



**Filling the Gaps: Examining Reach, Engagement and Impact in
North Carolina's News Nonprofits**

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Abstract

In an attempt to fill gaps in coverage caused by shrinking newsrooms in the traditional news industry, numerous nonprofit digital news organizations have been established around the United States in recent years. These organizations are diverse in focus and scope. Three organizations in North Carolina, all less than five years old, are part of this new wave. Each has a different niche and geographic focus: North Carolina Health News covers state politics and public health issues; Carolina Public Press focuses on investigating regional issues in the western part of the state; and PlanCharlotte is devoted to urban planning and design in the Charlotte area and is part of the Urban Institute at UNC Charlotte. All of these sites face significant hurdles as they attempt to figure out a long-term business model. Instead of returns for shareholders, nonprofits must show impact on their communities to receive funding from foundations, donors and other sources. This paper uses readership data, content analysis and qualitative information gleaned from anecdotes, articles and interviews to gauge where the sites stand today. NC Health News and the Public Press have seen healthy readership growth and have well-documented local impacts. But the two nonprofits are far from financial sustainability. They need to focus on business development and the founding editors need to move into the roll of executive directors. PlanCharlotte's readership has been relatively flat over the past two years. Because it is part of a university, its financial concerns are less about bringing in donations and grants and have more to do with being part of a public university budget.

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Introduction

For serious reporters and editors looking for trustworthy places to work, these new and future nonprofit institutions could be ways to rejuvenate and sustain the soul of journalism.

- Charles Lewis, Center for Public Integrity, 2007

Nonprofit news organizations are nothing new. Charles Lewis, founder of the nonprofit Center for Public Integrity, tracking the history of American nonprofit journalism in a 2007 *Columbia Journalism Review* article, identified the Associated Press, founded as a cooperative in 1846, as the oldest example. The AP still has its nonprofit status and, at the time of Lewis's writing, employed 3,000 journalists. *The Christian Science Monitor* has been "published secularly since 1908," he writes. National Public Radio, which has seen unmatched audience growth in the U.S. in recent years, launched in 1970 (C. Lewis, 2007, p. 34).

Lewis, an investigative reporter for ABC and CBS, and two other journalists, left their jobs with traditional news outlets in 1989 to found the Center for Public Integrity, a non-partisan organization that covers the intersection of politics and government policy issues. "By 2004," he writes, "I oversaw a full-time staff of forty and more than twenty part-time, paid intern researchers on a \$4.6 million annual budget" (p. 35). On numerous occasions he has attributed his own move away from for-profit journalism to the nonprofit arena to his growing frustration that many of the most important issues of the day, which lay behind the headlines, were not being covered by mainstream media organizations. He ended his article with a call to action, encouraging serious journalists to work for and establish nonprofit ventures

that he believed could “rejuvenate and sustain the soul of journalism.” In recent years, numerous reporters have answered that call. According to data compiled by the Pew Research Center, between 2008 and 2010, at the peak of the recession, almost 100 nonprofit news organizations were established in cities and regions across the country (2013b).

This paper will examine three of these organizations recently established in North Carolina, all of which have a stated mission of filling gaps in reporting no longer covered by traditional media outlets¹: Carolina Public Press and PlanCharlotte, founded in 2011, and North Carolina Health News, founded in 2012. These organizations approach journalism in different ways, aiming to cover their special niches, such as health policy concerns, or defined geographies, such as the western counties in the state. All three were established by professional journalists who had either been laid off or, like Lewis, left traditional news organizations voluntarily. This paper will examine these organizations’ place in the North Carolina media ecosystem, and will explore their potential impact and sustainability.

The collapse of a for-profit model

The news industry changed dramatically in the first decade of the millennium. Today, traditional news organizations in the United States, especially

¹ Author’s note: In 2008 I founded Raleigh Public Record, the first organization in North Carolina to be part of this new wave of nonprofit news sites. The Record was, and remains, dedicated to municipal coverage in Raleigh, NC. In order to keep an arm’s length in my analysis, I will not include the Record in this analysis. I should also note that during my tenure as editor and executive director the Record provided fiscal sponsorship to North Carolina Health News.

newspapers, face numerous new digital competitors. In her book *Saving Community Journalism*, Penelope Abernathy writes, “The creative destruction wrought by the Internet has undermined the traditional business model of news organizations by siphoning off both readers and advertisers” (p. 1).

Advertising dollars, which provided the vast majority of revenue for most local and regional newspapers, peaked in 2000, and began a steep decline, falling back to 1950 levels in just a decade (Newspaper Association of America, 2014a). In response, newspapers began to cut staff and regional papers started to pull back from outlying areas (Abernathy, 2014). According to a survey by the American Society of News Editors, the total workforce in newsrooms in the United States peaked at 52,600 in 1990. Since then, the workforce has dropped by more than 35 percent to 36,700 in 2014. Most of the newsroom losses have been since 2008 (American Society of News Editors, 2014).

In 1990, classified advertisements, which had the highest profit margins, accounted for more than a third of overall advertising revenue for newspapers, according to annual data from the Newspaper Association of America. That number dropped from \$11.5 billion in 1990, to \$4.6 billion in 2012 (2014a), thanks to online services like Craigslist (Powers & Yaros, 2013).

The decline in advertising revenue has continued. In 2013, newspaper revenue declined 2.6 percent compared to 2012 (2014b). Digital advertising for newspapers, while increasing, “has grown anemically the past two years and does not come close to covering print ad losses” (R. Edmonds, Emily Guskin, Amy Mitchell

and Mark Jurkowitz, 2013, para. 9). Combined print and online revenue declined by more than \$23 billion from 2007 to 2012 (Newspaper Association of America, 2014a). According to the Pew Research Center's annual *State of the Media* 2014 report, advertising still accounts for most revenues at newspapers, television and radio stations. The report stresses, "The advertising-supported business model is in a state of churn. Print advertising continues its sharp decline. Television advertising currently remains stable, but the steady audience migration to the web will inevitably impact that business model, too" (2014).

Even though most newspaper companies are seeing profits, "many companies continue to struggle with debt and pension obligations assumed in better times" (R. Edmonds, Emily Guskin, Amy Mitchell and Mark Jurkowitz, 2013, para. 12)

A new nonprofit model

In response to the dramatic decline of newspapers, nonprofit digital enterprises began springing up across the country starting in the mid-2000s, initially hoping to rely on cash-deductible donations from concerned citizens and foundation grants. A 2013 study by the Pew Research Center identified and studied 172 nonprofit news organizations, almost three-quarters of which had been founded since 2008. By and large, these "younger outlets are not seeking to replace or replicate newspapers or other traditional news media, but rather to fill certain gaps" (p.5). Most of these new nonprofits have a distinct geographic focus: 38 percent focus on a state, 29 percent on a city and 8 percent are hyper-local, focused on a smaller community or neighborhood (Mitchell, 2013).

Nationally, the young nonprofit news organizations have a variety of missions and scopes. The Knight Foundation's 2011 report *Getting local: How nonprofit news ventures seek sustainability* states, "The new ventures defy easy description. They range in size and sophistication" (p.5). This diversity includes organizations like ProPublica, which has a budget of several million dollars, a staff of 45 reporters, and has won Pulitzers for its investigative journalism (ProPublica, 2015), to others like North Carolina Health News, which has one part-time editor and a small cadre of paid freelance reporters (Hoban, 2014).

These organizations share a common mission -- to fill gaps left when traditional news outlets cut staff and pull back circulation from outlying regions (Mitchell, 2013). The Knight Commission report states, "Newspapers may have their shortcomings, but in many communities, they have been for a century or longer the primary source of fair, accurate and independent news. They are usually the major provider of 'beat' and investigative journalism" (2009, p. 29). As news staffs have contracted, so have these traditional watchdog roles, and these are the gaps the new nonprofits hope to fill.

Measuring the impact of these new nonprofit groups has become part of the broader discussion regarding the future of news in our democracy, which, to some extent, remains an open and vigorously debated question. The Knight Foundation's 2013 report *Finding a foothold* states, "Some organizations consistently collect qualitative information and stories about the impact of their reporting on communities. ... The assumption is that with better metrics, organizations can be

smarter about developing content and user experience strategies, and also better positioned to raise dollars from both institutional and private sources” (p. 15).

Measuring and demonstrating impact has become essential if nonprofit news organizations hope to attract investors and benefactors, and attain sustainability.

“Non-profits face increasing pressure for quantifiable results from numerous stakeholders,” writes Richard Tofel, president of ProPublica, in a 2012 paper.

“Funders are attracted by the potential of journalism to spur change” (p. 2). The measurements are both quantitative – page views, number of comments, how many times a story is reprinted or followed by another news organization, shares on social media – and qualitative – statements from public officials, legislative hearings, or policy change (Tofel, 2013). ProPublica uses these kinds of measurements to judge the impact of its bigger projects. Small, local sites without those kinds of resources have a more difficult time documenting impact.

By traditional newspaper standards, even the largest nonprofits are small.

Steven Waldman, in a 2011 report for the Federal Communications Commission, puts the numbers in new nonprofit newsrooms into perspective:

The Knight Foundation hosted a recent gathering of leaders from 12 of the most influential and well-funded websites. Together they employ 88 fulltime staffers, which seems quite encouraging until one remembers that more than 15,000 journalists have left the newspaper industry in the last decade (Waldman, 2011, p. 16).

In the FCC report, Waldman writes, “while newspapers have been suffering an estimated \$1.6 billion drop in editorial spending per year, foundations have contributed an estimated \$180 million” (p. 16). Foundations, while investing in

nonprofit journalism, could not come near the investment the traditional newspaper industry makes.

Most of the new organizations are small. Pew found that most of the 172 nonprofits it studied had fewer than five employees, and one quarter had no paid staff. Eight percent of the sites surveyed had more than 10 paid full-time people working for the organization (not just as reporters and editors but total employees) and 6 percent had more than 25 employees (Mitchell, 2013). The same survey found that, with so few employees, “finding the time for staff to work on developing new revenue streams is proving to be a challenge for many nonprofit news organizations” (p.2).

Finding sustainable revenue streams is key to long-term growth and sustainability, both Knight and Pew concluded. But roughly half of the organizations polled in the 2013 study rely on one revenue source, “almost always foundation grants,” to make up three quarters of their income (2014, p. 13). A 2011 report from the Knight Foundation studied eight nonprofit news organizations around the country of varying size and scope. Looking at the sustainability of the startups, it found, “The strength of an organization’s revenue base depends not only on the total amount of revenue, but also on the consistency and diversity of its revenue sources. These sources should be diverse enough to protect the organization from a catastrophic loss of one source” (M. McLellan, Mayur Patel, 2011, p. 16). The most common revenue streams, according to the Knight report, are foundations, donations, advertising, events, corporate sponsorship and syndication (2011). The

Pew report found that “given the uncertainty of grant funding, one way these organizations are trying to build financial stability is by diversifying their revenue streams” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 2). However, as Pew points out, many nonprofit news organizations find themselves in a catch-22: these organizations don’t have the staff or resources to develop new revenue streams that would give them enough income to hire new business people to focus on the financial sustainability. As a 2013 Pew report explains, even though nonprofits must focus on business development if they are to survive, there is pressure from foundations and other donors to allocate grants to services (i.e. reporting stories) “because of a nonprofit culture that prizes spending on services over business development” (Mitchell, 2013, p.2).

Three case studies from North Carolina

The state of the press in North Carolina is a microcosm of what has been occurring nationally. McClatchy Co. owns the two largest newspapers in the state, *The Charlotte Observer* and *The News & Observer*. McClatchy purchased the Knight Ridder newspaper chain, the second largest in the country, in 2006, and took on significant debt in the process as it went from owning 12 daily papers to 32 (Lieberman, 2006). *The News & Observer*, the daily newspaper in the state capital, had 250 reporters in its newsroom in 2004. By early 2011, that number was 103 (Waldman, 2011). A report from the Federal Communications Commission states: “Among the beats the paper stopped covering full time: Durham courts, Durham schools, legal affairs, agriculture, science, environment, and statewide public

education” (p. 44). The newspaper pulled back its coverage of surrounding areas to reduce costs (Waldman, 2011).

In 2012 and 2013, Berkshire Hathaway bought the state’s third and fourth largest newspapers, the *Winston-Salem Journal* (Michael, 2012) and the *Greensboro News & Record*. Both of those papers pulled back their regional coverage and now focus primarily on the metro areas.

In a 2009 paper for the North Carolina Medical Journal, UNC journalism professor Ferrel Guillory writes:

Consolidation has taken place along with diversification. Big media companies, based outside of North Carolina, now own most of the state’s major journalistic enterprises. The long recession has drained vital resources from North Carolina’s daily newspapers and television stations, already weakened by the expansion of the Internet and shifts in news-consuming habits. The economic woes of the mass media lead inexorably to a depletion of their ability to report and analyze major trends and issues (Guillory, 2009, p. 360).

He was writing about health journalism, but the same conclusions hold for most reporting specialties, including education, the state legislature and the environment.

The new nonprofits focus their reporting on the areas traditional newspapers no longer cover. The 2013 Pew report found that, along with the geographic focus, “most of the nonprofits studied have niche orientations—they focus on one topic or type of reporting” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 6). Only about a quarter of the organizations Pew surveyed cover general interest news

The three North Carolina nonprofits studied—Carolina Public Press, North Carolina Health News and PlanCharlotte—have taken different approaches to delivering niche content. The Public Press has a geographic niche and focuses on

investigative and long-term projects in western North Carolina; NC Health News primarily reports on state politics and policy as it relates to healthcare and public health; PlanCharlotte has a defined geography and niche content focused on urban planning and policy.

Carolina Public Press

Founded in 2011 by former *Asheville Citizen-Times* reporter Angie Newsome, the Carolina Public Press focuses on the 18 western-most counties in North Carolina (Carolina Public Press, 2014). The Public Press chose to cover the region as a whole because, as the founder said in an interview, “We looked at it regionally because we wanted to cover an area that has some cultural, geographic and political ties to one another and that, in my opinion, was being largely overlooked by the state or regional press.” The geographic focus is the primary driver in editorial decisions about coverage and scope at the Public Press. The organization’s mission statement explains its focus:

Public interest reporting is critical to an informed, engaged electorate and to ensuring government accountability. Carolina Public Press, a nonprofit online news service, provides Western North Carolina with unbiased, in-depth and investigative reporting as well as educational opportunities to journalists, students and others (Carolina Public Press, 2014).

Rather than covering daily hard news such as car crashes and town council meetings, the Public Press’s objective is to pull back and cover regional issues with investigative work and long-term reporting projects (Newsome, 2014).

Funding for the Public Press, according to the organization's 2014 budget, relies heavily on foundation support. Grants make up more than 70 percent of the \$68,700 budget. The budget also lists income of \$15,000 from individual donors, and the remaining \$3,700 from a mixture of syndication, paid trainings, events, sponsorships and other small sources. Of the total budget for 2014, \$4,000 went to a person dedicated to development (Carolina Public Press, 2014). The Public Press began as a fiscally sponsored organization under the Institute for Southern Studies but then received its own 501(c)3 nonprofit status from the IRS in 2014.

North Carolina Health News

Rose Hoban left her position as healthcare reporter with North Carolina Public Radio (WUNC) to launch a nonprofit in 2012 focused on healthcare politics and policy. It also covers research, medical schools and other healthcare-related issues in North Carolina (Hoban, 2014). NC Health News began under a fiscal sponsorship with Raleigh Public Record but then received its own 501(c)3 status from the IRS in 2013. NC Health News's mission statement stresses it aims to fill gaps in statewide media:

North Carolina Health News is an independent, not-for-profit, statewide news organization dedicated to covering health care in North Carolina employing the highest journalistic standards of fairness, accuracy and extensive research.

We were founded in response to the decrease in health reporters around the state. We were founded because we believe that to make the best decisions about their health care and about the state's health care system, the citizens of North Carolina need the best information possible.

NCHN seeks to become *the* premiere source for health reporting in North Carolina (North Carolina Health News, 2014).

NC Health News is the only site in this study with a statewide focus, but its specific niche allows for a broader geographic scope.

Coverage focused primarily on daily policy news and in-depth coverage on the North Carolina General Assembly and state government. The organization also has specific funding allocated towards environmental reporting and, separately, research developments (Hoban, 2014).

The funding mix at NC Health News is more diverse than the Public Press. With an overall 2014 budget of \$53,600, three different grants contributed \$17,500 to the budget. Another \$17,000 came from individual donations. Fundraising events and campaigns earned \$9,000, another \$5,000 from a content partnership, and almost \$4,000 from corporate sponsorships. Notable, though a small part of the budget, is \$1,200 from a syndication agreement with the *NC Nursing Bulletin*.

PlanCharlotte

PlanCharlotte is part of the Urban Institute at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The organization receives all of its funding through the university. The organization's mission statement reflects an academic foundation:

PlanCharlotte.org is a project of the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, an applied research and community outreach center at UNC Charlotte. Our goal at PlanCharlotte.org is to be a citizen resource for exploring problems and finding solutions in land-use planning, neighborhood design, environmental protection and other urban and regional issues.

PlanCharlotte.org offers news, information and analysis to help people of the Charlotte region make well-informed decisions about the shape of their cities, towns and countryside. Join us as we work to connect and educate citizens of this region to build a shared future (PlanCharlotte, 2014).

Being part of a major academic institution has its benefits and its drawbacks.

PlanCharlotte founder Mary Newsom worked at *The Charlotte Observer* for three decades in the newsroom and as an editorial writer. In an interview, she said, “What I thought would give me more freedom, versus being a pure nonprofit where you’re out scrambling for money, has in some ways given me less freedom because there’s a lot of nervousness about pissing off somebody.” Since the university pays her salary and provides a graduate student assistant, she has to depend on the university’s development office for additional funds (Newsom, 2014a).

PlanCharlotte is the smallest site in this study in terms of content and readers. It also has the narrowest niche, with a focus on urban planning, design and related issues in the Charlotte metropolitan area.

Reach, impact, sustainability

The nonprofit news organizations in this study face the same issues as others around the country: how to reach an audience, how to create lasting impact, and how to develop a business model. Reporters are trained to develop beats and tell stories. Developing revenues to sustain such an organization is far more challenging, especially for journalists with little or no formal business training.

Using readership data, content analysis and qualitative data points, this paper will explore the reach and impact of each organization, and consider the long-term prospects for sustainability.

Chapter 1 - Readership: who, what, where, when and why

The most basic way to understand website reach is through readership numbers. This raw data gives measurements of how many people visit a site, where they come from, and other basic data. “Web analytics initially served the needs of online marketing by keeping track of metrics that lead to conversion, usually defined as an online purchase. News organizations also saw the utility of Web analytics in understanding their online audiences. Most online newsrooms in the United States now use Web analytics” (Tandoc & Thomas, 2014, p. 1). There are ethical questions about using analytics in the newsroom: “News judgment in this age of analytics is increasingly becoming a fragile balancing act between editorial autonomy, on one hand, and the increasing influence of the audience, on the other” (Tandoc, 2014, p. 2). This study considers web analytics data, reader surveys, content analysis and qualitative impacts.

