

A photograph of the Oklahoma City skyline at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue, purple, and orange. Several skyscrapers are visible, with their windows glowing with interior lights. The Oklahoma Tower is prominent on the right side of the image. In the foreground, there are lower buildings and a street with a few cars.

OKLAHOMA MEDIA CENTER

2024 IMPACT REPORT

OUR MISSION

The Oklahoma Media Center’s mission is to support and strengthen Oklahoma’s local journalism ecosystem and spur innovation through statewide collaboration that benefits diverse audiences.

ON THE COVER

Oklahoma City skyline at sunset. PHOTO ADOBE STOCK

What’s inside

- 2 Our Mission
- 3 Letter from Executive Director Rob Collins
- 4 OMC by the Numbers
- 5 OMC Collaborators
- 6 OMC Board of Directors
- 16 Thank You to Our Funders

STORIES OF IMPACT

- 8 Oklahoma Newsrooms Complete Data-driven Projects to Enhance Trust
- 12 OMC Launches ‘Free Press Isn’t Free’ Local News Literacy Campaign
- 13 For a Song: News Literacy Campaign Reaches Big Audience with Little Expense
- 14 Strengthening the Pipeline, Shared Resources
- 15 Trainings to Elevate the Industry, Hub for Collaboration, Research and Resources

LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear friends and colleagues in the local media industry,

One year ago, our two-person Oklahoma Media Center team traveled more than 1,500 miles to serve lunch and listen to the needs of Oklahoma newsrooms. The mission of this listening tour was to inform our work for OMC's strategic plan through 2026.

We learned the talent pipeline is the biggest issue facing Oklahoma newsrooms. The best and brightest don't always stay in Oklahoma and often move to bigger cities or states, and high-profile positions are difficult to fill. Low pay and long hours are burning out industry veterans. And out-of-state candidates often don't want to move to Oklahoma.

So addressing this issue is job No. 1 for our statewide collaboration supporting local news. To deepen the bench and bullpen of trained journalists, we're working closely with higher education and technology centers to help bridge the gap between the classroom and the newsroom for budding professional journalists.

As you read our track record in this year's impact report, it's clear that OMC gets stuff done. We've had success partnering with researchers with our state's universities. We maximized usage of comprehensive data from our award-winning ecosystem engagement project. That helped gain a deeper understanding of how Oklahomans consume information, what they trust and what would make them support local journalism. Based on that research, we just executed a very cool "Schoolhouse Rock!"-style song to engage Okies where they are.

That's just one example of how research can increase engagement. As platforms evolve, we'll need to come up with new and innovative ways to reach folks.

The Fourth Estate has a distribution problem. We must double down on delivering community information in more easily consumable ways.

The local news watchdog and guide dog has to learn new tricks. Information dissemination must be clear, concise and circulated via ever-changing technology. We need to do a better job reaching overworked and overwhelmed citizens to help them feel personally invested in the true value of trustworthy information created at the local level.

OMC works diligently to help the local news ecosystem in Oklahoma. Please consider our nonprofit as a resource to help foster conversations and be convener. That, in turn, will help our Oklahoma newsrooms connect with local communities.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rob Collins".

Rob Collins
Executive Director
Oklahoma Media Center

OMC IMPACT: BY THE NUMBERS

Nearly **\$300,000** in grants given directly to member newsrooms since 2020.

Over **80** Oklahoma journalists, including nearly **30** journalism students, attended an in-person IRE training facilitated by OMC.

Majority of OMC collaborators participated in Local News Literacy Campaign to reach audiences online with a nonpartisan message about the importance of a free press.

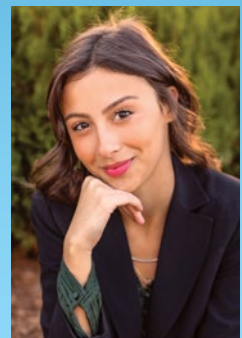


“Since 2020, I wanted to do a project that highlighted voices from the state’s historic Black towns. With staffing challenges, I knew it would be impossible for our two-person Viewpoints team to do all the reporting and research that would be required. The \$10,000 OMC grant made it possible to hire reporters to travel to the towns and have conversations with residents, capture photos and videos.”

