

## **VT Journalism Conference 2024**

Post-conference summary and survey results

Thank you to **CCTV Center for Media & Democracy** for providing this video of the conference: <https://www.cctv.org/watch-tv/programs/2024-vermont-journalism-conference>

How would you rate the value of your overall experience at the Vermont Journalism Conference this year?

Rating: 4.4 out of 5

### **Sen. Peter Welch interview**

Rating: 4.1 out of 5

#### **Summary of interview**

Sen. Welch discussed the importance of local news, and the negative impact of its decline. He discussed his efforts to improve the USPS, which is especially important to local newspapers.

#### **Comments on Sen. Peter Welch interview**

- The Senator helped frame the stakes
- No substantial proposed solution.
- I've talked with Sen. Welch many times and often am the only reporter to attend appearances he makes in my town. But this was the longest I've heard him talk about the role local news plays in daily life and our democracy. I was skeptical I would hear something new, but pleasantly surprised at the detail he got into.
- Good anecdote about disagreeing with kid's hockey coach re:ed funding.
- I felt like he talked a lot about the importance of journalism. While I respect this, I am not the one in need of convincing.
- Excellent national perspective on journalism
- He has been a staunch supporter of local journalism over the years, and it is encouraging to know that there is bipartisan support for his USPS reforms.
- Always good to hear from our congressional delegation; and appreciate the focus on the legislation he was backing/proposing.
- overview excellent if sobering"norms shattered"
- THOUGHT PROVOKING

**Incentivizing Sustainability With Public Policy** (Rebuild Local, Vermont Secretary of State, etc.)

Rating: 4.0 out of 5

**Summary:** Anna Brugmann, Director of Policy, Rebuild Local News discussed recent successful efforts to pass funding mechanisms for local journalism in New York, California and Illinois. Vermont State Senator Andrew Perchlik discussed the potential for state funding of local journalism in Vermont, saying direct funding is more likely than a tax break for journalism organizations. Vermont Secretary of State Sarah Copeland-Hanzas discussed her office's efforts to support local journalism.

### **Comments on the Public Policy panel**

- Nice to hear the SOS and state senator discuss policy options so openly
- This discussion was the most interesting as it offered examples from other states where there's already momentum to acknowledge and support local news through new initiatives that bring attention to this need to the public at large.
- Need info-specific sign up on web or by paper at conference, for getting on sect's list via her staffer.
- A little too in the weeds on federal policy, not enough exploration of state policy.
- Interesting ideas but I'm in search of solutions sooner rather than later. I feel like it would take too long to implement, since we are losing so much money/reporters now.
- loved suggestion of news in schools
- Lots of new information and ideas came out of this panel, offering some hope that there might be some help available from state sources for newsrooms.
- Overly broad.
- discussion of progressive and inclusive voting reforms were significant
- It revealed the complexity of this issue
- Wish there was more time for questions.
- Wow. This was fascinating, excellent, actionable. Seriously inspiring and my biggest takeaway from the convening.

**Press Forward panel** (Press Forward National Director Dale Anglin, VCF President and CEO Dan Smith)

Rating: 4.2 out of 5

**Summary:** Dale Anglin discussed the new Press Forward initiative at the national level, and the effort to set up local chapters. She also talked about the need to help philanthropy and journalism to learn how to speak to one another. Dan Smith announced the state's new Press Forward chapter, while sharing the limits of the funding available. He said they were just beginning to determine their direction and asked for input from media leaders about how best to focus their efforts.

### **Comments on Press Forward panel**

- Dale spoke in a way that reached a lot of people
- This is nice to see coming together in Vermont. It will be interesting to see what support there is in our relatively small philanthropic community to direct investment to news outlets.
- Need nuts and bolts of how and when to qualify.
- I felt like the lady from Press Forward was out of touch with the needs of reporters because she kept talking about specific language and funding which are great but don't really apply to my day to day reality.
- Brilliant and on point.
- Learning that VCF is leading the Press Forward Vermont initiative was encouraging, and hearing more from Dale about what Press Forward is doing now and hopes to do in the future offered hope to us all.
- Good to learn more about Press Forward; thought Dan's comments were straightforward and cautionary. He wasn't sugarcoating the way forward; and I think he's right.
- Dale elevates the conversation enormously. High net worth individuals are key she said but always, audience first.
- If only grant writing and fundraising were easier .....
- I would have liked to have heard more from Dale
- Great to have Dale Anglin there.