North Carolina Health News and Carolina Public Press show steady growth in readership over the past several years. The numbers for PlanCharlotte, however, remain relatively flat. Reader surveys for all three sites show people who log on to these websites are generally well educated and place a high value on niche content.

The importance of online readership is growing as consumers are reading news on computers, smart phones and tablets instead of in print. New news organizations face an uphill battle competing with websites from traditional, well-known newspapers and broadcast news outlets. James Hamilton, in *All the news that's fit to sell*, writes, “The variety of choices on the Internet enhances the

advantages of brands established in the physical world. Internet users may go to *USA Today* or the *New York Times* in the virtual world because they already recognize their names and reputations as newspapers” (Hamilton, 2004, p. 198). Carolina Public Press, North Carolina Health News and PlanCharlotte compete with established news organizations like the Gannett-owned *Asheville Citizen-Times* and McClatchy Co.’s *Charlotte Observer*.

North Carolina Health News

NC Health News launched in February 2012. Figure 1 shows readership broken down by sessions and page views from launch through September 2014. It shows steady growth, with a couple of notable spikes from stories going “viral.” for the nine months of data collected in 2014, the site averaged 17,882.7 users per month. The 2013 average was 15,451.3.

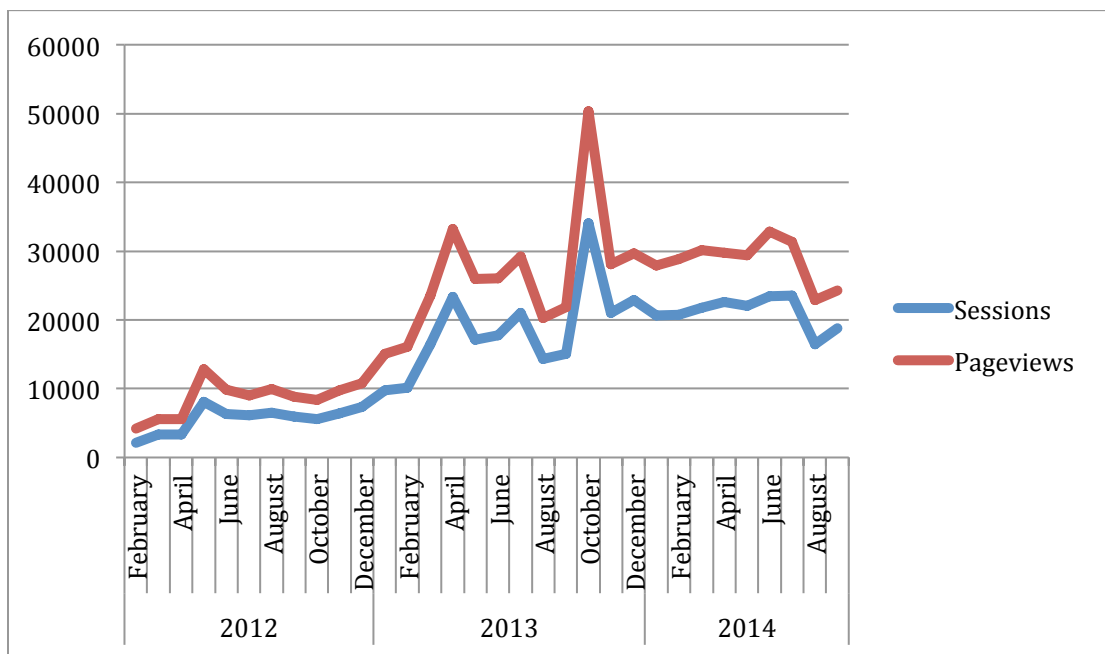


Figure 1 - North Carolina Health News readership.

| City | Sessions | % New Sessions | New Users | Bounce Rate | Pages / Session | Avg. Session (Seconds) |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Raleigh | 43509 | 55.86% | 24304 | 71.33% | 1.68 | 101.75 |
| Charlotte | 42878 | 77.01% | 33021 | 83.44% | 1.32 | 49.92 |
| Durham | 18713 | 65.45% | 12247 | 75.78% | 1.56 | 80.61 |
| Chapel Hill | 13922 | 62.17% | 8655 | 71.88% | 1.69 | 98.21 |
| Asheville | 10011 | 70.94% | 7102 | 72.87% | 1.60 | 87.22 |
| Greensboro | 9165 | 75.57% | 6926 | 75.52% | 1.56 | 82.06 |
| New York | 7963 | 85.41% | 6801 | 83.60% | 1.32 | 50.57 |
| Winston-Salem | 7627 | 74.29% | 5666 | 76.49% | 1.55 | 79.87 |
| Cary | 7175 | 69.34% | 4975 | 75.79% | 1.55 | 88.93 |
| Washington DC | 6498 | 69.44% | 4512 | 80.16% | 1.43 | 67.07 |
| Total/average | 472647 | 76.98% | 363844 | 80.43% | 1.42 | 65.05 |

Table 1 - North Carolina Health News readership by top 10 locations.

As shown in Table 2, most NC Health News website traffic comes from North Carolina. Average session duration and pages per session show higher engagement in North Carolina cities. The percentage of new sessions shows the ratio of newcomers to the site. Almost a quarter of sessions are returning readers. The bounce rate, which shows how many people enter on one page and never click through to other parts of the site, is lower for Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Asheville.

Carolina Public Press

The Public Press has the highest traffic of the three sites studied. It has spikes from popular stories, but they are much less pronounced than those from NC Health News.

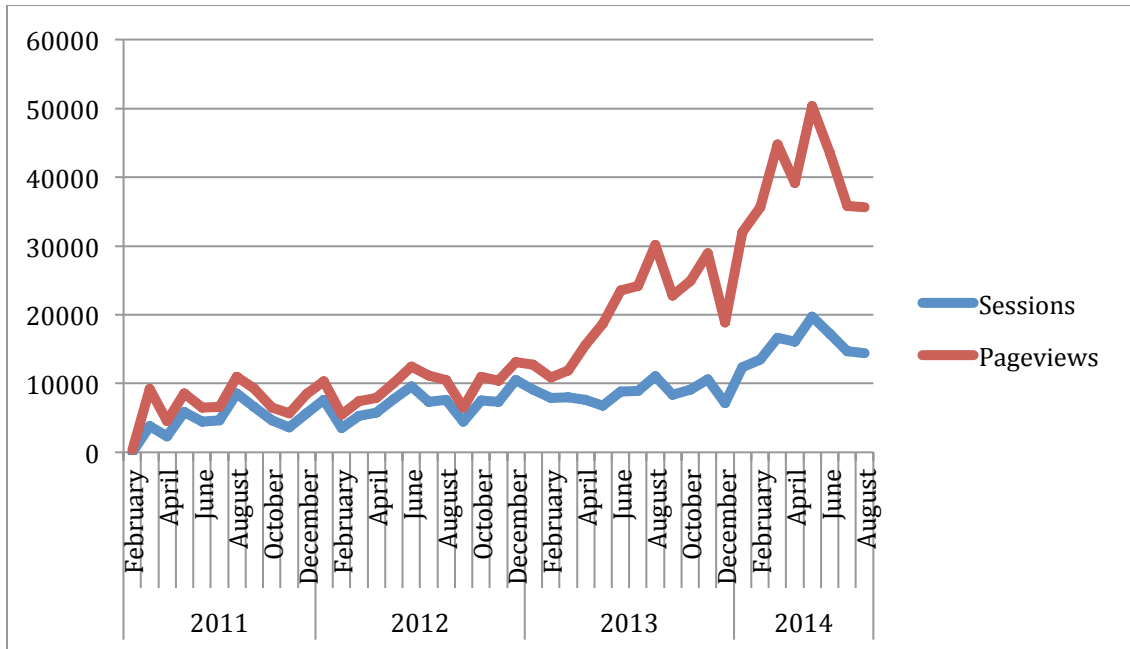


Figure 2 - Web traffic to Carolina Public Press since February 2011.

Carolina Public Press launched at the end of February 2011. The site started with a large readership base, with more than 9,000 page views in March 2011. The site saw slow growth until 2013, when traffic began increasing significantly. In 2014, the site had an average of 15,562 sessions, more than double the average for 2012.

| City | Sessions | % New Sessions | New Users | Bounce Rate | Pages / Session | Avg. Session (Seconds) |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Asheville | 72055 | 52.76% | 38019 | 34.53% | 2.51 | 110.28 |
| Charlotte | 39521 | 78.55% | 31044 | 60.84% | 1.58 | 34.69 |
| Raleigh | 18454 | 67.73% | 12499 | 41.08% | 1.97 | 49.93 |
| Hendersonville | 5920 | 61.57% | 3645 | 26.71% | 3.07 | 168.23 |
| Boone | 5007 | 72.00% | 3605 | 34.55% | 2.26 | 69.27 |
| New York | 4641 | 85.22% | 3955 | 51.63% | 1.78 | 41.64 |
| Durham | 4428 | 77.71% | 3441 | 39.16% | 2.05 | 53.40 |
| (not set) | 4385 | 86.98% | 3814 | 51.15% | 1.79 | 41.21 |
| Franklin | 4302 | 62.92% | 2707 | 24.15% | 2.72 | 85.58 |
| Washington DC | 4021 | 71.30% | 2867 | 33.60% | 2.14 | 66.44 |
| Total/average | 362446 | 73.40% | 266038 | 42.41% | 2.08 | 65.60 |

Table 2 - Carolina Public Press readership by top 10 locations.

Table 3 shows the majority of the site’s traffic comes from Asheville and Charlotte. The row labeled “not set” accounts for readers in rural areas or where the software can’t identify an accurate city. Additionally, small cities and towns in western North Carolina are included in the top-ten list: Hendersonville, Boone and Franklin. Site visitors from North Carolina are the most engaged based on bounce rate, duration on site and pages per session. The Public Press has the highest engagement as measured by the average bounce rate and pages per session.

PlanCharlotte

PlanCharlotte has not followed the same growth pattern as NC Health News and Carolina Public Press. The site’s web traffic growth has been slow, almost flat.

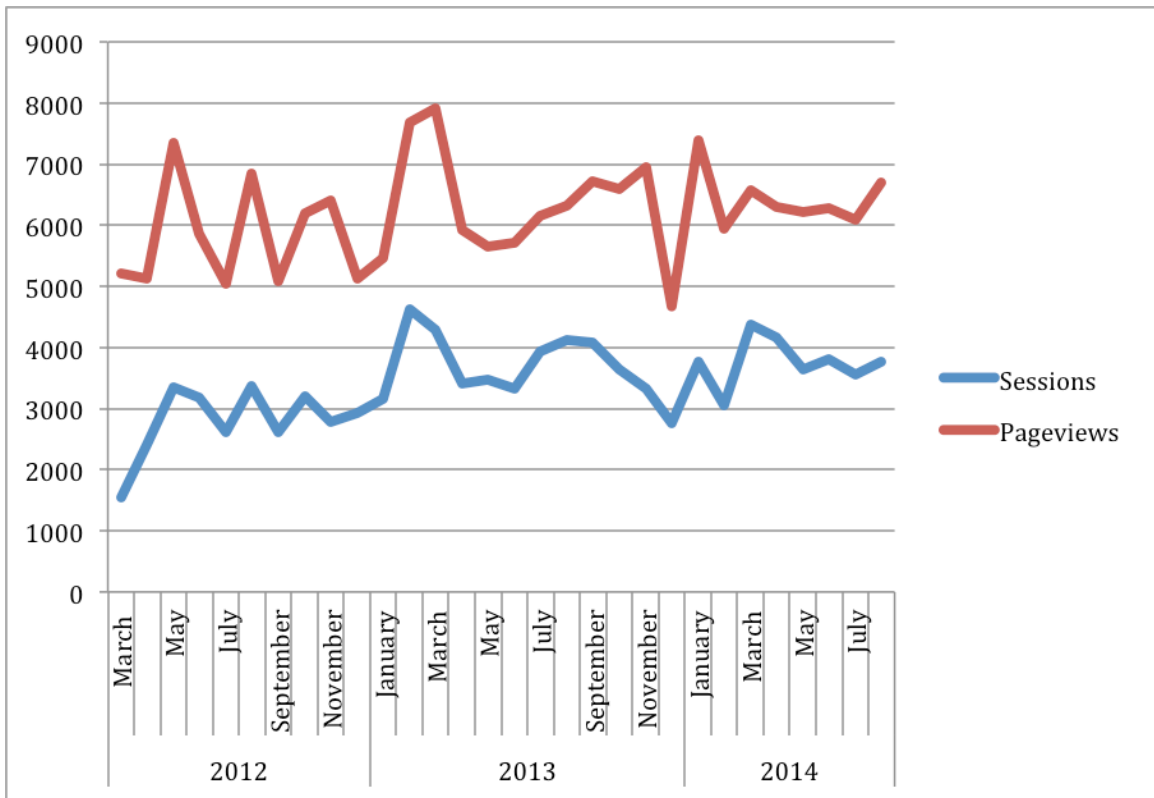


Figure 3 - PlanCharlotte readership data from March 2012 through August 2014.

Between the last nine months of 2012 and the first nine months of 2014, the average monthly traffic grew only 1,000 sessions, from 2,940 per month to 3,655 per month. That’s an 80 percent increase, but far lower than the growth seen in the other two sites. The increase has similar slow-growth track as the Public Press had in its first years. This does not imply that the rate will change or see the same success in building readership.

| City | Sessions | % New Sessions | New Users | Bounce Rate | Pages / Session | Avg. Session (Seconds) |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Charlotte | 42088 | 50.21% | 21132 | 62.00% | 2.23 | 208.75 |
| New York | 2692 | 55.20% | 1486 | 70.21% | 1.46 | 87.59 |
| Raleigh | 2153 | 70.32% | 1514 | 70.46% | 1.62 | 115.93 |
| Atlanta | 1731 | 71.46% | 1237 | 77.24% | 1.42 | 89.36 |
| Huntersville | 1419 | 46.79% | 664 | 65.12% | 1.72 | 120.57 |
| Washington DC | 1369 | 52.52% | 719 | 72.61% | 1.36 | 102.38 |
| (not set) | 1357 | 87.40% | 1186 | 86.37% | 1.26 | 41.75 |
| Matthews | 1304 | 68.87% | 898 | 71.93% | 1.63 | 111.68 |
| Concord | 1249 | 70.14% | 876 | 70.30% | 1.68 | 97.94 |
| Gastonia | 1077 | 78.46% | 845 | 74.37% | 1.69 | 107.61 |
| Total/average | 105406 | 63.30% | 66722 | 69.44% | 1.81 | 143.56 |

Table 3 - PlanCharlotte readership by top 10 locations.

PlanCharlotte has the smallest geographic target, focusing on the Charlotte metropolitan area. Half of cities seen in Table 4 are considered part of the target region, linked economically and socially. Huntersville, Matthews, Concord and Gastonia are all a short distance from Charlotte. Despite its lower readership, PlanCharlotte shows more engagement compared to NC Health News through the numbers for average bounce rate, pages per visit and duration on the site.

| Session type | Carolina Public Press | | NC Health News | | PlanCharlotte | |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------|----------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| Desktop | 288513 | 79.6% | 356236 | 75.4% | 80990 | 76.8% |
| Mobile | 46668 | 12.9% | 74123 | 15.7% | 16077 | 15.3% |
| Tablet | 27266 | 7.5% | 42286 | 8.9% | 8339 | 7.9% |

Table 4 - How readers access each organization.

Users access these sites with desktop computers more than 75 percent of the time. Smartphone users account for 13 to 16 percent of sessions and tablet users make up approximately 8 percent. A 2014 Pew report states, “Despite the growth in mobile phone and tablet use, the desktop still dominates the traffic to news sites” (p.15). The report examines national news organizations and shows the North Carolina sites follow a similar trend (A. Mitchell, Mark Jurkowitz, Kenneth Olmstead, 2014).

According to reader surveys, roughly half of respondents say they access these nonprofit news sites from work computers during the day. And 27 to 37 percent say they will access stories with smartphones.

The growth shown in the readership data demonstrates a demand for the type of reporting these organizations provide. In the words of Jay Hamilton, “Time spent consuming one type of information is time that cannot be spent on another task. This means the relative interest of viewers still plays a large role in the types of news demanded by news consumers on the Internet” (Hamilton, 2004, p. 194). The data show an increasing number of people investing their time in these sites.

Readership: why

To learn more about readers and what drives them to these news sites, each conducted a readership survey for this study. The survey data represent a small segment of readers due to low participation.

The North Carolina Health News Survey attracted the most responses, with 141 participants. The PlanCharlotte survey had 67. The Public Press conducted its own survey just two months before this study. As a result, only 22 of its readers participated. For reference, data from the earlier Public Press survey is included here with an additional 38 participants.

Readers tend to have high education levels. The three sites have an average of 49 percent reporting graduate degrees, and an additional 28 percent report having bachelor's degrees. Ages vary across the sites: a majority of NC Health News readers are 55 or older. PlanCharlotte has a significantly younger readership, with a plurality of respondents 22 to 34 years old. The data for Carolina Public Press only includes 22 reader responses on age for this study.

How old are you?

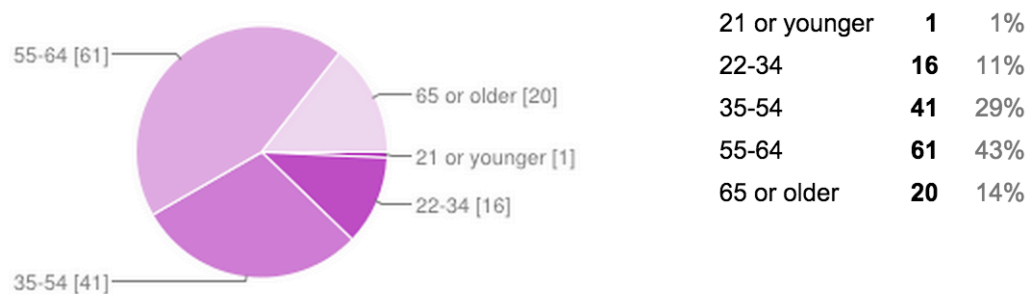
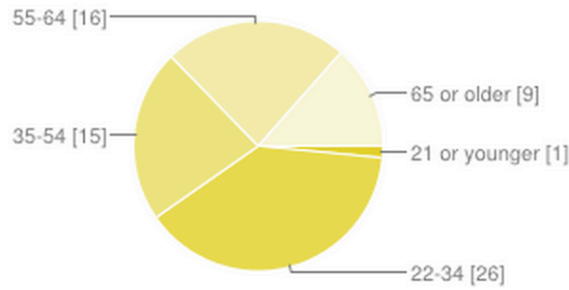


Figure 4 - Age distribution for North Carolina Health News.

