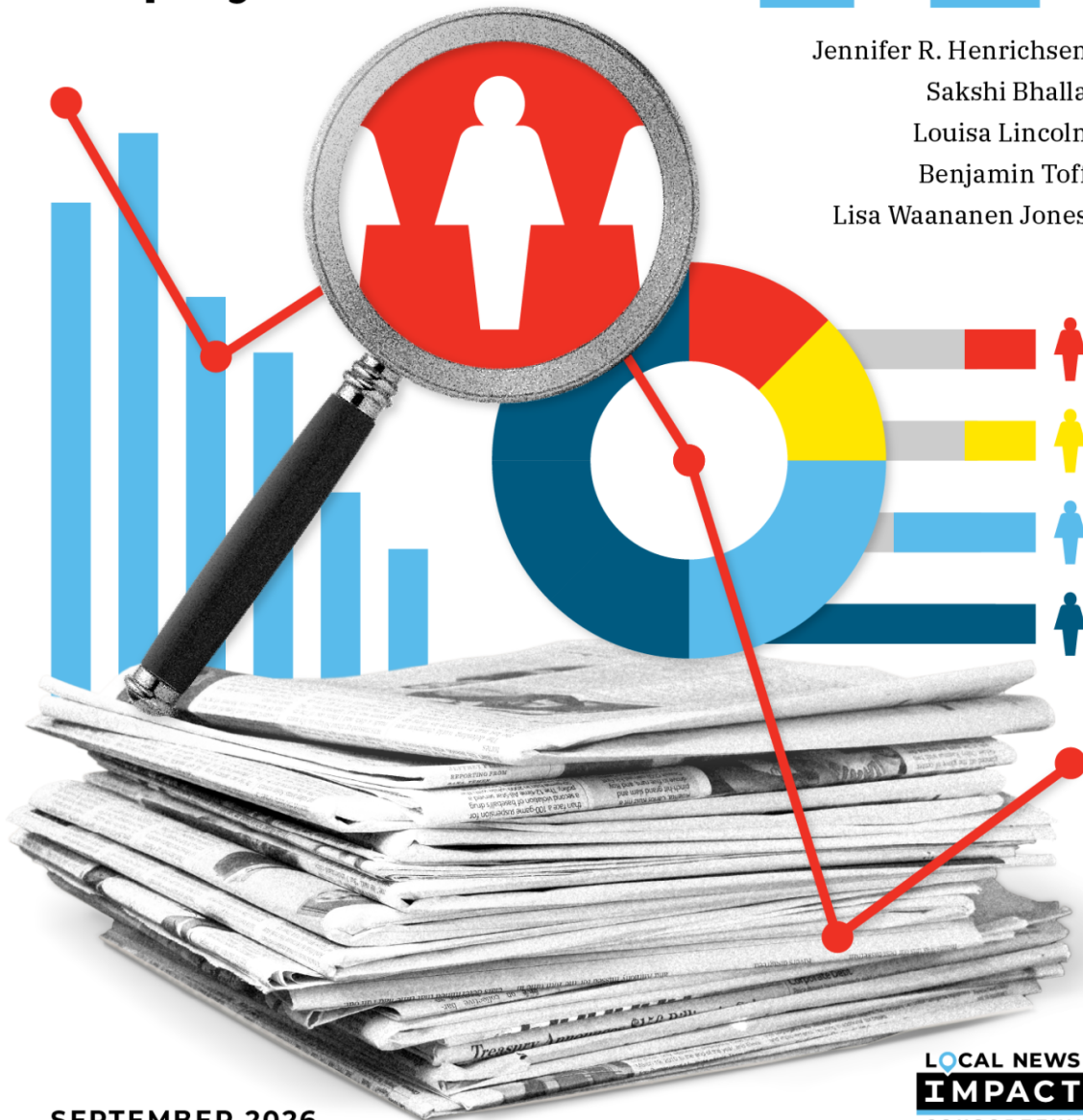


SCOPE IT

Understanding How to Measure Journalism Employment

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LOCAL NEWS
IMPACT
CONSORTIUM

ABOUT THIS REPORT

A Collaborative and Open-Source Approach to the Study of Journalism Employment

This report stems from discussion with scholars and practitioners who engaged with the Journalism Employment Working Group, affiliated with the Local News Impact Consortium (LNIC), an open-source initiative that unites researchers, journalists, and funders to rebuild sustainable, data-driven local news ecosystems.

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This report would not have been possible without the expertise of prominent scholars and practitioners in the journalism and policy realm who contributed in varying ways to the content of this report.

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INTRODUCTION

Creating a Baseline Understanding of How to Measure Journalism Employment

Journalism is in a state of crisis in many parts of the world, including in the United States, with implications for civic life and democratic governance. Academic institutions and nonprofit organizations have conducted research revealing the deteriorating environment afflicting local journalism, from economic and financial concerns to safety and security issues.

In response to the local journalism crisis, leading academic researchers came together to form the [Local News Impact Consortium](#) (LNIC), and in 2025, it was officially established as a nonprofit organization with a ratified governance plan and board. The overarching research question guiding the LNIC's efforts is, "How can we collect more systematic measures of changes in the health of our local news ecosystems?" This question is vitally important because local information ecosystems are changing faster than we can study them; inconsistent approaches to measurement and lack of standards undermine our ability to assess changes over time and across geographies; and the scale of the challenge is too large for a fragmented research community to tackle each aspect individually on its own.

The LNIC created five working groups focused on different aspects of the news crisis: 1) The Newsroom Census, 2) Computational Methods, 3) Audiences and the Public, 4) Journalism Employment, and 5) Economic Impact.

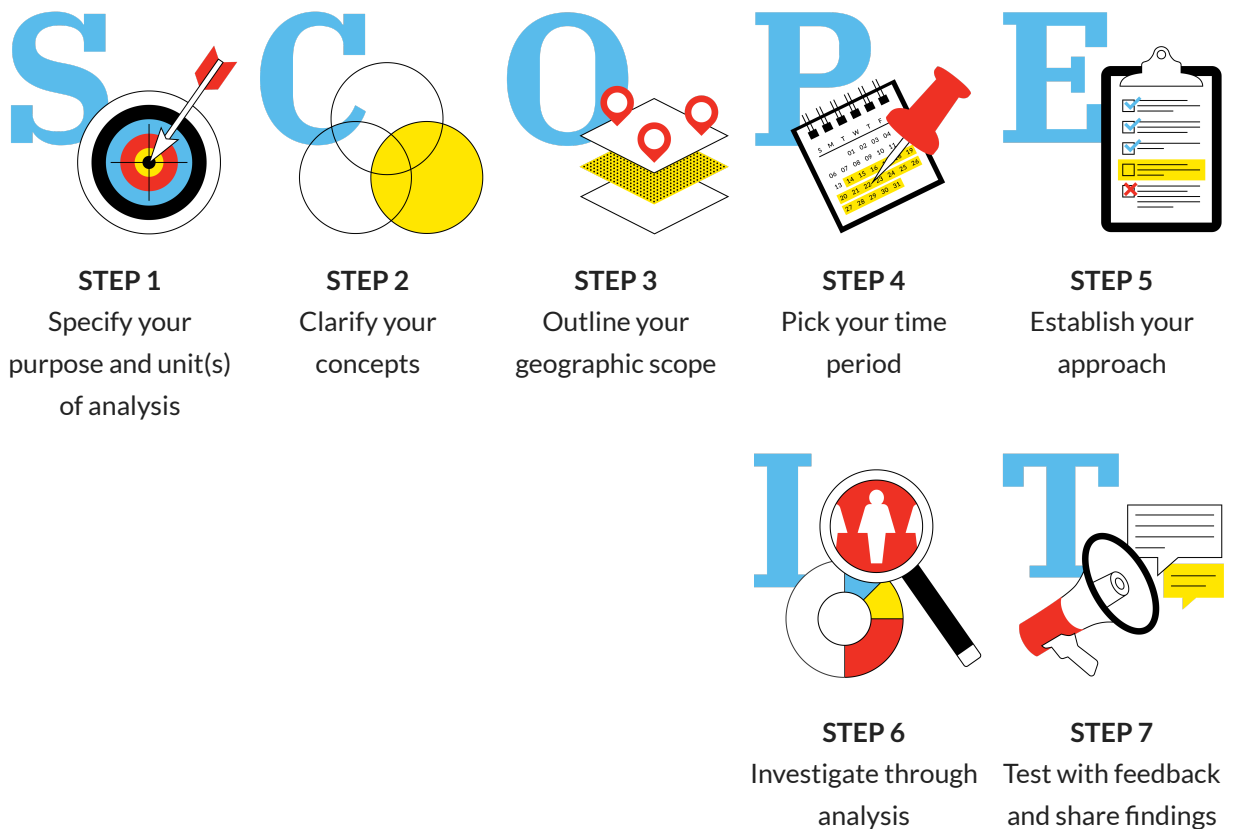
This report, **SCOPE IT: Understanding How to Measure Journalism Employment**, results from conversations with participants of the Journalism Employment Working Group and research conducted by the authors. The Journalism Employment Working Group focuses on studying changes in the local journalism employment landscape, including how to develop feasible, standardized approaches to measuring how many jobs are devoted to covering local news in a given geographic community with greater accuracy and precision.

More specifically, the Journalism Employment Working Group has focused on the following research questions:

- What are the past, present, and future approaches researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders might use for measuring local news employment?
- What are the tradeoffs and limitations around each of these approaches?
- What guidelines or recommendations does the working group suggest for how to collect more standardized data on this subject?

The answers to these questions can be found in this toolkit, which is designed to help readers create studies that measure and assess local journalism employment within a given geographic area. Different readers will arrive at this toolkit with a different set of questions. As such, this toolkit is intended to be flexible, based on the needs of the reader and the guiding questions at hand.

The toolkit proposes the **SCOPE IT** framework, which involves seven steps for individuals to consider when conducting journalism employment research, including:



Who is this toolkit designed for?

- **Policymakers:** The employment landscape for local news is a top priority for policymakers and policy organizations, such as [Rebuild Local News](#), that are lobbying state legislatures and local governments to invest in creating more local journalism jobs.
- **Journalism funders, including [Press Forward local chapters](#):** Many place-based foundations are increasingly interested in funding local journalism in their communities. This toolkit will help funders better understand and assess their existing local news infrastructure in terms of journalism jobs.
- **Researchers, both academic and non-academic:** This toolkit is designed to be accessible to researchers of all kinds, including those across disciplines and/or without extensive academic experience or training.
- **Practitioners:** Other practitioners from news organizations, journalism support groups, and civic and community organizations that are interested in better understanding their local news landscape in terms of journalism employment.

What does this toolkit enable readers to do?

This toolkit allows readers to gain insight into the complicated picture of journalism employment in the United States and provides guidance on the possible steps individuals should consider when carrying out research projects measuring journalism employment.

What does this toolkit not do?

This toolkit does not provide a “one-size fits all” solution to the study and measurement of journalism employment.

Why measure journalism employment?

It is important to measure journalism employment to understand the relative health of a news organization. When news organizations face ownership changes and funding constraints, they often face job losses. These cuts do damage to the news organization’s ability to cover communities fully and, by extension, individuals’ willingness to pay for the product. Too often, news organizations are operating as shells of their former selves. These so-called “ghost” news organizations may have retained their name, but have lost staff and can

no longer report local stories like they did previously. Instead, they may use filler content like reproducing press releases, or overrely on wire or syndicated content, to fill their pages. Thus, by measuring journalism employment, it might be possible to identify when a news organization is on the verge of collapse and intervene before further degradation occurs.

