

INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT AM I READING?

What follows is an assessment of the information ecosystem – the dynamic of information creation, distribution, and consumption – of Eureka, California. Eureka, (population 26,998) is the county seat and largest city of Humboldt County (population 136,373) located along California’s remote and rural northern coast. Humboldt is the home of Access Humboldt, a local non-profit, public access media network, and Internews, a global non-profit supporting healthy information worldwide.

The purpose of this project is to inform Access Humboldt’s new strategic plan for 2020-2025, and to help Access Humboldt better serve the information needs of their evolving community. We will also provide a version of this report for the general public, particularly journalists, philanthropists, government officials, and the civil society and activist community for consideration in pursuit of their civic and policy goals.

KEY FINDINGS

For its size and level of wealth, Eureka has a diverse array of information sources.

Eureka is one of the smallest media markets in the country (#195 of 205). Despite this, it enjoys a local newspaper of record, an alternative weekly, two network affiliates with local news broadcasts, a PBS affiliate, two commercial local news sources, and a host of commercial and community radio stations. With the notable exception of the sudden closure of KHSU, the local NPR affiliate hosted by Humboldt State University, Eureka’s market has remained remarkably stable.

Eurekans generally have access to an information source they trust.

The vast majority of the people we talked to, both in and outside the media industry, agreed there were multiple trustworthy news operations. Despite generally high levels of trust, some respondents raised concerns about sensationalist stories, clickbait headlines and salacious articles of little civic value. A small minority of respondents cited what they perceived to be conservative or liberal biases at a few outlets. The trend toward a polarized media audience has started, but people’s local news consumption preferences are more diverse than for their national news.



Access Humboldt studio in Eureka

People need better information about how they could address social challenges.

Nearly everyone has the same concerns in mind: homelessness and addictive drug use. There was palpable despair among the public about how to tackle these problems. Respondents describe reporting as depressing and demoralizing, an unrelenting succession of tragedies and outrages. In this environment, it is no surprise that public support for policies to address these problems erodes.



Access Humboldt production room in Eureka

Consolidation and closures threaten to degrade the ecosystem.

Media outlets have been closing across the country over the past 10 years. While Eureka and Humboldt County have been spared the disaster of massive closures, there may be signs of trouble on the horizon for the media market.

Users are fast moving to mobile consumption via social media and local blogs. Media consumers are moving to online, mobile consumption of information even more quickly than formal content creators and journalism institutions. This has given an advantage to digital-first media operations, particularly popular among adults under 40.

Information access and usefulness is severely limited for minority communities.

The information landscape looks much different for Spanish-, Hmong-, and other minority-language speakers. For these Eurekaans there is little or no local journalism in their language. Information is passed via word-of-mouth. Their children, second- and third-generation immigrants, are more likely to use social media and to prefer consuming information in English. Several people we spoke with lamented the lack of local Native American news sources, though they noted this was a bigger problem in tribal areas in rural remote pockets of the county.

“You don’t hear the news talking about our community often. It pushes people away. It focuses on the negative, or on drug dealers from Mexico. We need bilingual local media.”

– Luisa Angon, volunteer and organizer for Latinx communities

Standing out in its optimism. Nearly everyone we spoke to, either on the street or in an interview, inside the industry or outside, is optimistic and hopeful for the future of media and information. In the context of a national crisis in local journalism, Eurekaans bucked the trend.

SUGGESTIONS

While trust and confidence remain high, we can see the start of some problematic trends that have occurred elsewhere. To maintain the current optimism will require attention from the media and civil society communities. This will include neighborhood associations, international relief organizations, labor unions, faith-based groups, non-profit media outlets and local philanthropies to step up and maintain this progress.

Solutions Journalism collaboratives

Eurekans largely agree on the big challenges facing their community. But they feel hopeless about the solutions to those challenges. Collaborative projects that bring together multiple newsrooms and platforms could help the public build a greater understanding of policy solutions to their problems. Usually, these entail a non-profit organization acting as the convener and standards-setter for the reporting.

“The news doesn’t come around [to us] anymore because homeless populations are not news. They should cover when a homeless person is successful. Five percent don’t want to change, the rest do.”

– Betty Kwan Chin, homeless peoples’ advocate & non-profit leader

Unique, dedicated effort from on-profit community to serve underserved communities

The information needs of the neediest Eurekans are not well served by the current information ecosystem. This is in part due to language barriers and content constraints. Almost all journalism produced in Eureka and the larger county is in English. Very little content reflects the experiences of, or empathizes with Eureka’s most vulnerable people, including minorities, migrants, and the poor.

Consider dedicated channels for listening and addressing community concerns

Humboldt citizens are opinionated and want the opportunity to express themselves, find outlets for their concerns and answers to their questions about public life. Listening Post installations like those that LPC members have placed in public parks, businesses, and at events, as well as dedicated lines for community members to submit questions and comments via SMS, could be new ways for community information organizations to engage with public needs and fill gaps missed by the formal media and journalism sector.

Find synergies with the public library system

Humboldt’s County Library system already has a mandate to inform the public, with a very complementary mission and reach to Access Humboldt. Collaborations with the library system on content creation, media literacy, and public engagement could help each institution fill the content and empathy gaps in the ecosystem.

Explore new models for public access in the digital access era

Eurekans and citizens of the wider county do clamor for a voice in the public debate, but public access television is not their preferred platform. With the vast majority of residents shifting to online media consumption, organizations like Access Humboldt must adjust their public access model to prepare the next generations of local content creators to fill information gaps. Revenue streams that would return some of the value of Humboldt County’s internet user attention back to the county in the form of inclusivity and public information grants may be the next logical step toward a more equitable information ecosystem.

Further research

We can project conclusions onto other parts of the Humboldt County community, as we spoke to many in Eureka who reside or keep tabs on other parts of the county. But, to understand the full depth of the experience and context, further field research in other parts of the county would be required. This would necessarily include rural areas far from Eureka, as well as tribal communities, which may have been poorly represented by our samples. We could also narrow our research to gain a better understanding of the needs of specific groups.

“Our problems are clear: drug use, the needles, the crime. It’s so depressing but I don’t know what to do about it. I don’t know what is supposed to make things better.”
– Jane, 60-year old Eureka resident

NEXT STEPS

Access Humboldt will share this paper with their Board and community of stakeholders as it considers how to adjust its public access strategies in the evolving information ecosystem, along with some of the underlying data that has been collected.



Local youth access the Lost Coast Outpost events calendar to plan their weekend at the Eureka Marina (Photo credit – Joselyn Lindsey)

In consultation with those partners, Access Humboldt will develop and present its new strategy in the Fall of 2019 for consultation and refinement. The strategy will be submitted to the Board for approval later this year.

Internews and Access Humboldt will explore opportunities for further collaboration to serve the information needs in Humboldt county, building on their shared experience in this process and their collective expertise. This may include joint fundraising for projects suggested above from philanthropic sources in Northern California.

Given more time and resources, our teams would broaden the assessment across more of Humboldt County. Access Humboldt’s mandate covers the whole county and includes specific broadcast agreements with seven jurisdictions. While our findings focus on Eureka and the people we spoke with there, many of these same dynamics hold for other towns and rural Humboldt County.



EUREKA INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT

EUREKA, CALIFORNIA
MAY - JUNE 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	2
Eureka's Media Landscape	5
Research Methodology	10
Findings	17
Suggestions	25
Next Steps	28
Acknowledgements	29

BACKGROUND

About The Listening Post Collective and This Report

The Listening Post Collective is a community media initiative that works with local partners to engage, inform and support communities across the U.S. that are underserved by mainstream news coverage. We believe information changes lives.

The Listening Post Collective (LPC) is a project of Internews, an international nonprofit based in Arcata, California, which operates globally in deeply-challenging environments to increase access to vital information. After working for 30 years championing local media solutions in some of the hardest places on earth, Internews recognized that the very same information problems – lack of trust, lost community connection and populations entirely left out of the conversation – were growing in the U.S. as well.

With local media outlets closing or downsizing, a growing number of communities across the U.S are deprived of relevant information necessary to make informed decisions about their lives and livelihoods. Our mission is to build healthy information ecosystems that are a direct response to peoples' informational needs, resulting in more connected, empowered and inclusive communities.

Through our Place Based Practice, the Listening Post Collective works with community groups, local funders and journalism professionals to improve the information ecosystem in underserved areas. We perform deep information ecosystem assessments, identify information needs, gaps and opportunities, and then work with local partners to design a community driven project that improves overall information access.



Television producers in training are shown here monitoring a production in the control room at Access Humboldt's Community Media Center. Content created by members can be televised on four Suddenlink cable TV channels, broadcast over the radio on KZZH-LP and archived online at Archive.org for on-demand distribution. (Photo credit: Access Humboldt Staff)

Thanks to the generous support from the Democracy Fund, we conducted the following Information Ecosystem Assessment to better understand how local Eureka residents' priorities are covered by local media and how this impacts their ability to thrive. This is a rapid assessment, using largely volunteer time and existing staff resources from both organizations. We are sharing our methods and resources with Access Humboldt, so that together we might analyze the needs of the wider Humboldt County community in the near future. The following assessment was conducted from May-July 2019.

Underpinning this work is our belief that information is an essential ingredient for community health. Research shows that exposure to quality local news makes Americans more likely to take public stands on issues, join national policy conversations and express themselves publicly – all of which are key components of a healthy democracy. Involving residents in journalism by inviting feedback, giving them a voice in coverage and surveying their attitudes and behaviors has been linked to improved civic competencies.

About Eureka and its Media Market

Eureka is the center of the media landscape for Humboldt County, geographically, politically, and commercially. All of the media outlets that aim to serve the entire county are based in Eureka, with the exception of Lost Coast Communications and, until recently, KHSU.

