at the Levy Court meetings in Kent County, the city council meetings, the committee hearings, even sitting through JFC and all of the important stuff that happens at the legislature. We have, what, two or three people, including the AP, who are covering those issues now. And I don't think it's enough. And it's certainly not gonna be enough in the future with a growing state and a complicated environment." - Kent County, white male, 40s

"Now that my favorite political reporter has left the State News, it is really hard to get good political news out of Dover." - Wilmington, white female, 40s

"I always thought that there was space for The News Journal to try to create more of a niche to be taken seriously and do good, solid coverage of Dover and everything happening at Leg Hall and the governor's office and whatever, the courts, the judicial system. You're sitting in a state that is known around the world because of its courts and because of incorporations and business entities... and The News Journal doesn't seem like it has ever cared about that." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 40s

"What's missing is that help to amplify the things that folks can be paying attention to, to really engage in a meaningful way in local government and in state government. That's absolutely absent, which is unfortunate." - Newark, white female, 30s

"I don't know hardly anything about any other government official business here in Harrington. ... I don't see much of Harrington represented at all." - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"There's an issue with coverage of governmental affairs, the decision-making processes that happen at the state and the city level – cities level, multiple cities – that don't really cover who's making decisions and what those decisions are and how they affect people. There have been so many things that have happened in Wilmington City Council, for example, that I would consider to be newsworthy that aren't covered at all. And because they're not covered, people are just walking around with no understanding of what's going on and who the decision-makers are. So just general governmental affairs, like what's the City Council thing going on or what's the state working on?" - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"We'll hear what the governor said, you know, blah, blah, blah. We'll hear what our representatives voted no on, but I don't feel like I'm getting the whole story. The Cape Gazette will try. The Coastal Point does it, but they don't have the manpower. There's just gotta be more of it. There's gotta be more scrutiny." - Lewes, white female, 70s

"I think it could do a better job explaining what major bills will do and the impact it'll have. Take away the Democrat-Republican stuff, take away the spending aspect, but just getting to the root of bills and explaining it on a basic level to people of what a certain bill will do." - Wilmington, Black male, 20s

"Delaware's a small state, but we are a mecca for corporate law. And a lot of people don't understand what that means when it comes to economics and don't understand what it means when it comes to creating jobs and buying houses. If you're just a normal person... well, all these laws that are affecting you on a regular basis, you might have no idea what's coming down the pipe. And then of course you're not an informed voter. So, news is so vital for so many reasons. And I just think we're cut short on a lot of it, unfortunately." - Dover, Black male, 30s

**Many Delawareans feel that the lack of news sources means they have to go directly to government agencies to get the information they need, but that information is very difficult to access, even for people with connections and expertise.**

"It is very, very difficult to get information from state government, definitely the executive branch. I would like to see more information proactively put out by our government, especially budget and financing. It's very difficult for someone who is even a trained journalist or even a trained auditor to follow money, let alone someone who's just from the general public." - Elected official, Sussex County

"We're kind of like a little bit of a secretive state. We don't like things to always be aired out in public. If you've ever tried to put in a FOIA request here in the state, the state government doesn't like to give very much information and so everything kind of tends to be hush-hush and spoken in these informal quiet ways. It can be difficult to get information out there in the public sphere, too." - Wilmington, white male, 40s

"Even for us (elected officials), it can be difficult to get an answer because they're gonna close the ranks and not gonna give you the information." - Elected official, Sussex County

"Delaware is perhaps the least transparent of all states. It's certainly the least transparent of every state where I've worked as a journalist. It strikes me, though, that it's just part of the culture." - Kent County journalist

"The time I need to spend combing through state agencies and going to the websites at Leg Hall, or other things, just to get a sense of the state of the union or a landscape view of housing, for instance, it's debilitating. We spend so much time with the get-ready stuff, that we can't spend that time actually making good things happen." - Elected official, Sussex County

"A lot of people probably don't know you have to go to certain websites and look up what was made, what was constructed, whether it was passed or not. And then once it's passed, there's so much jargon involved. What does it actually mean? So that type of information put out in plain English for everyone to understand is super vital for those who want to grow and move forward in the State of Delaware." - Dover, Black male, 30s

### **Delawareans across the political spectrum say local media outlets are politically biased.**

"Most trusted are CG (Cape Gazette) and DSN (Delaware State News). Least trusted are WHY... (and) the TV stations because their reporting is shallow, and WGMD and WXDE because they're just conservative hype machines for the talk shows." - Text survey response, Dover

"I think the disconnect is that some of our written publications down here lean to the left, and I think people want middle. And like it or not, the predominant in Sussex County is to the right. So they're disenfranchised even by how they picked their letters to the editor, their editorials. It turns off and, and so you lose your credibility... Particularly the Cape Gazette. Never have they ever endorsed, supported, made a positive comment about any Republican candidate. Never." - Elected official, Sussex County

"I've been very disappointed in the coverage of the Kathy McGuinness-Kathleen Jennings debacle. It got more coverage than some of the other things that have gone on, and there's political motivation behind that, which becomes very obvious. So to me, that's when you lose credibility." - Elected official, Sussex County

"I go to WDEL... although they tend to shift over to the right a lot." – Wilmington, Hispanic female, 70s

**Delawareans say they want news that is both more objective – “just the facts” – and more analysis and help understanding issues.**

"I started to turn to talk radio, and even that's got a bias to it that I get frustrated with. Quite frankly, I get tired of hearing people talk all the time. Sometimes I just turn everything off and I'll do the best I can, but it is very hard to try to decipher truth and facts anymore." - Georgetown, white male, 40s

"I want to hear facts. I just want to know what's going on. And I want to know what resources I can double-check if I need to. I don't want to hear a bunch of conjecture and people's opinions on certain things... I want to know, 'This Walmart's going up in three weeks [...] and this is the people putting it up.' Great. I can follow that." - Dover, Black male, 30s

"News outlets have been trying to figure out what they need to be now. Now it's like, ok, news gets out so fast, so everybody already knows the story, so let's give some analysis. But then there's too much analysis and opinion. It's frustrating. Everybody has a side, depending on what your political party is." - Bridgeville, Black male, 40s

"(The Cape Gazette will) mention an issue – no water in Ellendale or whatever the case may be – and you never get to the heart of the issue because it's reporting the facts ... I'd

like to see them become more substantive in their development of their articles, and maybe become more demanding of those who put articles in to be more transparent and substantive... I'd like to see them do something different than what everyone does in Sussex County, which is sit on the fence." - Lewes, Black female, 60s

**Delawareans say local news overly negative and does not help advance solutions.**

- **People say local news is especially negative about the city of Wilmington.**
- **Many acknowledge negative news is more profitable and supports newsrooms' operations.**
- **Some say they entirely avoid consuming news because of its negativity.**
- **Delawareans want news that empowers them to make positive change.**

"If DETV is 100% positive, then DelawareOnline is 200% negative. .. Recently, I read a negative story about a fourth-grader. What about the fourth-grader who won the spelling bee? For every three negative stories, they should publish four or five positive stories." - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"What the hell sells? Good news doesn't sell. People want to read the gory stuff." - Wilmington, Hispanic female, 70s

"Bad news sells. Bad news gets the clicks. Bad news gets engagement. Good news doesn't really get the engagement that bad news does or what's considered bad news, or more neutral-leaning news. News stations got to pay their bills." - Dover, Asian female, 20s

