

LISTENING POST COLLECTIVE

YEAR IN REVIEW

2024



**DECEMBER
2024**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER	1
VISION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS	2
2024 PROGRAM INITIATIVES	4
PART OF A MOVEMENT	12
LOOKING AHEAD	13

LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER



**JESSE
HARDMAN**

Founder, Listening Post Collective

2024 is the year that the Listening Post Collective really leaned in and put its stamp on the US journalism space. After more than a decade of helping communities map their information ecosystems and build responsive, civically minded media, we initiated a new five-year strategic plan with a goal of asserting ourselves by building, launching, and popularizing tools to guide our organizational impact and inspire foundations, peer organizations, media outlets, academic institutions and more to share in our work and vision. In 2024, nearly 300 people logged into our Civic Media Playbook to access easy-to-use strategies for how to map community .

information needs and build sustainable news projects that reflect those needs. We also took another core internal product of ours, a simple spreadsheet looking at county level data from around the US and built it into a publicly accessible digital tool that measures civic health. The Civic Information Index can help media funders decide where their support is most needed, provide clues to outlets looking to better cover important local issues, give academics and journalism support organizations a broader context for the role media plays in a community civic ecosystem, and, eventually, track the overall impact of journalism on specific civic health indicators.

Lastly, we did a deep dive around the taxonomy of the growing Journalism Support Organization (JSO) space. This helped create a clear process around what we do, how that fits into the larger peer space we work in, and what we're looking for when it comes to partnerships, whether that means collaboration or coordination.

Moving into 2025 we are so excited to build on our important work this past year and continue to grow our vision working with communities, JSOs, civic media, and more around the US. It is a very comforting feeling to know who we are as an organization, what we want to accomplish, who we're going to partner with on this collective work, and what it looks like when we have impact. Onward!

VISION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

VISION

The Listening Post Collective envisions a world where communities have robust information ecosystems where they can find accessible, verified news on issues that matter to them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Listening Post Collective (LPC) is taking a fresh look at the role news and information play in communities across the nation, equipping people and organizations with the resources to better listen to the populations they serve, and to understand gaps and opportunities within their local information ecosystems.



We support non-traditional or frequently overlooked civic media entrepreneurs and community information actors with early-stage funding, tailored coaching and step-by-step community engagement methodologies that help them better understand and serve community information needs.

LPC began its ambitious five-year strategic plan in 2024 **which calls for a \$20 million investment to strengthen local information ecosystems in the most vulnerable regions across the United States.** LPC is uniquely positioned at the starting line within the local news ecosystem, providing professional development to grassroots outlets so that they can grow into thriving, sustainable media organizations that authentically meet community information needs. LPC offers hands-on facilitation as well as self-guided tools for communities to build local power and strengthen civic engagement.

LPC offers a compelling community-centered viewpoint, that recognizing journalism as a public service means shifting from an abstract plea to ‘save journalism’ to a concrete case for how news supports people and communities, and how equitable information access impacts people’s lives for the better.

LPC CIVIC MEDIA DESIGN PROCESS



Map: Use civic engagement data to identify vulnerable U.S. regions with the greatest potential for civic media investment.