### **What's Working to Sustain VT Journalism** (panel of local journalism leaders)

Rating: 3.8 out of 5

**Summary:** Local leaders discussed some “green shoots” of revenue success, including Sky Barsch of VT Digger, Paula Routly of Seven Days, Brendan Kinney of Vermont Public, Roger Garrity of WCAX, Meghan O'Rourke of CCTV Center for Media & Democracy, and Tim Calabro of the White River Valley Herald

### **Comments on panel of local journalism leaders**

- lots of great ideas
- I just wish people had explained more of what they did to get there rather than how successful they were.
- helpful
- A good cross-section of local newsrooms and what they are doing to ensure sustainability.
- Nice to see tv represented
- knew most of this

- Interesting to hear perspectives. WCAX/Gray TV is interesting/Fox news style I became better aware of.
- Really good. I enjoyed the WCAX guy
- It was a bit dominated by WCAX -- I would have liked to hear from at least one more weekly.
- Perhaps a bit more interaction among the panelists rather than a series of presentations would be even more effective.

### **Ideas for Financial Sustainability** table discussions

**Rating:** 3.5 out of 5

### **Comments on table discussions**

- This was quick and my table digressed!
- It was interesting how many people at my table weren't really journalists (philanthropy, PR, etc.) which is fine but I wish they had listened to and taken seriously what we found was working because we are the key to making sure this industry exists.
- Inadequate time to discuss and share ideas
- Missed the last session
- The table talk served as an amplification of what was said on stage.
- A few good ideas around the table.
- Didn't stay
- our table was kind of meandering. Interesting but no big takeaways
- N/A -- had to leave early
- I wasn't able to stay for this.
- Was nice to connect with folks but people were ready to wrap it up.

### **What was the best part of the VT Journalism Conference this year?**

- Press Forward panel
- Meeting new folks in the industry
- Hearing about the public policy steps being taken in other states. That seems to open up an entirely new avenue for both financial support and readership.
- collaborating. connecting.
- I liked being able to see other reporters and know that my outlet is not alone. I know we are competitors in some ways but also were all in this together in terms of making this industry function.
- Hearing from Anglin and Smith and the few minutes I had with a young journalist from CNS
- Interacting with and hearing from colleagues

- The tone of the meeting: there are things happening now and that the philanthropic and public policy landscapes are changing to reflect the importance of local news to communities.
- Getting us all together in one room and working toward a common goal.
- hearing from other journalists / newsrooms
- Networking and focusing on sustainability. A few years ago, we would have been reluctant to even admit as much; addressing our challenges in the open is a much healthier perspective.
- Dale Anglin and the lunch discussion
- Networking!
- networking and meeting other journalists
- Connecting with peers
- Discussions of public policy to fund journalism efforts
- The Rebuild Local News panel was super interesting and got my wheels turning! It was also so great to see friends, peers and counterparts from Vermont news. So cool to see past interns now in full time roles at other organizations, and a wonderful opportunity for people (including me) to hear from folks at the state and national level.
- Networking with the other attendees
- Taking time to connect with others in the field.

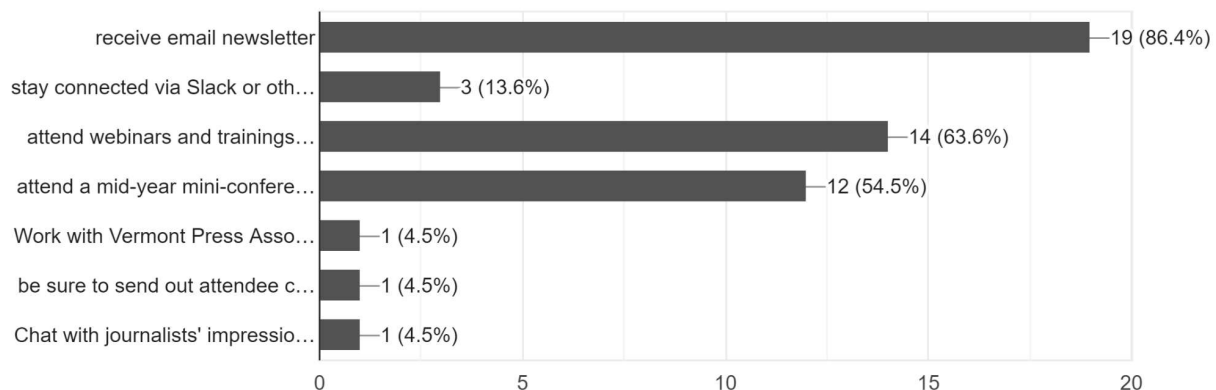
#### **What could be improved upon for next year?**