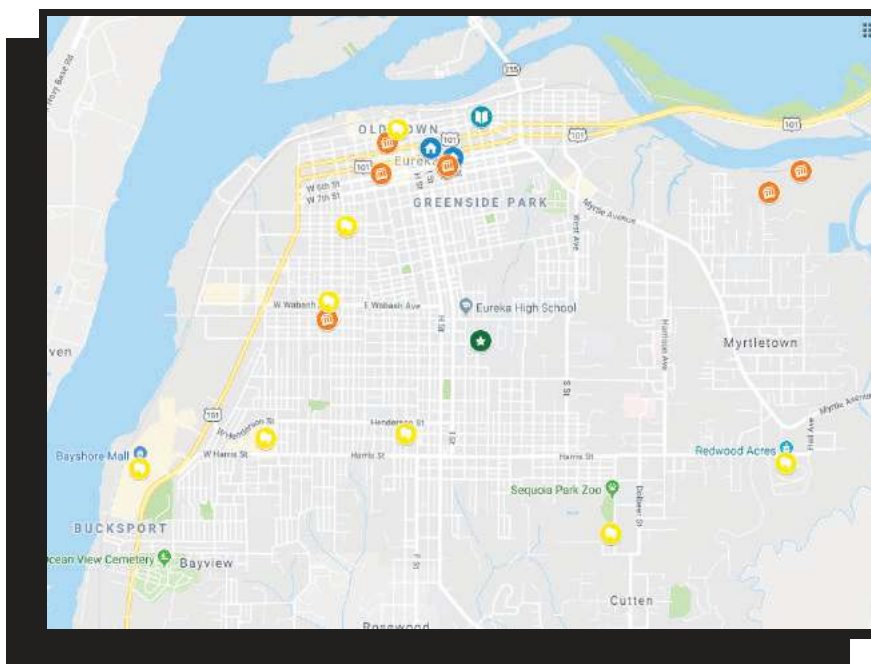
Census data from 2018 estimates the [city's population](#) at 26,998, largest in the county by a wide margin. Eureka accounts for nearly 20% of the [total county population](#) of 136,373. Eureka is also one of the most diverse communities in the county. The population of Eureka is 75.4% white, 11.1% Hispanic/Latino, 7.1% Asian, 3.4% Native American and 2.3% African American. [Census data](#) reported 1,500 Spanish speakers, 780 Hmong speakers, and 182 Chinese speakers in the city. Thus, around 10% of Eureka's population speaks a language other than English, as their first language. Despite this, nearly all journalism about Eureka is in English. About 7.4% of Eureka's population is foreign-born, far below the California proportion of 27% and the overall US proportion of 13.4%. Incomes in Eureka are lower than the US and California averages, though housing prices are significantly above the US average. Unsurprisingly, homeownership rates are lower than in other parts of the State.

With its low population both in the city and surrounding county, and its isolated geography far from major commercial routes, the Eureka media market is [ranked #195](#) among the 206 media markets in the United States. With 59,610 households, the Eureka media market is one of the smallest in the country. Redding-Chico to the East (#131), and Medford-Klamath Falls to the north (#140) each have three to four times the population. San Francisco (#6), to the south, is one of the biggest in the country.

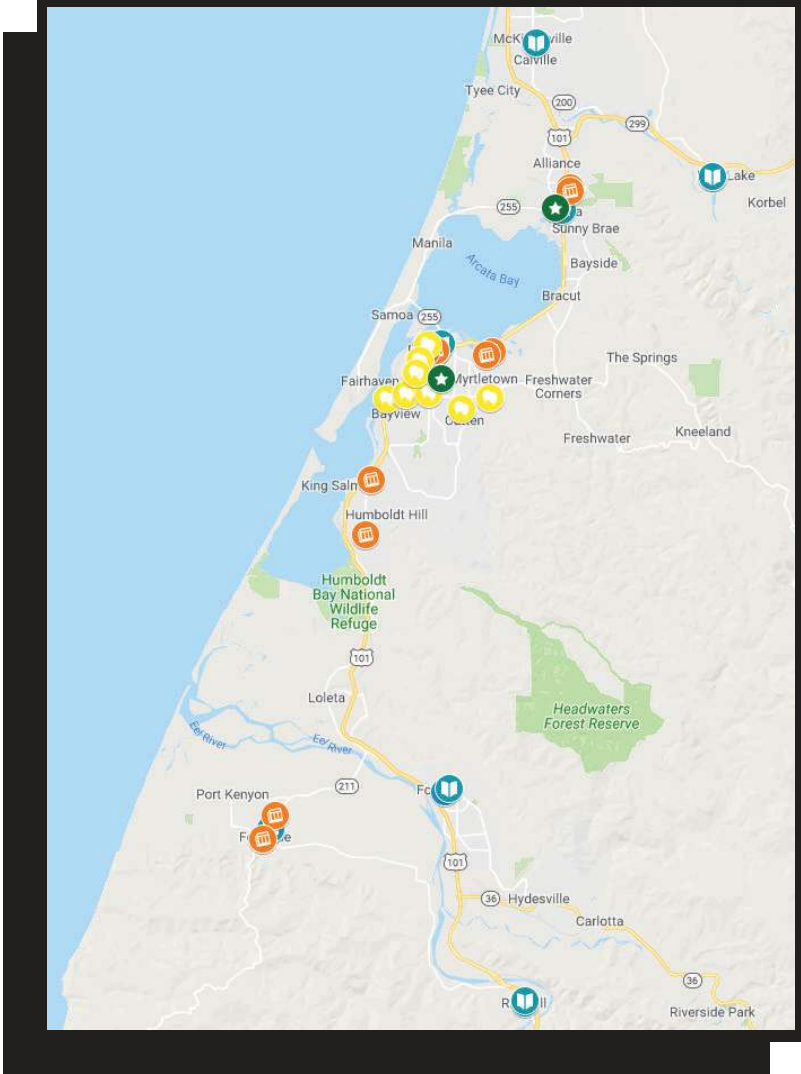
Despite its small population, Eureka and the greater Humboldt County market served from the city is noteworthy for the number of media outlets it maintains. But this is only a small number of actual workers – only about 300 are employed in the information and media sector in the entire county, according to US Census data.

The maps below show Eureka and central Humboldt County with markers for local media organizations, libraries, government facilities and listening tour locations.

To view this interactive IEA map online, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/iea-map-2019>



The city of Eureka is shown on the previous page with listening tour locations in yellow and media organizations in orange. Access Humboldt and Internews are represented by green circles with white stars. Directly below is a view of central Humboldt County from McKinleyville to Rio Dell. A few media outlets and other information assets noted in this report are outside of the frame of this map, including KMUD in Garberville. This map is available online at <https://tinyurl.com/iea-map-2019>



EUREKA'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Major News Sources

Eureka has a number of commercial and non-commercial news sources across several platforms. Those that were most often cited in our listening activities were:

The Times-Standard (Print/Online) is the Eureka-based daily newspaper and online source, serving as the newspaper of record for more than 150 years. It employs a newsroom staff of eight, and reports a circulation of 23,000.

Lost Coast Outpost (LoCO – Online) is the online news outlet of Ferndale-based Lost Coast Communications, which owns four commercial radio stations in the county (KHUM, KWPT, KSLG, KLGE). LoCO claims 400,000 unique monthly visitors. LoCO employs [four reporters](#) under an editor and has a number of regular additional contributors. KHUM and other stations will occasionally carry content produced for LoCO. The website provides a number of widgets for consuming data-based news, including police calls, arrests, and road blockages.

North Coast Journal (NCJ – Print/Online) is the county's alt-weekly newspaper. Its news operation is limited to weekly feature stories, which often focus on culture and arts. Weekly editions include regular editorials and some letters to the editor and op-eds. NCJ employs a newsroom staff of about four, and reports a circulation of 20,000.

Redwood News / News Channel 3 (TV/Online) is the local news production brand for [KIEM-TV](#), the Eureka-based NBC affiliate. For a number of years, KIEM was the only local television news production. It broadcasts 8 ½ hours of weekly news programs. In recent years, KIEM improved its graphics and format production capabilities to better serve the digital television market.

North Coast News / Fox 28 (TV/Online) is the local news production brand for [KBVU-TV](#), the Eureka-based Fox affiliate. *North Coast News* is much more limited than *Redwood News*, providing half-hour broadcasts nightly at 10pm.

Redheaded Blackbelt (Online) is the [newsblog of Kym Kemp](#), a former reporter at the *Times-Standard* who started her own online-only journalism property, supported exclusively by ads. While essentially a one-woman operation, Redheaded Blackbelt (or Kym Kemp herself) was widely cited by Eurekaans as a primary source of news and information.



Old Town Coffee and Chocolate is a popular hub in which to celebrate local community and access local information. (Photo credit: Jasmine Manuel)

Other Formal Information Sources

Eurekans mentioned a number of other sources in our interviews and surveys, though less frequently than those listed above.

KHSU, the [local NPR affiliate](#) based at Humboldt State University (HSU), shut down unexpectedly in April 2019. A community of its member-supporters and advisory board leaders are attempting to restart the operation. KHSU produced and aired a regular morning news bulletin during the national *Morning Edition* NPR broadcast. It also produced a limited number of locally-focused public affairs programs, including the weekly *EcoNews Report*, the monthly news segment *Point of Focus*, and the occasional feature *Que Onda*, which features segments from HSU's student-run bilingual newspaper *El Lenador*. Since closing its doors, KHSU has been rebroadcasting the signal of North State Public Radio in Redding, and has stopped social media activity entirely.

Radio Bilingue, a [syndicated Spanish-language radio network](#), ceased broadcasting under the umbrella of KHSU in April 2019. A recent survey estimated their listenership at 135,000.

Mad River Union (MRU) is a [weekly community paper](#) based in Arcata with some coverage of Eureka issues. Subscriptions are listed at \$35/year, though most copies are sold at retailers. It publishes online and reports a paper circulation of 3,000-4,000.

Senior News is a monthly publication focused on issues facing the senior population across Humboldt County, published with the support of the Humboldt County Senior Resource Center. It has a staff of two and a circulation of 11,000-13,000 depending on funding. This includes 6,000 copies as a monthly insert into the *Times-Standard*.

