FIGHTING THE BEHEMOTH
Sustaining Hyper-Local Public Interest Journalism in the Digital Age

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Introduction: Where are we now?

Both globally and locally, the journalism industry is experiencing unprecedented levels of convergence and financial pressure. Nowhere is it felt more than at a local level.

The global trends are toward shrinking local newsrooms, and a re-concentration of reporters out of local papers and toward national or international digital platforms. Census data shows that the number of print journalists [the census does not record a digital journalist category] in New Zealand dropped an enormous 61 percent between 2006 and 2013.

Meanwhile, those left in journalism face an increasingly dominant PR industry - closely corresponding with the drop in print journalists have been a 56 percent increase in numbers of PR professionals, between 2006 and 2013. According to Stoppress analysis, the final figures have public relations professionals outnumbering print, television and radio journalists three to one in 2013. New Zealand does not keep detailed data on numbers of print vs digital journalists[1]. This makes it difficult to track how many journalists might have been reassigned from, say, traditional community newspapers to national, digital news publishers like stuff.co.nz; or new digital-only startups like The Spinoff, VICE, and Newsroom.

Ten years ago, as job losses in traditional news outlets ramped up, the growth of digital newsrooms was the bright spark in a darkening media landscape. "Traditional Journalism Job Cuts Countered by Digital Additions," MediaShift wrote optimistically in 2007. While we don't have clear NZ data on the shift from print to digital, we can look to the global trends: in the USA, between 2005 and 2015, the number of print journalists declined by 25,090 journalists, or 38 percent. In the same time period, the number of journalists at digital-only publishers tripled, from 3,410 to 10,580. So while the number of reporters at digital-only outlets was growing, they were nowhere near keeping up with the drop-off from print: for every single journalist gained in the digital sphere, around three were lost from print. Additionally, US employment data indicates that the growth of digital outlets may have already peaked - with digital-only journalist numbers plateauing between 2012 and 2015. Globally, the last year has been a dark one for digital outlets, with significant cutbacks at

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[1] Given that census data categorises journalists by print, radio or television, it's safe to assume that digital journalists are primarily being recorded under the print category.

digital publishers [Mic](), [VICE](), [MTV News](), [Al Jazeera US,]() [Huffington Post](), and [Guardian US](). In the last year alone, key, credible players in online journalism - including [the bulk of MTV News' longform and reporting capacity,]() [Al Jazeera US,]() [Gothamist after its staff attempted to unionise,]() and [Gawker at the behest of a vengeful billionaire]() - have disappeared completely. Others have stuck around, but taken steps to cut their spending on written news, [favouring instead a "pivot to video"]() to chase one of the last remaining pots of digital advertising cash in a swiftly diminishing landscape.

In short, while the number of journalists employed at 'digital native' startups has increased, they're still nowhere near keeping up with the rate of loss from traditional outlets. Additionally, they're not necessarily replicating the same services as more traditional or local media outlets - and even the new digital jobs are not necessarily safe or stable.

Global trends demonstrate that that loss is particularly felt at the local level. According to the [Pew Research Center,]() between 2003 and 2014 the number of full-time newspaper 'statehouse' reporters - reporting on local democracy - declined by 35 percent. The number of dedicated court reporters had halved. Again, New Zealand does not keep specific data about how many journalists are being lost and where from, but the cuts are happening.

In 2017, an open letter from Fairfax and NZME editors - representing the bulk of local newspapers across the country - wrote that without a merger, "many jobs will inevitably be lost."

"We believe - no, we know - that the rapid dismantling of local newsrooms and journalism at scale in this country is inevitable if this merger does not proceed."

The merger did not proceed, and those editors have been [true to their word: the promised cuts have begun arriving](). In recent weeks, Stuff [previously Fairfax NZ] announced that it was selling or closing 28 rural or community newspapers, making up more than a third - or 35 percent - of the company's print titles. A week before the cuts at Stuff, [Australian Associated Press announced it was shuttering New Zealand Newswire]() and 14 journalist jobs with it.

"We predicted this outcome. We said that ultimately there would have to be rationalisation," Greg Hywood, [chief executive of Australian parent company Fairfax Media said.]()

Asked whether there [might be more cuts](), Hywood said, "We will make decisions on a publication by publication-basis about whether they are adding value to the business or not."

As overall numbers decrease, the industry has simultaneously seen a reconcentration of journalist numbers in the larger cities: most noticeably Wellington and Auckland. The broader picture is of high numbers of journalists leaking out of the regional papers, and resources being redeployed in centralised, national newsrooms.

But, as Jack Schafer [wrote for Politico](#), "Conventional newspapers, for all their shortcomings, remain the best source of information about the workings of our government, of industry, and of the major institutions that dominate our lives. They still publish a disproportionate amount of the accountability journalism available, a function that's not being fully replaced by online newcomers or the nonprofit entities that have popped up."

In New Zealand too, none of the new startups and alternative funding models, such as The Spinoff, Newsroom or Scoop, are currently capable of, or focused on, the genre of strong, constant local reporting that community outlets have traditionally taken responsibility for. And while national NZ newsrooms - including prestige units like [Stuff's National Correspondents](#) and the Herald's [Premium, In-Depth and Investigations team](#) - continue to publish important public interest work, they do not replace hyperlocal reporting. Nor are they intended to. International studies indicate that metro and national newsrooms don't provide the same mode of coverage as local presses. [Researchers have found](#) that metros and nationals tend to feature "a narrow set of sources" comprising those with the resources necessary to be in regular touch with reporters - with a bias toward official sources, and bureaucratic institutions. Local or ethnic publishers, by contrast, [sought out a higher proportion](#) of "alternative voices in terms of the sources they interview, as a mechanism for creating a stronger bond with their audience," and rather than reaching out only to elite sources, tended to "highlight citizens within the community".

If this picture is all a little bleak, it's still worth outlining, if only to know it presents us with a series of specific problems. Journalists across the board are decreasing. The journalistic resource left in the industry is being redistributed to large national or urban centres, and centralised digital outlets. In the digital sphere, hyperlocal journalism is not necessarily an attractive offering for digital outlets or audiences: it is by definition restricted in its audience appeal, resource-intensive in requiring boots on the ground, and is less frequently the source of viral hits or 'prestige'-style reporting. Emerging alternative revenue streams, such as brand-sponsored content, aren't a natural fit for the day-to-day of covering local government, school boards, and community governance issues.

Overall then? If nothing changes, New Zealand faces an impending apocalypse for local public interest journalism. With journalism across the board under threat, it's hard to treat the lower-profile, less glamorous products of local reporting as a priority.

But local reporting is vital. Local news provides the ground-level of public record that's crucial to informed civic engagement and decision-making. It informs communities about the issues that have the most direct and immediate effect on their lives: from sports game results to business closures, local government decisions to school board votes. Pew Research Centre data indicates that those that regularly consume local reporting are [more politically engaged, more engaged with their geographic community, and more likely to vote](). And, as many journalists know, big stories are built on small stories: as investigative journalist Matt Nippert has [put it](), "unglamourous rounds-based news-writing [is] the superstructure on which long-form is built".