"Every time I get news on my phone, it's basically news about violence. Almost every single time I go to pull my phone out, I check everything about Dover, it's about some incident. So other people say everyone hears good things, right? What I see is that they have to improve the way they communicate, not just about bad things, but they have to actually mix it and add a little bit more of good things in this kind of environment. Because I think that people are stressed too much and we need to relieve that a little bit more and send a different message to people. We need to hear good things at least every week." - Dover, Black male, 30s

"From the inner city, they highlight all of the negatives more so than the positives. When something bad is going on or when something tragic happens, it's like a big blowup for the news media, but it's very slim that they're in the park when a community service project is being done. I'm not saying that it's perfect, but there are some great things that happen in the city. So I just would kind of like to see the media focus on the positive more so than the negatives." - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"Our federal delegation and our top person (the mayor) all live in Wilmington ... and (the city) still has a bad reputation to the point where people don't want to move here, don't want to bring their companies here." - Newark, Black male, 30s

"I try not to watch news to keep negativity out of my daily life." - Text survey response, Bear

"A lot of people unplug and don't want to get the information. They're turning off the TVs. They're not wanting to look at the newsletters. They're not wanting to really hear anything about what's going on. And they're just trying to keep a safe space. And basically, I know some people said they went from TV news to Hallmark Channel, which I get." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"There's only so much news you can listen to sometimes before you get depressed." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 40s

"Personally, I'd like to know more about local businesses that are opening, so I can see if I can support them, if they need my support." - Frederica resident, Black male, 30s

"I kind of stopped watching the news altogether at the beginning of the pandemic. It was just too much." - Sussex County educator, Black female, 30s

"If there were more access to local news, I feel like it would decrease a lot of the statistics around here... The positive things that a lot of these organizations and nonprofits are doing are not being recognized, and it's so difficult to have to hunt for that information." - Seaford, Black female, 30s

"I want to see news that informs and empowers people, period. If there's news that is relevant to my area, I want to know how it could help grow, empower, inform those around us... In no way is that murder/kill/death news empowering to me... Let's say that the news is putting out that a new Amazon Fulfillment Center is being made. That's facts. The

empowerment is, what are you going to then do with that knowledge? How does that affect that community? That means that there's most likely going to be jobs. So, if a person lives in that area and didn't know that Amazon was coming in there, they now know that it's big, it's going to bring jobs, it's going to affect the community. What can I do to prepare myself to – maybe if I'm down and out – to put myself out for a job? Maybe I start learning people, or maybe I can get into construction, or maybe that bit of information can empower me to stand up and do something in my community.” - Dover, Black male, 30s

“We can talk about all the challenges and the problems, but let's also talk about potential solutions to that as well.” - Smyrna, Black male, 40s

**Delawareans feel disconnected and disengaged from local news teams and want to know the people covering their communities.**

“I don't even know who's covering my community.” - Sussex County, white female, 60s

“I would like to gain more access on being able to better be in contact with state representatives and local news stations, because I've tried to contact WBOC or 47ABC, and there's not really direct numbers to reach them. There's contact forms that you can do online or what have you. And the likeliness of getting a call back when you're trying to have them for an event is little to none.” - Seaford, Black female, 30s

“Sometimes I think that it's set up to be discouraging where you have to go through hoops, loops, skips, and hops. Trying to reach a local politician or trying to reach the local news station, it's like trying to get through to Verizon. Sometimes it can be so discouraging that you just give up.” - Magnolia, Black female, 60s

“The one reporter I know is Dan Cook [photojournalist for the Cape Gazette], because he's at the games. You see him with his camera, you see him in person. He goes out of his way to introduce himself to families. You know him because he makes himself a person and wants to be part of the community.” - Bridgeville, Black male, 40s

“Mike McClure from Laurel (Star), he's come out and interviewed and I've dealt with him a lot. Mike does a great job. He delivers the newspapers to us at the office. And if there's something that features our (organization) that I've either pitched to him or sent to him that he runs, he'll ask good questions. He does a phenomenal job.” - Georgetown, white male, 30s

**Delawareans face challenges when attempting to find information about resources to help them meet their needs.**

- **Delawareans say they struggle to get information about support available from both nonprofit organizations and government agencies.**
- **Many low-income residents rely on Delaware 2-1-1 for information about resources. Data suggests Kent and Sussex County residents may need more support through the call center.**

“I didn't know so many opportunities was afforded to us because of the Food Bank... And then when I found out through word of mouth that it was a (culinary) school, that's when I applied... Who's looking for the small programs, who's looking for the small business association that have grants and monies and things? I would have never known that this stuff even existed if I wasn't into it... I mean, who knows that I can get help starting a business. I didn't even know Launcher exists. How do we get (the information) out?” - Seaford, Black female, 40s

“I feel like I am pretty savvy about who to ask and how to find answers, but even still it seems hard to find answers about how to connect with support networks. The areas I have looked for such support lately are around health and housing.” - Text survey response, Wilmington

“They don't know that there's great employment or educational opportunity because no media is telling them that, so they can't better themselves. So if you can't better yourself in, all you can do is be pushed aside.” - Wilmington, Black female, 60s

According to the Outlier Media report we commissioned, which analyzed information needs and resources via text message survey and 2-1-1 data:

“The information gap that stands out to us is the large number of 2-1-1 requests for all manner of assistance in Kent and Sussex Counties. This is unusual, and we suggest finding out why the needs in these counties deviate from known categories...

We collected and reviewed Delaware 2-1-1 call data for the past year from 2-1-1 Counts. The service took 58,907 requests over the past year, 35,202 of which were phone requests...

The top requests statewide were utility and housing, with utility requests just slightly above housing.

Sussex County had the fewest number of requests, at 7,062. Requests for help with housing, utilities, and "other" requests accounted for about one-quarter of requests each...

In Kent County, there were only 8,327 requests, and the top area of need was housing, which accounted for about one-third of all requests. This was followed by 'other' at more than a quarter of requests.

The high number of 'other' results is unusual in our experience and may indicate that low-income residents face a variety of information gaps."

## Coverage by Geographic Region

### STATEWIDE

**DelawareOnline/The News Journal ostensibly is a statewide outlet, but residents outside New Castle County say that it does not cover their communities and is not easy to get.**

"The News Journal is a great, great media source when it comes to information on what's happening in upstate, wonderful. I don't think downstate Delaware gets enough coverage in The News Journal. And it's unfortunate because you think of The News Journal as the state paper." - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"Almost every time I send a press release or a story to the Cape Gazette and Delaware State News, they run it. I haven't heard back from The News Journal probably in the full year that I've done this role. I think they've run one story that they reached out to me about." - Sussex County school employee

"We have stopped getting it. We couldn't get it delivered here in a regular, normal manner. They just were... very much involved north of the canal, and they did not keep up with a good amount of news from this area." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 70s

"In the last four or five years, it's mostly USA Today. There isn't enough local news in The News Journal anymore, except for maybe crime. Crime seems to be covered pretty good. Fires and crime get a lot of play in The News Journal." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"The News Journal doesn't even know Sussex County's here, unless it's controversial news or something bad. Then they will sensationalize that." - Georgetown, white female, 60s

"We were a subscriber up until about two years ago and the guy just couldn't get it delivered to my house before I left in the morning. If you can't just deliver the paper for me before eight, I don't need it. It's too late... They don't know there's life below the canal only when they want to get into our business. Generally it doesn't matter if it's sports, school related, other stuff, you rarely see them focus anything on the largest-growing portion of the state. It's a predominantly New Castle-Wilmington kind of newspaper." - Sussex County, white female, 60s

