



# Chicago Independent Media Alliance

## **Chicago Independent Media Alliance**

The *Chicago Reader*, founded in 1971, is the city’s largest free weekly newspaper. It was the first free weekly in the country and remains among the largest “alt weeklies” in the U.S. It is known for its award-winning cultural and investigative work, and for being a voice for those challenging institutional power and corrupt politicians—and fighting with and for the marginalized.

Since its founding by a group of friends from Carleton College, the *Reader* has had multiple owners, and in 2018, the paper became independent again. The new leadership, primarily made up of women and people of color, set out on a course of collaboration and growth.

As new leaders, we want to build on the *Reader*’s strong journalism legacy and use the paper’s platform and influence to unite independent media. Our leadership includes people who have worked in community and independent media for decades. Now, the *Reader* is announcing our move to a nonprofit journalism model.

The *Reader*, like so many of our colleagues across the journalism industry, has struggled financially and editorially. As we watch legacy newsrooms shrink and startup ventures fold, we know changing business models as a single entity isn’t

the only answer. We have to work together as an ecosystem. And now is the time to join forces, before any more ground is lost.

In the summer of 2019, the *Chicago Reader* sent a short survey to 103 independent media outlets in Chicago, ranging in size and scope from small all-volunteer nonprofits to large independent newspapers. Our wide-ranging survey asked for information about their business model, their coverage areas, what languages they speak, and whether they'd be interested in collaborative projects. Fifty one of them responded, which was so exciting to see.

We weren't sure if forprofits and nonprofits, small and large, legacy and new, would want to work together. Well, a majority did, and we know some of the ones who did not respond will come on board once they see the true collaborative spirit involved.

We see a path forward where media can work together on both editorial and business, including joint projects on news and culture topics, and on fundraising ventures.

Community, neighborhood, and ethnic media—whatever you want to call us—reach vital and important parts of this city long ignored by mainstream media. But just as larger media companies are struggling, so are community media. We need partnerships and new ideas, collaborations and support, to make sure these voices are not allowed to wither.

The name the group voted on was the **Chicago Independent Media Alliance**. Our project coordinator is Yazmin Dominguez, and this document was prepared by the *Reader* team to show you the possibilities of working together, to make sure community media thrive.

# Chicago Independent Media Alliance

66 media outlets have opted-in to CIMA

## Print & Digital

**Total: 27**

Austin Weekly News  
Bronzeville Life  
Chicago Citizen  
Chicago Crusader  
Chicago Parent  
Chicago Reader  
Contratiempo  
Current Magazines  
Gazette Chicago  
Grab Magazine  
HiIndia  
Hyde Park Herald  
Inside Publications  
La Raza  
Left Out Magazine  
New City  
North Lawndale Community News  
Polish Daily News  
South Side Weekly  
Streetwise  
Students Xpress  
The Arab Daily News  
The Beverly Review  
The Chicago Sun-Times  
VIA Times News Magazine  
Windy City Times  
KEY-This Week in Chicago

## Radio, Podcast, Broadcast

**13 total**

AirGo Radio  
CHIRP  
Chicago in Arabic  
E3 Radio  
Free Spirit Media  
Juneteenth Productions  
Kartemquin Films  
Open TV  
Public Media Institute  
Rivet  
Soapbox Productions and Organizing Vocalo  
Radio  
WIN-TV

## Digital Only

**Total: 25**

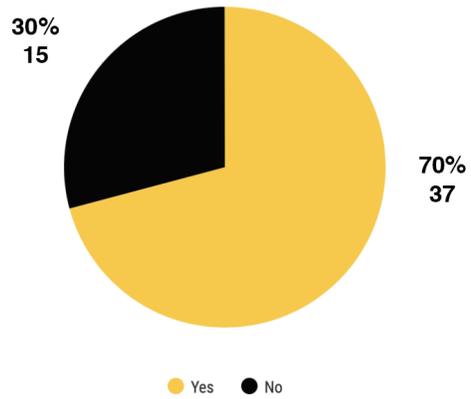
Better Government Association  
Black Youth Project  
Block Club Chicago  
Borderless Magazine  
Bronzecom  
Chalkbeat Chicago  
Chicago Jewish News  
Chicago Monitor  
Chicago Music Guide  
Chicago Public Square  
Chicago Reporter  
Cicero Independiente  
City Bureau  
Gozamos  
Injustice Watch  
Invisible Institute  
Loop North News  
N'Digo  
Rebellious Magazine for Women  
Sixty Inches From Center  
Urban Gateways- Mild Sauce  
The Daily Line  
Third Coast Review  
True Star  
The Village Free Press

## Nonprofits

**1 total**

Public Narrative

Would you be interested in the creation of a large media center with shared offices, meeting rooms, shared back-end services, incubator space, etc.?