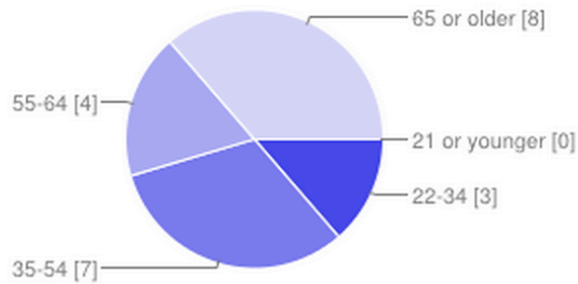
How old are you?



| | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----|
| 21 or younger | 1 | 1% |
| 22-34 | 26 | 39% |
| 35-54 | 15 | 22% |
| 55-64 | 16 | 24% |
| 65 or older | 9 | 13% |

Figure 5 - Age distribution for PlanCharlotte.

How old are you?

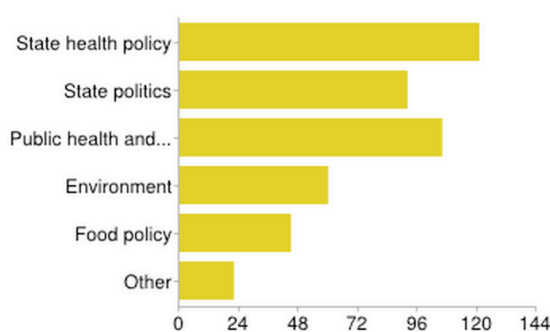


| | | |
|---------------|----------|-----|
| 21 or younger | 0 | 0% |
| 22-34 | 3 | 14% |
| 35-54 | 7 | 32% |
| 55-64 | 4 | 18% |
| 65 or older | 8 | 36% |

Figure 6 - Age distribution for Carolina Public Press.

Overwhelmingly, respondents from all three surveys put a high value on political and policy reporting in each of these sites' niche areas. Participants were asked to select all topics of interest that apply:

What kind of coverage do you value from the North Carolina Health News?



| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|-----|
| State health policy | 121 | 86% |
| State politics | 92 | 65% |
| Public health and medical research | 106 | 75% |
| Environment | 60 | 43% |
| Food policy | 45 | 32% |
| Other | 22 | 16% |

Figure 7 – Valued coverage from NC Health News.

What kind of coverage do you value from the PlanCharlotte?

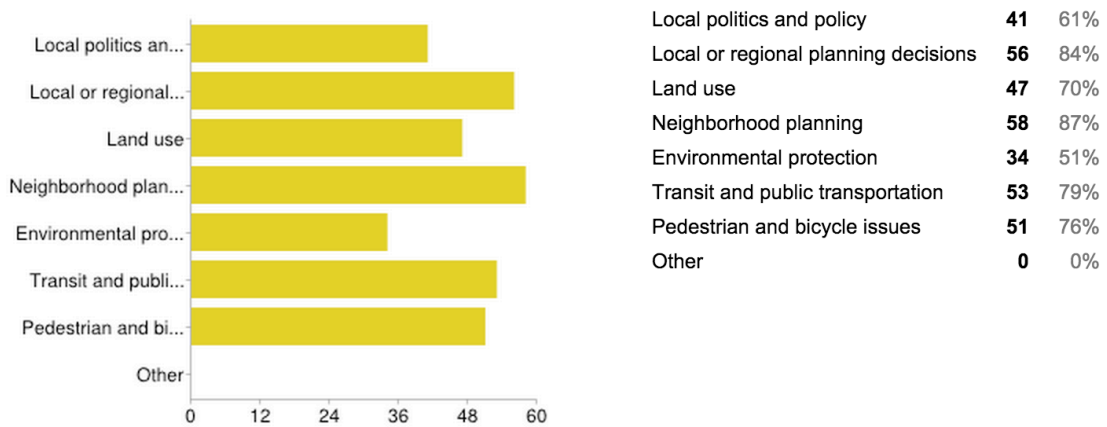


Figure 8 – Valued coverage from PlanCharlotte.

What kind of coverage do you value from Carolina Public Press?

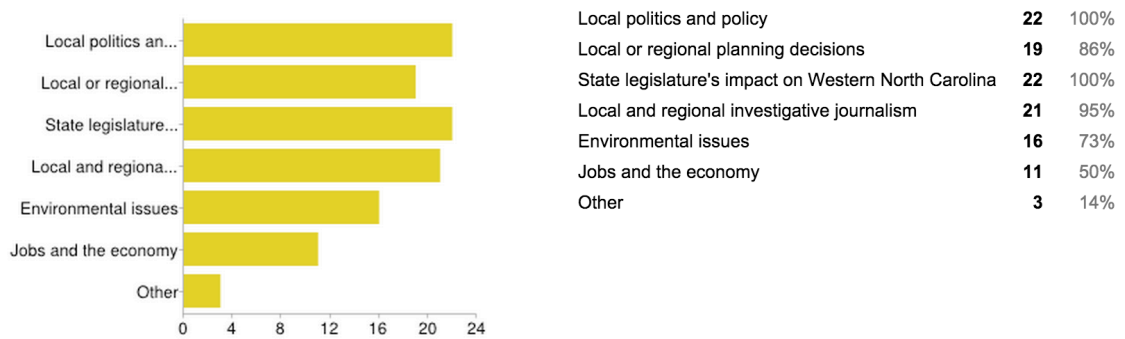
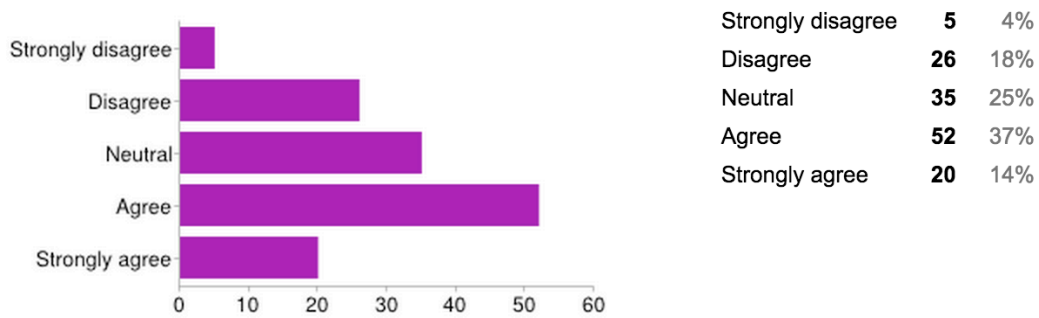


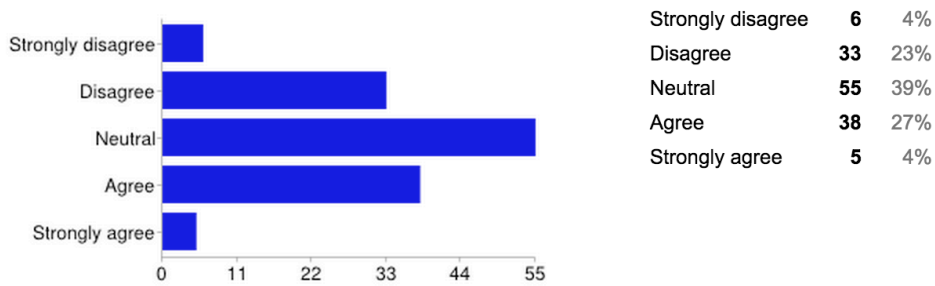
Figure 9 – Valued coverage from the Public Press.

Several questions in the surveys focus on information and news reporting available on the niche and geographic regions the three sites focus on. The questions asked respondents if they agreed with the following statements:

Without North Carolina Health News, I would not know about public health issues in my community. [Do you agree with the following statements?]



I consider myself well informed on public health issues by other local news outlets. [Do you agree with the following statements?]



North Carolina Health News covers issues that I care about. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

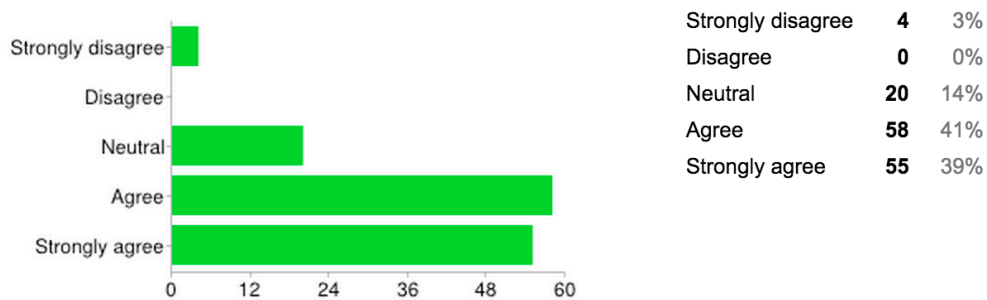
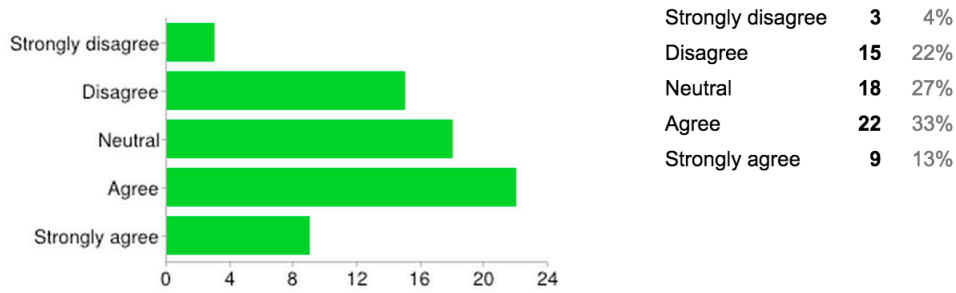


Figure 10 – North Carolina Health News issue responses.

Without PlanCharlotte, I would not know about planning and public policy in my community. [Do you agree with the following statements?]



I consider myself well informed on planning and public policy by other local news outlets. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

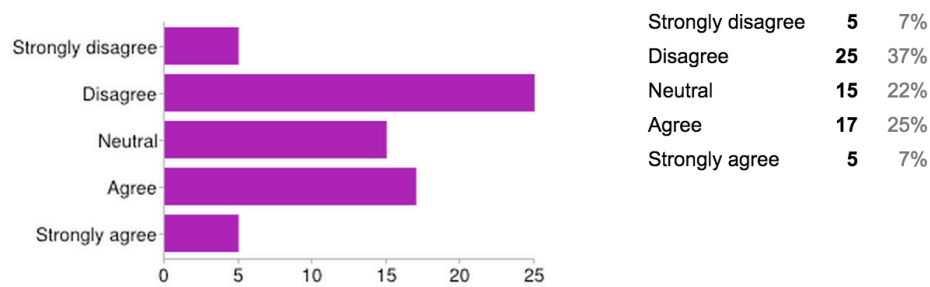


Figure 11 - PlanCharlotte issue responses.

The surveys asked readers to identify themselves based on their personal or professional interest in the coverage. For NC Health News, 40 percent identified as a “healthcare worker,” almost 20 percent said they worked in the public sector. Four respondents said they were lobbyists. For Carolina Public Press, only 29 people responded to this question. Of those people, 86 percent identified themselves as “interested citizens.” In the PlanCharlotte survey, 73 percent of respondents identified themselves in the “interested citizen” category. Thirty percent called themselves “community activists.” One quarter of the respondents said they worked for the public sector.

A plurality of respondents to these surveys say they would not be as well informed if it weren't for these nonprofits. Many respondents do not consider other news outlets as informative on similar issues. Each organization's mission is to fill the gaps left by traditional news organizations. Based on these survey responses, traditional news outlets leave readers without coverage of issues important to them. Survey responses indicate these nonprofits are having some success filling reporting gaps for their readers.

Chapter 2 - Content analysis: unique, in-depth

Each site in this study takes a different approach to content. Each organization's mission and focus drive these editorial strategies. NC Health News has some in-depth reporting and analysis along with regular coverage of state politics and policy. The Public Press focuses its staff resources on long-term and investigative coverage of issues facing the region while also running a number of press releases and stories from content partners. PlanCharlotte, in line with its academic mission, focuses on research, commentary and community issues.

For this content analysis, this study looks at March 2014 to analyze stories published by the three organizations over the course of one month. March was selected because there were no major news events, such as an election or disaster, to sway coverage in one direction or another and readership for that month was more or less average for each site.

During the analysis period, NC Health News published 31 stories. Of those, 22 were original to the site. Six stories were from content-sharing agreements: Carolina Public Press (3) and Kaiser Health News (3). One was a commentary from the North Carolina Readers Association's blog, and one reprint from ProPublica. The Public Press published 38 stories during this period. Seventeen of those stories were original to the Public Press; 15 were press releases from universities or government agencies; and six came from content sharing agreements: North Carolina Health News (2), *The Charlotte Observer* (3) and the *Yancey Common Times Journal* (1). PlanCharlotte published 10 stories, all original to the site.

Carolina Public Press

The Public Press is the only organization in this analysis to have fewer original stories than shared content. It had 15 original stories. Of the 23 shared stories, most were press releases; each release during the month had the story page clearly labeled as a press release. Five of the releases had to do with event announcements. The bulk of the rest involved an ongoing story about Duke Energy's coal ash spill into the Dan River a month earlier.

Five press releases covered the coal ash spill, and the site published an additional three stories related to the incident from the *Charlotte Observer*. The Public Press published two original, in-depth stories on the topic. The coal ash spill, widely reported around North Carolina as an environmental disaster, was major statewide news. The strength of the Public Press with the coal ash story is in localizing it to the region and going beyond what happened in this one event. On March 12, 2014 the Public Press published an in-depth story with many primary documents about state officials inspecting Duke Energy dams around Asheville. The article states that the inspectors found the active coal ash dams were sound, but then goes further to examine other coal ash dams in western North Carolina considered "high hazard" (Igelman, 2014).

Public Press editor and executive director Angie Newsome, in a 2014 interview, said a major part of their editorial strategy was to put stories into a regional perspective and see specific issues and stories through that broader lens:

In terms of content, we always think about assigning stories and writing stories with the idea that it crosses county lines, that readers

in Vance County would be interested in a story about Rutherford County. What are those ties? Often that becomes the economy, [it] becomes political influence in the region; it becomes the environment, it becomes trends in education. Our thought is that if we focus on a story in Buncombe County we have to say pretty clearly why we're focusing on this particular issue in this particular county (Newsome, 2014).

In the case of the Dan River spill, the role of the Public Press was not to use its limited resources on covering the daily developments. Those updates came through press releases and content partners, freeing up resources to investigate a local angle.

Four stories in March 2014 dealt with the closing of the sole abortion provider in Asheville. The clinic closing in the summer of 2013 was reported widely in the state and regional press, along with the debate in the North Carolina General Assembly that led to stricter rules for abortion providers. Public Press reporter John Ellison produced several stories in March 2014 based on documents turned over after a public records request. The initial story takes a non-traditional approach to presenting the information, publishing bullets and excerpts from the public records and using an online system to publish the full text of the email and documents received from the records request, allowing readers to make their own judgments on the material. The Public Press published three follow-up stories in March 2014 on the issues of access to abortion providers and the clinic closing.

For this study, the original news stories during the analysis period were compared to reporting in other area news outlets to see if the Public Press reported stories not found in other outlets and identified other trends. The comparison was

done by searching the archives of the *Charlotte Observer* and *Asheville Citizen-Times*, and with topical searches through Lexis-Nexis and Google. The comparison shows eight stories the Public Press localized from state or national news. One story, about a Republican senatorial debate in Hendersonville, was only covered by the Public Press and not picked up by other outlets, according to the analysis. Three stories, all on the ongoing story about abortion provider closing, were first reported by the Public Press and later picked up by other outlets. The Public Press was first to report that Planned Parenthood would provide services in Asheville during this reporting, which was picked up by the *Asheville Citizen-Times* (though it cannot be determined if the information came directly from the Public Press story or another source, such as a press release or personal contact) and then by the Associated Press and distributed statewide. The abortion clinic documents story was also the most-viewed post on the Public Press that month.

During the analysis month, the Public Press published 15 stories, a mix of original reporting, shared stories and press releases, related to either the coal ash spill or the abortion clinic closing, accounting for 39.5 percent of all stories published in that time period. Focusing so heavily on these two stories was deliberate. Editor Angie Newsome, in an interview, said, “We’re not forced or compelled to be the newspaper of record, the site of record, so we really are able to have a niche and really speak to a specific audience.” The stories studied show a regional approach, and the organization directed its resources toward reporting that impacted the broader region.

| Page | Pageviews | Unique Page | Avg. Time on Entrances | | Bounce Rate |
|---|-----------|-------------|------------------------|-------|-------------|
| documents-disclose-political-pr-pressures-surrounding- asheville-abortion-clinics-suspension | 4,663 | 2,205 | 0:00:47 | 2,047 | 2.44% |
| asheville-abortion-clinic-for-sale-could-close | 3,601 | 1,698 | 0:00:38 | 1,598 | 2.94% |
| from-pacs-to-individuals-who-is-funding-foxx-mchenry- meadows-campaigns-coffers | 1,317 | 630 | 0:00:31 | 567 | 0.88% |
| election-2014-more-throw-candidate-hats-in-ring-as-nc- filing-period-ends | 1,266 | 594 | 0:00:29 | 557 | 4.13% |
| asheville-buncombe-crime-databases-offer-access-to- public-records | 1,094 | 449 | 0:00:37 | 446 | 7.62% |
| yancey-to-have-southeasts-first-designated- international-dark-sky-park | 894 | 397 | 0:00:31 | 392 | 6.87% |
| in-8-wnc-counties-child-poverty-reaching-more-than-30- percent | 635 | 249 | 0:00:59 | 192 | 0.00% |
| groups-call-on-mccrory-to-come-clean-about-ties-to- duke-energy | 574 | 268 | 0:00:45 | 225 | 6.67% |
| nc-obamacare-enrollment-among-countrys-highest | 552 | 265 | 0:00:30 | 223 | 4.04% |
| honoring-remembering-sen-martin-nesbitt | 539 | 246 | 0:00:44 | 192 | 2.08% |

Table 5 - Top ten stories by page views for Carolina Public Press, March 2014.

Data covering the top stories for the month show a high level of interest in the reporting on the Asheville abortion clinic. Not all of the stories in Table 5 were published in March 2014, but the stories readers prefer are original content on regional politics. The top two stories for the month together accounted for more than 18 percent of page views. Absent from the top five stories, and with only one in the top ten for the month, is reporting on the coal ash issues.

The bounce rate on the top ten is surprisingly low. Having every top ten story with a bounce rate of less than 10 percent shows significant engagement with the site as a whole, beyond just the one story (Chinn, 2010). Bounce rate, the percentage of people who viewed that one page and left the site, is lower for the Public Press over the existence of the site (about 42 percent) than the other two in this study. In a roundtable discussion sponsored by the Knight Foundation in 2013, Joel Kramer with the MinnPost said:

The issue of bounce rate, bounce rate is high because of the number of people who come to your site who aren't interested in your site so

they are functionable as uniques. If you run a website and you run content on it, you are going to get an enormous number of visitors mainly through search and secondarily through various other kinds of linking who are not interested in your site.

The low bounce rate shows a high rate of engagement with the site and its content.

A separate 2013 Knight Foundation report studied 18 nonprofit news organizations and found that they had an average bounce rate of about 68 percent.