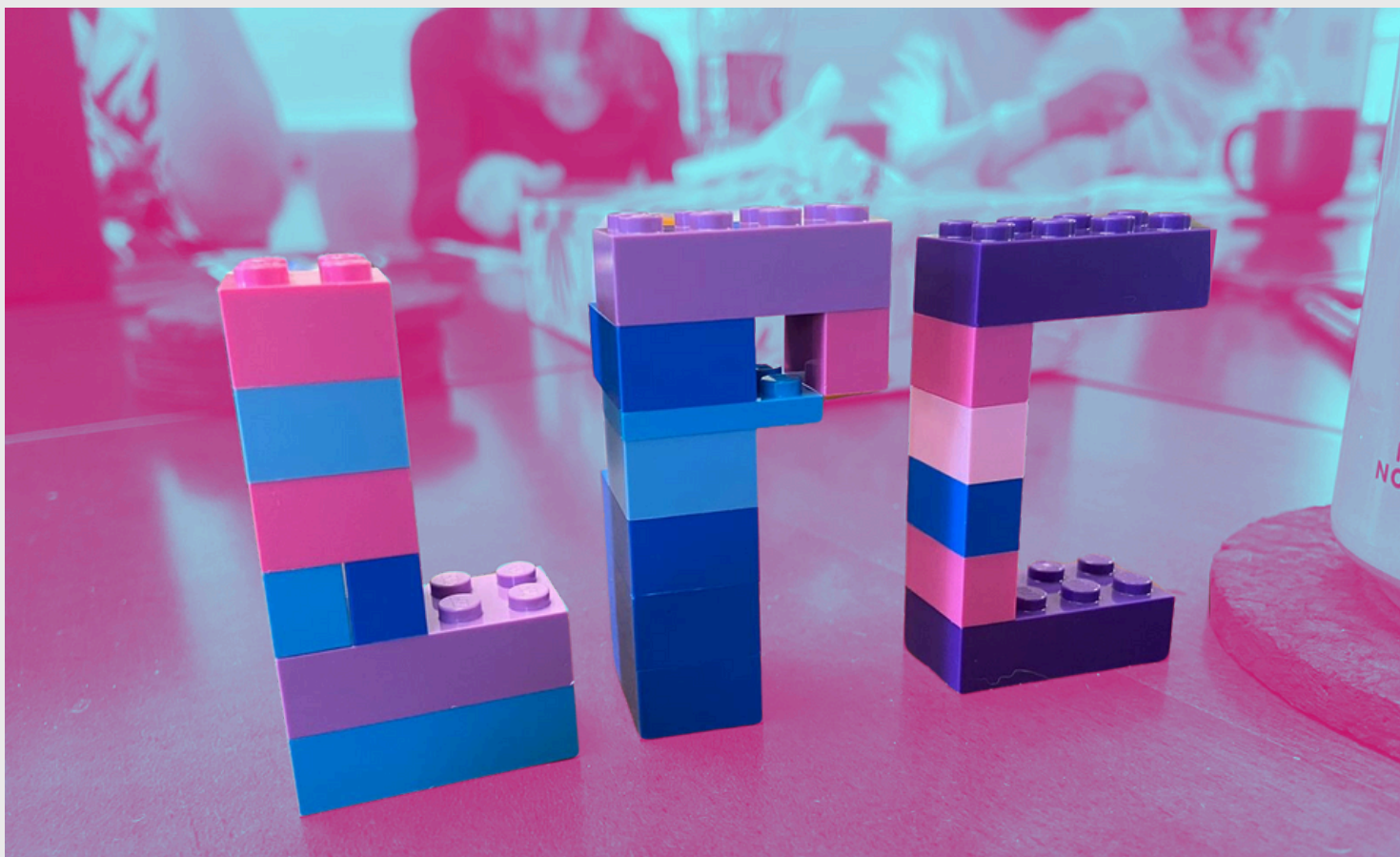
Listen: Guide these communities through Information Ecosystem Research (IER) to understand the supply and demand sides of local information, identifying gaps, assets and opportunities.



Seed: Pilot new civic media programming based on IER findings to better meet the community's information needs.



Cultivate: Scale and sustain long-term capacity for their project, including organizational investments such as strategic planning or community-centered investments such as civic and media literacy activities.



2024 PROGRAM INITIATIVES

CIVIC MEDIA PLAYBOOK

The Civic Media Playbook is a free self-paced information assessment tool that guides users through the Listening Post Collective's (LPC's) proven Civic Media Design process. Since launching in 2022, the Playbook has grown into an online learning hub that empowers

local media entrepreneurs to launch community-driven projects and sustain resilient initiatives over time, with a focus on BIPOC and immigrant populations who often have limited access to quality, relevant information and have historically been excluded from civic processes.

600+

Total Playbook Sign-ups



300+

Sign-ups in 2024



People and organizations using the Playbook have access to the LPC Help Desk, a web-based platform connecting them to experienced program staff that answer questions and provide guidance. Playbook users can also apply for a micro-grant (\$10,000 - \$25,000) at each step in the Civic Media Design process, providing them funding as well as one-on-one implementation oversight, professional development and pathways to other journalism support organizations. LPC proudly funded 13 grassroots media outlets in 2024 – thanks to

support from the Walton Family Foundation, Democracy Fund and Loudhound Foundation – incubating new community-led and community-centered local news efforts in vulnerable U.S. regions. LPC also facilitated a series of webinars for the broader Playbook Collective, covering topics such as AI in journalism, impact reporting and equitable elections coverage.

Most notably, LPC released a Spanish language version of the Playbook in 2024, empowering Spanish-speaking communities to conduct their own local Information Ecosystem Research. Using the Civic Information Index as a geographical guide, LPC will promote the Playbook as a resource in both English and Spanish moving forward, equitably building local power in diverse communities across the country.