But even in an uncertain world for all journalists, international models for funding that hyperlocal public interest journalism are emerging. In the UK, the Local Democracy Reporters fund 150 local government journalists to provide copy to other news agencies, including commercial. In the Netherlands and, soon, the United States, De Correspondent has created a large-scale, sustainable, member-funded public interest news organisation, using 'trust' as the primary metric for measuring their success. In New Orleans, small hyperlocal outlets are fostering membership and advertising models, and creating new databases to keep their work relevant and cumulative, rather than fleeting and temporary. In New York and Washington DC, large players join in cooperation with hyperlocal outlets in mutually beneficial relationships.

The Structure of this Report

The aim of this report is to see what concrete strategies are emerging on the ground in to counter those problems, and develop case studies for sustainable, appealing, audience-driven, local public service journalism that could potentially be applied to a New Zealand context. It will seek to answer questions including:

- How are newsrooms making hyper-local reporting appealing and visible across national digital platforms?

- Can local news outlets create sustainable business models on digital platforms?

- How are local newsrooms and reporters collaborating with national newsrooms?

This report is structured to address the three key problems identified in the course of research: funding local newsrooms, visibility of local reporting, and trust in local media. These problems tend to be interconnected and contribute to one another, but for clarity have been divided along these lines. Each section is then devoted to specific solutions, including relevant newsroom case studies to illustrate what the models are, and how they solve the stated problems. Each chapter then goes on to discuss possibilities for how the principles of those case studies could be replicated in New Zealand, identifying any emerging local examples which appear to be applying those principles in new or interesting ways. Those solutions and principles include siloing of investigative journalism funding, the ins and outs of membership models, how advertising can continue to play a role in hyperlocal news, wiki and database models for increased surface area of stories, possibilities for crowdfunding at a hyperlocal level, and how state or newswire funding can be applied to local democracy coverage.

A final note: as becomes clear in this report, there is no single panacea, or endlessly replicable and scalable model to solve the problems facing local public interest journalism in New Zealand - or anywhere. The future of local news, if it is to survive, will be a patchwork of solutions, funding streams and revenue experiments. Here, I seek to highlight what has worked for some publishers, not to suggest that a single playbook may work for all. I hope this report can aid in introducing some of the new models to New Zealand publishers, and spurring on local conversations about what could be next for local news.

Acknowledgements

Solving the problem of trust

Membership Models and Reader Engagement

"We must reconceive of media and journalism as a service, not a product."

      -   Jeff Jarvis, Whither News?

"One thing out of the nest of [trust] problems that exploded in 2016 was the deterioration of journalism at a local level, which is a long-term problem. The reason that's so important is that that relationship - between local citizens and their local sources of information - is the proving ground for trust. That's where it starts, that's where people's relationship to journalism begins. Whether it's the sports pages, or the parents who now care about school district because they have kids in it - that's where the relationship starts. So the deterioration of quality and boots on the ground at the local level is part of how we got into this crisis of trust."

      -   Jay Rosen, Media Critic, Membership Puzzle Head & De Correspondent Ambassador

Higher levels of trust than we currently hold are essential to many of the alternatives to advertising-driven business and revenue models. Trust is essential to journalism if we want to get people to pay for our product. It is crucial to member-funded journalism; to public-funded journalism, to crowd-funded journalism.

In both the United States and the UK, the question of trust is considered one of the most urgent risks facing journalism. In New Zealand journalism, the problem of trust is regarded as a less critical threat than the more immediate, tangible disasters of revenue loss and a collapsing business model.

But the situation in New Zealand is not fundamentally different to the ingredients that lead to the crisis in America. According to the [2017 Acumen Edelmen Trust Barometer](#), New Zealand has some of the lowest levels of trust in media in the world. Globally, levels of trust in media have fallen steadily over the past 30 years, hitting an all-time low in 2017. Here in New Zealand, our levels of trust in media are even lower than the global average. We have lower levels of trust in media than the UK, USA, and Australia. Bucking the global trend, we trust our journalists even less than our politicians. According to the Acumen Edelman research, New Zealand also has one of the largest "trust gaps" in the world. That's the discrepancy between how much the "informed public" - a

highly educated, media-saturated, high-earning minority - trusts institutions, as compared to the general public. New Zealand has a [trust gap of 20 points](#) - with rates of trust among the 'informed public' sitting at around 62 percent, compared to the general public's trust levels at around 41. New Zealand is beaten on this measure only by the USA.

In this section, I'll look at some of the key reasons identified for mistrust of media in the United States - most of which are highly applicable to our own context. In the next section, I'll outline the case study of De Correspondent, a Dutch start-up which operates with trust as its key metric, and how it uses that high level of reader trust to create revenue. In the following section, I'll outline strategies New Zealand newsrooms could consider adopting.

What's Caused Our Crisis In Trust?

When surveying New Zealand journalists, the lack of trust in media is sometimes described as an inevitability; an unfair and unfounded failure of public perception; and a result of the public's fundamental misunderstanding and/or ignorance of what we do. Some degree of that is probably true. Globally, [trust of all large institutions is down](#); there will always be people with a tendency to mistrust large institutions like the media, and some people will always be dismissive of reports that conflict with their worldview or deliver news they don't want to hear - something that good reporting is wont to do.

But some of our mistrust levels also have their roots in journalism's practices and business model - issues that apply equally in New Zealand and internationally.

To identify some of the ingredients leading to the record-low levels of mistrust in the US, I interviewed to Jay Rosen, a professor at NYU Journalism, and a media commentator and analyst who has been writing about issues of trust and media perception since the nineties. He outlined a number of factors, the following of which were also articulated by other media outlets, editors and journalists. I've roughly divided them into five categories.

1. Destruction of print revenues: the failure of the print advertising model has lead to cost-cutting, evacuation of newsrooms, fewer staff, more errors in copy, faster deadlines. In the US, cost-cutting

has hit particularly hard at a local level, with smaller community papers shutting up shop or reducing staff.

