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INDEPENDENT NEWS  
SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT

# SPONSOR REPORT

SEPTEMBER 3-5 | ST. LOUIS, MO





# About **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.

We support more than 450 members across the U.S. and Canada in enhancing their business operations so they can, in turn, deliver relevant, trusted news and information to their communities for years to come.

## MEMBER SNAPSHOT

LION represents **438 publications** across 48 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, plus **19 Canadian members** across six provinces:

- **59%** have two or fewer full-time employees.
- **Two** is the median staff size.
- **\$170,000** is the median annual revenue.



## Independent News Sustainability **Summit**

The Independent News Sustainability Summit is a celebration and culmination of our year-round efforts. This national conference brings together hundreds of independent journalism thought leaders, funders, and supporters for networking and programming focused on LION's [three pillars of sustainability](#).



INDEPENDENT NEWS  
SUSTAINABILITY  
**SUMMIT**  
ST. LOUIS 2025



# The Summit: A ‘Must-Go’ Event

Attendees walk away with valuable connections, vital tools, and practical resources to help them operationalize sustainability. **But don’t just take our word for it; here’s what a few 2025 Summit attendees said about their experience:**



“Attending the LION Summit was **inspirational and informative**. We came away with a lot of strategies and ideas that we hope to implement to improve our work and to get Sapan News off the ground from a voluntary to a professional media outlet. With much gratitude.”

– Beena Sarwar, Founder and Chief Editor, **Sapan News**

“The LION Summit is **a must-go for local independent newsrooms**. We’ve obtained recommendations, resources, and information that have made a huge impact on the sustainability of our news business.”

– Diana Oliveros, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer, **Se Habla Media**



“I loved being a part of the LION Summit and having **ample opportunity to connect with other attendees**.”

– Orlando P. Bailey, Executive Director, **Outlier Media**

# Attendees: ‘These Are My People’

The 2025 Summit, which included our seventh annual [LION Publishers Sustainability Awards](#), took place from September 3-5 in St. Louis, Missouri, and featured **84** speakers and **23** sessions. Here’s the attendance breakdown for both events:

## SUMMIT

- **421** tickets sold
- **377** people attended
- **80%** held an executive or senior-level role
- **58%** were LION members
- **38%** represented a systematically excluded group
- **46** states, along with Mexico, Canada, and Australia, were represented

## LION AWARDS

- **212** tickets sold
- **188** people attended
- **43** of 51 LION Award [finalists](#) attended
- **18** of 21 LION Award [winners](#) attended
- **\$60,000** in prize money was awarded to winners

**For both events, nearly 90% of ticket holders showed up in St. Louis.**



“I return to the LION Summit over and over again because **these are my people** – local newsroom and civic organization leaders who are trying, sometimes failing, but often succeeding to deliver vital news and information to their communities in ways that are useful, hopeful, and sustainable.”

– Keri Mitchell, Founder and Executive Director, **Dallas Free Press**



# Attendee Experience: A ‘Homecoming’

We’re proud to have put on an event that centered inclusion, community, and knowledge sharing. Thirty-three percent of attendees (125 people) completed our post-event survey, and we’re buzzing about the results. **Here’s a bit of background on the survey respondents:**

- **85%** hold an executive or senior-level role
- **66%** work for an independent news organization

**Now here’s the really good stuff:**

**99%** would recommend this event to others based on their 2025 experience.

**94%** agreed that attending the Summit was worth their investment of time and money.

Plus, it’s clear that the Summit provided value for **both news entrepreneurs and supporters:**

- **94% of non-news entrepreneurs** agreed that the Summit gave them the chance to learn more about the needs of independent news publishers and how to best support them.
- **93% of news entrepreneurs** agreed that the Summit made them feel more confident and energized about running a sustainable news business that serves their community.
- **73% of attendee survey respondents** said networking was their favorite aspect of the event.



*My discussions with newsroom leaders in the hallways and outside the hotel were meaty and **gave me great guidance on how to serve newsrooms better.***

– Jon Greenberg, Faculty,  
**Poynter Institute**



*Going to a LION conference **feels like a homecoming.** And I always leave feeling emboldened to keep doing the journalistic work I’m so passionate about.*

– Megan Raposa, Founder,  
**Sioux Falls Simplified**



# Sponsors: ‘An Amazing Mix’

The Summit simply wouldn't be possible without our generous sponsors. And if there's one common thread from conversations with our 2025 group, it's this: If you want to connect with local news entrepreneurs and decision-makers, and learn more about their needs and how to support them, **the Summit is a must-attend event.**

## OUR 2025 SPONSORS

- BlueLena
- Broadstreet
- Creative Circle Media Solutions
- Democracy Fund
- Flying Comet Games
- Google
- Jobcase
- John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
- Newspark
- Nextdoor
- Press Forward
- Spot-On Ads
- The 19th
- The AP Fund for Journalism
- The Carol Oppenheim and Jerome S. Lamet Charitable Fund
- The Collaborative Journalism Resource Hub at Montclair State University
- The Lenfest Institute
- The New York Times
- The Reynolds Journalism Institute

*The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation also provided support for this event.*

“The LION Summit brought together **an amazing mix of news outlets, funders, and key service providers** who help us do our work. I came away energized and excited about my work in the months and years to come.”