KEET, the [local PBS affiliate](#), broadcasts out of Eureka. KEET produces and airs public affairs talk shows including *North Coast Perspectives* and *Conversations*, but produces no regular local news reporting. It was not cited widely as a source of local news and information.

KMUD is a long-running community radio station based in Garberville in southern Humboldt County, which offers frequent public affairs programming and covers issues relevant to Eureka. KMUD reports half of its subscribers and underwriters are based in the Eureka area, and balancing the interests of listeners and supporters in southern and central Humboldt County is a challenge.

The Lumberjack is a monthly student newspaper produced by Humboldt State University students with a circulation of 8,000. It focuses on issues relevant to the students. The paper is available for free at several establishments in Eureka, which is home to some HSU students and staff.

El Lenador is a monthly bilingual student magazine produced by HSU, which translates some stories into Spanish. It is distributed freely and has a circulation of 3,000.

A few news sources occasionally cover issues related to Eureka, but were less-important sources for local news, according to our research:

- **The Ferndale Enterprise** is a local weekly paper in nearby Ferndale with a circulation of 1,200-3,500. Subscribers pay \$58/year.
- **KINS 106.3 FM** is a news / talk format radio station covering Humboldt County. It was infrequently cited as an information source by those Eureka we met. It is a CBS news affiliate and distributes nationally-syndicated conservative radio programs as well as producing a local news bulletin and local interview shows.
- The ABC affiliate in Redding, **KRCR-TV / News Channel 7**, provides limited local news on the region, but production is largely based in Redding and focuses on that area. The Eureka-based partner station, KAEF-TV, does not produce its own news.
- KHSU now rebroadcasts Redding-based **North State Public Radio**, which may on occasion cover events in Eureka and Humboldt county.
- **Humboldt Last Week** is an alternative online radio feed and [weekly podcast](#) by journalist Myles Cochrane. It partners with established outlets like *Redheaded Blackbelt* or *North Coast Journal* to carry content. The format also includes interviews on local issues.
- CBS affiliate **KVIQ** cut its news program in 2005, and broadcasts only syndicated programs, meaning CBS-branded local news also comes from Redding-based affiliates.

Access Humboldt in the Local Media Market

In discussions with mediamakers, we found Access Humboldt's mandated-services, such as recordings, broadcasts, and archives of community meetings, to be a very useful resource for area journalists. They are used as the basis for stories, or to put local officials on-record for hot-button issues and allow journalists to cover events that they could never attend in person. In this way, Access Humboldt makes quality local journalism more efficient and lower-cost. In a roundtable with media outlets, *North Coast Journal* and *Lost Coast Outpost* journalists both recalled using Access Humboldt services for stories. The value of this service to the community should not be underestimated at a time



Local Resident enjoys *The North Coast Journal* (Photo credit: Joselyn Lindsey)

when falling revenues among media outlets is leading to strains on newsgathering budgets. The number of local journalists covering Eureka and Humboldt County has fallen by dozens in the last two decades, and it would be impossible to send reporters to each of the meetings covered by Access Humboldt. Without this service, there might be no easily-accessible record of the official proceedings that govern daily life in the county.

At the same time, very few people we met on the streets of Eureka knew of Access Humboldt and its services to the community. In our listening tours, we only encountered a few folks who could name the brand, though a few more described being able to find local meetings online or on television and appeared to be describing Access Humboldt's website and television channels. Sean McLaughlin, Access Humboldt's Executive Director, noted this was one of the more useful aspects of the exercise. "When you're not trying to interject and pitch what you are offering, and instead just listen to what people have to say, you learn a lot," he said.

Among high school-age students and recent graduates of Eureka High School whom we encountered on listening tours, only a few were familiar with Access Humboldt or had used its services. The offerings and technology at Access Humboldt’s Community Media Center at Eureka High School is unique in the county and an excellent resource, but seem somewhat incongruent with an age demographic that has in recent years become capable of creating and distributing media instantly. Since most teens and young adults use Instagram and Snapchat to communicate with each other, the cable and radio broadcast production studios of Access Humboldt may seem outdated or irrelevant for young people. This subject was not a specific focus of our research, but may warrant further study by Access Humboldt.

This moment affords Access Humboldt an opportunity to reposition itself as a resource for the emerging gaps in information inclusion. Deciding how to effectively leverage its [five public access cable channels](#), local networks of supporters and content producers, online [Community Media Archive](#) and [KZZH radio station](#) is a fascinating challenge.

Social Media and More

When we asked Eurekaans on the street about where they got their information about local issues, events and news, the most common reply was: “Facebook”. Most described hearing about these issues from friends and family in the community who posted on their personal timelines, or shared links from local news sources. Most could name the sources behind those links, particularly *Lost Coast Outpost*, *RedHeaded Blackbelt*, and the *Times-Standard*. It was notable that LoCO was often cited as a more common source of local news on social media, but *Times-Standard* was more often described as the most trustworthy. *Redwood News* was frequently mentioned as a source on our listening tours of Eureka neighborhoods. *Redwood News* was cited for its television broadcasts but it appears to have a large Facebook following. With the largest volume of video content of the area’s media leaders, this may not be surprising.

Table: Social media presence of most-followed local news and information outlets. Sources with less than 2,000 followers on any platform are omitted.

Source	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
Lost Coast Outpost	82,900	17,400	6,950
KIEM/Redwood News	41,900	1,550	2,890
Redheaded Blackbelt	26,500	3,580	2,250
Times-Standard	20,900	685*	5,850
KBVU / North Coast News	13,500	350*	900
North Coast Journal	14,380	4,329	5,200
KMUD News	5,500	1,240	3,530
The Lumberjack	2,500	2,100	1,430

* Note: these Instagram profiles have not been updated for 11 (Times-Standard) and 14 (KBVU) months.

Other sources had a negligible following on social media. Aside from Kym Kemp, whose *Redheaded Blackbelt* site is synonymous with her own brand, a few individual reporters in the region had their own social media presence. Few media outlets demonstrated a complex strategy for their social media program. Most reposted content created for other platforms and posted links without additional context or opportunities for engagement. This is common in lower-resourced newsrooms.

One clear outlier in this ecosystem is *Lost Coast Outpost's* Instagram account. We can see two clear aspects to the strategy. First, LoCO explicitly solicits and promotes excellent local photography shared by its followers. Second, LoCO deftly uses the story feature in Instagram to promote its online content, with better engagement opportunities for its followers and greater reach among young audiences. This strategy explains its comparative success on the platform, which garners comparatively little interest from Eureka and Humboldt County journalism followers on social media.

Twitter had low followings and use by Eurekaans – Beth, a middle-aged woman whom we met in Sequoia Park, said: “Twitter is an East Coast thing. Here, it’s Facebook.” Meanwhile, a group of Eureka High School sophomores working a fundraiser at Arts Alive! put it plainly: “Facebook is for parents only,” noting their preference for Instagram and Snapchat. Older Eurekaans were more likely to rely on Facebook groups, such as Humboldt County on Alert (8,600 members), and Humboldt County Conservatives (2,000 members). Notably, every news presence on social media is dwarfed by the memes and humor page, Only in Humboldt (99,400 followers).

Offline, Unofficial, and All the Rest

A number of people we met described word-of-mouth, bulletin boards, or other non-formal sources and venues as important resources. We met a significant minority of people who were outside the formal news ecosystem. Kendall, who we met in Eureka but lives in Ferndale, said she got much of her local information from “Coconut radio,” essentially local word-of-mouth. Diego, a barista, noted that officials such as city council members and public safety officers meet with constituents in coffee shops like Old Town Coffee & Chocolates and Ramone’s.

The Jefferson Community Center, a repurposed elementary school building in northwest Eureka, was one of the few places in Eureka that provided a wealth of information about community events, resources, and support services in Spanish, and on paper. Two massive bulletin boards near the entry doors provided information on English-language courses, child care, summer camps, and professional and social opportunities. Interestingly, the Eureka Mall, which provides the area’s most affordable grocery store and other services for the working class and poor, had no bulletin boards or other information services for their patrons. In many places, these businesses are a hub of community information serving the vulnerable.

Erica, a volunteer we met there, said the Center was a real hub for these communities, and provided support services as well as enrichment that members of all Eurekaan subcommunities rely on, including the Hmong and Latino communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We Begin by Listening

Information ecosystem assessments are a form of research designed and developed by Internews that call on the assessment team to be guided to new insights by the words, suggestions and actions of the subjects. The formative research on information ecosystems identifies key dimensions for analysis: landscape, infrastructure, production & movement, trust, influence, use, and impact. [Read more about our methods here.](#)

Internews and Access Humboldt conducted this assessment in May and June, 2019. It included several methods. We interviewed 20 key informants including journalists, civic groups, politicians, and public officials. We conducted focus group discussions with local citizens and media business leaders. We conducted listening tours on several occasions at events and popular gathering places, including at the Eureka Mall, Sequoia Park, Arts Alive!, Henderson Center, Old Town Eureka, Redwood Acres Flea Market, Jefferson Community Center, and on walks in-between. We talked to dozens of Eureka residents and residents of the surrounding area who frequent the city and consider it their home town. Insights from these discussions formed the basis for this report. This effort was undertaken almost exclusively using volunteer time, or as a side project of the staffs of Internews and Access Humboldt.

Disclaimer on our Approach

This assessment is not an academic or rigorous research study. Instead we hope to learn about the information dynamics in a Eureka over a few days, using anecdotes and qualitative data. Most of the work took place in the first week of May, 2019, with follow-up interviews continuing over the next five weeks. Our approach was far from comprehensive and we acknowledge that many important Eureka voices and communities were not included in this project.

Our survey was designed by Access Humboldt, and distribution and data collection began before our field work. As everywhere, our conversations with community leaders and media-makers — who have the benefit of years of on-the-ground observation — informed and refined our understanding of residents' information habits.

Due to limited time and resources, and our desire to not limit the scope of our study before having initial conversations with residents, we did not narrow the range of our inquiry. Consequently, this is a very broad assessment methodology. With a few paid staff, we could invest more resources in survey data collection and analysis, translation to Spanish and Hmong, as well as potentially other languages, and travel funds to reach more of Humboldt County with this outreach. We hope to identify resources for more intense study in the near future.

