THE STATE OF NONPROFIT NEWS



INN Index Special Topics Report: How the 2025 Political Landscape Affected Nonprofit News Outlets

Institute for Nonprofit News

About INN

The Institute for Nonprofit News strengthens and supports 500 independent news organizations in a different kind of news network: nonprofit, nonpartisan and dedicated to public service. From local news to in-depth reporting on pressing global issues, members of the INN Network tell stories that otherwise would go untold – connecting communities, holding the powerful accountable and strengthening civic life. INN programs help these news organizations develop revenue and business models to support strong reporting, collaborate on editorial and business innovation, share services and advance the diverse leaders who are forging a new future for news.

REPORT CREDITS

Primary authors: Michele McLellan, Glynnis Melnicove, and Ha Ta

Data analysis: Jesse Holcomb, Michele McLellan, Glynnis Melnicove, and Ha Ta

Data collection: Jesse Holcomb, Michele McLellan, Glynnis Melnicove, Melody Miller, McKenna Wilkinson, Ha Ta, and Ian Tjoelker

Data visualization: Glynnis Melnicove and Ha Ta

Cover photo: Daniel Robles/Conecta Arizona

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About the INN Index Special Topics Report

The INN Index is the most comprehensive dataset on nonprofit news in North America. As the nonprofit news field rapidly changes and grows, INN tracks and studies what's happening behind the scenes. Index data indicates what drives nonprofit news, how it's funded, who it serves, and how we can continue expanding sources of high quality information for the public. In the most recent INN Index survey, we asked INN member newsrooms if the current political climate had resulted in any negative impacts to their organization and if so, how they were responding to these challenges. Drawing on survey responses from 406 INN member newsrooms and supplemented by interviews with a subset of 16 member newsrooms, this report aims to serve as a resource to the nonprofit news sector, helping to shed light on how newsrooms are being affected by and navigating changes in the political landscape.

Please contact INN's communications team with any questions or press inquiries.

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

INN's Index is made possible thanks to John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, along with unrestricted support from INN's individual donors and foundations, including, including Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, Cedar Tree Foundation, DAF Giving360 made possible by the Present Progressive Fund, Democracy Fund, Ford Foundation, Howe Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, and Charles Spear Charitable Trust.

The Nonprofit News Difference:

INN's work in the field points to key differentiators that characterize nonprofit journalism.

1. **EDITORIAL FOCUS:** Nonprofit newsrooms prioritize reporting that meets public needs but is challenging to produce, including specialized in-depth reporting, investigative and civic work to hold governments accountable, and robust, inclusive local coverage.

2. **TRUST & TRANSPARENCY:** Community-centric rather than shareholder-focused, nonprofit news is nonpartisan and focuses on facts, and news nonprofits are more transparent about their funding than most commercial media.

3. **SUSTAINABILITY:** News nonprofits are highly entrepreneurial and supported in good measure by the people they serve, making them more resilient than many for-profit media.

4. **COLLABORATION:** A culture of collaboration enables nonprofit news to share local reporting on a national scale. Most nonprofits share their coverage with commercial media, distribute through digital platforms and publish without a paywall – sharing information far beyond their own direct audiences.

[1]The INN Network includes 35 public media outlets, accounting for approximately 7% of all members, all of whom were impacted by the funding cut.

Introduction: The political landscape in 2025

The 2025 landscape for journalism in particular and nonprofits in general was shaped by federal funding disruptions and increased pressure on philanthropic resources, open conflict between the administration and the press, greater scrutiny of nonprofit organizations, intensified immigration enforcement, and continued proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Rescission of federal funding for public media

In July 2025, the United States (U.S.) Congress approved President Donald Trump's legislation package rescinding roughly $1.1 billion in funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), effectively ending federal support for National Public Radio (NPR), Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and over 1,500 local member public radio and television stations around the country. The White House claimed the public media system is politically biased and an unnecessary expense.

This created a cascading funding challenge for public media organizations around the country, with smaller stations, those serving rural communities, and those serving Indigenous populations facing higher risks due to their greater reliance on federal funding.[1]

The CPB rescission came on the back of broader federal funding freezes and cuts that targeted programs across the government and resulted in an estimated $177 billion in lost funds.

Challenging fundraising environment across the nonprofit sector

In 2025, nonprofit organizations broadly faced mounting financial pressures from rising operating costs, federal funding cuts, and abrupt disruptions to government grants and contracts. The administration's reductions in funding for federal programs, including education, public health, environmental protection, and humanitarian assistance placed additional demands on philanthropic organizations, which experienced growing requests to fill funding gaps previously covered by public dollars. A 2025 survey by the Center for Effective Philanthropy found that 87% of surveyed foundations reported increased demand for funding since the beginning of the year.

At the same time, the administration's tariffs on imported goods and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East contributed to rising business costs and broader economic uncertainty. These developments placed additional pressure on household finances and business spending, potentially limiting the capacity of individuals and corporations to make charitable contributions.

Increased tensions between the federal government and the press

President Trump's second term brought renewed conflicts between the administration and news organizations. These included the White House's restrictions on press access, federal investigations of broadcasters, and multiple lawsuits by the President against news outlets.

In February 2025, the White House barred The Associated Press from selected press events after the organization refused to adopt the name "Gulf of America."

