

A 2026 AGORA JOURNALISM CENTER REPORT

Lincoln County Information Assessment Report

Understanding Local News and
Information Needs in Lincoln
County, Oregon

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Prepared in collaboration with the Agora Journalism Center
by students in the School of Journalism and Communication,
University of Oregon.

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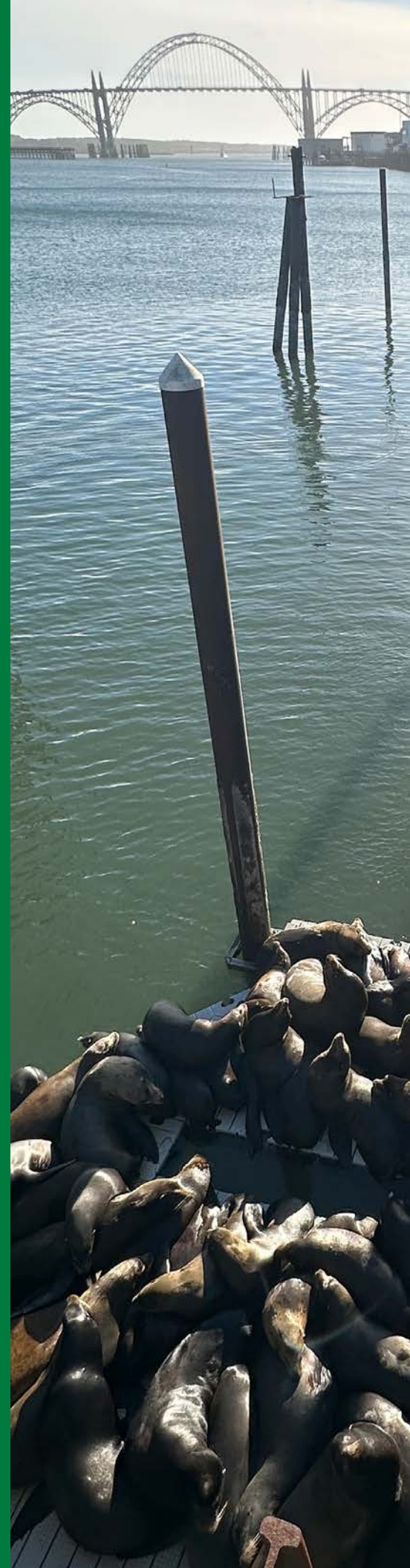


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About the course

Engaged Journalism is a community-centered course designed to explore a more inclusive, responsive, and representative form of journalism. Shifting away from the traditional top-down approach, this course focuses on meeting communities' demonstrable needs through deep listening, collaboration, and a reciprocal, nonextractive approach to reporting. It emphasizes building trust, understanding, and credibility with communities by producing relevant and actionable news for their daily lives.

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- **Kurtis Barker**, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians
- **Linda Brown**, Lincoln County League of Women Voters
- **Lori Arce-Torres**, Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce
- **Maggie Conrad**, Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce
- **Mark Farley**, Head of Operations, OSU's Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport
- **Patrick Alexander**, Oregon Coast Today
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- **Quinton Smith**, Founder & Editor, Lincoln Chronicle
- **Shayna Schlosberg**, Vice President - Community Connections, Oregon Public Broadcasting
- **Susan Painter**, Newport criminal defense attorney
- **Susan Schuytema**, Lincoln County School District
- **Tom Fullmer**, Waldport Chamber of Commerce
- **Wayne Patterson**, Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce

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About the Agora Journalism Center

The [Agora Journalism Center](#) at the [School of Journalism and Communication](#) (SOJC) serves as the University of Oregon's forum for advancing the future of local news and civic health in Oregon and beyond. Established in 2014, the center is grounded in the belief that the health of democracy and journalism are fundamentally interconnected. Since its inception, the center has advocated for a more participatory and collaborative approach to professional, independent journalism, emphasizing the need to engage the public to enhance communities' information health and foster trust in local news media.

About Lincoln County

Lincoln County encompasses Oregon's central coast, stretching from Lincoln City in the north to Yachats in the south, and includes coastal communities such as Depoe Bay, Newport, and Waldport, as well as inland areas like Siletz, Toledo, and Eddyville. The county's geography presents both opportunities and challenges. The coastline supports a tourism-driven economy, whereas inland regions are characterized by timber heritage, tribal lands, and rural communities that often receive less attention in regional discourse. This geography influences information dissemination: coastal centers typically benefit from greater access to formal information channels, while inland and smaller communities depend more on interpersonal networks and localized sources.

The population of Lincoln County comprises long-term residents, retirees, seasonal workers, and families engaged in service, fishing, and education sectors. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians are integral to the region's history and current governance. As a sovereign tribal nation with independent institutions, it frequently operates its information systems alongside, rather than within, broader county networks. Additionally, Spanish-speaking residents, many of whom are employed in the hospitality and service industries, constitute a significant segment of the local workforce.



On the street of Newport Historic Bayfront.

Civic life and local institutions

Civic infrastructure in Lincoln County is organized among various municipalities, special districts, and community-based organizations. Public life is structured through city councils in Newport, Lincoln City, and Waldport, as well as county governance, school districts, and a network of nonprofit and civic groups. Educational and scientific institutions, including Oregon Coast Community College and the Oregon State University Hatfield Marine Science Center, enhance the county's academic profile. Chambers of commerce and economic development organizations further facilitate regional coordination.

A shifting local media landscape

Over the past two decades, Lincoln County's local media ecosystem has experienced substantial transformation, mirroring national trends of consolidation, contraction, and experimentation.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, community newspapers functioned as the primary means of connection within the county. Publications such as the **Newport News-Times** and the **Lincoln City News Guard** consistently covered local government, schools, and community events. However, shifts in ownership and industry pressures have led to consolidation, reducing newsroom capacity and, at times, narrowing coverage. In January 2024, Country Media merged the *Newport News-Times* and the *Lincoln City News Guard* into the **Lincoln County Leader**, reviving a historic title and exemplifying a broader trend of regional aggregation in the newspaper industry.

As traditional media models declined, new forms of local media emerged. **The Lincoln Chronicle** is a notable example. Established by Quinton Smith in 2019 as **YachatsNews**, initially as a personal service project after a lengthy journalism career, the outlet transitioned to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2022 and hired its first staff member. In 2025, it broadened its mission and rebranded as the Lincoln Chronicle to serve the entire county. Its nonprofit status, free public access, and ongoing focus on community-centered reporting have established it as a central component of Lincoln County's information ecosystem.

In parallel with this evolution, additional locally based publishers have emerged or adapted to address changing information needs. Outlets such as **Oregon Coast Today** serve a distinct function by providing event-focused information that helps residents navigate daily life, including local events and community activities. **Oregon Coast Breaking News** primarily uses social media to deliver rapid updates on incidents,

weather, and community activities, often filling immediacy gaps left by traditional outlets. In contrast, *The Boiler Bay Beacon* adopts a more specialized, editorial approach, providing commentary and locally focused reporting that reflect its audience’s perspectives and concerns. Collectively, these initiatives exemplify a broader trend of experimentation and adaptation as local information providers respond to the decline of legacy models and evolving resident expectations.

Local news and information serve as civic infrastructure.

As with transportation and public utilities, their effectiveness relies on coordination, accessibility, and sustained investment.

Public radio continues to serve as one of the most reliable and trusted information sources in the region. Stations affiliated with **Oregon Public Broadcasting** and **KLCC** deliver essential coverage through signals that reach all areas of Lincoln County, including **KOPB** at 89.3 FM for Depoe Bay and **KLCC’s** Newport–Lincoln City frequencies at 90.5 and 89.7 FM. These stations act as vital connectors, integrating local developments with regional and statewide reporting.

Concurrently, the local broadcast landscape has experienced significant contraction. On December 31, 2023, five long-standing commercial radio stations operated

by Yaquina Bay Communications ceased operations due to pandemic-related revenue losses. For decades, these stations provided routine local news and emergency information. Their closure signifies not only a reduction in coverage but also a structural weakening of the county’s real-time communication infrastructure. The resulting gaps help explain the increased reliance on public radio and smaller community stations during critical moments.

Social media platforms, especially community Facebook groups, are widely used for information distribution; however, residents often characterize them as unreliable for verification.

This evolving media landscape demonstrates both adaptation and fragmentation. No single outlet has assumed the comprehensive role formerly held by legacy newspapers. Instead, residents rely on a combination of nonprofit journalism, regional media, informal networks, and digital platforms.

Information flow as civic infrastructure

Collectively, Lincoln County’s information environment is best conceptualized as a layered ecosystem rather than a single system. Formal institutions generate information through government channels; media organizations report and interpret it; and residents disseminate it

through personal and community networks.

The primary challenge is not a lack of information, but rather the uneven distribution of information flow. Accessibility varies by geography, language, and familiarity with civic systems. Reliability is contingent upon the source, and visibility is influenced by distribution channels that may not align with residents’ information-seeking behaviors.

These conditions highlight a central premise of this report: local news and information serve as civic infrastructure. As with transportation and public utilities, their effectiveness relies on coordination, accessibility, and sustained investment. In Lincoln County, this infrastructure is fragmented. Future efforts should focus on strengthening the connections among these components.



The library at Waldport High School.

Executive Summary

Lincoln County's information ecosystem remains active, valued, and integral to community life. Residents depend on a combination of local journalism, public media, institutional communication, and informal networks to remain informed. Most report minimal barriers to accessing information, and local outlets continue to play a significant role in fostering community connections. However, this assessment identifies a system under strain, characterized more by fragmentation, uneven access, and deficiencies in trust, coordination, and coverage than by outright absence.

Based on 787 validated survey responses, listening sessions, and community engagement, this report analyzes how residents locate, utilize, and assess information that influences their daily lives. The participation encompasses a broad cross-section of communities, including strong representation from both coastal population centers and inland areas such as Toledo, providing a comprehensive countywide perspective on information needs and behaviors.

Several distinct patterns emerge from the assessment.

- **First, the primary challenge is not merely access, but coherence.** Although information is distributed across numerous channels, residents report difficulty navigating available resources, assessing reliability, and identifying appropriate sources for various types of information. Email newsletters, Facebook, and word of mouth frequently serve as connectors across systems, amplifying information while also contributing to inconsistency.
- **Second, trust within the information ecosystem is multifaceted.** Residents tend to trust personal networks and journalists who maintain a visible presence in the community. However, confidence in the accuracy, independence, and comprehensiveness of information is inconsistent. Concerns about bias, incomplete coverage, and financial influence indicate that trust must be established through transparent, sustained practices.
- **Third, coverage gaps remain evident across both geographic areas and demographic groups.** Communities outside Newport, such as Lincoln City, Depoe Bay, and Siletz, report limited visibility in local reporting. Spanish-speaking residents and younger audiences identify barriers related to language, format, and access points. These challenges are systemic, indicating that the current informa-

tion ecosystem does not yet fully represent or reach the county's diverse population.

- **Fourth, the civic information infrastructure has deteriorated in recent years.** The closure of several commercial radio stations, coupled with limited reporting capacity, has diminished redundancy in critical information systems, especially during emergencies. While residents continue to depend on trusted sources such as public radio and community networks, the overall system is more fragile than it may initially appear.

Despite these challenges, Lincoln County possesses a strong foundation for improvement. Nonprofit and community-centered outlets are emerging, public media continues to deliver regional coverage, and informal networks remain active and trusted. Local institutions, including libraries and schools, serve as vital points of connection. These assets indicate that progress should focus on strengthening coordination, expanding capacity, and enhancing the visibility and accessibility of existing systems, rather than rebuilding entirely.



Residents and civic leaders, including the Mayor of Lincoln City, gathered at the Lincoln City Cultural Center for one of two listening sessions.

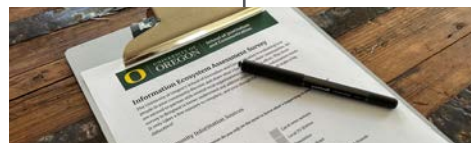
The recommendations that follow focus on six interrelated areas: improving coordination across information systems, strengthening emergency communication infrastructure, investing in trust-building practices, expanding civic coverage, increasing representation and access, and developing sustainable models for local journalism. Together, they point toward a more connected, resilient, and inclusive civic information ecosystem.