**Notably, only a few Delawareans mentioned WDEL, WDDE (Delaware Public Media) and Delaware Live, which also are statewide outlets. Almost all comments were to say that those entities have significant limitations.**

- **Some expressed concerns about difficulty accessing WDDE and its limited capacity.**
- **Some expressed concerns about the owners of Delaware Live having a particularly strong political agenda. (One co-owner is a major political donor and the other is a current State Representative.)**

"I listen to public radio. Now, I can't get WDDE down here unless I stream it. ... I don't know, maybe there's a way to get a public radio station in Dover that can be heard in Bethany Beach? I don't know, call me crazy! The news, it's gotta get down here." - Lewes, white female, 70s

"WDDE (Delaware Public Media)... they do a pretty good job, but it's not comprehensive at all. They don't cover, you know, the obits, the sports, the government. They're doing, like, one-off stories." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"I think the local NPR station in Dover (WDDE/Delaware Public Media) does an adequate job for arts and entertainment, but not really a good job in reporting politics and what's going on in the state, plus they tend to repeat the same stories in the morning and the evening." - Lewes, white male, 60s

"At first (Milford Live was) getting traction, they were getting a lot of credibility. But most recently, the coverage has been very limited, and they've partnered or been absorbed by a statewide newspaper called Delaware Live, and their take on certain issues is very partisan. One of the owners of the newspaper is a state representative, so it kind of feels like someone who's covering and providing information shouldn't be also the person representing the community." - Milford, Hispanic male, 20s

"There's something called First State Update and there's... Milford Live. I just see those new online 'news sites' – I'm using air quotes here – they just come out immediately as biased, even when you read the headlines. I think it's divisive." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 40s

## **NEW CASTLE COUNTY**

**There is a general perception that DelawareOnline/The News Journal covers New Castle County, but Delawaerans say, in practice, it covers the county north of the canal, leaving southern New Castle County without a news source. This has worsened since DelawareOnline/The News Journal absorbed the Middletown Transcript.**

"I've struggled to find more localized news. I subscribe to DelawareOnline. I've customized my settings so that I'm getting daily kind of headlines each day, and even ask for stuff specifically for Middletown. When I get the special for Middletown, it seems to be just a watered down version of the other subscription that I also get, so I never really see anything specific to the area where I live." - Middletown, Black male, 30s

"I just found that a lot of the stories in (the Middletown Transcript) didn't cater to what was going to enrich me. I learned a lot about those homes that are protected through them being historic sites and all... Not as informative around things that would help me to better understand what school I should choose for my kid, or if there was some dangerous ring going around where people are going in and out of neighborhoods and we need to be on the lookout for something." - Middletown-area, Black female, 40s

## **SOUTHERN DELAWARE (Below the C&D Canal)**

**Southern Delaware lacks adequate news and information overall.**

"It's Virginia, it's Maryland, it's Wilmington. We don't have that representation, whether that's a lack of journalists out there, I don't know, but it is a little taxing to try to find that information." - Ellendale, white female, 50s

"I don't think that Milford gets a lot of attention in the news. I don't think lower Delaware really gets a lot of attention in the news." - Milford, white male, 30s

**TV is important for local news in southern Delaware, particularly Sussex County.**

**Residents say:**

- **It provides surface-level information.**
- **Coverage has diminished in recent years as stations merged.**
- **It has less reach and coverage in Kent.**

"I grew up watching WBOC. Growing up in Kent County, it's the station. My parents still watch – the hosts are the hosts from my childhood. When I want local news... I tend to watch WBOC, sometimes I watch WRDE... and there are often a lot of community stories." - Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"WBOC was probably a nice, general sort of news broadcast that gives you information that you would need [on] anything that is serious or important. I felt like they were pretty reliable in providing you with that." - Western Sussex County, Black male, 20s

"TV coverage in particular has radically changed in the time that I've been down here. Draper Media has really consolidated and taken, has bought a wide swath of broadcast media. ... That's had an impact on things." - Milton, white male, 60s

"If I look at a newspaper article, it might take me a half an hour if it's a long, in-depth article, to read it. Well, the news that you see on TV... the whole broadcast may be a half an hour, so they're not gonna devote it to just one story." - Milton, white male, 60s

## **SUSSEX COUNTY**

### **Sussex County lacks adequate news and information overall.**

"We do not have a Sussex County newspaper per se that's designed for Sussex County, the Harbesons, the Hardscrapples, the Seafords, and all that." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 70s

"Journalism in Delaware has really diminished over the last, I'm gonna say, 10 to 15 years. It's more difficult for local writers to give any kind of attention or have the ability to really discuss things that happen in Sussex County. We often feel disengaged. The State News, The News Journal... they don't really care about what goes on in Sussex, only if it makes a good headline." - Sussex County, white female, 60s

"We have no clue on the east side of the county, often, what's going on the west side of the county, even though our issues resonate. There are many issues that resonate across the whole county and very difficult to get what I would call a systemic grasp of the news in Delaware." - Lewes, white female, 60s

**Eastern Sussex County has regions with almost no coverage.**

- **The twice-weekly Cape Gazette is the flagship source for its coverage area, which is limited to the boundaries of the Cape Henlopen School District.**
- **The weekly Coastal Point provides limited coverage in Bethany Beach, South Bethany, Fenwick Island, Ocean View, Millville, Dagsboro, Frankford, Selbyville, Millsboro, Long Neck and Georgetown areas**
- **Other areas have no coverage.**

“(A former reporter who left in 2020, was) the last one that wrote anything (about Harbeson). We're just floating along here now and things have been quiet. ... We're in a protective mode, meaning that we are very satisfied with the way things are right now. And so no news is good news. ... I can't think of anything newsworthy really. I think it's a quiet little town doing well by itself. I have no idea the ramifications of the new developments.” - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 70s

**The majority of Western Sussex has no flagship news source.**

- **Seaford and Laurel have some coverage by the Morning Star publications.**
- **The new Delaware Independent is attempting to fill the gaps in Western Sussex, but has very limited capacity.**
- **There is no daily news source.**

“I'm sure there are people in Seaford who would like to know details. I'm sure there are people in Millsboro who would like to know what's going on. ... You might see an article about these towns or something going on in these towns, but it is not focused on those towns.” - Milton, white male, 60s

“Need daily information in western Sussex County about events, weather, traffic conditions and planned road maintenance. Weekly publications are not timely and insufficient.” -Text survey response, Blades

“We need real investigative reporting and deeper dives. This new publication that's popped up, the Delaware Independent, I think that could be a model for the kind of thing I'm talking about. They just did a two-part piece on the biogas issues where everybody's expressing opinions, but nobody understood the issue. I thought he did a pretty decent job of laying out, in two articles, what the dynamics are, what the issues are, why the opinions varied and we're all over the map and the kinds of things you need to think about. I just stood back because it's one of the first times I've seen anything that in depth,

that you really walked away from and said, the next time I hear people talking about this I'm going to just say, 'Read this.'" - Lewes, white female, 60s

## **KENT COUNTY**

**Kent County has very limited coverage.**

- **The Delaware State News has limited capacity.**
- **The TV stations Sussex County relies on have limited reach and interest in Kent.**

