

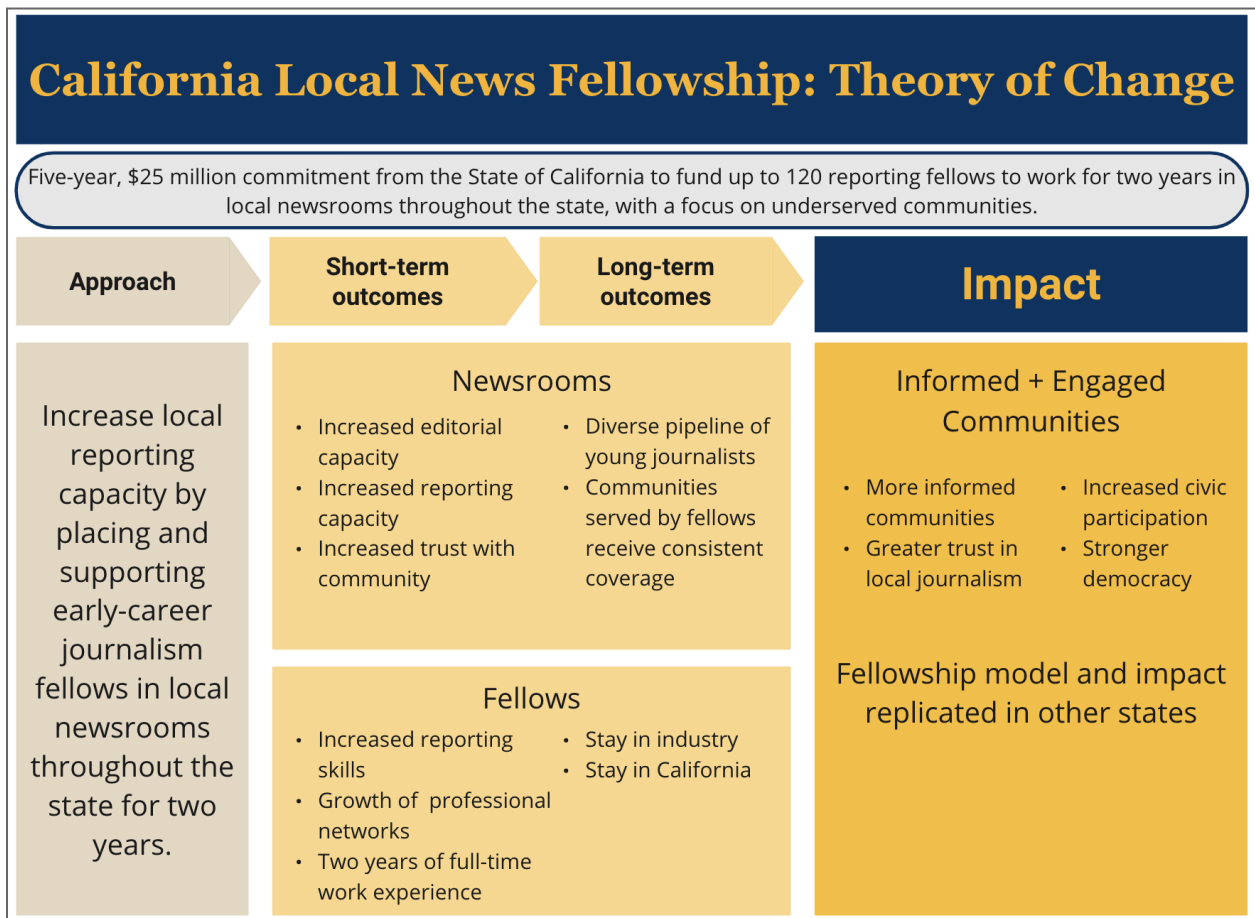
## California Local News Fellowship:

### Cohort 1 Baseline Survey Summary

March 2024

#### Executive Summary

In December 2023 Impact Architects developed surveys to be distributed to California Local News Fellowship fellows and host newsrooms. The purpose was to gain a baseline understanding of the goals and expectations for both populations, with an emphasis on the desired short-term outcomes and long-term impact of the fellowship regarding fellows and their career trajectories, newsroom sustainability, and community impact. The questions were developed in consultation with the California Local News Fellowship program team and designed to reflect the priorities identified in the program's theory of change. This and subsequent surveys will be used to understand progress toward the program's major goals over the life of the fellowship and to identify where the program can adapt, if needed.