Measuring journalism employment is important for numerous stakeholders, including:

- Journalism support organizations that are trying to understand their local news environments;
- Philanthropic organizations and individuals who want to invest in journalism;
- Policymakers who want to understand the health of local news organizations and how best to support them, such as through policies that would provide funding to news organizations with a certain number of employees (e.g., Washington State Senate Bill 5400);
- Research labs, centers, and individuals who seek to understand and support the future of journalism and its relationship to civic engagement and democracy.

SCOPE IT

7 Steps Toward Understanding the Journalism Employment Landscape

Step 1: Specify Your Purpose and Unit(s) of Analysis

As noted above, the various applications of journalism employment research — including, but not limited to, policy, philanthropy, academia, and/or newsroom practice — require varying levels of precision and comparability. Research questions, measurement approaches, and corresponding data needs will differ, based on the audience and purpose of your analysis. For that reason, it is essential to determine the purpose of the research at the outset.



Therefore, as you begin to design your study, clearly state: 1) the purpose of the analysis, 2) the audiences you intend to reach, 3) the discussions or debates the research will aim to inform, and 4) the unit of analysis you intend to use for the research study.

Importantly, your journalism employment study may have myriad purposes, reach various audiences, and/or inform multiple discussions. For example, a place-based foundation funding a study of local journalism employment in their region may want their eventual findings to both inform their funding and, additionally, instruct policy debates. This is not uncommon, and is to be expected, given the complex and resource-intensive nature of these studies. However, these purposes should be clearly stated from the start to ensure that the final product is legible across different audiences and can be used to inform various discussions.

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Newsroom employment can be captured at different levels. Are you most interested in understanding how many people work as journalists or editors and where they work? Or are you most interested in how many jobs exist within the news production sector at a particular place? The answer to these questions will determine what type of database you will need to use.

For example, if you are interested in understanding how many people work as journalists or editors, you could examine Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), which provides establishment occupational staffing data within the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Current Population Survey data, which provides individual/household-level occupation data.

If you are interested in how many jobs exist inside the news production sector (as defined by North American Industry Classification System or NAICS) in a particular place and time, you could rely on specific BLS data streams such as the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Current Employment Statistics (CES), or the Economic Census because they include jobs attached to establishments that are clearly classified as news publishing/broadcasting.

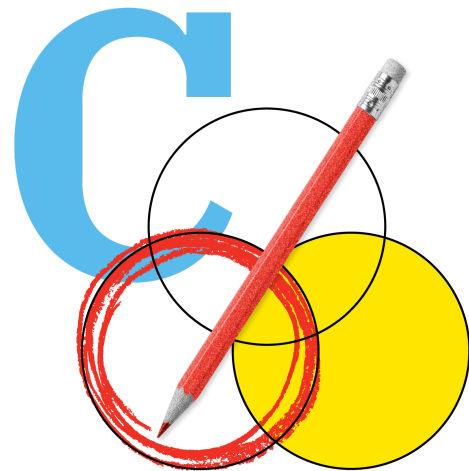
If your use case demands a small geographic scale (such as a county or a community) as well as a specific cross-section of data (news/editors reporters *within* specific print news organizations), primary surveys or platform-based data are more effective than federal sources.

Step 2: Clarify Your Concepts

Next, it's important to define the concepts you plan to use for your study. Two aspects that are key to any journalism employment study include: who counts as a journalist, and what counts as local.

Who counts as a journalist?

While this might seem like a straightforward question, determining who “counts” as a journalist quickly begins to get complicated when attempting to measure and assess the number of journalists working in a given community.



For example, do only full-time employees at an established news organization count as journalists for the purposes of your study? What about part-time staff, freelancers, or regular contributors? Students or interns? Volunteers?

Even among full-time journalists at established news organizations, will your study include editorial staff that do not necessarily get bylines on individual articles? For example, an editor-in-chief, a photojournalist, or digital producer may or may not “count” as a journalist under some definitions. Ultimately, the answer to this question will vary depending on the aforementioned purpose of the study and, to an extent, the data available.

There are three main approaches you can take when conceptualizing newsroom labor, with increasing specificity regarding the job roles performed.

The first approach focuses on headcounts of individuals employed at news outlets, often across job roles. Fluctuations in these headcounts serve as indicators of organizational health and shifts in response to major economic shocks or industry-wide recessions.

The second perspective focuses on labor performed by the employee, regardless of employer. Journalistic labor can often occur outside traditional news organizations, such as nonprofits, or on digital platforms like YouTube. This approach explains the broader demand for journalistic skillsets across the economy, irrespective of the sector to which they are attached.

Lastly, the most specific approach examines the intersection of role and organization. In this case, the analysis is limited to individuals who report and edit specifically within organizations that specialize in news production.

Each measure captures some part of the labor market, leaving out some others. The tradeoff, therefore, is best determined by the purpose underlying this exercise. For a policymaker, for example, full-time journalists within traditional news media may be the most applicable definition to inform legislation. But for a journalist or an academic researcher, it may be necessary to develop a broader definition that includes a wider array of roles. Keep the purpose of your study front-of-mind as you define who counts as a journalist.

Two aspects that are key to any journalism employment study include: who counts as a journalist, and what counts as local.

What counts as local?

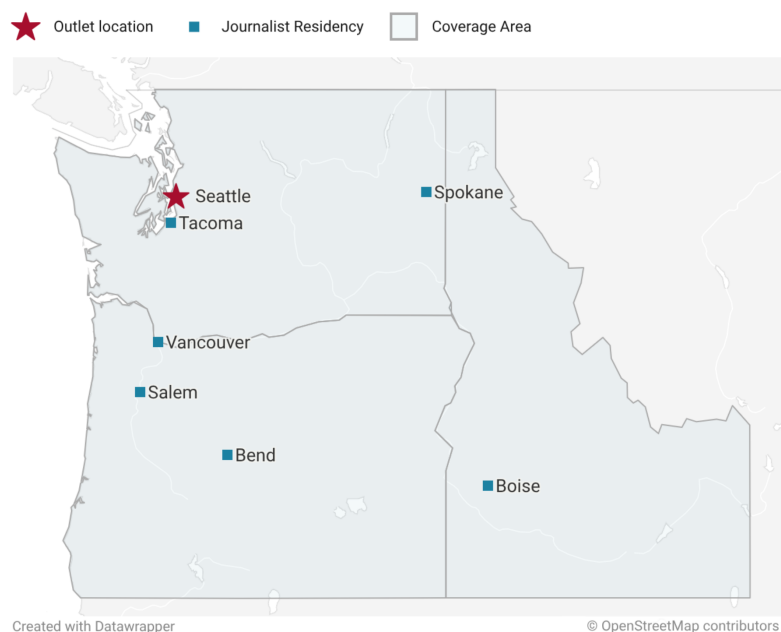
Similarly, a relatively straightforward question quickly becomes convoluted when measuring the number of journalists in a previously-determined, well-defined locale. Most importantly, researchers must determine whether they count local journalists based on where their news organization is physically located, where the journalists are based, or the region the journalists cover.

Take Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) in Portland, Oregon. John is a local reporter at OPB and lives in Portland, but he covers the neighboring community of Vancouver, Washington. If your definition of local is centered on John's place of employment and where he is based, he would count as a local journalist in Portland. But if your definition of local is based on John's coverage area, he would count as a local journalist in Vancouver, Washington. The importance of these definitions is even more stark for John's colleague, Jane, who reports for OPB from her home in Bend – more than three hours away from the organization's headquarters in Portland. Would your definition of local count Jane as a reporter in Portland, or Bend? John and Jane at OPB are fictional examples, but they nonetheless illustrate the importance of clearly defining how you and your study are conceptualizing "local" journalists.

To concretize this a bit further, we've provided the example of the regional outlet InvestigateWest. The outlet is physically based in Seattle, Washington, but it covers Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Additionally, journalists who work at the outlet reside throughout the coverage area.

Figure 1: Example comparison of location methods.

[InvestigateWest](#) is a regional news outlet that shows how different location methods can affect the resulting information. The outlet location is Seattle; coverage area is Oregon, Washington and Idaho; and journalist residency includes cities distributed throughout the coverage area. (Note: Location information is from the outlet's website and LinkedIn as of July 2026. Map omits one editorial staff member based in Colorado.) [Visit Datawrapper for more >](#)



In studies analyzing the local news ecosystem, researchers have defined a local news organization as one that must either be a) located in a particular state and primarily oriented to that state's community, or b) located outside of that state, but primarily oriented toward that state's community. To meet the first criterion, the outlet is based in the state if its physical address or mailing address is in the state and its primary audience is a community in that state. To meet the second criterion, an outlet can still be considered local if it is not located in the state, but its primary audience or one of its primary audiences is a community in that state, evident in a state demonym in the outlet's name, substantial circulation or broadcast in a state community, or an explicit description that the outlet serves a community in that state.¹

Step 3: Outline Your Geographic Scope

Once you have determined the purpose of your study and clarified your concepts, you must also clearly define your geographic scope. Are you measuring local journalism in a particular community, city, or county? Statewide? Regionally? Nationwide? Are you measuring local journalism by a Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA), which is “an area that contains a central county that has a substantial urban population, along with any adjacent communities that have a high level of integration with the central county,”² or are you measuring local journalism by a Designated Market Area (DMA)?



This should flow clearly from the purpose, audience, and debates you have already identified, but may nonetheless come with some nuance — namely, determining the unit of measurement for contextualizing local journalism employment (e.g., outlet-level, county-level, state-level). For example, even if you know that you are analyzing local journalism employment in a particular state, you must decide whether you will

¹Jennifer R. Henrichsen, Pawel Popiel, Elizabeth Chambers, Alexandra Fil, Katie Robinson-Tay, Lisa Waananen Jones, Joanne Lisosky, Ryan J. Thomas, Jody Brannon, and Ben Shors, *From News Deserts to Nonprofit Resilience: Assessing the Health of Washington's Local News Ecosystem* (Pullman, WA: Edward R. Murrow College of Communication, Washington State University, March 2025), <https://news-fellowship.murrow.wsu.edu/documents/2025/10/news-ecosystem.pdf/>

² Congressional Research Service, *Core Based Statistical Areas*, July 3, 2024, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF12704/IF12704.1.pdf

include a county-by-county breakdown of the statewide ecosystem. If so, this will impact your measurement tools and data analysis.

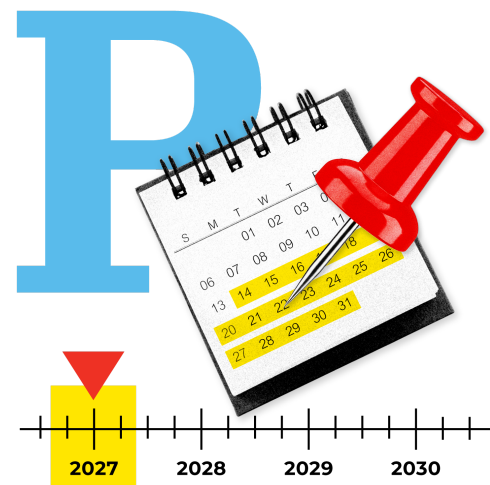
Calibrating these parameters at the outset is critical because it determines whether the data you are using can be credibly aggregated or disaggregated to provide a representative-enough view of the ecosystem you intend to study.