out of 52 responses



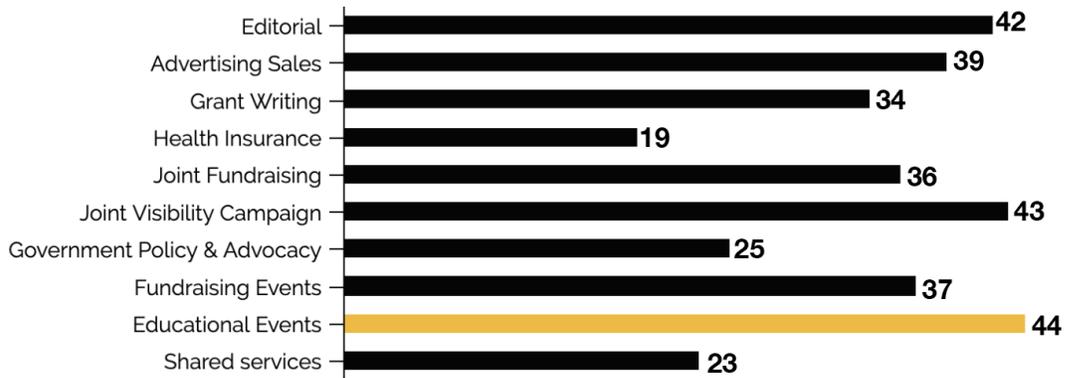
out of 41 responses

## BEATS



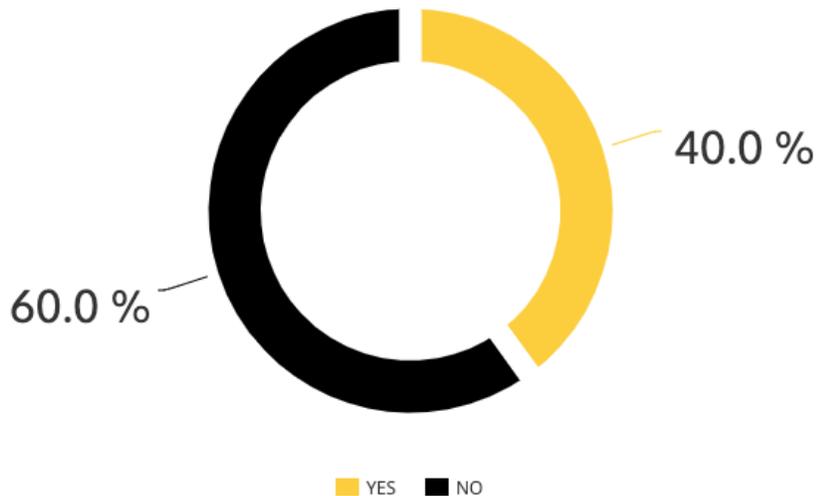
out of 47 responses

## Would you work with other local media on collaborative projects?



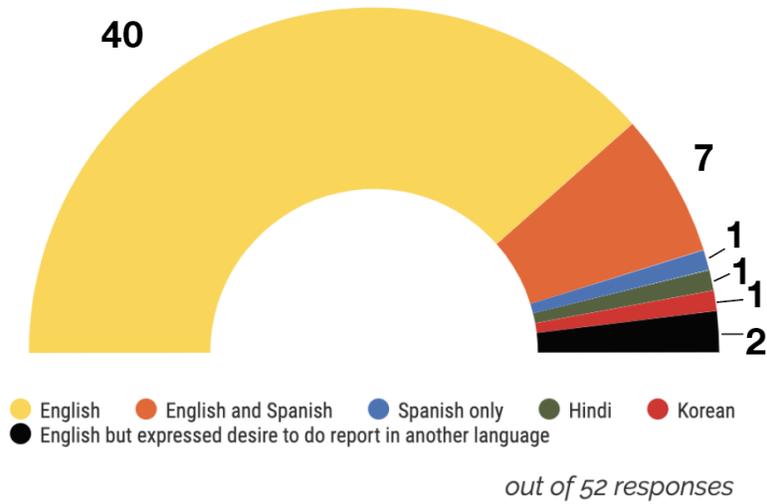
*Other responses: distribution, youth development and digital arts, legal review, marketing, financing, film and audio, and promotion.*  
*out of 52 responses*

## Do you have multiple media products, all owned/operated by the same parent company?

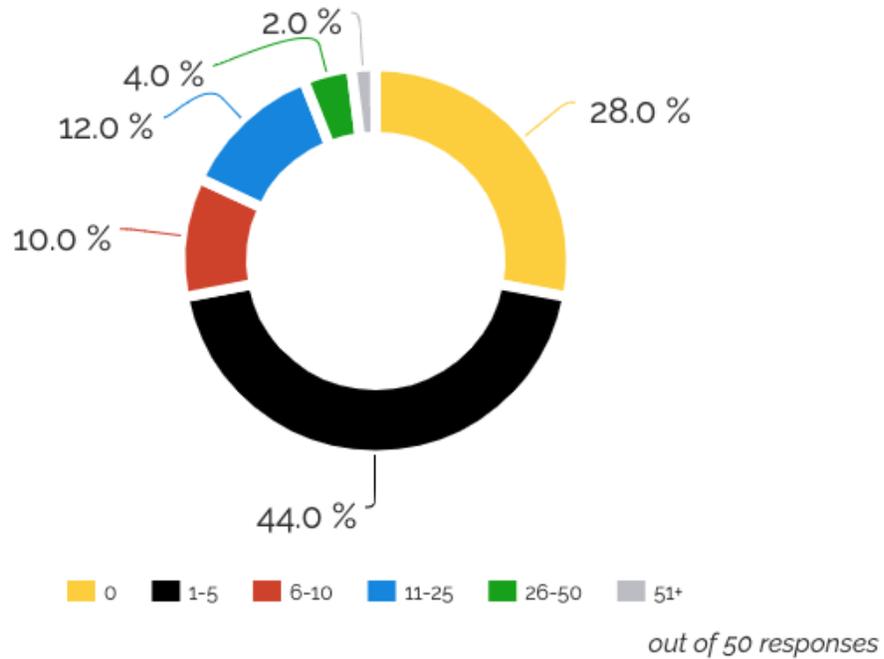


*out of 50 responses*

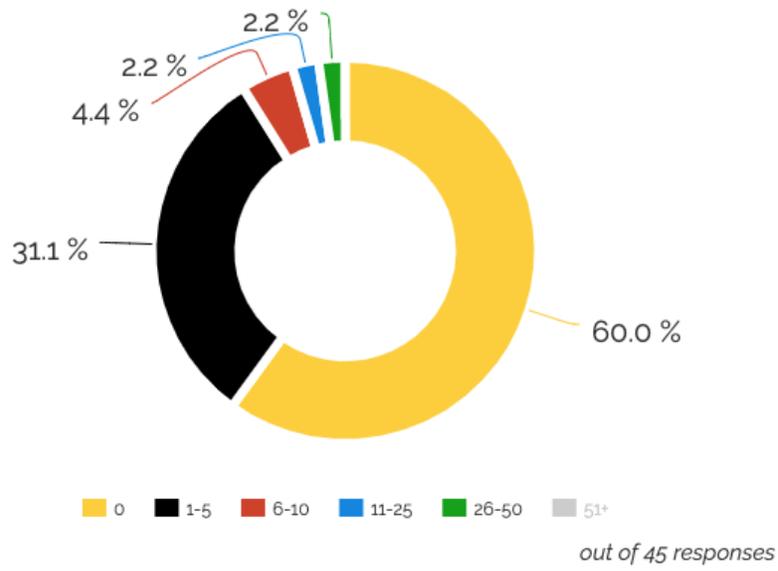
### In what languages do you produce?



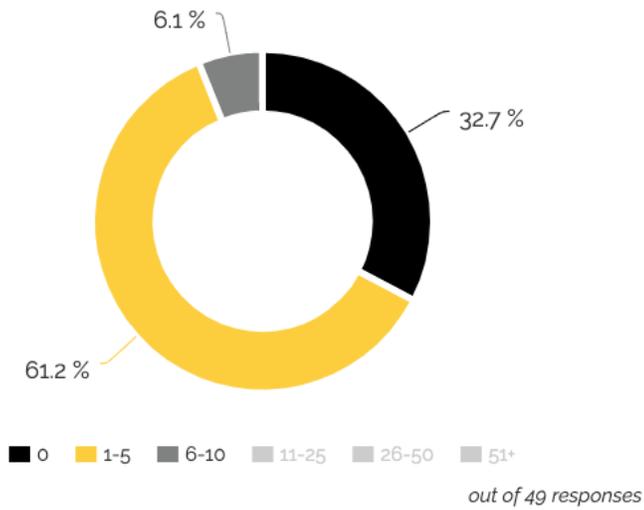
### Number of paid full time staff/full time equivalent?



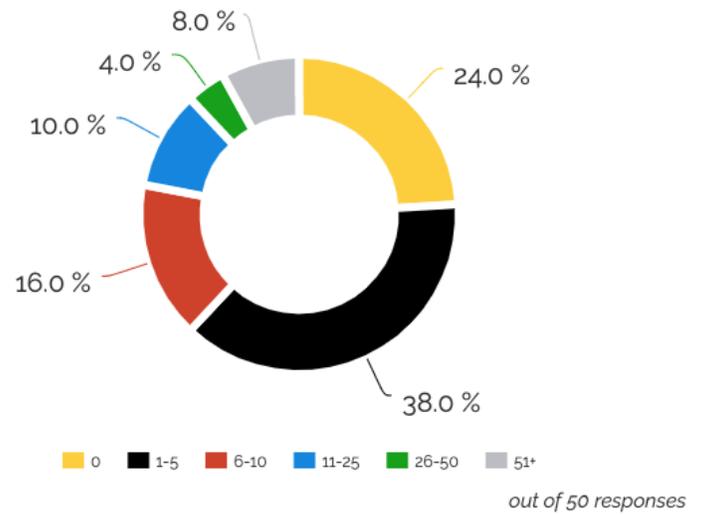
### Number of unpaid staff/full time equivalent?