The survey results indicate that both the newsrooms and the fellows are well set up to execute the necessary activities for fulfilling the desired change. Fellows are eager to develop their skills, and newsrooms are similarly eager to deploy those skills to produce more journalism and reach more people in their respective communities. While newsrooms already perceive a high level of trust between them and the communities they serve, increased content production and intentional coverage of underserved communities – demographic, geographic and linguistic – will still contribute to long-term goals.

The goals newsrooms set for the fellows and the types of work they are asked to do are focused on editorial production. Additionally, almost all organizations are able to identify specific populations that they want to reach that they currently don't. While it's not always the expectation that the fellow will be responsible for reaching those communities, the added reporting capacity they bring should smooth the path toward reaching them. The newsrooms overall have an expansive vision for the fellows in terms of fulfilling the information needs of California communities. The extent to which each fellow is able to shape the relationship between the organization and California communities will vary because the organizations are varied, ranging from small operations in which they are the only reporter to the largest newspaper in the state.

The fellows are motivated by opportunities for professional growth, having a positive impact on communities, and maintaining financial security while gaining experience. They are invested in relationship building between their organizations and the communities they serve. So while their primary motivation is reasonably to have financial stability while developing skills, they also see the big picture about how they can play a part in building and sustaining the public service elements of journalism.

## Detailed Results

### Newsrooms

We received responses from 33 of 37 newsrooms. The survey focused on how the organizations imagine the fellows contributing to the organizations and their relationship with the communities they serve, but it also focused on the current relationship between the organization and those communities.

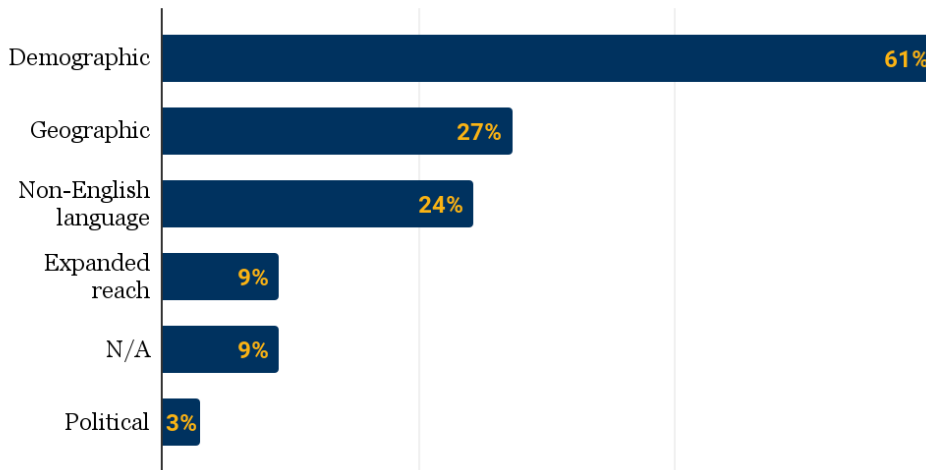
**All but one** newsroom indicated that they have clearly established goals for the fellows (the one that didn't said they were "unsure" if they had clearly established goals). When asked to elaborate on the goals, almost all of them referenced editorial production, such as "2-3 stories a week on average." Many mentioned that the goals mirror other reporters in the newsroom. As a whole, even if there are fellows who fail to meet their editorial production goals, the fellowship will almost certainly have contributed to increased local reporting. Whether it's sustainable post-fellowship or if the reporting capacity is reaching desired communities are further questions.

There is some indication that the reporting from fellows is aimed at reaching new communities. Of the 22 newsrooms to indicate that their fellow has a specific beat, **13 (59 percent) said that it is a new beat**, and two others (9 percent) said that it was an existing beat that had not been filled recently. Given the priorities of the newsrooms, the fellowship is thus far contributing to thematically expansive coverage in California.