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), under Chairman Brendan Carr, launched or reopened several investigations involving major U.S. broadcasters, including Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), American Broadcasting Company (ABC), National Broadcasting Company (NBC), NPR, and PBS. These investigations alleged issues ranging from unequal treatment of political candidates, biased news coverage, to diversity initiatives.

News outlets across the country pushed back, filing legal actions against the government from the federal down to the local level.

Greater scrutiny of nonprofit organizations and tax-exempt status

The broader nonprofit sector experienced significant policy and regulatory uncertainty in 2025.

The administration rolled back initiatives protecting and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and raised questions about the tax-exempt status of certain institutions. The administration's threat to remove Harvard University's tax-exempt status sparked concerns across the nonprofit sector about the potential use of federal tax authority against organizations engaged in politically contentious work.

Intensified immigration enforcement leading to unrest in major U.S. cities

In 2025, the administration expanded immigration enforcement efforts across the country, deploying U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to conduct mass arrests and deportations in major U.S. cities. The immigration crackdown sparked protests in major cities across the country, notably in Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Portland, and heightened uncertainty and fear in immigrant communities.

Rise in Artificial Intelligence (AI) exacerbating issues with public trust

The proliferation of AI, particularly on social media channels, continued throughout 2025. AI-generated videos distorted current events, AI chatbots helped spread inaccurate information, and convincing AI audio impersonations contributed to the spread of misinformation at an increased rate. This further exacerbated already shaky public confidence in mass media, which hit a new low in 2025.

What newsrooms said

Given the events of 2025, INN wanted to understand how INN member newsrooms were being impacted by and navigating the political environment.

What we found was that in 2025, three-quarters (76%) of nonprofit news publishers in our survey said the political climate had resulted in negative impacts for their organization. The most cited challenges were those related to funding reductions (45%) and growth in misinformation and decline in audience trust (41%), followed by issues of staff safety and harassment (25%).

While many of these challenges were not new to newsrooms, the 2025 political landscape intensified

these issues. INN member newsrooms reported experiencing many challenges related to the political climate, however, a few appeared more acute not only to the moment but to the future of the field more broadly.

- Newsrooms faced serious funding concerns as a result of 1) the ripple effects created across the nonprofit sector in response to broad sweeping federal funding cuts and 2) sensitivities around specific topic areas targeted by the administration, including DEI, immigration, and healthcare.
- Harassment and direct threats of violence against journalists compounded by decreased access to information, both from community sources and government officials, impeded newsrooms ability to do their job.
- Newsrooms that primarily serve communities of color appeared to be disproportionately impacted by the political climate across the board, displaying higher rates of funding volatility, staff safety concerns, and growth in misinformation than newsrooms whose primary mission wasn't specifically serving communities of color. This is likely due to both their organizational identity as well as the fact that the communities that they serve were targeted by the administration's policy changes and actions.

2025 POLITICAL CLIMATE IMPACTS

	%
Charitable revenue reduction	36%
Growth in misinformation	35%
No negative impacts	23%
Declining audience trust	18%
Online harassment of staff	17%
Threats to staff safety	16%
Government funding reductions	13%
Non-charitable revenue reduction	12%
Other	9%
Defamation suits	3%
Regulatory investigations	2%

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Methods

About the survey: INN distributed the Index survey online in January 2026 to 471 INN Network newsrooms, excluding service organizations that are also INN members. Ninety-three percent, or 437 organizations, completed the survey. Survey responses reflect performance in the calendar year 2025. The survey language is provided here. The data do not scientifically represent all North American nonprofit news outlets because not all of them belong to INN, including an array of public media stations. Cautiously interpret specific year-over-year comparisons; this report draws directional trends across the nonprofit news field.

A note on the cohort used for this report: The Index tracks parent organizations rather than individual publications under the same parent. In cases where an organization produces multiple outlets, we collect data only from the parent

organization. The Index dataset includes the data of 412 of the 437 news organizations that completed the survey. The 412 dataset excludes data from 22 public media outlets and three outlets that are not primarily publishers. As part of the 2026 survey we asked members, "has the current political climate resulted in any negative impacts for your organization?" Respondents were instructed to select as many of the eleven answer options as applicable. Four hundred and six organizations responded. This report includes analysis of those responses.

A note on the qualitative data included: Respondents who indicated they had experienced a negative impact, were prompted with the open ended question, "how has your organization responded to these challenges?" Two hundred and seventy seven organizations responded. Responses were analyzed and included in the report. In addition, we conducted interviews with 16 members, who were purposely selected according to the balance of organizations that reported being affected by the political climate. The interview sample included seven local, six state, one regional, one national, and one global outlet. Five of the outlets indicated that their organization primarily served communities of color.

A note on the year-over-year revenue analysis: For the year-over-year revenue analysis we drew comparisons from a smaller cohort of outlets that provided complete financial data for 2024 and 2025 (N=238).

Key Findings

FUNDING REDUCTIONS THREATENED NONPROFIT NEWSROOM OPERATIONS

In 2025, across the nonprofit sector, organizations reported experiencing funding cuts from foundation funders, federal, state, or local government, and individual donors. Nonprofit news outlets were no exception.

Shifts in funding priorities threatened nonprofit newsrooms' largest revenue source

Charitable revenue reductions were the most cited challenge facing nonprofit newsrooms in 2025, with 36% of INN member newsrooms reporting a reduction in charitable revenue. This presents a serious challenge for nonprofit news outlets, whose single largest revenue stream comes from foundations, which accounted for 48% of overall funding to INN member newsrooms in 2025.