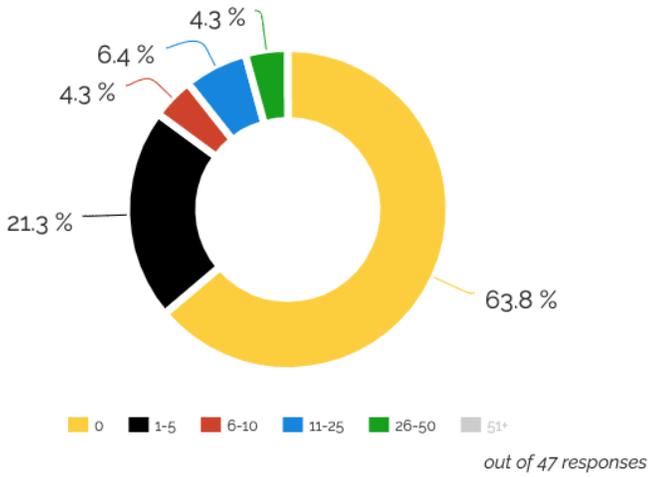
### Number of paid part time staff?



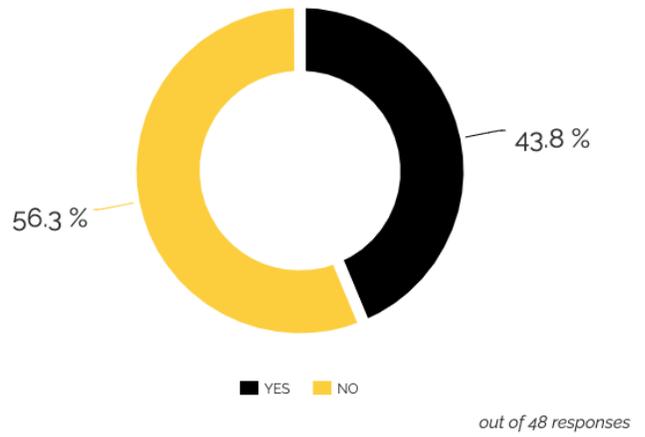
### Number of paid freelancers per year?



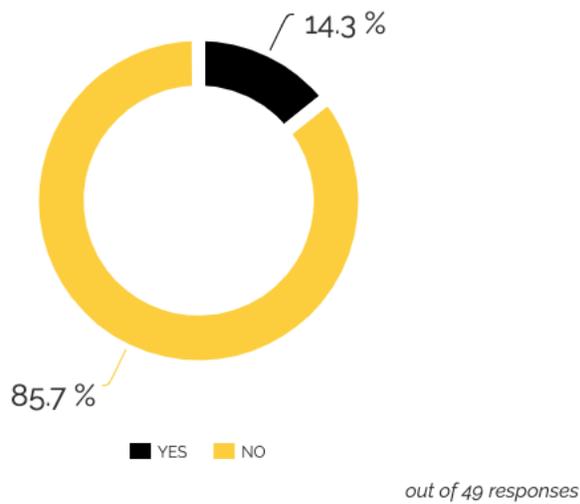
Number of unpaid freelancers per year?



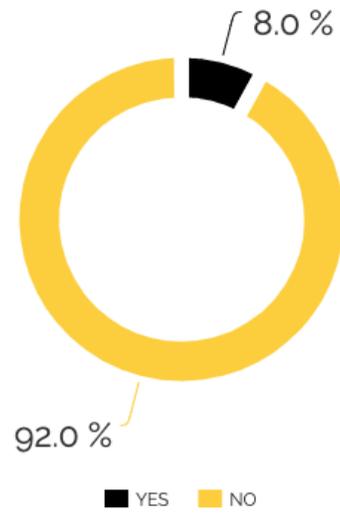
Do you offer health insurance to your full time staff?



Do you offer health insurance to your part time staff?

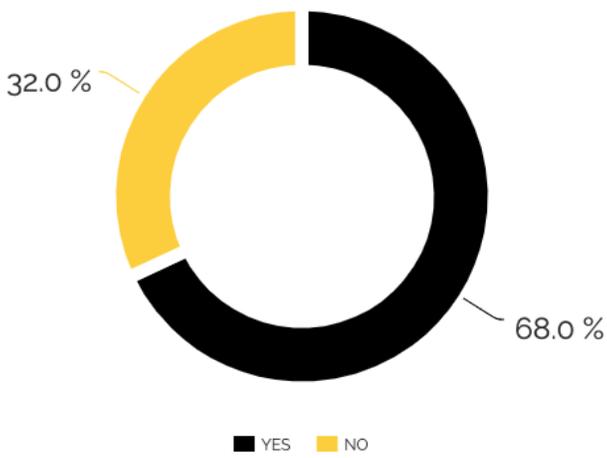


Does part or all of your staff belong to a union?



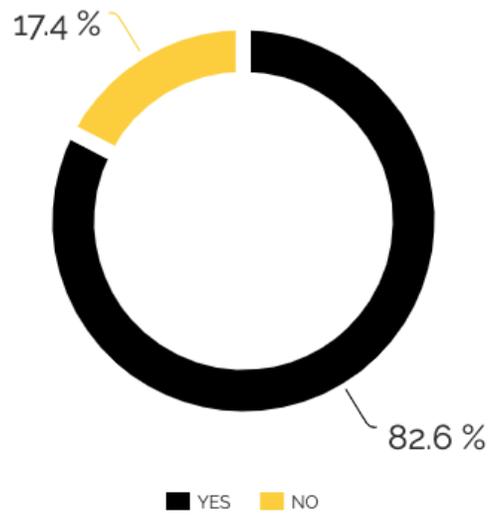
*out of 50 responses*

Do you have a physical office?



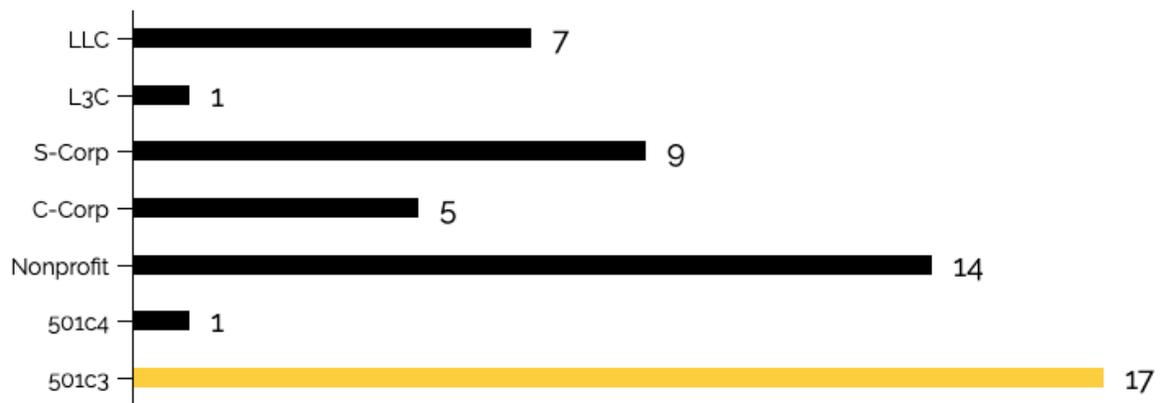
*out of 50 responses*

Are you incorporated?



