

All-Party Committee on Local Journalism

Overview

The All-Party Committee on Local Journalism is an initiative to support local journalism throughout Manitoba. Local journalism is essential to sharing the stories, voices and experiences of Manitobans, as well as supporting an informed public. In particular, the committee seeks opportunities to support rural and northern media, and cultural media such as French, Filipino, Punjabi and Chinese language media.

Journalism has long been a keystone of democratic society. Despite the known benefits and demand for local journalism, a variety of factors have led to a decline in local journalism in recent years. The all-party committee's aim is to explore the future of journalism in Manitoba and discuss how the Manitoba government can strengthen and support local media.

The committee is dedicated to listening to views, needs, concerns and ideas on journalism in Manitoba. Through public consultations, the committee is exploring how government can help local media in Manitoba to flourish.

Committee Members

Diljeet Brar, MLA for Burrows

Jennifer Chen, MLA for Fort Richmond

Robert Loiselle, MLA for St. Boniface (Chair)

Konrad Narth, MLA for La Vérendrye

Greg Nesbitt, MLA for Riding Mountain

Eric Redhead, MLA for Thompson

Terms of Reference

Purpose:

In May of 2025, the Manitoba government announced the creation of an All-Party Committee on Local Journalism.

The committee will explore the future of local journalism, including rural and northern media and cultural media such as French, Filipino, Punjabi and Chinese language publications, with the mandate to consider matters of public support for journalism. The committee, consisting of four government members and two official opposition members, and led by the chair, will hold meetings at times and places it considers advisable to receive briefs and hear presentations.

Roles and Responsibilities:

1. The committee will establish a plan to engage with local media organizations, other affected stakeholders, and members of the public related to the current state and future of local journalism in Manitoba. This should include in-person consultations over the summer of 2025. This plan may include promotion of the consultations.
2. Following the completion of this engagement work, the committee will prepare a report with its findings.

Engagement Overview

Public meetings were scheduled throughout Manitoba in June, July and October of 2025. Local media organizations, interested parties and the public were encouraged to participate. Interested parties were invited to register to present at one of the meetings:

- June 26 in Gimli
- July 2 in Winnipeg
- July 7 in Brandon
- July 8 for Thompson and northern media (held virtually)
- July 11 in Winkler
- October 10 in Thompson

High interest in the Winnipeg meeting on July 2 led to two additional sessions being added for that day. The Gimli meeting was cancelled because of a lack of registration. Across the nine sessions, 102 people registered and 43 presentations were made. Presenters were given 15 minutes each for their presentation, including time for questions from committee members. Presenters were asked to answer the following questions:

- How does local media support our communities and democracy across Manitoba?
- How can government strengthen local media?

What We Heard

Participants at each of the public meetings were asked to share their views on how local journalism supports communities and democracy, and how the government can strengthen Manitoba's local media. Many thoughtful accounts of the value of and challenges faced by local media, as well as innovative proposals, were presented to the committee. This report covers the common themes that emerged.

Challenges facing local media

Throughout the presentations, many shared the struggles confronting local media outlets in Manitoba. The common challenges that presenters described give important context for the value of local media and how it can be supported.

The committee heard that local media is under considerable financial pressure. Advertising revenue, in particular, is necessary to maintain operations. Government can play a significant role in supporting ad spending, through initiatives to encourage businesses to place local ads and devoting more government ad spending to local media.

Numerous media outlets shared that they rely on volunteer support to sustain operations. This can be attributed to their inability to support staff salaries, and related challenges attracting and retaining staff.

Throughout the presentations, it was clear that while different types of media outlets (for example, print, radio, cultural and northern) face unique challenges, participants agreed that social media is a threat to local media. They discussed how social media and online media giants are overshadowing local and traditional media, drawing away audiences, and with them, ad spending. The role of social media in society and the issues it presents to local and traditional media, democratic institutions and public well-being cannot be ignored. Presenters spoke of this from two perspectives: one, that social media's popularity is driving a decline in traditional and local media consumption; and two, the harms of misinformation, disinformation, unverified information, and unbalanced perspectives that come with the territory of social media. Many stated that growing polarization, mistrust and breakdown of respectful public debate is the result.

How does local media support our communities and democracy across Manitoba?

Presenters spoke about the value of local media to democracy, community connection and engagement, recording history and remaining a trusted source of information. All these elements are needed to combat prevalent misinformation and polarization in society.

The participants made it clear that local journalism is integral to democracy in Manitoba. Local and cultural media play a significant role in informing their audiences about important political issues and current events in relevant and accessible ways. This is particularly important for election coverage, which many presenters noted was essential for civic engagement and the greater public good. Cultural media outlets highlighted that their audiences turned to them for comprehensive election coverage that reflects their perspectives, experiences and connection to election issues.

Local media creates a space for and uplifts the voices, stories and interests of Manitoba's diverse geographic, linguistic and cultural groups. For newcomers to Canada, cultural media helps to connect them with community and make sense of their new political and social landscapes. Local journalism tells stories that otherwise would not be heard, highlights notable events, and shines light on issues of importance to their communities. In this way, it records the history of a community and of our province.

Presenters noted that their audiences trust their reporting. Public trust makes local media many Manitobans' preferred source of information about important topics such as social services, public health and government activities and initiatives. Trust in local media also makes it a strong resource for communicating with the public in emergencies.

Additionally, local media supports local economies by creating jobs and promoting local businesses.