While the aggregate foundation funding to INN member newsrooms remained steady in 2025, with the total, average, and median foundation funding not experiencing an overall drop, looking at the individual newsroom level, we found that about one in three members (34%) experienced a decline in their foundation funding between 2024 and 2025.[2] Comparatively, between 2021 and 2024, only 13% of INN member newsrooms experienced a decline in foundation funding, suggesting that the decline in 2025 could indicate a shift towards reduced funding to the field.[3] Challenges with securing foundation funding in 2025 was a trend observed among the nonprofit field more generally, with over 40% of nonprofits reporting that they experienced reductions in funding from foundation funders in 2025.

While aggregate foundation funding for INN member newsrooms did not drop in 2025, we anticipate that much of the financial impact of foundation funding reductions will show up in the coming years. This is due to 1) the timing of the CPB funding rescissions, with the rescission occurring in the middle of the 2025 calendar year and 2) the standard foundation grant cycles which are often multi-year.

Funding priorities shifted in response to volatility at the federal level

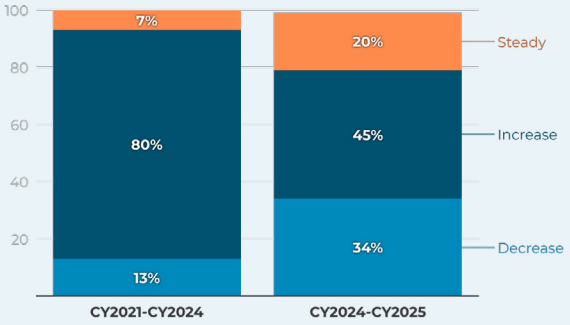
INN member newsrooms indicated that funding reductions were primarily due to donors, both philanthropic and the business community, shifting their funding priorities 1) to direct funds towards high-need sectors that faced sudden funding gaps as

TOTAL FOUNDATION FUNDING

	CY2024	CY2025
Median	$187,100	$210,341
Average	$818,170	$873,840
Total	$264,268,859	$281,376,436

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CHANGE IN FOUNDATION FUNDING



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*Decrease of 10% or more than the previous year; Increase of 10% or more than the previous year; Steady is less than 10% change in either direction between from the previous year.

a result of federal funding cuts, and 2) in reaction to targeted attacks from the federal government on specific issue areas (e.g. DEI, immigration, healthcare, etc.). This shift in priority was noted in the Center for Effective Philanthropy's report, which found that 93% of foundation Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) indicated they were "making at least one change to the way they approach their foundation's work," with more than 60% indicating they were increasing funding in one issue area. Examples cited included increasing funding for food security and civic health.

Newsrooms faced downstream effects from federal funding cuts

INN member newsrooms are typically not reliant on government funding, which accounted for less than 2% of the overall funding to INN member newsrooms in 2025. While the majority of INN member newsrooms were not directly impacted by government funding reductions[4] — only 13% of INN member newsrooms reported reductions in government/state funding — nonprofit newsrooms felt the downstream effects of government funding cuts as philanthropic donors sought to help fill the gap left by federal funding cuts. This included directing funds towards media organizations that were directly impacted by the rescission of CPB funding as well as towards organizations that were impacted by funding cuts to other federal programs such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and National Sciences Foundation (NSF), among others.

Grist, a national newsroom based in Seattle, Washington, highlighted this effect in their survey response, "Although Grist does not receive federal funds, cuts to USAID, AmeriCorps, EPA grants, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and similar programs have a ripple effect across the sector, as philanthropy seeks to bolster organizations that are directly affected. These cuts impacted us in 2025 and could continue to do so in 2026."

Philanthropic donors weren't the only ones subject to shifting funding priorities as a result of federal funding cuts. The shift in funding priorities also showed up in earned revenue sources, with 12% of newsrooms indicating that non-charitable revenue reductions were a challenge. This came as businesses pulled back advertising and sponsorship support due to uncertainty in government funding and a strained economic climate. Reductions in earned revenue present a potential challenge

[2]For the year-over-year revenue analysis, we drew comparisons from a smaller cohort of outlets that provided complete financial data for 2024 and 2025 (N = 328).

[3]For the year-over-year revenue analysis portion, we drew comparisons from smaller cohorts of outlets that provided complete financial data for 2021 and 2024 (N = 236).

[4]The INN Network includes 35 public media outlets, accounting for approximately 7% of membership, all of whom were impacted by the CPB funding cut. The 2026 INN Index dataset does not include data from these 35 public media members given the systematic differences in how they report revenue and expenses. To read more about how INN public media partners were impacted by the 2025 political climate please see the Public Media chapter in the 2026 INN Index report here.

International Nonprofit Newsroom[5]: Changing philanthropic priorities and editorial tradeoffs

One INN member newsroom covering international humanitarian crises shared how its position at the intersection of journalism, humanitarian assistance, and global governance created a uniquely challenging funding environment. Although the outlet did not receive funding from USAID, the shuttering of the agency created a more crowded grantseeker market within the humanitarian sector, forcing the outlet to compete with former agency-funded projects for philanthropic and non-U.S. government grant dollars. The closing of USAID also paved the way for other country governments to reduce their humanitarian support budgets. This created both a, "supply" and "demand" side funding challenge.

To replace lost funding, the newsroom shifted toward more project-specific fundraising, presenting funders with defined reporting initiatives rather than seeking support for its broader mission. While this approach generated interest from prospective funders, it also presented editorial tradeoffs. Making reporting commitments in advance reduces the discretion of the newsroom's editors to follow emerging stories, or find new angles in real time.