Website managing editor for the Poynter Institute, Mallery Tenore suggests several strategies to decrease bounce rate, including three practiced by the organizations in this study: link to relevant content in the text of the story, provide links to related stories and write descriptive headlines so people find what they're looking for. She also suggests using the search term that brought people to the page to serve related content and using cookies to track user activity to give links to content the users may be more interested in – none of the sites here use the latter strategies (Tenore, 2010).

North Carolina Health News

NC Health News published 31 stories in March 2014. One fifth of its content came from outside sources. One of those, about a health research study, came directly from a press release. The content analysis revealed a wide range of topics, but all pertained to public health and healthcare. The topics reported on most frequently were the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion, hydraulic fracturing for natural gas, and politics and policy from the North Carolina General Assembly.

During the month studied, NC Health News published stories related to literacy, the Dan River coal ash spill, mental health, Medicaid, the state budget, child care subsidies, nursing homes, minority health, teen pregnancy, obesity, abortion, allergies and others. The comparison analysis primarily looked at coverage with the *Raleigh News & Observer* and the *Charlotte Observer*, with broader story searches as explained in the Public Press section above. Of the 20 original news stories published during the month, NC Health News had two stories appear first. One covered research into using SMS messaging to give real-time feedback on hospital quality, and was not picked up by other local outlets. The other was an update on the Medicaid budget debate among state lawmakers. Other news outlets did cover this story, and it is likely that they would have reported on the issue without coverage in NC Health News. What is clear from the content analysis is the prominence of continued coverage of topics like Medicaid funding and the Affordable Care Act—almost 20 percent of the stories for the month related to those topics. These are not stories a news organization can “break” *per se*, but they can go deeper and give a fuller understanding of the issues.

In the NC Health News readership survey, more than 85 percent of respondents said they highly valued reporting on state health policy, and another 60 percent placed high value on reporting about the politics involved. NC Health News content, according to views in the reader survey, lines up well with what readers value in the site. Many of these stories are reported through the lens of the state legislature, where editor Rose Hoban spends much of her time. In a September 2014

interview, she said, “Our focuses right now are legislative, rather than state government, looking at policies around the state” (Hoban, 2014). As seen in Table 6, the top stories for the site in March 2014 focus on the federal Affordable Care Act and state Medicaid expansion. The sharp topical focus has allowed NC Health News to build its brand around the often-contentious politics and policy of healthcare.

| Page | Pageviews | Unique Page | Avg. Time on Entrances | Bounce Rate |
|--|-----------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|
| obamacare-faces-scrutiny-at-legislature | 933 | 897 | 0:05:50 | 93.27% |
| medicaid-reform-plan-rules-out-privatization | 859 | 752 | 0:04:34 | 79.77% |
| different-cultures-different-systems-comparing-health-care-in-the-u-s-and-taiwan | 616 | 575 | 0:07:01 | 93.85% |
| new-unc-program-will-turn-army-medics-into-local-practitioners | 521 | 497 | 0:04:02 | 95.57% |
| texting_quality | 431 | 384 | 0:03:42 | 86.54% |
| group-homes-provide-support-keep-mentally-ill-from-hospital | 424 | 402 | 0:03:59 | 92.35% |
| obamacare-enrollment-in-n-c-among-the-countrys-strongest | 378 | 341 | 0:03:18 | 87.35% |
| state-managed-care-organizations-to-consolidate | 364 | 312 | 0:03:38 | 79.20% |
| medicaid-plan-likely-to-face-tough-road-through-general-assembly | 357 | 323 | 0:03:39 | 84.98% |
| vietnam-veterans-still-looking-for-answers-on-agent-orange | 353 | 322 | 0:04:43 | 90.82% |

Table 6 - Top ten stories by page views for NC Health News, March 2014.

Of the top ten stories published during the month in question, there is an average 88 percent bounce rate. This shows low reader engagement with the site, as readers go to one article and then leave the site instead of clicking to another story. The 2013 Knight report on nonprofits states, “As nonprofit news organization are niche sites, and many distributed their content through other websites, we might expect bounce rates to be higher than typical” (Knight Foundation, 2013, p. 14). NC Health News has the highest overall bounce rate of the three organizations studied here, with an average 80 percent over the life of the site. NC Health News’s strength is in its niche appeal and direct connection to readers who work in the healthcare

field but that same specialized appeal may lead to lower reader engagement with the site as shown in the bounce data.

PlanCharlotte

PlanCharlotte has a sharp geographic and niche focus. Its coverage area is urban planning, architecture and related issues in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg metropolitan area. PlanCharlotte published the fewest stories of the three sites in March 2014. The site posted ten original stories, including three announcements of university-related initiatives or events, two on a reader-engagement initiative, one historical story, one multimedia presentation about public transit, and three traditional news stories.

The three news stories covered: phasing in new LED streetlights in Charlotte; using train rights of way for greenways before funding comes in for paving; and a story about how a Supreme Court decision on who owns abandoned railroad tracks won't impact North Carolina's rails to trails program. In the comparison analysis, the LED street lights and greenways updates first appeared in PlanCharlotte. No other news organizations appeared to pick up those stories directly, but did cover the issues later. The Supreme Court decision on rights of way appeared in the national press but PlanCharlotte localized the story to North Carolina.

The content on PlanCharlotte is befitting its academic mission and decidedly different from the Public Press and NC Health News. It is housed in an institute at a large university, and from that academic perch part of its mission is to bring the

study of cities and urban planning to the public through reporting and storytelling (Newsom, 2014a).

| Page | Pageviews | Unique Page | Avg. Time on Entrances | Bounce Rate |
|---|-----------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|
| charlotte-transit-ridership-bicycling-millennials | 618 | 556 | 0:05:52 | 87.67% |
| when-place-needs-design-makeover | 398 | 336 | 0:05:10 | 71.89% |
| dirtways-speed-trail-access-mecklenburg-nc | 264 | 237 | 0:05:20 | 71.08% |
| charlotte-msa-change-2013 | 185 | 168 | 0:05:45 | 84.47% |
| charlotte-nc-led-streetlight | 124 | 110 | 0:03:45 | 76.92% |
| charlotte-urban-design-transit-oriented-development | 113 | 97 | 0:02:07 | 52.08% |
| charlotte-belmont-villa-heights-noda-neighborhood | 104 | 90 | 0:08:01 | 79.78% |
| charlotte-gold-mining-district-south-end | 91 | 71 | 0:05:13 | 76.00% |
| daniel-levine-interview-first-ward-plan-charlotte | 85 | 79 | 0:05:25 | 89.87% |
| historic-noda-textile-mills-face-uncertain-future | 80 | 78 | 0:03:25 | 92.11% |

Table 7 - Top ten stories by page views for PlanCharlotte, March 2014.

Examining the top ten stories for PlanCharlotte during March 2014, the bounce rate is an average of about 78 percent but varies widely from 52 percent to 92 percent. The top stories reflect the interest in PlanCharlotte’s original, unique content. The top two stories focus on engaging people beyond the journalism to participate in urban design and thinking about the issues that make up the mission of the Urban Institute. The second most popular story for the month, “When place needs a design makeover,” is part of a public engagement effort by the Urban Institute. The story is a call to action: “Imagine a spot in your city or town that you think needs a makeover – only instead of adding a new haircut and stylish clothes, you add trees, sidewalk cafes, bicycle lanes or parks.” The story asks readers to look at spaces in the city and suggest changes, which are then turned into visuals, showing what streets and blocks could look like (Newsom, 2014b). The top story for the month, “They’d rather not drive, thank you” is a multimedia feature story with video and transcribed interviews with people in Charlotte who commute by bicycle

or public transit (Peters, 2014). The presentation is closer to a multimedia documentary or profile than a news story.

Examining the number of comments and the number of times users clicked on Facebook and Twitter buttons on the PlanCharlotte site, the multimedia presentation “They’d rather not drive, thank you” performed the best with seven comments, 360 clicks on the Facebook button and 119 on the Twitter button. The second most popular story page based on these measurements is “When a place needs a design makeover.”

The three sites in this study take different approaches and show the range of how content can be created and aggregated. The Public Press relies most heavily on content partners and press releases. PlanCharlotte uses no outside content. NC Health News falls in between the two. When it comes to raw numbers of page views, stories published and bounce rate, the Public Press has seen the most success. NC Health News attracts the most sessions to its website but lags far behind in terms of bounce rate.

The Public Press and NC Health News have been successful in attracting readers by knowing their respective audiences. Creating, aggregating and distributing the right content to attract readers in the specific topic has allowed the Public Press to attract an average of more than 34,000 page views for the 12 months from September 2013 through August 2014. In that same period, NC Health News attracted more than 30,000 average page views. PlanCharlotte, in that same 12-month timeframe, attracted an average of just 6,300 page views.

Partnerships expand content and reach

For NC Health News and Carolina Public Press, content partnerships led to additional stories for the sites, expanding the breadth of coverage available for readers, and the reach of their stories by publishing links or full text on other sites. A recent study from the Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project states, “The center has encountered news providers teaming up in new ways. Legacy media outlets are looking more than ever for ways to augment what they can produce with a depleted staff, and news startups are eager to place their work before a wider audience and figure out roads to sustainability” (R. Edmonds, 2014, p. 2). Partnerships can take several forms, including collaborating on stories across newsrooms, sharing links to each other’s stories, sharing full-text content for free or for a fee (the paid model is traditionally called syndication), or jointly hiring a reporter to work for each organization. With sharing stories, common for both NC Health News and the Public Press, the other publisher gives full credit and an online link to the nonprofit.

Some of these partnership agreements have contracts and a set process, but others are based on less formal agreements. The Public Press has a “Share our content” page on its site devoted to helping potential partners through a short process to get free access to republish its content (2014b). The Public Press and NC Health News can get additional content for their sites and find a broader audience for their own stories. The Pew report states: “What these collaborations mean for the public—at least in theory—is broader and deeper news coverage, more easily accessed or discovered. What they mean for news organizations is—depending on

one's place at the table—a more diverse mix of content to offer, broader reach and more scalable reporting” (R. Edmonds, 2014, p. 2). The partnerships attracted a small amount of revenue for both organizations, with \$1,200 for NC Health News (Hoban, 2014) and about \$1,000 for the Public Press (Carolina Public Press, 2014) through paid syndication agreements.

The Pew Research Center's report *Journalism partnerships: a new era of interest* begins with a quote from Jim Brady, former president of the Online News Association: “This is a time when journalists need to huddle together for warmth.” The report states that collaborations give readers “broader and deeper news coverage, more easily accessed or discovered” (p. 2). The 2014 report details five partnerships that saw varying degrees of success, including a local nonprofit in Charlottesville, VA giving beat coverage to the local paper, an exchange in Texas where rivals share front-page stories, and a nonprofit in New Orleans that partnered with the local public radio station. The report gave several major takeaways, but most important for this study are: “economics were and still are the driver”; “little if any money changes hands”; “imaginative ad hoc partnering may be the next wave”; and “quality counts; quality plus engagement is even better” (R. Edmonds, 2014, pp. 3-4). Newsroom collaboration on content is not easy, the report states, but many news organizations are interested, if uncertain, in forging partnerships.

These partnerships in North Carolina, by and large, are not at the level of direct collaboration, but the Public Press shares stories with the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, *Charlotte Observer*, North Carolina Public Radio, WLOS-TV and numerous

small community newspapers in western North Carolina. Public Press editor Angie Newsome said in an interview: “We have sharing agreements with daily print, weekly, community newspapers, alternative weeklies, radio stations and TV stations in North Carolina.” Five stories during the analysis period ran in the Mountain Xpress, an alt weekly in Asheville.

In the content analysis, the Public Press reprinted three stories from the *Charlotte Observer*, one from the *Yancey Common Times Journal* and one from NC Health News. All three stories from the *Observer* related to the coal ash spill. The NC Health News story covered health insurance enrollment around the state as the Affordable Care Act was rolled out. Some of the partnership agreements, such as with the newspapers in Yancey County and Charlotte, are reciprocal and both sites share stories, but many are not. The Public Press and NC Health News each have content partners republish the nonprofit’s content and expand the organizations’ reach in North Carolina.

NC Health News published three stories from the Public Press in the same month, two related to investigation into the abortion clinic closing and another about changes to child-care subsidies. NC Health News also ran three stories from a content sharing partnership with Kaiser Health News, a national nonprofit with a similar healthcare reporting mission. Kaiser also links to NC Health News stories in a daily digest of health reporting sent to subscribers each day.

PlanCharlotte, as of fall 2014, did not have formal content partnerships. The content analysis did not reveal any reprints of stories from the month. In an

interview, editor Mary Newsom said, “The [*Charlotte Observer*] arts and features pages have picked up several of our pieces. The *Observer* has what they call ‘news partners’ and they specifically said no; they didn’t want to partner with government agencies” (Newsom, 2014a). The Public Press is a member of the “news partners” group with the *Observer* and shares news content directly with the newspaper for republication and to a broader audience through an automated feed from partner organizations (Newsome, 2014).

Content analysis of the three news websites shows different approaches to producing, aggregating and distributing content. PlanCharlotte has the lowest readership of the three nonprofits in this study; it also had the fewest stories by far in the analysis period. NC Health News performed well when looking at raw pageview numbers, but a closer look shows a high bounce rate and a low level of engagement with the site. The top ten stories at NC Health News in March 2014 had an average bounce rate of more than 88 percent. The Public Press had the most web traffic of all three and a strikingly low bounce rate. But to make a case to funders and donors, these organizations have to go beyond the raw numbers. They have to show that their journalism creates impact. Impact is an elusive term, but can equate to policy change, social awareness, building community, and other intangible concepts that are harder, if not impossible to measure, but go to the heart of why the press is important to civil society.

Chapter 3 - Impacts: knowledge, change

Analytics, Jonathan Stray writes for NiemanLab, produce “reams of data: page views, unique users, and more. News organizations reliant on advertising or user subscriptions must pay attention to these numbers because they’re tied to revenue” (2012). While these analytics might not be as “relevant editorially,” nonprofits need to be able to show the foundations and benefactors that support them that they are having an impact.

“We are desperately interested in impact and metrics. It’s a key part of the way we do grant making,” said Tom Glaisyer, with the Democracy Fund, at a 2013 Knight Foundation roundtable on the future of nonprofit news (Pew Research Center, 2013a). Dan Green, with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said, “What we’ve realized fairly quickly is we can try to force grantees to measure [impact] but the reality is that we have to actually convince them that this is – getting this information is valuable to their own business.” Showing impact is essential for demonstrating to funders of all levels why they should give money to a nonprofit news organization (Tofel, 2013).

In 2012 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation asked Richard Tofel, president of ProPublica, to prepare a report on the impact of investigative journalism. Tofel makes the distinction between hard news, features, explanatory journalism and investigative reporting (Tofel, 2013). ProPublica’s mission is investigative, and that’s what he focuses on for measuring impact. Of the three sites in this study, the Public Press is the only one to put significant resources towards investigative work. All

three, based on the content analysis and interviews with editors, produce a significant number of hard news reports and explanatory stories.

No matter the objective of the organization, Tofel's report points out, measuring impact across the news industry is complicated: "There is no one reliable measure of journalism's impact, no single algorithm that can be devised, no magic formula to load into a spreadsheet or deploy in an app" (Tofel, 2013, p. 21).

Just because a story deadline is tomorrow doesn't mean impact will be felt tomorrow or next week or by the time the next grant report is due.

Any effort to measure impact should necessarily stretch over the longest possible period. At the same time, we need to recognize the practical problems this reality presents: those with oversight responsibility for investigative journalism (such as board members at non-profits, or top editors or publishers at large for-profit newspapers) cannot always wait two years to reach judgments about performance (Tofel, 2013, p. 22).

Grant reports have deadlines; annual reports need to reach donors in a timely fashion. Therefore, it may be more helpful to think about tracking impact instead of measuring it once or twice a year. Impact assessment is a continual process of connecting the dots between and among analytics data, audience engagement in comments and on social media, public awareness, possibly even indictments or policy change somewhere down the line.

Impact is a web of information, a dozen data points: some are straightforward (how many people read this story?), others not so much (did this story increase awareness of an issue? get a public official fired or arrested? did it make people think critically about the topic at hand?). Knight's *Finding a foothold*

report states, “The maturation of the online nonprofit news sector requires a well-defined set of measurement practices, consistently applied by practitioners and funders” to gauge the impact of nonprofit journalism ventures and base funding decisions on those measurements (Knight Foundation, 2013, p. 50). In a 2013 co-authored paper with Hilary Niles, Center for Public Integrity founder Charles Lewis, writes, “Funders are, understandably, looking for a way to gauge the social impact of their financial investments.” With so many new nonprofits, the foundations “are feeling a bit overwhelmed and besieged by proliferating prospective grantees” (C. Lewis, Hilary Niles, 2013, p. 4). Foundations and donors need a way to compare nonprofit news ventures and the organizations need a way to show how they are important to potential funders, and the way forward is measuring impact.

Based on the literature reviewed for this paper, the impact of any story can be judged on six different dimensions: 1) number of readers, 2) engagement in comments and social media, 3) direct content sharing through partnerships, links or other mentions, 4) original reporting, 5) number of times story was picked up by other news organizations and 6) official action or legislative change. Some of these measurements fit easily in spreadsheets, like the number of page views or the number of times a story is reprinted. Others are more qualitative.

Carolina Public Press

Angie Newsome, with the Public Press, gives her definition of impact this way:

The easy answer is looking at our readership, but we tend to not look at our readership when we define impact. We consider it, but it's not the only consideration that we have. We look at how many times people engage with a story, we look at if that story had any kind of "results" in the community: a policy change, an action by a public official, changes within a public agency primarily. Secondly, we look at whether we are essentially providing a service that the community wouldn't have gotten anywhere. If our story wouldn't have run, would that story be available anywhere else (Newsome, 2014).

Newsome's picture of impact aligns with some of the best practices highlighted by major funding organizations.

The Public Press has documented impact. Readership is growing and, based on the analytics data in Chapter 1, the site has high engagement for its most-read stories. The organization's reach goes further than the site, as it's picked up by the regional daily the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, the local alternative weekly *Mountain Xpress*, and numerous small community newspapers in western North Carolina, including the *Hendersonville Lightning*, the *Macon County News* and other rural papers.

The Public Press also has a documented track record of impacting public discourse. Two examples from 2014: The Public Press did an investigation into county commissions around the region and discovered that the public bodies overused closed meetings to discuss issues that should have been in open session (Elliston, 2015). In response, Bob Scott, mayor for the town of Franklin, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Citizen-Times*, giving a grade of "A" to the Asheville Citizen-Times and the Carolina Public Press for "the excellent in-depth story on secret county commission meetings and the accompanying editorial"; Scott pointed out

that: “All this tied in with Sunshine Week which basically says the public has a right to know what their elected officials are up to”(Scott, 2015). While most people would have a hard time finding Franklin on a map, the letter from the mayor illustrates the wide reach the Public Press enjoys. Beyond that, performing this kind of regional investigative reporting expands the reach of their watchdog role, bringing experienced investigative reporting skills to bear on rural areas that may not have their town council or county commission covered at all by a professional reporter.