This decision involves significant methodological nuance, as information ecosystems rarely respect administrative boundaries. For example, a statewide analysis might mask local labor gaps or news deserts if the data is not broken down to the county or census-tract level. Conversely, a county-level focus may fail to account for regional newsrooms that provide "spillover" coverage across multiple jurisdictions. Calibrating these parameters at the outset is critical because it determines whether the data you are using can be credibly aggregated or disaggregated to provide a representative-enough view of the ecosystem you intend to study.

Step 4: Pick Your Time Period

Once you've defined your unit of analysis and your geographic scope, it's important to clarify your time period.

Over what length of time are you interested in studying journalism employment? Are you most interested in recent trends to the profession or do you want to understand how certain flashpoints or critical incidents — such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the introduction of artificial intelligence into the journalism labor market — have affected journalism employment? If the former, you need a baseline to work from and replicable methodologies to ensure measurement remains the same over time.



When selecting your time period, it's important to keep your study purpose and your research questions front and center as these will inform your selection.

When selecting your time period, it's important to keep your study purpose and your research questions front and center as these will inform your selection. It's also important to keep in mind the relationship between the unit of interest and the unit of measurement (e.g., the relationship between bylines collected in a discrete period of time and what they imply for the number of journalists who are working in that time period). This helps to ensure continuity between the relationship of what is represented during the time period of data collection and what it implies more broadly.

Step 5: Establish Your Approach

Based on your study's purpose, conceptual definitions, geographic scope, and time period, you can determine which journalism employment research approach and corresponding methodology is most appropriate. Several approaches are outlined below, with associated strengths and limitations. These include:

- [Exploring Occupational and Labor Statistics](#)
- [Using Surveys of Journalists or News Organizations](#)
- [Conducting Desk Research and Manual Compilation](#)
- [Assessing Commercial or Platform-Based Data](#)
- [Exploring Content- and Byline-Based Approaches](#)



This report also features a table comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach in [Appendix B](#).

Exploring Occupational and Labor Statistics

A variety of federal labor datasets provide insights into the health of the journalism industry, yet they operate at varying frequencies and geographical resolutions. The primary challenge for researchers is navigating the trade-off between capturing a real-time industry temperature and conducting a deep dive into occupational specificity. The frequency of publication dictates the granularity and the ultimate purpose of these datasets; understanding these mechanics is essential for accurately measuring the news workforce.

The primary challenge for researchers is navigating the trade-off between capturing a real-time industry temperature and conducting a deep dive into occupational specificity.

High frequency datasets serve as the primary indicators of immediate economic shifts, such as mass layoffs or industry-wide contractions, but they often lack the resolution needed to distinguish specific newsroom roles. Lower frequency datasets are critical in helping us distinguish between all newspaper employees from those employed in specific journalistic roles. Table 1 summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of six federal data sets.

DATASET	UNIT OF ANALYSIS	FREQUENCY	USE CASE	COVERAGE GAP
Current Employment Statistics (CES)	Establishment	Monthly	Tracking immediate newsroom headcounts, helpful in assessing shocks/industry-wide layoffs	No occupational detail
Current Population Survey (CPS)	Individual	Monthly	Estimating national unemployment rates for self-identified journalists/editors	Small/negligible sample for news
Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)	Job	Quarterly	Benchmarking total newsroom employment at different geographical levels	Misses freelance

DATASET	UNIT OF ANALYSIS	FREQUENCY	USE CASE	COVERAGE GAP
Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS)	Occupation	Annual	Wages and staffing ratios specifically for Reporters and Editors	3-year rolling lag; misses freelance
American Community Survey (ACS)	Individual	Annual	Analyzing the demographics within local newsroom workforces via PUMS	High noise in small areas; limited news coverage given sample size limitations
Economic Census	Firm/Establ.	5 Years	Mapping the total number of physical news establishments	Suppression in small markets

Table 1: Summary of federal labor datasets.

Current Employment Statistics (CES)

Website: www.bls.gov/ces

Published monthly, the CES is an establishment survey that tracks non-farm payroll employment, hours, and earnings. For the purposes of studying journalism employment, it provides a high-frequency count of the total workforce within specific industry classifications, such as Newspaper Publishers or Broadcasting. It is designed to reliably track monthly macroeconomic shifts across sectors rather than granular job roles. As a result, it serves as a measure of sectoral health rather than occupational density. That is, it does not distinguish between a reporter, a delivery person, or an accountant employed within the same industry, as it aggregates all payroll headcounts regardless of specific job functions.

Current Population Survey (CPS)

Website: www.bls.gov/cps

This monthly household survey is the source of the national unemployment rate. It allows researchers to identify individuals who self-report their occupation as a "journalist" or "editor." However, because

journalists represent a small fraction of the total population, the sample size at the monthly level is often too small for reliable geographic analysis below the national or large-state level. Despite that limitation, the CPS reports “place of residence” of the workforce. Thus, if a reporter lives in and covers rural Washington, they will be counted as a resident professional within their rural county even if their place of work is Seattle.

Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)

Website: www.bls.gov/cew

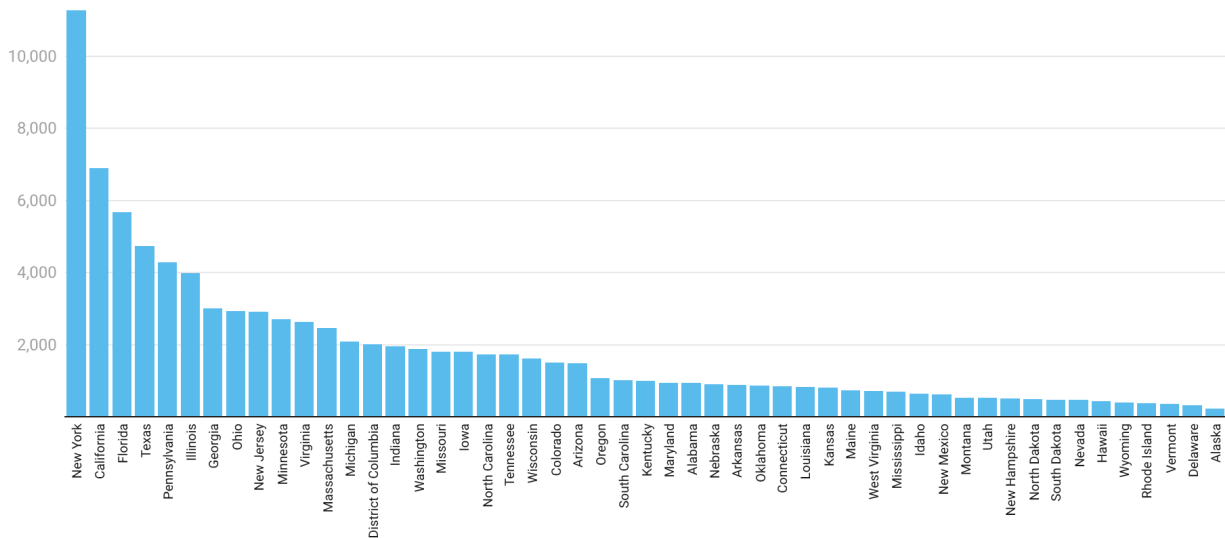
Derived from administrative Unemployment Insurance (UI) records, the QCEW is a near-census of U.S. jobs. Its greatest strength is its geographic resolution, providing data down to the county level. While it is the most robust tool for measuring local industry health, it remains limited by its focus on industry classification (NAICS). Thus, it can tell us if a local newspaper is shedding jobs, but not which types of roles are being eliminated.

However, most freelancers and independent contractors will be invisible in the QCEW. Since they are not “employees” in the legal sense, a newsroom does not report them on their quarterly UI filings. Furthermore, this is a “place of work” report. In the age of remote work, a journalist living in rural Washington might work for a paper headquartered in Seattle. The QCEW attributes that job to Seattle, masking the existence of *local* journalistic labor in a rural county.

The following figure shows the number of employees in newspaper publishing in the first quarter of 2024. You will notice that figures from QCEW are only slightly understated compared with the Economic Census (discussed later) which produces a similar count. This makes the Quarterly Census a very valuable source of high frequency data.

Newspaper Industry Employment by State – BLS QCEW Q1 2024

NAICS 513110: All employees at newspaper publishers (private sector)



Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Newspaper industry employment by state. [Visit Datawrapper for more about this data >](#)

Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS)

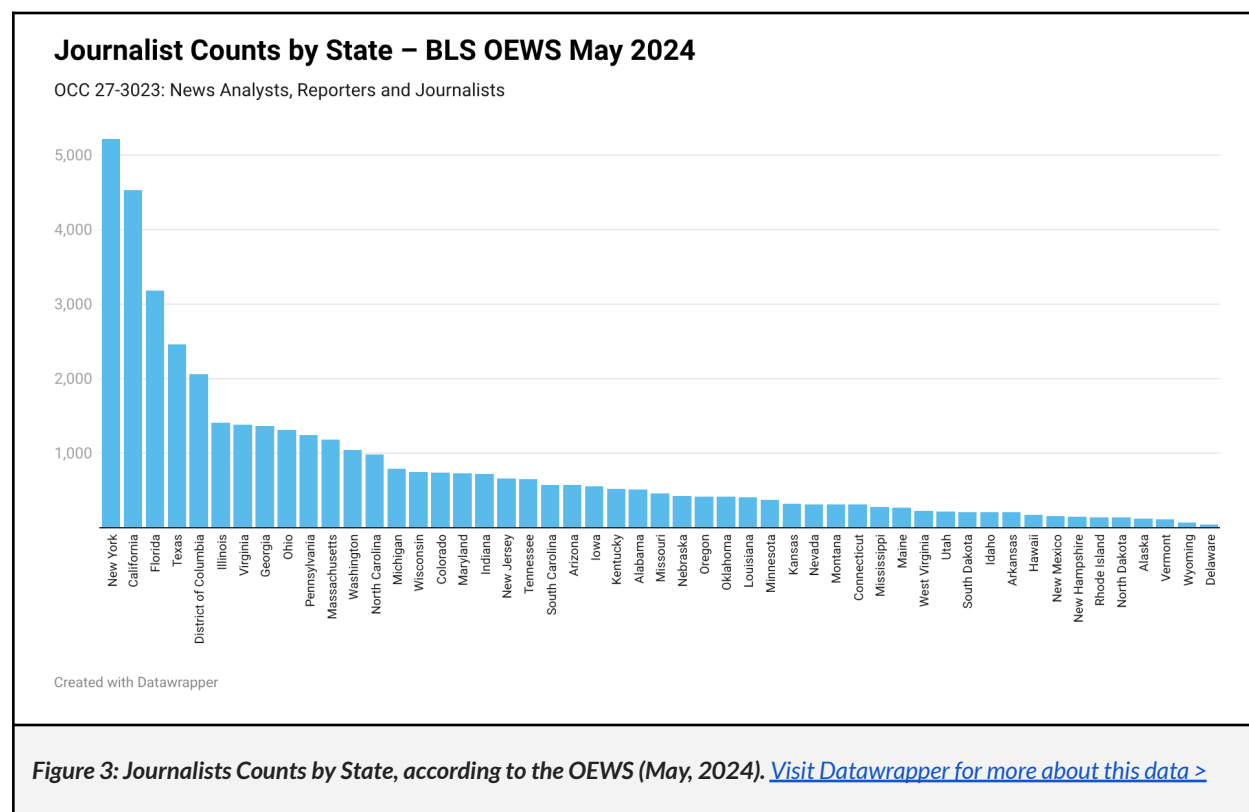
Website: www.bls.gov/oes

This annual survey of employers is the primary tool for measuring specific roles, such as News Analysts, Reporters, and Journalists. It provides critical data on employment levels and wages at the national, state, and Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) levels. To generate its annual estimates, the OEWS pools data from six semi-annual panels collected over a three-year cycle. However, it faces significant geographic suppression. This means that in smaller or less competitive markets, the BLS may suppress data to protect the confidentiality of the few local news employers in that region.