[5]Author's note about anonymity: Interviewees were given the option to remain anonymous when discussing sensitive topics. This organization is not identified at the interviewee's request due to concerns about potential repercussions.

to newsrooms as they accounted for 17% of total newsroom revenue in 2025, and are seen as a priority for newsrooms as they seek to decrease their reliance on institutional philanthropy.

Bay City News Foundation, a regional newsroom operation serving the greater San Francisco Bay Area and Northern California, noted in their survey response, "We have seen a decline in charitable donations this year and sponsors who are unable to allocate revenue to marketing due to uncertainty with government funding. So while we are not directly impacted by government cuts, entities that normally would have supported us are."

Funding shifts due to heightened political sensitivities around hot-button topics

In addition to trying to fill funding gaps, members noted that funders were pulling back funding for topic issues that were being targeted by the administration, such as DEI, immigration, and healthcare.

Jake Hylton, Executive Director from LOOKOUT Publications, commented that in the months following the 2024 presidential election potential funders abruptly ended conversations that the Arizona-based nonprofit newsroom covering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other identity (LGBTQ+) communities had spent years cultivating. "By February, we lost about eight potentials, and still haven't heard from them," Hylton said. "There has been a major pullback from philanthropic institutions around anything that might be deemed DEI, or DEI adjacent." For the young newsroom launched in 2023 and operating with two full-time team members, the loss of these potential funding opportunities added to an already difficult environment for securing philanthropic support.

Heightened focus on coverage of these topics, for example around the administration's handling of things like immigration enforcement, sparked fears of retribution.

Brandon Quester, the Executive Director and Editor of Arizona Center for Investigative Reporting (AZCIR), an investigative news outlet dedicated to statewide accountability journalism noted that some funders were fearful of the potential blowback that could occur from their reporting. He commented that "people were fearful of rocking the boat and becoming or drawing the ire of the current administration." He went on

Carolina Public Press: Funders increasingly cautious about supporting politically sensitive investigative reporting

Frank Taylor, Executive Director of Carolina Public Press, a nonprofit investigative newsroom in North Carolina, noted concerns from prospective funders about associating themselves publicly with certain investigations. One such investigation that garnered hesitance from donors was *Stray Cops*, an investigative project examining law enforcement officers who faced disciplinary or other problems in one jurisdiction before moving to another. Although police sources themselves responded positively to the investigation, Taylor noted that some funders were hesitant to support it. This reluctance was particularly apparent among regional funders and sponsors, although similar behavior was observed from at least one national funder. Taylor attributed this caution partly to concerns about political retaliation and reputational risk, noting that some funders might prefer supporting less politically sensitive coverage over investigative projects that could attract controversy.

to say that this retaliatory behavior, "creates a very serious challenge to do journalism."

Individual donors stepped up in a time of crisis

Individual giving was one bright spot for INN members in 2025. Total individual giving in dollars, went up across the board between 2024 and 2025, with the median individual giving increasing from $91,507 in 2024 to $126,907 in 2025.[6] This held true for total individual giving across all three donor categories - small, medium, and major donors. Narrowing in, we see that over half (55%) of members saw an increase in their total individual giving dollars in 2025.

This points to the reality that when it comes to fundraising, "emergencies drive response." In 2025, M+R reported that individual donors rallied in response to large scale funding cuts to help fill the gap left by charitable giving and federal funding cuts with "average online revenue increasing by 15% in 2025." INN's NewsMatch program also saw this with "more than 100,000 first-time donors contributed to 407 participating nonprofit newsrooms through the campaign, a 34% increase from the previous year."

While a promising sign, an increase in individual giving during a time of crisis is likely to be a one-time bump and should not necessarily be seen as sustained growth.

STAFF SAFETY, HARASSMENT, AND MISINFORMATION IMPEDED NEWSROOMS ABILITY TO DO THEIR JOBS

In 2025, INN member newsrooms spent time and resources addressing safety concerns and responding to misinformation. Compounding difficulties accessing information both from community sources and public officials created a chilling effect, limiting newsrooms ability to do their job effectively. The more time and resources newsrooms spent on these efforts, the less time they had to respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

Threats to staff safety amplified by technology and political voices

In 2025, one in four organizations (25%) reported staff safety concerns, including either physical and verbal threats to staff

[6]For the year-over-year revenue analysis, we drew comparisons from a smaller cohort of outlets that provided complete financial data for 2024 and 2025 (N = 328).

TOTAL INDIVIDUAL GIVING

	CY2024	CY2025
Median	$91,508	$126,908
Average	$528,867	$600,008
Total	$173,468,362	$196,802,549

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MEDIAN INDIVIDUAL GIVING BY DONOR TYPE

	CY2024	CY2025
Small-dollar (less than $1,000)	$39,523	$49,160
Mid-range($1,000-$4,999)	$16,203	$19,400
Major-gift ($5,000 or more)	$63,145	$85,000

Created with Datawrapper

safety (16%) and online harassment of staff (17%), via website or social media comments or email spams. INN member newsrooms described receiving harassment and attacks from both individuals and government agencies.

News operations are no strangers to threats to staff safety or online harassment as a result of their reporting, what sets the 2025 landscape apart is the intensity of hostility and the ease of harassment enabled by technology.