An archive analysis of the *Macon County News*, a free community paper based in Franklin, NC, showed ten stories republished from the Public Press during 2014 (Google, 2015b). A similar analysis of the *Asheville Citizen-Times* shows that daily paper published at least nine Public Press stories over the same year (Google, 2015a).

A comment and a link on state Representative Chuck McGrady’s website points to a different kind of reach. The House member from the 117th District in western North Carolina pointed readers of his website to the Public Press’s story “State House committee looks at drone policy; Moffitt, Whitmire stress privacy protections” for what he called an “excellent report” on the proceedings of a committee studying drones used for law enforcement (McGrady, 2015). This is an example of how people in positions to make state-level policy decisions are paying attention to the Public Press.

Impact, at times, can go beyond reach and awareness. Reporting related to possible thefts from the Asheville Police evidence room, including missing guns and drugs, led to a city policy change, a federal prison term for one member of the Asheville Police Department, and helped turn the tide in an election. In an interview, Public Press editor Angie Newsome explains a story involving the evidence room at the Asheville Police Department:

We were really pushing for a document that we believed would indicate the degree to which the evidence room in Asheville had been robbed, basically, of guns, money and drugs by a staff person or persons of the police department. It really indicated a crucial flaw in the justice system in Asheville. So we were really pushing really hard for this document and, frankly, years of reporting on our end.

We ended up forming a coalition of news organizations in Buncombe County to press for that document. We ended up going to court with the city council and the Buncombe Country District Attorney over that document. We were unsuccessful there, but during the course of that, the auditor came and showed the city council the havoc that was the Asheville evidence room. That really changed how they started doing evidence handling in Asheville. It also became an issue later on in the district attorney's race where that DA that we had sued basically lost his seat over issues of transparency.

The evidence manager in that case was charged by a federal grand jury and eventually sentenced to prison. The Public Press did the initial reporting on this story as it emerged from a city council meeting and went on to write more than 40 stories about the evidence room and the work to get the audit. While other local media covered the story, including the Gannett-owned *Asheville Citizen-Times*, the Public Press published more about the ongoing public records fight and served as the lead

plaintiff in the suit. By mid-2014, the *Citizen-Times* began running updates directly from the Public Press.

In interviews with the editors of these sites, they highlighted broader issues of impact. Angie Newsome gave another example, but this time the concept is significantly harder to document for funders:

I think we, at the very least, have inspired, influenced, forced in some cases, the traditional for-profit press to resume some of this basic reporting in their communities. The fact that we've launched, we've been successful, we're gaining in influence and readership, it reminds them, encourages them, again, perhaps even forces them, to go back to some of those traditional beats that they have abandoned for some reason.

I think we're clearly showing that communities need and want the reporting that we're doing. We're challenging them; we're disrupting what some of the for-profit press think they should be doing. We also, frankly, feel like we're still producing news that people aren't going to find anywhere else.

That last point, about producing news that “people aren't going to find anywhere else” is a measurable impact as seen in the content analysis section of this study.

The Public Press does report stories readers can't find anywhere else, and then shares them with the local daily newspaper and others in the area for republication.

North Carolina Health News

NC Health News founding editor Rose Hoban said that she could see and document impact on the ground everyday from her unique perch as a dedicated healthcare reporter in the North Carolina General Assembly:

Part of my measuring impact is [...] when I'm at the legislature and people, lobbyists come up to me and say things about things we've

covered. When I hear my stories paraphrased or sometimes quoted from the floor during debate. These are the softer ways we measure impact.

When I hear that a story of mine has been poached by another outlet, I take a screen shot of it and date it and a screen shot of ours with the date stamp on it, we're able to show to potential funders and sponsors that we may not have the largest circulation but we're driving the conversation.

These story pickups and being cited on the floor of the state House can and should be documented as evidence of impact. But Hoban, who, before going into journalism was a registered nurse, said her impact goes further than that. She said she "frequently gets calls from other reporters" who need help understanding the complicated, technical issues in healthcare or health policy:

It was Tuesday evening, July 2 at 6:30 p.m. when our legislature proposed a sweeping abortion ban bill that probably would have made us one of the most restrictive abortion states in the country, and part of what they were talking about was between medical abortion, which is RU486 pills, and surgical abortion, which is traditional abortion, and people in the newsroom didn't know what those two terms meant.

I had an impromptu workshop session around my desk, we spent about 20 minutes [and] there were five or six reporters there. I explained to them some of the issues that were being discussed in the bill, where they can find data. I basically did a 15-minute data and information download for the other reporters and they could go off and do their stories.

In that short time, Hoban said, she was able to have a significant impact on news stories around the state by making sure other reporters knew the facts before reporting on an exceedingly contentious debate. This is not an impact that can be measured in a spreadsheet, but it is an important demonstration of the impact NC

Health News has on overall reporting on healthcare issues. The impact of this specialized knowledge can be measured in how many times NC Health News staff are invited onto television or radio broadcasts to discuss complicated healthcare issues. She's been on Time Warner Cable's Capital Tonight more than a dozen times and on WRAL News four times to discuss ongoing stories (WRAL, 2015), as well as appearances on public radio and other broadcast stations.

Healthcare coverage in North Carolina had been a vibrant beat, according to longtime University of North Carolina professor Ferrel Guillory:

Only a few years ago, for example, *The News & Observer* in Raleigh had as many as four reporters assigned to various health-related beats. They covered the big pharmaceutical industry in Research Triangle Park, Chapel Hill-based Blue Cross Blue Shield, the medical schools and local hospitals. They covered the health care sphere as business, as science, and as personal interest stories (Guillory, 2009).

But the situation changed. North Carolina now has only one dedicated full-time healthcare reporter, working for the *Charlotte Observer*, at a traditional news organization (Trogon, 2014). Rose Hoban used to be the second one in the state as the healthcare reporter for North Carolina Public Radio (Guillory, 2009) before she left to start NC Health News.

Having a reporter dedicated to health coverage means having a full-time person with specialist knowledge looking into tips, following stories, requesting documents and pushing for information. One example of a high-impact NC Health News story came from digging into a report about Medicaid as the state GOP argued that Medicaid was broken and should not be expanded under the Affordable Care

Act. Hoban received the report and, she writes, “In a document that displays ‘track changes’ that include [Carol] Steckel’s electronic signature, whole paragraphs were deleted, with evidence that, for example, North Carolina’s administrative costs are lower than most states rather than 30 percent higher, as maintained by McCrory administration officials” (Hoban, 2013). This was major news, especially among Democrats, and the story played out in newspapers, talk shows and newscasts around the state. Shortly after NC Health News published the story, it was featured prominently in a state legislative oversight hearing where the Health and Human Services Secretary testified and led to the state auditor reviewing the documents (Binker, 2013).

This story gets to the heart of the local and national political debate at the time, as Obamacare was in its initial roll out. It shows what a dedicated, specialized healthcare reporter can do. The story had 18 comments, which, based on the analysis of March 2014, is a significant level of engagement for NC Health News. The story also had 3,200 Facebook likes and 285 clicks on its Twitter link, based on the social media share links at the bottom of the story page (Hoban, 2013). This story is an extreme example of NC Health News’s impact, but it shows the reach of the site’s daily reporting and significant impact on healthcare issues in North Carolina.

In an interview, Hoban pointed to other measurable metrics she tracks on an ongoing basis:

About once a week I have a Google search and I am looking for other organizations, other news outlets, blogs, etc. that are quoting us, that are citing us. And then, also scanning the local media and, if imitation is a form of flattery, we are very highly flattered amongst out state’s

other news outlets. I had a contact say to me the other day, someone who is paying a lot to be a sponsor, “I’ve come to realize everything they do in the *News & Observer*, you’ve done first” (Hoban, 2014)

It’s easy to see here how quantitative metrics like counting story pickups and follow-up reporting by other news outlets leads into anecdotes that, while they cannot be measured, show impact for readers. In the case Hoban speaks of here, that qualitative statement turns into funding. Hoban said her tracking of story pickups involves taking screenshots of stories based on NC Health News reporting and saving them in a file on her computer. “We’re able to show to potential funders and sponsors that we may not have the largest circulation but we’re driving the conversation,” she explained (Hoban, 2014).

Based on the analysis of available data in this study and compared to the metrics ProPublica’s Tofel and others have suggested suggest, NC Health News stories made significant impact. Readership numbers are climbing and NC Health News is expanding its reach through limited content sharing and by serving as an expert reporter on topics such as Medicaid and mental health in interviews with television and radio news programs.

PlanCharlotte

The two most popular stories on PlanCharlotte during the content analysis month were, as noted in the previous chapter, not news stories. One was a multimedia presentation profiling people who rode a bicycle or took public transit to work (Peters, 2014). The second most popular was an engagement initiative that

asked readers to imagine, and physically visualize what could happen with urban design in parts of the city (Newsom, 2014b). These two stories also had the greatest engagement in the month, with the commuter story receiving seven comments, 360 clicks on the Facebook “like” button on the page and 119 “retweets” from the Twitter button on the page. To compare, of the 10 stories published in the month, three got one comment and five had none. The average number of clicks on the Twitter buttons is 24, and 60.5 for the Facebook buttons.

The reach, shown by the number of page views, and the engagement shown through social media clicks, demonstrate hard news stories are not PlanCharlotte’s strength. And, based on the traffic data, they are not why its readers are going to the site. The limited readership survey shows that respondents like reporting on planning decisions, neighborhood planning, public transit and issues related to pedestrians and cyclists.

Tracking impact, and making impact on the ground in Charlotte, lags behind what the Public Press and NC Health News can demonstrate. But based on the different mix of content on PlanCharlotte, perhaps the mission is not to engage readers in everyday news but educate on broader issues of urban design and planning.

Returning to PlanCharlotte’s mission statement from the first chapter, which states, “We work to connect and educate citizens of this region to build a shared future” and further, the Urban Institute itself is “an applied research and community outreach center” (PlanCharlotte, 2014). If the purpose of PlanCharlotte

is to engage readers and the community in urban design, then the readership and engagement data are pointing in the right direction.

PlanCharlotte does not fare well when using the same impact metrics as the Public Press and NC Health News. As the content analysis shows, Carolina Public Press and North Carolina Health News add to the conversation in real ways, reporting stories that otherwise may not have seen the light of day. They engage readers on important issues other outlets do not, or publish information in new or different ways. PlanCharlotte is a different case and, because of its academic mission and place within a public university, it is may be unfair to compare it directly with the work done by the other two organizations. Perhaps it should be judged on a separate scale more in line with an academic mission, weighing citizen engagement and discussion first with less consideration for other definitions of impact.

Engagement can be an indicator of impact because it shows how connected readers feel to what is presented to them. The 2011 Knight report states, “Engagement is particularly valuable to nonprofit news sites; it is critical to their missions of community impact and provides opportunities to attract and retain potential members and donors by creating social value” (p. 11). The report suggests, “More engaged users may be critical to a site’s revenue strategies” because funders or members could put a higher value on local users interacting with the site rather than a large number of page views from readers around the country who read one story from a Facebook link or Internet search and then leave (p. 12). The 2011 report argues engagement can lead to revenue because readers who are engaged will be

more willing to sign up as donors or members because the time they spend on the site and how they interact with it can indicate how much value they place on the reporting.

A recent Pew Center study, which looked at several media markets, found that “specialty outlets” added significantly to the overall depth and breadth of reporting in a community. “When it comes to what gets covered, the specialty outlets had a vastly different news agenda. ... Crime and accidents made up more than 40% of the stories studied in Denver’s broad-interest media, compared with just 10% among these specialty news providers. Conversely, the specialty sources as a whole spent more time during the five days studied on issues involving local culture such as recreation (10% vs. 3%) and restaurants (7% vs. 1%)” (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 122). Specialty publications like NC Health News and PlanCharlotte are there for readers whose interests are not covered by traditional news organizations. It’s easier to have an impact on, say, healthcare reporting, if there is only one full-time healthcare reporter in the state at a traditional news organization (Trogon, 2014).

Understanding and demonstrating impact is essential to the success of a nonprofit news organization. The Knight and Penn foundations together published a booklet in 2011 titled *Journalism and media grant making: Five things you need to know, five ways to get started*, produced specifically for grant-making organizations considering funding nonprofit news organizations and similar efforts. The booklet states, “As with any project, be clear at the outset what impact you hope the work

will have and have a plan for measuring it. To have great impact it needs to be used by people to improve their communities and their lives” (M. McLellan, Eric Newton, 2011, p. 21). The work has a section devoted to impact and shows the level of importance that foundations place on measurements of impact. The Knight Foundation’s *Getting local* report points to the ultimate goal of showing impact:

Creating and demonstrating social impact is a core role of any nonprofit organization and tied to the question of sustainability. Nonprofit news sites are no exception. A sizeable part of the current and anticipated funding comes from foundations and donors who are increasingly focused on community impact. Placing a strong emphasis on demonstrating social value creates opportunities to strengthen an organization’s financial stability (M. McLellan, Mayur Patel, 2011, p. 12).

The ultimate goal of these nonprofit news organizations, while producing good journalism and impacting communities, is sustainability. An organization that’s making a positive impact on its community is nothing without long-term financial viability.

Chapter 4 - Challenges for the future

The road ahead is unclear for the organizations in this study, as it is for similar nonprofit news sites around the country. A 2011 report by the Federal Communications Commission put it this way: “While journalistically many of the local news start-ups have soared, financially most have not gained traction” (Waldman, 2011, p. 124). Carolina Public Press and North Carolina Health News can show reach, engagement and impact: now they have to turn that impact into revenue. PlanCharlotte is in a different model and relies on funding from the operating budget of the Urban Institute at UNC Charlotte and faces its own set of challenges as part of a public university system. This chapter will focus on questions concerning business models for the Public Press and NC Health News as they work to find sustainability as standalone nonprofit news organizations. They face three primary challenges: staffing, business development and revenue diversification (Knight Foundation, 2013).

Institute for Nonprofit News executive director Kevin Davis, in a 2014 interview for the Saving Community Journalism website, summed up the issues facing these small organizations: “Sustainability to me looks like an organization that has dedicated staff on the business side, the technology side, as well as the editorial side. Sustainability looks like a strategy that understands the market you serve” (Davis, 2014). In North Carolina, the Public Press and NC Health News have significant work ahead of them to meet Davis’s definition of sustainability. They are both small organizations with budgets under \$70,000, according to 2014 budgets

posted on their respective websites. Neither has paid full-time staff. The Public Press relies heavily on foundation grants while NC Health News has a more diverse (though smaller) mix of income streams.

Staffing

One report from the Pew Research Center found in a survey of 172 nonprofit news organizations that nearly a third spent less than 10 percent of their time on business, advertising and marketing. More than half said they spend less than 25 percent of staff time on the business side of the operation (Mitchell, 2013). Data from that Pew Study parallels with what Kevin Davis said he experiences with his members: “There is no line of business that I know of that can be effectively managed when you are part-time. I say that because, unfortunately, so many of our members do 80 hours of journalism, and then, when their eyes are bleeding, they’ll try and do some fundraising,” (Davis, 2014). Staffing is the first major hurdle facing the Public Press and NC Health News.

Based on conversations with nonprofit news editors and executive directors in North Carolina, they face problems with staffing every day. Staffing for business competes heavily with the need for additional capacity on the editorial side. For the Public Press and NC Health News, the position of editor and executive director is a dual role. This split role points to the source of the problem: that journalists are not finding business-minded people to partner with before launching new ventures. Steve Beatty, editor of the nonprofit The Lens in New Orleans, said at a 2013 roundtable sponsored by the Knight Foundation, that he had difficulty fitting into his

new role of running a nonprofit instead of editing a news website: “Through some programs and some tough love and Kevin Davis and some partners at INN [Investigative News Network], I’ve realized my journalism days are over. I’ve got to be a business person. Yeah. [Laughter] It’s been tough, but it’s absolutely critical” (Pew Research Center, 2013a). This shift Beatty spoke about is one that any founder of a nonprofit news organization has to face. The editor-executive director is responsible for raising funds to support daily operations and future sustainability. That leaves significantly less time for actual journalism.

Challenge number one for the Public Press and NC Health News is to make this shift and prioritize business development. Kevin Davis, in the 2014 interview, said he tries to talk what he called “well-meaning journalists” out of launching their own nonprofit news startup: “Starting your own nonprofit truly requires entrepreneurship. It requires business savvy. It requires technology skills. If you don’t have that, you should probably think twice before starting it” (Davis, 2014). But that’s how most of the existing nonprofit news sites in North Carolina got started, by journalists with little to no formal business training. The editor-executive directors know that business development is important, but they need to put the resources and time behind that knowledge to find a sustainable path.

The Public Press recently received funding to hire a part-time managing editor who could take over some of the daily editorial duties from editor-executive director Angie Newsome (Newsome, 2015). This additional staff will hopefully free

up Newsome to work on business development and cultivating new donors and revenue streams.

Business development

There is no “one size fits all” business model for nonprofit news ventures. Just because something works in Raleigh doesn’t mean it will in Asheville. A 2011 Knight Foundation report states, “A key aspect of a nonprofit organization’s sustainability is its ability to adapt and innovate, and to allocate resources in ways that allow for the continued creation of social value” (M. McLellan, Mayur Patel, 2011, p. 22). Every market will be different, and markets change, so nonprofit news organizations have to be flexible in their content and business strategies. During an interview, Kevin Davis said at the time, the Institute for Nonprofit News has “92 members with 92 business models; everyone doing something slightly different, the commonality being the mission.” Small nonprofit news sites like Carolina Public Press and NC Health News need to create business development plans that are flexible and leave room for creativity.

Each organization in this study has its own geographic scope and niche to base their business plan on. NC Health News, for example, could (and does) go for corporate sponsorships from hospitals and medical associations. The state nurse’s association might support NC Health News, but not the Public Press. In the same way, a small restaurant in the North Carolina Mountains wouldn’t see value in having a sponsorship message on a healthcare site. NC Health News’s readers overall have more disposable income than the Public Press, based on reader surveys. That

information changes how an organization approaches someone for a donation. A sustainable business plan has to be local, built for its own audience and easily adaptable.

The Public Press is experimenting with new outreach and development tactics. Last year it received a \$25,000 INNOvation Fund grant from the Institute for Nonprofit News to run a pilot program to “organize a series of in-person News Exchange events to reach potential readers, subscribers and policymakers in 18 rural Blue Ridge mountain counties” (Everts, 2014). These new News Exchanges began as this study finished in early 2015.

Diversified revenue

As INN’s Davis said above, each nonprofit news organization has its own business model. The objective, according to a 2011 Knight report, is to create a sustainable mix of revenue streams. The report states, “The strength of an organization’s revenue base depends not only on the total amount of revenue, but also on the consistency and diversity of its revenue sources. These sources should be diverse enough to protect the organization from a catastrophic loss of one source, but not so diverse that the organization is spread too thin” (M. McLellan, Mayur Patel, 2011, p. 16). If a foundation decides not to renew a grant or a major donor cuts off funding, a diverse revenue stream will protect the organization.