— Clytie Bunyan, The Oklahoman’s managing editor for Opinion & Community Engagement, commenting on the “Black Towns” project that was part of OMC’s Ecosystem Engagement Project

“The Oklahoma Media Center provides a foundation for young journalists to share their hopes, concerns and questions about entering the news industry. I was thrilled to participate in their Young Journalists’ Roundtable, and the conversation with professional newsroom leaders gave me hope about the future of local journalism.”

— Luísa Clausen,
an Oklahoma State University student from Brazil



OMC COLLABORATORS



The Black Wall Street Times

The Broken Arrow Sentinel

CNHI Oklahoma

Cherokee Phoenix

Curbside Chronicle

Enid News & Eagle

The Frontier

Gaylord News

Griffin Media

Indigenous Journalists Association

Investigate Midwest

KFOR

KGOU

KOSU

The Lawton Constitution

Mvskoke Media

NonDoc

The Norman Transcript

Oklahoma City Free Press

Oklahoma Press Association

The Oklahoma Eagle

The Oklahoman

Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma Voice

Osage News

Public Radio Tulsa

StateImpact Oklahoma

Streetlight

Tulsa World

Telemundo Oklahoma

OU Student Media

VNN

OMC BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Tyler Tokarczyk

BOARD PRESIDENT

Board President Tyler Tokarczyk is a senior program officer for Inasmuch Foundation. His work primarily focuses on journalism, education and entrepreneurship. In addition to OMC, Tyler serves on the board of directors for ReMerge of Oklahoma County, The Verge OKC and Oklahoma Public School Resource Center. Outside of the office, Tyler enjoys spending time with his wife, Ariel, and their young daughter. Born and raised in Buffalo, New York, he majored in journalism at Washington and Lee University and earned his MBA at the University of Oklahoma.



Angel Ellis

BOARD TREASURER

Board Treasurer Angel Ellis is a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and has lived, worked and played within reservation boundaries most of her life. Early in her career, she became the editor for a Kimberling City Publish Co. newspaper. By 2008, Ellis had performed every job, from throwing paper routes with her children in car seats to selling advertisements and covering local news. Ellis became director of Mvskoke Media in 2020. In 2021, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation became the first tribe to usher in a citizen-ratified, constitutionally protected and fully funded press. Her advocacy work is captured in the 2023 documentary film “Bad Press,” which received the Sundance Special Jury Freedom of Expression Award. She serves on the Indigenous Journalist Association’s Board of Directors, chairs the IJA’s first Free Press Committee and serves on the Society of Professional Journalists’ Freedom of Information Committee.



Bianca Gordon

BOARD SECRETARY

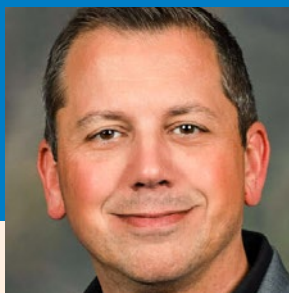
Board Secretary Bianca Gordon joined the nonprofit agency Bridges of Norman in September 2017. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in music from the University of Tulsa in 2000, and a Master of Arts degree in mass communication management (strategic communication) from the University of Oklahoma in 2014. Gordon serves on the board of directors for the historic Norman Depot where she is chair of the marketing and development committee and is an appointed member of the Norman Public Library board. She is also an adjunct public relations research and writing professor at the University of Oklahoma’s Gaylord College of Journalism & Mass Communication. Gordon founded Spire Public Relations in 2016. Gordon has a daughter, Chesna, and is an insatiable learner who loves spending time with family, doing real estate on the side, and playing trivia. A sixth-generation Oklahoman, Gordon is a descendent of the Choctaw Freedmen.



Kari King

BOARD MEMBER

OMC board member Kari King leads a team of content creators for KFOR.com, KFOR+ the Live OTT- CTV Channel and the station's social media channels. Previously, Kari has worked for other Oklahoma media outlets. Before returning to Oklahoma, Kari worked as a main anchor, broadcast executive producer and news director for a CBS affiliate and Telemundo while living in the Texas Panhandle. Kari enjoys reading, cooking and spending quality time with family and friends. Her dog is also a source of enjoyment and entertainment! Over the years, she has served on the boards of the Oklahoma Better Business Bureau and served in several leadership positions for other nonprofits. She is currently active in networking groups, an executive board member of the Edmond Women's Club and a Red Earth board member. Kari has been a member of the Oklahoma Media Center since its inception.