In Chicago, four journalists working for Block Club Chicago, all of whom were visibly identified as members of the press, were struck by pepper-spray bullets and exposed to tear gas while covering protests against federal immigration enforcement in 2025. The incident occurred during Operation Midway Blitz, a multi-agency federal immigration enforcement surge led by ICE that involved raids and detentions across Illinois. For the nonprofit newsroom, which covers Chicago's diverse neighborhoods, the incident represented a level of danger it had not encountered in its eight years of operation.

"In my entire career doing this before, I've never seen anything like this," said Stephanie Lulay, Block Club Chicago's Executive Editor and Co-Founder. "That includes the 2020 unrest here in Chicago, which got very tense."

Lulay worried that the use of force against journalists could have a chilling effect on reporting about immigration enforcement.

At the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), which includes Mother Jones and Reveal, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Monika Bauerlein said online harassment, everything from horrible online responses to death threats, is quite common for the organization to receive before 2025, but Bauerlein said threats have become more frequent.

What was new, she said, was what appeared to be the administration "weaponizing its relationships with online trolls." Bauerlein pointed to an incident in which a reporter made inquiries to the Pentagon and was subsequently targeted by one of the newly credentialed members of the Pentagon press corps,[7] who threatened to publicize the situation. She called the episode "kind of a nightmare." Bauerlein also cited an incident when a political figure went after one of CIR's staff on social media as the kind of political amplification that had become "part of the climate." The incident was not prompted by a Mother Jones investigation, but it illustrates

[7] Mother Jones reporter Dan Friedman reported that one day after he sent questions to the Pentagon about a senior adviser to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, newly credentialed Pentagon press corps member Jack Posobiec emailed him with highly personal allegations and said he was preparing a story about him. Friedman said Posobiec gave him the same response deadline he had given the Pentagon, leading Friedman and his editors to view the episode as an apparent attempt to intimidate him into dropping his reporting. Posobiec and the Pentagon both denied coordinating.

how criticism of an individual journalist could quickly be elevated by highly visible political figures and exposed newsroom staff to a much larger wave of online attention and the harassments that often follow.

Keeping journalists safe is essential, and increasingly expensive

Harassment, both online and in person, not only makes journalists' jobs more difficult but it also points to a growing reality for newsrooms: the costs of preventing and responding to safety incidents are increasingly becoming part of routine operating expenses.

For example, MLK50, a local newsroom primarily serving communities of color in Memphis, Tennessee, reported they raised $135,000 from funders to address safety and security challenges, conducting an organizational safety and security audit and implementing improved safety protocols and procedures. They noted in their survey response, "We heavily relied on the expertise of trusted partners and sister newsrooms, and tapped our funders for additional financial support to navigate the challenges."

At Deep South Today, a network of local newsrooms serving communities in Mississippi, Executive Editor Adam Ganucheau said protecting staff also means securing private information and having resources available when political or online intimidation becomes personal.

"For individual reporters who might face something like a lawsuit, or intimidation from right-wing press friendly with the political leaders targeting them," Ganucheau said. "Having a budget set aside for mental health support, or something as concrete as, 'I need a home alarm system now because I've been doxxed,' matters." Ganucheau said the organization had faced situations requiring personal protective measures "a couple times," including measures involving journalists' homes.

Reluctance among community sources to speak on the record

Amid increased harassment and heightened concerns about staff safety, in some communities, members indicated that local sources have become more reluctant to trust that speaking on the record won't make them targets.

This was particularly apparent in the Chicago metropolitan area which was targeted in Operation Midway Blitz.

Irene Romulo, Co-Founding Editor at Cicero Independiente, a bilingual newsroom serving predominantly Latino communities in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, said journalists began to see hesitancy about going on the record from community members in late 2024. That reluctance grew as the area became a target of ICE raids in 2025.

"When talking to sources and community members for some of our reporting, it's definitely been harder to get people to feel comfortable just being on the record or using their names," she said. "It just takes so much more work and relationship building and time to get people to feel comfortable, and for us to also think through risk assessment."

Not only were community sources hesitant to go on the record, but they became difficult to reach as a result of legal rulings. Daphne Watson, Operations and Communications Manager from Reparations Media, a Chicago-based media education and production organization reporting on issues affecting marginalized communities and communities of color, noted challenges getting community members to go on the record for a podcast on immigration and its impact on the Haitian and broader African diaspora communities. She commented that these communities "have essentially been driven underground."

These fears created serious challenges for newsrooms in their reporting as they sought to "balance the need to protect sources with our commitment/dedication to reporting the truth," as noted by Block Club Chicago.

Increased roadblocks to accessing public information

It wasn't just community sources that were hesitant about going on the record. Journalists also faced growing difficulties accessing information from public agencies and elected officials in 2025. Some officials were reluctant to speak with reporters, even about routine government processes, amid concerns about attracting federal scrutiny or political backlash.

Quester at AZCIR described 2025 as one of the hardest years he had experienced as a journalist, noting that people were reluctant to speak out for fear of drawing federal attention or "the ire of the president himself."

"It has never been harder to get access to public information than it is today," Quester said. "I've been doing this for more than 20 years, and it has never been so difficult for me to get somebody on the phone to answer a basic question."

Quester said the difficulties extended across government agencies, from health care and Medicaid to higher education institutions. Even basic questions about agency procedures often went unanswered, making it harder for journalists to write stories. "We don't understand how you do this because you won't talk to us," he said, describing the frustration of seeking routine information.