2. Loss of local reporting - connected to the destruction of the print/advertising models, the cutting of newsrooms and journalism resource has been particularly felt at the local level. Rosen says,

> *"One thing out of the nest of [trust] problems that exploded in 2016 was the deterioration of journalism at a local level, which is a long-term problem. The reason that's so important is that that relationship - between local citizens and their local sources of information - is the proving ground for trust. That's where it starts, that's where people's relationship to journalism begins. Whether it's the sports pages, or the parents who now care about school district because they have kids in it - that's where the relationship starts. So the deterioration of quality and boots on the ground at the local level is part of how we got into this crisis of trust."*

When I interviewed New Zealand journalists about their reflections on trust levels nationally, several mentioned the erosion of hyper-local reporting as a key factor. One reporter remarked,

> *"Perhaps [it's] due to less community news (or fewer outlets in general) - people feel that news is not about/for them."*

Another journalist who worked for a small regional paper provided more detail. New Zealand's community papers, she says,

> *"Used to each have their own editor and reporters, who became well-known in their respective communities. Those staff would be easily accessible - readers could walk into newspaper offices and talk to them, including to the editor - and they would attend all manner of meetings and events within the community. In other words, there was high visibility in the community... and therefore a certain sense of trust.*

> *That model has been killed off by cuts, layoffs and restructure. The loss of community editors is a big thing for communities. Those people were held in high esteem. Also, a lack of staff and resources means stories just don't get covered or are reprinted from the daily paper. So, communities are missing out coverage of events and news they deem important to them. Those kinds of cuts are replicated up and down New Zealand."*

The erosion of local journalism can have a disproportionate effect on people's opinion of media institutions more broadly - and, consequently, their willingness to invest in the product.

3. Digital traffic-driven business model - the digital model of revenue, which depends on high numbers of page views and/or the sale of subscriber information to advertisers, generates problems of trust. The drive to build and monetise audiences results in clickbait, syndicated sensationalist stories, misleading headlines, intrusive ads, and tracking of user data. In the [2018 Acumen Edelman Trust Barometer](#), for example, 69 percent of New Zealand respondents believed media were "more concerned with attracting a big audience than reporting".

4. Major failures of the "watchdog press" - Rosen argues the United States press had a series of shocking failures that eroded public trust in the institution. He identifies the failure to detect a faulty case for the war in Iraq in 2003; the failure to warn the public about endemic corruption in the mortgage market and the 2008 financial crisis; and the failure to appropriately cover Trump's campaign, culminating in the near-universal failure to accurately predict the outcome of the election. In each of those cases, he says,

> *"It's not just that there was a failure. It's that there was no serious self-examination after that failure - there was no industry-wide post-mortem or investigation of how that happened, and no real lesson-learning from it."*

The failings provide 'pegs' on which to hang a public narrative that has gained momentum in recent years: that the media is inaccurate, or corrupt, or out of touch with reality. Elsewhere in the world, similar failures have occurred. In the UK, we could point to the 2009 revelations of widespread phone hacking by the press; more recently, the failure to predict the outcome of Brexit. What might New Zealand's equivalents be? Nothing so dramatic, but we could consider the [fallout from Dirty Politics, which revealed reporters' vulnerability to manipulation by partisan political players](#), or more broadly, the syndication of inaccurate and poor quality global content, or the use of Outbrain have eroded public trust in local reporting institutions. [Acumen Edelmen found 64 percent of New Zealanders](#) said they could no longer discern "good journalism from rumour or falsehoods," and [62 percent said as a result of the media failing to fulfil its responsibilities,](#) they no longer knew what was true and what was not.

5. Professional model of journalism - adopting an ideology of 'objectivity' which became counter-productive for trust when scrutinised. Rosen argues that initially, the model of professional detachment and objectivity seemed to be the way to generate trust. Over time, however, it backfired: the distancing became a reason the public adopted to distrust media

"At a certain point, what happened was that this claim, of "we don't have an ideology, we don't have a position, we don't have any politics, we just tell you the way it is, you should believe it because it's just the facts" - that claim itself started to generate mistrust. It became a way of mobilizing discontent with elites. Generating reaction and resentment that way became a very effective way of doing politics."

In 2018, the Trust Barometer survey found 48 percent of New Zealanders believe the media "support an ideology rather than informing the public" - slightly lower than the global average, but still including almost half of the general population.

Membership Models

Membership models are designed to create a new social contract between journalists (or news organisations) and their audiences. Membership models are distinguished by their depth of connection and level of mutual exchange between audience members and journalism providers.

In the United States, an [in-depth study by Membership Puzzle of 22 digitally-based membership-models](#) found those with a successful, financially sustainable and thriving membership consistently had these features:

- A clear mission or origin story

- Focused on the limitations and flaws of what was already available

- Models of engagement that were approachable as opposed to institutional

- Allowed a variety of routes for audience participation, which takes concrete form

Research project the Membership Puzzle notes that it's extremely rare for news organisations to be 100 percent funded by direct audience revenue. This was the case for membership models across the United States, including case studies for this report The Lens (also sustained by large-scale philanthropic bodies and speaking fees) and De Correspondent (also sustained by book publishing, crowd-funding, and speakers).

Case Study: De Correspondent

What would happen if a news organisation maximised for trust? If trust - as opposed to audience, page views, or sales - was the key metric for success? De Correspondent goes some way to answer that question.

At a glance:
- De Correspondent is a Netherlands-based journalism startup that began publishing in 2013.
- It is financially sustainable, funded by more than 52,000 paying members. [Around 78 percent of members pay €60 a year, the other 22 percent pay €6 a month.](#) From

membership contributions alone, that gives them an operating budget of roughly €3.2 million [NZD5.6million] per year.

- As well as member contributions, the publication runs its own book-publishing arm and speakers bureau, which contribute a small amount to its income.
- Pre-launch, it broke the world record for journalism crowd-funding, raising 1.7 million in 30 days.
- It now employs more than 31 beat correspondents.
- The company is currently looking to make its entry to the United States. I spoke to their US-based ambassador Jay Rosen about the model.

At most journalism outlets, we consider how our work measures up to several metrics. Financial success is a key one: in digital journalism, this amounts to page views. How many people read it? Did it go viral? But we look at other metrics too. One is recognition - did our peers like it? Did people write letters to the editor, or comment in droves? Another is impact: did it change a law? Trigger a resignation or an investigation?

De Correspondent is a glimpse of what journalism might look like if the key metric was reader trust. So far, it has worked for them. The site's clarity of mission and ethos has won it a stronghold of supporters, to the point where it is financially sustainable and the size of some of New Zealand's larger newsrooms. Some of its key principles include:

Free of ads, and not profit-driven. Funded almost entirely by its membership base, the site has no advertising, no sponsors, no shareholders. It publishes its finances and spending every year. The company is limited profit, meaning the vast majority of any profits are reinvested back into the journalism. The founders' access to profit is capped at 5 percent.

An antidote to the daily news grind.
The company's informal ethos is to cover "not the weather, but the climate"

> "[We are very self-conscious about striking out in a different direction than just the Daily News flow that everybody else has. When you go to the site in the morning or if you read their email, it's not the same stories in the rest of the Dutch media because they don't care about the daily stories, they're doing longer-term investigations: not the weather, which is a daily cyclical thing, but the climate, which is the underlying forces that are changing the world."

Journalism as a service
The outlet is focused on reconceiving media and journalism as a service, not a product - and that means a reinvention in the eyes of their audience.
Speaking to Niemen Lab, one of the founders reflects that a key to their successful fundraising was the focus on the provision of value for members, rather than saving

journalism as a public good. "One important thing it is that we didn't talk about journalism or 'save our jobs,'" says [Wijnberg, the 34-year-old editor-in-chief](). "We always talked about the service we would provide to readers."