Jeff Mayo

BOARD MEMBER

OMC board member Jeff Mayo is publisher and president of Cookson Hills Publishers, Inc., with publications covering Atoka, Haskell, McIntosh, Okmulgee and Sequoyah Counties in eastern Oklahoma. Jeff is vice chair on the National Newspaper Association Board of Directors. He received a community journalism degree from the University of Kansas and a law degree from the University of Minnesota. Jeff was elected to the Oklahoma Press Association Board of Directors in 2007 and served as president in 2013. He was presented with NNA's Daniel M. Phillips Leadership Award in 2010.



Ashley Harris Philippsen

BOARD MEMBER

OMC board member Ashley Harris Philippsen partners with organizations and institutions as executive director of ImpactTulsa, where she develops programs that create sustainable outcomes for students. Through her career, with roles including executive director at Met Cares, managing director of Teacher Leadership Development at Teach For America and founding dean of students at YES Prep Public Schools, Ashley developed skills in team management, effective program design and implementation, strategic thinking and planning. As the deputy chief of community development and policy at the City of Tulsa, she was responsible for designing and facilitating community engagement and organizing processes for urban planning and development.



Tres Savage

BOARD MEMBER

OMC board member William W. (Tres) Savage III has served as NonDoc's editor-in-chief since the publication's launch in September 2015. He holds a journalism degree from the University of Oklahoma and covered two sessions of the Oklahoma Legislature for eCapitol.net before working in health care for six years. He is a nationally certified Mental Health First Aid instructor.

STORIES OF IMPACT

Oklahoma Newsrooms Complete Data-driven Projects to Enhance Trust

A dozen different newsrooms across Oklahoma completed data-driven projects designed to enhance trust in and the sustainability of local journalism as part of the nonprofit Oklahoma Media Center's Ecosystem Engagement Project.

The statewide collaborative's multiphase project consisted of contracting scientific polling as well as qualitative academic research. This comprehensive data helped gain a clearer perspective of how Oklahomans consume information, what they consider trustworthy and what would spur them to support local journalism. In September 2023, OMC facilitated a training with the national nonprofit Trusting News at the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma to discuss how to turn the study's findings into practical applications to enhance the impact of local newsrooms.

Next, OMC began accepting proposals and awarded over \$112,000 in stipends to 12 media organizations to undertake projects related to the ecosystem study and the subsequent training. Working closely with cohort members, Trusting News Director Joy Mayer provided specially designed online training sessions, one-on-one coaching, office hours and additional support through the end of March.

"Across Oklahoma, there are journalists building on the research and working hard to understand their communities, connect with new audiences, and explain the value of their news coverage," Mayer said. "It's been inspiring and exciting to support them as they've evolved their practices to offer an improved public service."

During OMC's monthly group meetings, participating organizations gave presentations that discussed these lessons learned from their projects:

[Enid News & Eagle](#) shared how they wanted to play more of a leadership role in providing reliable information to their community instead of the social media rumor mill. They

do have a social media presence but wanted to leverage community members to help spread the word. They targeted Enid's substantial [Marshellese population](#). Language barriers and cultural differences make engagement challenging, but they are continuing to look for ways to include this historically underrepresented population by reaching out to employers, schools and other organizations to find the individuals to share local information and provide feedback to the publication. They worked with an outside marketing person with a news background to develop a survey, find other community ambassadors and organize a meeting with potential community contributors. They continue to work with these contacts to develop their content as well as help expand their reach on social media.

[The Frontier](#) shared how they implemented a subscription text messaging service with two-way texting. They also planned two in-person events in [Tulsa](#) and [Oklahoma City](#). The texting service allows readers to share story tips and comments, as well as allowing the publication to promote its content directly to engaged readers. They are using the [SimpleText](#) platform to do this. As social media algorithms have changed, they have seen engagement on those platforms decrease,

so they hope directly texting readers will eventually increase traffic. With a six-person staff, the events took a bit longer to organize. Legislative forums were designed to connect with new people who are interested in public policy and local news.