Individual donations, as seen in recent years with the Center for Investigative Reporting and ProPublica, can offer tremendous opportunities for growth (Knight Foundation, 2013). Earned revenue gives the most interesting and innovative

opportunities for new revenue streams. In 2012 the Texas Tribune had almost 50 percent of its income from earned revenue, with \$2.2 million primarily from events and sponsorships (Knight Foundation, 2013). Of the event revenue at the Texas Tribune, “Half of event revenue comes from Texas Tribune Festival, an annual weekend of discussion with more than 100 speakers. Other events include Tribune Conversations, moderated discussions with prominent officials and newsmakers,” and other conversations and symposiums on local issues (Knight Foundation, 2013, p. 36).

A 2013 Knight Foundation report studied 18 nonprofit news organizations across the spectrum, from established national organizations with firm financial footings, to small local sites with budgets of less than \$200,000. The report cites eight primary income sources. The big two are foundations and donors; the rest are under the category of “earned revenue”—corporate sponsorships, events, advertising, syndication, subscriptions, and paid services like trainings and data analysis. Of the 18 nonprofits studied, foundation funding as a revenue share decreased between 2010 and 2012 according to the report. Local organizations in the study reported 18 to 24 percent increases in earned revenue; the state-based sites reported 7 to 24 percent in earned revenue growth. Investigative news nonprofits, the Center for Investigative Reporting, the New England Center for Investigative Reporting and ProPublica, reported growth in individual donations from 31 percent to 51 percent (Knight Foundation, 2013).

The Public Press has hosted several income-generating events, primarily specialized trainings in journalism-related topics. In the organization's 2014 budget it projects \$2,000 for income from trainings.

Content syndication, essentially paid content sharing, offers another potential for revenue. Both the Public Press and NC Health News have ongoing syndication agreements, but they do not represent a significant portion of either budget. The Public Press hoped to reach \$1,000 from syndication in 2014 (Newsome, 2014). NC Health News reported a projected income of \$1,200 from a syndication deal with a nursing association magazine. NC Health News, when it launched, had hoped to earn significant revenue through syndication to small newspapers around North Carolina who couldn't afford healthcare reporters. But, editor Rose Hoban said after conversations with a number of editors around the state, she couldn't get them to pay a small fee for the content (Hoban, 2014).

These two small nonprofit news organizations are still businesses, despite a nonprofit designation from the Internal Revenue Service. As businesses, they need to generate revenue. Where a traditional company would create returns for investors, nonprofits create social returns for the communities where they work (M. McLellan, Mayur Patel, 2011). In order to shift into sustainable organizations, the Public Press and NC Health News have significant challenges ahead. The two organizations have to pivot staff resources (mainly in the form of the editor's time) to spend substantially more time on business development. The Public Press is already moving in the direction to free up the editor's time. Both need to find or

allocate additional financial resources to the business side of the operation. These two steps could come at the cost of content. But that short-term pain on the editorial side will, if successful, generate new income to bring in new resources. Without giving the business side the attention it requires, the journalism runs the risk of going away forever because of a lack of resources. Both organizations need to increase their overall revenue pie to levels where editor-executive directors don't have to work for little or no pay and have the financial resources to bring additional reporters and business staff on board.

Conclusion

Long-term sustainability is an open question for the North Carolina organizations in this study and similar news nonprofits around the country. Sustainability involves developing a diverse revenue stream and the flexibility and staff capacity to develop a business plan and react to sudden changes. Reporters know how to react to sudden events and adapt; that's part of being a journalist – a reporter never knows when breaking news will pull her or him away from that 1,000-word story that was supposed to lead the front page the next day. But the reporters who leave or get laid off from traditional news outlets need to learn a new skill set if they want to run a nonprofit news organization. The founder had to be more executive director than editor. They have to bring that ability to prepare, adapt and react to the business side of the operation.

The analysis shows readership and reach are growing for the Public Press and NC Health News. Public Press stories regularly appear in newspapers across the region, and that serves to broaden the reach and fill additional gaps in reporting. PlanCharlotte is also filling a niche, but with an academic mission parallel to the journalism that makes it fundamentally different from the other two organizations in terms of resources, corporate structure and mission.

The Public Press has been able to step in and begin to fill the gaps across the rural area with public service and investigative journalism. That in-depth reporting makes it into some of the smaller community weeklies in the region, and the wide geographic approach makes the stories more relevant to residents in places like

Macon County. The regional approach also gives the Public Press a broader view to be a watchdog over each of these counties, as seen in stories like the county-by-county survey of how county commissions use and abuse closed sessions.

NC Health News is working to fill gaps identified by UNC professor Ferrel Gillory in his 2009 article for the North Carolina Medical Journal. Reporters covering healthcare in North Carolina, he writes, have become a thing of the past. The content analysis and reader surveys show NC Health News produces a large volume of stories on the politics and policy of healthcare, which attracts a relatively large volume of readers. NC Health News has significantly lower reader engagement with the site, seen in the comparative bounce rates, than the Public Press. NC Health News has been able to begin filling in statewide gaps in healthcare coverage with daily and in-depth reporting on healthcare and public health issues.

PlanCharlotte has some similarities with the other two organizations in this study – primarily that it is an online-only niche publication with nonprofit status. It does produce original news content, along with opinion columns and public engagement efforts from the Urban Institute. Based on the content analysis, PlanCharlotte does not have the same kind of public affairs and watchdog reporting characteristics of the other two sites in this study. PlanCharlotte’s business model, based on its budget and conversations with its editors, depends more on university politics.

These sites need to figure out long-term revenue streams, which are as diverse as their individual content, and tailor their approach to business

development in the same way they tailor reporting to a niche audience. A healthy mix of revenue means a diversity of income streams from foundations, donors, corporate sponsors and earned income. The Public Press and NC Health News can demonstrate real impact from their work, and need to use that impact to attract funding. The traditional business model for newspapers is to produce journalism to attract readers, and then sell the attention of those readers to advertisers (Abernathy, 2014). Nonprofits must sell their social impact to foundations, donors and sponsors, and create returns in the form of social value—awareness, engagement, and impact (M. McLellan, Mayur Patel, 2011). They have to sell their brand to corporate sponsors. They have to develop new ways of making money to keep the reporters working and the stories coming.

Nonprofit news organizations around the country exist to fill the gaps in coverage left by layoffs and budget cuts in the traditional press (Mitchell, 2013). The journalists who founded these sites, in the words of Public Press founder Angie Newsome, did it because “the for-profit press has really abandoned this type of reporting – public interest reporting and investigative reporting – because it’s expensive, it’s time consuming, the return on investment isn’t as clear to them as, say, they would get on reporting on the latest car crash” (2014). These nonprofits have the luxury of not having to fill a newspaper or newscast every day. They can spend the time (even if the money isn’t quite there) to produce thoughtful, carefully crafted investigative reporting. They can, as the Public Press does, help lead to cities uncover wrongdoing in the police department. The Public Press evidence room

stories led directly to policy change and a federal prison term. That is impact. These sites can, as North Carolina Health News, help set the agenda for state-level healthcare debate and reporting. These sites can reach thousands of people with news and information, not about celebrity gossip or gruesome real-life crime dramas, but with public interest and investigative reporting.

But reach, engagement and impact are not enough to sustain a nonprofit news organization. The editors, executive directors, members of the board of directors, and anyone else with a vested interest in new nonprofit journalism sites, have to push the message of that impact every day to potential donors, sponsors and funders. The work of developing and keeping current a sustainable business plan is much like staying on top of the daily flow of journalism, and it's just as important.

Appendix A: Readership data

Carolina Public Press

| Month Index | | | Sessions | Page views |
|-------------|------|-----------|----------|------------|
| 0000 | 2011 | February | 10 | 322 |
| 0001 | | March | 3773 | 9244 |
| 0002 | | April | 2361 | 4522 |
| 0003 | | May | 5873 | 8541 |
| 0004 | | June | 4430 | 6543 |
| 0005 | | July | 4676 | 6631 |
| 0006 | | August | 8521 | 11020 |
| 0007 | | September | 6622 | 9279 |
| 0008 | | October | 4621 | 6473 |
| 0009 | | November | 3634 | 5644 |
| 0010 | | December | 5655 | 8443 |
| 0011 | 2012 | January | 7638 | 10348 |
| 0012 | | February | 3485 | 5491 |
| 0013 | | March | 5273 | 7408 |
| 0014 | | April | 5765 | 7895 |
| 0015 | | May | 7741 | 10043 |
| 0016 | | June | 9535 | 12471 |
| 0017 | | July | 7314 | 11119 |
| 0018 | | August | 7626 | 10468 |
| 0019 | | September | 4445 | 6469 |
| 0020 | | October | 7576 | 10984 |
| 0021 | | November | 7304 | 10410 |
| 0022 | | December | 10549 | 13081 |
| 0023 | 2013 | January | 9114 | 12729 |
| 0024 | | February | 7943 | 10860 |
| 0025 | | March | 7952 | 11890 |
| 0026 | | April | 7665 | 15639 |
| 0027 | | May | 6756 | 18679 |
| 0028 | | June | 8844 | 23571 |
| 0029 | | July | 8918 | 24189 |
| 0030 | | August | 11072 | 30124 |
| 0031 | | September | 8397 | 22750 |
| 0032 | | October | 9124 | 24895 |
| 0033 | | November | 10622 | 28965 |
| 0034 | | December | 7116 | 18910 |
| 0035 | 2014 | January | 12369 | 32020 |
| 0036 | | February | 13484 | 35622 |

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| 0037 | March | 16617 | 44741 |
| 0038 | April | 16088 | 39171 |
| 0039 | May | 19678 | 50353 |
| 0040 | June | 17189 | 43450 |
| 0041 | July | 14697 | 35788 |
| 0042 | August | 14374 | 35666 |
| | | 362446 | 752861 |

North Carolina Health News

| Month Index | | Sessions | Page views |
|-------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| 0000 | 2012 February | 2137 | 4204 |
| 0001 | March | 3302 | 5622 |
| 0002 | April | 3348 | 5621 |
| 0003 | May | 8116 | 12805 |
| 0004 | June | 6287 | 9860 |
| 0005 | July | 6092 | 9057 |
| 0006 | August | 6502 | 9911 |
| 0007 | September | 5982 | 8809 |
| 0008 | October | 5542 | 8343 |
| 0009 | November | 6388 | 9722 |
| 0010 | December | 7315 | 10792 |
| 0011 | 2013 January | 9759 | 15069 |
| 0012 | February | 10153 | 16111 |
| 0013 | March | 16474 | 23505 |
| 0014 | April | 23341 | 33232 |
| 0015 | May | 17112 | 25933 |
| 0016 | June | 17758 | 26009 |
| 0017 | July | 21013 | 29260 |
| 0018 | August | 14283 | 20282 |
| 0019 | September | 15025 | 21833 |
| 0020 | October | 34066 | 50316 |
| 0021 | November | 21024 | 28107 |
| 0022 | December | 22877 | 29647 |
| 0023 | 2014 January | 20677 | 27945 |
| 0024 | February | 20711 | 28821 |
| 0025 | March | 21754 | 30165 |
| 0026 | April | 22574 | 29748 |
| 0027 | May | 22022 | 29432 |
| 0028 | June | 23479 | 32861 |
| 0029 | July | 23559 | 31347 |
| 0030 | August | 16419 | 22904 |
| 0031 | September | 18758 | 24327 |
| | | 473849 | 671600 |

PlanCharlotte

| Month Index | | Sessions | Page views | |
|-------------|------|-----------|------------|--------|
| 0000 | 2012 | April | 1542 | 5213 |
| 0001 | | May | 2396 | 5120 |
| 0002 | | June | 3353 | 7347 |
| 0003 | | July | 3181 | 5858 |
| 0004 | | August | 2608 | 5050 |
| 0005 | | September | 3379 | 6852 |
| 0006 | | October | 2621 | 5090 |
| 0007 | | November | 3199 | 6196 |
| 0008 | | December | 2790 | 6415 |
| 0009 | 2013 | January | 2936 | 5124 |
| 0010 | | February | 3160 | 5466 |
| 0011 | | March | 4621 | 7692 |
| 0012 | | April | 4299 | 7908 |
| 0013 | | May | 3416 | 5933 |
| 0014 | | June | 3483 | 5659 |
| 0015 | | July | 3318 | 5720 |
| 0016 | | August | 3937 | 6164 |
| 0017 | | September | 4117 | 6332 |
| 0018 | | October | 4087 | 6721 |
| 0019 | | November | 3633 | 6587 |
| 0020 | | December | 3326 | 6944 |
| 0021 | 2014 | January | 2766 | 4674 |
| 0022 | | February | 3759 | 7393 |
| 0023 | | March | 3049 | 5948 |
| 0024 | | April | 4383 | 6565 |
| 0025 | | May | 4162 | 6297 |
| 0026 | | June | 3644 | 6215 |
| 0027 | | July | 3800 | 6288 |
| 0028 | | August | 3558 | 6091 |
| 0029 | | September | 3776 | 6706 |
| | | | 102299 | 185568 |

Appendix B: Reader surveys

North Carolina Health News

141 responses

How often do you visit northcarolinahealthnews.org?

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----|
| Every day | 6 | 4% |
| A few times each week | 24 | 17% |
| Once a week | 35 | 25% |
| A few times a month | 40 | 28% |
| Almost never | 36 | 26% |

How did you find out about North Carolina Health News?

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Friends or family | 19 | 13% |
| Coworkers | 25 | 18% |
| Other news organization | 36 | 26% |
| Facebook | 9 | 6% |
| Twitter | 3 | 2% |
| Other | 48 | 34% |

Do you have local media organizations in your area that cover public health issues?

| | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----|
| Newspaper | 89 | 63% |
| TV | 69 | 49% |
| Radio | 52 | 37% |
| Online news site | 54 | 38% |
| None | 19 | 13% |
| Other | 7 | 5% |

What kind of coverage do you value from the North Carolina Health News?

| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|-----|
| State health policy | 121 | 86% |
| State politics | 92 | 65% |
| Public health and medical research | 106 | 75% |
| Environment | 60 | 43% |
| Food policy | 45 | 32% |
| Other | 22 | 16% |

North Carolina Health News covers issues that I care about. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 4 | 3% |
| Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Neutral | 20 | 14% |
| Agree | 58 | 41% |
| Strongly agree | 55 | 39% |

Without North Carolina Health News, I would not know about public health issues in my community. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 5 | 4% |
| Disagree | 26 | 18% |
| Neutral | 35 | 25% |
| Agree | 52 | 37% |
| Strongly agree | 20 | 14% |

I consider myself well informed on public health issues by other local news outlets. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 6 | 4% |
| Disagree | 33 | 23% |
| Neutral | 55 | 39% |
| Agree | 38 | 27% |
| Strongly agree | 5 | 4% |

I consider myself well informed on public health issues issues by other regional/state news outlets. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 7 | 5% |
| Disagree | 26 | 18% |
| Neutral | 52 | 37% |
| Agree | 42 | 30% |
| Strongly agree | 9 | 6% |

How do you access North Carolina Health News?

| | | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| A personal computer at home | 88 | 62% |
| A workplace computer | 73 | 52% |
| A public computer, such as a library | 4 | 3% |
| A mobile device, such as a smart phone or tablet | 43 | 30% |
| Other | 0 | 0% |

What type of Internet connection do you have at home?

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----|
| Broadband/DLS/high speed | 129 | 91% |
| Dial-up modem | 1 | 1% |
| Smart phone | 7 | 5% |
| No internet connection at home | 1 | 1% |

If North Carolina Health News asked for a monthly donation, how much would you be willing to give?

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| None | 62 | 44% |
| \$1-10 | 59 | 42% |
| \$11-20 | 12 | 9% |
| More than \$20 | 1 | 1% |

How old are you?

| | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----|
| 21 or younger | 1 | 1% |
| 22-34 | 16 | 11% |
| 35-54 | 41 | 29% |
| 55-64 | 61 | 43% |
| 65 or older | 20 | 14% |

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

| | | |
|---|-----------|-----|
| Some high school or less | 1 | 1% |
| High school diploma | 2 | 1% |
| Some college | 15 | 11% |
| Associate's degree or technical certification | 12 | 9% |
| Bachelor's degree | 38 | 27% |
| Graduate degree | 71 | 50% |

Which of the following best describes you?

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Community activist | 28 | 20% |
| Interested citizen | 68 | 48% |
| Healthcare worker | 56 | 40% |
| Elected official | 0 | 0% |
| Lobbyist | 4 | 3% |
| Public sector employee | 27 | 19% |
| Other | 34 | 24% |

Do you work in the healthcare sector?

| | | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| I do not work in the healthcare sector | 48 | 34% |
| Doctor | 5 | 4% |
| Nurse | 20 | 14% |
| MD or PhD student | 3 | 2% |
| Public health official | 6 | 4% |
| Public health researcher | 10 | 7% |

Other **52** 37%

What is your income?

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----|
| Less than \$30k | 23 | 16% |
| \$30k to \$50k | 33 | 23% |
| \$51k to \$100k | 42 | 30% |
| Greater than \$100k | 18 | 13% |
| Rather not say | 19 | 13% |

Carolina Public Press

22 responses

How often do you visit carolinapublicpress.org?

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----|
| Every day | 6 | 27% |
| A few times each week | 12 | 55% |
| Once a week | 2 | 9% |
| A few times a month | 1 | 5% |
| Almost never | 1 | 5% |

How did you find out about Carolina Public Press?

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Friends or family | 6 | 27% |
| Coworkers | 2 | 9% |
| Other news organization | 3 | 14% |
| Facebook | 1 | 5% |
| Twitter | 0 | 0% |
| Other | 10 | 45% |

Do you have local media organizations in your area that cover local issues?

| | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----|
| Newspaper | 19 | 86% |
| TV | 12 | 55% |
| Radio | 14 | 64% |
| Online news site | 9 | 41% |
| None | 1 | 5% |
| Other | 3 | 14% |

What kind of coverage do you value from Carolina Public Press?

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------|
| Local politics and policy | 22 | 100% |
| Local or regional planning decisions | 19 | 86% |

| | | |
|--|-----------|------|
| State legislature's impact on Western North Carolina | 22 | 100% |
| Local and regional investigative journalism | 21 | 95% |
| Environmental issues | 16 | 73% |
| Jobs and the economy | 11 | 50% |
| Other | 3 | 14% |

Carolina Public Press covers local news in my community that I care about. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 5% |
| Disagree | 1 | 5% |
| Neutral | 3 | 14% |
| Agree | 14 | 64% |
| Strongly agree | 3 | 14% |

Without Carolina Public Press, I would not know about important topics in my community. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 4 | 18% |
| Neutral | 10 | 45% |
| Agree | 6 | 27% |
| Strongly agree | 1 | 5% |

Without Carolina Public Press, I would not know about important topics in my region of the state. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 9% |
| Disagree | 3 | 14% |
| Neutral | 5 | 23% |
| Agree | 11 | 50% |
| Strongly agree | 1 | 5% |

I consider myself well informed on local issues by local news outlets. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|----|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 2 | 9% |
| Disagree | 5 | 23% |
| Neutral | 3 | 14% |
| Agree | 10 | 45% |
| Strongly agree | 2 | 9% |

**I consider myself well informed on local issues by regional/state news outlets.
[Do you agree with the following statements?]**

| | | |
|-------------------|---|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% |
| Disagree | 8 | 36% |
| Neutral | 4 | 18% |
| Agree | 8 | 36% |
| Strongly agree | 2 | 9% |

How do you access Carolina Public Press?