Driving editorial sovereignty down
Decision-making authority is driven to the writer level, rather than held higher up the hierarchy of editorial.

> *"Writers get to decide what their beat is.the writers get to pick their reporting projects and the writers are encouraged to define their work around their own obsessions - things they're passionate about. That has an effect on trust because you're you're reading the work of people who care deeply about what they're doing - not because somebody said, "go cover this"*

Actively involving members in the journalistic process

Perhaps a unique feature of De Correspondent's model is its focus on interacting with their audience. Beat journalists at the organisation have to spend about 30 to 40 percent of their time interacting with readers. Each individual journalist sends out regular email newsletters to their subscriber base, detailing what they're working on, how it's going, what knowledge needs they have, what they're missing, what kinds of sources they're looking for, what questions they have. The organisation has cultivated a philosophy of 'everybody's an expert in something'.

> *"And when you are an expert in what we're reporting and researching… we should ask you to contribute - we should get that knowledge flowing in."*

Possible Applications: refining the offering

For New Zealand's large commercial media organisations, wholesale adoption the kinds of principles and structures of De Correspondent would require a total restructure of newsroom priorities, hierarchies, and practices. But individually, some of the organisation's principles could be implemented.

Firewalling off "public service arms"
The [Membership Puzzle's 2017 assessment of membership models]() describes the successful candidates as "manifestly mission-driven".

Subscription models, it concludes, are only functional when audiences perceive the outlet's news and analysis as providing enough unique value - in the same way that specialist outlets such as New Zealand's National Business Review appeal to institutional audiences in specific industries.

It's more difficult for large institutional players, such as Stuff, the New Zealand Herald, or Radio NZ to access that kind of funding: they lack the specificity of mission statement or vision that smaller players can articulate. One potential way around the problem is to firewall off fundable projects.

While audiences may be reluctant to become 'member funders' of a large media entity as a whole, separating out more specific campaign possibilities, with clearly defined goals and functions can prove effective. This could include funding for local reporting projects, where there is a high level of local public interest and clear examples of value offering.

Local Application Case Study: The Spinoff Auckland

In mid-2016, Auckland City Council was on the eve of voting on its unitary plan, which would dictate the direction of the city's development for years to come.

Digital outlet *The Spinoff* launched a crowd-funding campaign for what it dubbed a "War for Auckland" - funding political and social affairs coverage directly connected to Auckland local government in the lead up to the vote. The site promised to provide coverage aligned with certain specific goals - especially solving housing affordability, and making the city more accessible for young adults - that they felt had been underrepresented in mainstream media coverage.

At the launch of the site's crowdfunding campaign, editor Duncan Greive wrote:

> *If you believe this is important too, then we'd love your help. We've funded every part of our coverage of this election and the housing crisis ourselves to this point – from satirical takes to deeply reported features. It's part of how we give back to the community which raised us. But it's also exhausting, and expensive. … We're asking for money for this specific project, from both businesses and individuals, to chip in either publicly or anonymously. What we're saying is: if you think it's important that we live in a modern city which is fit for purpose into the future, then we would love your help to cover this election with that in mind.*

He commits to dedicating any money raised to "paying contributors, increasing the social reach of election-specific posts, creating collateral, developing election-specific parts of the

site, paying fact-checkers, creating video – basically anything we can think of to make the young and the interested care more about the election, and get them voting."

The project launched with a modest fundraising goal of $10,000. It closed a whisker away from $25,000. Perhaps more than any other example in New Zealand, the War for Auckland demonstrated the possibilities for membership funding of hyperlocal journalism in New Zealand. It holds the same key attributes outlined by The Membership Puzzle for "thick" membership-funded models: offering a clear mission or origin story; focusing on the limitations and flaws of what's already available; providing clear lines of concrete participation. The campaign errs toward approachable over institutional, at least in the sense that it emphatically grounds The Spinoff within the Auckland environment and as a concerned party in the outcome: "It's part of how we give back to the community which raised us," they say. The initiative also went some way to abandoning a hardline objectivity focus, calling it "an unashamedly campaigning new part of the site" - another attribute that can build trust in local outlets.

The War for Auckland gives some hope that the strategies of membership models can be applied to a New Zealand context - and, more promisingly still, to the 'unglamorous' projects of local democracy reporting. It demonstrates, too, that those strategies can be applied to a ring-fenced project, as well as an entire news organisation - The War for Auckland was member-funded; The Spinoff is not.

Possible Applications: Enhancing Audience Engagement.

"I take it for granted that my readers know more than I do, and this is a liberating not threatening fact of journalistic life. Every reporter on every beat should embrace this. We will use the tools of grassroots journalism or be consigned to history."
Dan Gillmor, We The Media, 2004

Taking on new levels of audience engagement - and taking them seriously - can require a dramatic shift in newsroom culture and journalist priorities. As Merel Borger writes in *Participatory Journalism: Rethinking Journalism in the Digital Age*: "Journalism's ideology has long provided a sense of who is 'in' and by consequence also of who is 'out': professional journalists are in, while, amongst others, sources, the audience, and those from neighbouring occupations, like public relations and communication, are out."

This means contributions or 'reporting' sourced direct from the public are often viewed with suspicion in journalism, But high-level engagement with audiences can benefit journalists and newsrooms in tangible ways.

Case Study: The Fahrenthold Method

By 2016, the Washington Post's David Fahrenthold had been covering the United States presidential election campaign for 13 months. He'd covered candidate after failed candidate and was on the lookout for a new beat - when he became curious about whether then-candidate Donald Trump had actually given away the money he'd raised, and promised to veterans.

As with many journalists, his first search was for paperwork - but he discovered that IRS papers wouldn't be filed until at least 2017, and even if the filings were suspect, the timeframe for an investigation would be lengthy. The Trump Foundation, in turn, said the money had been spent, but wouldn't provide details on where or how. Stymied by official sources, Fahrenthold turned instead to a new knowledge community: his audience. Farenthold announced his query on Twitter, and began talking to veterans groups about whether they'd received funds. The next day, Trump had called a press conference, announcing that he'd given the full million away.
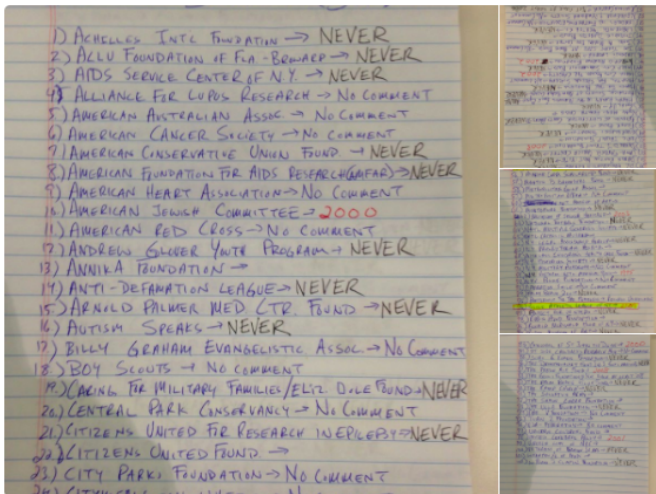

But Farenholdt's interest was piqued - and he broadened the investigation to look at all of Trump's personal charitable giving, which the candidate had said amounted to more than 12 million. Again, he turned to Twitter, constructing a list of possible charities Trump may have given to, and updating his followers on the progress on the investigation in real time.