How can government strengthen local media?

Proposals from presenters to strengthen local media generally fell under the themes of:

- advertising
- funding and reducing costs
- education and careers
- public trust
- tailored solutions
- ongoing engagement

Advertising

Many presenters agreed that more support is needed from the Manitoba government in the form of buying ads in local media. Proposals in this theme ranged from allocating a percentage of government advertising to local media, the Manitoba government and MLAs buying more ad space in local media, and the government increasing the use of ads to inform and update the public about government activities and initiatives on a regular basis.

Some presenters suggested that a percentage of advertising should be allocated to a particular segment of local media, for example, rural, cultural, digital or independent media.

A tax credit for businesses that advertise with Manitoba-based media was also proposed.

Funding and reducing costs

Numerous proposals sought to alleviate financial burden on media outlets through targeted financial support for journalism. Like the advertising proposals, dedicated funding for specific types of media, such as linguistic, rural, Indigenous and print media, was a popular suggestion.

Grants and tax cuts were a popular suggestion for how to deliver financial supports. Some specified these initiatives focus on specific expenses such as journalist salaries or rental costs. Some mentioned examples of existing programs that could be expanded or emulated for Manitoba's journalism industry, such as the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy program and the Canadian Journalism Labour Tax Credit.

Presenters also noted that cost savings could be found by eliminating or reducing fees for journalists and media outlets in areas such as recycling fees collected under The Waste Reduction and Prevention Act, print costs, office space rentals, admission fees (to attend events being reported on) and access to information application fees.

Education and careers

Many presenters advocated for stronger supports for individuals to pursue journalism, such as through investing in media and journalism training programs, creating journalism co-op, internship and mentoring programs, and partnering with post-secondary and industry to facilitate initiatives. Some specified a particular recipient group for these programs, such as recent graduates, Thompson residents and newcomers.

The importance of helping journalists to make a living and enabling local media outlets continue operation by offering tax credits or grants for journalism salaries was discussed. This would also support local media's efforts to recruit and retain journalists.

Public trust

Initiatives to reinforce local journalism as a trusted source of information were suggested. Proposals in this theme included helping Manitobans identify credible Manitoba news sources. Some suggestions for how to do this included creating a Manitoba verified media outlet designation and developing a resource hub for the public to access verified Manitoba media outlets.

Promoting media literacy for the public, including implementing media literacy and journalism education in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system, was cited as important. This approach supports local media by improving the public's ability to think critically about the information they consume, and as a result, increase public recognition of local media's value.

To build the public's trust in local media, some called for an ombudsman to investigate bias in media. Others suggested government reject using social media to communicate with the public in favour of local media.

Tailored solutions

Many presenters spoke about the need for approaches specific to their focus areas, whether it be a linguistic or cultural community, newcomers, Indigenous people or rural and northern communities. Similarly, different media such as print, TV, radio and digital have their own needs and challenges. To address the unique contexts of diverse media outlets, tailored solutions are needed. The specificity of the presentations and proposals highlighted that a one-size-fits-all approach will not produce equitable results for all Manitoba media outlets.

Ongoing engagement

Participants expressed a desire to continue connecting and collaborating on how to support and strengthen local journalism. Ideas were proposed for how this might be achieved. These included putting a journalist on the All-Party Committee on Local Journalism, creating online collaboration spaces for local media, and creating a forum for ongoing conversations on supporting local journalism.

Recommendations

Financial supports to help support local journalism

The Manitoba government should explore options to offer support to local journalism outlets through tax credits, and ensure these supports benefit rural and cultural outlets.

Tax credits offer government a way to target industries for specific purposes. In this case, journalism tax credits can benefit Manitoba's local industry by offsetting labour costs to encourage the creation of original content, protect the role of independent media, promote Manitoba ownership, and support media for cultural, rural, and northern communities that may be underserved.

The Canadian Journalism Labour Tax Credit (CJLTC) and the Quebec Tax Credit to Support the Print Media (TCSPM) are the only two credits in Canadian jurisdictions. These credits should be examined as Manitoba looks to develop its own approach to supporting local journalism.

Using advertising to support local journalism

The Manitoba government should commit to ensuring a minimum of 25% of its advertising spend (encompassing core government, Crowns, and agencies) goes to local journalism, starting in the next fiscal year (Budget 2026/2027). Within the benchmark, the Manitoba government should ensure that rural outlets and cultural communities are represented.

While the Manitoba government and its Crowns and agencies currently balance their advertising spends between local media outlets and national/international outlets, a formal benchmark will help ensure that media organizations and the public have confidence in how government advertising dollars are being spent. It will also ensure that as the prevalence of social and digital media grows, government is balancing the use of this media to reach more Manitobans, with the value that local journalism brings for members of the public.

By targeting 25%, Manitoba would be aligning with a similar policy in Ontario, as well as a benchmark that was most frequently identified in public consultations.

Reporting on advertising spending

The Manitoba government should develop a reporting mechanism for advertising spending (encompassing core government, Crowns, and agencies) to increase transparency on government ad spending, starting in the next fiscal year (Budget 2026/2027).

Regular reporting of advertising spending is used in other jurisdictions, and could provide media outlets and the public with greater transparency and confidence on where advertising dollars are being spent. It would also complement recommendation 2, by ensuring that spending benchmarks were being met.

Questions?

Please email engagemb@gov.mb.ca if you require this report in an alternate format, or have any questions.