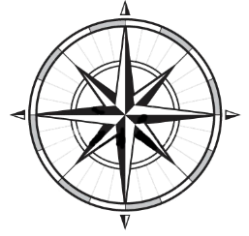


# Inside the Compass Experiment



Mandy Jenkins, General Manager  
@mjenkins

Mega-Conference  
#2020MegaConf  
February 18, 2020

# Who we are

The **Compass Experiment** is a local news lab funded by Google and operated by McClatchy to explore new sustainable business models for local news.

## Our Remit

Over the next three years, we will launch **three** digital-only news operations in small to mid-sized U.S. communities that have limited sources of **local, independent** journalism.

## Our Goal

Our goal is to support the dissemination of news in these communities, while making the local operations **financially self-sustaining**.

# Our guiding principles

1. No parachute journalism
2. One size doesn't fit all communities
3. All decisions come back to sustainability
4. Collaboration is king

# Finding the right communities

- Has a population of roughly 50,000 to 200,000
- Strong sense of local identity
- People live and work there
- Has an engaged citizenry that votes, volunteers and is focused on making their city a better place
- Has few sources of local news, or recently lost a major local news provider

# Making the move to Youngstown

- Impending closure of Vindicator, a 150-year-old locally-owned newspaper
- Is it a news desert? No, but...
- A place in the market for accountability reporting the *Vindy* was known for
- Added degree of difficulty: Low average household income, declining population, minimal broadband penetration





# MAHONING MATTERS

- Digital-only news site focused on Youngstown & the Mahoning Valley
- Launched October 9, 2019, 42 days after the closure of the *Vindicator*
- Free-to-access site made for mobile
- Local staff of five: 4 editorial, 1 business, all from the *Vindicator*
- Supported by central staff of 3





**Telling the stories that matter in  
Mahoning County and empowering  
citizens to engage in their community  
with a focus on solutions.**

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MAHONING MATTERS' MISSION STATEMENT

# Building toward sustainability

**Sponsorships:** Community Leaders Program for local businesses to underwrite key content areas

**Newsletters:** Sponsorship of our popular and growing newsletters

**Shop Local:** Paid directory of local business profiles and classifieds

**Programmatic ads:** Limited, fit for the market

**Sponsored content:** High-quality local content

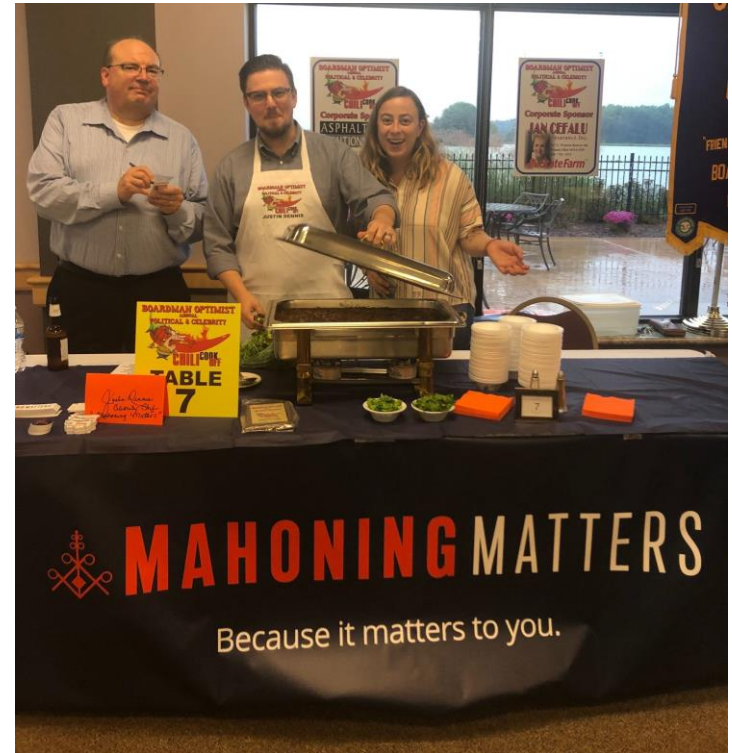
**Foundations:** Community-funded reporting

**Membership:** Program launching summer 2020



# A focus on community and collaboration

- No office, no problem! We live and work in the community
- Monthly community engagement events
- Facebook Live story pitch nights
- Content partnerships with WYSU public radio, statewide media and YSU student media
- Community partnerships with the local library system and Better Business Bureau



# So how's it going?\*

60,000+ Unique Monthly Readers

200,000+ monthly PVs

4,000+ email subscribers

8,000+ followers on social media

Expecting to hit our monthly recurring revenue targets in April

Expanding our team with a Report for America reporter this summer

\*As of February 2020, four months after launch

# Challenges & Lessons Learned

- Local hires are key: In first 60 days, our team broke exclusive stories and secured region's top sponsor thanks to established connections
- Brand awareness takes time and lots of money
- Converting a print team to a startup metabolism takes more than just a can-do attitude (but that really helps!)
- Advertising operations are not built for small teams, so we have to make our own processes
- A print-focused market can form new habits if you talk to them about their needs and challenges
- Mobile-first works for a rural/urban audience that doesn't have desk jobs (75% mobile audience)



# What's Ahead for Compass

- Announcing location for site #2 within weeks
- Hiring an additional staff member for audience development/marketing
- Launching second site this spring
- Rolling out membership at Mahoning Matters
- Selecting and launching site #3 later this year

# Thank You!

Mandy Jenkins

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## The Compass Experiment

Updates and case studies:

[Medium.com/the-compass-experiment/](https://medium.com/the-compass-experiment/)

@CompassLocal

## Mahoning Matters

[mahoningmatters.com](https://mahoningmatters.com)

@MahoningMatters