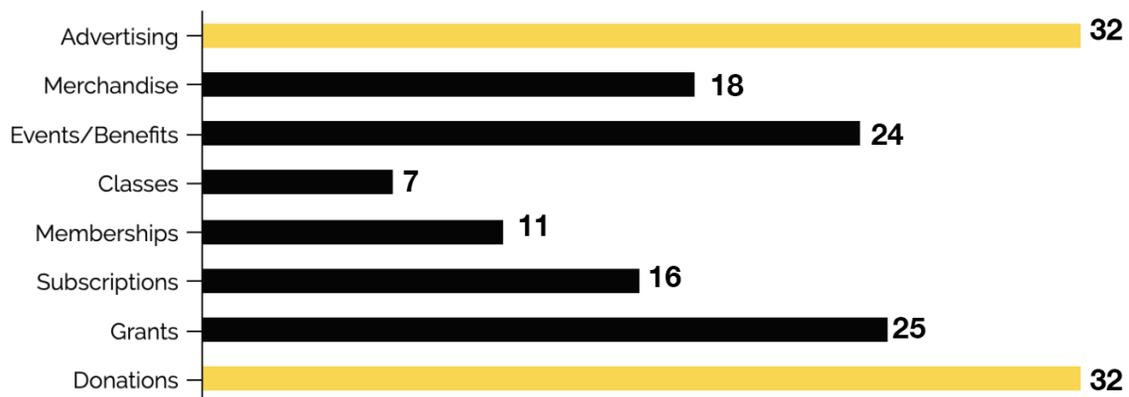
*out of 46 responses*

## If incorporated, what is your ownership or nonprofit structure?



out of 41 responses

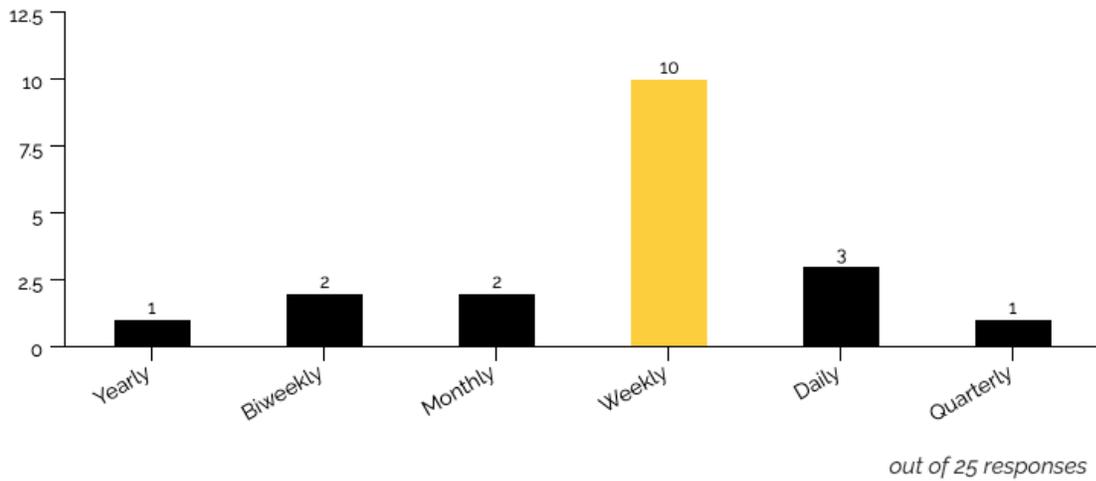
## What are your categories of revenue?



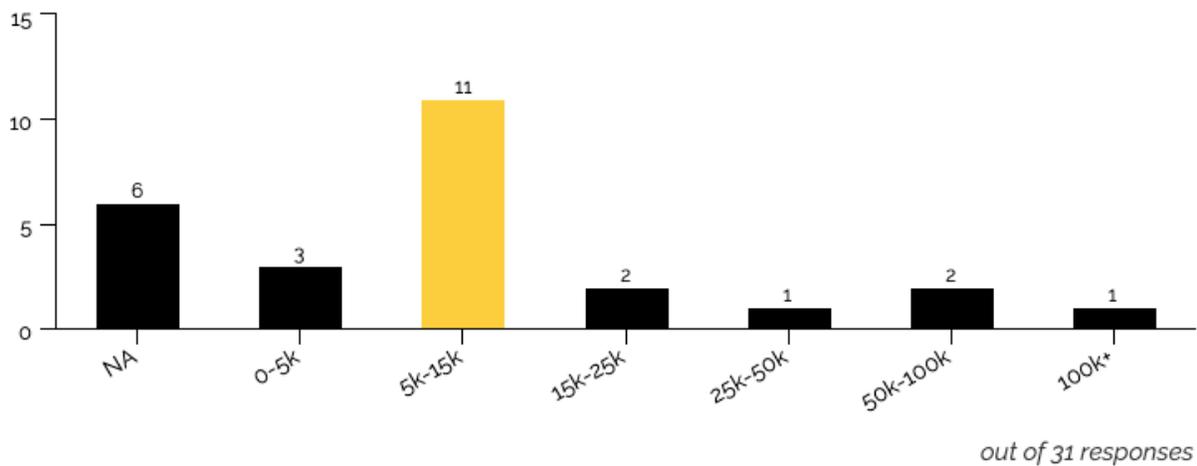
\*Surveyees were allowed to check all the options that applied. Other written-in responses included: licensing, fees-for-service, earned revenue (contracts and productions), legal notices, the Bud Billiken Parade, editorial partnerships, and writing commissions.

out of 52 responses

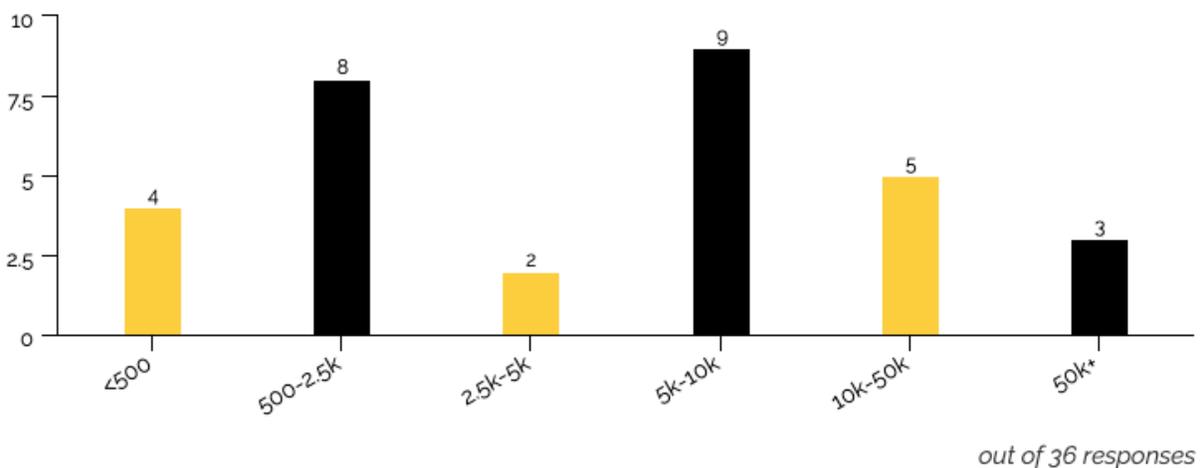
If applicable, what is your media outlet frequency in print?