The process appears, in many ways, to be the opposite to how investigative journalists tend to work: secretly, in fear of being scooped, releasing the results only when the investigation is complete. But the response to Farenholdt's strategy was enormous. By lifting the curtain on his reporting process, he creates an intensely invested knowledge community of

followers, who not only paid attention to the final journalistic product, but also assisted him along the way: providing tips for other charities, confirming or denying donations, and spreading the scope of the investigation.

He says in this report on his own reporting, "I had attracted a virtual army, ready to join the scavenger hunt. I had begun the year with 4,700 Twitter followers. By September I had more than 60,000 and climbing fast."

Fahrenthold repeated the process a number of times - using the Twitter community to track down paintings purchased with charitable funds, or fake TIME magazine covers displayed in Trump residences. Less measurable, but still vital, was the impact of the process on reader engagement and trust. By allowing readers to see, step by step, the mechanics of the project: pages of notepaper, calls made, charities ticked off one by one - Farenthold demonstrated the legwork and challenge of the investigation. Readers who had been privy to every step of the working process saw how arduous it was, and were - potentially - less likely to disbelieve the final conclusions of the investigation. Rosen noted in our interview, and summed up succinctly here: "Fahrenthold's methods suggested that bulletproofing could be made social: when people follow along with your investigation, they're likely to correct you if you get something wrong. That helps build trust."

The Farenthold Method offers a different, less structured example of implementing the principles of a membership model.

Rather than seeking financial resource, Farenthold primarily works with his readership to access knowledge resource. His approach demonstrates, in particular, two features of successful membership: a model of engagement that is approachable as opposed to institutional; allowing a variety of routes for audience participation, which takes concrete form.

He also implements a number of similar principles to De Correspondent: specifically his radical involvement of his 'membership' in the journalistic process, and practice of informing his audience of progress, knowledge gaps and intentions. These principles are applicable for both newsrooms and individual journalists looking to more deeply engage and access resource within the communities they write for and about.

Membership at a Hyperlocal Level
The Lens New Orleans

At a glance:
- A non-profit, public interest newsroom
- Sustains six staff
- Focus on investigations in a few rounds of immediate and tangible concern to the local community: local government, environmental degradation, and charter schools.
- Maintains partnerships and collaborations with high-profile, national newsrooms, including ProPublica and NPR
- Depends on a diverse mixture of revenue streams: membership, The Lens speaker's bureau, donations from large philanthropic bodies, and sale of stories to larger national players.

At an inner-city community centre in New Orleans, a small group of journalists has gathered at an inner-city bar. It's The Lens happy hour, one of the bi-monthly events where journalists of the Lens meet with their members and community. There around 30 people here tonight. Some have written opinion pieces for The Lens before. Others are involved with local government. Others are just interested community members or lovers of rum-based punch.

The evening is modelled on "News and Brews", a style of event that's become an institution in small, nonprofit and member-funded newsrooms across the United States. The events are designed with a dual purpose: they lift the curtain on the newsroom's personnel, allowing members to directly interact, feel 'part of the project', discuss coverage, and demand accountability from journalists. On the other side, it's an opportunity for journalists to cultivate the knowledge community within their membership base: to get tips, information, clarification and contacts from the local community.

The Lens is a small, reader-supported, nonprofit newsroom that focuses exclusively on public-policy issues. They have a relatively tiny team of six, but have a high hit-rate for that number, and have won multiple national awards for their coverage.

The outlet's mission is to hone in on the stories others aren't covering, focusing on a few core areas: coastal loss, charter schools, government accountability, land use, and criminal justice.
"Most media outlets are a mile wide and an inch deep," says Steve Beatty, editor of the Lens. Instead, his reporters focus on exclusive work that deeply impacts members of the community. "Everything we write must be original, he says. "You'll never find us in a press conference; we try to never be in the scrum."

Possible Applications:

Partnerships with bigger players

Some of the Lens' most successful pieces of work occurred in collaboration with national, highly resourced newsrooms. Particularly notable is [Losing Ground](#), a joint-bylined project between the Lens and ProPublica. The project was the first comprehensive document tracking of land-loss in Louisiana. It was lead by Bob Marshall - the Lens' long-time environmental reporter - and ProPublica data journalists Al Shaw and Brian Jacobs, who analysed years of satellite and historical imagery to track the amount of land disappearing along the coastline. Interviewing ProPublica's Al Shaw, he said the exchange was of mutual benefit: "We had the technical expertise, but Bob Marshall had that local knowledge. He was a fisherman and knew the wetlands so intimately." The project was able to combine the strengths of both newsrooms: the kind of high-level data science expertise that can usually only be maintained by major newsrooms, and the boots on the ground, long-term local familiarity and contacts of small, hyperlocal newsrooms. The project won multiple national awards, but it also demonstrates a possible pathway forward for New Zealand outlets: how larger players can cooperate with hyperlocal outlets for mutually beneficial arrangements.

Deep Communication with Membership

The Lens maintains a deep relationship with its membership base, sending out regular email updates, holding events, and ensuring staff members remain contactable and in contact with their subscribers. They make large-scale attempts to reach members of their geographic region who wouldn't otherwise be aware of them. During one [ongoing] investigation into illegal subpoena forms used in courthouses, the Lens did a neighbourhood-wide letterbox drop with examples of the fraudulent subpoenas, and ways to contact the Lens if they'd been affected. The result of the initiative was threefold: it resulted in a new wave of tips coming in for journalists, but also communicated to the community that the Lens was an active player on their behalf - and allowed them to raise their profile within lower socio-economic and more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods where they lacked visibility and brand penetration. The Subpoena investigation illustrates how mutually beneficial open lines of communication between journalists and audience are, and how they can assist in building trust with communities.

Speaker's Bureaus

The Lens has also implemented a Lens Speaker's Bureau, whereby they rent out journalists or editors to speak at public events about their areas of expertise. This method of raising revenue was also practiced by De Correspondent, and multiple other nonprofit newsrooms across the USA. Again, the purpose of the practice is twofold: it brings in some additional revenue for the outlet, but also gives journalists public profile and visibility within the community.

Solving the problem of local: State Models and Content Agreements

Membership-model newsrooms lean one of two ways: they are sustained partly by large philanthropic donors, such as the Knight Centre and Democracy Fund, which recognise local journalism as a public good and fund it accordingly. Or, where primarily member-driven like ProPublica and De Correspondent, they tend to provide a 'prestige' offering of high-profile, nationally significant commentary and investigations. Neither of those solves all of the primary problems this report seeks to address, of sustaining local public interest journalism in New Zealand. The environment in Aotearoa is largely big-donor-free; and prestige journalism outlets don't complete the kind of hyperlocal, on the ground reporting that is disappearing from New Zealand's journalism environment.