These newsrooms selected the beats for a variety of reasons. For the most part, they were to **fulfill a community need**. The need was identified in one of two ways. Newsrooms themselves identified the needs, for example in recognition of a growing population or by providing dedicated local government coverage for the first time. In other instances, existing audiences identified the need, either implicitly through coverage that garnered a lot of interest or explicitly through direct feedback. Other organizations primarily selected the beat to fill an organizational need, such as adding capacity to an existing beat or filling an existing role previously held by freelancers or former staffers.

Whether the fellow is a beat or general assignment reporter, the organization hopes that the fellow's added capacity will benefit them through developing skills, while benefiting the newsroom and communities by filling information needs. For the most part, the organizations want to fill needs among specific communities, whether or not the fellow is on a dedicated beat, and they identified demographic communities (such as "Southeast Asian" or "younger Latinx") as the primary communities to reach. Geographic targets (such as "Central Valley" or "Mendocino County") could also include specific demographic groups. About a quarter of newsrooms also said that they hoped to produce journalism in languages other than English.

## Newsrooms hope fellows expand reach to new communities

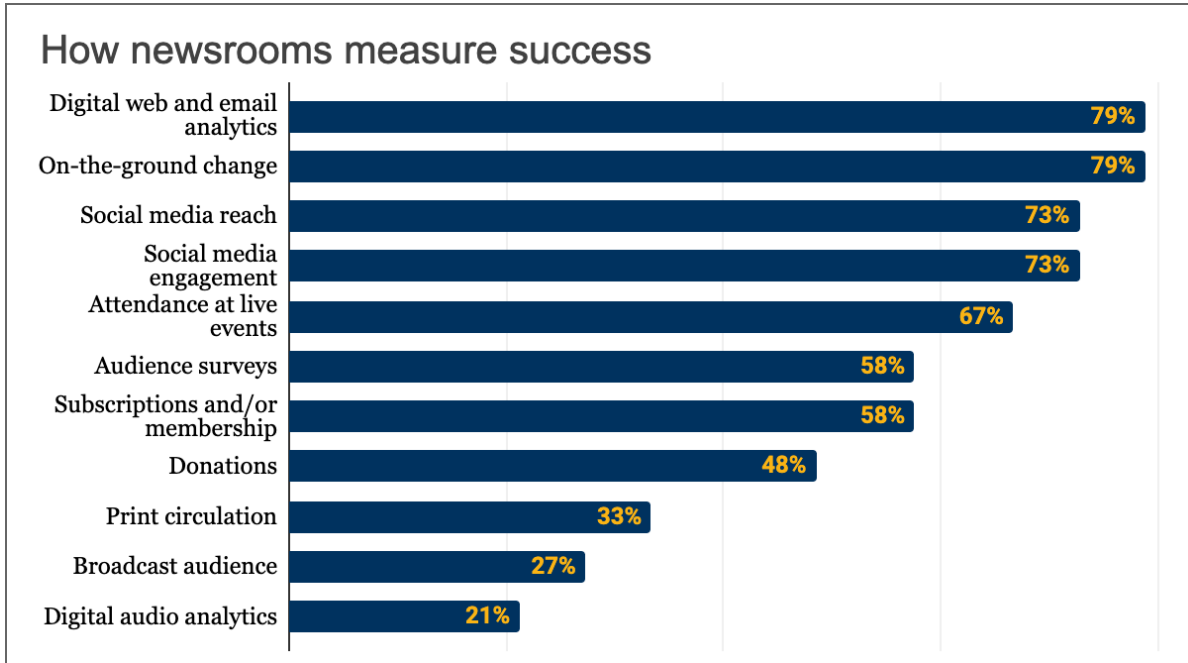


On the whole, newsrooms rated the trust they have with the communities they serve very highly. When asked to rate the level of trust from one to 10, one being "very little trust" and **10 being "highly trusted," the average response was 8.5**. In fact, 58 percent of newsrooms selected either nine or 10. This question measures the level of perceived trust among the communities the organization already serves, not the communities it wants to reach as a result of added reporting capacity.