"Kent County – there's this giant hole, which I think is unfortunate. There's, what, 70,000 people in the Dover Metro area, 180,000 people in Kent County. Occasionally, you have someone from the TV stations, but not much. It's really the State News. And since the Dover Post was consumed by Gannett as well... there's so much that I think goes untold." - Kent County, white male, 40s

"I do think Kent is missing good coverage. We don't have a Cape Gazette. ... The State News, I think they try to do a really good job for what they do. They are much more interested in advertising. Then all of these (publications such as) the Dover Posts – the last one I got was like four pages. A lot of these print things are on life support, basically." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"Kent gets, like, zero coverage whatsoever. I rarely hear about Kent in the news, but I hear about the Sussex County Council. I hear about New Castle County Council... I may see one article about the Levy Court a year, if that." - Wilmington, Black male, 20s

"94.7 [WDSD], which is, I recognize, a country station, but they do talk a lot about what's going on in Kent County. And usually, they do have a slight focus on Sussex County. When they talk about local news, it's like, 'Oh there's the bus delays and stuff. There's the weather and whatnot. But also guess what? Guess we're getting some new things at the Delaware State Fair. So, if you're going down there, be careful there's construction.' I find that that can be very helpful sometimes." - Dover, Asian female, 20s

## Coverage by Demographic Communities

**Black Delawareans feel negatively represented and/or underrepresented by local outlets and social media neighborhood groups.**

- **Delawareans of all races say that Black people are negatively represented in local media outlets, particularly related to violent crime.**
- **Delawareans of all races say that people of color are not adequately represented in the news media, although many recognize newsrooms' efforts to diversify staff and deepen coverage.**
- **Some Black Delawareans report experiencing racism through the social media platforms they use for local news and information, including suppression of and negative responses to information about subjects and resources that may be perceived as targeting Black people (e.g., soul food trucks, BLM events).**
- **Delaware's Haitian community lacks voice or representation in local news and information resources.**

"It's lacking context. I don't think it's accurate. I don't think it tells the whole story and I think it's written and biased, very biased, especially if it's coming from DelawareOnline or The News Journal. They're racist. They're mad racist. It's very racially biased. And... the way they write it, it's not in depth for Delaware news. It's not in depth at all. Like if you listen to NPR or you listen to WHY?...they give context and an understanding of, like, there's more factors that contribute to what they're experiencing. Whereas when you read Delaware News (Journal), it'd be like, 'Yeah, poor people have poor people's problems like crime, cause they're bad.' It's not like, 'This family is facing homelessness' or 'The city has done this thing in terms of gentrification making it more expensive to live in the city.'" - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"I haven't really yet heard or read up on much news that talks either about people that... I could relate to. If anything, maybe a friend... the news has talked about that had unfortunately got shot and killed." - Western Sussex County, Black male, 20s

"Besides groups that cater to the Millennials, there is a total absence of the Black voice in Sussex County. They are not in the newspapers, they are not in the board rooms, they are not in the restaurants, they are not in the school systems. If you want to know what's

going on in the Black community, you'll have to become Black and move in with a Black family because there is no other way to find out." - Seaford, Black female, 30s

"Start diversifying your journalists. If you have young people who have never experienced half of what is happening in the community in the lives of certain demographics of people, trying to report... It's called culture intelligence." - Wilmington, Black female, 60s

"The Delaware Way is like, 'We don't want to talk about things that feel like they could be a division or things that could be controversial.' That leads to a lot of stories that impact communities of color not really being told in the local newspapers." - Wilmington, white male, 40s

"The papers are doing their best, but the city of Dover's population is, what, roughly half African American, and I don't see a lot of stories geared necessarily completely toward that community. The same could probably be said of the LGBTQ community." - Kent County, white male, 40s

"I'm raising three Black children... and I often see Black people painted in a light that is not favorable. It is something that has been ongoing, I'm sure, since news became news in this country. But when I look around the circles that I move in from church to social to work, if what I saw on the news was a true reflection of who we were as Black people, then I should see that around all my circles, and I don't." - Middletown-area, Black female, 40s

"I just think that there's unfair representation or disproportionate bias... against people of color, and that's what I don't care to read or to see. It would help (to have) more reporters of color, people that had just different voices, people with different experiences that come from different walks of life that can kind of provide that other side." - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"(Media outlets) are making – you can very clearly tell – diverse hires, hires that are representative of our community. Even the fact that WBOC and our other local news affiliates even have Spanish channels is a step in the right direction. I don't know that they're talking about issues though. We have representation (but) we're not locally reporting on social issues as much." - Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"The European American population, when they hear an opinion different from theirs (on social media group), especially if it seems to be negative, they tend to push back with,

'Why are you guys crying and complaining all the time?' As a Black person... you actually don't even know all the times I've wanted to complain or say something, or just state an opinion or talk about things that are important to us. ... There are a lot of racial slurs, a lot of individuals who are not looking for any diverse thought and any diverse people." - Middletown-area, Black female, 40s

"I don't say anything on the (Facebook neighborhood) page, because I don't want to have any problems with my neighbors." - Middletown, Black male, 40s

"There's a large Haitian population here. As a Haitian person who grew up here in Sussex County and navigated my way through Delaware, there isn't a voice for the Haitian community... We love being in Delaware, and we must be at the table also." - Seaford, Black/Haitian female, 30s

**Delaware has strong Hispanic media, but many Spanish-speaking Delawareans still face issues of access and feel underrepresented by mainstream outlets.**

- **Delawareans of all races expressed concerns that coverage of Hispanic communities is insulated, leaving non-Hispanics with little exposure to information about Delaware's Spanish-speaking communities.**

"If I want to hear what's happening in the Latino community, (I read) the Spanish newspapers, Hoy en Delaware and El Tiempo Hispano. Hoy en Delaware, he is pretty good because if something happens in the Latino community, you hear about it in Hoy en Delaware sooner than you will hear in The News Journal." – Wilmington, Hispanic female, 70s

"We have some great journalists, like Jose Somalo (Hoy en Delaware), they're doing great work... But it's not a consistent source of the information we need as the English community (has)." - Rehoboth Beach, Hispanic male, 50s

"With having 20-some percent Latino (in the area) – and I don't know the percentage of those that actually read, write and speak English... so I'm not sure how accurate or timely or appropriate the information they get is. A lot of my district has problems with broadband, and so the assumption, 'Oh, you can find that online,' but 'No, I can't.' There's also the socioeconomic divide. Last time I bought a phone, it was \$800... so (lower-income people) may not have that access." - Elected official, Sussex County

"I'd like to see more about the Hispanic community. The community is growing exponentially. I think it's valuable when people that are not part of the Hispanic community, for instance, really hear their stories and ... the struggles that people face and why people come to this country, I just think it would really unite all the communities. There's a lot of common ground, and I don't think that people are aware of that." - Lewes, Hispanic female, 30s

"In Sussex, (there's a) a radio program that is in Spanish that features different folks who are all here in Delaware talking about a different issue every week. It's been really great that their stories are getting out, but it also hits me that it's on Spanish-language radio, and so it's really then become insular to just the Hispanic community. Then the greater Sussex or Delaware community doesn't hear those stories either, and I think that that's also sort of another parallel to what we're seeing: Oftentimes, things are well known in communities of color through official or unofficial news, but then getting known in other places within the community is a lot harder." - Wilmington, white male, 40s

**Some Delawareans say the LGBTQ+ community is not covered effectively by mainstream local media.**

"Channel 47 down here did a interesting feature on the trans community a couple of months ago, but a lot of those stories or are not told... particularly because some of the biggest fights to gain equality, at least for the gay community, came years ago." - Kent County, white male, 40s

"I (am) a Black male who identifies as gay. I don't see our representation anywhere. It's not so much solely on the media, but... a lot of the LGBT community is still very Eurocentric and WASPy. But I believe it's a job (of) the journalism industry to dig deeper, to investigate and uncover the truth of what actually is." - Wilmington, Black male, 30s

## **Coverage by Issue/Subject Matter**

Delawareans said they need more local information about a wide range of specific issues. These issues were discussed repeatedly and across multiple focus groups, suggesting that there is a significant demand for and an overall lack of coverage.