130,000

in Micro-grants distributed



146

Playbook Help Desk sessions



Playbook Collective Members (2024)

Micro-grantees

PLAYBOOK

SPOTLIGHT: NOWRUZ MEDIA



Nowruz Media is a news startup led by Faisal Karimi, a seasoned Afghan journalist, teacher and media entrepreneur recently served as a John S. Knight Fellow at Stanford University. Faisal received a 2024 Playbook grant to assess the information needs of Afghan migrants in Sacramento and Fremont. He facilitated community listening activities including workshops, town halls and dialogues to directly engage with this target population and document their unique needs, preferences and challenges. Faisal partnered with migrant support centers in Sacramento which led him to a local Afghan WhatsApp network — empowering him to engage

more than 250 individuals in his Information Ecosystem Research, all of which he conducted in Farsi.

His deep listening revealed that the local Afghan population doesn't feel represented in local media, relies on social media platforms like Facebook for information and wants more opportunities to connect to social services. In response to these expressed needs, Faisal formally launched Nowruz Media, a civic media outlet dedicated to serving Afghan immigrants with verified and relevant news. He plans to grow the Nowruz Media website to include information about job opportunities, legal processes, healthcare and education, all available as multilingual content — especially in Farsi and Pashto — to help overcome language barriers and enhance accessibility.



The project reinforced the importance of culturally relevant content and the vital role of media in preserving cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging among immigrant communities."

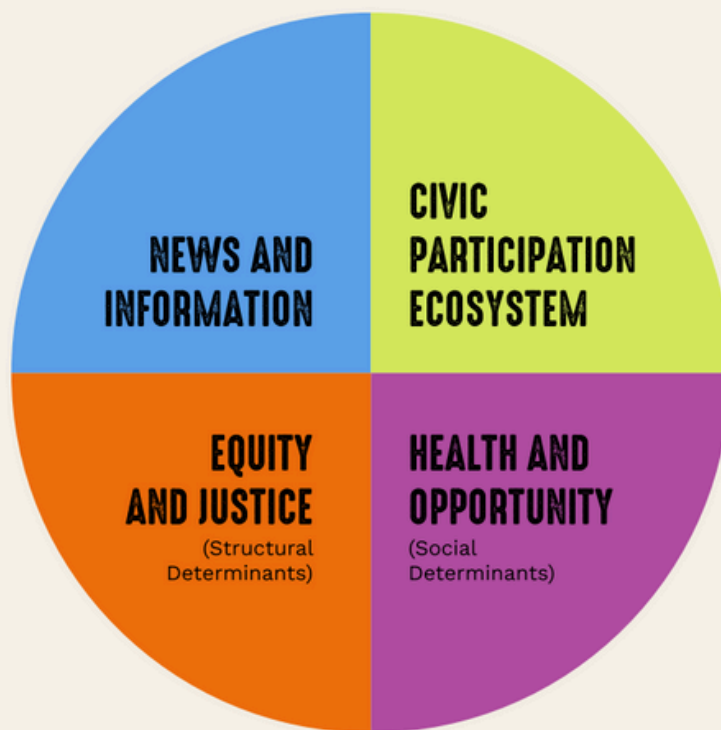
--Faisal Karimi, Founder of Nowruz Media

CIVIC INFORMATION INDEX

Listening Post Collective (LPC) embarked on a dynamic civic health mapping initiative in 2024 to identify the U.S. regions most in need of civic media investments. In partnership with Press Forward and co-led by the Information Futures Lab at Brown University's School of Public Health, LPC convened an expert advisory group in an

intense four-month process that included multiple working sessions, asynchronous engagement, interviews with other experts and diverse stakeholders as well as a thorough review of existing literature, evidence and approaches. What culminated is the Civic Information Index — a first-of-its-kind digital tool that aggregates and tracks data from every U.S. county, analyzing access to local news alongside civic participation and community health metrics.

DRIVERS OF ENGAGED, INFORMED, EQUITABLE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



There's a great opportunity to build awareness about the critical role of media in supporting healthy, engaged communities. This work helps highlight the interconnectedness of different facets of our lives and how they contribute to civic health. It's essential for journalism to be part of this ecosystem, serving the community transparently and truthfully.