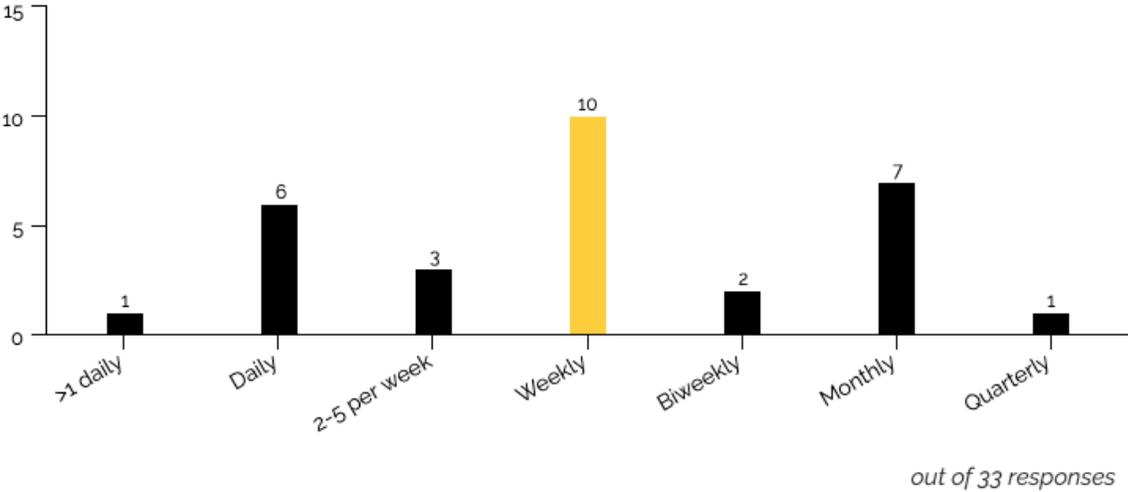
What is your estimated reach in print?



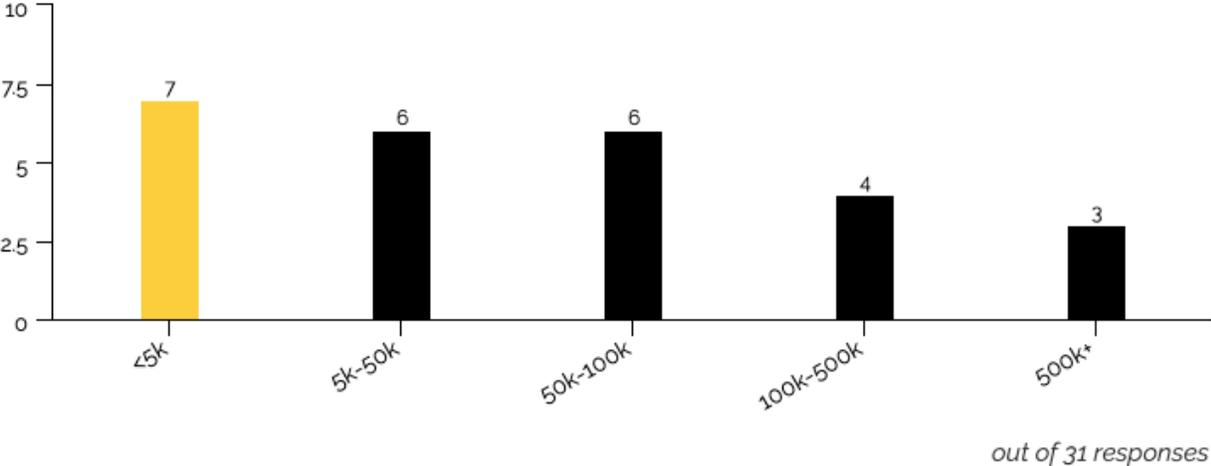
What is the total list size of your e-mail newsletters?



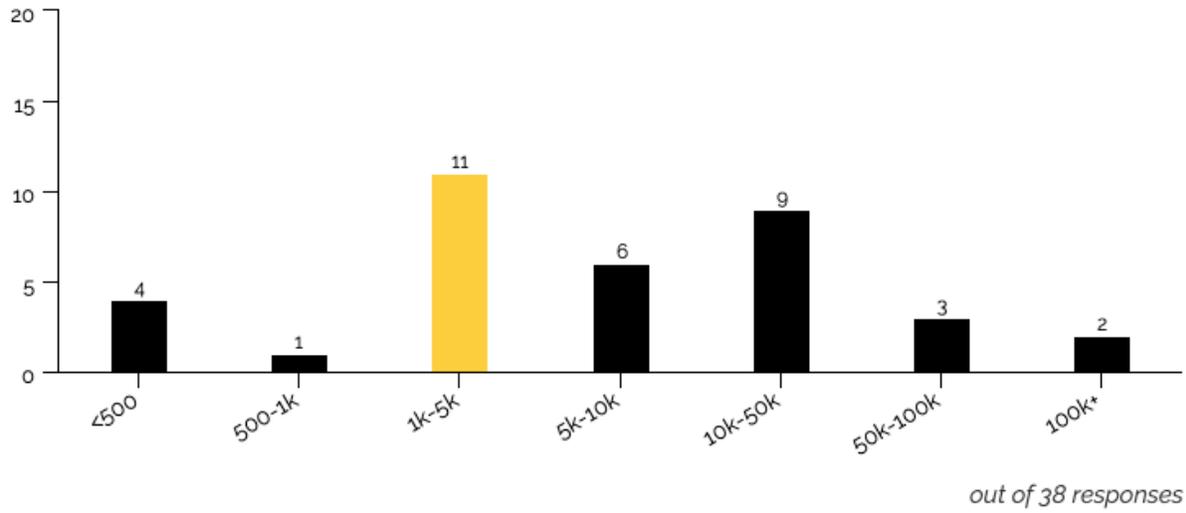
If applicable, what is your e-mail newsletter frequency?