The OEWS is aimed at providing a precise overview of employment and wage estimates for specific occupations. To do so, the BLS combines six panels of data collected over a three year period. Thus, it is not entirely suitable to study shocks to the economy, but excellent for structural analysis. Since it is also an establishment survey, coverage for self employed or freelancing workers is limited.

Furthermore, occupation codes follow the individual worker, rather than their employer. So, if a large corporation (let's say, an insurance company) hires an individual for the purposes of brand journalism, they will still be counted as a journalist based on their day-to-day tasks.

The figure below depicts the estimated number of individuals employed as journalists across states according to the May 2024 estimates of the OEWS.



American Community Survey (ACS)

Website: www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.html

As an ongoing household survey, the ACS provides the most detailed socioeconomic look at the journalism workforce, including age, race, and education. Using Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files, researchers can analyze journalists at the PUMA level (areas of ~100,000 people). While it offers high geographic flexibility, the data is subject to high Margins of Error (MOE) for niche occupations, making it noisy for researchers looking at specific rural areas. In some cases, depending on the goals of your study, you may need to default to the five-year ACS to get a large enough N for a local enough analysis.

Economic Census

Website: www.census.gov/programs-surveys/economic-census.html

Conducted every five years, this is the most comprehensive measure of American business. It provides the ground truth for the number of physical news establishments and total revenue. It is the most accurate tool for identifying long-term structural shifts.

Conducted in years ending in '2' and '7', the goal of the economic census is to provide comprehensive, industry-specific statistics on the number of establishments, revenue, and payroll to benchmark GDP and other economic indicators.

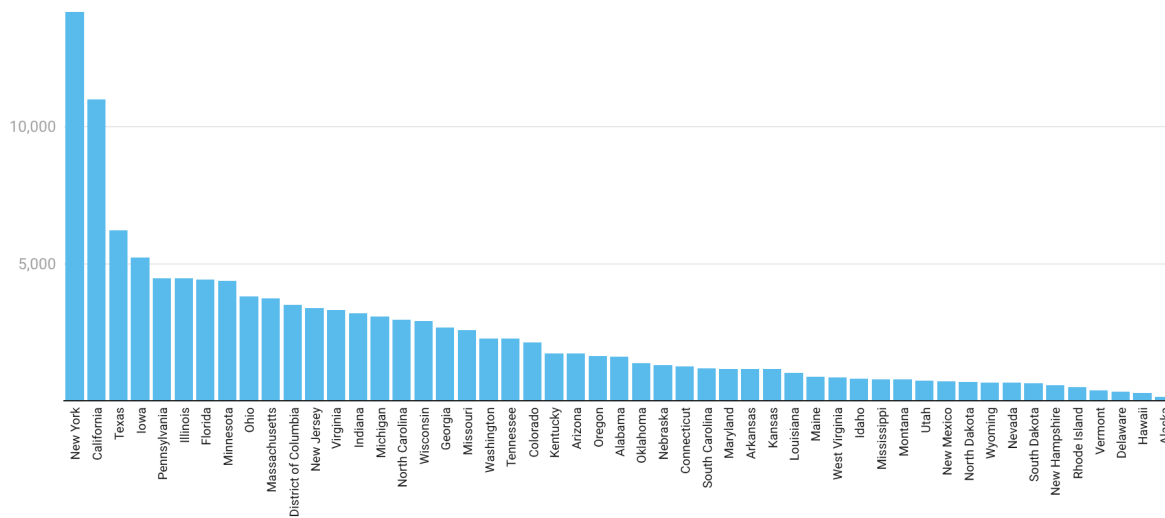
It offers the highest potential for geographic granularity, often drilling down to the county and place level. However, its utility is restricted by disclosure rules. If an industry like Newspaper Publishers is not sufficiently “publishable” in a specific region, the data is suppressed to protect firm confidentiality. In practice, this results in data being available for only about 364 out of 900+ CBSAs and 499 out of 3,100+ counties, creating significant blind spots when studying rural news ecosystems.

Furthermore, the primary Geographic Area Statistics only cover employer businesses (those with paid employees). This means that these tables potentially systematically understate journalistic activity in regions where production is heavily reliant on freelancers or independent contractors.

The figure below shows the number of people employed in the newspaper sector by state, according to the Economic Census of 2022.

Newspaper Industry Employment by State – Economic Census 2022

NAICS 513110: All employees at newspaper publishers



Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4: Count of employees across newspaper publishers by state. (Economic Census, 2022). [Visit Datawrapper for more about this data >](#)

Ultimately, federal labor statistics should be viewed as a floor rather than the ceiling for measuring the journalism workforce. Given that these datasets are tied to administrative tax records or UI filings, they primarily capture the minimum count of formal, payroll-based staff jobs. They effectively ignore the fluid non-employer margin of the industry, often comprising independent contractors, freelancers, and solo-entrepreneurs who increasingly define the local news ecosystem.

Ultimately, federal labor statistics should be viewed as a floor rather than the ceiling for measuring the journalism workforce.

To capture this missing labor force and move toward a more realistic ceiling, researchers can pivot to commercial or platform-based data (such as Muck Rack, LinkedIn, or Coresignal discussed later). These sources are agnostic to a worker's UI tax status. That is, they categorize individuals based on professional identity and self-reported activity rather than payroll classification. While federal data provides the structural baseline of the industry, these commercial layers are increasingly necessary to understand the extent of journalistic work produced by individuals who are less visible within these datasets.

In sum, although federal databases have several strengths, including a national scope, consistency over time, and legitimacy for trend analysis, they also have significant limitations. These large datasets include occupational categories that align poorly with newsroom roles, they have a limited ability to distinguish local work from non-local work and inadequately capture part-time, freelance, intern, or volunteer labor. Additionally, they suppress local journalism employment data and have weak geographic specificity, making national labor datasets one part of the equation when measuring journalism employment, but requiring additional measures to capture the entire picture.

Using Surveys of Journalists or News Organizations

While journalists have been directly surveyed for more than five decades,³ these surveys have traditionally focused more on journalistic roles, work conditions, and professional values rather than direct staffing estimates. Surveys such as the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) Newsroom Employment Census (later known as the Newsroom Employment Diversity Survey) operated as a benchmark mechanism for tracking the demographic makeup of newsroom staff and evolved to include digital-only outlets, newsroom leadership diversity, and gender. In later years, the survey was plagued by limited participation and low response rates, leading to a temporary pause in data collection⁴ before relaunching in 2025 (under new ownership) as the [American Press Institute's Media Inclusion and Impact Survey](#). Updates from this survey are anticipated to arrive by late 2026.

While journalists have been directly surveyed for more than five decades, these surveys have traditionally focused more on journalistic roles, work conditions, and professional values rather than direct staffing estimates.

One ongoing national survey of nonprofit organizations is conducted by the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN). INN has been surveying its members since 2018 for information related to staff size, revenue, and

³ John W. C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski, and William W. Bowman, *The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); David H. Weaver, Lars Willnat, and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "The American Journalist in the Digital Age: Another Look at U.S. News People," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 96, no. 1 (2019): 101–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018778242>.

⁴ American Press Institute, "Survey History," accessed May 4, 2026, <https://americanpressinstitute.org/api-media-inclusion-impact-survey/survey-history/>

audiences, among other metrics.⁵ [INN's index of business and editorial statistics](#) allows its members to benchmark their progress and develop strategies for further development. Additionally, [Project Oasis](#), a global research project focused on independent digital media and led by SembraMedia with the support of LION Publishers, the Google News Initiative, and others, has surveyed outlets across the globe, including outlets' staffing numbers.

The local TV industry has also been surveyed over the years, including measures such as staff size, layoffs, and salaries, but these surveys have focused only on local broadcast organizations, limiting the overall journalism employment picture across media types, and the unit of analysis has been at the newsroom level rather than the individual journalist level.⁶ Additionally, the sample frame and definition of a journalist can vary, making direct comparison across decades and survey waves difficult.

Scholars have begun conducting surveys of local news organizations in their respective states to try to ascertain staffing numbers across news organizations, including radio, TV, online-only, and newspaper. In Washington, scholars disseminated a survey to 353 news organizations who met the inclusion criteria for their database and specifically asked staffing questions, including how many full-time editorial staff, how many part-time editorial staff, and how many overall staff existed in each news organization. The survey was disseminated specifically to management level employees like editors, publishers, and owners who were in a position to provide up-to-date data on this metric. In Minnesota, scholars sent a survey to a subset of news organizations in the state and asked similar questions, but structured their survey so newspaper owners could answer the survey for up to five newspapers because of the high number of small local chains in the area. As such, scholars were able to differentiate how much time staff members worked part-time at each publication.

The strengths of state-level surveys include the ability to tailor definitions and adapt them to the local context. Additionally, the state-level surveys mentioned above occurred after the scholars had already mapped the local news ecosystem in their states and had a database of verified news organizations to send the survey to, allowing for a more robust and accurate response. Survey questions and survey logic can also be tailored to capture part-time, freelance, intern, and volunteer labor; effort which is essential for keeping news organizations afloat and yet is masked or opaque in broader data collection efforts, including at the national level with BLS data. Finally, state-level surveys can provide “ground truth” to other measurement approaches, thereby serving as an important triangulation tool.

⁵ Institute for Nonprofit News, “The 2025 INN Index,” accessed May 4, 2026, <https://inn.org/research/inn-index/2025-index/about-the-index/>

⁶ Bob Papper and Keren Henderson, “2022—A Challenging Year in Local TV News,” *Electronic News* 17, no. 3 (2023): 139–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19312431231181925>.

Another challenge with survey research is that researchers may define their concepts differently, use different units of measurement, and/or have different aims or goals in their surveys, making replication and/or longitudinal studies difficult.

Even with these strengths, state-level surveys have limitations. Like most surveys used in social science research, state-level surveys on journalism employment can suffer from low or uneven response rates among participants. Journalists may not respond to survey requests because of time constraints, competing priorities, or suspicions that such requests are phishing attempts. Additionally, surveys that ask questions related to annual operating budgets and staffing numbers may be sensitive for many newsrooms. These topics may bring up painful emotions related to layoff decisions and colleague departures and may feel like a criticism to managers who have had to oversee shrinking newsrooms.

Another challenge with survey research is that researchers may define their concepts differently (e.g., who is a journalist), apply different time scales when operationalizing concepts (e.g., may view “employed” to mean “recently employed” versus “currently employed”, in order to capture fluctuating interns, etc.), use different units of measurement (e.g., newsroom vs. journalist), and/or have different aims or goals in their surveys, making replication and/or longitudinal studies difficult. Conducting surveys can be resource-intensive with high labor costs for researchers. Depending on the strengths and skillsets of the researchers involved, researchers may need to outsource certain components of the survey process, such as survey design, dissemination, follow-up, or analysis. Surveys also typically require an institutional review board (IRB) process by a university body, which can lengthen the overall time for a project.