Techniques Employed

Listening Tours are a straightforward method for initiating conversations with members of a community. We sought out diverse gathering places where a wide cross-section of the community would be gathered, and further targeted residents of neighborhoods that are often under-represented in community events where Access Humboldt normally conducts outreach. Several listening tours included:

- Eureka Mall and its surroundings along West Harris Street on May 2
- Old Town Eureka during an Arts Alive! Friday evening event on May 3
- Flea Market at Redwood Acres on May 5
- Henderson Center commercial district on May 5
- Central Eureka along H Street from Downtown to Eureka High School on May 6
- Jefferson neighborhood, around the Jefferson Community Center on May 6

We spoke to many dozens of Eureka residents at these events. During the tours, our volunteers, working individually or in pairs, approach Eureka residents and ask them simple, open-ended questions such as: “Where do you get your information about what’s happening in Eureka?”, “Who do you trust when it comes to local news?”, and “What are the issues that should be covered more in the press?” These questions open a wide-ranging set of possibilities for responses. Our volunteers were instructed to only ask clarifying or open-ended followup questions, and to refrain from interjecting opinions, responses, and biases. The resulting conversations are an excellent basis for initiating understanding. These inputs to the report are anonymous, though we provide some basic identifying information about the commenter in some cases.

Key informant interviews are a method for gathering structured, consistent input from individuals with particular insights about their communities. We conducted 20 KII’s with a range of leaders in the fields of journalism, media business, politics, civic activism and civil society. Some were known to Access Humboldt, others were suggested to us in the course of KII’s or in discussions with residents about who they trust to provide information. These interviews included a list of about 15 questions from which the interviewer could select, always leaving open the possibility for the subject to redirect the conversation. All interviews were conducted “on background,” meaning that respondents could choose not to be quoted by name, though permission was sought to attribute quotes by name whenever possible.

We also conducted **focus group discussions**, which included several participants in one group. We used this method to interview four media representatives from North Coast Journal, Lost Coast Outpost, and KMUD.



Local resident, Internews staff member and project volunteer Jasmine Manuel posts a flyer at the Eureka CoOp bulletin board (Photo credit: Joselyn Lindsey)

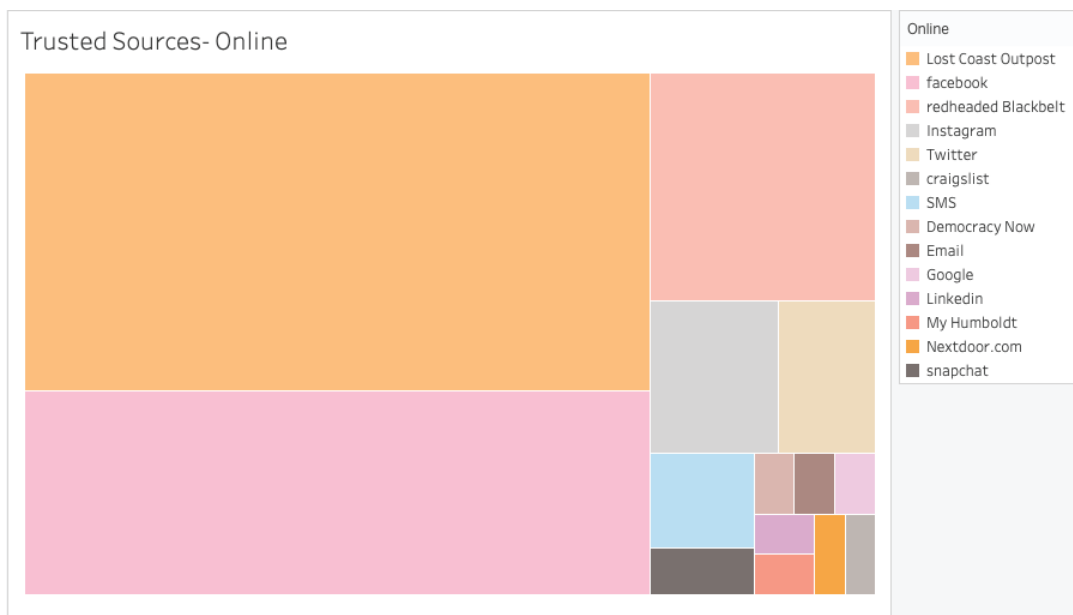
We incorporated **outreach at community events** and public meetings beginning in 2018. These are distinct from the other formats, as they require some self-selecting of the participants, in contrast to the Listening Tours (spontaneous) and the Key Informant Interviews (requested and structured). We incorporated input from three “world cafe” events attended by Access Humboldt staff, including one with the KHSU Library on October 3, 2018, another at the Humboldt County Library on October 24, 2018, and the Arts Alive! Event in Eureka on March 2, 2019.

We also conducted significant **desk research** with the help of a number of volunteers, focusing on census data, media outlet data, historical context, and demographics. Desk research also filled in the holes remaining from our other work, and helped inform KII selection and outreach event selection.

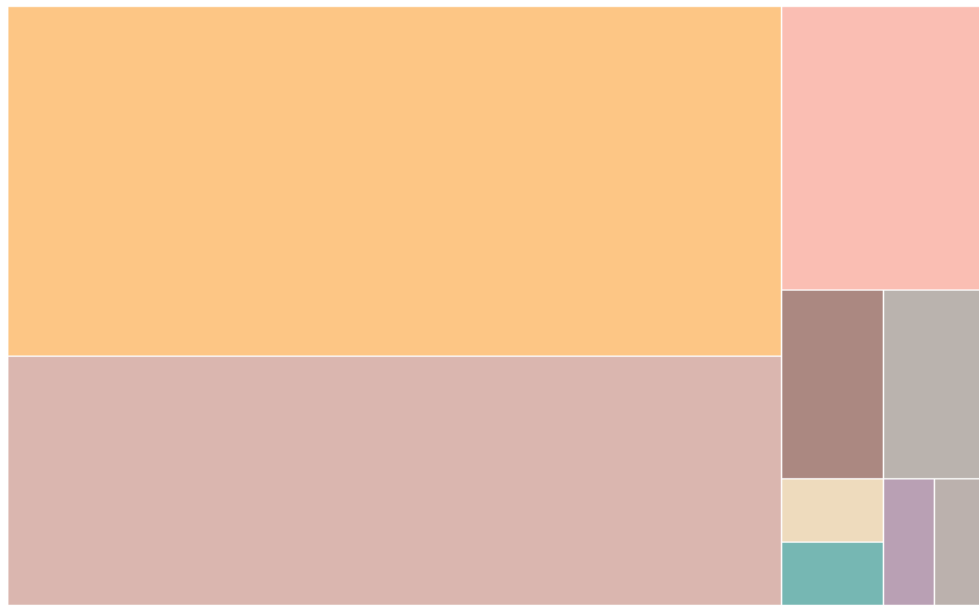
Survey Data and Analysis

Access Humboldt also developed and collected responses to several Information Landscape Surveys. A team of volunteers from both Access Humboldt and Internews conducted surveys throughout the community throughout March, April and May of 2019. One survey was conducted at the local monthly arts-centered event Arts Alive!, in which 108 index cards were filled out in response to the question “Where do you find information about your community?”. Additional information was received through listening tours in areas around Eureka such as the Eureka Mall, the Bayshore Mall, Sequoia Park, and the Flea Market. The team also interviewed key informants such as political representatives, ethnic representatives, media experts and community activists, these responses were not anonymous but we have rolled them up in this data set where the questions overlapped. The total number of people interviewed for the data reflected in these tables was approximately 184.

The below graphics reflect the compiled data from all sources we reached, in the form of frequency diagrams. The colors of the squares are indexed, while its size represents the number of responses that mentioned that media outlet. The graphics are categorized by medium of information distribution, including “Online”, “Newspaper”, “Radio” and “Television”. There is also a table for “Other” responses which did not fit into the criteria of any other category. Finally, there is a graphic which portrays the frequency of responses between the mediums previously mentioned.