Delawareans indicated that they need both 1) information to help them navigate these issues in their daily lives and 2) journalism that will help communities understand the issues.

## **EDUCATION**

Delawareans throughout the state said education is particularly poorly covered in Delaware. Delawareans statewide said they need better information about navigating school choice and options, including magnet and charter schools. They also said the state needs more coverage of students' accomplishments and challenges as well as in-depth reporting on education issues.

(At the time of publication, DelawareOnline/The News Journal currently had not filled its education reporter role. Delaware State News and the Cape Gazette had reporters doing some education coverage in specific school districts. The Newark Post has a good reputation for covering the Christina School District. Delaware Live recently hired an education reporter.)

"There's just not enough information going out to help inform the public... How is that (information) getting to the families of what's happening in our schools? What the needs of the schools are? The good things, the struggles, all of that? And what it really takes for it to change?" - Sussex County school employee

"I read the Newark Post if I want more localized news, especially if I want to hear things about the Christina School District. They cover them very well.... The unofficial drum beat is the best place to get local news." - Newark school employee

"It's a huge diversity and inclusion issue. ... For the choice thing, I just started stalking the website to find out when it was going to happen, but that should be something that's just very clearly posted somewhere. Like, 'Hey, choice opens up this date and it's going to close this date. Here's the available schools.' But you have to go searching and find that information for yourself if you have interest. And if a parent just unfortunately doesn't have the time for that, their child's going to be left behind, because it's almost hidden

information that the parent has to spend some time going to find.” - Middletown resident, Black female, 30s

“You keep hearing nationally about the schools. It’d be nice to come to have some information about what’s going on in the schools.” - Kent County resident, white female, 60s

“I wish I had a better handle on what exactly is going on with public schools.. teacher, administrator and safety officer shortages, discipline issues with kids who took backward steps this past two years with covid challenges, and how to best support my kids when it comes to missing social interactions and activities with friends - how to have conversations about their mental health.” - Text survey response, Wilmington

## **DEVELOPMENT/LAND USE**

People throughout the state indicated serious concerns and questions about development and land use issues. This was a particularly prevalent theme in eastern Sussex County and in MOT.

Delawareans statewide said they want more information about what is being built in various places, including practical information such as what businesses new buildings will house, when they’re opening and whether job opportunities will be available.

Delawareans statewide also want information about proposed development early enough for them to influence final decisions, and they want to know who is making the decisions and how they can contact them. They also want more information about development-related infrastructure issues, such as studies of impact on transportation, utilities, environment, public education, etc.

Delawareans statewide expressed a sense of frustration about lack of access to this type of information, and a sense that public officials are intentionally keeping them in the dark for the benefit of developers and realtors. They also expressed skepticism about local media outlets’ ability to cover these issues objectively because of their advertising relationships with developers and realtors.

This is particularly the case in Sussex County, where many residents expressed extreme fear of the environmental impact of development.

"I'm also interested in more transparency related to land use and development. I live close to the Incyte property and have many worries about the future of our natural resources, roadways, community." - Text survey response, Wilmington

"Right now there's a rush of people who want to live here (Sussex County) and I can't understand why there's no attempt at all to look at it as to the effect it's going to have in the future. How can a hotel in Rehoboth get FEMA to change its flood guidelines for an underground garage? Nobody has answered that for me yet. So I get very frustrated, which means that I have to go outside Delaware sometimes to hear what's going on." - Lewes, white female, 70s

"My question is, how do our elected officials make their decisions? Because it just seems like everyone I talk to is saying, 'This is crazy!' The unchecked development, the lack of infrastructure, the lack of affordable housing, these things that are really so obvious to your average person walking around. The lack of access, the lack of equity, the lack of opportunities, the segregation between communities, the injustices that go on between the Black, white, and Latino communities." - Lewes, white female, 60s

"I'd also like to know what motivates people. In Sussex County, when the County Council or the planning and zoning commission comes up with an idea to modify an old ordinance, it's like, okay, what? Who's behind that? Unless you've come up with it on your own – which most times isn't the case – who is behind this? Is it a developer? Is it a landowner? Who's really behind this?" - Milton, white male, 60s

"Traffic and development, they go hand in hand. We all know that the roads in Sussex County cannot handle the population boom. I have no idea of a remedy. I wish I could tell you that there's a remedy out there. Being a landowner, I don't want any government to have the authority to tell me whether I can sell it or whether I can develop it or whatever. If I own it, I have the right to do that, to do whatever I want to with it. On the other side, it's just unreal as far as what's gonna happen in the next five to 10 years." - Sussex County, white male, 70s

"If the bridge is flooded and a storm is coming, how are we going to get out? This is a matter of survival." - Lewes, Asian female, 60s

## **INFLATION AND SUPPLY CHAIN**

Many Delawareans expressed anxiety and confusion about inflation and supply chain issues. This theme was particularly prevalent in the text message survey responses, in which we heard more overall concerns about economic security and meeting basic needs (food, housing, utilities).

People said they need more information about how to manage financial challenges related to inflation and supply chain issues, and they also indicated a need for more information about why it's happening.

"Another challenge that I can see is trying to purchase groceries due to the fact that everytime (sic) I get off of work (which is at 3PM) there is never much left in groceries stores. I wish that there was more information about these shortages available. I mean yes I know we have change shortages but food shortages aren't really talked about! I also worry about being able to afford groceries with the prices going up constantly." - Text survey response, male, Bridgeville

"As far as a challenge, I would say dealing with inflation. Especially at the grocery store. Prices seem to rise more each week." - Text survey response, male, Newark

## **HOUSING**

Delawareans throughout the state said they need access to more information about housing, including affordable housing and emergency housing options, as well as in-depth reporting on housing affordability and related issues. This theme was particularly prevalent in southern Delaware.

"There is no affordable housing in Sussex County. I'm curious as to why it doesn't exist. I'm curious as to why there's no transportation, though we expect people to get jobs. I'm curious as to why, rather than government making major decisions for the residents, we allow people moving in to make decisions, who come in from other places and say, 'This is what I want. I don't want affordable housing next door to my house. I don't want even a workforce housing next door to my house. I don't want shelters next to my house.' And so we have a county government, a city government, or councils and state who listen totally to constituents. But really, I'm curious as to why the general needs of the population in terms of growth are not considered." - Lewes, Black female, 60s

“Homelessness is a big issue that isn't getting enough coverage. In Dover at one point they wanted to build another shelter or a bigger shelter or something like that.” - Dover, Black female, 30s

## **REPRESENTATION AND DIVERSITY**

Delawareans said they want to know about their neighbors and want to see themselves and the diversity of their communities reflected accurately.