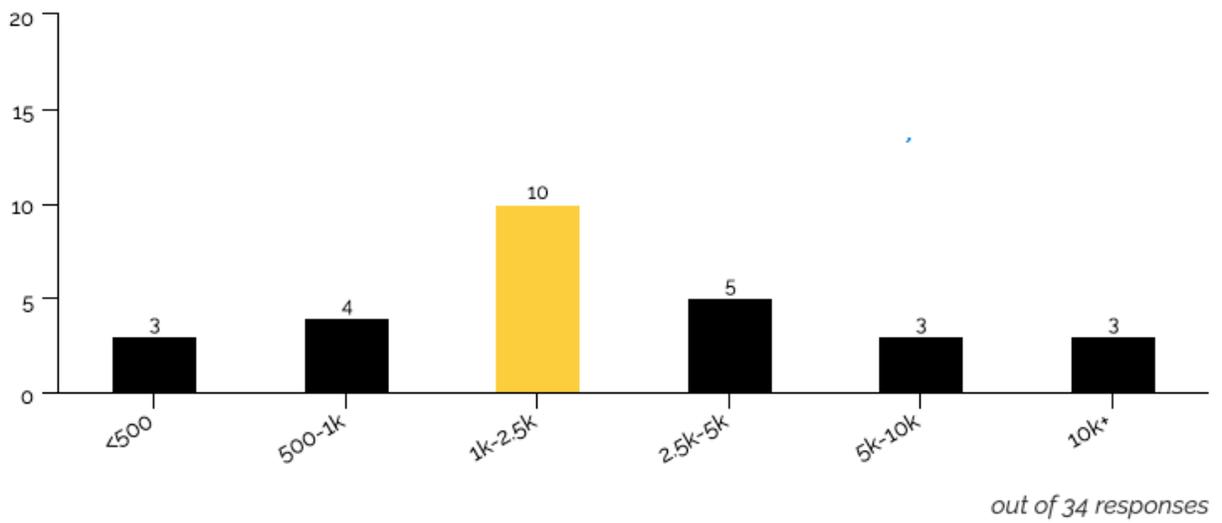
What is your website monthly unique page views?



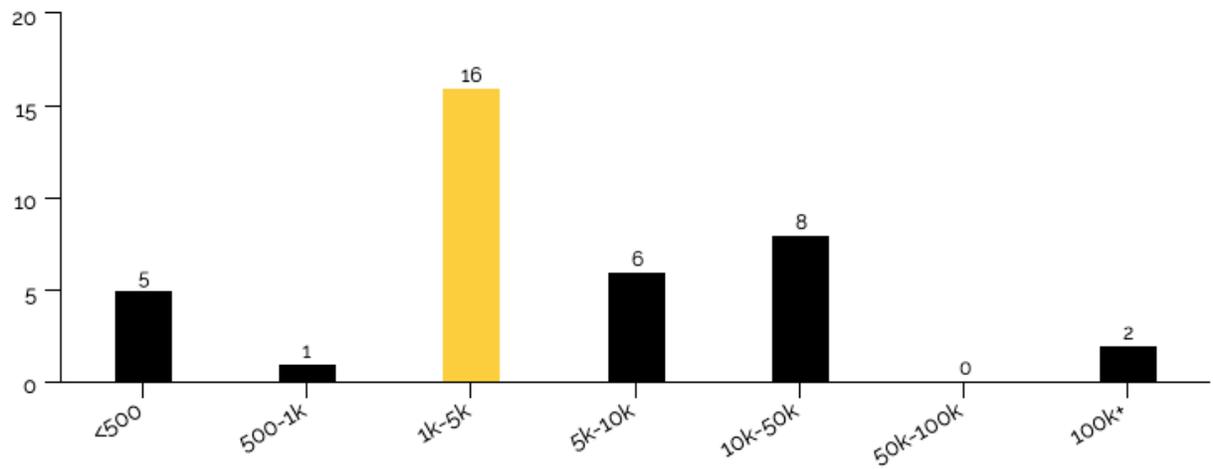
## What are your total social media followers on Facebook?