– Emilie Raguso, Founder and Editor-in-Chief, **The Berkeley Scanner**

***Thanks to our Accessibility Sponsor, Democracy Fund, we were able to provide the following:***

- ASL interpretation for all mainstage sessions
- Assistive listening technology
- A prayer room, nursing room, and quiet room
- Comprehensive accommodations to ensure all LION-provided meals met common dietary needs



*ASL services provided by DEAF Empowerment.*



# Sponsor Experience: ‘Worth Every Penny’

Fifty-three percent of our 2025 sponsors completed our post-event sponsor survey, and like with our attendee survey, the results are definitely worth celebrating:

**100%** were **satisfied** with their sponsorship.

**100%** agreed that Summit sponsorship was **worth their investment of time and money**.

**100%** agreed that LION **met their expectations**.

**100%** reported that they are either **somewhat or very likely to sponsor** the Summit again.



“Sponsoring the LION Summit was **an unmatched opportunity** to meet face-to-face with publishers, partners, and other industry experts. It is the best way for us to get a pulse on the industry and learn where our business stands. The LION team was extremely well organized and wonderful to work with.”

– Calli Fuchigami, Co-Founder, **Flying Comet Games**  
(plus, read her [rave review](#) on LinkedIn)

“Being a LION Summit sponsor is always a joy. **The staff are wonderful at making sure we are fully prepared to take advantage of our sponsorship.** It is always an easy decision to support it!

– Kat Duncan, Director of Innovation, **RJI**

“**Worth every penny.** Nowhere else can you get that many attendees from across the nation in one place with so much detail and care. They seem to top it every year.

– Adam Sessions, Account Executive, **Broadstreet**



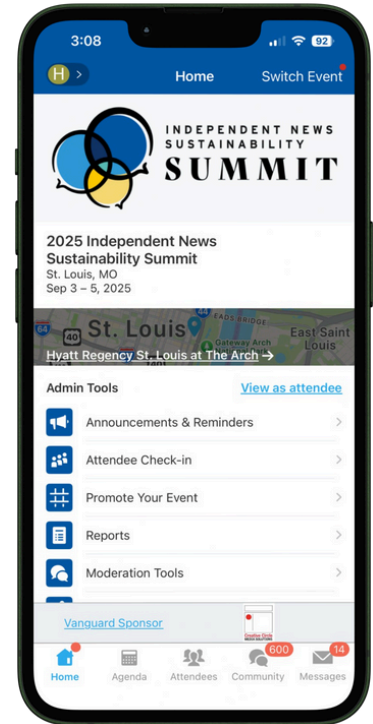
# Engagement

This year, for the first time, we introduced an event app (Whova) and a small vendors' fair – both offered invaluable opportunities for engagement. **In Whova, we saw:**

- **160,635** total sponsorship impressions
- **850** total Community Board messages shared
- **104** total business cards exchanged
- **23** Community Polls created

**Seven** sponsors exhibited at our first vendors' fair, positioned just outside the main ballroom, a prime location where attendees often gathered.

We also actively promoted our sponsors on social media. Our [top LinkedIn post](#), featuring all sponsors, received **1,400** organic impressions, **718** engagements, **644** clicks, and **57** reactions. That's a 50% engagement rate, well above industry standard.



## SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT: NEXTDOOR

First-time Summit sponsor **Nextdoor** leveraged several benefits, including the 1:1 Whova meeting scheduler and on-site vending space. Their in-app push notification (below) was sent to all Summit attendees, and they received a total of **6,945 sponsor impressions** and **14 unique profile visits**.

[Nextdoor's](#) 1:1 meetings went fast! If you didn't get a chance to connect yesterday, stop by their booth in the Regency Foyer to learn more about their network of over 100M neighbors across 345,000 neighborhoods, and how local news publishers use Nextdoor to share important information and engage with neighbors at scale.

LION INSS  
Organizer,  
2025 Independent News Sustainability Summit



# The Place to Be

The 2025 Summit provided the perfect opportunity for additional group gatherings, with various sponsors, support organizations, industry partners, and friends hosting after-hours activities. **Here are just some of the options attendees had for more connection building outside the core program:**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>RJI Member Day</b>   | RJI invited LION members to Mizzou for a day of programs and workshops.  |
| <b>Broadstreet Doubleheader</b>   | Attendees joined Broadstreet at Busch Stadium for lightning talks, lunch, and the Cardinals game.  |
| <b>California Local News Fellowship &amp; Report for America Meetup</b> | For Golden State folks, this was a casual meetup before the LION Awards.   |
| <b>Thursday Evening Reception &amp; Funders' Roundtable</b>             | Sponsored by BlueLena, this session featured leaders from Knight Foundation, Press Forward Chicago, and Barr Foundation, who discussed changes in journalism philanthropy before a standing-room-only audience.  |
| <b>News &amp; Brews</b>   | Institute for Nonprofit News, American Journalism Project, Report for America, Newpack, Rebuild Local News, CatchLight, Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk, RJI, Tiny News Collective, American Press Institute, and others hosted many attendees at Tin Roof for refreshments and engaging conversation. |
| <b>Newpack AI &amp; News Publishers Breakfast Panel</b>                 | This event explored AI in news and featured Everlit's insights on AI-powered audio engagement.   |
| <b>"Talking Memberships" with Outpost</b>                               | Membership and subscription-centric publishers met up at the historic Urban Chestnut Biergarten.   |
| <b>West Coast LIONs Meetup</b>  | A large group of West Coast LIONs gathered to enjoy lunch and network.   |

**In total, 18 attendee meetups were organized using our Whova app, including a morning run through the Gateway Arch National Park.**



# Sign On for Summit 2026

## Inspired by what you've read?

We're headed to San Diego from September 9-11 for our 2026 Independent News Sustainability Summit. [Sponsorship opportunities are now available](#); review our deck and connect with Shelly Hunter, [sponsorships@lionpublishers.com](mailto:sponsorships@lionpublishers.com), to secure a spot for next year's conference or to discuss other sponsorship opportunities.



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