This report is intended as a starting point rather than a definitive conclusion. Its value depends on its application. For Lincoln County, the primary opportunity is to translate these insights into ongoing collaboration among media, public institutions, and community organizations, ensuring that residents can access information, see themselves reflected within it, and take informed action.

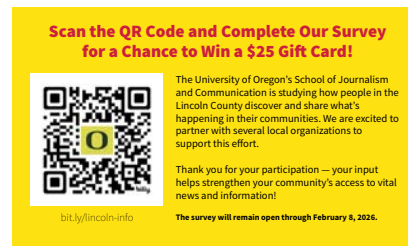
Methodology

A Community-Centered, Collaborative Approach

This assessment builds on a model developed by the Agora Journalism Center and informed by previous information-needs studies conducted across Oregon as part of the broader [Listening to Oregon initiative](#). Consistent with earlier projects, the work was grounded in collaboration with a network of local partners, including government officials, local media, academic institutions, and community organizations. This approach ensured that the findings reflect both lived experience and institutional perspectives.



Hi, Lincoln County Residents! How Well Are Your Information Needs Being Met?



About the Lincoln County Civic Information Initiative: This effort is a collaboration between local community partners and the University of Oregon's Engaged Journalism class, led by Professor Andrew DeAngelis. This partnership brings university expertise and local insight to create actionable solutions tailored to the region's information needs. Our work bridges the gap between journalism and the public, focusing on participatory and collaborative approaches that amplify community voices.

In Lincoln County, collaboration commenced earlier than in previous projects. During a listening session in Florence the preceding year, the publisher of the *Lincoln Chronicle* participated in the discussion. This engagement catalyzed the decision to conduct the subsequent assessment in Lincoln County and facilitated early local engagement with community partners. Formal engagement with community partners began in November and December 2025, approximately two months prior to the academic term. Outreach efforts were both relational and organic, shaped by participants who were willing to engage and expand the network. Although levels of participation varied, partners included the following:

- **Local media:** Lincoln Chronicle, Oregon Coast Today, Oregon Public Broadcasting
- **Local government:** City of Lincoln City (Planning and Community Development), City of Newport
- **Academic institutions:** Lincoln County School District, Oregon Coast Community College, Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center
- **Community organizations:** Lincoln County League of Women Voters, Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce, Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce, Waldport Chamber of Commerce, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

These partners played a central role in co-designing and distributing the survey and in supporting community engagement throughout the process.

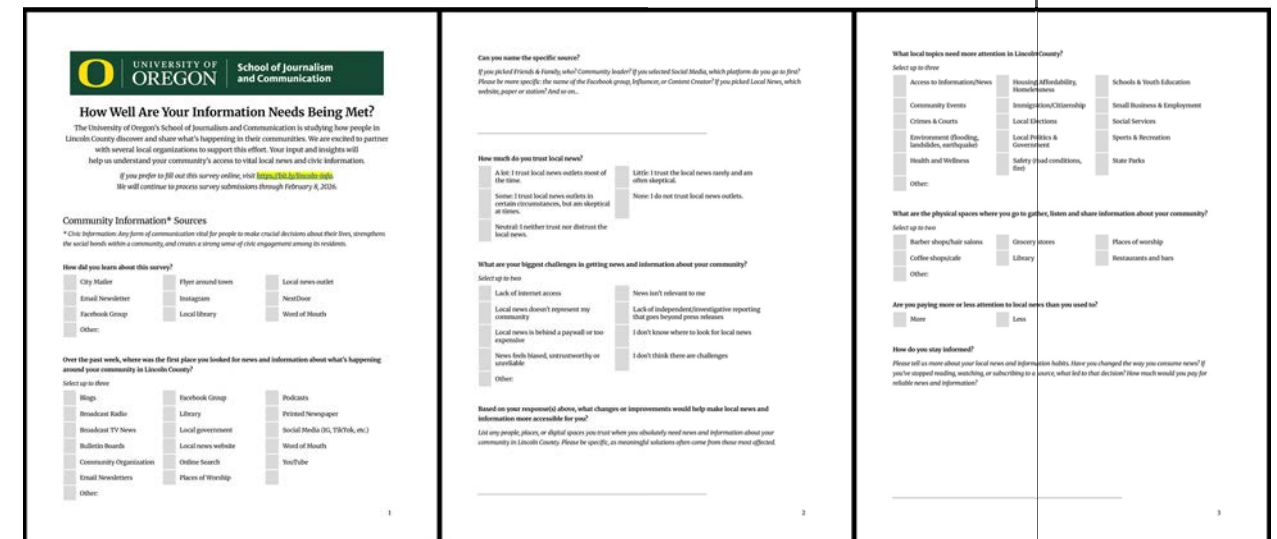
Copies of the flyer were distributed across the county which pointed to the online version of the survey.

Survey Design and Co-Development

The survey instrument was developed using a framework from the Listening Post Collective, which has informed similar assessments nationwide. This framework established a consistent baseline, while local partners helped adapt the survey to reflect Lincoln County's specific context and priorities.

The survey did not reference any local media organizations in its questions. Instead, respondents were invited to identify information sources in open-ended fields. This approach aimed to reduce bias and enable residents to describe their information habits in their own terms.

Students were introduced to the Listening Post Collective framework through a session with its executive director, which provided context for both the survey's purpose and the broader methodology.



Survey Distribution and Data Collection

The survey was administered from Jan. 7 to Feb. 8, 2026, over a 33-day period. Distribution employed a multi-channel strategy designed to reach residents through both traditional and non-traditional pathways.

Primary distribution channels included:

- Local news outlets, including coverage by the Lincoln Chronicle
- Email newsletters and partner listservs
- Social media platforms, including Facebook groups
- School-based outreach and in-person presentations
- Flyers, libraries, and community organizations

The survey was available both online and in print. The overwhelming number of submissions came from the online survey.

A total of 808 responses were collected. After removing 21 entries for duplicate submissions, invalid, or unreliable responses, the final dataset comprised 787 valid responses.

Response volume varied throughout the field period, with four distinct spikes observed. Notably, a single day on January 19 accounted for 27 percent of all responses, corresponding with school-based outreach and contributing significantly to the number of younger respondents in the dataset. Additional spikes aligned with coordinated outreach efforts, including distribution through the Lincoln Chronicle’s newsletter and social channels.

Survey distribution channels influenced the sample composition. The three most common pathways through which respondents learned about the survey were local news outlets, email newsletters, and Facebook, which together accounted for 63 percent of responses. This suggests that the sample is weighted toward residents already connected to existing information systems.

Student Engagement and Fieldwork

At the start of the academic term in January 2026, students engaged directly with community partners to enhance their understanding of community-centered journalism.

As part of this initiative, a site visit took place in late January. During the visit, we engaged four high schools across the county with a friendly competition intended to encourage student responses, including Taft, Newport, Toledo and Waldport High Schools. Toledo High School achieved the highest participation rate, with nearly 20 percent of its student body completing the survey.



Engaged Journalism student Ian Valleau shares lessons from our course with Waldport Middle/High School’s leadership class.

We also attended a Chamber of Commerce luncheon to briefly share details about the project and encourage broader participation.



At the Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce luncheon, held at the Cultural Center, we invited local business leaders to get involved with the project.

Qualitative Interviews and Community Listening Sessions

In addition to the survey, qualitative data were collected using two complementary methods.

First, survey respondents were invited to participate in follow-up conversations. From this pool, participants were selected based on availability and willingness to engage in virtual discussions. Students facilitated these conversations via Zoom, focusing on how residents access, interpret, and share information in their daily lives.

Second, two public listening sessions were held in Newport and Lincoln City in late February and early March. These sessions were promoted through the same channels as the survey and were open to all community members. The sessions offered an opportunity to share preliminary findings and gather additional context through dialogue-based engagement. Together, these qualitative components contextualized the survey data and revealed lived experiences not fully captured by structured responses.

Sample Characteristics and Limitations

As with any community-based assessment, the findings reflect the characteristics of the population that elected to participate and the channels through which they were accessed. Several attributes of the sample are critical for interpreting the results:

- The age distribution is bimodal, with strong representation among residents aged 65 and older and those under 18, and comparatively fewer respondents in the middle age ranges.
- The sample is majority White (76.5%), with Hispanic or Latino residents somewhat underrepresented relative to county demographics.
- Political affiliation skews toward Democrats, while Republicans are underrepresented.
- A significant portion of responses was generated through channels connected to existing media and partner networks, particularly local news outlets and email newsletters.

The survey achieved a complete response rate for core questions related to information behavior, trust, and topic needs, indicating strong engagement among participants.

Interpreting the Data

Certain populations, such as residents less connected to digital platforms, local institutions, or partner networks, may be underrepresented. These gaps indicate areas for future outreach and deeper engagement.

The data reflects the perspectives of residents who are, in many cases, already connected to local information systems. This may contribute to higher reported levels of trust in local news and strong demand for additional coverage. For example, distribution through established outlets such as the *Lincoln Chronicle* likely reached audiences already engaged with local journalism, potentially influencing trust-related findings.

The findings also reveal important gaps. Certain populations, such as residents less connected to digital platforms, local institutions, or partner networks, may be underrepresented. These gaps indicate areas for future outreach and deeper engagement.

Instead of providing a statistically representative sample, this assessment offers a detailed, community-informed perspective on information flows among engaged residents, identifies persistent gaps, and suggests ways to strengthen the local information ecosystem.

Outlets Surfacing Prominently in Resident Responses

Two additional outlets appeared frequently in open-ended survey responses and warrant specific attention: the *Lincoln County Leader* and the *Newport News Times*. Many respondents treat these as a single institutional entity due to their shared history of ownership and rebranding.

The *Lincoln Chronicle* was the most frequently named outlet in the dataset, appearing in 375 responses, which represents nearly half of all survey participants. The *Lincoln County Leader*, previously known as the *Newport News Times* and, before that, the *Lincoln City News Guard*, was the second most frequently named, cited by 90 respondents (approximately 11 percent of the sample). Despite this recognition, qualitative sentiment about the Leader was largely critical, focusing on the narrative that the paper's acquisition by a regional chain had diminished its quality. Respondents described it as "a shell of its former self," noted the elimination of local reporting positions, and characterized its content as increasingly wire-fed rather than locally produced. One respondent counted 23 articles in a recent edition, of which only six were staff-written, a figure cited elsewhere in this report as illustrative of the broader press-release problem.

The *Newport News Times* was named by 23 respondents (approximately 3 percent of the sample), most of whom referred to it in the past tense, indicating that it no longer exists in its former form. Several respondents expressed a sense of loss. One wrote: "I miss the *Newport News Times*." Others used the name interchangeably with *Lincoln Leader*, treating both as names for the same declining institution.

Together, these two outlets represent one of the clearest trust signals in the dataset. Residents are not opposed to local print journalism; many actively desire it. The frustration expressed regarding the Leader and the News Times reflects unmet demand rather than indifference, and highlights the need for a local, accountable outlet that respondents would trust and support.

Although the *Lincoln County Leader* was invited to participate as a distribution partner early in the process, it did not respond to outreach and was therefore not included among formal partners. The resulting gap between institutional participation and resident recognition constitutes a finding that should inform future engagement efforts.

Residents are not opposed to local print journalism; many actively desire it. The frustration expressed reflects unmet demand rather than indifference, and highlights the need for a local, accountable outlet that respondents would trust and support.

The *Lincoln Chronicle*'s prominence in the dataset warrants attention regarding trust. Of the 375 respondents who named the Chronicle, 18 (approximately 5 percent) expressed critical or negative sentiment, a substantially lower proportion than the criticism directed at the *Lincoln County Leader* relative to its mentions. Overall, the Chronicle's trust profile in this survey is strongly positive.

The critical responses are notable for their ideological diversity. Respondents who distrust the Chronicle do not share a single political perspective: some characterize it as conservative or right-leaning, while others describe it as a liberal outlet that does not represent their views. Several respondents do not reference ideology, instead focusing on specific coverage areas, most often local government, where they perceive reporting as one-sided or insufficiently critical of public officials.