The [KGOU/Oklahoma Watch](#) collaboration [shared](#) how they planned to do several in-person events across the state, where they



Joy Mayer

Top 10 Journalism Collaboration

In 2023, the Center for Cooperative Media listed OMC's ecosystem engagement project as one of the **Top 10 Journalism Collaborations** in the world. **The OMC project made No. 7 on the list** "because it combines the infrastructure of an existing news collaborative with an ecosystem-wide research effort."

talked to community members, learned about their concerns and developed personal relationships that would let the public learn more about the news media. The collaborators did a similar project in 2022 at seven locations around Oklahoma. As they began to plan the project, they were reminded of the importance of emphasizing promotion and building their audience. They did find that the two best-attended events were places with KGOU transmitters and most attendees were listeners. With the compressed grant timeline, they decided to focus on four events with more geographically centered locations: Chickasha, Woodward, Ponca City and Durant. Participants provided good feedback on what their concerns were and how they related to local journalism. Many people did not realize how few people are involved in most newsrooms, and these events helped build trust and make journalism more relatable to the general public. Common community concerns included information on crime, schools, infrastructure, funds to promote business and job creation and health care. Participants appreciated the sincerity, transparency, time and resources that were put into conducting these listening events.

[KOSU](#) shared how they sought to create an advisory board to enhance collaboration and help emphasize civic engagement. The project began more slowly than anticipated. They worked with a consultant outside of the media field in order to get different perspectives from what they would usually have. They held a few community listening sessions with [Focus: Black Oklahoma](#) on journalistic accountability, fairness and other areas. Initially, they were very focused on central Oklahoma and reaching every demographic in the area, but then they focused the board on specific tasks related to community engagement and other listening events. Developing job descriptions for the board has helped to direct their work, and they were being very intentional about setting both the board

and the station up for a successful relationship that will inform their coverage.

[The Lawton Constitution](#) shared how they conducted a readership survey to understand where to best allocate their limited resources and staff and provide desired community coverage. Using a third-party consultant through February, they reached out to both current and former readers. Initial attempts via email did not receive much attention, but a Facebook survey garnered over 600 unique responses, split fairly evenly between readers and nonreaders. They found 94% of respondents wanted more coverage of community events and festivals, which is something the paper had de-emphasized due to time constraints and community organizations shifting primarily to social media promotion. Since then, they have been able to add a new reporter and have re-emphasized covering local events. A majority of respondents also want a clear mix of local, state and national news, particularly about state government, so they are looking into ways to collaborate with other newsrooms to better provide this content.

[NonDoc](#) created a news ambassadors program to help grow text and newsletter subscribers, establish republication partnerships with local outlets and support their annual fundraising campaign. They have partnered with several people in communities across Oklahoma and check in with them monthly. They have seen subscriber and social media follower growth every month since starting this project. They also have created a [Google Doc](#) with pre-shortened stories for smaller papers to share, particularly regarding state government and statewide matters. It took more time than initially expected to build trust in different communities and identify ambassadors who have the skills and time needed to help promote journalism effectively. They received real-world feedback from their ambassadors about how they have connected their own social network with NonDoc reporting. They are continuing to nurture these relationships as well as identify additional ambassadors in a more intentional way.



STORIES OF IMPACT

[The Oklahoma Eagle](#) shared how they sought ways to more effectively distribute their content. As they developed the idea, they found they first needed to get a better sense of who their readership is and what more it expects from the Eagle. Instead of their original six-pronged approach, they decided to focus on a more targeted strategy that included creating a [Trusting News page](#) on their website, creating a content group of readers and asking for feedback, making outreach presentations to the general public and partnering with other local organizations to spread the word about their work. The presentations were targeted to six different audiences around Tulsa, and the Eagle surveyed attendees and passed out copies of the paper to get direct feedback. They found the publication carried considerable weight in the area's Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and is considered trustworthy, especially in the 45-plus age group, though its following among younger audiences is not as strong. They received feedback about how their online presence, especially across non-Facebook social media platforms, could be improved. After the conclusion of these efforts, the Eagle produced reports on their results, which showed high levels of perceived accuracy, trustworthiness and interest in the publication's content, though they found that readers did request more variety of reporting topics. They also learned important insights on their readership to enable them to develop ways to reach new audiences, particularly younger people. They plan to regularly engage readers and the broader community moving forward.