The lack of cooperation from government officials led members to seek information through alternative channels, including submitting lengthy and time consuming Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests which, according to Romulo from Cicero Independiente, were often denied, "either as being too burdensome or we're being told there's no information." She commented that while information access has always been a challenge, it appears to have been heightened in the past year.

These barriers took a toll on newsroom capacity to fully report on issues. Quester noted that they were unable to pursue important stories because of the time and effort required to obtain even small pieces of information from government agencies.

Responding to misinformation and hostile comments further pulled newsrooms away from reporting efforts

Lack of information from official sources was further compounded by the growth of misinformation which continued to proliferate in 2025, especially on

International Nonprofit Newsroom: Political backlash intensified scrutiny of coverage and affected safety of journalists and their sources

Scrutiny around coverage wasn't limited to domestic reporting. One INN member newsroom covering international humanitarian crises encountered growing resistance to its work examining the colonial legacies of humanitarian assistance and unequal power structures within the sector. The newsroom noted that this reporting was more positively received in the years following 2020 but faced substantial pushback amid the broader backlash against DEI initiatives.

Heightened focus on specific coverage further complicated reporting efforts in conflict-affected regions the newsroom covers, requiring difficult decisions about journalist and source safety. In some cases, the newsroom had to conceal sources' identities or rely more heavily on outside experts when quoting local participants could expose them to danger. These precautions created tensions with the organization's mission of amplifying local perspectives. While such safety challenges are longstanding for reporting in conflict-affected areas, heightened political tensions and focus made it even more difficult.

social media, for more than a third (35%) of the INN member newsrooms in our survey. These efforts to undermine public trust have created a more difficult environment for news organizations and news consumers.

"What we're seeing is a continuation and intensification of a broader trend: on virtually every social media platform, people are taking advantage of and weaponizing audience concerns," added Bauerlein of CIR.

This was particularly true for coverage of marginalized communities. At LkldNow, a hyperlocal newsroom in Lakeland, Florida, Executive Director Trinity Laurino said she observed accounts she believed to be bots or trolls becoming unusually hostile during election years, particularly on stories about LGBTQ+ and Black communities.

For example, one Juneteenth story and one Black History Month story LkldNow published received "horrific comments" unlike responses those stories would normally attract, she said. The activity occurred primarily on Facebook. Rather than relying only on hiding hostile comments, Laurino asked community members to enter the conversation and leave genuine responses, effectively overwhelming hostile threads with real readers' engagement.

Newsrooms are spending more and more time marshalling fact-checking, debunking efforts, and mitigating the impact of hostile comments which is essential, but again, pulls them away from regular publishing. The more resources that newsrooms spend taking defensive measures to combat misinformation and online harassment, the fewer resources they have to reach vulnerable populations that are being impacted by misinformation efforts.

ORGANIZATIONS PRIMARILY SERVING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED

In 2025, organizations primarily serving communities of color were more likely to report negative impacts across the board, with almost all of INN member organizations that primarily serve communities of color reporting negative impacts (94%) related to the political climate. These outlets likely felt the impacts more acutely for two reasons. First, as noted earlier, the administration's crackdown on DEI affected funding to organizations with a DEI focus. And second, because the topics

these outlets cover and the populations they serve were under attack from the administration, for example, coverage on immigration issues, they faced greater staff safety threats and issues with misinformation.

Funding reductions in response to organization's mission

Forty-percent (40%) of outlets whose primary mission is serving communities of color saw a decrease in total revenue in 2025 compared to 23% of outlets that do not serve communities of color. Outlets that primarily serve communities of color experienced a decrease in almost all revenue sources – foundation, individual giving, and earned revenue – at greater rates than those who don't serve communities of color. As noted in INN's 2023 Index Report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Nonprofit News Sector, funding for outlets that primarily serve communities of color has been more sensitive to political shifts, and 2025 appears to be no exception.

Pullbacks in commitments to DEI initiatives and organizations were observed across the nonprofit sector in 2025, with 61% of nonprofits surveyed by the Nonprofit Finance Fund indicating they had been impacted by funding cuts. Among nonprofits led by people of color, the figure was higher at 71%. INN member newsrooms noted that they observed these funding challenges both in relation to the overall funding landscape but also as a response to their specific mission.

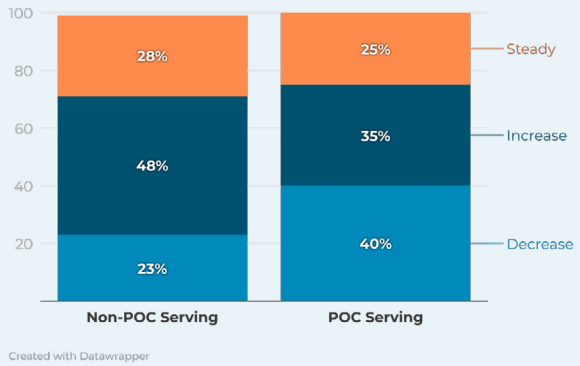
Daphne Watson from Reparations Media, described how the organization's mission and name have influenced funders' perceptions and willingness to provide support. "There's just a lot of talk about money, race, and all these things that make people very uncomfortable right now given the anti-DEI climate," she said.

Despite Chicago's strong philanthropic community, Watson noted that the organization frequently encounters reluctance from funders. "The response we get so often is essentially, 'Journalists and reparations? We're not funding that.'"