This pattern is analytically significant. An outlet accused of bias from opposing political perspectives does not necessarily indicate failure; rather, it may reflect the challenges of covering a politically diverse community from a single editorial position. The data suggest that conditional trust, reliance on the Chronicle for certain coverage while remaining skeptical of its government or political reporting, is more common than complete rejection. For the purposes of this assessment, the Chronicle serves as the county's most relied-upon local news source while also attracting the scrutiny that role entails.

Distribution Gaps and Outlets Not Reached

As the survey distribution period was concluding and listening sessions were in the planning stage, it became evident that a small number of media organizations active in Lincoln County had not been included in the initial outreach and had not participated in survey distribution. Two in particular, ***Boiler Bay Beacon*** and ***Oregon Coast Breaking News***, were absent from the distribution network.

This is notable for two reasons. First, their audiences may be under-represented in the sample, as media partners were a primary pathway for survey awareness. Second, despite not participating in distribution, both outlets were mentioned by a small number of respondents, unprompted and organically, in open-ended survey responses, indicating their presence in the county's information landscape.

Oregon Coast Breaking News was named by 8 respondents, representing approximately 1 percent of the total survey sample. Respondents described it in various terms: some included it alongside other outlets as part of their routine information sources, while others reported

actively avoiding it due to concerns about writing quality, factual accuracy, and perceived bias. Others mentioned it with additional community sources as part of their information routines, suggesting that, regardless of editorial reputation, the outlet occupies a place in some residents' information practices.

Boiler Bay Beacon was mentioned by 4 respondents, representing less than 1 percent of the total sample. Qualitative references were primarily critical, with respondents characterizing the outlet as having a strong, apparently one-sided editorial perspective. One respondent, reflecting on the county's broader information environment, noted that certain local sources carry "specific agendas," citing *Boiler Bay Beacon* as an example, and observed that these dynamics contribute to significant tensions in local civic discourse.

The appearance of both outlets in organic responses, despite not participating in survey distribution, suggests that their presence in the county's information ecosystem is recognized by some residents. Their absence from the distribution network, resulting from early outreach that did not elicit participation rather than from intentional exclusion, represents a potential blind spot that may have influenced these findings. This gap highlights the need for more comprehensive engagement in future assessments and presents an opportunity to include these outlets more fully in the process.

The community listening session held at the Atonement Lutheran Church in Newport.

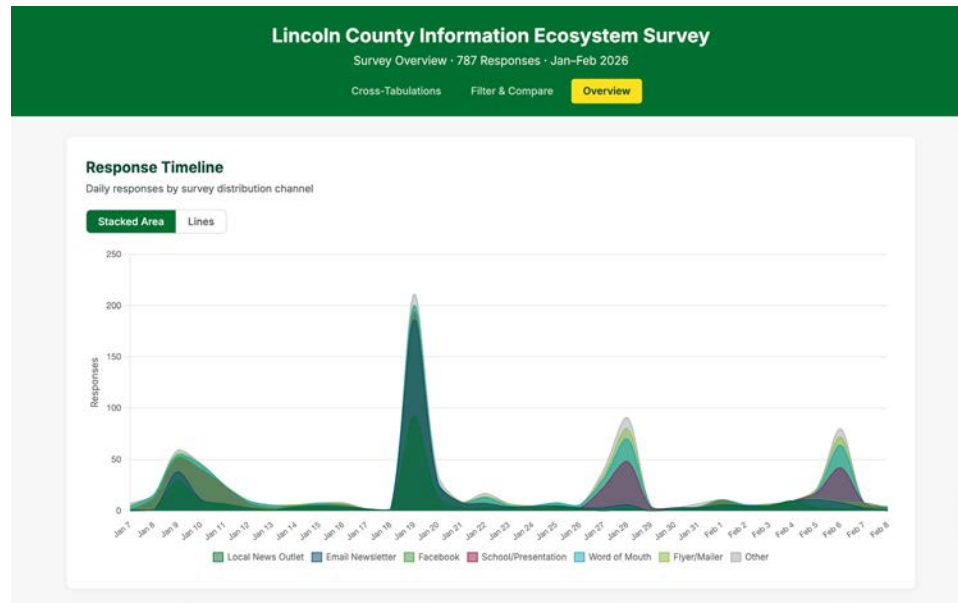


Why This Matters

This methodology emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and community participation. By engaging partners from the outset, co-designing the research instrument, and integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, the project aims to measure information needs and interpret them within the specific context of Lincoln County.

A Note on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools were selectively employed at multiple stages of producing this report to support, rather than replace, human judgment. These tools contributed by standardizing the criteria of open-ended survey responses to enhance consistency and readability while maintaining original meaning; facilitating early pattern recognition across the dataset to identify themes and categories for subsequent human analysis; and assisting in developing and refining specific passages. Additionally, Claude Code was utilized to create a visualization tool that enabled students and the professor to examining patterns in the data and identify emerging storylines from the findings.



All ideas, source materials, interviews, listening session data, cross-checking of findings, fact-checking, and final editorial decisions were managed exclusively by the human authors, students, and collaborators involved in this project. AI-generated content underwent review, revision, and verification at every stage. The research design, analytical frameworks, community engagement, and interpretive judgments that inform this report are entirely the result of human effort.

By the Numbers

This section provides an overview of how Lincoln County residents access, utilize, and assess local information. The data, representing 787 respondents, identifies key patterns that inform subsequent findings.

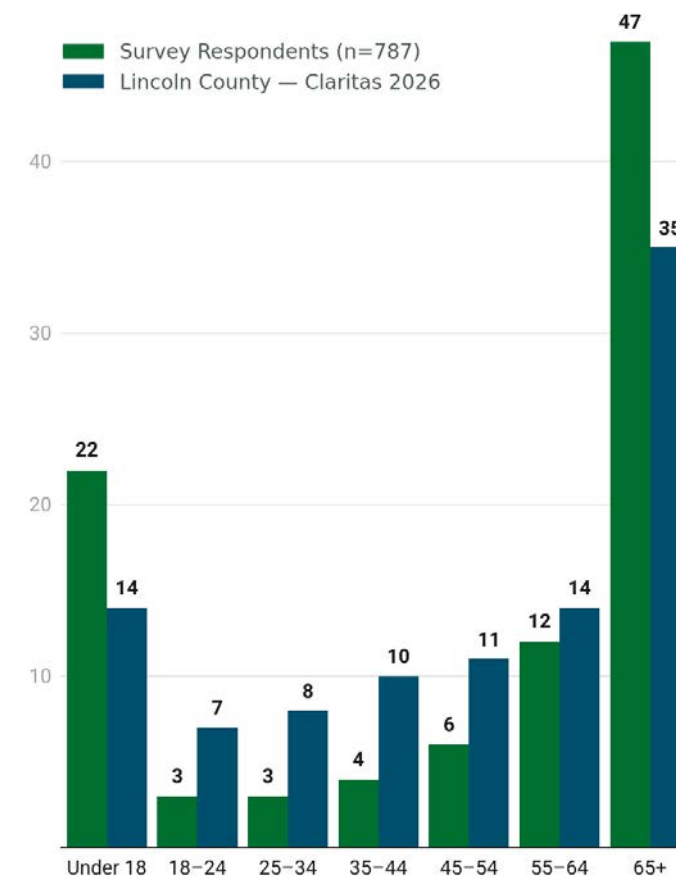
Where applicable, findings are compared with county-level demographic benchmarks from Claritas Pop-Facts Premier 2026, as provided by the Listening Post Collective, to contextualize the survey sample relative to the broader population.

Who We Heard From

The survey engaged residents throughout Lincoln County using institutional outreach, community partnerships, and voluntary participation. As is typical for community-based surveys, the sample reflects both the population reached and those who elected to respond.

Age Distribution

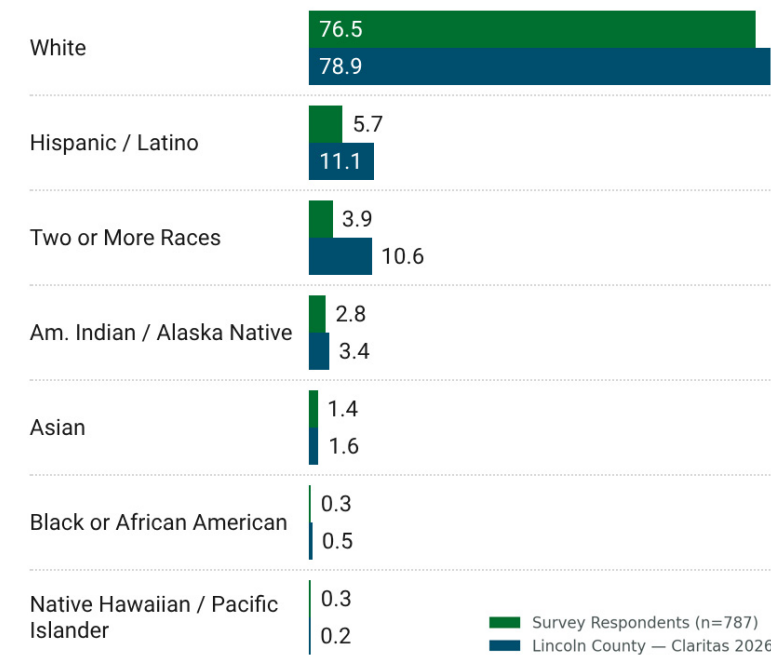
*Survey skews older and younger than the county.
The middle generation is thin.*



The age distribution demonstrates two prominent concentrations: younger residents and older adults. The youth cohort was recruited through targeted outreach at local high schools, intended to ensure meaningful representation of younger voices and to reduce the average respondent age. Conversely, older residents, especially those aged 65 and above, are typically more likely to participate in such surveys. These factors together result in a bimodal distribution, with relatively fewer respondents in the middle age ranges.

Race & Ethnicity

Hispanic/Latino residents are underrepresented relative to county population.

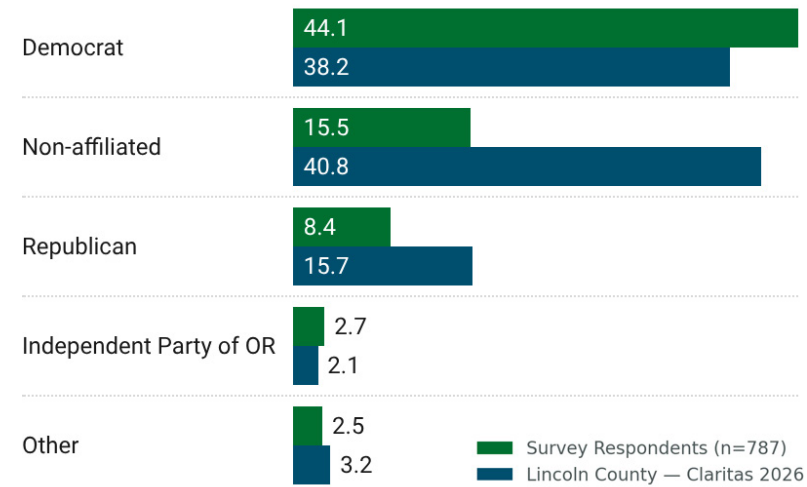


Racial and ethnic representation in the sample reflects both outreach and participation patterns. White respondents constitute 76.5 percent of the sample. Hispanic or Latino residents, who represent a larger proportion of the county population, are underrepresented at 5.7 percent. American Indian and Alaska Native respondents comprise 2.8 percent, a figure more closely aligned with county demographics and indicative of the presence of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

Political affiliation among respondents is skewed toward Democrats (44.1 percent), while Republicans are underrepresented at 8.4 percent relative to county registration patterns. This distribution is an important consideration when interpreting responses concerning trust and perceived bias.

Political Affiliation

Democrats are overrepresented. Republicans and non-affiliated are underrepresented.



Despite these demographic skews, survey engagement was robust. All core questions regarding information habits, trust, and topic needs received a 100 percent response rate, indicating that respondents were highly invested in sharing their perspectives.

