

# Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION<sup>Review</sup>

---

***What's Next***  
***Saving Local News***  
By Gustavo Turner

Stanford Social Innovation Review  
Spring 2024

Copyright © 2024 by Leland Stanford Jr. University  
All Rights Reserved

*Stanford Social Innovation Review*  
**[www.ssir.org](http://www.ssir.org)**  
Email: [editor@ssir.org](mailto:editor@ssir.org)

ownership and new technologies replace the old. According to Shepherd, archivists and collectors have also tended not to prioritize Black media for preservation due to racial biases.

Love says BWIR's work is also a response to today's political climate, which has prompted crackdowns on how Black history is taught, if at all, in schools. "That makes this collection even more important," Love says. "If we don't tell our stories, who will?"

While the LEGENDS Collection focuses on Black radio culture, it will also allow historians to tell richer, more inclusive stories. Old radio recordings hold vital details for historians, since radio captures the day-to-day political actions that give rise to historic episodes such as the Civil Rights Movement. The collection will offer context for decades of pop-culture moments and trends that have grown out of Black radio, from 1960s dance crazes to the genre of hip-hop.

In addition to recorded media, the collection will include print media like scrapbooks of playlists and vintage photographs. One of the challenges of curating the collection has been locating items like these, which may be held in private collections or just gathering dust in someone's attic.

"I lament that we didn't always do a good job of saving more of the rare items," Dillard says of times when he has seen stations dispose of old audio and visual material during his three-decade-long career. "Now, I want to help find as much of it as we can." ♦

MARIANNE DHENIN is an award-winning journalist and historian.

## NONPROFITS & NGOS

# Saving Local News

**Rebuild Local News seeks to reverse the rapid decline of local journalism with public policy.**

BY GUSTAVO TURNER

**T**he catastrophic collapse of local news is a global phenomenon. Governments and civil society around the world are considering how public policy can save local news in order to stem the growing tide of political manipulation and disinformation.

In the United States, the problem is compounded by a national culture that is reluctant to mix government and the press and by extreme political polarization that has eroded trust in both institutions.

Rebuild Local News, a nonpartisan nonprofit coalition, launched in 2020 to confront these challenges. The public-policy initiative started as a part of Report for America, a news nonprofit that recruits emerging journalists and matches them with newsrooms committed to strengthening local news, and its fiscal sponsor, the GroundTruth Project. Report for America subsidizes the compensation of those reporters and helps newsrooms raise money from their communities.

"The severity—and the speed—of the collapse of local news is so immense, and the threat to communities and democracy is

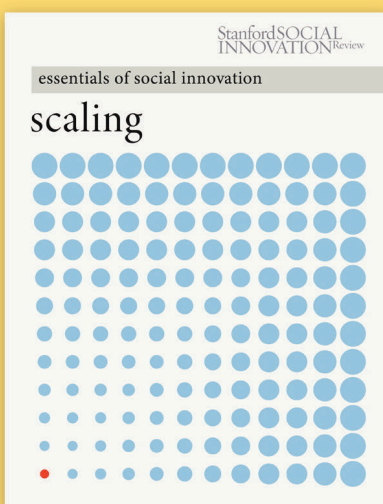
# SSIR eBooks

Like taking a course in how to make social change.

Buy online at  
[SSIR.org/ebooks](https://ssir.org/ebooks)



A starter kit for social change.



Grow to meet the needs of  
the community you serve.



Integrating human-centered  
design into your work.

so severe, that we need a multi-pronged approach to solving it,” warns Rebuild Local News president Steven Waldman. “There’s been an 82 percent drop in the amount of advertising revenue for newspapers in about a two-decade period and an almost 60 percent drop in the number of journalists.”

Report for America envisioned Rebuild Local News as focusing on public-policy solutions like tax credits and subsidies to address the rapidly accelerating disappearance of local-news outlets. But what started off as a public-policy-focused coalition continued growing to the point where Report for America decided, in 2023, to establish it as an independent nonprofit. According to Waldman, the change was made to give Rebuild Local News its own mission and funding so that it wasn’t merely a side project of Report for America—which he cofounded—and to protect the mission of that organization and the GroundTruth Project.

“With Rebuild Local News, we are [entering] into the world of advocacy, and there’s some value in separating that from the journalistic operation that is Report for America,” Waldman says. “It’s good for both entities to have their own personality.”

Originally, several major philanthropies—including the Knight Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the American Journalism Project—backed the initiative through GroundTruth and Report for America. Some of these funding sources transferred to Rebuild Local News when it became a nonprofit.

Waldman thinks that serious attempts to reverse the local-news crisis must incorporate philanthropy, business, and public policy.

“There needs to be new ownership structures for commercial news organizations, for instance,” he says. “But philanthropy and commercial innovation will not be enough. We also need public policy and, in some cases, taxpayer support.”

What distinguishes Rebuild from other organizations seeking to revitalize the local-news business is “its laser focus on actionable public-policy solutions—big ideas to address a big, big problem,” says Jim Friedlich, CEO of the Philadelphia-based Lenfest Institute for Journalism and a board member of Rebuild Local News. “The legislative and policy solutions proposed have been simple, smart, nonpartisan, and First Amendment friendly.”

Nevertheless, Rebuild Local News is not naive about the potential downside of mixing politics and journalism. Waldman acknowledges the many examples—especially under authoritarian leadership—of government funding being weaponized to promote populist agendas.

But Waldman remains guardedly optimistic about Rebuild Local News. In 2022, the ideologically split US Congress, he notes, came “very close” to passing the Local Journalism Sustainability

Rebuild Local News president Steve Waldman (R) delivers a keynote address on the future of journalism at The City Club of Cleveland’s annual meeting on November 1, 2019.



Act, which included a payroll-tax credit for news organizations that hire or retain local reporters. The legislation, narrowly defeated, would have provided \$1.7 billion for local news over five years.

Looking to the near future, Waldman says the coalition will continue the fight to pass legislation at the federal level.

“We’re trying to develop a broader coalition and really create a strong foundation to get the federal bill passed,” he says. “As for the state governments—in red, purple, and blue states alike—they need to really understand the severity of the crisis. And move quickly.” ●

**GUSTAVO TURNER** is a writer and photographer in Los Angeles.

A former editor and contributor at *LA Weekly*, he has witnessed firsthand the demise of local news, even in larger markets.

## CITIES

# Deregulating Housing for Renters

**A charity and bank are teaming up to ease the rental process for low-income and homeless people in the United Kingdom.**

BY EMMA WOOLLACOTT

**R**ocketing inflation and rising interest rates in the United Kingdom have caused landlords to raise rents, sending UK rental prices to a 16-year high. Compounding this financial barrier to affordable housing, the UK government has frozen financial assistance—in the form of housing benefit to low-income residents—for the past three years. According to 2023 research by the homelessness charity Crisis and financial-services provider Lloyds Banking Group, only 4 percent of properties are affordable for people who receive a housing benefit. Furthermore, 1.8 million low-income renters live in unsafe conditions.