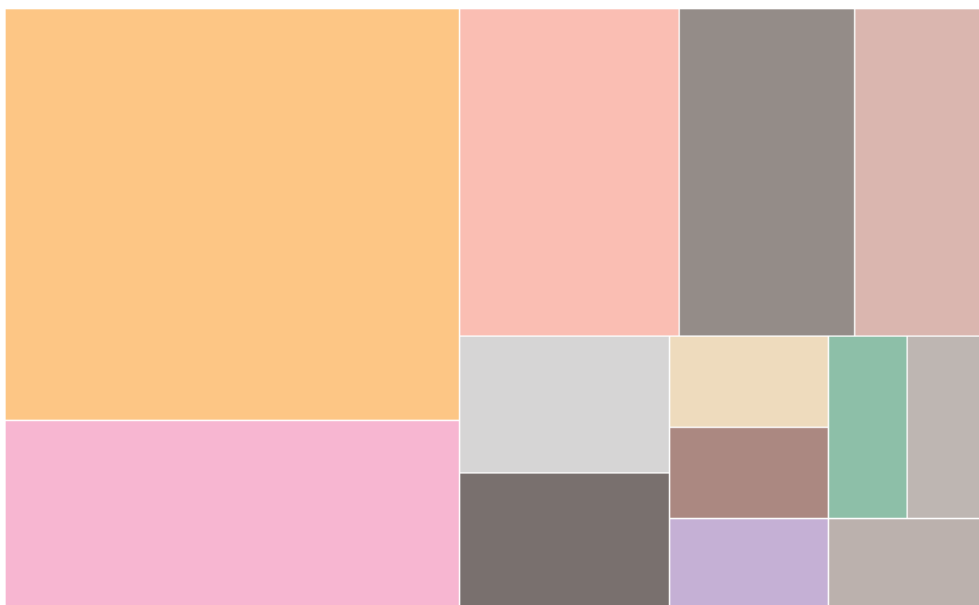


Trusted Sources- Newspapers



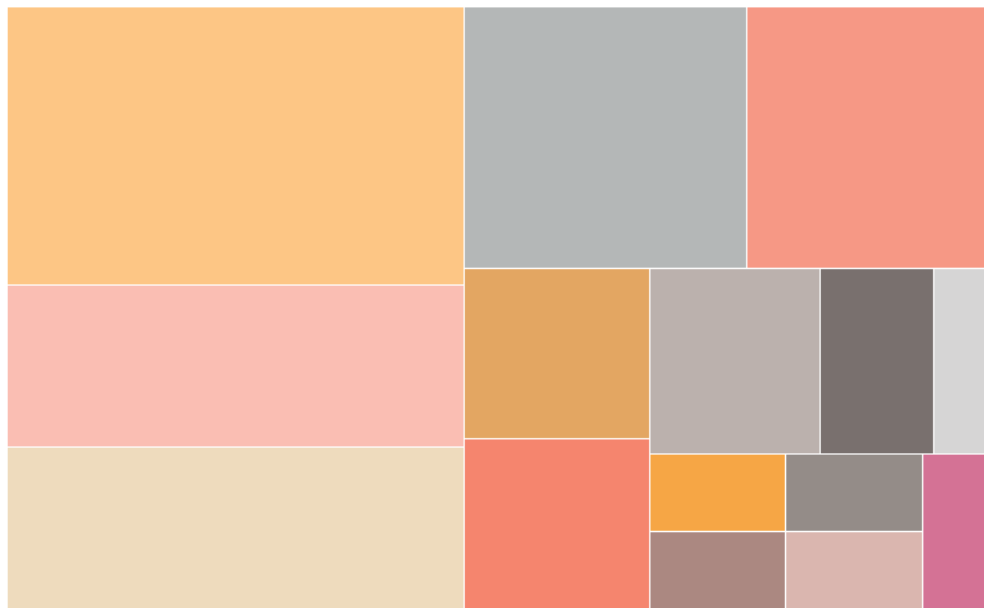
- Newspapers
- North Coast Journal
 - mad River Union
 - Times Standard
 - New York Times
 - San Francisco Gate
 - The Triplicate
 - McKinleyville Press
 - Huffington Post
 - Two Rivers Tribune

Trusted Sources- Radio



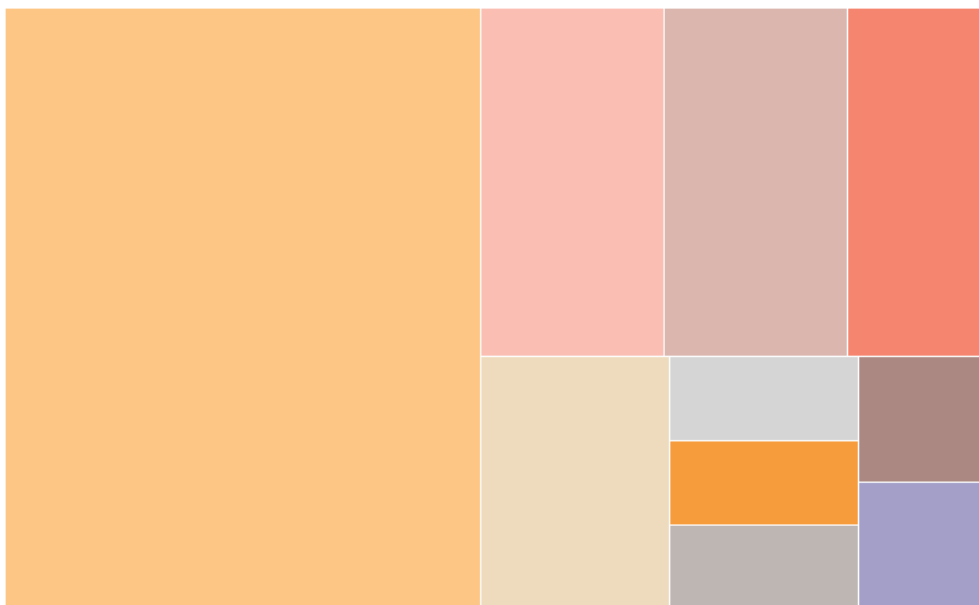
- Radio
- KHSU
 - KHUM
 - KMUD
 - KWPT
 - BBC
 - KZZH
 - JPR
 - KGOE
 - KRED
 - KSLG
 - KVVU
 - NPR
 - Radio Bilingue

Trusted Sources- Television

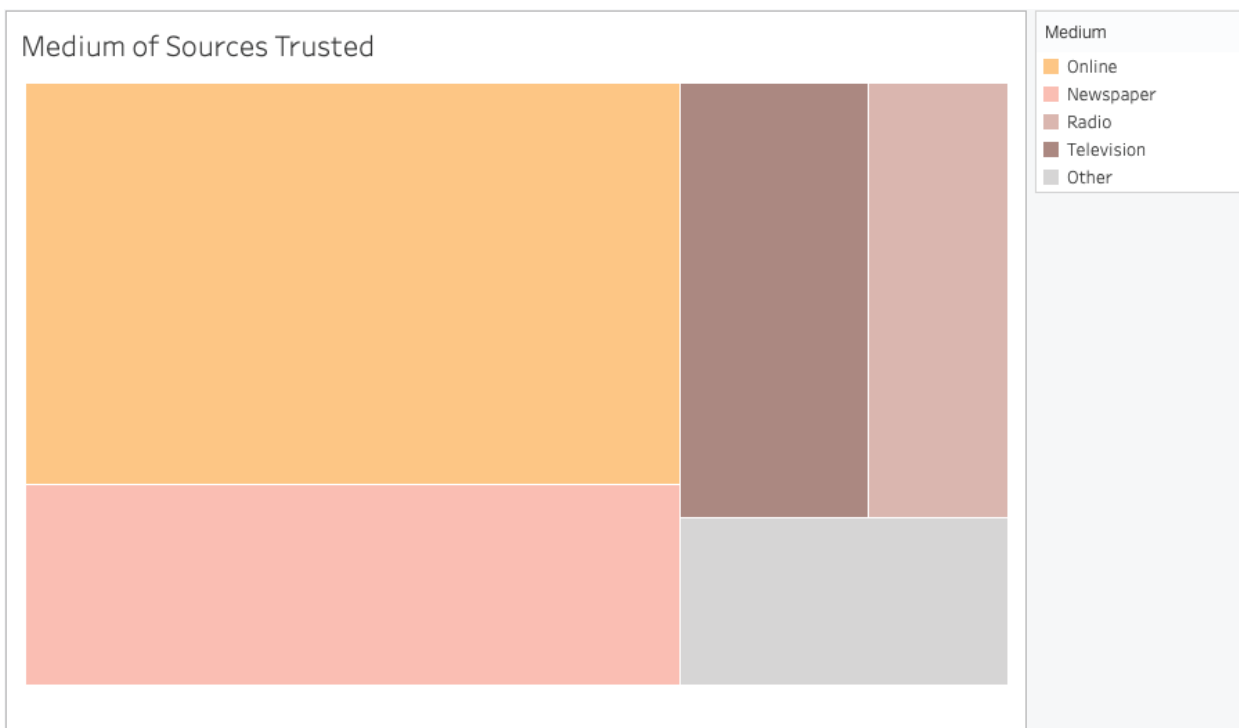


- Television
- Kiem-TV
- Access Humboldt
- Antenna
- BBC
- CBS
- Ch. 23
- PBS
- Ch. 3
- Fox 23
- Ch. 6
- Democracy Now
- KEET
- MS NBC
- NBC
- npr

Trusted Sources- Other



- Word Of Mouth
- word Of Mouth
- Bulletin Boards
- School
- Caltrans
- Farmers Market
- Humboldt County Vis..
- Humboldt Room
- newsletters
- Parents
- Reporter



The surveys give a useful, if unscientific, snapshot on the media sources the community prefers and trusts. Trends toward online media consumption are apparent, with the online outlet *Lost Coast Outpost* being the most popular across all formats. Newspapers, notably *The North Coast Journal* and *The Times Standard* follow closely behind. Among certain communities, especially those in which English is a second language, information is often distributed by word of mouth. Television broadcasts are more evenly distributed, although KIEM was allocated the highest number of responses. Local radio stations seem to be declining as a source of community information, although they are still a vital source for many.

About the Author and Contributors

Myles Smith is the Senior Director for Programs at Internews. He oversees Internews's US programs portfolio and supports programs, strategic planning, and program design. He is originally from Maine, and is currently based in Washington, DC. Myles led a team of Internews employees from the Arcata office who contributed to this report with research, photos, field interviews, coordination, report formatting and editing. They included David Frank, Jasmine Manuel, Tere Hicks, Bridget McGraw, and Erica Guevara.

Similarly, many Access Humboldt staff and board members contributed to this report. AH staff including Sean McLaughlin, Sean Kearns, Clay McGlaughlin, and board member Jane Callahan provided extensive contributions to research, field work, and this report. Additional volunteers included Joselyn Lindsey, who made many useful contributions to the field work, data visualizations and photos. Her vigorous efforts and timely assistance help to push this project over the finish line.

About Access Humboldt

Access Humboldt is a non-profit, community media and broadband access organization serving the residents and local jurisdictions of Humboldt County, California, managing resources that include cable access TV channels; KZZH FM 96.7 community radio; a wide area broadband network with dedicated optic fiber connections to 20 locations serving local jurisdictions and community anchor institutions; broadband access wireless networks; the Community Media Center with television studio and other production equipment and training on Eureka High School campus.

In collaboration with Internet Archive, Access Humboldt has also supported development of the Community Media Archive (https://archive.org/details/community_media), which hosts local community content online.