[The Oklahoman](#) shared how they focused on Oklahoma's 13 remaining [all-Black towns](#), bringing attention to the issues facing these historic communities through residents' own words and amplifying their voices. By visiting each town, they planned individual profiles and vignettes that spoke to what is special about the community, what residents' needs and concerns are and what they would like other Oklahomans to know about these towns. The commentaries included infrastructure and revenue concerns, education and other topics. They also included print, digital and video elements. The Oklahoman found that many residents had previously moved away, but they returned later in life hoping to build up these unique communities and share them with the younger generation. One challenge they encountered was staff changes, which delayed project implementation, but they found workarounds that will ensure success despite the unexpected hurdle. This project could easily be replicated in other marginalized communities. The Oklahoman found the trust issue in these small communities is a very real problem. It takes time to work

Gary Lee discusses The Oklahoma Eagle's Ecosystem Engagement Project on a local radio station.



Clytie Bunyan, editor for the Viewpoints project on Oklahoma Black Towns, with Shelby Minner, curator at the Oklahoma Jazz Museum in Rentiesville, Oklahoma.



Rochelle RedBone Arebalo (Apache/Comanche) speaks to other VNN Citizen Journalism Project participants about her work in the Anadarko community.

within marginalized populations to build trust and help them understand how journalists want to give them a voice and not exploit their stories.

The [Oklahoma Press Association](#) shared how they decided to measure news coverage in two OPA members. They analyzed a year's worth of coverage from those weekly newspapers, surveyed readers to gather feedback on what they wanted and provided this data to the newsrooms so they could adapt their reporting based on reader interests. Despite both newspapers serving rural areas, their reporting varied enormously in terms of topics, the annual analysis showed. These disparities also were not in alignment with what their communities actually wanted to read. Both newspapers were publishing few features, but readers said human interest stories were among the most requested. The surveys revealed that if coverage is not balanced, then readers will seek out different sources of information. When content is more balanced, readers are much more likely to support local newspapers. The surveys also showed most respondents did find their local newspaper to be an important part of the community and considered it trustworthy, but they did not generally see it as providing content readers could not discover elsewhere. Issues with high-speed internet connectivity also limited online access and digital news delivery options in these rural communities.

[OU Daily shared](#) how they sought to enhance audience engagement through a number of different initiatives. They have created an engagement desk with four students creating content and providing deeper analytics. They also have revamped their monthly newsletter to increase visual elements as well as providing more space for advertisers. The newsletter has seen significant growth in open rates since these changes were implemented. Centralizing and

automating their social media accounts have increased engagement, access to analytics and improved content moderation. Readership surveys revealed a majority of their readers are older than 25. The OU Daily's first ever business survey showed a number of opportunities to expand revenue and enhance partnerships with various businesses around Norman. They also

deepened their fundraising efforts, which included earlier planning, making cross-platform appeals and offering more donor incentives.

[VNN shared](#) how they created a Citizen Journalism Project using their custom web application to develop news training for underserved communities. Though they had the platform for a little while, they had never embarked on actually training individuals to be journalists. Through surveys, they found that many people simply lacked confidence to contribute, so they developed a specific training program to bridge this gap. The program was promoted primarily through word-of-mouth recommendations they received from current readers. Contributors could sign up under a number of traditionally underserved groups and then receive training on media literacy, how to conduct interviews, write like a journalist and work with editors to share important stories affecting their communities. Seven individuals, who were already community influencers in one way or another, attended the training. VNN found they came in with considerable skills, so the training could go more in-depth than initially expected. All the participants completed the program, including three people who had considerable travel involved. Every member came from underrepresented populations, often in multiple ways.

Rob Collins, executive director of OMC, said he was impressed with how the newsrooms experimented with new tools and ideas to deepen community engagement.

"By listening to the needs of local citizens, we're being intentional about better serving relevant information to meet folks where they are located," Collins said. "Expanding beyond journalism's traditional bandwidth, local newsrooms are interacting with audiences in innovative ways through the execution of these engagement experiments." 

STORIES OF IMPACT

OMC Launches 'Free Press Isn't Free' Local News Literacy Campaign

The animated 'Schoolhouse Rock!'-inspired video explains value of local news.

The nonprofit Oklahoma Media Center released a "Schoolhouse Rock!"-inspired animated video with a song designed to bolster trust and support for local newsrooms.

