

Independent News Sustainability Summit

SPONSOR REPORT

2024



INDEPENDENT NEWS
SUSTAINABILITY
SUMMIT
CHICAGO 2024

A photograph of three people smiling at a summit event. On the left is a woman with long blonde hair and glasses, wearing a white t-shirt and holding a glass of wine. In the center is a man wearing a blue and white checkered shirt, a blue blazer, and a grey baseball cap with a logo. On the right is a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a black shirt and a grey jacket. The background shows other people and a blurred indoor setting.

About LION and the Summit

LION Publishers

Local Independent Online News (LION) Publishers is on a mission to strengthen the local news industry by empowering independent news publishers to build more sustainable businesses.

Independent News Sustainability Summit

One of our core offerings is events like the **Independent News Sustainability Summit**, which provides publishers with tools, resources, and best-of-industry advice on how to operationalize sustainability. The Summit uses LION's framework of sustainability to design programming focused on financial health, operational resilience, and journalistic impact.



From our Executive Director



LION Publishers' **2024 Independent News Sustainability Summit** was, in many ways, a return to LION's roots. This sold-out event, which incorporated our sixth annual **LION Publishers Sustainability Awards**, took place from September 5 to 7, 2024, in Chicago, Illinois – the host city of one of LION's first gatherings.

Back in 2011, the Patterson Foundation brought together a group of independent publishers in Chicago as part of a project led by the Reynolds Journalism Institute. A year later, at a similar gathering, LION Publishers was born.

We've since hosted several in-person conferences, with the Summit being our largest and most comprehensive, consisting of keynote presentations, panel discussions, hands-on workshops, and ample networking opportunities.

Thanks to the generosity of 15 sponsors, in 2024, we gave \$600 travel stipends to nearly 100 attendees, taking a barrier to attendance away from these (mostly small) publishers. We were able to offer complimentary tickets for all our speakers, volunteers, and special guests (about 100 people). We also awarded about \$60,000 in cash prizes during the LION Awards Ceremony & Dinner. And every year, our members reiterate just how important it is to be able to connect with and learn from each other in an inclusive, accessible setting.

That's why we produce the Summit – and seek support from sponsors and partners to make it possible.

Our goal is to ensure this event remains impactful for all attendees, and that's a critical component we'll continue to keep front and center as we plan for 2025 and beyond.

Thank you to everyone who supported the 2024 Summit. **We hope to have you join us again in 2025.**



Registrant Details

The 2024 Summit was our biggest yet, and we sold out a month in advance (and had to release more tickets!). **Here are some key details about who signed up:**

* 533 total Summit registrants

70% said revenue generation and/or operations development was their primary focus

70% held an executive or senior-level leadership role

68% were LION members

34% represented a historically underrepresented background in news

41 states, plus Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, were represented

* 286 total LION Awards registrants

100% of all 2024 LION Awards winners registered

78% of all 2024 LION Awards finalists registered

\$60K distributed in cash prizes to our 2024 LION Awards winners

The **LION Publishers Sustainability Awards**, formerly known as the LION Local Journalism Awards, **recognize excellence by local independent online news businesses** in award categories focused on LION's pillars of sustainability – journalistic impact, financial health, and operational resilience. In 2024, we celebrated 18 winners across 10 categories with recognition and cash prizes. Each winning entry received at least \$2,500.

MEMBER SNAPSHOT

LION represents nearly 600 member publications across 49 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, plus 31 Canadian members across 8 provinces:

- 62% have two or fewer full-time employees
- 1 is the median employee headcount
- \$138K is the median annual revenue for all members; \$147K for those who have been LION members for at least one year



Attendee Experience



95% of all attendee survey respondents would attend a future Summit, based on their 2024 experience

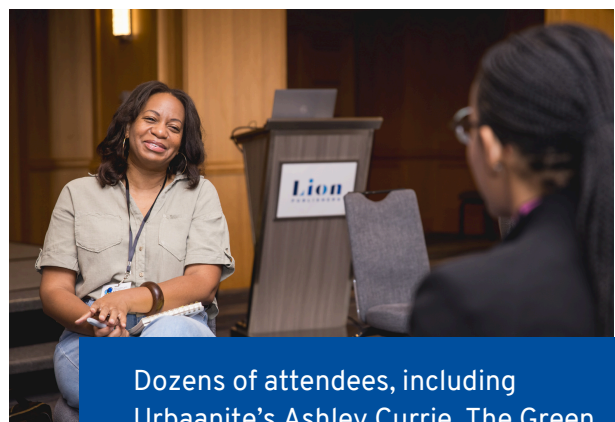
A majority of publication founders and leaders said that the Summit made them feel more confident and/or energized about running a sustainable news business that serves their community.

In their own words, here's what some attendees said about the event:

* "Congratulations on an excellent Summit. The program was great, the venue worked well, and the vibe was positive. I have come away with pages of notes, people to follow up with, and actions to take at my own organization. **Thank you for an extremely useful few days in Chicago.**"

* "The overall culture of the conference felt more welcoming and less corporatized than other conferences I've attended. This was my first LION conference and my first time meeting a lot of other LION-affiliated publishers, and **I found that people had strong social bonds but were very welcoming of new faces.**"

* "**The community I find at the LION Summit is a highlight of my year, every year.** Running a news org and holding it down for your community, whether it's a couple blocks or a county of a million, can be really lonely work. The LION Summit gives us a space to bring us closer together, and that's how the industry moves forward."



Dozens of attendees, including [Urbaanite's Ashley Currie](#), [The Green Line's Anita Li](#), and [CivicLex's Richard Young](#), also shared their thoughts on social media. Penn State professor Tom Davidson called the 2024 Summit the "[best conference of the year.](#)"





Sponsor Experience

90%

of all sponsor survey respondents would recommend this event to other potential sponsors, based on their 2024 experience

A majority of respondents valued the visibility the Summit offered by presenting an educational session and/or a LION Award, the Q&A feature and promotion, and/or the opportunity to book meetings with attendees while on-site.

DIGITAL REACH

Sponsors had access to various benefits, and we often promoted their support across our online platforms.

Our digital reach includes:

- **5,936** followers on X/Twitter
- **5,585** newsletter subscribers (with an average 46% open rate and 5% click rate)
- **2,351** LinkedIn page followers

90%

indicated they were satisfied with their sponsorship

100%

of respondents indicated communication with LION staff was effective



“I felt like it was very organized and supportive. The LION staff made everything easy to plan for and handle once we were there.” – Kat Duncan, Reynolds Journalism Institute



“We loved the large conference venue and the ability to meet so many people.” – Adam Sessions, Broadstreet





“This event provides great exposure to Indiegraf's target market, so we're grateful for the opportunity to present ... during the awards ceremony. **These are valuable opportunities to show off who we are and what we do to those who are still getting to know us.**”

- Joe Lenane, Indiegraf

Our sponsors believe in the power of independent news, and we thank them for helping us support news leaders' continued learning and connection-building across our industry.

2024 Summit sponsors included presenting sponsors the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Google, plus the Carol Oppenheim and Jerome S Lamet Charitable Fund, Reynolds Journalism Institute, Indiegraf, the MacArthur Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, Democracy Fund, BlueLena, Ballotpedia, Lede AI, the McCormick Foundation, Newspaper, News Revenue Hub, and Broadstreet.

SUPPORT LOCAL NEWS LEADERS

We plan to host another Independent News Sustainability Summit in 2025.

If you're interested in supporting the only conference for independent news leaders, contact our team at sponsorships@lionpublishers.com. Our complete sponsorship deck will be available in early 2025.