Access Humboldt provides ongoing support for local media and broadband access for five purposes:

- Public Health and Safety
- Education
- Economic Development
- Culture and Arts
- Civic Engagement

FINDINGS

For Its Size and Level of Wealth, Eureka Has Diverse Information Sources

Eureka is one of the smallest media markets in the country (#195 of 205). Despite this, it enjoys a local newspaper of record, an alternative weekly, two network affiliates with local news broadcasts, a PBS affiliate, two commercial local news sources, and a host of commercial and community radio stations. With the notable exception of the sudden closure of KHSU, the local NPR affiliate hosted by Humboldt State University, Eureka's market has remained remarkably stable. This is a stark contrast with the rest of the country. Hank Sims, editor of *Lost Coast Outpost*, wondered aloud if the media market in Eureka and Humboldt County wasn't already saturated. Still, Eureka residents are concerned about the viability of some of their most trusted information sources.

Eureka residents we spoke to were concerned about the future of the *Times-Standard*. One former *Times-Standard* reporter lamented the consistent cuts to the journalist team and cited the worrying trend as a reason for leaving the newspaper and the journalism industry entirely. We hear local journalists express these concerns across the country. *The Times-Standard* was purchased in 2016 by Digital First Media / MediaNews Group, which owns nearly 100 news properties in Colorado, California, and elsewhere. Digital First Media has earned [controversy](#) in a number of markets for aggressive downsizing of newsgathering staffs, including sharing resources across multiple properties in order to stretch reporting teams and reduce costs. Numerous attempts to establish a competing daily newspaper, most recently by the Eureka Reporter (2003-2008) have been unsuccessful.

The number of sources has declined in recent decades, as has happened [everywhere in the United States](#). Advertising revenue that fueled the media boom of 1950-2005 has dried up in the last 15 years. The classified business that once sustained local newspapers and broadcast channels has often found more targeted audiences at lower costs through specialized websites like Craigslist, and via digital and programmatic advertising.¹ These formats benefit companies that can provide scale, notably Google and Facebook, which now earn the majority of revenue growth for the media industry.

“When local news goes away, it’s often replaced by national tribal conflicts... the Times-Standard is as local as it gets... breaking our necks every day to get people as many stories as we can.”

– Marc Valles, Editor of the Times-Standard

We heard consolidation was another concern among some respondents. Two companies control all six broadcast networks covering Eureka. [Sinclair Broadcast Group](#) owns four channels serving the Eureka market, including one of the two main news broadcasters, KBVU (Fox 28), as well as KAEF/KRCR (ABC 23/ABC 7), KECA (The CW / MyNetworkTV, Channel

¹ Programmatic advertising uses cookies embedded in the user's browser to instantly identify users by their online browsing habits, and sell advertising based on those characteristics. Such advertising may be more closely aligned with user interests than general, non-targeted “banner” ads, but these ads generally deliver far less value to the site that carries them, as that value is captured by Google, Facebook, and other intermediaries.

29), KEUV (Univision, Channel 31). [Redwood Television Partners](#) owns KIEM (NBC) and KVIQ (CBS). Only KBVU and KIEM provide local news, and they do not compete directly for their time slots.

While not a problem for Eureka residents, who have access to digital broadcasts and cable, DirecTV has been an unreliable partner for Eureka-based stations. Eureka was one of the last markets to be added by the satellite carrier, and continues to have [disputes](#) or outages with local affiliates. This may limit access to local news for Humboldt residents in rural and mountainous areas, where satellite is sometimes the only or preferred method for receiving broadcast signals.

Eurekans Generally Have Access to an Information Source They Trust

The vast majority of the people we talked to, both in and outside the media industry, agreed there were multiple trustworthy news operations. But this factor is starting to divide along familiar lines. Some respondents asserted that a few online news outlets were sensationalist, chasing clicks through salacious stories that have little civic value. A small minority of respondents cited what they perceived to be conservative or liberal biases at a few outlets. The trend toward a polarized media audience has started, but people's local news consumption preferences are more diverse than for their national news.

Among the more consistently trusted outlets was the *Times-Standard*, which many respondents praised as fair. Its editor, Marc Valles, said "we get frequent complaints from readers who identify as conservatives that we are slanted one way or another, especially on the opinion page." He encourages us to try to find out how conservative those readers think the paper should be, and how that would compare to Humboldt's overall political makeup. Valles emphasized he wanted the paper to be like "hosting a holiday dinner," providing something for everyone on the table to choose. A few respondents described *Redwood News* or *North Coast Journal* as left-leaning. As an alt-weekly, *North Coast Journal* might not dispute that claim.

The most consistent response we heard from Eurekans was a bias towards sensational, incidents-based reporting. Few were able to describe stories that put persistent events in the context of a larger, systemic problem. A number of respondents described a rush to report breaking news, particularly by *Lost Coast Outpost* and *Redheaded Blackbelt*, which might jeopardize traditional journalistic ethics, either by getting facts wrong, or by publishing personal information about subjects of a story. *Lost Coast Outpost* "gets written off because they can be snarky, but the news is sound," argued Nick Wilczek, Director of the Humboldt County Library. Respondents were consistent in their critique of stories on incidents like car crashes, police actions, and crimes related to substance abuse. These complaints were common across all formats, including print and TV.

At the same time, *Lost Coast Outpost* was the first official source of information for the majority of respondents we spoke with on listening tours. Eurekans, particularly those between their late 20's to late 60's, acknowledged their first source of information about issues in the city was Facebook. This came directly from friends, neighbors and shared posts, and from local news sources posted locally to social media. *Lost Coast Outpost* was the most widely acknowledged source of links shared among these respondents, with *Redheaded Blackbelt* (or Kym Kemp herself) and the *Times-Standard* as the second- and third-most common online sources cited. Eric, an attorney we met in Eureka, had one explanation for this: "They're independent – they'll tear into the politicians, even on the left. And LoCO will rush on a story, but they will correct it."

Our field research was limited in its ability to reach minority and marginalized communities in Eureka to determine the extent to which they trust the primary sources of information used by most Eureka residents. Our initial findings suggest there are clear gaps for these communities (see below). Alvaro, a Latino Eureka resident we met in Sequoia Park, suggested the media “should work on their facts... they forget the accused are innocent until proven guilty, too quick to post a mugshot and are biased in favor of officers. This juices people to buy the paper.” He said he noticed this in particular with *Lost Coast Outpost* and to some extent in the *Times-Standard*. He argued that *Redheaded Blackbelt* / Kym Kemp was better, but that the commenters on the articles posted to her blog were still awful.

Diego, a barista we met in Henderson Center, put it this way: “*Lost Coast Outpost* is sensationalist. *Times-Standard* is more trusted. But they cover more things like crime or who died, not what’s important.”

In somewhat the same vein, some folks we met said that their main issues of concern were ignored by the local press, or covered poorly in general. Colin, a cycling advocate, noted that his interests in city planning and cycling are covered poorly by local news. He noted that Eureka’s media ecosystem was “not bad for a small market,” but complained that the local media tends to “blame the victim” when covering collisions involving cars and cyclists.

People Need Better Information About How They Could Address Their Biggest Social Challenges

Nearly everyone has the same concerns in mind: homelessness and addictive drug use. Some we interviewed cited crime as their biggest concern, but tied it directly to people who use drugs. A few policy makers and civic leaders cited economic struggles as an underlying cause and solution to these problems. There was palpable despair among the public about how to tackle these problems. Respondents describe reporting as depressing and demoralizing, an unrelenting succession of tragedies and outrages. Elizabeth, who we met in Sequoia Park, said “drugs and transients” were the two biggest issues in town: “Eureka is trying but it’s not getting any better.” Chris, a middle-aged man we met in Old Town, said the city is becoming more fractured and polarized on these issues. “How do we solve this? We don’t know what to do to help them. The media covers it a bit but no one is sure why we have all these homeless people. Is it drug use? Mental health? Are they really all from San Francisco?” he said. In this environment, it is no surprise that public support for policies to address these problems erodes.

For instance, the needle and syringe exchange programs championed by local non-profit and advocacy groups and funded by state government agencies were the subject of controversy, confusion and disillusionment. Some respondents claimed these programs increased drug use, encouraged or facilitated addiction, or led to increases in needles discarded in parks and other public places. Skylar, a young woman we met in Sequoia Park, said “the needles program is covered 100% positive. People should be shamed.” She said Facebook, 92.3 (KRED country and talk radio),



Outreach materials created by Access Humboldt are shown here at a community event highlighting the idea that “Information is the currency of Democracy.” By studying the local Information Ecosystem, Internews and Access Humboldt are seeking ways to empower local voices and strengthen democratic ideals. (Photo credit: Access Humboldt Staff)

Kym Kemp and LoCO were her top sources of information. Few respondents could describe why they came to believe these claims, except to say their conclusions were obvious, logical, or based on specific incidents described by the local press. There was little discussion of the facts, evidence, or science behind these programs, and whether those facts supported the programs' continued implementation in Eureka.

Similarly, incidents involving people experiencing homelessness were frequently cited as the subject of local news stories. Many respondents made claims about the causes and sources of homelessness – where people came from, how they got to Humboldt County, why they came, and what keeps them here without a place to live. Few could cite statistics to back these claims or recall stories about individuals. Several respondents separately lamented the lack of success stories about the homeless population. These ranged from an Access Humboldt board member, to a woman in Sequoia Park, to a woman named Donna who we met outside the Eureka Mall. “I live over there [gestures to public housing project on West Harris Street] and it’s not great over there. But I used to be homeless and I got out of it. I got a job now. You never hear stories like that,” Donna said.

Our desk research found very few stories that relayed the personal experiences of these residents – most tell the stories of those who experience homelessness through intermediaries like non-profit agencies, government officials or law enforcement. *North Coast Journal* was occasionally mentioned as an exception

to this tendency. Dawn, who we met in a coffee shop in Henderson Center, said “the Journal is pretty good, they go beyond just homelessness and drug use.” But she still felt the media wasn’t helping people understand some issues she thought important. “We need more coverage on the military testing in the ocean and its effect on the whale population,” she said, referencing a recent local controversy. “I’m not educated enough to comment on it, we’re relying on them to find the facts.”