The nonpartisan 501(c)(3) commissioned the creation of the 60-second "Free Press Isn't Free" video. The song was written by a well-loved Oklahoma musician with animation designed as an homage to the vintage educational cartoon series.

OMC's local news literacy campaign provides education on journalism's role in facilitating an informed citizenry and explains the value of local news. To convey this message, OMC's Board of Directors Treasurer Angel Ellis suggested creating a "Schoolhouse Rock!"-influenced video.

"Small, impactful segments geared toward educating the audience could be the perfect answer to making the public more aware of news-gathering processes and increasing their confidence in journalism," said Ellis, the award-winning director of Mvskoke Media, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's independent tribal media agency.

Rob Collins, executive director of Oklahoma Media Center, said the campaign was targeted for Generation X and Baby Boomers not currently paying for news in Oklahoma, where the trust issue is reaching a tipping point. In 2023, the McCurtain Gazette-News made national headlines after releasing audio that recorded four county officials discussing the killing of two journalists and lynching.

"Many citizens do not read, believe or trust the media," Collins said. "Grievance merchants are ratcheting up the rage with social media, which exacerbates our nation's shortcomings in civic literacy to the detriment of our democracy.

"At the same, local newsrooms are suffering from revenue shortfalls and staffing issues. They all need more

resources and more folks to cover the important issues affecting their communities."

Collins said OMC's targeted local news literacy campaign provided newsrooms stipends to publish and broadcast the "Free Press Isn't Free" video on their websites and help newsrooms execute paid social media campaigns to reach local audiences in specific geographic areas.

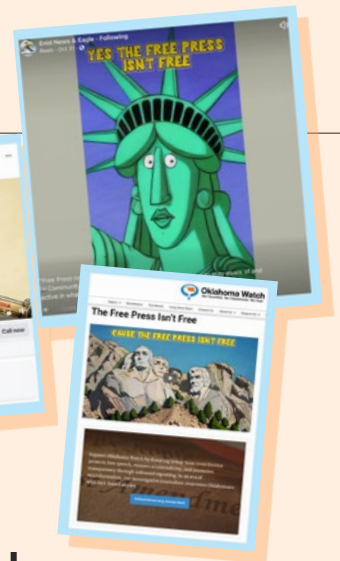
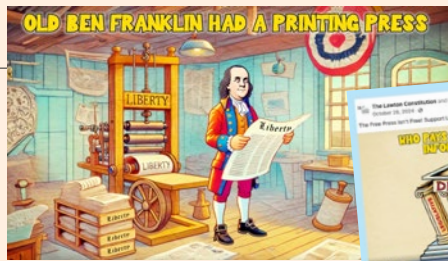
OMC's statewide polling showed citizens trust news sources closer to home. And a respected ambassador recommending a local news source goes a long way toward building trust.

Mike Hosty, a witty guitar guru known for performing in towns throughout Oklahoma, wanted to help the statewide collaborative change the perception of local news. Hosty also happens to be a big fan of Bob Dorough, the Southern musician and vocalist famous for composing and performing the iconic "Schoolhouse Rock!" songs.

After Hosty recorded the OMC-commissioned song in June, OMC then contracted with a New York City-based studio, Mechanism Digital, to produce an animated video aimed at promoting and supporting local news. A creative brief provided by Collins tasked the team with designing the "Schoolhouse Rock!"-style video, blending educational content with a unique visual approach.

Mechanism Digital's team, led by Creative Director Lucien Harriot and Producer Valeriu Iancu, meticulously crafted visuals to match each line of the song. The animation spans from the days of Benjamin Franklin and the first printing press to emphasize the foundational importance of the Fourth Estate to America's independence.

The "Free Press Isn't Free" song and video were supported by a Kirkpatrick Foundation grant.



Check out the
campaign song
here!



Rob Collins

For a Song: News Literacy Campaign Reaches Big Audience with Little Expense

A statewide collaborative's grant-funded Facebook ad campaign to explain the importance of local news generated nearly 400,000 impressions with targeted audiences, according to a new analysis of the news literacy campaign.

In August 2024, the nonprofit Oklahoma Media Center released a "Schoolhouse Rock!"-inspired animated video with an original song designed to bolster trust and support for local newsrooms.