— Madeleine Bair, Index Advisory Group
Member and Founding Director at El
Tímpano



The initiative addressed two key questions: What drives civic health, and how does news and information shape it? The Index, grounded in the idea that news strengthens civic health, compiles 21 public, county-level datasets on metrics like volunteerism, library visits, housing insecurity, and medical debt.

The interactive Index is currently available in a beta version and allows people to pay unique attention to areas with the most potential for transformation from ‘news deserts’ to ‘information gardens.’ The Index will be released as an interactive public-facing website in Spring 2025, coinciding with a campaign to promote its applied use by a range of local news stakeholders, including funders, journalism support organizations, local and national news outlets, academic institutions, local governments and community-based organizations.



The reason I'm excited about this work is that we've been in a reactionary frame in terms of how to talk about our work. This project creates a proactive framework for discussions about what impact looks like and what we are all working towards as a collective.

— Mazin Sidahmed, Index Advisory Group Member and Co-Executive Director at Documented



LPC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Eight organizations graduated from Listening Post Collective's (LPC's) inaugural Partnership Program in 2024 — a cohort of BIPOC- and immigrant-serving media outlets that collaborated to build their collective power over the course of three years. LPC previously facilitated Civic Media Design work with all of these organizations, including

El Tímpano, Documented, Frontline Observer, Cicero Independiente, Lede New Orleans, The Space, Conecta Arizona and uSpark Valley. LPC also worked on mapping projects with the outlets SAADA and Sahan Journal, as part of an initial phase of the Partnership program.

187

Power-building sessions
over 3 years



LPC Partnership Graduates

El Tímpano
Documented NY
Frontline Observer
Lede New Orleans
The Space
uSpark Valley
Conecta Arizona
Cicero Independiente



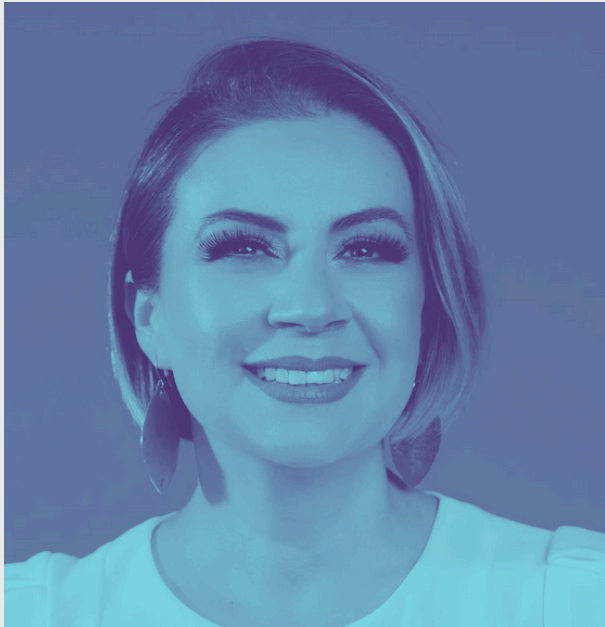
LPC helped each emerging media outlet create an individual plan for sustaining their work while also encouraging collaboration within the cohort. Each partner completed an Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) at the beginning of each year of the program to identify their biggest opportunities for growth. Partners then participated in one-on-one training with LPC staff, receiving tailored professional development toward their goals. Fundraising was a focus for the entire cohort during year three and, with financial and narrative guidance from LPC, all eight organizations have now received their own independent grant funding.

In May 2024 LPC hosted it's first in-person Partner retreat where these outlets came together to share respective challenges, milestones and learnings in addition to exploring future collaborations with one another. As a next step three of these outlets are building a coalition with the goal of expanding the reach, impact and sustainability of civic news and information to better serve and center immigrant communities.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

CONECTA ARIZONA



Maritza Félix is a journalist, producer and writer based in the Arizona-Sonora region along the US-Mexico border. She founded Conecta Arizona in 2020 to provide accurate and timely COVID-19 pandemic information in Spanish. LPC gave Maritza a seed grant to build upon her community engagement efforts and identify additional information gaps in existing Spanish-language news services.

Conecta Arizona is now an innovative non-profit media outlet serving a majority Hispanic, migrant and border community both in the United States and Mexico.