The newsrooms similarly have a positive view of the level of civic engagement in the communities they serve. The **vast majority (94 percent) of newsrooms describe the communities they serve as either "highly" or "somewhat" civically engaged**.

The high-level goals of the newsrooms, which include content production from fellows in areas that otherwise wouldn't have been covered, are easy to measure. It will be more challenging to connect the production of journalism with audience growth and relationship-building from communities with which the newsrooms want to engage. Newsrooms appear to be set up for understanding the success of the fellowship in these terms. We asked newsrooms to identify the ways in which they measure success and community impact overall. The two most commonly cited methods are digital web analytics, the lowest hanging fruit of success measurement, and on-the-ground change, such as individual and collective action, civic participation and responsiveness of government to community needs as a result of journalism.

On-the-ground change will be most revealing with regard to the long-term impact of the California Local News Fellowship.



## Fellows

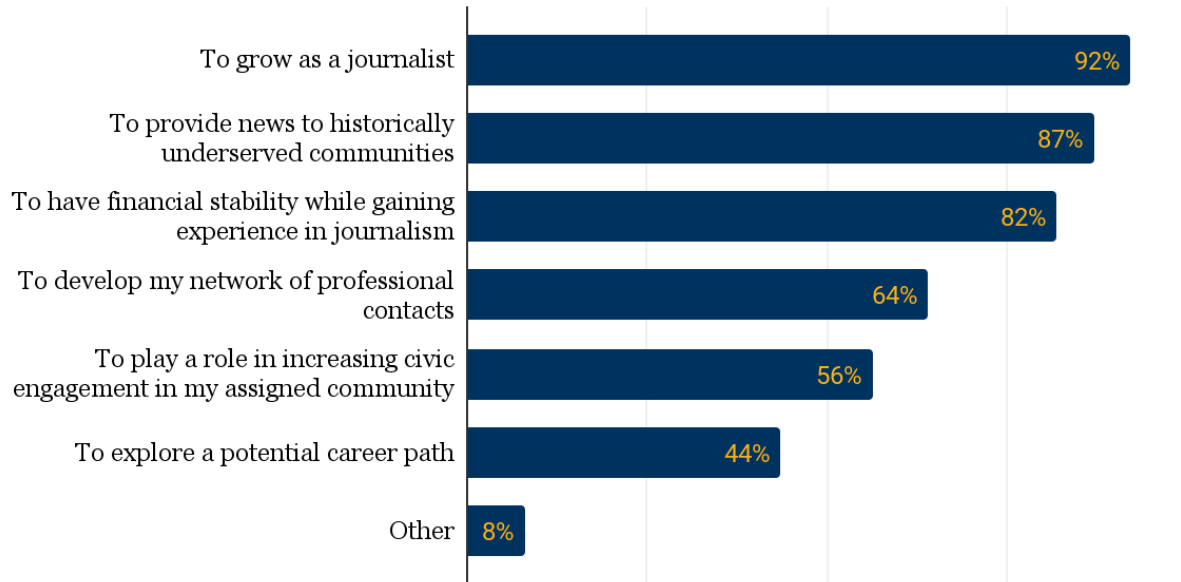
We received responses from all 39 fellows. The survey focused on the fellows' motivations for applying for the fellowship, what the fellows hope to contribute to their newsroom and communities, and what would make a successful fellowship experience.

The **vast majority of fellows were at least a little bit familiar** with the geography in which they were placed and the communities that reside there, as only eight percent of fellows reported to be "not at all familiar" with the place, while 10 percent reported being "not at all familiar" with the communities. Almost half (49 percent) of the fellows are general assignment reporters, while over a quarter (28 percent) are beat reporters. The remaining fellows report holding either hybrid roles or other roles, such as video reporter and investigative journalist. One fellow indicated that their role remains unclear as a result of misalignment with the host newsroom.