“The community needs to see positive stories, success stories so people can be inspired... The outlet’s business model is based on clicks and digital presence. Because they need to increase clicks, negative news is always highlighted. As a result, the news perpetuates less than self-worth in my community.” - Wilmington, Black male, 40s

## **VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

Some Delawareans complained there is too much coverage of crime while others said there isn’t enough. Those saying there’s too much frequently pointed to excessive coverage of crime involving Black people and highlighting Black perpetrators. Those asking for more crime coverage said they specifically need information to help keep themselves and their families safe and address the larger issues at a public-policy level.

“(People need) to be informed of what the crime rates are and things that they should look out for and where they can go to pull this information up, especially if they're moving into the area and they want to know exactly what they're getting themselves into. But there's not a place that can give them a decent idea of what to expect in the area... You know, there might be vehicle thefts or... houses that are burglarized or something along those lines. I feel like that's information that should be easily obtained.” - Western Sussex County, Black male, 20s

“Let's figure out as a community, what can we do to eliminate this or to alleviate it or to address it? What needs to happen? Those kind of communications aren't happening. And I feel like more of that should be perhaps hopefully a role of media to be more proactive in doing that since a lot of people will get that information from those sources. So let's be the proponents to bring the sides together, to bring the community together, to address it.” - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

"People need to understand more about what their government's doing. It's one thing to know how many killings there were. It's another thing to report about what the city is doing about the killings. What progress are we making? Are we making progress or not? If not, why? And, and then, if we understand why, then what are we gonna do next? How are we gonna deal with this issue?" - Wilmington, Black male, 70s

### **How people fill the gaps**

- **Most Delawareans get their news and information by word of mouth or from social media groups (e.g., Facebook neighborhood groups, Next Door, Neighbors app by Ring). They have concerns about the accuracy of the information.**

"Even older people rely on social media. I get most of my news from social media or word of mouth." - Wilmington, Black male, 20s

"If I don't feel like I'm getting what I want, I get on the phone to the horse's mouth and find out – if it's contacting the representative from the paper or WBOC or wherever, I will do it." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 70s

"It's more or less word of mouth, which is kind of unreliable. People make their own assumptions and put their opinion... which makes what they're talking about or what information they're providing almost completely inaccurate." - Western Sussex County, Black male, 20s

"The new retail area that's being built now, I've heard four different stories about what's going to be the anchor store there. Nobody really knows the true information. That is one of the things that I also am very concerned about when someone tells me something, they direct me to a place to go get information, or they send me information. Do I really know it's vetted or it's true? That's always a concern for me." - Middletown-area, Black female, 60s

"We don't have a neighborhood Facebook page. My neighborhood is actually just two streets, so really I use the Ring (app) as well. Flyers sometimes are put on our door with local events. But other than the app, if it wasn't for that, I would never know what was really happening now that my children are young adults and out of school age." - New Castle, Black female, 40s

"The Cape Gazette is pretty much the only local paper that's out there on a regular basis. The local stuff is – I know this is very unreliable – but I really hear it through the grapevine." - Lewes, white female, 60s

"I think journalism can help level-set people's understanding of the issues, what's fact and fiction. NextDoor is often wrong. People rely on this crowdsourcing for information that sends them off on wild goose chases and that not only causes friction, but it wastes resources." - Lewes, white female, 60s

- **Delawareans also rely on getting information from agenda-driven organizations, such as political parties, advocacy groups, religious organizations and government officials. They worry about the accuracy and bias of the information they get from these sources, but they feel they have nowhere else to turn.**

"We don't have a lot of avenues for news. We don't get a lot of the facts. You should be informed, but we have so much conflicting information. Where do we find the truth, the facts without all of the opinions?" - Ellendale, white female, 50s

"I get so much news from social media sources and some of it's from people who are involved, who have their own opinions when they present it. It's because so many of the news organizations aren't as robust as they used to be." - Newark, white female, 50s

"We have a lot of grassroots groups that are growing out of, coming out of nowhere and pulling together and trying to figure out how they might influence policy or affect change, and they're often wrong about their facts... I don't know that journalism could provide all of those answers, but it certainly could provide more than it has been doing." - Lewes, white female, 60s

"People email me and say, 'Hey, look out for this'... or a chamber of commerce gives legislative news, but that's often biased as to their position on that. There isn't an unbiased source for governmental news." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"The trust end of it makes you concerned. You've got to know who you're dealing with, and that's why I like to go to the horse's mouth. ... Most of the time, what I'm finding is if it's by a professional organization, they let you know what they want you to know, and it may not be the whole picture." - Sussex County, white male, 70s

"As far as local goes, I used to get the Dover Post and then they stopped delivering to my area. So now I'm pretty connected with a lot of online newsletters... Central Chamber of Commerce, legislative newsletters, State Chamber of Commerce emails, meetup groups and also I'm at a lot of meetings. So that's how I'm getting most of my state news." - Kent County, white female, 60s

"I don't get the Dover Post anymore. They stopped delivering it to us. After a while I stopped reading it, because it was just full of advertisements, not information anymore like it used to have." - Dover, Black female, 40s

"We have advocates on issues sort of taking that role and telling their own constituencies what's happening. So of course that's painted with the brush of the issue advocate. Without watchdog journalism happening in and around political issues, both in city councils and county councils, as well as in Legislative Hall, a lot is getting missed and a lot happens that has a lot of nuance. And I think that a lot of that is missed by people who aren't elbow deep in that work all the time." - Wilmington, white female, 40s

## What Delawareans want from local news and information

### **Delawareans want greater transparency and scrutiny of state and local government.**

"I actually think that the fact that we don't have the well-rounded legacy media that other places have is actually a disadvantage when it comes to holding us accountable and holding our feet to the fire when scandal occurs. Because oftentimes when scandal occurs, it's the repetition of stories that pushes for action." - Elected official, Wilmington

"You mean like Kathy McGuinness? You mean like Gerald Brady? You mean like Darius Brown? You tell me how likely it is that elected officials are getting away with stuff. Look around." - Wilmington, white female, 40s

"There's so much money out there that's come into the state for a variety of things, and there's no watchdog in journalism for that." - Elected official, Sussex County

"The one role journalism has that can't get lost is watchdog. That's not to say negative, just watchdog... If you're a Millennial, you wouldn't even know this existed in the state of Delaware, but we used to have a very robust network of community-based newspapers. They did not cover every single community, but the communities they did cover, that was the place where you could find the story about (for example) the bribery that was going on in the road project." - Claymont, white male, 50s

"I like the investigative reporter, because when you see them in the big cities, it's almost as if they're advocating for the community." - Newark, Black male, 50s

### **Delawareans want information to enable them to influence public policy decisions.**

- **Unless they have personal relationships, it's difficult for Delawareans to determine what government officials to contact and how to reach them when they have a concern. Delawareans want to know who is making decisions about public policy issues that affect their communities – development/land use, school feeder patterns, taxes, public safety, environmental regulation, public infrastructure, business/commerce – and how to contact those decision-makers.**

"Politics is one of the single most important things of our lives because it literally dictates everything we do... So, when I see new legislation that comes out, I want to

know about it. Right now, the only reason why I know as much as I do is because I actually talk to the legislators that are making these laws. If I was anyone else that wasn't involved and done what I've done in years, where do you get that information from?" - Dover, Black male, 30s