Maritza credits LPC and the Partnership Program with helping her to establish Conecta Arizona and scale it into a thriving news outlet. LPC assisted her in conducting Information Ecosystem Research at the starting line, followed by tailored coaching as she piloted news products in response to her community's needs — including WhatsApp updates, newsletters, audio broadcasts, podcasts and live events. Conecta Arizona is now a nationally recognized news outlet that is creating authentic dialogue between Spanish-speaking communities in the border region through accurate, engaging and accessible news from a bicultural and bilingual perspective. Additionally, LPC laid the operational groundwork for Conecta Arizona to raise a remarkable \$1.5 million in 2023/2024 from prominent philanthropy organizations, including MacArthur Foundation, Democracy Fund, Emerson Collective and Press Forward.

\$1.5M 

Raised for Conecta Arizona
with foundational support
from LPC

PART OF A MOVEMENT...

The Listening Post Collective (LPC) is enabling communities to create and sustain their own civic media initiatives. We believe that no one understands a community better than its residents, and our guiding principle is to *listen* before recommending news strategies. LPC's tools and methodologies empower local leaders to thoughtfully assess information needs so that they can develop their own community-driven solutions to media inequities and build power among historically marginalized voices.

Small media startups often lack the experience, resources and infrastructure needed to solicit and accept funding from larger institutions and an LPC grant is typically the first funding they receive. LPC plays an integral role in identifying high potential but often overlooked organizations and equipping them with the Civic Media Design resources that allow them to become thriving independent outlets. LPC is focused on scaling the operational capacities of media entrepreneurs, readying them to apply for and accept larger investments from institutional funders to sustain their ongoing community engagement and reporting. LPC plays a crucial on-the-ground intermediary role, nurturing grassroots efforts while also stewarding local and national journalism investments in priority areas.

In 2019 we did information ecosystem research in Fresno, California, that led to a start-up grant for local media maker Sergio Cortes. He launched the outlet uSpark with that money, and a follow up grant and wraparound services to grow his work.

“The most important thing that the Listening Post Collective provided was support on how to basically run a startup. It's a lot of work and it's very hard and having the Listening Post Collective help me with resources, connect me with grants and provide guidance really reassured the steps I was taking were in the right direction.”

Cortes is transitioning out of the LPC Partnership program after 3 years. He'll take with him his first non-LPC grants from the Walton Foundation and the McClatchy Foundation, a business and growth plan for the next 3 years, and a connection with fellow LPC Partnership grads who will support each other as they grow.

LPC's Civic Media Design process is helping to shape a fundamentally new culture of journalism with each new Playbook project and Partnership Program graduate, building a generation of community-centered storytellers that genuinely serve people. LPC is offering an alternative approach to media production as the news industry at large grapples with urgent existential and financial challenges. While the past decade has been marred by media consolidation, dwindling local news and exacerbated social inequalities, LPC is driving a movement that fosters diverse, inclusive and resilient local information ecosystems. By incubating nontraditional media initiatives — from research to pilot projects to long-term sustainability — LPC envisions a reimagined journalism field at a critical juncture for the industry.

LOOKING AHEAD...

The Listening Post Collective (LPC) will begin year two of its five-year strategic plan in 2025, with ambitious projects already in motion. In addition to releasing the Civic Information Index as a public-facing website, LPC aspires to scale this resource into a dynamic data repository and interactive online learning community that regularly gathers civic health findings as local media projects are implemented. LPC will continue its partnership with Information Futures Lab (IFL) to update and evolve the civic data in the Index. The LPC will continue its partnership with Information Futures Lab (IFL) to update and evolve the civic data in the Index, and will explore how to integrate the Index with our Civic Media Playbook, specifically encouraging users who are mapping community information needs to share that local data in the Index.

Lastly, and importantly, LPC will continue to hone its role within the journalism support ecosystem. Many of the civic media providers we work with have told us that it is difficult to navigate the growing number of services, programs and tools that promise to help make their fledgling businesses more successful. We agree, and we've also found it difficult to keep up with the myriad — and sometimes overlapping — offerings from other support organizations.

After more than a decade implementing our Civic Media Design process, we feel confident that our role is to support media initiatives in their pre-launch stage, to provide nontraditional and frequently overlooked civic media entrepreneurs an ecosystem entry point. We will increasingly own our position so that we can thoughtfully collaborate and coordinate with other support organizations —serving communities and journalism outlets with the resources they need, at the stages they are needed.

MORE TO COME IN 2025...



Listening Post Collective

Powered by Internews

Email/
info@listeningpostcollective.org

Website/
www.listeningpostcollective.org



linkedin.com/company/listening-post-collective/



[@listeningpostcollective](https://www.instagram.com/listeningpostcollective)



[@postcollective.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/@postcollective)