Where We Heard From

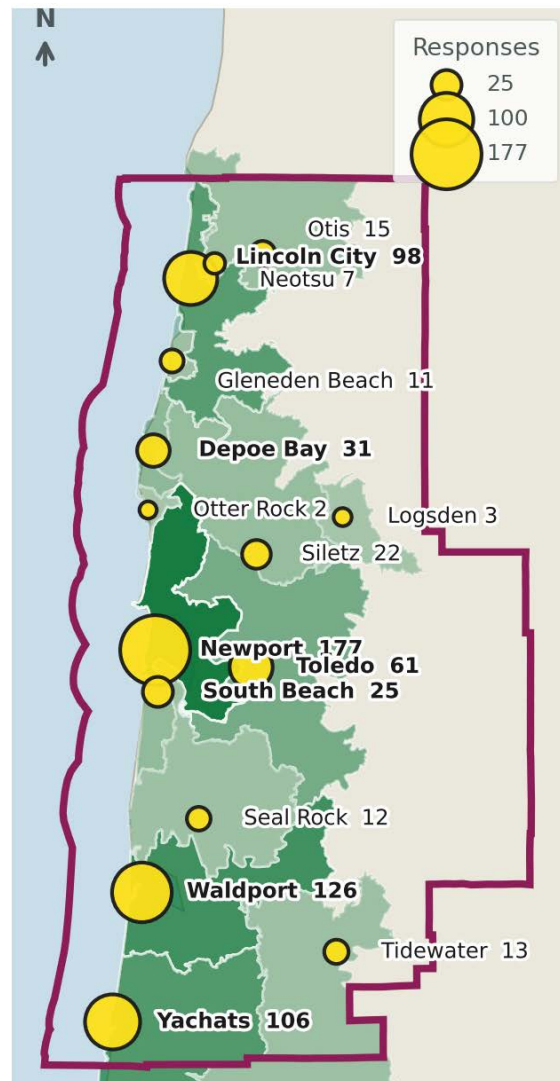
Survey responses were mapped across Lincoln County using self-reported ZIP codes, enabling a geographic analysis of participation in both coastal and inland communities.

Participation was broadly distributed throughout the county. Newport contributed the largest share of responses at 177 (22.5%), followed by Waldport with 126 (16.0%), Yachats with 106 (13.5%), and Lincoln City with 98 (12.5%). Collectively, these four communities accounted for nearly two-thirds of all responses.

Toledo, the county’s primary inland community, contributed 61 responses (7.8%), demonstrating substantial reach beyond coastal areas. Smaller communities, such as Depoe Bay, South Beach, Siletz, Otis, Tidewater, Seal Rock, Gleneden Beach, and Neotsu, each contributed between one and 31 responses, collectively representing an additional 13.8% of the dataset. This distribution reflects both population differences among communities and the varying effectiveness of outreach and listening session efforts.

The observed distribution indicates variations in both access and engagement. Areas with a stronger institutional presence, including schools, local government, and media partners, are more heavily represented in the dataset. Outreach initiatives associated with high schools and community organizations contributed to localized increases in participation.

However, the data also indicates potential geographic gaps. Some communities are less represented, which may result from differences in outreach effectiveness, connectivity to distribution channels, or varying levels of civic engagement.



Although the sample is not fully proportional geographically, the responses provide a meaningful cross-section of the county. Areas with more established information systems and partner networks are more strongly represented.

Where Residents Get Their Information

Residents utilize a combination of formal media, institutional communication, and informal networks to remain informed.

Local news outlets serve a central function. Many respondents identify at least one local outlet as a primary source of information, underscoring the enduring significance of place-based journalism in the county. This category includes both nonprofit and freely distributed publications, which reduce barriers to access.

Email newsletters and Facebook also represent key channels. These platforms function both as independent sources and as extensions of local media and partner organizations, many of which disseminate reporting and updates through newsletters and social media. Consequently, these channels amplify existing information systems rather than operate independently.

Survey distribution patterns reflect these dynamics. Respondents reported learning about the survey through twelve distinct channels.

How People Learned About the Survey

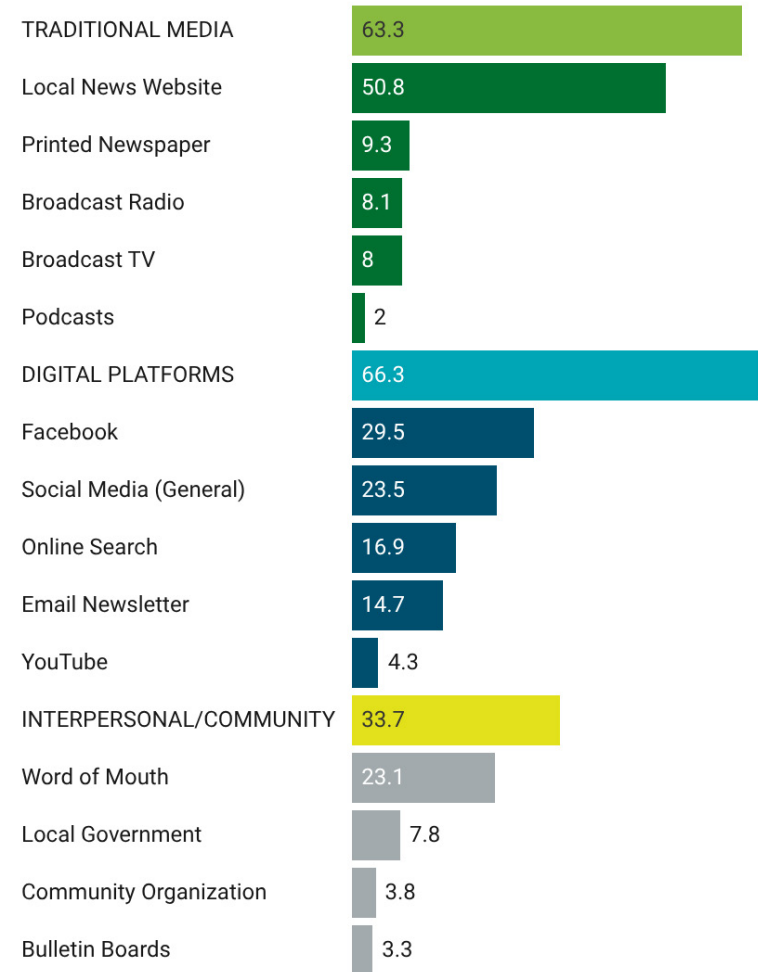
Existing media infrastructure drove the majority of reach. School outreach added a significant youth count.



Collectively, these three channels represent 63 percent of all responses, demonstrating that participation was significantly influenced by established media and communication infrastructure.

Where Resident Get Local Information

Digital platforms edge out traditional media overall. Interpersonal channels remain a significant third pathway.



Informal pathways also remain significant. Word of mouth (11.8 percent), school-based outreach (13.2 percent), and community-based distribution underscore the role of relational networks in disseminating information.

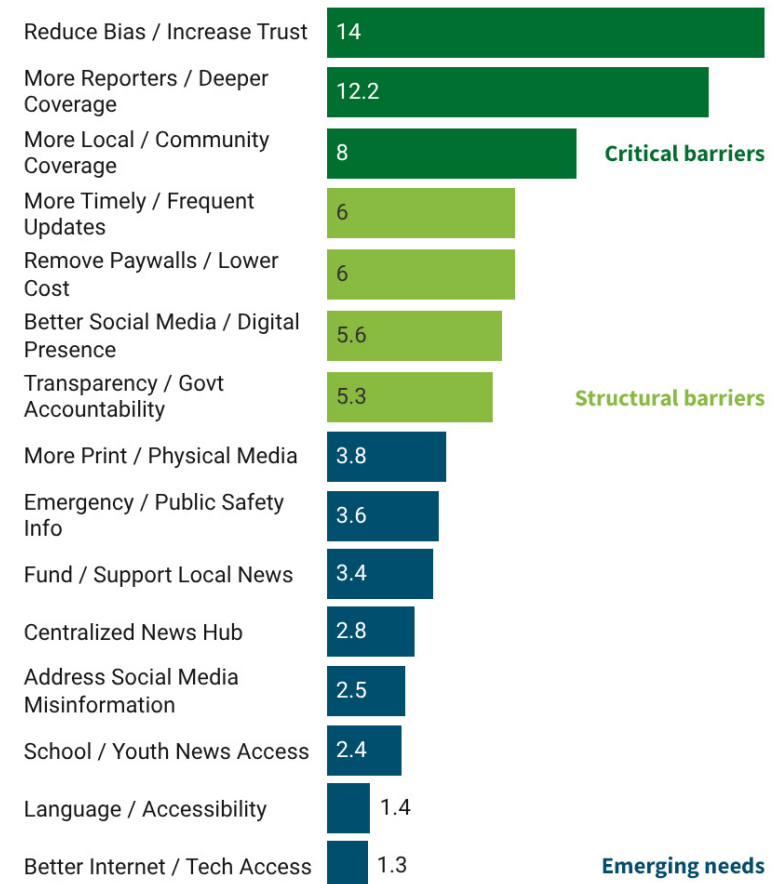
Challenges Accessing Information

Although many respondents report regular access to local information, persistent barriers remain, though they differ from those identified in earlier assessments.

Previous community studies frequently identified cost as a primary obstacle, especially where paywalls restricted access to local news. In Lincoln County, this barrier is less significant. The Lincoln Chronicle functions as a nonprofit news organization and offers free access to its content, while Oregon Coast Today is broadly available at no cost through physical distribution points across the region.

Top Barriers to Accessing Local Information

Trust and coverage depth dominate. These aren't access problems but credibility and capacity challenges.



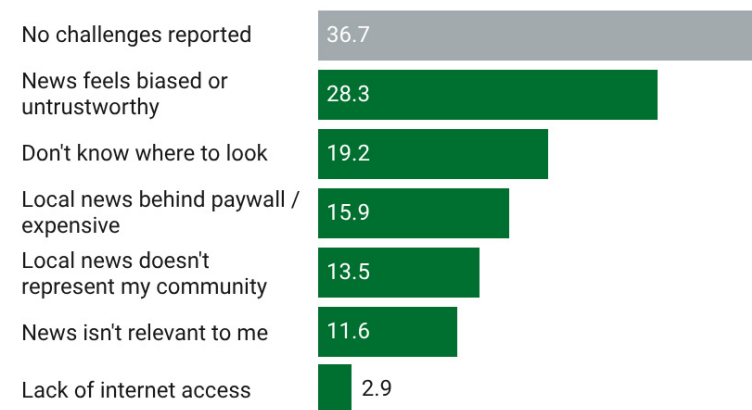
Currently, the primary challenges concern fragmentation and navigation. Residents report difficulty staying informed about local issues when information is dispersed across multiple platforms, inconsistently updat-

ed, or difficult to locate. For some individuals, the challenge is not the existence of information, but the effort required to synthesize a coherent understanding of local events.

Digital access and literacy further influence these experiences. Although many residents rely on online platforms, engagement varies, resulting in uneven access based on individual familiarity, habits, and preferences. These patterns indicate that in Lincoln County, the central challenge concerns coherence, consistency, credibility, and the overall capacity of the information system to deliver accessible, navigable content, rather than affordability.

■ Challenges Accessing Local Information

Bias and trust are the top barriers, ahead of cost, relevance, and discoverability.



The most common survey response complicates the findings. Over one-third of respondents indicated no challenges in accessing local information. However, when this result was shared during listening sessions, participants expressed surprise. Subsequent discussions revealed that many individuals encounter significant barriers. This pattern suggests that residents have adapted to fragmented information environments by developing personal routines, such as consulting multiple sources at various times, cross-referencing information across platforms, and relying on trusted individuals within their networks. Over time, these adaptive habits normalize the effort required to remain informed, thereby obscuring the underlying issue as a systemic problem.