After commissioning the creation of Mike Hosty's "Free Press Isn't Free" song, the nonpartisan 501(c)(3) provided 18 local newsrooms stipends to execute paid social media ads. The messaging was based upon 2023 research that showed 77 percent of surveyed Oklahomans cited Facebook as their main source of local news and information among social media platforms.

The OMC-funded Meta ads started in the fall of 2024 and ended prior to Facebook canceling its third party fact-checking program in 2025.

Rob Collins, OMC executive director, said the data-driven campaign targeted people in demographics within specific geographic locations. Newsrooms spent an average of \$350 for each Meta ad campaign featuring the 60-second animated song to demonstrate the significance of subscribing, advertising and/or donating to their newsrooms.

"A lot of newsrooms have never done paid Meta campaigns, but we knew we were reaching people not engaging with local news," Collins said. "That was what we hoped to accomplish. The main point of this literacy campaign was to reach audiences where they are."

The individual ads were relatively low investment for the amount of audience engagement. The cost per ad for public radio stations ranged from 42 cents at KGOU to 4 cents at KOSU and 2 cents for Griffin Media, the owner of CBS affiliates in Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Other key findings from the campaign analysis included:

- The ads reached 473,281 Facebook users and made 388,633 impressions.
- The 55-plus age demographic accounted for more than 60 percent of nearly every outlet's ads.
- The under-35 demographic accounted for less than 15 percent of viewers.

Digging more into demographic data provided by newsrooms, audiences for Griffin and the Sequoyah County Times newspaper skewed more female. Griffin reported a 75-25 percent split and Sequoyah County Times a slightly more modest 74-26 percent.

In contrast, more even gender breakdowns were reported

by other outlets. KGOU showed 56-42 percent with more women, The Lawton Constitution newspaper's campaign skewed 1 percent toward men, while KGOU showed an exact 50-50 split between male and female.

KGOU, Griffin and Lawton also showed a notable trend in click-through rates, with Griffin reporting 6.6 percent, Lawton 4.1 percent and KGOU achieving 3.2 percent of people actually clicking on and viewing the ads.

"With a variety of new, low-cost advertising strategies, these outlets reengaged their local audiences in a conversation about the importance of having accurate local information as an essential means for taking part in civic life," said OMC Program Coordinator Zach McGrew.

OMC's local news literacy project was funded by the Oklahoma City-based Kirkpatrick Foundation.

Several news outlets discussed lessons learned from their campaigns with the collaborative. Violet Hassler, the Enid News & Eagle's digital communications coordinator, said she focused on pointing out facts, realizing some followers don't always agree with their publication. Enid also created a web page with the video embedded with information about the local newspaper, emphasizing its importance to the community and other interesting info they will continue to add in the future.

As Meta tightened up its advertising rules a great deal during the last week or two before the 2024 presidential election, several publications ran into technical issues. When KGOU tried to run the cartoon with copy featuring the word "democracy," Membership Director Cate Howell said the ad was flagged and the radio station had to change the verbiage before it could run.

Howell noted a certain amount of negative comments, but she said the video received good reach overall.

Responding to The Norman Transcript's campaign, reader Becca Bean expressed gratitude.

"We deeply value the role The Norman Transcript plays in our community," Bean commented on the Meta ad. "Local newspapers are vital to our democracy."

The George W. Bush Institute recently mentioned the campaign in the article "What's working in local journalism?" William McKenzie's blog discussed different initiatives across the country that are helping reestablish trust in local journalism.

"The one-minute animated presentation, which is modeled after the 'Schoolhouse Rock!' series of short films, emphasizes how holding leaders accountable, reporting on government agencies, and verifying facts secure our liberties," McKenzie wrote.

"In-depth reporting, fact-checking, and accountability journalism don't come free, of course. The work takes time and costs money. That's why the new 'Free Press Isn't Free' video emphasizes the need to pay for the information that keeps us free, whether through subscriptions, donations, or advertising."

STORIES OF IMPACT

Oklahoma Media Center's Strategic Plan

In March 2024, the OMC Board of Directors, along with local news and education leaders, met at the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits for strategic planning.

The strategic plan was adopted by the OMC board in May 2024. This plan will serve as the blueprint for OMC staff and board through December 2026.