Eric, an attorney, had a slightly different take on the subject: “Conservatives here mostly talk about needle exchanges and the threat of bike lanes. I’m more concerned with a stable economy to replace timber and fishing. Why does no one look into Oracle’s decision not to relocate here? We are overinvested in cannabis and you can see that now. The media doesn’t cover this systematically.” Joseph, who we met in Eureka handing out flyers for a local Baptist church, similarly argued that local news was almost entirely focused on crime and one-off incidents. “We need more projects that spotlight spiritual life, people would be less angry,” he said. Eddie, a retired social services provider, said he gets most of his news from television, highlighting Fox 23 and News Channel 3. He mentioned other issues related to local priorities and trust. “Affordable housing is a huge issue. Special needs residents too, though now all the focus is on immigrants. The news doesn’t want to talk about Democratic [Party] failures on this – Massachusetts had a state social services system and California’s is a mess.”

Marc Valles, the editor of the *Times-Standard*, had a different take from his inside perspective: “If you look at our top 10 stories, there’s some good news in there. It’s not all



The marquee at the Eureka Mall, host to a budget grocery store, advertises English lessons at the Jefferson Community Center, a major asset for information and services (Photo credit: Jasmine Manuel)

doom and gloom, crime and blood. Anyone suffering news fatigue should look beyond the most sensational story. Look down the page. Heather Shelton [*Times-Standard* reporter] is holding point on community news.”

Consolidation and Closures Threaten to Degrade the Ecosystem

Media outlets have been closing across the country over the past 10 years. While Eureka and Humboldt County have been spared the disaster of massive closures, many are wondering if there are signs of trouble on the horizon for the media market. Mark McKenna, a freelance photographer who has worked for and with many local outlets, described the local economics to us, saying “cannabis legalization means the cannabis price is down. Ad revenues are down because of that. This also affects sales tax and revenue. Legitimate businesses feel it as well. Illegal cannabis was a huge part of the economy and we have to face it, now.”

The *Times-Standard* is the county’s newspaper of record, and its only daily print publication, formed as a result of the merger of the city’s two main newspapers in the 1950s. As elsewhere in the country, it is the subject of endless speculation among news consumers about its financial health and future. The *Times-Standard* charts its origins [back to 1854](#), thus controlling a critical archive of the city’s history, some of which has been passed to the public library and university systems. Through delivery and retailers, it reports a circulation of 23,000, though the [online version](#) is fast replacing paper subscriptions. The *Times-Standard* appears to be pushing more of its subscribers online with fast-escalating paper subscription rates, at least partly due to the transportation costs and inefficiencies for the sprawling coverage area that would be required for at-home delivery of a daily paper throughout the county.

One subscriber reported that an annual paper subscription costs around \$300. Online subscriptions cost about \$9.50 for four weeks, or about \$123.50/year. This price for the online version is similar to the rates for national digital subscriptions like the *Washington Post*, which offers far more content on national issues. The *Times-Standard* was sold several times since passing from local family ownership and is now owned by a Colorado-based conglomerate, Digital First Media, also known as MediaNews Group. The company has a history of aggressive cost-cutting of newsgathering operations and selling real estate assets of local news organizations to pad corporate revenues. Regardless of the general morality of these practices, they result in less coverage of local issues. Marc Valles, the news editor for the *Times-Standard*, didn’t want to discuss the business side of the paper, but said in general that “until they come up with an ad model that replaces what came before, we’re going to continue to see the internet behemoths suck up a good portion of the ad revenue.” At the same time, he says his readers expect the same level of coverage and attention to issues they used to get.

“If the *Times-Standard* were to go down, it would certainly cause us to rethink our mission,” said Thad-eous Greenson, news editor for the *North Coast Journal*.



"Vending stations for the North Coast Journal and the Times-Standard are located in Old Town Eureka as well as at several local shopping centers and grocery stores. Residents also frequently make use of community bulletin boards to disseminate messages and access services." Photo by Joselyn Lindsey

In another example of consolidation, several television network stations received by Eureka were recently purchased by Sinclair Media Group, a Baltimore-based media holding company. Several respondents expressed concern about the ownership of these stations and Sinclair's record of inserting nationally-syndicated conservative commentary into local broadcasts. Others reported they saw no particular bias in the broadcasts of the same stations, and that the one Sinclair station based in Eureka (North Coast News / KBVU Fox 24), which added a news program in the last few years, was significantly higher production quality than KIEM's long-running *Redwood News* program. The other Sinclair-owned stations are based in neighboring counties, and their news is less relevant and less popular among Eureka. While some may argue a more conservative perspective on local events is welcome, this study is of local information. We consider the replacement of local voices with regional or national ones a net negative for Eureka. In the same vein, the closure of KHSU, the local NPR affiliate, and its replacement with a feed from Redding was felt as a major loss by many people.

KBVU's entry prompted investment in KIEM's news production operations a few years ago, which was a welcome change that respondents noted. But staffing either operation is a constant struggle. "Their skills are lacking, you can tell if this weren't Humboldt County most of their on-air people wouldn't be on television," said Rachel in Sequoia Park. Tere, who prefers KBVU's *North Coast News* broadcasts, noted that the turnover of television news reporters is incredibly high, as salaries and opportunities are low: "They have to do everything – travel, interview, shoot the video, edit, present on TV – you can tell this is a stepping stone to getting anywhere else. They do their best. But as soon as a reporter knows the area and has some sources, if they're decent, they move up and out."

***"There have long been rumors of the Times-Standard's pending demise, but it keeps going."
– John, 60-year old Eureka resident***

Deva, who we met at Arts Alive! in Old Town, said she cut cable TV and her Internet package because the prices were too high for home service. The Eureka market offers few choices for subscribers – Access Humboldt's own research on the cable television market found that Suddenlink had lost significant subscribers in the last 10 years, and has raised prices for its remaining subscribers to equal the lost revenue. This suggests that cable television service is on pace to become a premium service, not a public utility and widely-used access point. While the market for commercially-funded news is threatened, it remains stable for the moment. At the same time, non-profit news and information remains nascent. There are few charitable resources available to support news and information in the county. KHSU, the NPR affiliate, received an estimated 60-70% of its funding from community support before its sudden closure in April. "KHSU's decline is a big, big deal," said Nick Wilczek, Director of the Humboldt County Library. It remains to be seen where KHSU's resources will go – Access Humboldt and KZZH, PBS affiliate KEET, and Garberville-based KMUD all seem like natural destinations for KHSU's local programming. It is unclear if the donors and underwriters who supported KHSU will now support other community news partners.

There are some information projects that occur under the auspices of government or community institutions, such as Senior News. Elsewhere in the country, we have seen non-profit organization step in to fill gaps in areas like reporting for marginalized and underserved communities, and for investigative reporting that has always been financially and practically difficult for for-profits to pull off. These types of initiatives have not yet emerged in Eureka, but their time may be coming.

Users are Fast Moving to Mobile Consumption Via Social Media and Local Blogs

Media consumers are moving to online, mobile consumption of information even more quickly than formal content creators and journalism institutions. This has given an advantage to online digital-first operations such as *Lost Coast Outpost* and the blog *Redheaded Blackbelt*. These were the only sources that competed with the *Times-Standard* for the first news site of choice among users, and were particularly popular among adults under 40.² Familiarity with these digital-only brands was extremely high. Hank Sims, editor of *Lost Coast Outpost*, told us: “We’re growing. This is an insular community. People are interested in themselves.” Rachel, who we met in Sequoia Park, was one of those followers. She said, “My mom watches the news and I hear about it from her. I get my own stuff on Facebook.”

Perhaps surprisingly, media consultant John Harper told us that the 18-34 year old demographic watched more television in 2018 than in any other year on record – 8.5 hours per day. This squares with national trends – media consumption is up across all formats, but each outlet has a smaller share of the audience due to the plethora of choices.

But Marc Valles of the *Times-Standard* put the new shift to digital in context as an opportunity for journalism, noting that “something I hear infrequently is: ‘What do we need actual media for if we have social media?’” – people seem to recognize the value in journalism. When he does, he says, “I ask in response: ‘Have you actually seen social media?’”

Information Access and Usefulness Is Severely Limited for Spanish-speaking, Hmong, and Native American Communities

Locally-focused Spanish-language newspapers and radio stations have had numerous false starts in recent years. None currently operate. The remaining primary sources admit they miss those Eureka and other county residents who do not speak English. “We miss no one geographically or demographically,” said Hank Sims, editor of *Lost Coast Outpost*, “except monolingual Spanish speakers.” Mark McKenna, a freelance photographer who has worked with several outlets, said, “the news media is still a relatively white-dominated enterprise.

Typically, unpaid internships in the summers is how you get into journalism, and that takes out a majority of the eligible people.”

The Hmong community also has no official news source. The few Hmong adults who spoke to us during encounters around Eureka were able to name the local newspaper, but admitted they mostly exchanged information via word-of-mouth within their community. Dany, who runs an Asian grocery store in Henderson Center, reported that this and Facebook were his main sources.

“You don’t hear the news talking about our community often. It pushes people away. It focuses on the negative, or on drug dealers from Mexico. We need bilingual local media.”

– Luisa Angon, volunteer and organizer for Latinx communities

² We see the same trend nationally, where small digital-first startups gain a fast advantage over legacy media in online traffic and revenue. See the [Harvard University Shorenstein Center report](#) Small is Beautiful: New Business Models for Digital Media: A Case Study.

He spoke little English, but used it as his language of communication with customers, white and Asian alike. Hmong children, second- and third-generation immigrants, were more likely to be social media users and prefer consuming information in English. Several people we spoke with lamented the lack of local Native American news sources, though they noted this was a particular problem for tribal areas in rural corners of the county, in part addressed by efforts of tribes including KIDE radio and Two Rivers Tribune.

Pata Vang, a young female Hmong-community advocate we interviewed, said the local media does not reflect the Hmong community. As a young woman, even Pata finds it hard to be an informative leader of the community. “You must approach the elders if you want to be taken seriously – parents and grandparents. Flyers sent home with children are not read. Because it’s all word-of-mouth, it’s important to have these [relationships],” she said. McKenna noted that “we have a large Hmong community here, Lao and Vietnamese populations have grown, but in terms of the issues of their cultural assimilation, I don’t think anyone has covered that.”