Case Study: Local Government Reporter Service

At a glance:

- The Local Democracy Reporters scheme employs 150 journalists across the United Kingdom.
- The roles are publicly funded, via the BBC.
- Each reporter is employed by a news organisation, in a bid to foster ongoing competition between existing news outlets.
- The scheme costs a total of £8 million [NZ$15.2 million] per year.
- Reporting produced by the journalists is published by the outlet and shared with the BBC. Following publication, it is also shared with around 700 other publishers belonging to the scheme, who can republish it as they please.

In 2014, the BBC announced it would be creating a kind of hyperlocal-focused wire service. The pilot project, which launched at the end of 2017, will employ 150 local democracy reporters, funded centrally by the BBC, to cover public interest local government and public office stories.
The reporters will be hosted by "bidding" news organisations, who must demonstrate that they have a committed track record for strong local coverage. The reporters' coverage, once published, will be shared with hundreds of other media organisations who are members of the service programme.

The goals of the scheme are twofold: to sustain local reporting, following research in the UK which demonstrated the majority of local titles recorded falling year-on-year sales in 2016; and to increase the reach and local presence of the BBC, which otherwise tended to be centralised.

"We believe the LDRs will help drive up both the quality and quantity of local democratic reporting and will help support local news organisations. But we are clear that they are not a solution to the financial challenges faced by some parts of the sector. The intention is to enrich local journalism for BBC audiences, but in a way which taps into the sector's expertise and shares the fruits of that partnership as widely as possible," says Matthew Barraclough, editor of the BBC Journalism Working Group.

Partnership focused: the service is a partnership between the BBC (publicly funded) and local news bodies (primarily private). The service aims to see both parties contributing: the BBC provides financial support for the reporters' salaries, as well as a system for centralised distribution and a single set of editorial standards. They're also establishing "NewsBank," which shares BBC audio and video with local news providers to help illustrate their online journalism. The partner newsrooms are expected to contribute local knowledge, expertise, and context to the initiative, by hosting the reporters as members of their newsroom teams. While the local democracy reporters are funded by the BBC, they're not BBC employees - rather, they're the employees of their host news organisations.

It is worth noting that the LDR scheme has not been without hefty criticism and controversy in the UK. Concerns about the scheme include that it may allow newsrooms to cut existing, experienced local government reporter jobs and rely on the funded reporters - not increasing reporter numbers overall - and that the bureaucracy associated with the bidding process excludes smaller newsrooms, meaning that a large number of contracts have been awarded to large, for-profit media companies rather than small, hyperlocal players.

Local Applications

Possibilities for a Local Democracy Wire Service

> *"RNZ is committed to making its content available to as many audiences as possible through a wide range of platforms. We will deliver content wherever, however and whenever audiences choose to receive it."*
> - **Glen Scanlon, Radio New Zealand**

The Local Democracy Reporters Service is one model with strong potential for direct application in New Zealand.

In recent years, following the digital expansion of RNZ under current chief executive Paul Thomson, RNZ has bedded in a strategy that, while not overt, has overlapping features with the LDR. RNZ has established content sharing relationships now with 14 media organisations, including Stuff.co.nz, Indian Newslink, Noted, Scoop, and Te Whakaruruhau O Ngā Reo Iririangi Māori.

Head of Digital Glen Scanlon said when the [Scoop partnership was announced in 2018](#) that RNZ, "want to be a helpful partner by collaborating with a range of media partners". He goes on: "Content-sharing agreements broaden the reach for independent journalism in a highly competitive media environment and we believe these kinds of deals enhance our public media role and help meet our charter commitments by getting quality content in front of new audiences."

Scanlon has said the company would "expect to announce more partnerships in future".

In 2016, a new memorandum of understanding established a relationship where the 21 Māori radio stations which make up Te Whakaruruhau got access to RNZ's programming and journalism, as well as working with the RNZ news team to cover Māori stories in a more collaborative way. As of yet, RNZ's content sharing agreements haven't had an explicit focus on providing local-democracy, hyperlocal or community reporters. But with further cuts occurring at small-scale media outlets, plus the promise of $38 million next year for RNZ and New Zealand on Air from Labour's broadcasting budget, it's a strong possibility.

Labour's [Broadcasting and Media Manifesto](#) from 2017 makes little mention of hyperlocal or regional models specifically and seems more focused on building RNZ up as a multimedia platform in and of itself, rather than developing the kinds of 'wire service' models. On New Zealand on Air, it notes that the finder should aim to create "sustainable models for regional and community access media in respect to supporting their content, distribution and discovery".

It would not be any great stretch for RNZ or NZOA to implement a local democracy reporters scheme if the allocated funding was available. Both entities have track records of sharing their own funded public-interest reporting with multiple commercial outlets.

Commercial media has, until now, provided the majority of hyperlocal reporting by way of local and community outlets. The recent cuts, at Stuff in particular, indicate that that may soon cease to be the case.

Solving the Problem of Surface Area: Databases, Resurfacing and Wiki Models

The internet is a playground dominated by monoliths. So how, in an age where information exchange has shifted online, can the small players maintain visibility?

The largest digital "front pages" of the internet, Facebook and Google, are algorithm-driven rather than editorially selected. News reports surfaced by the internet giants are selected for their potential reach - and as a result, often their shock value and clickability. As well as stories of national significance, they by nature reward oddity, extremes, and the unusual. In this environment, it's increasingly difficult for day-to-day local reporting to rise out of the sea of accumulated content online and materialise in front of viewers.

In terms of the bigger players, that may change slightly: Mark Zuckerberg said [in a 2018 statement](#) that Facebook, even as it began decreasing the amount of news overall appearing in news feeds, would be increasing the presence of local publishers. "People consistently tell us they want to see more local news on Facebook," he says. "Local news helps us understand the issues that matter in our communities and affect our lives. Research suggests that reading local news is directly correlated with civic engagement. People who know what's happening around them are more likely to get involved and help make a difference."

Facebook's [statement](#) defines local publishers as "those whose links are clicked on by readers in a tight geographic area," and notes that they are also testing a dedicated section, or tab, on Facebook that connects people to news and information in their local community: [Today In](#). The company is currently testing 'Today In' in six cities across the United States, with plans to expand.While the changes at Facebook are hopeful for local reporting, publishers know it's risky to rely on the whims of Mark Zuckerberg to sustain their presence in front of readers.

That same problem of surfacing local content also applies to national digital media and journalism outlets. Compare the structure of centralised news websites Stuff.co.nz or The New Zealand Herald to their preceding, newspaper-based models. The network of newspaper outlets, many of which are geographically-focused, provides multiple points of access for different communities to be exposed to and access local reporting. By contrast, national websites' key points of entry are a single front page, where local stories must compete with national and international reports.