The next chapter

1. Grow membership through program expansion focused on sustainability and innovation
 - Test ways to retain journalists in Oklahoma
 - Strengthen newsrooms through revenue training
 - Develop programming around AI
 - Define collaboration more clearly
 - Grow the number of members by 25% by the end of 2026
2. Be an advocate for Oklahoma media organizations in both national media circles and with local audiences
 - Champion the importance of local news
 - Research the media ecosystem in Oklahoma
 - Expand in-person events
3. Expand organizational capacity through increased staff and board development
 - Maximize professional development opportunities
 - Grow fundraising base
 - Expand board and review governance to identify best practices in committees, terms and policies

Strengthening the Pipeline, Shared Resources

Entering its fifth year as a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2025, the Oklahoma Media Center is continuing to reshape the landscape around local journalism in the state. Beyond the research, training, networking and funding opportunities, a crucial facet of OMC's work is providing best-practices training for Oklahoma journalists with extra support to help them succeed in their work.



Penny Riordan, Local Media Foundation's director of collaboration and Local News Fund, led Oklahoma Media Center's strategic planning in March 2024 at the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits.

OMC began giving out three Journalist Stipend Awards quarterly starting in April 2025. Student advisers and newsroom supervisors recommend journalists who have gone above and beyond to do exceptional work. These awards go to student journalists, early career journalists and news industry veterans. Each award of \$200 incentivizes initiative and shows journalists they are appreciated. A panel of seasoned journalists judge the entries to determine awardees. Winners are recognized with newsroom visits, at group meetings and featured in the OMC newsletter.

OMC has continued its partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse to offer the Employee Assistance Program to partnering organizations. This service provides free, 24/7 mental health support for journalists struggling with the many pressures they face just to succeed in their profession. OMC members need only identify themselves as such when they call the EAP hotline or reach out to them via email to receive help.

In addition, OMC continues to provide the LegisOK legislative tracking service for its members. Media organizations interested in using this tool can contact OMC to set up credentialed access. 

Trainings to Elevate the Industry



OMC co-hosted a great two-day training with Investigative Reporters & Editors in April 2024 in Oklahoma City. About 80 journalists attended the collaborative event at the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits in Oklahoma City.



Training sessions at the 2024 IRE Oklahoma City Watchdog Workshop included “Collaborating across newsrooms on important stories,” “Navigating investigations that impact Indigenous communities,” “Gathering your content: Access to public records and court,” “Pitching, managing, and vetting your investigations,” “Watchdog story ideas for anyone” and “Digging into data for stories using Google Sheets.”



The Freedom of the Press Foundation offered a cohort training in the summer of 2024 for Oklahoma

reporters covering elections, accountability and freedom of information issues. The sessions focused on Digital Security Fundamentals, Advanced Secure Communication and Data Security, Digital Security in Hostile Urban Environments and Online Abuse Self-Defense Training. The Source Protection Program was offered by Freedom of the Press Foundation and The Centre for Investigative Journalism (UK), teaming up with the Oklahoma Media Center to offer the newsrooms trainings.



Zach McGrew, OMC's program coordinator, presented an interactive training in 2024 on uses and ethics of AI in journalism, featuring real-world discussions from Jerry Goodwin, assistant professor of journalism and mass communications at Tulsa Community College, Jeff Mayo, publisher at Cookson Hills Publishers Inc., and Seth Prince, OU Student Media director and OU Daily newsroom adviser.



OMC newsrooms met in 2024 with Chandler Engelbrecht, the new multimedia journalism teacher for a CareerTech pilot program at Metro Tech

in Oklahoma City. The course prepares students for jobs in journalism and media through project-based learning, industry certifications, proficiency in design tools, digital video, editing, photography and multimedia storytelling. It includes ethical leadership, artificial intelligence and electronic marketing strategies. Certifications are available from the new course include Adobe Suite, drone technology and photography.



Hub for Collaboration, Research and Resources

The latest version of Impact Architects' Local News and Information Ecosystem Framework wrote: “Oklahoma’s news ecosystem shows signs of strong collaboration with the goals of filling information gaps, building trust, and understanding community needs,” according to the Oklahoma chapter.

The report noted how the nonprofit Oklahoma Media Center is serving as a hub for collaboration, research and resources within the local news ecosystem.

“In addition to publishing analyses of news consumption and needs within the state, the center has supported community engagement projects and trainings centered around building trust,” according to the report.



THANK YOU

TO OUR FUNDERS

