

UNC Hussman School of Journalism and  
Media

Center for Innovation and  
Sustainability in Local Media



Director, Susan Leath

# UNC Knight Foundation Table Stakes Newsroom Initiative

Yearlong program that helps media organizations identify challenges and opportunities, as well as create sustainable solutions to survive and thrive in the digital age.

## Program Outcomes

Coaches guide participating organizations through the program to reach the following outcomes:

- Provide a pathway, based on the principles modeled after the [Knight-Temple Table Stakes](#) effort that was piloted in 2015-16 with four major metro newspapers, to transform their media organization into an audience-focused, digital-first, market-leading and sustainable enterprise. ([Learn more about the seven Table Stakes here.](#))
- Define specific performance initiatives that will significantly advance digital transformation and successfully achieve identified objectives over the course of the year.
- Identify and address the underlying skill, role, workflow, technology and culture changes required to achieve the objectives of the chosen performance initiatives.
- Develop the individual skills and organizational capabilities needed to continue the work beyond the project, using the tools and methodologies of performance-driven change.
- Develop a peer network of news organizations to draw on shared experiences, approaches, tools, technology and other resources.



# U.S. News Deserts

Supports established and emerging local news organizations through applied research and analysis. The Center documents the loss of local news across the U.S. while researching sustainable business strategies and innovative technologies for media organizations through three avenues of research.

Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics Penny Abernathy leads The News Desert Project, which has produced three reports assessing the U.S. local news landscape, as well as two books—The Strategic Digital Media Entrepreneur and Saving Community Journalism—aimed at helping media organizations survive and thrive in the digital world.

- The U.S. has lost nearly one-quarter of the local newspapers in existence in 2004. Many of the remaining newspapers are “ghosts” of their former selves, owned and or operating by hedge funds and private equity funds that employ aggressive cost cutting that erodes the quality and quantity of local news.
- The News Desert Project documents areas of the country at risk of becoming “news deserts” while also working with dozens of news organizations to create sustainable business strategies. The Center defines a “news desert” as “a community, either rural or urban, where residents have limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feeds democracy at the grassroots level.”
- The News Desert project has produced three comprehensive reports highlighting industry changes and ways to thwart the rise of news deserts and is currently updating the numbers for a 2019 report:
- [The Expanding News Desert](#) (2018)
- [Thwarting the Emergence of News Deserts](#) (2017)
- [The Rise of a New Media Baron and the Emerging Threat of News Deserts](#) (2017)



# PROJECT OASIS

Our news deserts research has well-defined the dynamics, trends and causes of our industry's challenges. Project Oasis brings us to the next step: where are the opportunities? We are partnering with the Google News Initiative, LION Publishers and Doug Smith for something completely new: we'll be researching these digital news outlets that are beginning to emerge in communities hard hit by the changes with the hopes of making that knowledge shareable and replicable for a new generation of news publishers.

- Despite these stark numbers, we're starting to see the evidence that local news digital startups can thrive in communities and fill these gaps. Penny's research has shown that a positive response to the loss of local newspapers has come from several hundred digital news outlets that now span the country, most of them started in the past decade. Project Oasis will build on a range of programs at UNC CISLM to arm these local news publishers with sustainable practices to help strengthen their digital business models and strategies.
- For this project, LION will help us focus our research on the most pressing and relevant questions, and engage with the right news organizations. The GNI will bring digital expertise and inform our research with lessons from the GNI Local Experiments project, where they're working with global partners to create new digital local news organizations. We're also partnering with Doug Smith, the founder of Media Transformation Challenge and architect of Table Stakes, which has supported the growth of more than 150 local news organizations in the U.S. and Europe.
- This month, we will begin surveying digital native local news organizations in the U.S. and Canada to shine a light on the business strategies that have set some apart from others. If you run a digital native local news publication, we invite you to complete the survey, which we're making available until the end of April 2020.
- I believe local news is an essential element of a strong democracy. These information outlets build trust, inspire civic engagement, and bring communities together. Through new research and resources, we believe this project has the potential to help shape a bright future for local news.

# Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting

The Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting represents a new take on a familiar mission.

We are a news trade organization with a mission of increasing the ranks, retention and profile of reporters and editors of color in the field of investigative reporting.

- The Society seeks to raise the awareness of, and opportunities for, investigative reporting among journalists of color and to foster the desire for social justice journalism and accountability reporting about racial injustice.
- Although there are journalism membership organizations that provide training and skills building for investigative reporting and others that serve as advocates for diversity in newsrooms and media organizations, none of these groups adequately serve journalists of color who are interested in opportunities in investigative reporting.
- Today, even as ongoing racial inequality roils the national landscape, too few of the journalists doing investigative reporting comes from the communities suffering the most. The ranks of investigative reporters in the nation's newsrooms continue to be overwhelmingly white.

**Our mission is to do something about that.**