## What are your total social media followers on Instagram?

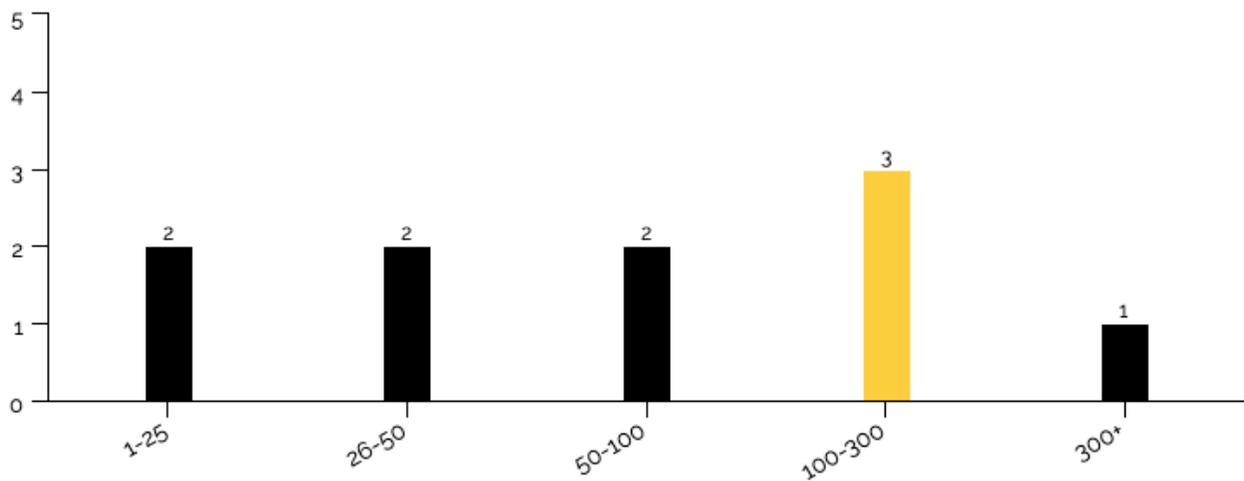


## What are your total social media followers on Twitter?



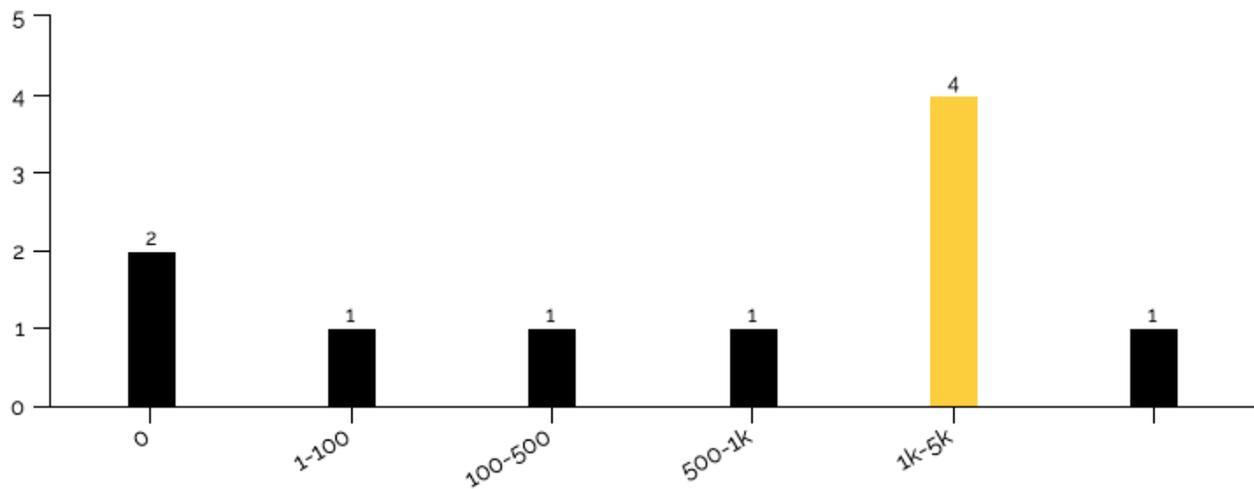
out of 38 responses

## What is your average monthly attendance for events/workshops/classes? (if applicable)



out of 27 responses

## How many podcast listeners per show? (if applicable)



out of 28 responses



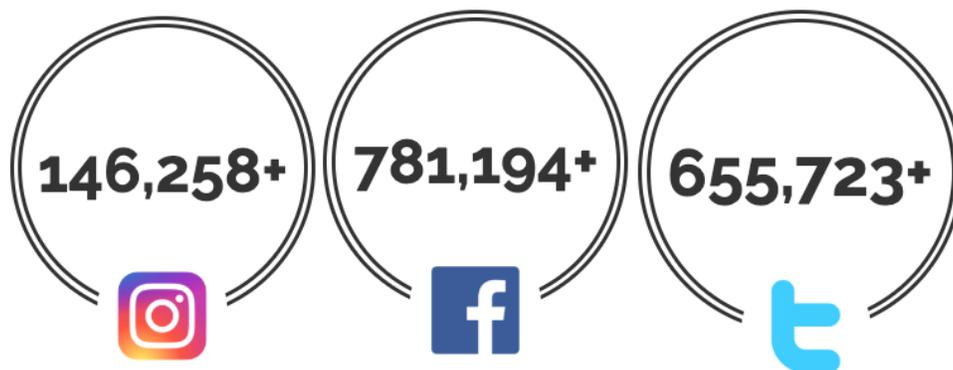
Totaling over

# 6,038,665

combined content consumers

outside of social media

out of an average 32.6 responses



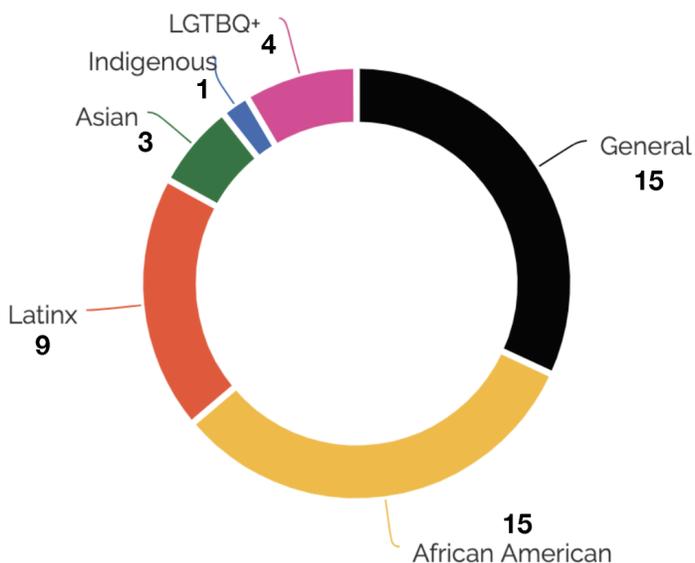
Totaling over

**1,583,175**

combined followers on social media

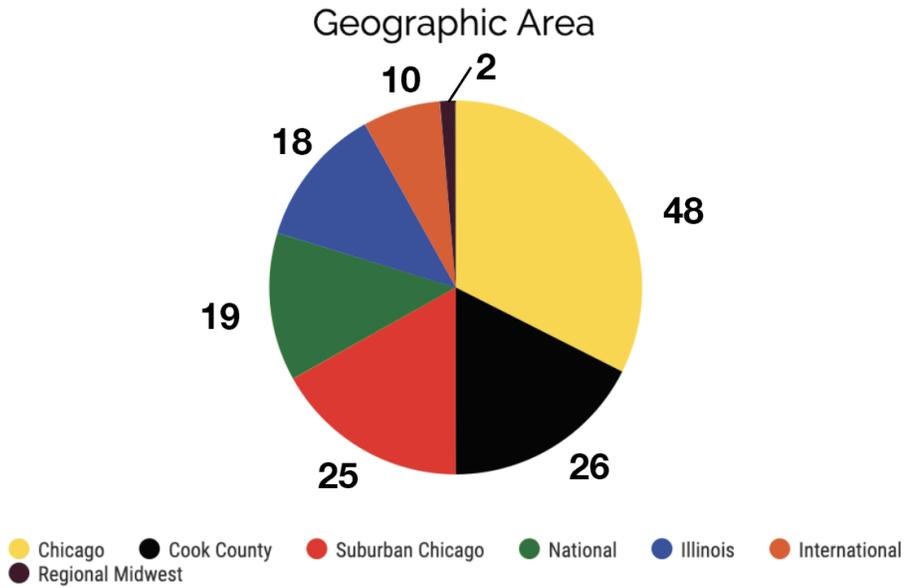
*out of an average 36.6 responses*

Primary ethnic or niche groups reached?



*\*Surveyees were allowed to write in their own responses. Several responses were given to this question from individuals. Each response was summoned up and tallied by categories.*

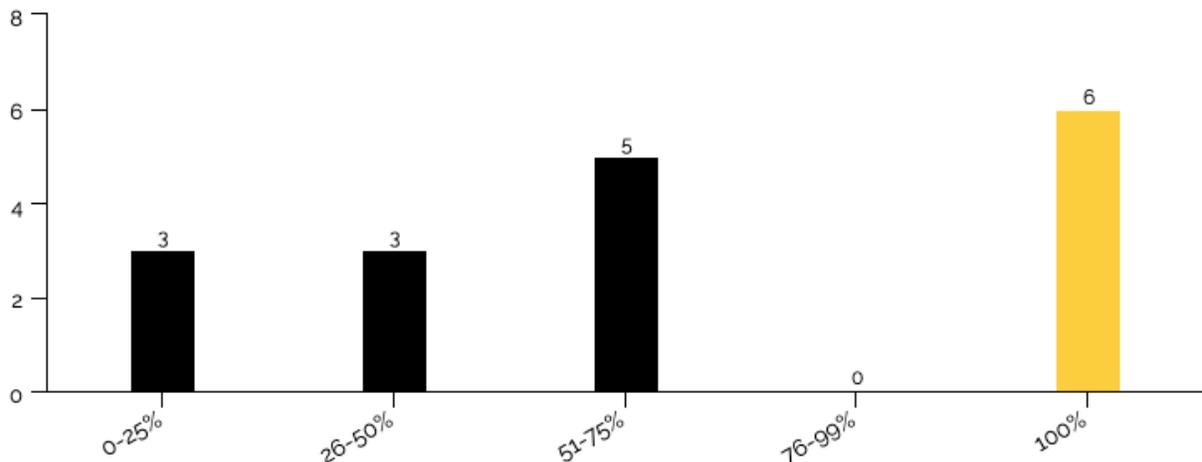
*out of 40 responses*



*\*Surveyees were asked to check all responses that applied to their primary audience. There was a blank option allowing surveyees to write in their own response.*