Conducting Desk Research and Manual Compilation

In the absence of a comprehensive database, researchers might elect to conduct desk research to take stock of the number of journalists in a particular region. This approach generally involves bringing together multiple data sources, such as assembling a list of news outlets in the region and estimating staffing based on outlet websites, social media pages, public filings, union records, and/or association lists. For example, a researcher might start with a comprehensive list of news outlets in a particular region — newspapers, digital news sites, radio or TV stations, etc. — and then record the number of journalists employed by each outlet, based on publicly-available information on their website, LinkedIn page, or other sources.

Directories such as the News Media Yellow Book and Bacon’s Newspaper Directory have historically provided a useful starting place for such studies because they previously included contact information for

reporters and editors working at newspapers.⁷ However, these directories are limited because they only contain information for journalism employees in newspapers, which constitute a shrinking segment of the media ecosystem. Neither the News Media Yellow Book or Bacon's Newspaper Directory are published in print anymore, although older versions can be accessed for historical work. Additionally, both databases have transitioned to online subscription databases that can be prohibitively expensive. More recently, journalism support organizations like [INN](#) and [LION](#) have made their membership databases freely available, providing a generative starting place for studies involving desk research and manual compilation.

While they may be highly accurate and painstakingly precise, these studies are hard to scale, sustain, and update, which therefore limits their utility.

At its best, this approach to measuring journalism employment can be highly accurate when carefully executed, making it a particularly useful approach in situations when precision is required (e.g., policymaking). It is also highly adaptable to the local context and larger media ecosystem in a particular region, making it useful for place-based philanthropies. Additionally, desk research can be combined with other methods — including the aforementioned national labor statistics or survey data — to resolve any gaps and provide additional precision, when required. Unlike survey methods, though, desk research does not require researchers to recruit news organizations to participate, because it is largely based on publicly-available information, thus reducing the burden on time- and resource-strapped news organizations.

One downside of desk research and manual compilation is the fact it is extremely labor- and resource-intensive. Depending on the scope of the analysis, such studies will generally require multiple researchers and/or research assistants to achieve the level of precision and detail necessary to meaningfully assess local journalism employment. Additionally, they are highly dependent on the researcher's judgment, making them difficult for other researchers to replicate (and thus measure change over time). Therefore, while they may be accurate and painstakingly precise, these studies are hard to scale, sustain, and update, which therefore limits their utility.

Assessing Commercial or Platform-Based Data

Commercial platforms such as Coresignal, Revelio, and Muck Rack offer alternative methods for measuring the journalism workforce by aggregating professional identities of professionals' presence across digital

⁷ Erik Peterson and Johanna Dunaway, "The New News Barons: Investment Ownership Reduces Newspaper Reporting Capacity," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 707 (May 2023): 74–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162231211426>.

media and platforms. Unlike administrative records, these sources identify individuals based on their self-reported roles and public-facing work. Publicly-available and/or purchased data from these sources and others can be used as a method to measure and assess local journalism employment.

Coresignal and Revelio

Websites: www.coresignal.com and www.reveliolabs.com

Data providers like Coresignal and Revelio aggregate structured labor market data from professional networking sites like LinkedIn and Glassdoor. They provide large-scale datasets focused on employment and organizational history.

Sources like these can potentially offer coverage across time on firm-level headcounts, employee seniority, and career trajectories. They may be effective for mapping personnel movement as well, tracking when individuals leave journalism for other sectors, such as public relations or corporate communications.

Muck Rack

Website: www.muckrack.com

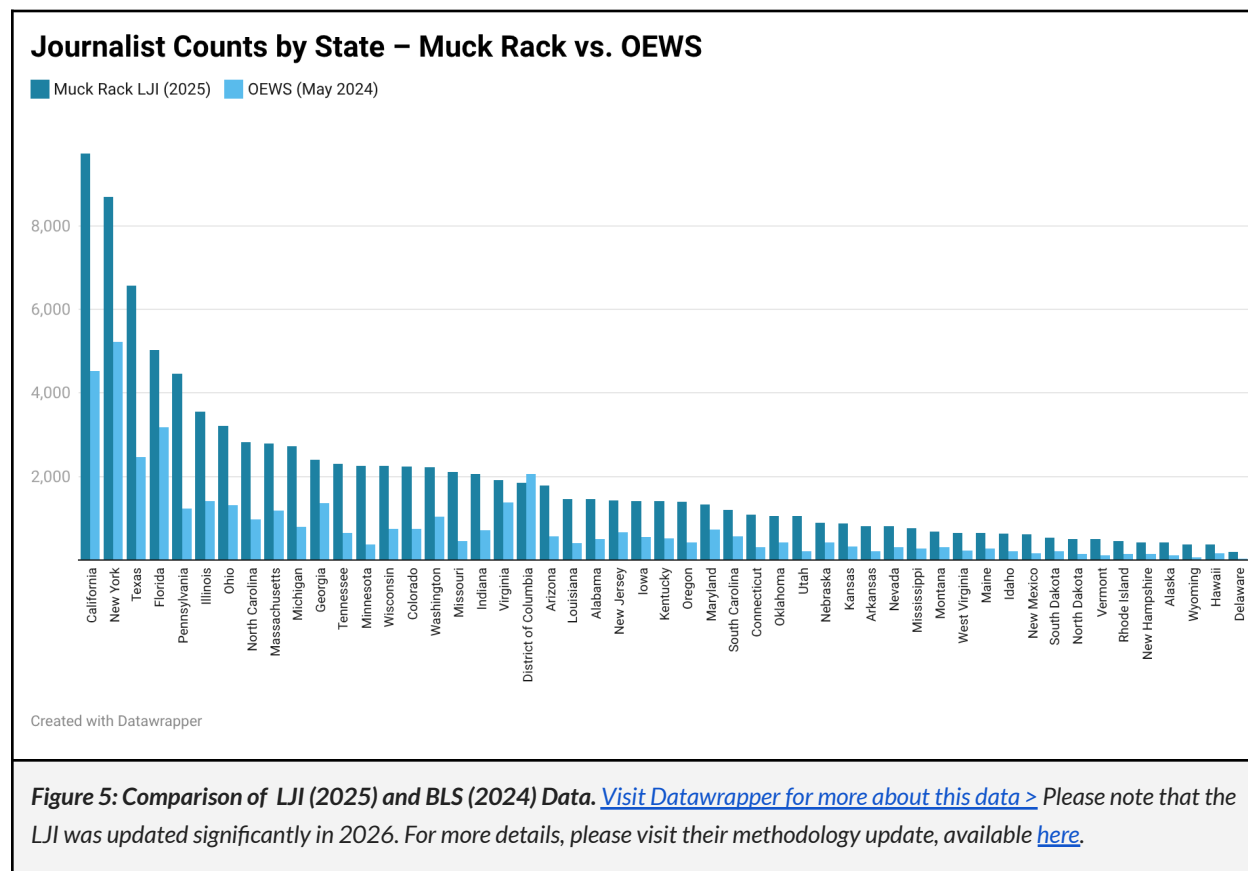
Muck Rack is a media database that identifies journalists by scraping news websites for bylines and monitoring social media activity. It maintains a directory of professionals that is updated through a combination of automated web crawls and manual verification.

Individual profiles include current outlet affiliations, historical byline archives, specific topical beats and social media engagement metrics. It identifies contributors based on active production, allowing the inclusion of freelancers, independent contractors, and remote reporters who may not appear in a specific newsroom's local payroll data but are actively producing content for that outlet.

The [Local Journalist Index \(LJI\)](#) by Rebuild Local News is an example of effective and innovative usage of such platform data. Relying on extensive data extraction from the Muck Rack platform, LJI provides estimates of how many journalists remain at various geographic levels, including the county. Further, they provide an improvised statistic, the Local Journalist Equivalent, which estimates how many journalists cover counties even if they lack their own local media.

As the comparison between the raw counts of journalists from LJI and BLS data show (Fig. 5), platforms like Muck Rack provide more extensive coverage across states and counties because they are not constrained by federal disclosure-avoidance rules. Furthermore, because these platforms identify journalists through byline activity rather than payroll records, they capture independent and freelance labor that falls outside the BLS definition of a "wage and salary" employee. At the same time, platforms like Muck Rack may provide an overly optimistic view of the market by including content creators or bloggers who are not journalistic in

nature and by not regularly removing journalists who have been laid off or have left the industry. As a result, platform data may be more reflective of the content economy rather than newsroom health.



To best facilitate a fair assessment of these various datasets as well as the journalistic labor market, one way to think about this is to consider federal figures as the floor of the analysis, and the platform data as the ceiling. Bounding expectations in this way can result in more reasonable estimates than either data alone can provide. Triangulating between these two bounds allows for a measurement of the market that accounts for both the state of legacy newsrooms and the rise of decentralized content production.

While these sources provide a granular view of the workforce, they introduce specific biases and technical challenges that require careful consideration. For instance, these platforms rely on a digital footprint. As a result, they can over-represent journalists at national outlets or digital-native startups in urban centers. Rural reporters or those at legacy publications with limited web presence may be undercounted or omitted. To address limitations, the updated 2026 LJL methodology added an adjusted count to exclude non-local news coverage and better account for journalists who work in multiple roles or for multiple employers.

Selection bias is more pertinent for data like CoreSignal or Revelio, which, while reliable when it comes to macro trends, still depend on individuals creating a LinkedIn, Glassdoor or Indeed profile. Those who do not create or update their profiles, will continue to remain invisible or miscounted.

Occupational categorization on these platforms often relies on user-selected tags. This creates a significant risk of occupational conflation, where content marketers, brand managers, and PR specialists are grouped with newsroom professionals due to overlapping keyword descriptions like "writer" or "content creator."

The accuracy of the data depends on the frequency of platform scraping as well as user updates. Profiles often remain active long after an individual has left a specific role or the industry entirely, leading to potential overcounts of active labor in the field. In the same vein, utilizing platform data to aid over time analyses requires significant technical and computational resources.

Exploring Content- and Byline-Based Approaches

Another way to assess journalism employment is to use publication output as a proxy for journalism labor. Specifically, researchers can measure content volume, track bylines, or content similarity, to assess newsroom employment capacity and capabilities.

Researchers who measure content volume assume that when staffing cuts occur, a news organization's original content volume will likely drop as well.⁸ Through empirical research in U.S. and French newsrooms, scholars have shown how content volume is credible as an explicit theory of newsroom production⁹ because it reveals changes in reporting effort within an outlet or market over time. That said, it still serves as a proxy measure for exact journalism employment numbers because it does not pinpoint whether decreased output is a result of fewer staff, platform shifts in the news organization, or changes in newsroom workflow.¹⁰

Scholars have shown how content volume is credible as an explicit theory of newsroom production because it reveals changes in reporting effort within an outlet or market over time.

⁸ Erik Peterson, "Paper Cuts: How Reporting Resources Affect Political News Coverage," *American Journal of Political Science* 65, no. 2 (2021): 443–59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12560>.

⁹ Julia Cagé, "Media Competition, Information Provision and Political Participation: Evidence from French Local Newspapers and Elections, 1944–2014," *Journal of Public Economics* 185 (2020): 104077, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2019.104077>; Charles Angelucci and Julia Cagé, "Newspapers in Times of Low Advertising Revenues," *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics* 11, no. 3 (2019): 319–64, <https://doi.org/10.1257/mic.20170306>.