What People Want More Of

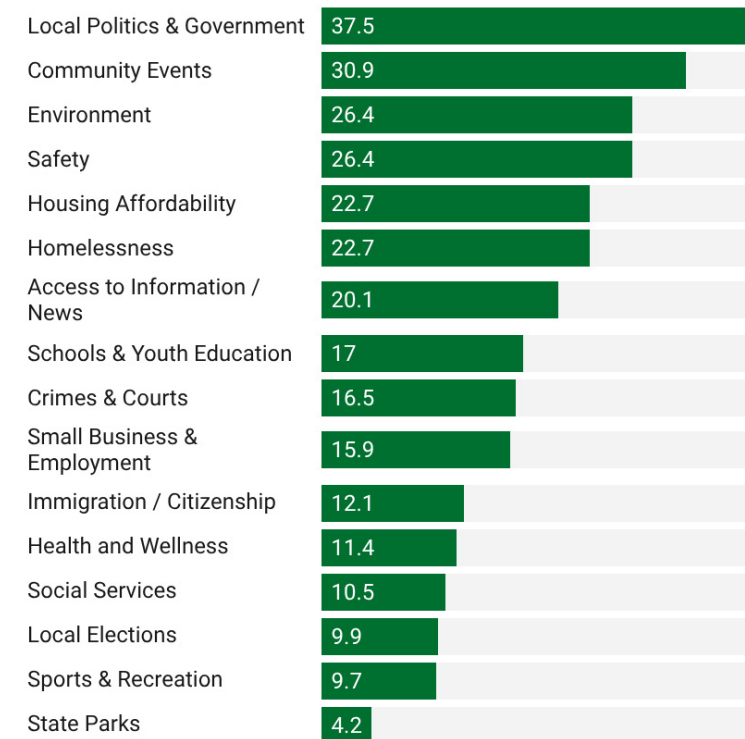
Survey responses indicate a clear and consistent demand for increased access to local information. The highest demand is for practical, actionable information that directly impacts daily life. This includes:

- Decisions made by the local government
- Information about community events
- Updates regarding public safety
- Information on housing and development
- Details about infrastructure and public services

Respondents are not asking for more information so much as better information: timely, relevant, and easy to use.

■ Most Requested Information Topics

Local politics leads by a wide margin while events, environment, safety and housing form a strong second tier.

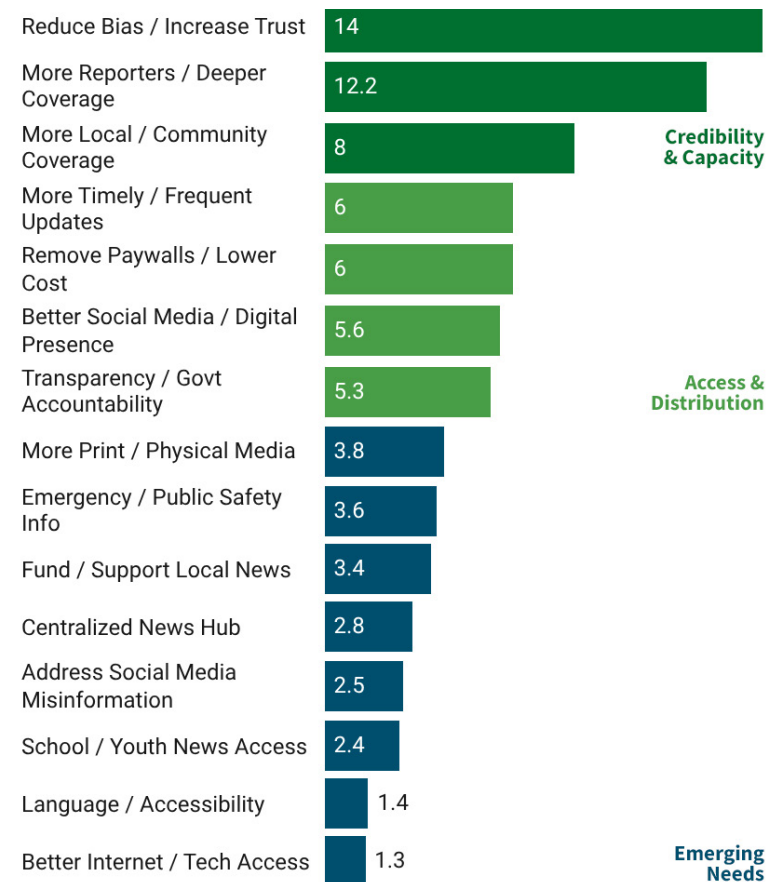


There is also significant interest in coverage that represents the diversity of experiences throughout the county. Residents express a desire to better understand various communities, perspectives, and issues, indicating that informational needs extend beyond transactional matters to encompass broader civic understanding.

This combination of practical needs and civic curiosity highlights a gap between the information currently available and what residents require to participate fully in their communities.

■ What Would Help: Improvements Residents Want

Reducing bias and adding reporting capacity top the list, ahead of structural fixes like paywalls or print access.



Trust and Demand

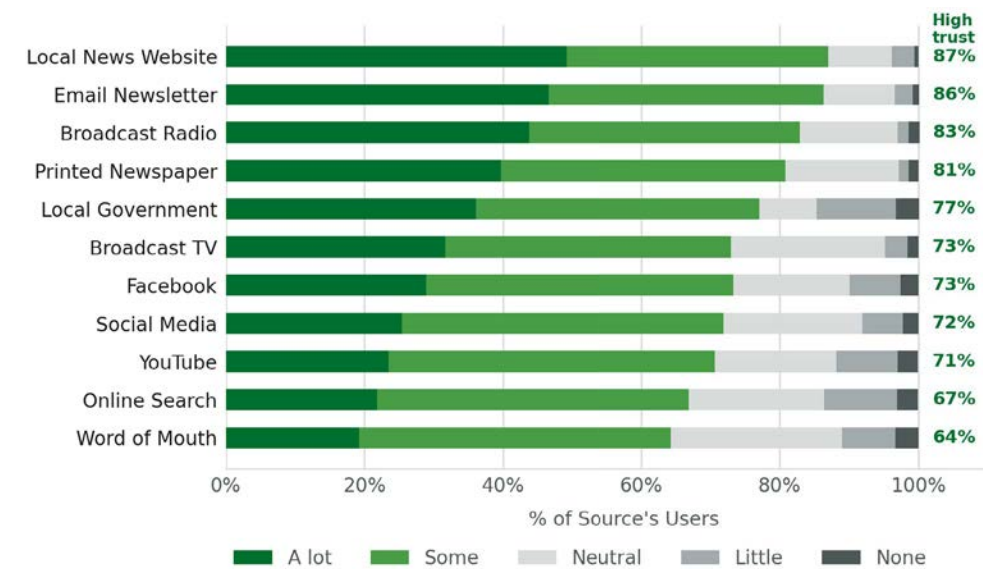
Trust in local information sources exists but is unevenly distributed and closely associated with familiarity and frequency of use.

Many respondents report trusting at least one local source, especially those with whom they interact regularly. Respondents who identify the Lincoln Chronicle as a primary source frequently express high levels of trust. These findings indicate that the Chronicle’s journalistic model and approach are resonating with its audience and contributing significantly to the local information ecosystem. However, trust remains conditional. Residents report evaluating information according to perceived bias, transparency, and consistency.

Demand for local information remains consistent. Even among skeptical respondents, there is a clear desire for more local information of higher quality. The central issue is not the need for information, but whether it fulfills expectations for credibility, relevance, and access. This dynamic highlights a key tension: while trust in local information sources may be uneven, the need for reliable information is universal.

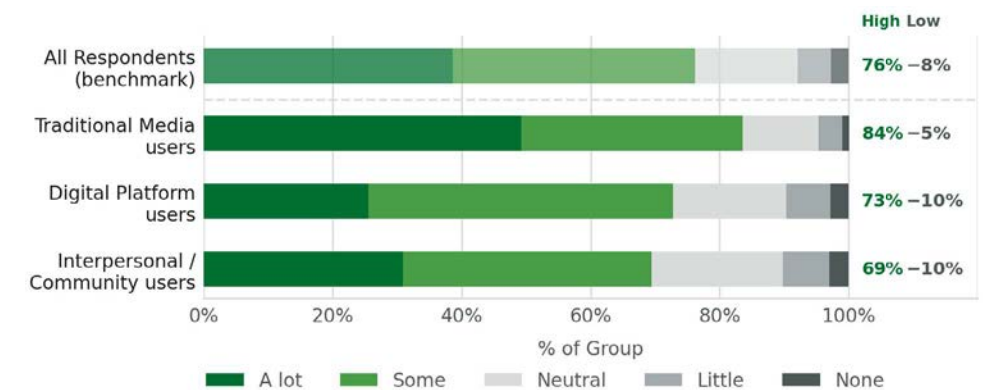
■ Trust Levels by News Source

Traditional sources anchor trust while social media and informal channels show markedly lower confidence.



■ Trust Levels by Source Category

Traditional media users show 14 points higher trust than digital platforms.



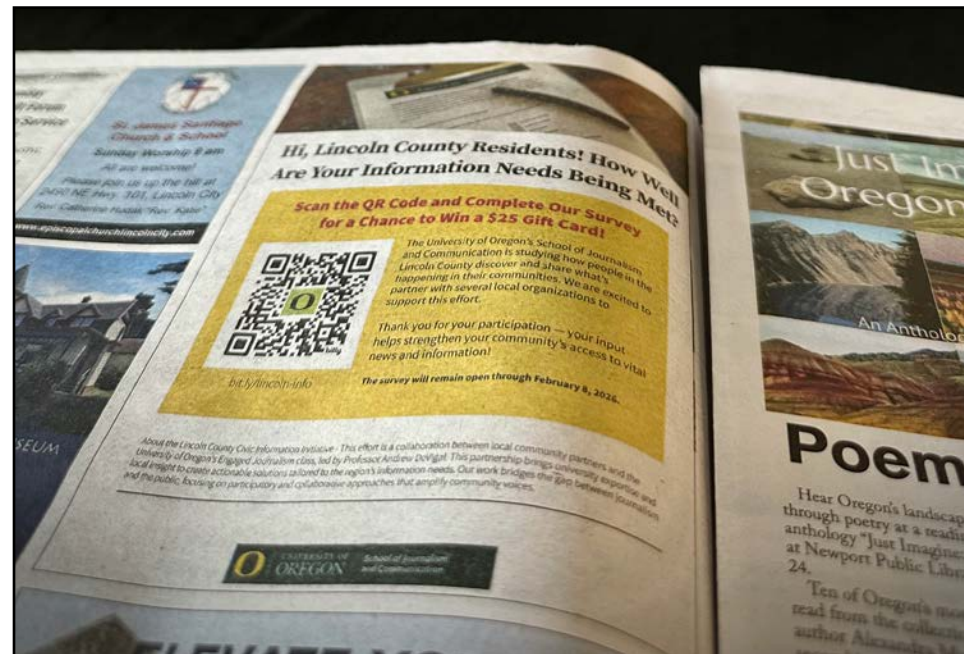
Reading the Data

Collectively, these patterns indicate that the community is engaged, motivated, and actively seeking information, although access is not distributed evenly.

Survey participation demonstrates both strong interest and established access pathways. Residents with existing connections to local media and community networks are more likely to be represented, which may account for the relatively high levels of trust in certain information sources.

At the same time, gaps remain. Some populations are less visible in the data, and access to information is shaped by how easily residents can navigate and connect to existing systems.

These findings do not provide a statistically representative portrait of the entire county. Instead, they offer a grounded, community-informed perspective on information flows among engaged residents, highlight areas of friction, and identify opportunities to strengthen the local information ecosystem.



Oregon Coast Today printed the flyer pointing to our digital survey.

Key Findings

The six findings presented here demonstrate consistent patterns identified in both survey responses and the lived experiences shared during listening sessions. Collectively, these findings indicate that the civic information ecosystem is active yet uneven, with residents relying on a mix of formal sources and informal networks to stay informed. Although local outlets such as the Lincoln Chronicle serve a significant function, no single source offers comprehensive, timely, and widely accessible coverage throughout the county.

These findings further illustrate that access to information is determined by factors beyond mere availability. Timeliness, trust, social connection, and representation each influence how residents navigate and interpret local information. Consequently, some residents are well-positioned to remain informed, while others experience gaps that hinder their awareness, participation, and capacity for action.

Timeliness, trust, social connection, and representation each influence how residents navigate and interpret local information.

KEY FINDING 1

Ecosystem Fragmentation and Awareness

Residents must actively navigate a fragmented local information environment, requiring effort to remain informed across multiple disconnected sources. While survey data suggest diversity of access, in practice, this manifests as burden, inconsistency, and unequal awareness.

Survey Insights

Survey responses indicate a multi-channel ecosystem without a dominant pathway. Residents rely on local news websites (50.8%), Facebook (29.5%), social media broadly (23.5%), word of mouth (23.1%), and online search (16.9%). Nearly 40% of respondents report using both formal and informal channels, while approximately one in three have entirely substituted social media for local journalism. At first glance, these patterns suggest adaptability and cross-format access.