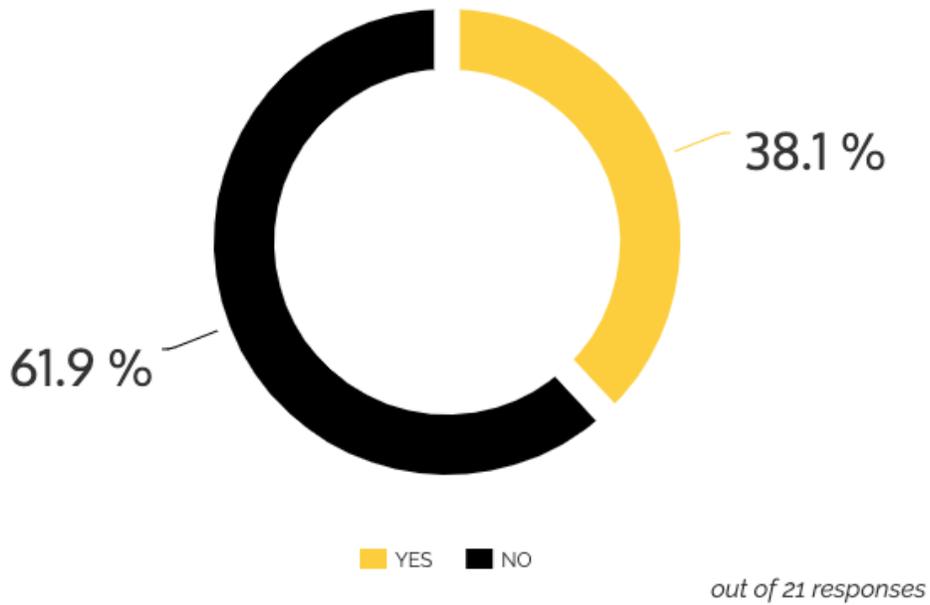
*out of 52 responses*

If your organization has a board, what percentage of your board members have ALAANA (African, Latino, Asian, Arab and Native American) status?

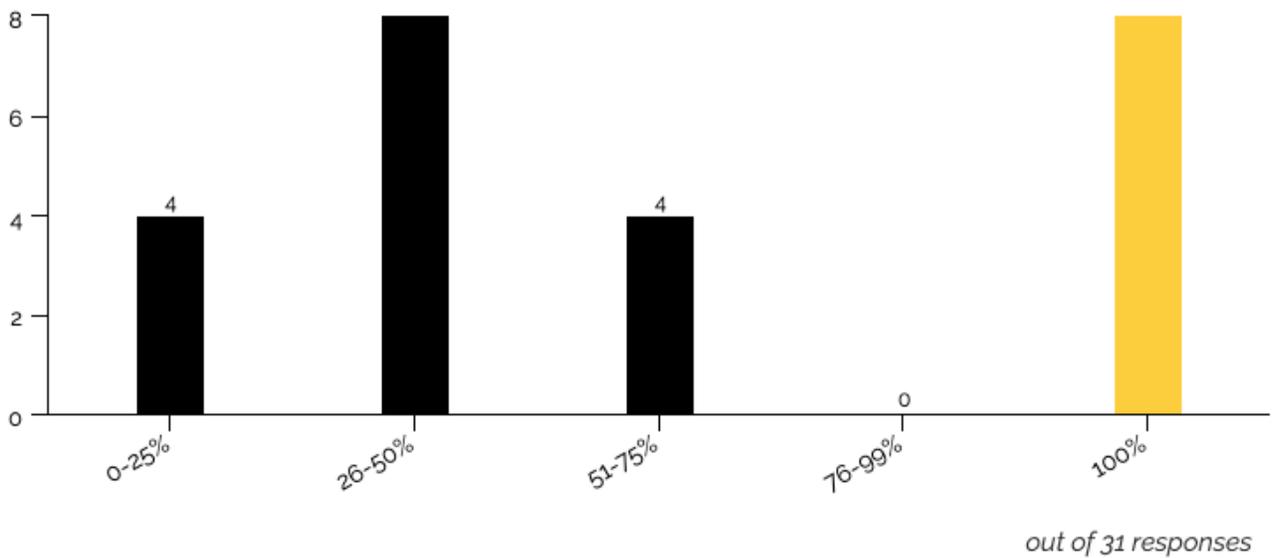


*out of 26 responses*

### For 501c3s: Are you ALAANA qualified?



### What percentage of your editorial leadership has ALAANA status?



## Report Summary

### What does all of this mean?

First, with more than 100 community, neighborhood and ethnic media, Chicago has a vital independent media landscape.

Second, it is very tenuous. Many are barely surviving, while they continue to cover their communities in critical, authentic ways. In 2019, the *Chicago Defender* closed its legacy print paper and the weekly Latinx paper *Hoy* has been shut down by the *Tribune*.

And third, helping community media is not only important, it is relatively easy to accomplish. Even relatively small grants for general operations, fellowships, and other needs can go a long way to assisting media as they adapt to new technologies and economies. The resources needed can start small and build.

### What can be done?

Here are a few ideas on how we can work to help lift all boats—at least the boats of those willing to partner.

Create a **citywide joint annual fundraising drive** to support community media. Through one web portal, promoted across all media, millions of people can be reached by a campaign educating about the importance of community media, while also encouraging people to give to one or multiple outlets.

Create a **journalism pooled fund** with multiple funding streams, including public and private foundations, private donors, and government. This pooled fund can work with independent community media in several ways (and it is important that community media are at the table of the fund):

- Match funds raised by media outlets through the above annual campaign
- Give grants for general operations
- Give grants targeted to certain coverage areas or tracks (education, criminal justice, healthcare, immigration, etc.)
- Fund training and education to help community media have the tools they need to compete in the changing media landscape
- Work to create realistic support systems to make independent journalism more viable, something if piloted in Chicago could work elsewhere
- Help bring in more donors for the pooled fund and for individual projects.

Create a **pooled insurance fund for Chicago-area journalists**. In an economy that is increasingly freelance or gig-based, how do part-time workers and freelancers get health insurance and other resources

needed to continue their work? Without it, a generation of journalists are moving into other fields. Experience, knowledge, and networks are being lost.

### **In Summary**

Just as Chicago thrives when its diverse people, neighborhoods, and communities come together, Chicago media will continue to thrive—and survive—when our diverse media outlets join forces across our shared passion for the transformative power of journalism.

Without journalism, including outlets that authentically cover communities, we will lose the watchdogs that keep corruption at bay. It has been shown that corruption increases when local media die. We need journalists to watch the powerful, to speak with and for those not in power, and to amplify the stories—good and bad—that make up the fabric of the city.

The reality, though, is that journalism as an industry cannot continue without help. The old ways that we used to fund ourselves are no longer viable or available, and we need to find a new way forward together. *The Reader*, and the Chicago Independent Media Alliance, believe in our ability to navigate the path forward with two distinct and important components in our roadmap: nonprofit status and vigorous collaboration.

More than ever before, our colleagues in community media agree with us that cooperation, alongside the editorial competition that has made our journalism landscape thrive, will cement a future for all of us.

On the surface, funding community journalism may not seem to achieve many nonprofits' goals of providing services to at-risk populations, supporting the arts, or championing social justice causes. But dig a little deeper, and you realize that you need journalists to uncover those peoples' stories and what they need, to critique and review the arts, and to hold those in power accountable on issues that make the city a better and more just place.

Whether you fund the arts, homeless issues, criminal justice, education, the environment, social justice or something else, the work you do depends, in no small part, on the work of journalists.

Thank you for all you do for the city. We look forward to continuing this conversation with you and including you on this journey toward strengthening Chicago's community journalism ecosystem, now and for generations to come.

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