An internal memo from Stuff in 2016, [published by the Spinoff](#) highlighted some of the problems that approach presents for hyperlocal reporting. The memo, outlining priorities for the morning news meetings, says:

> *"We're focusing the meeting on our two biggest promotional channels: the homepage and Facebook. So instead of us asking 'what's going on today?' We'd like you to tell us what are your contenders for Facebook and the Homepage."*

It goes on to outline some stories the national homepage editors are not interested in, including

> *"Court stories, particularly procedural appearances. Ongoing case reviews etc can't go on social because of prejudicial risk and they're almost always of no interest to the HP [homepage].Follow-ups that assume knowledge. Very few people follow stories from start to finish. For stories to be shareable they need to assume people are reading them/or watching video for the very first time."*

The issues of which stories do well on Facebook and homepage are obviously not unique to Stuff, and they do not mean that local reporting can't or won't be done - the memo notes that "Local govt or court stories, for example, of course aren't going to be entirely scrapped. It's just we might need to be a bit more creative in how we tell them." - but it does make things difficult.

The great strength of local reporting is in cumulative knowledge - a single story on a council's vote on water use is not of great interest, but 10 years' worth of coverage is an intensely valuable archive; for the public, for reporters; for officials; for law enforcement or lawyers; for anyone with an interest in democratic accountability or public records. In isolation, it's inconsequential. Cumulatively, it's hard to overstate its importance. So how do outlets make the relative trivialities of local reporting valuable and lasting?

Case Study: The NOLA Messenger

> *"We need to find more permanent ways to share accumulated knowledge with the community."*
>   - **Robert Morris, Editor, Messenger**

At a glance:

- Uptown Messenger was launched in 2010 by newspaper reporter, editor and journalism lecturer Robert Morris
- His portfolio now consists of four titles: the NOLA Messenger, Uptown Messenger, Gentilly Messenger and Mid-City Messenger.
- The 'newspapers' exist entirely online.
- The financial model is sustained by a mixture of advertising and contributions from readers. ITs primary revenue source is online advertising.
- Low infrastructure costs make this possible - the Messenger stable does not maintain a centralised newsroom. Reporters work remotely, from cafes, libraries or home. The sites do not produce any print products, keeping set-up costs low.
- Focus is on neighborhood-level crime, land use issues, and the local schools – things that have a direct impact on the lives of residents of their areas.
- At last count, they employed 3 full-time reporter editors, with one part-timer and a number of freelance contributors.
- The Messenger outlets have republishing partnerships with other, larger media entities, to increase their reporting's reach and grow their audiences, as well as bringing in a small amount of revenue selling stories.
- As well as more traditional, outlet-based websites, the Messenger is developing an online Wiki, as a means of increasing the surface area of its day-to-day reporting.

 "I was convinced that it was possible to do it [local reporting] well, and to sustain it," says Robert Morris over an iced coffee in the backroom of a New Orleans cafe.

The Uptown Messenger was established in 2010, making it a long-gamer in the hyperlocal startup space. The Messenger was established by Morris, a journalist and editor who began the outlet partly out of frustration seeing legacy newspapers he'd worked for stripping the resource from their local operations.

Working at a large, well-respected city paper in South Carolina, he saw round after round of layoffs, where "decisions [about revenue] were being made on the opposite side of the continent". Morris pitched the newspaper the idea of launching a series of hyper-local digital bureaus, so the newspaper could "reclaim" some of the communities it had largely ceased to cover as a large outlet with shrinking resources. His editor responded that the idea was a good one, and she'd actually pitched it several years earlier - but the prospective revenue streams were too small for corporate to green-light it. And so Morris decided to do it himself: he moved to New Orleans, and the Messenger was born.

The site's mission is to provide "neighbourhood-level coverage of government and politics, crime, business and community events. We will tell the stories of Uptown New Orleans and its people through traditional articles and photos, as well as extensive use of the video and live-blogging made possible by the Internet."

The outlets focus on news that is of immediate, quality-of-life concern to residents of its neighbourhoods, but which could be considered too small fry for city-wide papers to cover. In particular, he cites the examples of charter school governing bodies, and armed robberies - neither of which are considered worthy of the resource by larger outlets, but which have a significant ongoing impact on the lives of the communities.

The Messenger has been boosted as larger New Orleans newspapers - such as the *Times-Picayune* - shrunk their print editions and cut circulation days. As one reader [writes on their website](#):

> *"With the recent change in the Times' circulation schedule, and the rising crime in our uptown neighbourhoods, this website is becoming increasingly important. Thanks so much for all the hard work y'all do, and making this info available!"*

The Messenger titles are unusual among the emerging models in that they're sustained by online advertising - a revenue stream deemed unsustainable by most new media startups. Morris says the model works because of its low-startup-cost structure, and the close-knit relationship with the local community - and thus, local advertisers. He admits wages aren't high, but says the model is currently covering its own costs and is debt free.

A second, and particularly unusual feature of the NOLA Messenger is its development of a neighbourhood Wiki as a new way of presenting reporting - as opposed to the traditional news story model. Just as newspapers in the age of digital are considered an outdated mode of delivering news, Morris says, "I feel strongly that our notion of articles as our primary work product is outdated as well - I think the news article is as much a relic of a prior time as a printing press is."

He goes on: "We need to find more permanent ways to share accumulated knowledge with the community."

The solution Morris is experimenting with is using Wiki software - the same that powers Wikipedia, to create a constantly growing, expansive archive of the Messenger's coverage, that's accessible in a more immediate way to the community, and doesn't require the kind of prior knowledge necessary

for searching an archive. At present, they've focused on Wiki-ing two major projects: local government body elections, and homicides in the area. Like a Wikipedia page, the system creates pages for individual people, and events, built up out of out-linked Messenger articles.

"The concept is to update it one sentence at a time - that could be over a single council campaign, or over a reporter's 40-year career. That reporting accumulates into a vast bank of information," Morris says.

"The system can also drive coverage," he says, "because the first things that tend to jump out are the holes in it." It also constructs years on small-scale local reporting into a larger, far more significant body of accumulated trends and bigger-picture overviews. In the case of the Messenger's database of the elections, for example: "That will outlive any individual article that we do."

Jay Banks announces his candidacy for the District B seat on the New Orleans City Council on Tuesday morning at New Zion Baptist Church in Central City. (Robert Morris, UptownMessenger.com)

Local Applications

Database-Focused Reporting, and Resurfacing Archives

Not every local New Zealand outlet would be willing - or able - to reconstruct its archive of local reporting into a wiki. But the principle of surfacing archives can be applied to a multitude of projects. In the United States, a number of newsrooms are turning their attention from individual news stories to databases of reporting: a single network of information that can be constantly updated, as opposed to a series of individual pieces of coverage that disappear one after the other.