The major factors that motivated the fellows to apply for the fellowship were **professional, community-oriented and financial**. They align well with the goals of the fellowship program overall, as they include elements beyond individual experience and touch on community needs and sustainability within the industry.

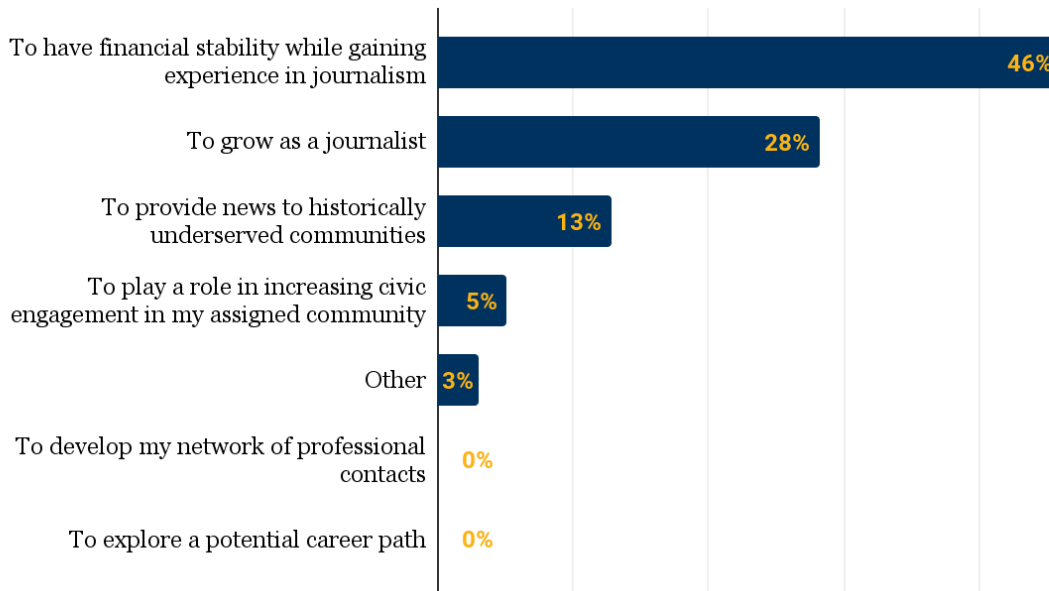
Other professional factors, such as developing a network or exploring a potential career path, were less common motivations relative to the others. These could be indications that the fellows feel they are already set on a career path and will thus have networking opportunities as a matter of course. Regarding community-oriented motivations, delivering news to historically underserved communities was a much stronger motivation than increasing civic engagement.

## The most frequently cited motivations for applying for the fellowship



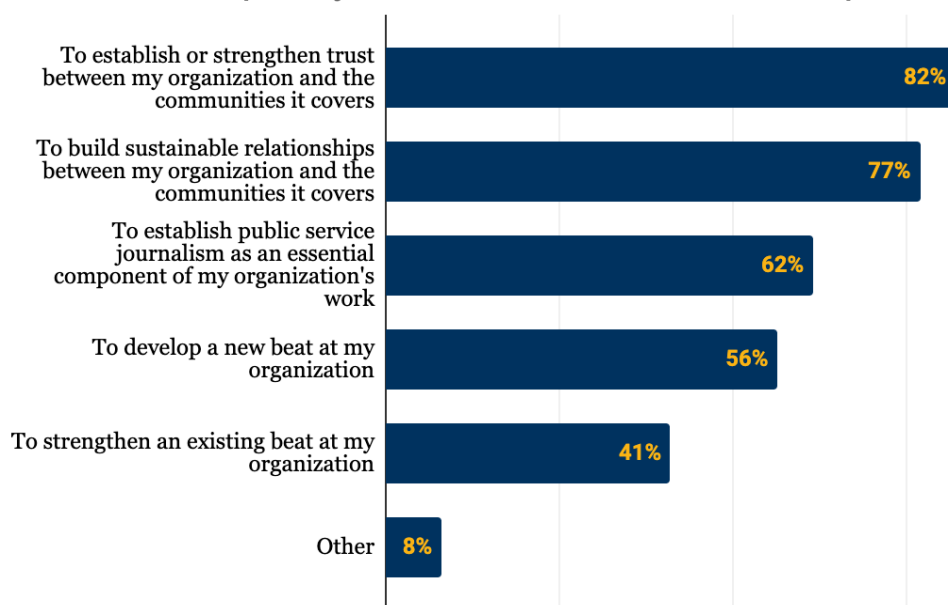
When asked to identify the *primary* motivation, however, **nearly half of all fellows identified financial stability**, with more than a quarter identifying professional growth. These results indicate that the fellows want to remain in the industry and use the fellowship as an opportunity to do so in the short- and long-term.