However, this distribution also indicates the absence of a centralized, reliable entry point for local information. No single source reaches a majority of residents in a manner that reduces the need for cross-checking or supplementation.

What residents described

During listening sessions, residents consistently characterized this information landscape as laborious rather than a matter of choice.

For example, one Toledo resident described a routine that involved television, a local news website, a weekly newspaper, community bulletin boards, and Facebook to stay current in a single week. Another resident in Lincoln City (25-34 yo, female) articulated the structural challenge: “No one source is fast enough to cover the whole county, so often I have to rely on word of mouth to figure out the day to day.”

“No one source is fast enough to cover the whole county, so often I have to rely on word of mouth to figure out the day to day.”

— 25-34 yo, female, Lincoln City resident

Fragmentation contributes to uneven awareness among residents. In one session, a resident who had lived in the area for several months was unaware of the city’s recycling program. Although the information was available, it had not reached her through any of the channels she accessed. This pattern recurred across conversations, with residents often discovering services, resources, or updates only through incidental interactions.

Participants frequently described sequential moments of realization: one individual mentions a resource, another indicates unawareness, and a third echoes this sentiment. Information circulates, but distribution remains uneven.

Fragmentation also manifests socially. In Newport, participants described an information environment segmented among distinct community groups, such as academic and research institutions, the fishing and waterfront workforce, and the arts community. Information circulates within these groups, but less reliably between them.

What this reveals

Fragmentation in Lincoln County extends beyond the presence of multiple platforms. It constitutes a structural condition that transfers the responsibility for information coherence onto residents. Individuals with time, experience, and established social networks are better positioned to navigate multiple sources, verify information, and address informational gaps. In contrast, newcomers or those less connected to local networks often encounter an environment in which essential information exists yet remains effectively inaccessible.

Consequently, access within the information ecosystem is determined not solely by availability but by an individual’s capacity to assemble,

interpret, and validate information across fragmented channels. Over time, this dynamic produces subtle inequalities. Residents’ knowledge, timing of awareness, and confidence in acting on information vary not only by geography but also by their position within social and informational networks.

In this context, fragmentation is not only inefficient; the system primarily benefits those who possess the skills and knowledge to navigate it effectively.

KEY FINDING 2

Timeliness and Real-Time Information Gaps

Residents face substantial gaps in timely, real-time information, especially during emergencies and rapidly evolving events. Although the information ecosystem offers broad coverage, it frequently fails when speed and clarity are most critical.

Survey Insights

Survey responses indicate that the current system prioritizes periodic updates over real-time information. Weekly publications, newsletters, and word-of-mouth communication remain central, yet they do not offer immediate awareness. In contrast, social media platforms (29.5% Facebook; 23.5% other platforms) provide faster access. Residents rely on these channels for timely updates, despite expressing lower trust in the reliability of the information they provide.

What residents described

Listening sessions consistently revealed challenges in emergency communication. Residents reported confusion about systems such as Lincoln Alerts, citing inconsistencies in enrollment processes, reliability, and clarity. While some participants intended to rely on the system during emergencies, others were unaware of how to enroll or when they would receive notifications. As one coastal newcomer (35-44 yo, female) stated in the survey, “I just moved to the area and have no idea how to even receive pertinent weather alerts.” This highlights how systems dependent on prior awareness can fail those most in need of orientation.

During the Newport listening session, participants discussed break-

“I just moved to the area and have no idea how to even receive pertinent weather alerts.”

— 35-44 yo, female, coastal newcomer

downs in emergency communication. For example, a boil water notice sent to a limited number of households generated widespread concern in neighboring areas due to unclear communication about the alert's scope. In this instance, both the formal alert system and informal word-of-mouth networks failed to provide necessary clarity. In urgent situations, residents reported relying primarily on Facebook groups or direct messages to neighbors for real-time updates. These information gaps are most acute in communities already underserved by local coverage, where residents are least likely to receive timely information through formal channels.

As observed, the effectiveness of the emergency radio depends on residents' awareness of its existence and accessibility.

"A radio station with regular news and weather, including emergency broadcasts."

— 65+, Newport resident

Radio was identified as one of the few trusted and timely channels during emergencies, although its potential remains underutilized. Across listening sessions and analyses, a consistent recommendation emerged: establishing a dedicated AM/FM frequency for emergency broadcasts. The primary gap is communicative rather than technical. As observed, the effectiveness of the emergency radio depends on residents' awareness of its existence and accessibility. A Newport resident (65+) reinforced this need, stating, "A radio station with regular news and weather, including emergency broadcasts." This request was noted across geographic areas and age groups, indicating a shared recognition that radio could serve as a reliable foundation for real-time information if implemented and promoted more effectively.

These information gaps extend beyond emergencies. Residents also reported delays in learning about road closures, public meetings, and service disruptions. In several instances, individuals became aware of time-sensitive information only after the relevant events had occurred.

What this reveals

The information ecosystem in Lincoln County is not consistently structured to support real-time information needs. While it performs adequately for general awareness, it becomes vulnerable under circumstances that demand speed, coordination, and clarity.

In such situations, residents often rely on informal, improvised systems, prioritizing speed over verification. This reliance introduces a secondary risk: as the speed of information increases, its reliability may decrease.

Timeliness is not solely a matter of faster publication. It involves ensur-

ing that critical information consistently reaches residents through multiple channels and in formats that are actionable when most needed.

KEY FINDING 3

Information Integrity and Conditional Trust

Trust in local information is present; however, it remains conditional and fragile, grounded primarily in perceived accuracy and consistency rather than institutional authority.

Survey Insights

Survey responses indicate relatively strong trust in local news sources. However, a significant portion of respondents also rely on social media and informal networks, suggesting that trust is distributed across multiple platforms rather than concentrated within a single institution. This distribution does not necessarily represent a weakness. Instead, a diversity of trusted sources can strengthen the information ecosystem, provided these sources remain accessible, consistent, and reliable.

What residents described

During listening sessions, residents articulated trust through specific, tangible criteria. Participants defined trust in terms of integrity, transparency, humility, and a willingness to acknowledge mistakes. As one participant stated, trust involves "doing what's right instead of doing what's easy." A Depoe Bay resident emphasized the importance of reputation, a proven track record, and the absence of conflicts of interest. These are not abstract preferences; rather, they are criteria that residents actively apply.

Participants expressed appreciation for the Chronicle's accessibility and commitment to local coverage, noting that its nonprofit model and free access reinforce its public-serving role. However, trust was described as contingent and closely linked to journalistic quality. One participant reported discontinuing support for a local paper not due to its perspective, but because of repeated typographical errors and factual inaccuracies. In this instance, trust was lost due to deficiencies in craft rather than ideology.

Residents also identified instances in which journalism relied on re-

Participants defined trust in terms of integrity, transparency, humility, and a willingness to acknowledge mistakes.

As one participant stated, trust involves "doing what's right instead of doing what's easy."

publishing official statements rather than conducting independent, evidence-based reporting. One participant described the consequence: “The lack of good reporting on what’s happening in the community decreases trust and causes people to just throw their hands up... leading to apathy and lack of civic engagement.” Conversely, coverage of a proposed ICE facility in Newport, which was driven by independent reporting, generated a “groundswell of information” that increased public attention and participation.

“I follow community groups on Facebook, but find those unreliable and inflammatory. I also think too many people put their trust in what they read on those platforms rather than attempting to find information on a legitimate news outlet.”

— 55-64 yo, Depoe Bay female

proposed ICE facility in Newport, which was driven by independent reporting, generated a “groundswell of information” that increased public attention and participation.

Social media further complicates the dynamics of trust. Although Facebook is widely used, residents characterized it primarily as a platform for social connection rather than a source of credible news. As one Depoe Bay resident observed, “I follow community groups on Facebook, but find those unreliable and inflammatory. I also think too many people put their trust in what they read on those platforms rather than attempting to find information on a legitimate news outlet.” In practice, usage reflects availability rather than endorsement.

What this reveals

Trust in Lincoln County is present, but it is negotiated rather than assumed.

Residents do not rely solely on institutional reputation. Instead, they evaluate information based on consistency, accuracy, and alignment across multiple sources. This dynamic requires that trust be continually earned and maintained.

The presence of a trusted local outlet such as the Chronicle is significant, as it demonstrates that trust can be established through sustained journalistic practice. However, the ongoing need for residents to verify information across multiple channels indicates that trust within the information ecosystem is not yet fully consolidated.

KEY FINDING 4

Civic Accountability and Government Transparency

Residents demonstrate a strong demand for accessible, transparent, and accountable civic information; however, access to decision-making

processes remains inconsistent and, at times, exclusionary.

Survey Insights

Survey responses consistently reflect interest in local governance, public decision-making, and civic issues. Respondents express a need for clearer, more accessible information about policies, meetings, and local decisions that affect their daily lives.

What residents described

Listening sessions identified both the demand for and barriers to civic information. Residents reported difficulty accessing information about local government actions, including decision-making processes and opportunities for participation. Several participants recounted submitting public comments on community issues without receiving any response. Decisions were often made without follow-up, explanation, or visible reporting, leaving residents uncertain about how their input was considered or how outcomes were determined.

The lack of feedback and coverage contributes to a broader perception that civic participation lacks a clear pathway. Evidence suggests that residents are not disengaged, but are often unable to pursue meaningful participation due to limited or opaque infrastructure. For example, one participant described exclusion from a homeowners association decision-making process due to insufficient access to meeting information. Others noted that civic processes frequently require prior knowledge or insider familiarity.

A participant in a virtual session observed that individuals “stay in silos and do not really listen to each other,” expressing hope that journalism could facilitate greater mutual understanding among residents. This highlights a dual challenge: ensuring access to information about decisions and fostering connections across communities affected by those decisions.

Initiatives such as Engaged Lincoln County were acknowledged but characterized as having limited reach. Participants indicated that, although the initiative aims to foster connection and dialogue, awareness remains uneven, and its presence within the community is not yet firmly established. Consequently, it has not addressed the broader gap identified across sessions: the absence of a visible, shared space where

A participant in a virtual session observed that individuals “stay in silos and do not really listen to each other,” expressing hope that journalism could facilitate greater mutual understanding among residents.

residents can reliably access information and engage with one another across community boundaries.

Recent coverage of a proposed ICE detention facility in Newport served as a natural experiment. Once credible reporting brought the issue to public attention, civic engagement increased significantly, with residents participating in public meetings, organizing across communities, and engaging in public discourse.

Conversely, examples demonstrate the potential impact of improved information flow. Recent coverage of a proposed ICE detention facility in Newport served as a natural experiment. Once credible reporting brought the issue to public attention, civic engagement increased significantly, with residents participating in public meetings, organizing across communities, and engaging in public discourse. The desire for civic participation is evident; however, the necessary information infrastructure to support it is often lacking.

A longer-term shift underlies these patterns, as noted across sessions. Participants identified the erosion of civic education in local schools, leaving many residents less prepared to understand or navigate government processes. Although not directly measured in the survey, this gap emerged consistently in discussions and influenced how residents interpret, access, and act on civic information.

What this reveals

Civic information in Lincoln County is distributed unevenly.

Although there is clear demand for transparency and accountability, access to such information is not consistently structured to facilitate public participation. In many cases, residents must already know where to find information or how to engage.

Effective civic communication demonstrates the potential for a more accessible and inclusive system. Conversely, ineffective communication reinforces perceptions of opacity and exclusion.

This gap is both informational and participatory. Access to civic information directly determines who can engage in local decision-making.

KEY FINDING 5

Informal and Relational Networks as Core Infrastructure

Informal networks such as neighbors, friends, and community groups function as essential infrastructure for information sharing, often filling gaps left by formal systems.

Survey Insights

Word of mouth accounts for 23.1% of residents' information access, establishing it as a significant channel. Combined with social media, this demonstrates that relational and networked communication forms are central to information circulation.

What residents described

Residents consistently reported relying on interpersonal connections rather than digital platforms. In emergency scenarios, participants emphasized checking on neighbors, alerting others, sharing supplies, and identifying safe routes. These practices reflect a strong ethic of mutual care that frequently substitutes for formal systems. As one Newport resident (25–34) stated, “Mostly word of mouth, since I’m getting increasingly untrusting of many local news outlets.”