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| A personal computer at home | 12 | 55% |
| A workplace computer | 10 | 45% |
| A public computer, such as a library | 0 | 0% |
| A mobile device, such as a smart phone or tablet | 6 | 27% |
| Other | 0 | 0% |

What type of Internet connection do you have at home?

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----|-----|
| Broadband/DLS/high speed | 21 | 95% |
| Dial-up modem | 0 | 0% |
| Smart phone | 1 | 5% |
| No internet connection at home | 0 | 0% |

If Carolina Public Press asked for a monthly donation, how much would you be willing to give?

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| None | 8 | 36% |
| \$1-10 | 13 | 59% |
| \$11-20 | 0 | 0% |
| More than \$20 | 0 | 0% |

How old are you?

| | | |
|---------------|----------|-----|
| 21 or younger | 0 | 0% |
| 22-34 | 3 | 14% |
| 35-54 | 7 | 32% |
| 55-64 | 4 | 18% |
| 65 or older | 8 | 36% |

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

| | | |
|---|-----------|-----|
| Some high school or less | 0 | 0% |
| High school diploma | 0 | 0% |
| Some college | 5 | 23% |
| Associate's degree or technical certification | 2 | 9% |
| Bachelor's degree | 5 | 23% |
| Graduate degree | 10 | 45% |

Which of the following best describes you?

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Community activist | 6 | 27% |
| Interested citizen | 19 | 86% |
| Town/city council member or mayor | 0 | 0% |
| Other elected official | 0 | 0% |
| Work for public sector | 4 | 18% |
| Student | 0 | 0% |
| Other | 3 | 14% |

Do you work in the public sector?

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| I do not work in the public sector | 14 | 64% |
| Town/city government | 2 | 9% |
| County government | 1 | 5% |
| State government | 0 | 0% |
| Public education | 0 | 0% |
| National government | 0 | 0% |
| Other | 2 | 9% |

PlanCharlotte

67 responses

How often do you visit plancharlotte.org?

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----|
| Every day | 3 | 4% |
| A few times each week | 11 | 16% |
| Once a week | 18 | 27% |
| A few times a month | 22 | 33% |
| Almost never | 13 | 19% |

How did you find out about PlanCharlotte?

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Friends or family | 10 | 15% |
| Coworkers | 10 | 15% |
| Other news organization | 11 | 16% |
| Facebook | 3 | 4% |
| Twitter | 16 | 24% |
| Other | 16 | 24% |

Do you have local media organizations in your area that cover issues about planning, city design, transportation and growth policy issues?

| | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----|
| Newspaper | 44 | 66% |
| TV | 19 | 28% |
| Radio | 20 | 30% |
| Online news site | 31 | 46% |
| None | 10 | 15% |
| Other | 3 | 4% |

What kind of coverage do you value from the PlanCharlotte?

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Local politics and policy | 41 | 61% |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----|

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Local or regional planning decisions | 56 | 84% |
| Land use | 47 | 70% |
| Neighborhood planning | 58 | 87% |
| Environmental protection | 34 | 51% |
| Transit and public transportation | 53 | 79% |
| Pedestrian and bicycle issues | 51 | 76% |
| Other | 0 | 0% |

Without PlanCharlotte, I would not know about planning and public policy in my community. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 3 | 4% |
| Disagree | 15 | 22% |
| Neutral | 18 | 27% |
| Agree | 22 | 33% |
| Strongly agree | 9 | 13% |

I consider myself well informed on planning and public policy by other local news outlets. [Do you agree with the following statements?]

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----|
| Strongly disagree | 5 | 7% |
| Disagree | 25 | 37% |
| Neutral | 15 | 22% |
| Agree | 17 | 25% |
| Strongly agree | 5 | 7% |

How do you access PlanCharlotte?

| | | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| A personal computer at home | 45 | 67% |
| A workplace computer | 36 | 54% |
| A public computer, such as a library | 1 | 1% |
| A mobile device, such as a smart phone or tablet | 25 | 37% |
| Other | 0 | 0% |

What type of Internet connection do you have at home?

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Broadband/DLS/high speed | 60 | 90% |
| Dial-up modem | 1 | 1% |
| Smart phone | 3 | 4% |
| No internet connection at home | 2 | 3% |

If PlanCharlotte asked for a monthly donation, how much would you be willing to give?

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| None | 35 | 52% |
| \$1-10 | 30 | 45% |
| \$11-20 | 0 | 0% |
| More than \$20 | 0 | 0% |

How old are you?

| | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----|
| 21 or younger | 1 | 1% |
| 22-34 | 26 | 39% |
| 35-54 | 15 | 22% |
| 55-64 | 16 | 24% |
| 65 or older | 9 | 13% |

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

| | | |
|---|-----------|-----|
| Some high school or less | 0 | 0% |
| High school diploma | 1 | 1% |
| Some college | 3 | 4% |
| Associate's degree or technical certification | 4 | 6% |
| Bachelor's degree | 24 | 36% |
| Graduate degree | 35 | 52% |

Which of the following best describes you?

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Community activist | 20 | 30% |
| Interested citizen | 49 | 73% |
| Development industry | 6 | 9% |
| Elected official | 1 | 1% |
| Work for public sector | 16 | 24% |
| Student | 6 | 9% |
| Other | 4 | 6% |

Appendix C: Content analysis

North Carolina Health News, March 2014

| Date | Headline | Shared Content | Summary |
|---------|--|----------------|---|
| 3/3/14 | Youth Health and Racism in Focus For Students | | For 35 years, a gathering organized by the school of public health at UNC has been focusing on the health of minority populations. |
| 4-Mar | One Third of Nursing Home Patients Harmed in Treatment | | A study by Medicare's inspector general of skilled nursing facilities says nearly 22,000 patients were injured and more than 1,500 died. |
| 3/5/14 | Texting to Improve Hospital Quality | | A local project allows patients and family members to give real-time feedback on patient safety and satisfaction. Piedmont Health SeniorCare meets the many needs of seniors and – most important – allows them to remain in their homes and. |
| 3/6/14 | Caring for Seniors in a Holistic Way | | Today's ruling from Wake County Superior Court on a petition by environmental groups intended to force Duke Energy to clean |
| 3/6/14 | Judge Rules Coal Pond Owners Take Action to Eliminate Sources of Groundwater Contamination | | Almost one of every three adults living with mental illness is likely to be the victim of violence in any six-month period |
| 3/7/14 | Mentally Ill at Higher Risk of Victimization, Study Says | | North Carolina Senate Minority Leader Martin Nesbitt, known for his slow drawl, folksy turns of phrase and occasional flashes |
| 3/7/14 | Minority Leader Martin Nesbitt Dies at 67 | | In cases where drinking-water wells near fracking sites have been contaminated, the problem usually comes from gases released as a result |
| 3/10/14 | Proper Cement, Piping Could Prevent Fracking Contamination | | This is Part II of a story about hydraulic fracturing and its effects on drinking water. |
| 3/11/14 | How 'Strong' are NC's Rules for Fracking Well Construction? | | |
| 3/11/14 | Burr-backed Bill Could Change Decades-old Child Care Subsidy Program | CPP | This story first appeared in Carolina Public Press and is published by N.C. Health News through a content-sharing |
| 3/12/14 | Obamacare Enrollment in NC Among the Country's Strongest | | With only three weeks to go, North Carolinians continue to enroll for insurance available through the |

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| 3/13/14 | Medicaid Budget Still Unclear, Legislators Frustrated | CPP NC | Affordable Care Act at a brisk pace After months of delays, state legislators still don't know the extent – if any – of Medicaid shortfalls Reductions to the state's health and human services budget made during last year's legislative session become reality. |
| 3/13/14 | Service Cuts for Children Outlined to Legislators Documents Disclose Political, PR Pressure Surrounding Asheville Abortion Clinic's Suspension | CPP NC | This story first appeared in Carolina Public Press and is published by N.C. Health News through a content-sharing agreement. |
| 3/14/14 | Yes, We Have Markers! | Readers Assoc. | Commentary/guest blog on children with incarcerated parents |
| 3/17/14 | Lawmakers Give Initial Nod to Loosened Midwife Practice UNC Develops First Flowchart for Alcohol-related Hospital Admissions | | A legislative subcommittee has proposed a bill that would give certified nurse-midwives more liberty to practice without physician.. Alcohol-related hospitalizations can cost about \$5.1 billion annually in health care spending. |
| 3/18/14 | Medicaid Plan Likely to Face Tough Road Through General Assembly | | After months of work, the Medicaid reform plan is complete. But the proposal is likely to have a hard time on Jones Street. The Affordable Care Act took the stage in three different venues at the General Assembly Tuesday |
| 3/19/14 | Obamacare Faces Scrutiny at Legislature Gaston County Youth Initiative Sees Drop in Teen-pregnancy Rates | | Leaders at Gaston County's health department saw too many teens becoming parents before their time. North Carolina is one of the key states being targeted by leaders in the Obama administration for enrollment in the online health exchanges |
| 3/20/14 | NC One of Ten States Critical To Obamacare Enrollment Goals State Agency Denies Politics Played Role in Suspending Asheville Women's Clinic NC Fracking Risks Uncertain, Given Limited Public Health Research | CPP | This story first appeared in Carolina Public Press and is published by N.C. Health News through a content-sharing agreement. Many people worry about the potential health effects of hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," but there are few studies |

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| 3/24/14 | Injured Who Lived Near Closed Trauma Centers More Likely To Die | Kaiser | Injured patients who had to travel an average 13 minutes longer to reach a hospital trauma center Get ready for the yellow snow ... the kind that coats your cars, windows and driveways. |
| 3/25/14 | No Escape from Seasonal Allergies | | A symposium in Raleigh last week highlighted the ways child-care centers could contribute to reducing kids' weight. |
| 3/26/14 | Child Care Centers Chip Away at Childhood Obesity Budget for Child Care, Early Ed Looks Thin for Coming Year | | In the past three budget years, North Carolina's various early-childhood education programs |
| 3/26/14 | Half Of Uninsured Not Planning On Getting Coverage, Poll Finds | Kaiser | With less than a week left for customers to apply for insurance through the health care marketplaces, After months of waiting, legislators got their first hint of how large the overrun on the health care program could be. |
| 3/27/14 | Lawmakers Get Glimpse of Potential Medicaid Budget Shortfall | | Press release from UNC Chapel Hill News office, dated March 27 Children who received high-quality early care and education |
| 3/28/14 | Release: High-quality Early Intervention Brings Health Benefits 30 Years Later 'Young Invincibles' Drag Feet Signing Up for Obamacare | | Paperwork and cost are factors cited by young people for not signing up for health care coverage. |

Carolina Public Press, March 2014

| Date | Headline | Shared Content | Summary |
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| 3/3/14 | DENR issues violations to Duke Energy for coal ash spill 'Discharge' reported at Duke's Cliffside | Press release | State regulators issued notices of violation to Duke Energy Friday with the possibility of fines for state environmental laws related to the coal ash spill at the company's Dan River power plant in Eden. |
| 3/3/14 | Cliffside | Press release | Staff members from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources responded Thursday afternoon to notification of a discharge |

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| | Steam Station in Rutherford County | | from an emergency yard drainage overflow pipe at Duke Energy's Cliffside Steam Station in Rutherford County |
| 3/4/14 | Duke's Cliffside plant, in Rutherford, cited for enviro violations | Press release | State regulators late Friday issued notices of violation for five other Duke Energy power plants for failure to obtain a federally mandated National Pollution Discharge Elimination System, or NPDES, stormwater permit. |
| 3/4/14 | UNC Asheville to offer Women's History Month events Asheville public hearing scheduled for relocating adult care beds | Press release | Spanning generations of feminist thought and cultural influences ranging from African-American spirituals to punk rock, Women's History Month 2014 at UNC Asheville will extend into April. |
| 3/4/14 | In 8 WNC counties, child poverty reaching more than 30 percent | Press release | The Crossings at Beaverdam has filed an application with the Certificate of Need Section of the N.C. Division of Health Service Regulation to relocate 99 adult care home beds within Buncombe County |
| 3/4/14 | Canceled: WCU to host Gender Research Conference Thursday | Press release | County-by-county reports on the health and safety of North Carolina's children shows child poverty levels increased in all 18 westernmost counties between 2007 and 2012 |
| 3/5/14 | Regulators inspect coal ash dams at Duke's Cliffside plant | Press release | Themed "Women and Gender in the 1960s: The Beginning of a Revolution," the event will be held in the Blue Ridge Conference Room of Balsam Hall from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Staff from the state Dam Safety Program on Tuesday inspected the ash pond structure at Duke Energy's Cliffside Steam Station in Rutherford County, where the energy company is developing an engineered solution to the failed emergency yard ... |
| 3/5/14 | New technology available to aid those with hearing loss Cherokee, Yancey groups working to restore river | Press release | Dr. Juliette Sterkens, audiologist and national advocate for hearing loop technology will demonstrate the technology on Monday, March 10, at 7 p.m. |
| 3/5/14 | Yancey Common Times Journal | Yancey Common Times Journal | When the ancestors of the Cherokee lived on the rich land bordering the Cane River in the eastern part of Yancey County, the riverbanks were lined with cane that these Native |

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| | cane | | American inhabitants used for making baskets and other items |
| 3/7/14 | Report: Blue Ridge Parkway visitors spent \$902M in area in 2012 | Press release | A new National Park Service report shows that 15.2 million visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway in 2012 spent \$902 million in communities near the park. That spending supported 12,168 jobs in the local area. |
| 3/7/14 | Judge: Duke must take 'immediate action' on coal ash groundwater contamination | Charlotte Observer | Advocates hope to use a judge's order Thursday to force Duke Energy to remove ash from its unlined ponds across North Carolina. |
| 3/7/14 | State finds coal ash dam 'deficiencies' at Rutherford's Cliffside Steam Station | Press release | State regulators have cited Duke Energy for deficiencies at dams at two coal ash basins at the Cliffside Steam Station in Rutherford County and have notified the company to provide plans for repairing the dams. |
| 3/10/14 | Burr-backed bill could change decades-old child care subsidy program | | Along with requiring employees of participating child care providers to undergo background checks, the bill also calls for new health and safety benchmarks to be met. |
| 3/10/14 | Director: State wants 4 groups to manage mental health in NC | Press release | In an interview Thursday, Dave Richard also discussed the N.C. Department of Health and Human Service's proposal for reforming Medicaid in North Carolina. Richard is the director of the department's Division of Mental Health |
| 3/10/14 | Honoring, remembering Sen. Martin Nesbitt | | State Sen. Martin Nesbitt, a mainstay in the Democratic Party and longtime representative of Buncombe County, died Thursday after battling stomach cancer. He was 67 years old. |
| 3/10/14 | Duke CEO: Customers will pay coal ash clean-up costs | Charlotte Observer | Duke Energy expects its 3.2 million North Carolina customers to pay the costs of closing its ash ponds, CEO Lynn Good said Friday. |
| 12-Mar | Duke's Asheville coal ash dams free from recent violations, regulators on site this week | | In the aftermath of the 40,000-gallon coal ash spill on the Dan River, Duke Energy and North Carolina environmental regulators have said the two dams that contain coal ash at the company's Asheville power plant are sound. |

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| 12-Mar | Norovirus confirmed at Buncombe school | Press release | Buncombe County health officials have confirmed an outbreak of norovirus and have issued recommendations on preventing its spread. |
| 3/12/14 | NC Obamacare enrollment among country's highest | NC Health News | Enrollment in the online health care exchanges continues to be strong in North Carolina, as federal numbers reveal more than 200,000 people in the state have signed up for coverage provided as a result of the Affordable Care Act. |
| 3/13/14 | Documents disclose political, PR pressures surrounding Asheville abortion clinic's suspension | | A Carolina Public Press investigation uncovers messages about Femcare sent among DHHS staffers, Gov. Pat McCrory's office, legislators and reporters, showing how one of North Carolina's most intense recent policy battles came to a head |
| 3/14/14 | Groups call on McCrory to 'come clean' about ties to Duke Energy | | Conservation and progressive advocacy groups gathered Thursday on the shores of Lake Julian to call on Gov. Pat McCrory to reveal his level of financial investment into Duke Energy and to lead an effort to clean up 37 coal ash sites across t ... |
| 3/17/14 | As Duke Energy seeks enviro permit renewal in Asheville, CEO says changes likely at coal ash ponds | | The future of Duke Energy's 14 coal ash waste sites in North Carolina is not yet clear, but there are growing indications that the ponds at the company's Asheville plant could be headed for a major clean up. |
| 3/18/14 | UPDATED: Asheville abortion clinic for sale, could close; Planned Parenthood plans new clinic | | Femcare, the women's health clinic that is the only provider of abortion services in Western North Carolina, quietly went on the market last week, and a patient says she was told that a closure of the facility is imminent. |
| 3/18/14 | State awards Asheville airport \$1.2M for runway relocation | Press release | The money will fund the design of the runway relocation and design of the temporary runway and taxiway for Asheville Regional Airport. |
| 3/18/14 | Health officials present NC Medicaid overhaul plan | Press release | State officials with the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services presented their Medicaid reform plan to the General Assembly on Monday. |
| 3/19/14 | Hugh Morton's photos to go | Press release | Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Center will host a reception and talk Thursday, March |

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| 3/19/14 | on exhibit at WCU Public meeting on Asheville-Buncombe Historic Preservation plan to be held Thursday | Press release | <p>27, celebrating the opening of the exhibit "Photographs by Hugh Morton: An Uncommon Retrospective."</p> <p>The Historic Resources Commission of Asheville & Buncombe County invites the community to participate in a public meeting facilitated by Heritage Strategies as they continue to move forward in the development of the Asheville Buncombe Historic Preservation Master Plan.</p> |
| 3/19/14 | State agency denies abortion politics played role in suspending Asheville women's clinic | | <p>The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services weighs in amid the fallout from a Carolina Public Press exposé on documents surrounding last summer's suspension of Asheville clinic Femcare.</p> |
| 3/21/14 | Sunshine Week spotlight: Documents that drove our last year of investigative reporting | | <p>his is Sunshine Week, an annual celebration of open government and citizens' rights to public information. Public records are often the lifeblood of Carolina Public Press' investigative reporting, so today we're taking stock</p> |
| 3/24/14 | NC GOP Senate candidates rouse support from Henderson County party loyalists | | <p>Republican hopefuls for U.S. Senate spoke to a room awash with their own on Saturday, making platform pitches and alluding to current campaign issues a little more than a month before the May 6 primary.</p> |
| 3/25/14 | Asheville metro, WNC countywide joblessness increases | | <p>Unemployment across the 18 westernmost counties of North Carolina increased in January -- just as it did in the Asheville metropolitan statistical area -- according to data recently released by the state employment office.</p> |
| 3/26/14 | Artists, advocates, community members shine spotlight on incarceration | | <p>African Americans make up 22 percent of North Carolina's population, but 61 percent of its prison population, according to Prison Policy Initiative.</p> |
| 3/27/14 | Guidance offered on collecting ramps in NC national forests | US Forest Service | <p>For some visitors, spring in the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests means collecting ramps. The National Forests in North Carolina offers guidance on where you may collect ramps in North Carolina's national forests.</p> |
| 3/27/14 | As NC agency faces abortion-rules deadline, new Asheville clinic plans to meet potential | | <p>he N.C. Department of Health and Human Services is due to report April 1 on its path to abortion rules changes</p> |