Watson recalled a promising conversation with a family foundation that expressed enthusiasm for the organization's work, including training young journalists in trauma-informed reporting and solutions journalism. Yet she sensed hesitation around the organization's explicit focus on communities of color. "Everybody loves what we're doing. But then it's like — they don't

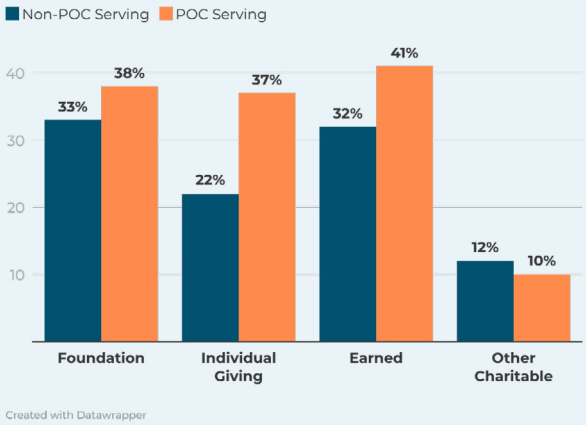
CHANGE IN TOTAL REVENUE

(CY2024-CY2025)



PERCENT DECREASE IN REVENUE BY SOURCE

(CY2024-CY2025)



say it directly, but it's almost like, 'Can you take the BIPOC part out of the description?'"

SAFETY THREATS AND HARASSMENT

Outlet type	Threat	Harassment
No POC-serving	7%	11%
POC-serving is one of several priorities	18%	23%
POC-serving is primary mission	31%	22%

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Higher rates of online harassment and threats to staff safety

Challenges weren't just on the funding side. Outlets whose primary mission is serving communities of color also experienced more threats to staff safety and harassment as a result of the heightened political tensions and rhetoric around communities of color. Nearly one in three outlets (31%) whose primary mission is serving communities of color reported experiencing threats to staff safety and one in five (22%) reported online harassment in 2025.

Harassment and threats were directed not simply at "the media," an issue that has been on the rise, but at newsrooms' community-serving missions and the language of reporting, in some instances.

Paola Jaramillo, Co-founder and Executive Director of Enlace Latino NC, a local newsroom covering Latino and Hispanic communities in North Carolina, commented that when staff livestream North Carolina General Assembly proceedings and translate or caption legislators' remarks in Spanish, hostile comments appear in real time.

"Why do you do that? You need to learn English. This is America," Jaramillo recalled commenters writing.

Harassment wasn't limited to online platforms, with some newsrooms experiencing direct attacks at public events. Romulo, from Cicero Independiente, said the town president has made racist and derogatory remarks during meetings broadcast by the newsroom and has threatened to ban its journalists from public meetings.

While some of the underlying harassment and safety concerns predate 2025, Romulo said it "feels like there is more of it now."

Safety concerns intertwined with journalists' identities

For many newsrooms, the safety concerns affecting the communities they cover are closely intertwined with the identities of the journalists doing the reporting.

While covering issues affecting their communities, staff also

experienced them personally. During Operation Midway Blitz, Romulo from Cicero Independiente, said she saw an increase in the presence of federal agents on her block and in the neighborhood where her coworkers live. She said some of their family members and friends were detained.

"There's definitely a toll," she said, "and that connects to our safety. We've spent a lot of time addressing our physical safety and our well-being, but it's also affecting our mental health and the way we show up to work."

This is not only impacting staff on a personal level, but it is increasingly shaping basic decisions about how and when journalists are assigned to report in the field.

Enlace Latino NC, which has a staff that is largely immigrant, Spanish-speaking and female, considers who can safely cover particular public events, often reporting in pairs rather than alone. When covering protests or other potentially volatile events, staff pay attention to which English-language news organizations are present and sometimes stay physically close to those journalists because it feels safer. Police officers have themselves warned Enlace Latino NC journalists to be careful at events where arrests or confrontations could occur.

"We just feel that we're not safe right now," Jaramillo said, describing a concern the newsroom did not previously have to factor into assignment.

Growth in misinformation around issues impacting communities of color

Safety concerns were compounded by increased misinformation around issues impacting the communities these outlets serve, with nearly half (45%) of outlets that primarily serve communities of color reporting growth in misinformation as a challenge in 2025.

Federal officials generated and amplified polarizing narratives and misinformation, around high-stakes issues including immigration enforcement, government funding for public benefits, and healthcare. In Oklahoma, the Tulsa Local News Initiative - which publishes a digital startup called the Tulsa Flyer and a 100-year-old news source called The Oklahoma Eagle - noted in its survey response how misinformation in this political climate was impacting communities of color served by both newsrooms, making it "harder for residents to distinguish credible, actionable information from noise." They went on to add that, "This can deepen distrust and confusion at the very moments when people most need accurate local reporting."

Even well meaning community members shared misinformation, as a result of panic and fear created by federal actions. Romulo, from Cicero Independiente, said the chaos created in her community during the ICE immigration raids generated misinformation.

"Everything was moving very quickly. A lot of different people and social media accounts sprang up trying to inform people about ICE sightings and other activity. Some of their intentions were good, but at the same time there was misinformation and incorrect information being shared."

