



## Save Local Journalism

Victor Pickard, University of Pennsylvania

To lose local journalism is to lose an institution that's vitally important to the health, culture, and democratic promise of our towns and cities. There's already some movement towards saving local papers and reporters, as calls for a journalism stimulus proliferate. Potential stimulus plans include subsidizing journalists' salaries, expanding public broadcasting's budget, and saving outlets from bankruptcy. **But journalism needs more than just stimulus; it needs a major structural overhaul. And it requires permanent and public support.**

In the short term, the government should intervene to salvage what local public service journalism remains in the commercial sector. As lawmakers shower industry after industry — from cruise ships to hotel chains — with bailouts, we can afford to allocate emergency funds to news workers on the front lines of the pandemic. Instead of propping up failed commercial models, this public financing should be conditional on newspapers transitioning into nonprofit status.

- Subsidies for local media could come in many forms. A new WPA-style program focused on jobs and infrastructure could return legions of unemployed journalists back to their beats and fund the build-out of necessary infrastructure, including municipal broadband networks and public media outlets.
- Devoting an average of \$100 per U.S. citizen to local media infrastructure would add up to more than \$30 billion annually (similar to the public media budgets of many European countries and proportionate to U.S. postal subsidies for newspapers in the 1800s). This would mean expanding and repurposing public broadcasting, which now receives just \$465 million a year from the federal government (or approximately \$1.40/person). By comparison, the U.S. government shells out \$700 million annually for international broadcasting services like Voice of America and devotes more than \$600 million to the Pentagon's public relations budget alone.
- Existing public institutions, including libraries, universities, and public broadcasting stations, could also be harnessed to provide institutional support for local journalism — for example, post offices could perform double duty as community media-making spaces.