This reliance typically follows a hub-and-spoke structure, in which a small number of trusted individuals, such as well-informed neighbors or community leaders, serve as informal hubs that distribute information within their networks. These individuals are often trusted more than government portals, which are perceived as unintuitive, and more than social media, which is viewed as unreliable. However, these networks are fragile: they are not visible to newcomers, lack formal support, and are not resilient to change. Complexity increases in communities with overlapping governance systems. As a retired Siletz resident explained, “My own community, the town of Siletz, is tiny. It can be hard to know exactly what is happening because there are two parallel forms of government here: tribal and city council. Finding out things is often word of mouth.”

Physical gathering spaces further sustain these networks. Coffee shops, cafés, libraries, restaurants, bars, grocery stores, and places of worship were most frequently identified as sites of information exchange. Residents described these locations as venues where information is collectively shared and interpreted. However, Lincoln County lacks a visible space that facilitates engagement across different community groups.

“My own community, the town of Siletz, is tiny. It can be hard to know exactly what is happening because there are two parallel forms of government here: tribal and city council. Finding out things is often word of mouth.”

— 65+ retired, female, Siletz resident

Community organizations also function as critical bridges between formal and informal systems. Groups such as the League of Women Voters have begun to occasionally provide city council summaries, at times offering the only accessible record of local decisions. However, this work remains uneven and largely unsupported. As one Waldport high school

student explained, “I don’t go to social media pages for news or events that are happening because they can easily be false or spread misinformation. I usually hear from local community groups because there are different opinions and you can kind of piece together what’s true and not based on what everyone else is saying and what officials say.”

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— Waldport High School, female student

These examples demonstrate that informal networks serve as essential infrastructure: they are trusted and responsive, yet remain uneven, difficult to access, and structurally unsupported.

What this reveals

Informal networks should not be considered supplementary; rather, they are foundational to the local information ecosystem.

In many cases, informal networks provide the fastest and most responsive communication available. However, they also introduce variability in both accuracy and reach.

This dynamic creates a dual condition: informal networks strengthen community resilience by enabling rapid information sharing, yet they also contribute to uneven access and the potential for misinformation. Efforts to strengthen the information ecosystem must recognize informal networks as central, rather than peripheral, components.

KEY FINDING 6

Demographic and Geographic Representation Gaps

Access to and participation in the local information ecosystem differ markedly across age groups, geographic regions, and communities, resulting in uneven representation and visibility.

Survey Insights

The survey sample demonstrates a bimodal age distribution, with substantial participation from younger residents, primarily due to school-based outreach, and from older residents, particularly those aged 65 and above. Middle-aged residents are underrepresented.

Survey responses were received from across Lincoln County, although engagement levels varied by location.

What residents described

Young residents did not express indifference toward local information. Instead, they identified a disconnect between available content and their preferred methods of accessing and engaging with information. Several respondents cited both quality and accessibility as barriers. As one Newport high school student stated, “I look at more state wide news because local news is not very good. I don’t read the news that much but when I was doing current events for a class I found that the local news sucked.” A South Beach resident under 18 echoed this sentiment: “I try to stay informed but it is difficult to in this community. I feel like there are not many resources. It would be nice if newspapers or other journals about local events were more widespread and accessible. We are unaware of where to look for accurate information.” These responses indicate that the gap lies not in interest, but in the relevance, format, and visibility of local information.

During the Newport listening session, participants identified challenges experienced by Spanish-speaking residents, such as the lack of accessible information in their primary language and limited representation in local media coverage. For example, a Hispanic couple expressed a preference for reporting on their community by individuals from their community. More broadly, participants observed that information that is neither bilingual nor mobile-first remains effectively inaccessible to a significant segment of the local workforce, particularly those in the service and labor sectors.

Residents also identified limited integration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous information systems. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, situated inland and outside the coastal news distribution network, may operate within a parallel information ecosystem that rarely

“I try to stay informed but it is difficult to in this community. I feel like there are not many resources. It would be nice if newspapers or other journals about local events were more widespread and accessible. We are unaware of where to look for accurate information.”

— Newport High School, female student

intersects with broader countywide coverage. As one Siletz resident (aged 25–34) stated, “I live in a very small community of Lincoln County and it is rare to have news stories about our area.” She also expressed concerns regarding misinformation: “I have a real problem in this community with fake journalism sites...I rarely ever look at them but there are multiple websites and Facebook pages that market themselves as local news when in reality they have no journalism training or ethics. I find it annoying and dangerous.” Isolation further shapes access. Smaller or more rural communities often rely more heavily on informal networks and have fewer direct connections to formal information sources. Across these examples, gaps in representation are not only about who is covered, but about who can access, trust, and participate in the information ecosystem.

“I have a real problem in this community with fake journalism sites... I rarely ever look at them but there are multiple websites and Facebook pages that market themselves as local news when in reality they have no journalism training or ethics. I find it annoying and dangerous.”

— 25-34 yo, Siletz female

What this reveals

The information ecosystem does not serve all residents equally.

Age, language, geography, and social connections all influence how individuals access and engage with information. These factors shape not only what people know, but also whether they feel included in their community’s civic life.

In this context, representation encompasses not only coverage, but also participation and accessibility.

Without deliberate efforts to address these gaps, existing patterns are likely to persist, thereby reinforcing disparities in both information access and civic engagement.

Recommendations

These recommendations result from integrating survey responses, insights from listening sessions, and comprehensive analysis. They are based on direct input from Lincoln County residents and translate observed patterns into actionable steps. Collectively, these recommendations position local journalism and civic information as essential civic infrastructure that underpins participation, safety, and community cohesion, rather than as isolated industry concerns.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Build a coordinated information infrastructure to reduce fragmentation and strengthen sustainability

Residents consistently reported the significant effort required to stay informed, often having to navigate multiple disconnected sources to assemble a basic understanding of local events. As one Lincoln City resident (65+) observed, “Finding out what’s going on in our tourist town is a challenge — must check several resources — there is no one place to go to find current events or plan the week or weekend.” Additional respondents emphasized the need for aggregation and coordination: “Possibly an aggregator of news from the variety of online news outlets, blogs, and newsletters in the county” (65+, Yachats), and “a main hub where you can find county wide news and then it can branch off into each specific city” (25–34, Lincoln City).

Residents’ feedback reflects not merely a desire for convenience, but highlights the absence of connective infrastructure. A county-wide information directory or community calendar, leveraging existing collaborations such as the Chronicle’s use of *Oregon Coast Today’s* calendar and *OPB’s* regional content-sharing model, would increase visibility of current resources and reduce duplication. A system designed for both active search and passive delivery via opt-in alerts or newsletters would alleviate the burden of navigating information for residents.

Precedents for this type of coordination are already established. The

Collectively, these recommendations position local journalism and civic information as essential civic infrastructure that underpins participation, safety, and community cohesion, rather than as isolated industry concerns.

Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University provides a well-documented example of how regional news ecosystems can align through shared infrastructure, collaborative reporting, and resource pooling. Their work demonstrates that cooperation among outlets does not compromise editorial independence but instead enhances a region’s overall capacity to meet its information needs. Lincoln County could benefit from adapting these lessons to its smaller, more geographically dispersed context.



The mission of the Center for Cooperative Media is to grow and strengthen local journalism and support an informed society in New Jersey and beyond.

However, coordination without sustainability risks exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. Local outlets experiencing financial strain cannot accommodate increased demand without additional investment. Therefore, any initiative to develop shared infrastructure must be accompanied by strategies that support local journalism, such as grant funding, diversified revenue streams, and opportunities for community contribution.

This analysis indicates the need for a publicly maintained, free-access county information directory, potentially co-managed with the public library, to aggregate news, government updates, and community information. Such an initiative should be coupled with investment in the long-term sustainability of local outlets, ensuring that coordination strengthens rather than conceals underlying vulnerabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Establish a resilient emergency communication system and ensure residents know how to use it

The most pressing gap identified during listening sessions was not general access to information, but rather the failure of communication systems during crises. Residents highlighted the lack of reliable, real-time communication at critical moments. For example, one Newport resident (65+) requested “a radio station with regular news/weather and emergency broadcasts daily,” while another observed, “During emergencies, when electricity goes out, there is NO local news available via radio or newspaper websites in Lincoln County” (65+, Newport).

Residents further expressed frustration with dependence on informal channels for critical updates. As one participant stated, “Shouldn’t have to pay or rely on individuals posting to Facebook — it should be the county-provided page” (55–64, Waldport). Participants consistently called for enhanced radio capabilities, clearer alert systems, and in-

creased public awareness of available emergency communication tools.

The primary challenge is not technological capacity, but rather coordination and communication. Establishing a designated emergency broadcast frequency, supported by infrastructure such as a generator and partnerships with trusted institutions like *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, would create a reliable foundation. However, infrastructure alone is inadequate; residents must be informed in advance about where to access emergency information.

A sustained public awareness campaign utilizing physical signage, school communications, library outreach, and utility bill inserts would help ensure that residents understand how to access emergency information. This approach should include enhancing the clarity and accessibility of systems such as **Lincoln Alerts** and incorporating preparedness education into community outreach. Additionally, hands-on emergency preparedness training should be provided to encourage residents to assemble a “go bag” that includes a battery-powered or hand-crank radio to ensure reliable access to critical information when digital systems are unavailable.

This situation requires a countywide commitment to a unified, resilient emergency broadcast standard, accompanied by a proactive and inclusive awareness strategy to ensure all residents know how to access emergency information.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Strengthen trust through transparent editorial practices and investment in journalistic capacity

Trust emerged as the most significant and multifaceted theme in the survey. Among 110 responses advocating for reduced bias and increased trust, residents expressed not a rejection of journalism, but a demand for greater process clarity and accountability. As one Newport resident (25–34) observed, “It would help to have clearer sourcing, more transparency about where information comes from.” Another respondent (65+, Waldport) highlighted the importance of verifiability: “I want to see the name, court case number, and link to the public record.”

These expectations reflect a broader understanding of trust as something earned through consistent practice. Residents reported evaluating



Community members, visitors, and businesses can choose up to 3 ways to receive emergency notifications and community information from Public Safety, City, Tribal, and County Officials for Lincoln County, Oregon.

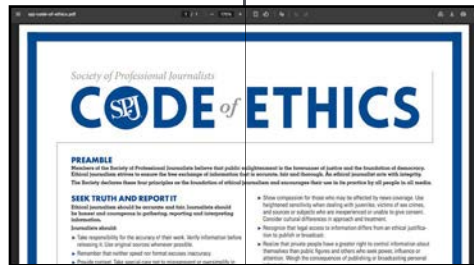
journalism based on consistency, transparency, and demonstrated independence. Concerns regarding financial influence also emerged, as one Tidewater resident (65+) stated, “When money is the motive for news reporting, credibility is gone.”



Trusting News equip journalists to listen and engage with humility and to explain their integrity through day-to-day transparency.

Trust is not a singular concept. This analysis distinguishes between cognitive trust, which is grounded in demonstrated competence, accuracy, and consistency, and emotional trust, which is rooted in a sense of connection, recognition, and care. This framework is informed by the work of **Trusting News**, a national organization dedicated to helping newsrooms build trust through transparent and engaged practices (disclosure: Professor DeVigal serves on its board), and was further clarified in a recent public discussion with executive director Joy Mayer. In Lincoln County, residents appear to extend emotional trust readily to neighbors, word-of-mouth networks, and journalists who are visibly present in the community. However, gaps persist in cognitive trust. Cognitive trust is earned through a consistent track record, transparency regarding processes and potential conflicts of interest, a reputation validated by others, and a demonstrated willingness to acknowledge and correct mistakes.

Addressing these concerns requires establishing a visible editorial infrastructure. Many professional journalists adhere to the **Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics**, which provides clear public guidance on accuracy, independence, minimizing harm, and accountability. For outlets lacking a visible standard, this widely recognized framework offers an immediate and credible foundation. When combined with clear corrections policies and source transparency, these practices create a basis for accountability. Even modest investments in reporting capacity directly address the quality concerns identified by residents.