One example is [Fatal Force](), The Washington Post's database of police shootings which was launched in 2015. For three years, the Washington Post has continued to build year-on-year databases counting every nationwide death by police shooting. The project accomplishes a number of things: it creates a dataset that is not recorded by any single government body. By bringing fragments of local crime reports together it is able to drive its own trend-based and bigger picture reporting. And it takes hundreds of small-scale, individually insignificant reports (the stuff of hyperlocal reporting) which cumulatively create a story of national importance. The reports on individual deaths find surface area within the context of the whole project - where individually they might be news one day, gone the next, when presented in combination they remain at the front page of the project indefinitely. On a local level, Stuff's [Faces of Innocents]() database works along similar lines and achieves similar goals.

Advertising for Hyperlocal

The other lesson from the NOLA Messenger is not to dismiss advertising as a possibility for sustaining the hyperlocal reporting projects. While the traditional advertising model clearly isn't working to sustain large media entities, the Messenger demonstrates that it can still be effective for small, nimble, and locally-grounded outlets. Hyperlocal outlets which are truly grounded in their community have a distinct value offering for local advertisers, Morris says - they connect to specific local audiences, and also provide reporting which is of interest and value to those local businesses. Additionally, because of the reporters' close links to the community, Morris says many advertisers also feel a sense of civic duty and connection with the mission of the journalism - in a way that they don't with larger, less directly-engaged papers.

Partnering with Larger Outlets

Another key element of the Messenger's model is partnerships with larger, city-wide broadcasters, to increase distribution and reader awareness of the outlet. They currently have ongoing relationships with local television network WWL-TV; as well as local African-American Radio networks, and print outlets The Advocate and Gambit. In the case of web or print-based publications, outlets republishing Messenger reporting pay for the articles, providing another revenue stream for the organisation, as well as deepening the localised reporting available to those larger, city-wide publishers.

Repackaging existing reporting into high-value products

The principles of databases and wikis can also be applied more broadly: via projects that reconstitute accumulated day-to-day reporting into single, higher value products. One recent local example of this is Stuff reporter Martin Van Beynen's [Black Hands](#) podcast. The podcast did not require additional reporting work from Van Beynen. Rather, it repackages several years of crime reporting into a single, re-accessible product, much as a database or Wiki does. A second example, also by Stuff, is Heartland, [an interactive database](#) that collates a decade of South Island regional reporting by Mike Crean.

Perhaps more broadly still, local outlets can consider the question behind Morris' thinking: "I feel strongly that our notion of articles as our primary work product is outdated as well - I think the news article is as much a relic of a prior time as a printing press is." Are there other modes of communicating journalism to local audiences, beyond the article format? Databases and Wikis are one method for doing so, but they will not be the only one.

Conclusion

The options presented by the United States are many. But do we have a hope of implementing them here?

New Zealand has its own set of clear challenges. In many ways, the path for us is harder than the United States. We do not have any of the large-scale philanthropic bodies which support, or provide seed funding, to a huge number of the local public interest newsrooms across the country. We suffer, too, from economies of scale: even if they have highly engaged members or subscribers, it's very difficult for small communities in New Zealand to sustain an outlet. And journalists here, for whatever reason, are not highly thought of: our levels of trust in the profession are some are some of the lowest in the world. Engaging the public enough to build sustainable membership models, or crowdfunding campaigns, or even political drives to increase state funding, will require a swift turnaround of those perceptions.

This comes to the heart of the problem: perhaps more than anything else, New Zealand still faces a reckoning around whether it wishes to preserve local public interest reporting at all. The cuts to local papers, outlined in the introduction to this report, have so far been met with a sense of inevitability and a slight collective shrug, rather than any huge public outcry. The benefits of local reporting may seem manifestly obvious to journalists and other members of the media industry, but it seems we have some way to go in communicating this to the broader population.

Until journalists can clearly and convincingly articulate their purpose, and precisely why they're necessary to the communities they serve, building any of the alternative models studied in this report will be difficult. Creating a new patchwork of functioning, sustainable local news providers is possible: the case studies outlined in this report show it can be done and, and those models can be sustained. But doing so requires will, and an appetite from the public.

Many of these case studies deal with that question as much as they do with the more immediate question of revenue streams: and they offer pathways forward. Journalist David Fahrenthold provides one model for building deep reader trust, communication and involvement on a small scale: through a single journalist's mode of interacting with his follower base. Others, like De Correspondent, demonstrate that ethos writ large: they create an entire model focused on trust and membership buy-in. In the opening case study of this report, their editor is quoted: "We didn't talk about journalism or 'save our jobs. We always talked about the service we would provide to readers." In a New Zealand context, it seems vital that local outlets become better at identifying

precisely what that service is, and communicating that to their readers. As discussed in the case studies, the principles of membership can be applied not only to entire outlets, but to individual public interest projects by larger commercial or advertising-funded outlets.

While membership models could be implemented by larger media companies and startups to fund local government coverage or locality-specific investigative projects - and to help solve broader problems of trust in New Zealand journalism - our relatively small population means those models are unlikely to be a catch-all solution, especially for small, rural, and currently underserved-by-media communities. In some of those communities, advertising may still prove the most sustainable model. The Messenger in New Orleans illustrates how it's possible for small, nimble, low-infrastructure news outlets to cover their costs with advertising. Editor Robert Morris argues that hyperlocal reporting has specific appeal to local businesses looking to advertise, and may even be an advantage to them over larger players. Here in New Zealand, titles like the Westport News have been bought back by local families, and in the coming years could present new models for sustaining a traditional local newspaper without a large media conglomerate in the back-end. And as Fairfax offers up its smaller titles for sale, it's possible some could be bought by smaller private players, co-operatives or community members and return to this - a hyperlocal commercial model that can work on a smaller scale.

In terms of larger-scale solutions, I believe one of the key models to for New Zealand to consider is the Local Democracy Reporters. The model is the only one in this report which would immediately establish a nationwide network of local reporters. We are well set-up to do so: RNZ provides an existing infrastructure, which has already begun distributing its public interest journalism to multiple commercial outfits. A wire-style service would benefit the entire New Zealand media ecosystem, rather that just a few outlets, and if they desire, NZ publishers could unite to lobby for it. If widely distributed through multiple publishers, such a system would benefit all New Zealanders with strong, reliable coverage their communities - rather than just improving things only for the few who are able to maintain membership-based outlets. While the UK model is entirely government funded via the BBC, there is also the option of supplementing it with small subscription-based fees to publishers, in the style of older wire services. And, if it were implemented in the next few years, it could also take advantage of the existing regional local reporters who are currently facing the spectre of paper sales and redundancy - and preserve some of that institutional knowledge before it disappears entirely.

The future of local, after all, has implications for the future of all national public-service journalism in New Zealand. Returning again to the opening sections of this report, we hear that, "that relationship - between local citizens and their local sources of information - is the proving ground for trust. That's where it starts, that's where people's relationship to journalism begins." If we can find, create and sustain local public service journalism in our communities, it will flow on to how those communities receive and support journalism as a whole.