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| | regs | | — a lengthy process, according to a little-noticed preliminary report — and Planned Parenthood’s newest clinic |
| 28-Mar | NC policymakers sowing effort to green state’s food deserts | | Since getting down to work in January, the House Committee on Food Desert Zones has heard from grocers, producers and participants in dozens of programs around the state, including grassroots initiatives like neighborhood cooperatives |
| | Charlotte looks at Asheville airport’s handling of Duke coal ash | Charlotte Observer | Charlotte officials are considering burying coal ash at Charlotte Douglas International Airport. In Asheville, the sight and sounds of ash-filled trucks passing by have become a normal part of life. |
| 3/28/14 | | | A U.S. district judge in Knoxville has ruled that a lawsuit over a backcountry user fee in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park can go forward. |
| 31-Mar | Judge: Legal challenge to Smokies backcountry fee can move forward | | |

PlanCharlotte, March 2014

| Date | Headline | Shared Content | Summary |
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| 3/4/14 | Charlotte to phase in less energy-greedy street lights | | Charlotte is starting to phase in LED streetlights, as an energy-saving move that will also lower the area’s carbon footprint. |
| 3/5/14 | Institute, partners launch 3-year look at environmental topics | | The UNC Charlotte Urban Institute, in partnership with the UNC Charlotte College of Arts + Architecture, has launched KEEPING WATCH, a three-year initiative designed to bring a higher profile to, and engage the public in, issues about the natural environment. |
| 3/12/14 | 'Dirtways' speed up trail construction in Mecklenburg | | City will build "dirtways" while it awaits funding and permission to build greenways along routes the government already owns. PlanCharlotte, with urban designers Keihly Moore and Alex Borisenko , invites you, the public, to nominate places in the Charlotte region that can be improved with some urban design magic. |
| 3/14/14 | When a place needs a design makeover | | |

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| | | <u>A recent Supreme Court decision has some trail advocates worried about the fate of the national rails-to-trails program, but the ruling is unlikely to affect North Carolina. The case, Brandt Revocable Trust v. United States, has to do with who retains the property rights to abandoned railroad right of ways.</u> |
| 3/19/14 | <u>High court rail-trails decision won't affect N.C.</u> | |
| 3/21/14 | <u>Imagining Charlotte places, remade: Week 2</u> | |
| 3/21/14 | <u>Blumenthal Foundation grant supports KEEPING WATCH initiative</u> | <p>Week 2 for Complete Blocks</p> <p>The Blumenthal Foundation of Charlotte has awarded \$22,500 to a collaborative initiative aiming to bring a higher profile to, and engage the public in, issues about the natural environment.</p> <p>Profiles of four Charlotteans explaining why they ditched the driver seat for bike saddles, bus poles and light rail benches.</p> <p>This year, Charlotte will be home to a festival of Jane's Walks the weekend of May 2-4.</p> <p>The Gold District enthusiasts want to showcase the neighborhood's gold-mining history as well as attract mixed use development</p> |
| 3/24/14 | <u>They'd rather not drive, thank you</u> | |
| 3/25/14 | <u>Join Charlotte's celebration of neighborhoods May 2-4</u> | |
| 3/26/14 | <u>Gold in them hills? Maybe it's in South End</u> | |

Appendix D: Interview transcripts

Angie Newsome, Carolina Public Press, October 2014

Tell me about why you chose a regional approach to cover western North Carolina?

When we formed Carolina Public Press we wanted to do a regional-based news organization for a couple of reasons: one is that, the purpose is really to provide public-interest reporting that's not being covered by other news organizations. The likelihood that that type of reporting getting covered is in Asheville and Buncombe County. We really wanted to focus on where the news isn't being generated or isn't being focused on. That goes the same for investigative reporting. We looked at it regionally because we wanted to cover an area that has some cultural, geographic and political ties to one another and that, in my opinion, was being largely overlooked by the state or regional press.

We focused on originally the 17 western-most counties, which at that time encompassed the majority of the 11th congressional district. Since we've launched in 2011, that region no longer exists with redistricting. We now have three districts within. We looked at where coverage was lacking, where, in general, public interest and investigative reporting was lacking and where we felt, and this is anecdotally, the state-level press doesn't go to in terms of geography. They don't cover this part of the state this much at all. That's the reason we focused on our area.

It is largely rural. You look at Swain County, which is the most rural area of our region, there's something like 25 or 26 people per square mile in that county compared to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, which is the most densely populated area in North Carolina, which is something like 1,700 people per square mile. So our region is exceptionally rural. There are lots of challenges covering that area because of that.

In terms of content, we always think about assigning stories and writing stories with the idea that it crosses county lines, that readers in Vance County would be interested in a story about Rutherford County. What are those ties? Often that becomes the economy, that becomes political influence in the region, it becomes the environment, it becomes trends in education. Our thought is that if we focus on a story in Buncombe County we have to say pretty clearly why we're focusing on this particular issue in this particular county.

The same goes for the rural areas. John Ellison did a big investigative piece in Cherokee County on the sheriff's race out there looking at how that sheriff's race has brought up issues yet again of evidence handling in North Carolina. Then it talks about why the story, which is based in Cherokee County, in Murphy, which is about

the farthest west you can get in North Carolina, would be of interest across our region. The residents of our region, which are about a million people within 7,200 square miles. That's what we think about it terms of content and the reason we are covering the region.

How do you feel like your coverage has been for rural counties as compared to Buncombe County?

I haven't ever spent time counting up the times we've reported on Madison County versus Buncombe County. We tend to look at that more topically. We don't do a lot of local reporting. Our reporting tends to be regional or have at least one or more counties involved. One example is we've focused on some changes to the public housing structure, management, funding in Asheville, but the reason is it's the largest public housing agency in the region and it also can show how the changes in that particular housing agency can have a ripple effect throughout the region. We focused that one story on that public housing agency but we've paired it with demand for public housing across the region.

If we do have a very local story or even a countywide story, we try to pair it with a regional look at the issue.

How would you describe the mission of Carolina Public Press?

The Carolina Public Press is a nonprofit, online news service that provides Western North Carolina with unbiased in-depth and investigative reporting as well as educational opportunities for students, working journalists and others in the community. We believe that public interest reporting is critical to an informed and engaged electorate and the ensuring government accountability.

We share our work both at Carolina Public Press and at other top news organizations across the state such as the Charlotte Observer, WUNC, WLOS-TV. We have sharing agreements with daily print, weekly, community newspapers, alternative weeklies, radio stations, TV stations in North Carolina.

Are you getting any money out of those agreements?

It is not a requirement currently for our content-sharing agreements for those other news organizations to pay us. We do get payment sometimes but it's unpredictable. I would say it's less than \$1,000 so far.

How do you define impact for the Public Press?

The easy answer is looking at our readership, but we tend to not look at our readership when we define impact. We consider it, but it's not the only

consideration that we have. We look at how many times people engage with a story, we look at if that story had any kind of “results” in the community: a policy change, an action by a public official, changes within a public agency primarily. Secondly, we look at whether we are essentially providing a service that the community wouldn’t have gotten anywhere. If our story wouldn’t have run, would that story be available anywhere else. We also look at our readership numbers, we look at our content-sharing numbers. We have some quantitative goals on both of those.

It’s a web of information that can sometimes feel very subjective. But that’s the news business, I think. The expectation that, even in the for-profit press, you write one story and something earth shattering happens and that’s not realistic. So we try to play a little bit of a long game when it comes to impact to see if we’re meeting our mission and are successful in those four area that I just described.

Are there specific stories you like to point to to show those kinds of impacts?

The one that I feel we’ve had the largest impact relatively recently is the evidence room story in the Asheville Police Department, which is the largest metro police department in this part of the state. We were really pushing for a document that we believed would indicate the degree to which the evidence room in Asheville had been robbed, basically, of guns, money and drugs by a staff person or persons of the police department. It really indicated a crucial flaw in the justice system in Asheville. So we were really pushing really hard for this document and, frankly, years of reporting on our end.

We ended up forming a coalition of news organizations in Buncombe County to press for that document. We ended up going to court with the city council and the Buncombe County District Attorney over that document. We were unsuccessful there, but during the course of that the auditor came and showed the city council the havoc that was the Asheville evidence room. That really changed how they started doing evidence handling in Asheville. It also became an issue later on in the district attorney’s race where that DA that we had sued basically lost his seat over issues of transparency, of which the evidence room was one. The evidence room was part of that race. The former evidence manager was charged with federal charges and sentenced to prison.

That story, stories, those years of reporting on that had some real dramatic impacts within our city. We also used that to look regionally at evidence handling in each of our county police departments. That was interesting, it really showed a lack of oversight, a lack of professional standards really across the state, but we focused on western North Carolina. That’s one of the biggest stories that we’ve had impact on.

Most recently we broke the news about a study that state environmental officials have planned to do in several western counties to look at natural gas, to see if

there's any possibility of fracking up this way. We've been looking at fracking for several years too and have reported about state geologists saying there were no deposits of note up in western North Carolina, but all of a sudden there appeared this proposed study up here. We broke that news, which was picked up by news organizations across the region, and that's resulted in tons of actions out this way, ranging from the formation of community groups, to county commissioners and town officials passing resolutions opposing fracking, to one of the state senators getting a public hearing to be held in western North Carolina.

Our story helped start that. We're not the only one that helped that occur, but I think that the press out here believed that we weren't going to be impacted by the push for fracking in North Carolina. When we broke that story that really started changing. It's had a lot of impact in the region in terms of awareness and giving people the chance to participate.

Why did you decide to go the nonprofit route instead of for profit?

There were philosophical reasons and business reasons we decided to be a nonprofit. The philosophical reason is that the for-profit press has really abandoned this type of reporting: public interest reporting and investigative reporting because it's expensive, it's time consuming, the return on investment isn't as clear to them as, say, they would get on reporting on the latest car crash.

We really wanted the focus to be on the news, and not on chasing clips or chasing revenue from traditional advertisers. We always want the news to come first. We want public-interest news and investigative news to come first.

We knew we wanted to be an online publication. We knew that nationally, advertising online really isn't there. We did not, at that point, want to do any type of print publication. That really supported our philosophical decision-making.

Do you have any other thoughts on the impact of nonprofit news organizations in North Carolina?

I think we, at the very least, have inspired, influenced, forced in some cases, the traditional for-profit press to resume some of this basic reporting in their communities. The fact that we've launched, we've been successful, we're gaining in influence and readership, it reminds them, encourages them, again, perhaps even forces them, to go back to some of those traditional beats that they have abandoned for some reason.

I think we're clearly showing that communities need and want the reporting that we're doing. We're challenging them; we're disrupting what some of the for-profit press think they should be doing. We also, frankly, feel like we're still producing

news that people aren't going to find anywhere else. Even though we are inspiring people, our colleagues in the traditional press, we still are breaking news and following stories over time. We're not forced or compelled to be the newspaper of record, the site of record, so we really are able to have a niche and really speak to a specific audience. Because of that, we can't help but have an impact within our communities within that audience because we are becoming a voice, a reputable source for the kind of news we produce.

Rose Hoban, North Carolina Health News, September 2014

What is the mission for North Carolina Health News?

We're here to fill the gap. We're in a state with four, now five, medical schools that all do research. We have literally hundreds of companies doing biomedical research in the state. We have dozens of organizations, not-for-profits, NGOs that do public health, international public health that do research and actual work and implementation of healthcare issues. And in a state of 9.8 million there is one other full-time healthcare reporter in the state. We're here to fill the gap.

Our focuses right now are legislative, rather than state government, policy, looking at policies around the state, and we have grant money that's allowing us to do environmental health coverage. We have a small amount of grant money that allows us to do some research coverage, which, I'm always telling folks, the folks who write that stuff, that there's some pretty cool research going on out there but the added value we bring is putting it in the North Carolina context. We do extensive coverage of the mental health system, we're doing more coverage of hospitals, we do a lot of stories about trends or programs that are getting results, really trying to look at things that are actually working in the healthcare system.

How do you define impact for North Carolina Health News?

On a daily basis I look at number of readers and page views and time on site. Our time on site is pretty good, especially during legislative session we get like three minutes on site.

About once a week I have a Google search and I am looking for other organizations, other news outlets, blogs, etc. that are quoting us, that are citing us. And then, also scanning the local media and, if imitation is a form of flattery, we are very highly flattered amongst out state's other news outlets. I had a contact say to me the other day, someone who is paying a lot to be a sponsor, "I've come to realize everything they do in the News & Observer, you've done first."

I was pretty pleased by that.

We also get digested by Kaiser Health News, which is a national daily digest that has tens of thousands of subscribers. We're also usually noted in a couple of state-based digests, those are mostly email digests and lobbying digests. You know, links that get send out by lobbyists, usually to other lobbyists.

It's hard to measure impact, as you know, and part of my measuring impact is (and I'm the legislative reporter) when I'm at the legislature and people, lobbyists come up to me and saying things about things we've covered. When I hear my stories paraphrased or sometimes quoted from the floor during debate. These are the softer ways we measure impact.

When I hear that a story of mine has been poached by another outlet, I take a screen shot of it and date it and a screen shot of ours with the date stamp on it, we're able to show to potential funders and sponsors that we may not have the largest circulation but we're driving the conversation.

Are there specific stories you point to to show impact?

A lot of it is soft. A lot of the stuff I've written about with Medicaid has had a considerable amount of impact. Our reporting on mental health. And I think the environmental reporting is starting to get more traction.

Our research stuff, not so much. I really feel our research stuff is because it's such an economic driver in the state, we have to acknowledge it's there. It's not the most groundbreaking stuff, those stories, but we have to acknowledge it.

Why did you go with a nonprofit model instead of a more traditional for-profit?

To be honest with you, I didn't know the first thing about selling ads, but I did know about writing grants. Literally, my entire life has been spent in the not-for-profit sector. I was more comfortable with that model than I was with the for-profit model. I think it's as simple as that. That, and the fact that I looked around and all the new journalism models out there were not-for-profit. There were resources, and the other thing, that has not panned out for me, that there would be more opportunities for funding from foundations etc.

Any other thoughts about the impact of nonprofit news organizations on the whole news ecosystem in North Carolina?

I think that because there are these huge gaps in the ecosystem, and because the press environment writ large has been so slow to embrace partnerships with organizations such as mine, the big thing that we add is helping to drive the conversation. Part of that, for me, in working at the legislature, is that I make myself

feely available to other reporters as a consultant to other reporters working on healthcare stories.

I frequently get phone calls from other reporters, there's been so much turnover at the legislature, both from people who are veterans at the legislature and newbies at the legislature. Long ago I lost count of the people I've sat down with who said, "Give me a download on Medicaid" and I'll tell them what to look for. Or, it was Tuesday evening, July 2 at 6:30 p.m. when our legislature proposed a sweeping abortion ban bill that probably would have made us one of the most restrictive abortion states in the country, and part of what they were talking about was between medical abortion, which is RU486 pills, and surgical abortion, which is traditional abortion, and people in the newsroom didn't know what those two terms meant.

Literally, I had an impromptu workshop session around my desk, we spent about 20 minutes, there were five or six reporters there. I explained to them some of the issues that were being discussed in the bill, where they can find data. I basically did a 15-minute data and information download for the other reporters and they could go off and do their stories.

At the reporting level, the other reporters look to the coverage that we're doing as something they need to watch.

Mary Newsome, PlanCharlotte, September 2014

What is the mission of PlanCharlotte?

The mission of PlanCharlotte is to provide news, information and analysis on topics of growth in the greater Charlotte region. We define growth fairly broadly.

Can you tell me more about your focus for content?

We thought that there had been a declining degree of publicity in the traditional media to issues of land-use planning, growth, that's growth other than real estate—which is typically covered pretty well. The coverage of the environment has been shrinking. There used to be a full-time reporter at the Charlotte Observer covering environment, not he only covers it half time. The regional newspapers have never covered the environment very well. To me, the broadcasters would cover a major spill but the don't do policy pretty much at all.

We also like to try to cover neighborhood developments, but we've had problems in terms of staffing. In theory there is a lot of neighborhood issues that we could be covering but we simply don't have the capacity to do that.

Do you see yourself as filling that gap left from what the Charlotte Observer, for example, used to cover?

Yeah, we try when possible to aim our coverage at topics that aren't being covered by the Charlotte Observer or the Business Journal or the other news outlets in town. There's not much coverage of planning as a discipline, there's virtually no coverage of urban design, there's no coverage of architecture. We don't do architecture criticism per se, but it's certainly not covered in the local media.

We adhere to traditional journalistic standards of objectivity, keeping a line between news and opinion and labeling opinion as opinion. What we hope to provide in our news coverage is the context and expertise that a lot of young reporters just can't apply.

How would you define the impact of your site?

I don't know yet. We have a number of devoted readers, but we can't tell if we're getting the attention of policy makers.

The Observer will take what we're done and do its own versions. The arts and features pages have picked up several of our pieces. The Observer has what they call "news partners" and they specifically said no; they didn't want to partner with government agencies.

Do you see yourself following that public radio model?

I would like us to be more of a public radio model. We do not have a very broad base of support right now in terms of donors right now. One of the reasons for that is because we're a piece of the larger UNC Charlotte we have to essentially clear all of our fundraising activities with the development office. The development office is getting ready to roll out a huge capital campaign and they've been less cheerful than usual about the prospect of going out and asking people for money.

I've applied for a variety of grants, but have not gotten a basic operating grant yet.

Are there specific stories that show your impact in the community?

It's really hard to tell whether you've influenced public policy. We haven't done any campaigns to say "this should not be happening" or "this ought to happen." Part of that is that the Urban Institute tries to be research and not advocacy. It's a little bit hard to know what impact you're having. I run into people who say, "I read what you wrote and I agree with it or I don't agree with it."

Any other thoughts on how you see your role in the community or how you hope to make an impact?

We are still building our site and our support. We didn't realize when we founded it that the university budget was going to continue to shrink instead of grow. I've not been able to hire any staff. I have a half-time graduate assistant, and I've been really lucky to get some good folks. Without a staff it's kind of hard.

The condition of the university system has shifted. When I was thinking about the job and when I took the job, it seemed to me that being lodged at a large state university would provide a degree of safety. In many ways it has. I have benefits, I have a pension, in that way the job is much more stable. But as the political landscape in North Carolina has changed, there's a lot more nervousness about anything that might get the attention of anybody who might then decide that the Urban Institute should be stricken from the state budget.

What I thought would give me more freedom, verses being a pure nonprofit where you're out scrambling for money, has in some ways given me less freedom because there's a lot of nervousness about pissing off somebody.

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