## The most frequently cited primary motivation for applying for the fellowship

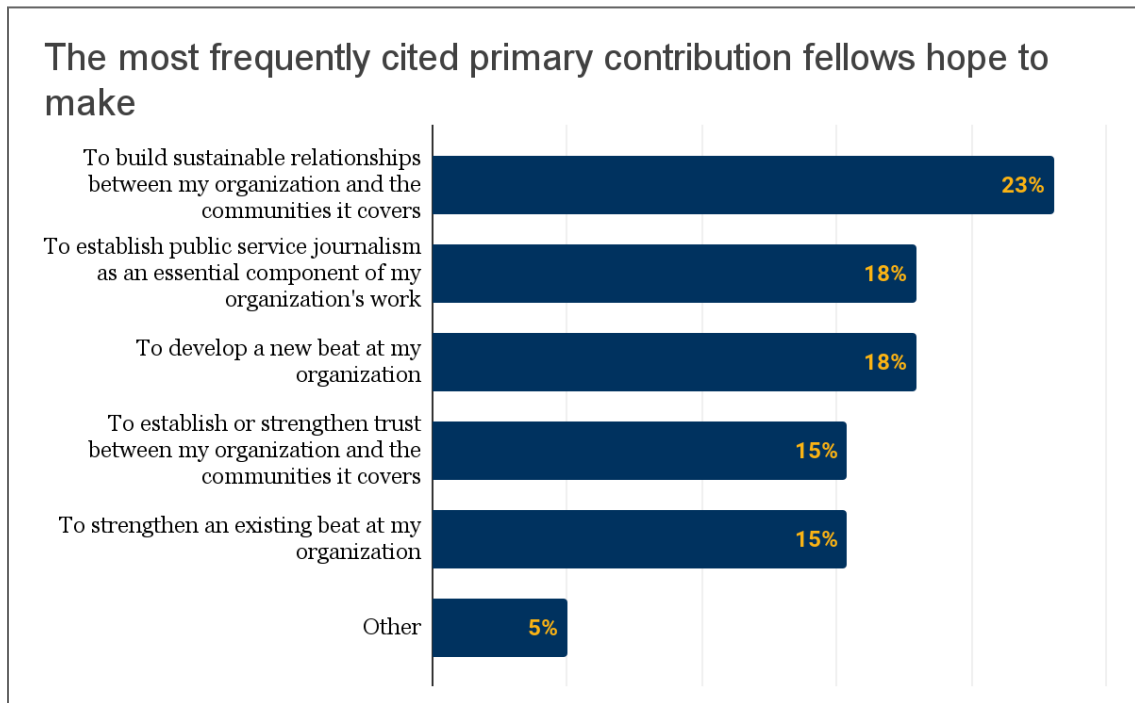


We similarly asked fellows what they hope to contribute to their host organization and communities. The most common contributions were community-oriented and had to do with building trust and relationships between the organization and communities it serves.

## The most frequently cited contributions fellows hope to make



While contributions internal to organizations were less frequently selected overall, developing a new beat was the second most cited factor when fellows were asked what they *most* hoped to contribute. Overall, however, responses were fairly evenly distributed. About a quarter said that it was "to build sustainable relationships between my organization and the communities it covers."



These results show strong alignment between the long-term goals of the California Local News Fellowship and the fellows' mindset. Future work will include determining the extent to which sustainable relationships have been strengthened or established with California communities.