- **Delawareans want to know about changes being considered *before* it's too late to influence the decisions.**

"By the time it shows up in the news, it's too late for me. It's kinda like looking at the stock market reports, you know, it's too late to buy that." - Wilmington, Black male, 70s

"A lot of times, media would only focus on pieces of legislation if it came out of committee. But a lot of news outlets are starting to pick up now is when legislation is introduced ... I'd like to see more of that because, when it gets out of committee, it's kind of over. I would like to see more of that, more ideas of things that could be, not just things that are definitely going to happen." - Elected official, Sussex County

"I would like to see live coverage or somehow better, more coverage of what's going on at Legislative Hall and committee meetings. Often, it seems that we hear about things after the fact and this and that happened in this committee." - Dover, white female, 60s

- **Delawareans want deeper and more nuanced information to foster public debate, advance better solutions to community issues and reduce polarization.**

"I would kill for good investigative reporting. There are so many ways of finding out news informally and not knowing the ups or downs, the truth of it or the not-truth of it. And then the dangling questions, always. A lot of articles we read begged the question that should have been asked next, but never was." - Lewes, white female, 60s

"I want more investigative reporting. I want stories and research I cannot do myself. I can't be at all the places. You can't be at all of these community meetings. You can't be at every city council meeting, but I would want to know what is happening. I think of things as simple as how do you know how clean different

restaurants are and if there was scandal that was happening, would I know about that?" - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

"[I want] better (researched, unbiased, in depth) local news reporting in Sussex County on issues facing people here. Investigative reporting that uncovers stories waiting/needing to be told. A way to hold policymakers accountable. A way to give a voice to citizen concerns. The Cape Gazette does a good job on the east side. WSCL FM does a good job with county news." - Text survey response, Greenwood

"I've been waiting for a deeper dive conversation in the local news, local meaning statewide, about teenage suicide. I personally know of two teenagers who have taken their own lives... Is anyone going to cover this? Is this going to become a story that offers some background, some perspectives, some resources?" - Wilmington, white female, 40s

"I think when we had decent journalists (at The News Journal) that were engaged in some of these issues, there was more information. We were doing a better job then... That was, what, five years ago we had that kinda coverage, that kind of capability and talent at The News Journal." - Wilmington, Black male, 70s

"At one point, there was debate. It was astonishingly informative. I don't see that anymore. The debate would be helpful in the ultimate problem, which is the tribalism." - Lewes, white male, 70s

"We are so divided everywhere, at every level at this point, in our schools, in our families, everywhere, nationally, in our counties. Is it possible (for journalists) to set up some kind of online forum... saying these are the questions that the community has, and these are the experts in those areas and this is where they are on it. I was thinking that it could bring us together... If we keep being so polarized, we're not going to solve anything." - Rehoboth Beach, white female, 50s

**Delawareans want better access to public information, including improvements to access information online and greater responsiveness to FOIA and other information requests.**

"Part of the problem is that some of this information that you force us to ask for through a FOIA should be online... I don't always have access to information. There's information that DNREC won't share with people. I'm sure that's the case with other agencies. The

latest big, controversial issue is access to the law enforcement disciplinary records. The public has no access to that... And sometimes, unfortunately, information's not available because they either don't collect it or they don't collect it in the form that I'm looking for." - Sussex County, white male, 60s

"Delaware has not reinvested in data infrastructure for, like, 30 years. They're using 8-bit computer systems to be able to process transactional data and stuff like that. There was even a bill in the General Assembly last year that would've even further limited the amount of times you could ask the government for information. Luckily, a sponsor pulled that bill." - Wilmington, white male, 30s

**Delawareans want more information about resources available to help them thrive and engage in the community.**

- **Delawareans are frustrated by limited dissemination of information about publicly available resources, including job training opportunities, small business development support, emergency services.**

"(Better local journalism would mean) people would have a reliable source where they could go, there would be a better understanding about who does what, how to get answers, how to get help... expand your business, start a business. When people know better, they do better and giving them things they have no other way unless they dig, dig, dig to find out." - Sussex County, white female, 60s

"I think there are so many resources available. I just think that sometimes it's not communicated enough. We have to hunt them down because I think sometimes... they know who they want to provide those resources too, instead of exposing it to everyone, it's kind of selective. And I think sometimes this is the reason why it's not publicized enough or communicated enough." - Magnolia, Black female, 50s

"I didn't know about the DEHAP (Delaware Housing Assistance Program) program that not only helps you with rental assistance, it also helps with down payment money as well as utility resources as well. ...The lady was saying that there are so many dollars just sitting, but people don't know how to apply. They're not provided information. And I feel like the positive things that a lot of these organizations and nonprofits are doing are not being recognized and it's so difficult to have to hunt for that information." - Seaford, Black female, 30s

“What jobs are available to Eastside Wilmington residents that they can reach by bus? Frequent updates on the Mayor's initiative to improve Wilmington neighborhoods?” - Text survey response, Wilmington

“(I wish) that Ocean View town would share plans with other than only those who are directly impacted by construction, restaurant information and especially phone and internet and cable info.” - Text survey response, Ocean View

“I'd want to know which employers and jobs in Delaware or regionally are hiring for remote-only positions. And I'd like to know why some employers are living in the past.” - Text survey response, Wilmington

“I'm always looking for data relative to small businesses, customer acquisition, trends, grants, loans specific to micro and minority businesses.” - Text survey response

“I've learned that a lot of things, when it comes to the town of Middletown, we have to go to the (government of the) town of Middletown to learn those things. Coming here from New York, a resource guide would've been nice. Even if it's online just for a list of the shops that we have, eateries, different schools, how they're ranked... Who does my trash? Do I have an option? Can I use someone else?” - Middletown, Black female, 40s

“There's a lot of places and community resources out there, community organizations that are addressing these issues or addressing these concerns even at their local level, but you don't know about them. And if they don't have the budget to be able to advertise on some of these platforms or the knowledge, you may not necessarily see that unless you're directly connected to them or to someone that is, but that's the problem sometimes.” - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

- **Some Delawareans reported difficulty accessing accurate information about how to vote and often rely on social media for voting information.**

“When they changed our voting places, that was unknown. So we went to go vote at the old spot and they were like, ‘Nope, can't vote here. Go somewhere else to vote.’

I would've thought it would've been on the voter registration card, but the old address where to vote at was on there." - New Castle, Black male, 40s

"I really found the MOT for Change one useful and also the basic MOT Facebook page during recent elections, because that's the only place that I could find out who the candidates were. I didn't even know whether or not we could vote based on where we lived. None of that is something I can find out anywhere other than those pages." - Middletown, Black female, 30s

**Delawareans want to be more connected to and engaged with their communities.**

- **Most Delawareans can meet their basic human needs most of the time, but they are hungry for stronger connection to their local communities. They want information about local events, volunteer opportunities, ways to meet their neighbors and more.**

According to the Outlier Media report, which surveyed Delawareans about what kinds of local news and information they need: "We also ask respondents if there was more information they think they need or that could help them with this challenge, and 48% responded yes. Interestingly, the most common information type people requested was information that would help them build social connections..."