- Add breakout sessions
- Allow more time for questions of panelists.
- Add in some time to cover actual journalism, not just the business of journalism.
- A session where local media editors get to weigh in on the efficacy, usefulness, timeliness, accuracy of CNS stories.
- I was disappointed that many of the most powerful attendees had a private lunch room. The private luncheon lent an awkward vibe to the space that seemed anathema to our open media culture and transparency. It increases the sense of competition and scarcity mindset.
- I know this year was focused on the philanthropic/legislative side of things because of the recent Press Forward developments but I think there is a real need to go back to basics and talk about how to actually restore trust and support reporters in doing their jobs so they don't have to worry about money/animosity from the public/bad working conditions.
- More time to network and connect with other journo
- Nothing. This third edition built upon the momentum created by the previous two conferences. Just keep it going and help it grow stronger.

- Diversify the agenda a bit. This year seemed largely focused on finance to me. Funding is important but not the only challenge we collectively face.
- More time for networking / Table Talk discussion-style topics
- There was confusion around the focus of the conference when the name was switched back and forth between "Vermont Media Conference" and "Vermont Journalism Conference".
- Implement plans of action that newspapers can be working on either individually or collectively.
- More from key speaker and no breakout sessions.
- not much. It was well organized
- I wished there were one or more nuts and bolts workshops where we share information about how we do our jobs -- eg: editors -- strategies for organizing contributions; ways to attract ad sales people -- etc.
- Discussion should be earlier in the day
- Honestly, I thought it was great! Maybe doing a semi-structured lunch hour, like assign topics to certain tables so folks can go and join a conversation.

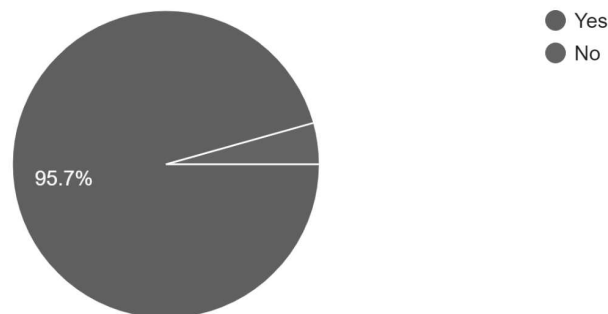
What would you be interested in doing between conferences stay connected with Vermont's journalism community?

22 responses



Are you interested in receiving more information about Press Forward Vermont?

23 responses



What ideas for topics do you have for the next conference?

- reaching new audiences
- A segment where participants can propose solutions.
- Journalism alone will not resolve political divisiveness. I'd like to talk about how we can foster, model, and moderate discussions across difference about local issues.
- Hiring/retaining reporters in the long term (esp. financially but also making a healthier/more stable work environment), mental health/burnout coping for individuals and institutions, ways to find stories that resonate with readers on the local level (instead of just localizing a national issue it might be good to talk about how we can think/act differently than national reporters when finding stories)
- managing technical convergence and the collapse of media imposed length standards
- How can Vt journos collaborate to:
  - Encourage young people to study journalism
  - Train the next generation of journalists
  - Affect local and regional policy (as it applies to us) with a united voice
  - Cross-pollinate to better serve rural news deserts in Vt
- Pros and cons of becoming a nonprofit, vs having a nonprofit arm (as the Vermont Standard has done) vs staying a for-profit with a fiscal agent as Seven Days has done
- Convincing small news organizations that they will maintain autonomy with funding from Press forward.
- what does objective reporting look like when politicians lie?

- How can small local newspapers be rebuilt? Should there be a limit to how many papers a corporate behemoth or hedge fund can own?
- Workshops about nuts and bolts related to our work broken out to editorial/advertising/business.
- How AI can help .
- what to understand about existing and best practices in digital audience and printed audience engagement
- Stellar examples of local VT journalism presented by the reporters. Also, more about broadcast TV's role and collaboration.