¹⁰ Richard Bowyer, "Where Have All the Stories and Voices Gone in Local Newspapers? The Effect Falling Advertising Revenues and the Rise of the Web Have Had on English Regional Newspapers," *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications* 7, no. 4 (2021): 221–38, <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajmmc.7-4-1>.

Another practice involves counting the number of journalists based on the public bylines available on a news organization's website to estimate journalism labor. Scholars can code articles by employment basis (e.g., specialized staff, general staff, freelancers, etc.) to better identify the type of employment available within a news organization. A limitation to this approach is that authorship and byline conventions differ depending on the newsroom's norms, with some news organizations choosing to not have bylines on their articles, creating external validity and replication challenges.

Recently, scholars developed a scalable and semi-automated approach to assess digital news *content* according to journalism quality standards,¹¹ capturing both the volume and quality of content, including bylines of journalists. This method, when combined with other approaches, may be a successful strategy for measuring journalism employment.

Lastly, researchers can assess content similarity within a news organization to infer labor capacity. The underlying logic of this approach suggests that fewer original stories reflects fewer employed journalists and greater reliance on external copy, such as wire stories or even press releases.

The strengths of these content- and byline-based approaches include a lower burden on newsrooms because researchers can typically bypass newsroom involvement and instead scrape news organizations' websites or manually download news stories to conduct content analysis. The limitations of these approaches include the fact that they are proxy measures for direct staff counts of journalists at news organizations, and if using a web crawler, typically require a certain level of technical expertise to develop and deploy it.

In sum, these five approaches to measuring journalism employment (occupational and labor statistics, surveys, desk research/manual compilation, commercial or platform data, and content and byline approaches) can be combined to compensate for gaps in any single approach (e.g., combining manual desk research to account for any gaps in a newsroom survey).

¹¹ Asma Khanom, Damon Kiesow, Matt Zdun, and Chi-Ren Shyu, "The News Crawler: A Big Data Approach to Local Information Ecosystems," *Media and Communication* 11, no. 3 (2023): 318–29, <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i3.6789>.

Step 6: Investigate Through Analysis

You have now taken the necessary steps ahead of conducting your analysis. You have established your research purpose(s) and selected your unit(s) of analysis. You have clarified your key concepts, defined your geographic scope and your timeframe. You have determined which approaches and datasets are most relevant to your needs and can answer your research questions. The next step is conducting your analysis. This will look different depending on what route you wish to take.

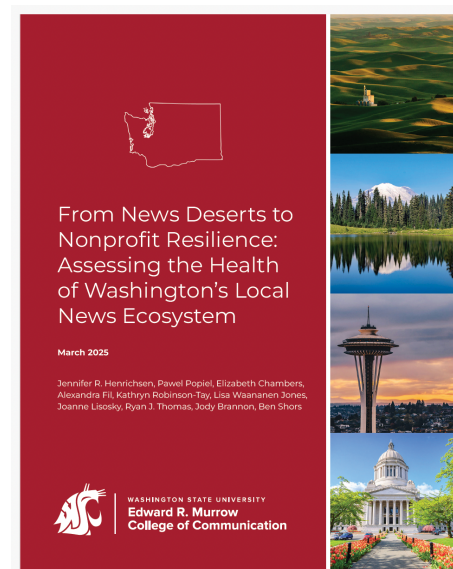


Ideally, you will combine approaches and datasets to obtain the most thorough and holistic picture of journalism employment in your given geographic region and timeframe. This might look like a combination of a state-level survey with desk research or content- and byline-based approaches. In other cases, depending on needs and resource constraints, you might rely solely on desk research or federal statistical data. Regardless of the approach you ultimately choose, remember your research purpose and the audiences you seek to reach.

Putting Research Principles into Practice: A Washington Case Study

The most robust way of documenting journalism employment in your given geographic area and during your specific timeframe likely results from a combination of approaches. To put these approaches into practice, we have included a case study from Washington state, [*From News Deserts to Nonprofit Resilience: Assessing the Health of Washington's Local News Ecosystem*](#).

A team of researchers, led by Washington State University Assistant Professor Dr. Jennifer R. Henrichsen, carried out a local news ecosystem analysis of Washington. The purpose of the study was to understand the health of the local news ecosystem in Washington to inform policymakers, foundations, journalists, and academics. The project began because the Washington State Legislature appropriated \$2.4 million to Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University to create the Murrow News Fellowship program. As part of



this program, Murrow College thought it was important to understand the local news ecosystem of Washington to ensure journalists were assigned to the most underserved areas in the state.

The unit of analysis for this study was the news organization as researchers were most interested in understanding how many news organizations existed across the state and where gaps in news were most prevalent. The research team first defined key concepts including what constituted a local news organization. To be considered local, outlets had to either be a) located in Washington and primarily oriented to a Washington community, or b) located outside of Washington but primarily oriented to a Washington community. Additionally, to ensure that the news organization produced local news, the research team only included organizations that a) publish substantial content on a website or social media page that is b) original, c) journalistic, and d) locally relevant.

The research team began collecting open-source data in the fall of 2023. They interviewed 32 journalists, policymakers, and academics, and disseminated a survey to the 353 outlets that met the criteria for database inclusion in 2024.

The research team sought feedback from other scholars in the field, especially those who had conducted or were in the process of conducting their own state-level ecosystem analyses. The lead researcher also presented the research at academic and practitioner focused conferences for additional feedback.

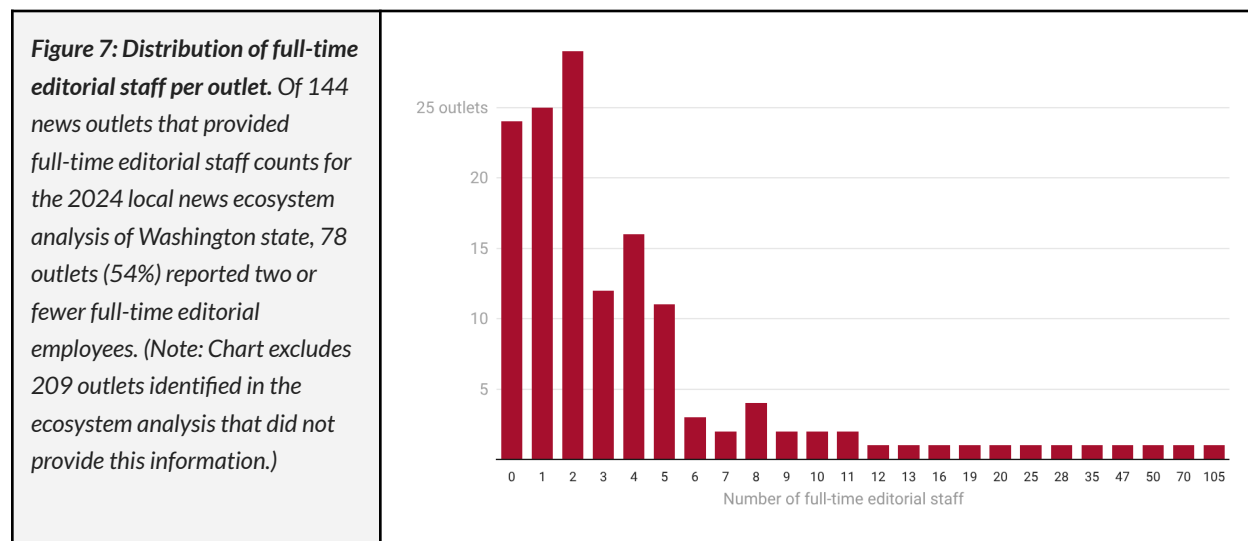
While the focus of the study was an overall mapping of the local news ecosystem of Washington, one metric the research team was interested in was journalism employment. Since several metrics were difficult to obtain via open source methods, including staffing data, the research team designed a survey questionnaire to get a more accurate and granulated count of journalism employment. In the Washington survey, top management officials (e.g., editors, publishers, owners) were asked the following questions as it pertained to staffing in their organization:

Q.7: What is your organization's staff size?

- How many part-time editorial staff, including freelance staff, contributors, and volunteers do you have?
- How many full-time editorial staff, including staff involved in reporting, editing, production, or distribution of news do you have?
- What is the total number of editorial, business and other staff?

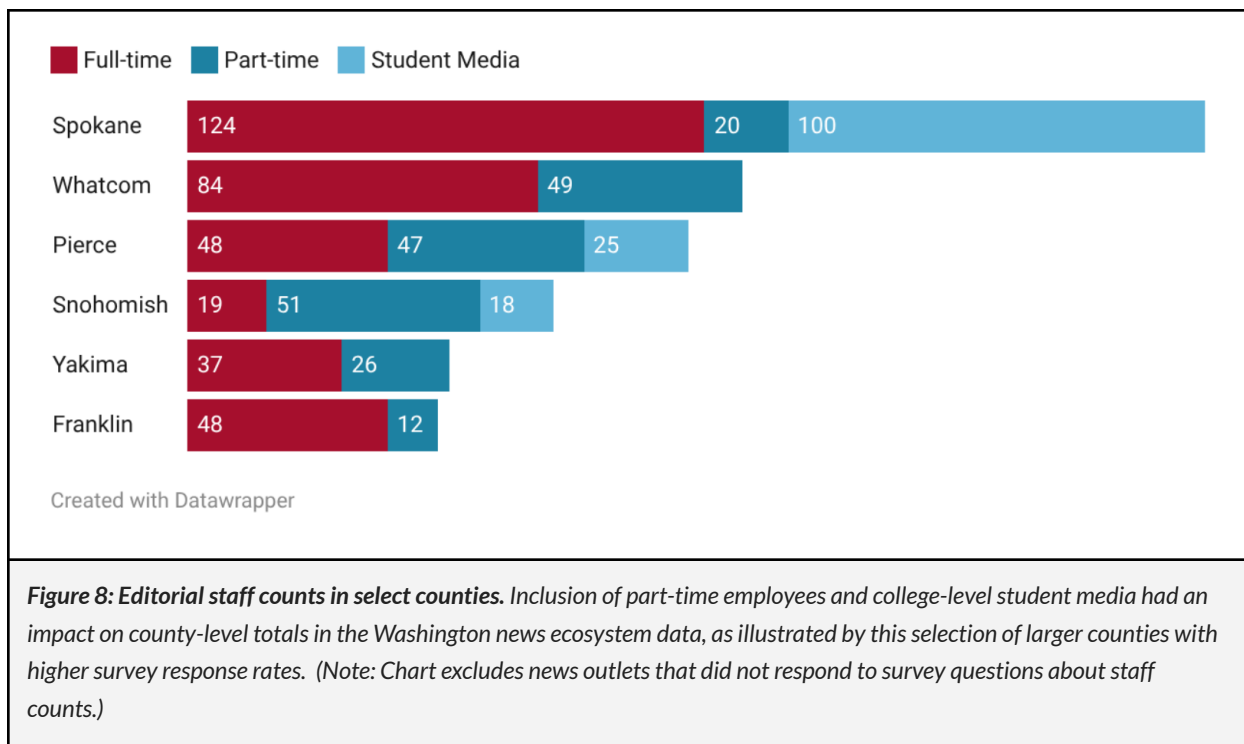
Figure 6: Sample question from the [From News Deserts to Nonprofit Resilience: Assessing the Health of Washington's Local News Ecosystem](#). View [Appendix A](#) for more questions.