While this study did not focus on geographic areas of the county with higher Native American populations, we anticipate that a wider study of Humboldt County would find significant information gaps among these communities. *North Coast Journal* publishes occasional features on local tribal issues and culture. Jennifer Fumiko-Cahill, culture editor and reporter for *North Coast Journal*, said, “we have our own [under-covered communities]. It’s easy to say ‘they keep to themselves’ and not put in the effort to report on them. ‘Man on the street’ interview subjects always look like the same man.”

Standing out in its Optimism

Many of the dynamics of the Eureka information ecosystem are similar to other small urban and rural areas of the United States. We found a broad diversity of readers across many of the top sites. Conservatives, Liberals, Moderates and the politically disengaged and non-aligned were familiar with a wide variety of news sites. Individuals reported biases at certain outlets or on certain subjects and stories, but also saw value and truth in the stories their local outlets told about life in Eureka. This is in contrast with the national news ecosystem, where information consumers are strictly divided and unlikely to take in the same information as their ideological opposites. “I’ve worked up and down the state, and I’ve never encountered a readership at once both so demanding and appreciative of the work its community paper does. Regardless of the criticism, it keeps us on our toes,” said Marc Valles of the *Times-Standard*.



Gary, a Eureka resident, Yurok tribe member and entrepreneur, shared his thoughts with us (and his jam samples) at the flea market at Redwood Acres Fairground (photo credit Sean Kearns)

The last question we asked during Key Informant Interviews was about the level of hope for the future of news, information and media in Eureka. Responses were very optimistic. Most answered 7 or 8 out of 10, reporting very high hopes. In the context of a national crisis in local journalism, Eureka bucked the trend. We heard a range of reasons for this. Armeda Retzel, a Professor of Communications at HSU, answered 9.9, explaining: “I work with young people with great potential to advance local news and information. Humboldt residents and media are stubborn, tenacious, and very talented.” Mark McKenna, a freelance photographer, also professed to being “way more optimistic” than most. Turns out he’s not more optimistic than most Eureka – he rated put his hopes at an 8 out of 10.

Nick Wilczek of the Humboldt County Library pointed out, “apathy is the hardest thing to cure. And we don’t have apathy and indifference here. There are so many local news sources, and the journalists are very dedicated. They recognize the importance of information. Our local media are in really good hands for the most part.”

SUGGESTIONS

Trust and confidence in the media remains higher than in other parts of the country. People we spoke with were almost unanimously hopeful about the future of the media in their community, a rare result that we have not seen in many other parts of the United States. However, we can see the start of some problematic trends that have occurred elsewhere. This will require attention from the media and civil society communities to maintain the current optimism.

“The news doesn’t come around [to us] anymore because homeless populations are not news. They should cover when a homeless person is successful. Five percent don’t want to change, the rest do.”
– ***Betty Kwan Chin, homeless peoples’ advocate & non-profit leader***

Solutions Journalism Collaborative

Eureka largely agree on the big challenges facing their community. But they feel hopeless about the solutions to those challenges. None of the main media outlets had the resources individually to invest in long-term investigative projects. With some exceptions – the *North Coast Journal’s* investigation into the eviction of residents from the Devil’s Playground encampment, or the *Lost Coast Outpost* series on suicide on the Yurok reservation – intensive investigations are few and far between.

Collaborative projects that bring together multiple newsrooms and platforms could help the public build a greater understanding of policy solutions to their problems. Usually, these entail a non-profit organization acting as the convener and standards-setter for the reporting. “We would be up for collaborating with others,” said Thad Greenson of *North Coast Journal*, “but we’d probably need someone to come in and do the coordination. If it’s just among us, it would be harder to find the time and resources.” Marc Valles, Editor of the *Times-Standard*, was particularly proud of their series ‘Healthy in Humboldt’ as it got not just to problems, but to the solutions people are trying.

Unique, Dedicated Effort From Non-profit Community to Serve Underserved Communities

The information needs of the neediest Eureka residents are not well served by the current information ecosystem. This is due to language barriers and content constraints. Almost all journalism produced in Eureka and the larger county is in English, excluding Spanish- and Hmong-speaking communities from information they may need to improve their lives. Our focus group with media makers wondered whether youth are an under-served demographic since most of their information comes from social media, not the mainstream sources that informed their parents' generation. And non-profit leaders and advocates, many of whom we interviewed for this report, would be great allies in making information more inclusive to people experiencing homelessness, struggling with drug use or mental health challenges.

Consider Dedicated Channels For Listening and Addressing Community Concerns

Humboldt citizens are opinionated and want the opportunity to express themselves, find outlets for their concerns, and answers to their questions about public life.

Listening Post installations like those that LPC members have placed in public parks, businesses, and at events, as well as dedicated lines for community members to submit questions and comments via SMS, could be new ways for community information organizations to engage with public needs and fill gaps missed by the formal media and journalism sector.

"Listening to each other, that's the most basic thing," said Marc Valles of the *Times-Standard*.



Clay McGlaughlin of Access Humboldt thanks Tim, a Eureka resident, for sharing his time and thoughts on information in Eureka at the flea market at Redwood Acres Fairground (photo credit Sean Kearns)

Find Synergies With the Public Library System

Humboldt's County Library system already has a mandate to inform the public, with a very complementary mission and reach to Access Humboldt. Perhaps some collaborations with the library system on content creation, media literacy, and public engagement would bring more people into the conversation. Media literacy is a limited resource in the public education system, according to Humboldt County Office of Education official Stacy Young. "Children increasingly need to learn how to distinguish what's good information from what's not," she said, noting that Ridgewood School in Eureka provides some training for K-2nd grade students using materials from Common Sense Media.

Nick Wilczek, Humboldt County Library Director, told us that “people basically think we’re a homeless shelter and a warehouse for books. That’s a widely held concern among librarians. It’s on us to try to change that perception.” Wilczek points out that the Eureka branch library is in an area close to the Humboldt Area Center for Harm Reduction (HACHR), a facility providing the needle exchange services that some city residents oppose. He supports the HACHR and has met and worked with them to try to make the library an accommodating place for everyone. He jokes, “we have two core groups of clientele: the homeless and the not homeless.” Wilczek also sees the opportunity created by the vacuum left from KHSU “if somehow Access Humboldt or the Humboldt County Library could generate content - hosting and convening discussions on key topics and airing them. Recognize what’s important and build programs about that. It’s almost cutting out the reporter as a middle man by opening sources to the public.” This is an opportunity worth exploring.

Explore New Models For Public Access in the Digital Access Era

Eurekans and citizens of the wider county do clamor for a voice in the public debate, but public access television is not their preferred platform. With the vast majority of residents shifting to online media consumption, organizations like Access Humboldt must adjust their public access model to prepare the next generations of local content creators to fill information gaps. Revenue streams that would return some of the value of Humboldt County’s internet user attention back to the county in the form of inclusivity and public information grants may be the next logical step toward a more equitable information ecosystem.

Further Research

We can project conclusions onto other parts of the Humboldt County community, as we spoke to many in Eureka who reside in or keep tabs on other parts of the county. But, to understand the full depth of the experience and context, further field research in other parts of the county would be required. This would necessarily include rural areas far from Eureka, as well as tribal communities, which may have been poorly represented by our samples.

Furthermore, our experience with information ecosystem assessments is that narrowing the scope of the research by subject or demographic group can develop sharper insights. For instance, we found young Eurekans who got their information exclusively through social media, particularly from SnapChat and Instagram. Could media outlets or non-profits better tailor their services to meet the information needs of youth? We also learned about the importance of Word-of-Mouth in smaller communities, particularly among minorities and those who do not speak English natively. What could media and non-profits do to reach out to help these folks keep informed?

“Our problems are clear: drug use, the needles, the crime. It’s so depressing but I don’t know what to do about it. I don’t know what is supposed to make things better.”

– Jane, 60-year old Eureka resident

If resources could be identified for projects to inform Eurekans, we could further investigate these questions and help the information providers of the County to better provide for their needs.

NEXT STEPS

Access Humboldt will share this paper with their Board and community of stakeholders as it considers how to adjust its public access strategies in the evolving information ecosystem, along with some of the underlying data that has been collected.



Local youth access the Lost Coast Outpost events calendar to plan their weekend at the Eureka Marina (Photo credit - Joselyn Lindsey)

In consultation with those partners, Access Humboldt will develop and present its new strategy in the Fall of 2019 for consultation and refinement. The strategy will be submitted to the Board for approval later this year.

Internews and Access Humboldt will explore opportunities for further collaboration to serve the information needs in Humboldt county, building on their shared experience in this process and their collective expertise. This may include joint fundraising for projects suggested above from philanthropic sources in Northern California.

Given more time and resources, our teams would broaden the assessment across more of Humboldt County. Access Humboldt's mandate covers the whole county and includes specific broadcast agreements with seven jurisdictions. While our findings focus on Eureka and the people we spoke with there, many of these same dynamics hold for other towns and rural Humboldt County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Access Humboldt and Internews would like to acknowledge the contributions of time, energy and perspective of key informants, focus group participants and community members who spoke with us during listening tours. Our thanks go out to all those who took part in this project. local media are in really good hands for the most part.”

Key Informants:

Armeda Reitzel
Betty Kwan Chinn
Connie Stewart
Jan Kraepelien
Jana Kirk-Levine
John Harper
Kym Kemp
Leslie Castellano
Libby Maynard
Luisa Angon
Marc Valles
Mark McKenna
Micha DeNizio
Nick Wilczek
Pata Vang
Rex Bohn
Rob Standish
Stacy Young
Susan Seaman
Virginia Bass

Media Focus Group Participants:

Hank Sims
Jennifer Fumiko-Cahill
Nate Horning
Patrick Cleary
Thadeus Greenson

Interviewers & Volunteers:

Myles Smith
Sean McLaughlin
Jane Callahan
Sean Kearns
David Frank
Clay McGlaughlin
Joselyn Lindsey
Jasmine Manuel
Katie Whiteside
Tere Hicks
Bridget McGraw
Erica Guevara