The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

Trust is further strengthened by coverage that represents the entire community. Solutions-oriented reporting, as well as stories highlighting achievement and connection, complement accountability journalism and reinforce relevance. Establishing accessible channels for residents to contribute information or raise concerns further integrates community perspectives into the reporting process.

These findings indicate the need for a commitment to transparent editorial standards, investment in reporting capacity, and practices that consistently demonstrate accountability and care.

These findings indicate the need for a coordinated approach to civic coverage that integrates community-based reporting, improved access

RECOMMENDATION 4

Expand civic accountability through structured coverage and accessible public information

Residents articulated a significant need for clearer and more consistent coverage of local government and civic decision-making. Requests for more in-depth reporting often focused on meetings, decisions, and mechanisms for follow-up accountability. For example, one Waldport resident (65+) stated, “A source with more local, county, and state government weekly wrap-up stories and upcoming agendas.” Another resident highlighted the importance of clarity: “I would like to see better highlights of televised meetings and a recap of how elected officials voted” (65+, Waldport).

Listening sessions further reinforced this demand, with participants calling for prioritized coverage of civic processes, enhanced access to public records, and clearer communication about outcomes. The lack of follow-up and transparency contributes to disengagement, even among actively involved residents.

The Documenters model provides a national template for civic coverage infrastructure, offering training and compensation for community members to attend, document, and publish summaries of local government proceedings. Implementing a documenters program in Lincoln County would address persistent coverage gaps without necessitating a full-time reporter at every meeting. Coverage should encompass not only city council and county commission meetings but also school boards, education boards, planning commissions, and other civic processes with substantial community impact. A regional precedent exists: **Uplift Local** has successfully adapted the **Documenters model in the Columbia Gorge**, demonstrating its viability in Oregon.

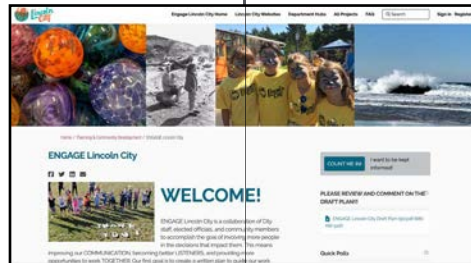
Simultaneously, enhancing access to public records through searchable, free digital portals and the timely publication of meeting materials would reduce barriers to public understanding. Implementing a “close the loop” standard, in which community input is followed by clear updates within a defined timeframe, would further reinforce accountability and trust.

These findings indicate the need for a coordinated approach to civic coverage that integrates community-based reporting, improved access



The Documenters Network equips people to access and produce the information they need. They make their work, process and tools as open and useful as possible.

to public records, and clear, consistent communication practices. The objective is not merely to increase information output, but to align the processes by which information is gathered, interpreted, and disseminated, enabling residents to observe, comprehend, and engage with civic processes.



ENGAGE Lincoln City is a collaboration of City staff, elected officials, and community members to accomplish the goal of involving more people in the decisions that impact them.

Existing elements of this coordination provide practical models. The **Engaged Lincoln City** program illustrates how structured participation, clear pathways for input, and visible follow-up can foster a more accessible civic environment. This framework could be adapted and implemented in other communities within Lincoln County. Similarly, **Representative Gomberg's** newsletter exemplifies accountable communication at the regional level.

Explicitly naming outcomes, acknowledging differing perspectives, and creating a verifiable public record of decisions and commitments demonstrate the transparency that residents consistently identify as essential. These are operational practices that can be replicated by local governments and institutions.

The Civic Information Index further demonstrates the necessity of a systemic approach. The Index analyzes the interactions among policies, local culture, and information systems in shaping civic life, emphasizing that gaps in access, participation, and trust are interconnected conditions rather than isolated failures. This assessment is grounded in that framework, recognizing that investment in civic information infrastructure yields compounding benefits for engagement, trust, and community capacity.



The Civic Information Index focuses efforts to revitalize local news on the core purpose of journalism: "to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing."

A coordinated approach must also prioritize closing the loop. Residents who participate in listening sessions and surveys expect transparency regarding how their input is utilized. City officials and community partners should adopt a clear standard for follow-up, providing concise and tangible updates within two weeks of any engagement. This practice demonstrates that participation has meaningful outcomes, reinforces accountability, and strengthens the relationship between institutions and the communities they serve.

the communities they serve.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Formalize and support informal networks as essential information infrastructure

Informal networks are central to Lincoln County's information ecosystem. Residents depend on neighbors, community groups, and physical gathering spaces to access and interpret information. As one South Beach resident (45-54) observed, "I'd love to have regularly repeating public events... to suggest relevant local news sources." Another resident emphasized the need for a "clearing house type place" for community information (65+, Yachats).

This reliance is particularly evident in Siletz. As one resident (65+) stated in the Key Findings section, "My own community, the town of Siletz, is tiny... Finding out things is often word of mouth." These networks are effective due to their trustworthiness and integration into daily life, yet they remain uneven, fragile, and inaccessible to those outside established connections.

The objective should not be to replace these networks, but rather to connect them with more structured systems. Investment in physical infrastructure, such as bulletin boards, printed materials in community spaces, and events hosted by trusted institutions like libraries, would broaden their reach. Simultaneously, establishing mechanisms for community members to contribute information directly to journalistic processes would enhance both accuracy and visibility. See *Documenters in Recommendation #4* above.

Sustainability is a foundational concern. Supporting this ecosystem necessitates a combination of philanthropic, private, and public investment. National initiatives such as **Press Forward** and policy frameworks advanced by **Rebuild Local News** offer models for coordinating these funding streams.

A deliberate effort is required to formalize informal networks through infrastructure development, integration, and sustained investment.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Expand representation through geographic coverage, multilingual access, and youth engagement

Representation gaps are evident both geographically and demographically. Residents throughout Lincoln County have expressed concern that



Press Forward mobilizes funders and resources to strengthen local news so communities are informed, connected and engaged.



The Rebuild Local News coalition is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advances public policies to counter the collapse of local news and revitalize community journalism.

news coverage is concentrated in specific areas, particularly Newport, resulting in reduced visibility for other communities. As one Lincoln City resident (65+) observed, “The articles now seemed to be geared towards Newport... does not pertain to those of us in Lincoln City.” Another respondent (65+, Waldport) emphasized the importance of efforts “to cover the whole county.”

In Siletz, this gap is particularly pronounced. As one resident (25–34) stated, “It is rare to have news stories about our area.” These perspectives underscore the need for deliberate geographic coverage, which could be achieved through a satellite reporter model that places journalists within specific communities. Additionally, partnerships with trusted local institutions, including libraries, schools, and tribal organizations, could help generate story ideas and facilitate more effective information distribution.



Through community-driven journalism, Documented expands access to news and critical information that helps immigrants in New York and across the country thrive.

Language and accessibility determine who can participate in civic life and who is excluded. Residents have identified a significant need for multilingual information, particularly for Spanish-speaking communities, as well as for distribution methods that align with individuals’ daily routines. Effective strategies include bilingual reporting, mobile-first channels such as WhatsApp or SMS alerts, and partnerships with employers and community organizations that already possess the trust of these populations.

Documented NY provides a compelling model: this nonprofit newsroom is designed specifically for immigrant communities, publishing in Spanish, Chinese, and Haitian Creole, and addressing issues such as immigration, housing, labor, and health care that directly impact readers’ lives. The tagline “news that speaks your language” represents journalism that reflects its audience’s lived experiences. Adopting a similar approach in Lincoln County, through hiring journalists with connections to the communities they report on or through collaborative reporting partnerships, would enhance both representation and the trust necessary to transform readers into active participants.

Young residents identified both barriers and opportunities regarding access to news. One Newport respondent (18–24) suggested that “having news accessible in the school... would be really impactful,” while another respondent under 18 stated, “If there was a physical copy of the news in our front office, I would read it.” Schools are a trusted yet underutilized channel for civic information. Expanding their role could involve student-led reporting programs, partnerships with educators to integrate local news into curricula, and distribution through school-based platforms such as announcements, newsletters, and common

spaces.

Additional strategies may further enhance inclusion among underserved communities. Establishing pop-up newsrooms or listening posts in rural and coastal areas would provide visible points of access and engagement. Community ambassadors, or “information stewards,” could help close information gaps by sharing and translating content within the networks they already serve, reinforcing the pattern identified in Key Finding 5: residents place greater trust in people than in government systems often seen as difficult to navigate or social media platforms viewed as unreliable. Regular coverage commitments, such as rotating geographic beats or setting minimum coverage thresholds for underrepresented communities, would promote consistency rather than sporadic attention. Aligning coverage with community rhythms, including cultural events and seasonal work cycles, would increase journalism’s relevance and presence in daily life.

Models such as **Newsberg’s** hybrid print-and-digital approach illustrate the effectiveness of combining multiple access points. Implementing similar strategies in Lincoln County could address both digital and physical access barriers.

These findings indicate the need for a comprehensive strategy that expands geographic coverage, invests in multilingual outreach, and develops pathways for youth engagement, thereby ensuring that the information ecosystem reflects and serves the full diversity of Lincoln County.

A note on implementation

The recommendations presented are interconnected. Initiatives to establish a centralized directory, broaden civic coverage, and enhance informal networks all indicate a collective need for coordination. Investments in trust and emergency communication rely on the existence of dependable local outlets. Advancements in one domain will reinforce progress in others.

The primary challenge lies not in identifying solutions, but in integrating them into a system that accurately reflects the flow of information within Lincoln County.



Newsberg is an independent, locally owned media outlet serving the Newberg-Dundee area with daily reporting, a weekly newsletter, and a commitment to the community it covers.

Conclusion and Potential Next Steps

This assessment provides a comprehensive overview of Lincoln County's civic information ecosystem at a specific point in time. Its scope and findings are influenced by the academic context in which it was conducted. Completed within a 10-week academic term, the project demonstrates the advantages of a university-based approach, including mobilizing students, gathering substantive input, and synthesizing insights efficiently. However, it is also limited by the short duration of engagement. The report alone cannot maintain the ongoing relationships, iterative processes, and sustained follow-through necessary for meaningful change.

Ongoing follow-through is essential. Residents who participated in surveys and listening sessions did so with the expectation that their input would result in tangible outcomes. Implementing a transparent process for providing timely updates on the use of findings is a critical initial step in maintaining trust and momentum. Without such practices, even the most comprehensive assessment risks being perceived as extractive rather than constructive.

The listening sessions provide a replicable model for ongoing engagement. These sessions revealed not only information needs but also relationships, shared concerns, and residents' willingness to contribute to solution development. Sustained and recurring listening—through community forums, targeted outreach, or integration within existing institutions—can function as a continuous feedback mechanism, ensuring the system remains responsive.

Lincoln County benefits from an existing foundation of engaged stakeholders. This project identified a coalition of local media organizations, community partners, public institutions, and residents who acknowledge both the challenges and opportunities present. Initiatives such as Engaged Lincoln City illustrate that coordinated civic participation is already feasible at the local level. The subsequent phase should prioritize connecting and expanding these efforts across communities, aligning them where appropriate, and ensuring adequate resources for sustainability. The recommendations presented in this report serve as a practical roadmap. They reference existing models, validated approaches, and adaptable frameworks suitable for incremental implementation. Progress will result from a series of coordinated actions, including enhancing information visibility, strengthening editorial practices, expanding coverage through community-based models, investing in multilingual access,



and reinforcing emergency communication systems. Collectively, these measures contribute to a more coherent and resilient infrastructure.

The [Agora Journalism Center](#) remains committed to supporting these initiatives as part of a broader statewide effort to enhance civic information health. Through research, teaching, and partnership, Agora will convene stakeholders, disseminate models from other communities, support experimentation, and contribute to ongoing evaluation. Lincoln County's experience will inform similar efforts throughout Oregon, reinforcing the principle that interconnected local solutions can scale into a more robust system.

Ultimately, the success of these efforts will be determined by subsequent outcomes: whether residents can more readily access and trust the information they need, whether communities are accurately represented in local coverage, and whether the systems that support civic life become increasingly connected, inclusive, and sustainable.

Residents and civic leaders convened in Lincoln City for one of two county-wide listening sessions, which revealed not only information gaps but also shared concerns and a collective willingness to develop solutions. Maintaining these dialogues represents a constructive step forward, fostering ongoing engagement with the county's civic life.