One major finding from this question was how precarious journalism employment is at a majority of outlets across the state. Out of the 144 news outlets that provided full-time editorial staff counts via the survey, more than half (54%) reported having two or fewer full-time editorial employees.



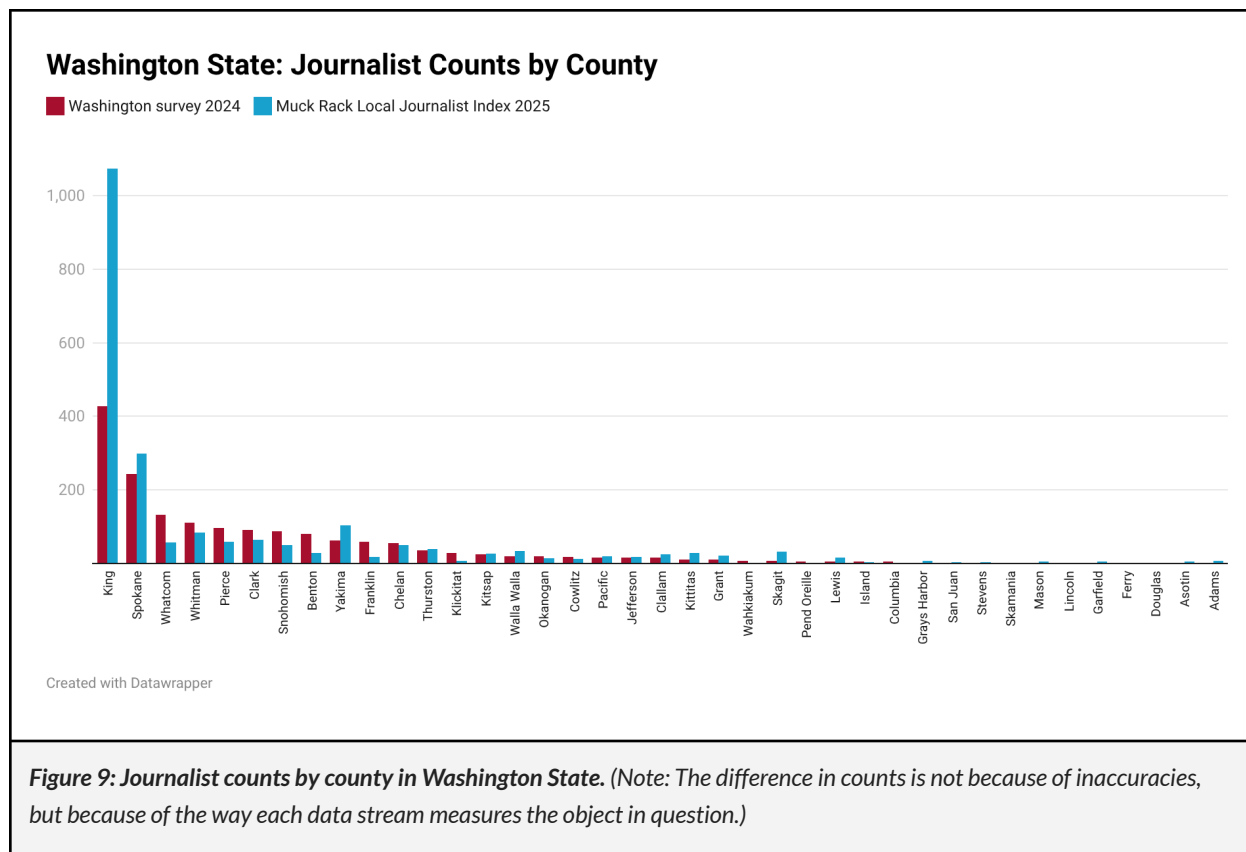
Such numbers underscore the precarity facing the majority of news organizations in Washington state and align with other research from INN and LION that reveals precarity in local news organizations across the nation.

Responses to this question also illustrate how decisions about including part-time staff can significantly affect overall headcounts. Part-time editorial staff, including freelancers and volunteers, accounted for slightly more than half (53%) of the editorial staff total from all responding outlets. Below is a figure showing a selection of larger counties in Washington with higher survey response rates. The figure reveals how news organizations rely on part-time editorial employees and student media to carry out work at their news organizations.



Below, you can see a comparison of journalist counts by county from Muck Rack data and the Washington state survey. In essence, the Muck Rack data drew on a county-level aggregation of all counties across the US and an analysis of 100,000 contributors work according to output volume, type and locality,¹² while the Washington data included full-time and part-time editorial staff employed at qualifying news organizations (per the inclusion criteria previously discussed), according to survey results from managers, editors, and publishers. It should be noted that some survey respondents interpreted “editorial staff” differently or were more thorough in their counts. This led to a few instances where small outlets that diligently reported all part-time contributors appeared to have greater staffing than large newsrooms that reported only full-time journalists directly involved in original reporting. Another issue that arose was double-counting in some counties, such as when two outlets in rural counties share the same three employees. A comparative glance shows distinctions in coverage across the two data-generating processes. Despite variation across smaller counties, the survey method utilizes a finer lens to understand the distribution of journalistic labor across outlets. This methodological approach provides greater granularity of journalism employment in news organizations than other options, such as BLS data. To see how news organizations in counties responded to the survey, please see [Appendix C](#).

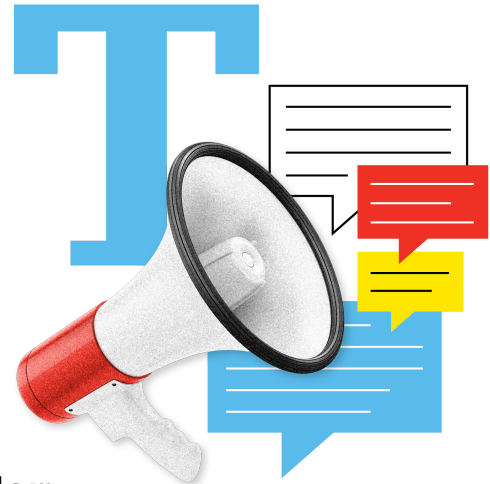
¹² Muck Rack, “Local Journalist Index 2025: Background & Methodology,” accessed May 4, 2026, <https://muckrack.com/research/lji-methodology#methodology>



The Washington research team is interested in conducting additional research, including analyzing the number of news outlets and their newsroom staff and how these vary by county and by region. The research team is also interested in evaluating how news ownership type affects news production capacity (operationalized as staffing, budget, and publication frequency). To carry out these future steps, the team hopes to explore a content and byline approach to measure newsroom content volume and similarity. Additionally, depending on funding, the team intends to conduct a second survey to assess how the ecosystem, including staffing, may have changed since data collection finished in 2024.

Step 7: Test With Feedback and Share Your Findings

After you have conducted your analysis, consider how you want to share the results to reach the audiences aligned with your research purpose. To ensure a robust analysis and comprehensive final product, consider a few additional steps before finalizing your material and data for publication.



Below are some simple steps to consider:

1. Seek feedback on your data and your analysis from subject matter experts in academia and practitioner circles.

Conducting a study of journalism employment is a novel endeavor and one that requires adaptation to a rapidly changing environment. As such, we recommend sharing your data, methodological choices, and analysis with external subject matter experts from academic and practitioner circles for their feedback. Doing so ensures a type of informal peer review and a rigor to the data analysis that otherwise might be missing from the analysis. It is especially important to be clear and transparent around methodological choices because these affect the data you are able to collect and the story you are trying to tell. Being transparent helps to ensure clarity, accuracy, and replicability of your research.

2. Consider publishing your staffing dataset publicly

We encourage you to publish your dataset publicly. Doing so lends greater credibility and transparency to your work. It also helps a variety of stakeholders in the field who are interested in journalism employment and who care about journalism's role in a democracy. By sharing the data that underpins your analysis, you are assisting other individuals—community leaders, journalists, and academics—who might be interested in conducting subsequent analyses. Please be sure to indicate how your dataset and your work should be cited. Additionally, ensure that your publicly available dataset is in a format that is not changeable by anyone external to the research team who drafted the work to protect the integrity of the data. Some researchers like data visualization tools

like Tableau for building interactive visualization dashboards. Others have used Google Docs and set the settings in such a way as to limit who can change the data. Many options exist, so choose the route that aligns with your research goals, purpose, and budget.

3. Welcome public input

If you provide your database publicly, we'd recommend that you offer an option where organizations can contact you with updated figures as it pertains to staffing details. Your research team can then vet these suggested data points before possible inclusion. If you do decide to integrate the updated data, you will need to note in your report and on your website that the data are a work in progress and will change over time. Alternatively, you can choose to save the data for a future report, noting when the data was received by the research team.

4. Produce a report that highlights key findings

When writing your report, remember the audiences you are writing for. Are you trying to reach community leaders, funders, policymakers, journalists, or academics? The audience(s) you are writing for will determine how you intend to communicate the information, including your writing style, what types of analyses and visualizations you include, and the overall design and presentation of the report. For example, funders and policymakers might be interested in knowing which counties or regions have the fewest journalists because it may inform their philanthropic strategies or policymaking efforts.

5. Partner with an academic institution to broaden your reach

Although it may sound counter-intuitive, consider sharing your data and findings with academics who conduct journalism studies research as they may be able to partner with you to conduct additional research or repurpose your existing data into research that aligns with academic conventions and can be published in peer reviewed journal articles. Doing so will not only expand the reach of your research and findings, but will also serve as a

connection point between the practitioner and academic fields and help strengthen the body of research in both places.

6. Host a webinar or public event to present findings

In keeping with your research purpose, consider providing a public facing webinar to communicate your research findings to a wide audience. Additionally, you could consider, depending on time and budget, to host a public event where you could share the findings or you could present findings at an industry-affiliated conference. By presenting your work both virtually and in-person to these audiences, you will be able to extend the reach and impact of your research, which in turn will help the academic field of journalism studies as well as journalism practitioners.

CONCLUSION

Using a Layered Approach for a Holistic View of Journalism Employment



This report presented past and present approaches for measuring local journalism employment, including the tradeoffs and limitations of each. It provided a snapshot of existing resources and approaches and a roadmap for how researchers could carry out their own projects assessing local journalism employment in their communities.

In summary, journalism employment is best measured through a layered approach, including combining multiple approaches to obtain a holistic view of journalism employment in a news organization. The approaches researchers use should reflect their research questions and goals, and their concepts and units of analysis should be clearly defined.

In conclusion, we would like to offer some final recommendations and best practices:

1. Keep in mind definitional specificity

An important principle to keep in mind when you are conducting your research study is the different ways in which researchers define key concepts (e.g., local, journalists). Clarifying key concepts as well as your unit(s) of analysis will help to ensure you use the appropriate data sources.

2. Treat employment counts as indicators, not absolutes

Employment figures should be framed as signals of capacity, not definitive measures of community information needs or democratic health. Other factors — such as medium, ownership, and/or business model — can affect newsrooms' capacity, beyond employment figures. In other words, two news organizations employing the same number of journalists can nonetheless have vastly different outputs.

3. Studies should document trade-offs transparently

Studies of journalism employment should acknowledge limitations inherent to selected approaches or operationalizations — the Local Journalist Index's [methodology section](#) provides a good example of this. When doing so, researchers should explain why particular methods were chosen over others, and clarify what conclusions can and cannot be drawn based on the selected methods.