INN MEMBER NEWSROOMS RESPOND TO CHALLENGES

While many of the challenges encountered in 2025 were a continuation or intensification of existing issues facing the nonprofit news field, newsrooms did their best to address the acute concerns while preparing for the long-term implications. Newsrooms focused on diversifying their revenue streams, investing in community building and staff safety, and collaborating with other newsrooms to amplify their reporting.

Diversifying revenue streams to address funding challenges

Given the uptick in individual giving, half (50%) of INN member newsrooms indicated that individual donors were their first fundraising priority for the coming

FUNDRAISING PRIORITIES

	%
Foundation grants	**36%**
Small dollar donors (less than $1,000)	**17%**
Mid-range donors ($1,000-$4,999)	**11%**
Major gift donors ($5,000 or more)	**22%**
Advertising	6%
Sponsorships and underwriting	4%
Events	1%
Subscriptions	2%
Syndication/commissions	1%
Other	1%

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LOOKOUT Publications: Rethinking business models amid shifting philanthropic priorities

In 2025, the difficult philanthropic environment for journalism, particularly journalism focused on LGBTQ+ communities, prompted a fundamental reassessment of LOOKOUT's future. With only a handful of LGBTQ+ nonprofit newsrooms nationwide, LOOKOUT worried about the consequences if organizations like theirs could no longer operate. Rather than relocate or retreat from their mission, LOOKOUT began rebuilding its business model to expand beyond Arizona, to go from a statewide news outlet to a regional news outlet. After nearly two years of planning and restructuring, LOOKOUT expanded its coverage to Colorado in June of 2026, marking its first step toward becoming a regional newsroom.

year. Specifically, newsrooms indicated they were prioritizing major donors ($5,000 and more) and small donors (less than $1,000). This includes both deepening their relationships with existing donors and seeking to expand their offerings to reach new audiences and potential donors. One key thread throughout many newsrooms appeals has been enhancing messaging around the importance of journalistic integrity and community impact of nonprofit news.

Despite reductions in philanthropic giving, 36% of nonprofit newsrooms indicated that foundation funding was still their number one fundraising priority for the coming year. While some members indicated that they were focusing on engaging with current or past funders, others said they were pursuing new relationships, including funders typically outside of the journalism sphere or more local and regional funders. While members noted some success with reaching out to new funders, they cautioned that this is a time and resource intensive process.

Building trust through community engagement and focus

Newsrooms are focused on building trust by emphasizing community engagement and outreach activities, including in-person events, such as panels, town halls, open mic nights, community listening events, and even celebratory events including dance parties. Community engagement and outreach efforts were noted as particularly important when working with underserved populations, as it helps to draw in audiences and demonstrate the value of local news. Newsrooms are also keeping a focus on community coverage and local impact. In a time when the news is dominated by federal level changes, news outlets reiterated the importance of ensuring that the local implications of these changes are clearly articulated to communities.

Investing in staff safety and security

In response to the increased safety concerns, newsrooms have invested in safety and security measures including conducting audits on both physical and cyber security and establishing staff safety protocols and procedures. This has meant investing in new safety and security products and softwares like DeleteMe licenses (provided at a discount to INN members), virtual

Block Club Chicago: Collaborating to uphold journalists' safety and First Amendment protections

In October 2025, Block Club Chicago, Chicago Headline Club, and others sued the federal government, seeking protections against the use of chemical weapons and other force against journalists covering protests. Represented by pro-bono attorneys including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in Illinois among others, the coalition secured a temporary restraining order restricting federal agents from using force against journalists covering protests, protecting reporters across a dozen Northern Illinois counties. Although the lawsuit was eventually dropped, the legal proceedings yielded an unexpected benefit for journalists across the city: the release of body-camera footage, incident reports, and other government records documenting federal enforcement operations. Block Club Chicago used the released materials to develop stories that shed light on the behind-the-scenes operations in Chicago. The experience illustrates both the safety and legal challenges facing journalists and how newsrooms' collaborative efforts to defend their reporting rights can also expand access to information for the broader press.

private networks (VPNs), organizational phones, gas masks, security guards for events, security cameras for offices, Signal, etc. Newsrooms are also investing in mental health support for staff to ensure that they are able to process reporting related trauma challenges and prevent burn out.

Collaborating to address legal concerns

While some members noted that they pursued legal actions independently, many commented that they were addressing legal issues through collaborative efforts. This included engaging in existing coalitions and pro bono services, like the First Amendment Coalition, Lawyers for Reporters, Reporters Committee for the Freedom of Press, as well as establishing local coalitions. Through these coalitions, newsrooms were able to amplify legal issues, provide direct support such as legal consultations and funds to journalists, and bolster official requests. These collaborative efforts are essential for nonprofit news organizations that often lack the financial resources to pursue or respond to legal concerns on an individual basis.

Conclusion

While the impacts of the 2025 political climate continue to unfold as the landscape changes with new legal proceedings and political shifts in Congress following the 2026 midterm elections, one thing is clear: nonprofit news organizations are facing threats on multiple fronts. Uncertainties around the future of the funding landscape for nonprofit organizations in general and news organizations specifically, are driving nonprofit news organizations to focus on identifying sustainable, diversified revenue sources that can better insulate them from fluctuations in philanthropic giving. Continuing threats against freedom of the press in an increasingly divisive political environment means that news organizations are navigating additional hurdles to ensure that they are able to provide communities with trusted and reliable information. Not every newsroom encountered the same type of challenges in 2025, but navigating these issues will require creative solutions, collaboration, and collective action.



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news@inn.org with any questions or press inquiries.