"We had the Sussex Countian and the Sussex Post and we had some other things that were more local and, and... you had a community calendar, you had announcements about births and marriages and deaths and that kind of stuff. And then you got away from that. And when you move away from those accomplishments of kids in school, the athlete of the week, the student of the week, your community is not as engaged." - Sussex County, white female, 60s

"I don't really feel connected to my community. There is no reliable/unbiased, consistent, local news source for western Sussex. Covid has prevented in person interaction, events. Online platforms are contentious." - Text survey respondent, Greenwood

"There's a big community here of volunteers that would like to get more informed about activities, where they can go and be of service." - Dover resident, Hispanic female, 60s (Translated from Spanish by her son)

"Would be nice to have a community newspaper up here that is affordable. We are in Frederica and there isn't much news coverage... We have been here a couple years and do not feel connected to the community at all." - Text survey response, Frederica

"I think sometimes the breakdown in community in terms of unity, in terms of coming together, sometimes has been in part because of the misrepresentation or information that's been in some of your major media. So I think if we saw greater representation, less bias, I think we would start to see more community, more – hopefully – elevated empathy and compassion, more action to bring people together to address some of the needs that we have." - Western Sussex County, Black female, 30s

- **They are particularly concerned that younger generations lack information to help them build social connections to Delaware, and that the disconnection prompts them to leave the state rather than staying and investing here.**

"(Talking about retaining young professionals), that 'well-informed citizen' piece is critical. If you don't know what's going on around you, if you don't know where you're at, if you don't know where your community is going, you won't be there long. So if we can find a way to increase well-informed citizens among younger age groups, it'll pay way more dividends than people realize." - Newark, Black male, 30s

#### **Delawareans want local news and information delivered on their smartphones.**

- **Most Delawareans have smartphones and broadband and want local news and information delivered to them through their phones (notifications, aggregators, apps).**
- **Some watch legacy TV news or listen to radio news, although many watch/listen to YouTube videos or listen to podcasts.**
- **We did hear from many people, especially those 65+, who value print media and network TV.**

"Very brief daily text message would great. An app with notifications. I don't need any more junk email." - Text survey response, Wilmington

“Especially for the young millennials and our age group, you won't find a lot of us turning on the news channel early in the morning how our parents used to do back in the past. We're waking up, we're grabbing our phones, we're checking what was just put posted on a social media app last night... So it's really just us reaching out on our phones and trying to figure out the latest news that way.” - Wilmington, Black female, 30s

“There's a different universe of listeners and viewers... how many people have turned off both the hard copy newspapers as well as TV. So they're getting their news off of their iPhones or their computers and things like that.” - Milton, white male, 60s

**Delawareans want different business models for providing local news and information.**

- **Delawareans pointed to local news and information as infrastructure, similar to utilities or public education.**
- **Many Delawareans said for-profit entities alone cannot meet the community's needs for local news and information.**
- **Some Delawareans do not want to pay individually for news and information, but they're aware that it needs to be paid for.**
- **Many cited high cost and low quality as the reasons they do not subscribe to local media outlets (print or online).**
- **Many people cited a connection between the advertising-driven, for-profit media business and high volume of advertising and sensationalism in content. They also indicated concerns that advertisers influence the nature of news coverage.**

“Years ago, we didn't have electric, and they've electrified the United States. And then during COVID people realized that we need broadband, so now they're giving us broadband. But we need the same thing with information. We need to look at it like this is a utility that people need in their day-to-day life. They need information and a comprehensive way to do it.” - Kent County, white female, 60s

“I just feel like until news companies are not-for-profit, you're going to continue to get similar headlines. They've got bills and expenses, and negative stories tend to get more click bait or just travel better. Like Murder Town USA will always travel more than anything a mayor of the city of Wilmington will ever do.” - Newark, Black male, 30s

“When a reporter's judged on clicks and not on accuracy and content and value, then we're done. It's a huge problem. It's what's causing a lot of the national polarization, on a local level.” - Claymont, white male, 50s

"There is a challenge there from the very beginning when the objective – if they are a private for-profit organization – is that they're looking to make a profit. So it yields a question about, should media companies should be for-profit? ... Because then certainly there's an element that goes almost against what is true journalism. True journalism is about finding the truth. That could be ugly. There could be a lot more bad news out there than good news, or certainly a lot more of bad news that are a lot more relevant. They may be difficult to digest, difficult to understand, but they are the truth. They are not here to entertain you. They are here to paint something that is challenging, not for everybody to enjoy. So shall we water down reality? Shall we give equal space to great stories that are soft and make us think that everything is half and half, half good, half bad? Or shall we tell what's going on? And with this, I'm not negating that there are interesting stories out there that could be inspirational. But the objective of the journalist, I would cast it out if it should be inspiring somebody. For inspiration, I look for somebody else. The journalist, I hope they are doing the rough investigative journalism, bringing data that is just ideally as objective as possible." - Wilmington, Hispanic male, 40s

"We need 21st-century version of what used to be the local news reporter, who said, 'Here's all the latest news here,' ... almost like a digest of hyperlocal news from local organizations." - Milton, white male, 60s

"I have also, in a negative way in the last five years, seen a lot more paid subscriptions for online news, which I think is the wrong direction. I understand from a financial standpoint why, but I think it's the wrong direction just for news in general to go... (Don't put a financial burden in front of them when we're just trying to get them to hear what's going on in their local community." - Milford, white male, 30s

"DelawareOnline – and I don't blame them too much because it's a business – but everything's behind a paywall. That's their right. They have to maintain their business industry. But you know, important information should not be behind a paywall. Feel-good stories, certainly. Op-eds, certainly." - Wilmington, Black male, 30s

"Is there a way for everybody to come together to have like a Legislative Hall pool and an education reporter and an economics reporter? This is a small enough state. There's gotta be a way to make this work. And it's also a double-edged sword because some of the people you're going to maybe get funding from don't want to be covered in the paper. They might like having news deserts because they don't have to be as accountable." - Eastern Sussex County, white male, 40s

"On the investigative, maybe there's an opportunity, like ProPublica.org does a great job of investigative journalism. Maybe their format or an affiliation, where it has a local flavor, is an idea." - Newark, Black male, 50s

"It's insane just trying to navigate through all of the advertising and everything. I know they need to make a living. I know they need to sell advertising. I don't know if there's a way they can do that better. Or if there's funders who would kind of supplement some of that so it's not so egregious." - Ellendale, white female, 50s

"A lot of the news that funnels in at least to my house for our area comes through those Facebook pages... And if I have to pay for that article, I'll wait until somebody drops a PDF somewhere. I'm not going to pay for it." - Middletown-area, Black female, 40s

"I follow DelawareOnline's Facebook page, but they charge a lot for their articles. I don't read anything I have to pay for... Right now, I piece together a lot of information from different sites, but it would be great if there was one place that had all that information that was free. I would even possibly pay for it – if it was a dollar a month." - Middletown, Black female, 30s

"The Cape Gazette, as far as I'm concerned, is not very valuable because the bulk of its advertising comes from developers, real estate agents, and people who are tied into the push for building and developing Sussex County. I'm sure that there is an invisible notion that you're not going to bite the hand that feeds it... which I understand is how a small town paper survives. I get that." - Lewes, white female, 70s

"I know a lot of why community newspapers have died is because of money. When the whole internet started, they gave everything away for free. And now as people go away from the paper newspaper, and people don't want to subscribe to things, we've got to find a way to be able to fund community journalism and get back to telling people so you can read something and find out, okay, when is this happening? What's going on in your community? Why? And you don't have to always be a personality or always have an opinion. Just give me the who, what, when, where, or how and why." - Bridgeville, Black male, 40s

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