4. Reduce burden on newsrooms and improve research coordination

Working group members repeatedly raised concerns about survey fatigue among news organizations and duplication of effort across policy and research initiatives. There was agreement that sharing instruments, aligning definitions, and coordinating data collection are all important steps when carrying out journalism employment research.

5. To be most comprehensive, combine approaches

As noted throughout this toolkit, the most comprehensive and precise studies of local journalism employment combine multiple research approaches to cross-check and validate data. For example, a statewide survey could be combined with desk research and/or content- and byline-based approaches to account for nonrespondents. If the purpose you established in Step 1 demands precision and a “ground truth” — as in the case of policymakers, for example — consider combining methods for a more comprehensive assessment of local journalism employment in your region.

Send Us Your Feedback

Finally, the LNIC sees this journalism employment toolkit as a living document and, as such, the research team welcomes suggestions and additions to the toolkit. If you would like to share your suggestions with the research team, please contact the lead author at jennifer.henrichsen@wsu.edu.

Join the Local News Impact Consortium

The Local News Impact Consortium is a new approach to a national emergency. We are building a strong coalition of researchers, journalists, founders, and funders to work together to revive local news ecosystems across the country. By contributing to our growth, participating in working groups, or engaging with the tools we're building, you can help ensure local communities have access to trustworthy news and information. Learn more and get involved at www.localnewsimpact.org/contact/.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Survey Questions

We compiled two different sets of questions below that were used in the 2024 Washington Local News Landscape Survey and the 2025 University of Minnesota Survey.

2024 Washington Local News Landscape Survey

Hello, may I speak with [name].

My name is [INT]. I'm calling to ask you for your help with a very important research project being conducted by the Washington State University Murrow College of Communication to find out what challenges local news outlets are facing and what can be done to help. This project aims to create a public database for anyone to use to support local news organizations thrive.

To that end, I am hoping for your help in filling out the survey, but from what I understand you manage several different news outlets. The survey should take about 10 minutes. Would you be willing to take the survey for each of your news outlets, or perhaps delegate some of the surveys to someone at those outlets who would be knowledgeable about the topics?

[additional information]

- This brief survey is part of a Washington State University study assessing Washington's current local news landscape.
- The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete, and consists of 14 questions about your news organization's reporting and business structure.
- A report on the study will be shared with the Washington State Legislature in order to identify potential gaps and challenges to providing local news in the state and provide recommendations for policymakers to support local news in Washington. The findings will also be made publicly available.
- If you have any questions about the study, please contact the Washington News Ecosystem Project's Research Director, Dr. Jennifer Henrichsen at murrow.news.ecosystem@wsu.edu. If you have a question about your rights as a research participant, please contact irb@wsu.edu. This study has been certified as Exempt by the WSU Human Research Protection Program. IRB # 20421.

Before we begin, I need to let you know that this survey is completely voluntary and confidential. If we come to any questions you prefer not to answer, just let me know and we will skip over them. First...

Q1: What is your news organization's name?

Q2: Does your organization serve communities in Washington state?

1. Yes
2. No

Q3: What is your news organization's medium? Would you say it is ...

1. A newspaper, either print, digital or both?
2. An online only publication, such as a digital only newspaper or digital native outlet?
3. A television station?
4. A radio station?
5. A magazine?
6. Or, something else? Please specify: _____
7. Don't know or unsure

Q4: How would you describe the ownership type of your news organization? Is it ...

1. Privately owned by a family?
2. Privately owned by a hedge fund or non-journalism company?
3. Locally or community-owned? If yes, skip to Q5a.
4. A non-profit (e.g., a 501c organization)? If yes, skip to Q5a.
5. Or something else? Please specify: _____
6. Don't know or unsure? Skip to Q5a.

Q4.1: How would you describe the ownership structure of your news organization? Is it a ...

1. Single company
2. National chain, such as a private company with multiple holdings in and outside of Washington
3. Or a regional chain such as a private company with multiple holdings in Washington
4. Don't know or unsure

Q5a: [IF NEWSPAPER, ONLINE, MAGAZINE] What is your news organization's circulation?

1. Do you have print circulation?
 - a. If yes, what is your print circulation? _____
 - b. No
2. Do you have digital circulation?

- a. If yes, what is your digital circulation? _____
- b. No

Q5b: [IF TELEVISION, RADIO] What is your organization's audience size (e.g., # of viewers or listeners)?

Q6: What is your organization's annual operating budget? Would you say ...

1. Less than \$250,000
2. \$250,000 to \$499,000
3. \$500,000 to \$999,000
4. \$1,000,000 to \$5,000,000
5. Or greater than \$5,000,000
6. Don't know or not sure

Q7: Now I'd like to ask what is your news organization's staff size?

1. How many part-time editorial staff, including freelance staff, contributors, and volunteers do you have?
2. How many full-time editorial staff, including staff involved in reporting, editing, production, or distribution of news do you have?
3. What is the total number of editorial, business, and other staff?

Q8: What NATIONAL or INTERNATIONAL coverage do your organization's journalists cover? I'm going to read a list of national or international topics. For each one, please tell me if your organization covers that topic or not.

TOPIC	NATIONAL COVERAGE (Y/N)	INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE (Y/N)
Politics		
International Affairs		
Business		
Crime		
Culture, Arts and Entertainment		
Sports		

TOPIC	NATIONAL COVERAGE (Y/N)	INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE (Y/N)
Health		
Science		
Technology		
Education		
Climate and Environment		
Other, please specify: _____		

Q9: What STATE and/or LOCAL coverage do your organization's journalists cover? I'm going to read a list of topics. For each one, please tell me if your organization covers that topic at the state level and at the local level or not.

TOPIC	STATE COVERAGE (Y/N)	LOCAL COVERAGE (Y/N)
Politics		
Civic Affairs		
Business		
Crime		
Culture, Arts and Entertainment		
Sports		
Health		
Science		
Technology		
Education		
Climate and Environment		
Other, please specify: _____		

Q10. Some news organizations have reported experiencing negative events, ranging from mild to severe, that have led to security or safety concerns. **Have the editorial staff at your organization experienced any of the following security or safety issues during the past five years?** Select all that apply:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Online harassment | ☐ Disinformation campaigns |
| ☐ Doxxing | ☐ Other, please specify: _____ |
| ☐ Hacking | ☐ None |
| ☐ Surveillance | ☐ Don't know or unsure |
| ☐ Physical intimidation or abuse | |

Q11: Does your news organization serve a specific community? Select all that apply:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ It serves a general audience | ☐ Ethnic or racial community (e.g., Latinx) |
| ☐ Professional community (e.g., small business owners, farmers, tech workers) | ☐ Religious community |
| ☐ Non-English speaking community (e.g., Spanish, Vietnamese) | ☐ Cultural community (e.g., LGBTQ+) |
| | ☐ Other, please specify: _____ |

Q12: How often does your organization publish or broadcast news?

1. Daily
2. Triweekly (three times per week)
3. Semi-weekly (two times per week)
4. Weekly
5. Biweekly (every two weeks)
6. Monthly
7. Quarterly
8. It varies

Q13: What is your role in your news organization?

Q14: Would you be willing to talk more in depth about your organization with a researcher on our team in the next few months?

1. Yes
2. No

Q15: Please enter your name and contact information so a researcher can contact you.

You have the option to remain anonymous in the report if you so choose, and the information you share here will not be linked to your future responses.

- Name:
- Email:
- Phone:

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey. Your response has been recorded.

2025 University of Minnesota Survey Staffing Questions

Next, we'd like to ask some questions about the staff at the [publication]**.

Q1: How many paid staff members work full-time exclusively for the [publication]?

Q2: How many paid staff members work full-time but split their hours between the [publication] and one or more other outlets?

Q3: How many paid staff members work part-time for the [publication]?

Q4: Thinking about the paid staff members who spend some portion of their time with the [publication], about how many full-time equivalents (FTE) does this add up to? You may include fractional numbers/decimals if relevant.

Q5: Thinking about what you reported for the total number of full-time paid staff members as well as full-time equivalents (FTE) who work for the [publication], what is the approximate percentage of their time spent contributing directly to news (such as through reporting, editing, or production roles)?

Q6: Thinking about additional contributors to the [publication]'s operations, how many are... (Please enter your best estimate of the total number per year.)

- Paid freelancers?
- Volunteers?
- Student interns?

Q8: What is the approximate percentage of the paid staff of the [publication] who are non-white/anglo?
(Please enter a number between 0 and 100.)

**In the survey, the unit of analysis was each newspaper, but owners can answer the survey for up to five newspapers.

Appendix B: Table of Strengths and Weaknesses of Various Approaches

METHOD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Occupational and Labor Statistics	• National scope • Consistency over time • Legitimacy for trend analysis	• Occupational categories align poorly with newsroom roles • Weak geographic specificity • Limited ability to distinguish local vs. non-local work • Poor capture of part-time, freelance, intern, and volunteer labor
Surveys of Journalists or News Organizations	• Ability to tailor definitions and adapt to local context • Capture part-time, freelance, intern, and volunteer labor • Provides “ground truth” to other measurement approaches	• Low or uneven response rates • High labor costs • Sensitivity around budgets and staffing disclosure • Challenges with participation from newspaper chains • Difficult to update regularly
Desk Research and Manual Compilation	• Highly accurate when carefully executed • Adaptable to local context • Useful where policy precision is required	• Extremely labor-intensive; difficult to replicate • Highly dependent on researcher judgment • Hard to scale, sustain, or update
Commercial or Platform-Based Data	• Potential for ongoing regular updates • Outlet-level comparability • Ability to benchmark against survey data	• Incomplete datasets • Opaque filtering and classification • Instability over time • Uncertain alignment with “local” or newsroom-specific definitions
Content- and Byline-Based Approaches	• Publicly observable • Lower burden on newsrooms • Useful for comparative analyses	• Weak connection between output and labor inputs • Inability to capture precarity, workload, or unpaid labor • Difficult to discern geography • Not comparable across mediums (e.g. newspaper vs. broadcast)

Appendix C: Responses by County to Washington State Staffing Survey

COUNTY	TOTAL NUMBER OF NEWS OUTLETS	NUMBER SURVEY RESPONSES	PERCENT RESPONDED
Adams	1	0	0%
Asotin	3	0	0%
Benton	4	2	50%
Chelan	11	6	55%
Clallam	8	3	38%
Clark	9	4	44%
Columbia	1	1	100%
Cowlitz	4	2	50%
Douglas	2	0	0%
Ferry	0	0	
Franklin	15	8	53%
Garfield	1	0	0%
Grant	5	2	40%
Grays Harbor	4	1	25%
Island	2	1	50%
Jefferson	4	2	50%
King	104	41	39%
Kitsap	6	4	67%
Kittitas	5	3	60%

COUNTY	TOTAL NUMBER OF NEWS OUTLETS	NUMBER SURVEY RESPONSES	PERCENT RESPONDED
Klickitat	3	3	100%
Lewis	5	1	20%
Lincoln	1	0	0%
Mason	3	0	0%
Okanogan	7	3	43%
Pacific	2	2	100%
Pend Oreille	2	1	50%
Pierce	22	9	41%
San Juan	5	1	20%
Skagit	5	1	20%
Skamania	0	0	
Snohomish	23	8	35%
Spokane	16	8	50%
Stevens	1	0	0%
Thurston	10	2	20%
Wahkiakum	2	2	100%
Walla Walla	5	2	40%
Whatcom	22	10	45%
Whitman	10	3	30%
Yakima	20	8	40%