

ANNUAL REPORT

MONTANA FREE PRESS

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helena, montana

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ABOUT US

MONTANA FREE PRESS

MISSION STATEMENT

Montana Free Press produces in-depth public service journalism that creates positive change and helps move society toward justice and equity.



Montana Free Press empowers citizens and strengthens democracy by serving as an independent watchdog covering the most important issues facing the state. We fill the investigative reporting gap created by the decline of statehouse news bureaus and diminished corporate investment in watchdog journalism. We do this by cultivating well-informed sources, studying arcane bureaucratic processes, seeking out dark corners of major institutions, digging deep into data, and holding those in power accountable to the people.

Like-minded individuals and organizations recognize the critical need for truth-telling, now more than ever, and support our efforts.



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FROM THE FOUNDER

JOHN S. ADAMS



As the state's first nonprofit statewide news organization, Montana Free Press strives to provide Montanans access to critical news and information about what's going on in their state's capital. We launched Montana Free Press in 2016 with the goal of keeping in-depth statehouse news reporting alive and well in Montana.

As we turn the page on 2019, I'm happy to report that we're meeting that goal. We still have a lot of work to do. Nevertheless, this year we demonstrated that reader-supported, nonprofit statehouse news is not only a viable proposition, but plays an essential role in Montana's journalism landscape.

In January, our small team of three journalists — including data reporter Eric Dietrich, Capitol reporter Leia Larsen, and myself — provided blanket coverage of Montana's 66th legislative session. We launched a first-of-its-kind weekly political podcast, *The Montana Lowdown*, featuring in-depth interviews with the state's top newsmakers.

We developed online tools to track lawmakers and their votes to increase transparency and accountability in the legislative process. Most importantly, we explained what was happening at the Capitol and why it mattered to Montanans throughout the state.

In July, Eric joined the reporting team on a full-time basis. A month later we tapped longtime Missoula Independent editor Brad Tyer as our first full-time editor. Over the course of the year, our original news reporting was picked up by — and appeared in print in — more than 50 of the state's newspapers, from Sidney to Libby. Our monthly online readership grew to nearly 10,000 visitors per month, and we counted more than 3,000 people among our online newsletter subscribers. This year we also teamed up with the Montana Newspaper Association and Solutions Journalism Network to produce a statewide reporting collaboration on the state's aging demographics, which we're excited to launch in the first part of 2020.

And throughout it all, support for our work has continued to grow.

As 2019 drew to a close, we reached out to our rapidly growing list of subscribers and asked for their help funding our vital work. We were overwhelmed with the response to our year-end NewsMatch campaign, with individual donations pouring in to help us exceed our ambitious goal of raising \$50,000. That financial support shows how much people value independent accountability journalism. As we head into 2020, we're excited about where we will grow next. We've already begun the search for another reporter to add to our talented news team, and we anticipate strengthening our organizational capacity in the coming months as well.

Thanks to all of you, from our esteemed board of directors to our individual donors to our foundation supporters, for making this work possible. We truly couldn't do it without you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Adams". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

FINANCIAL REPORT

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

JANUARY 1- DECEMBER 31, 2019

Income

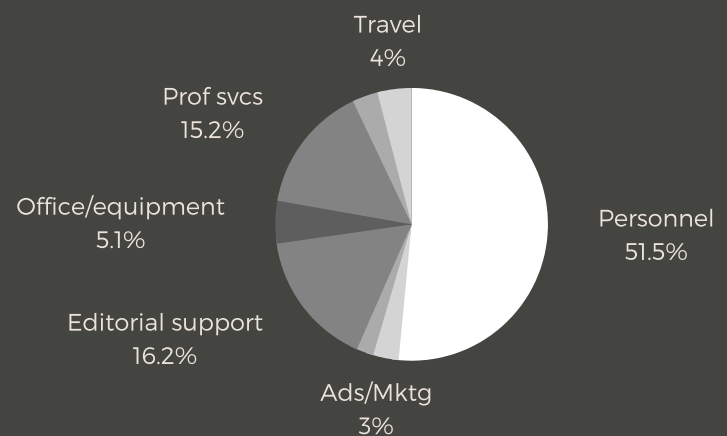
Foundation grants	\$86,500
Major gifts (>\$1,000)	\$172,000
Membership (<\$1,000)	\$118,725
Total Income	\$377,225

Expenses

Personnel (salaries, benefits, taxes)	\$155,870
Advertising and marketing	\$9,559
Development	\$7,100
Editorial support	\$50,014
Office and equipment	\$16,791
Professional services	\$45,305
Technology infrastructure	\$8,481
Travel and meetings	\$13,140
Total Expenses	\$306,260

\$221,202

TOTAL OPERATING RESERVE AT THE
END AT THE END OF 2019



2019 EXPENSES

As a percentage of the overall budget.

THIS FINANCIAL SUMMARY HAS BEEN
RECONCILED BY ACCOUNTANTS, BUT
HAS NOT BEEN AUDITED.

AUDIENCE

BY THE NUMBERS

666

Number of members at the end of 2019. MTFP members make annual donations less than \$1,000.

24%

Number of members who support MTFP with monthly or annually recurring donations.

3,525

Number of email newsletter subscribers by the end of 2019.

9.8K

Average monthly visitors to the MTFP website.

Print circulation in 2019

201,420
Weekly circulation total

89,324
Daily circulation total

\$0
Cost to publishers to run MTFP statewide content

54
of Montana Newspaper Association member newspapers that ran MTFP stories

SPECIAL PROJECTS

MTFP The Montana Free Press
TRACKING MTLEG 2019 ✓ LAWMAKERS ✓ BILLS ✓ GOV. ACTION

Rep. Geraldine Custer
R-Forsyth / HD 39

Sponsored bills

Showing 6 bills

BECAME LAW	HB 126	Increase fees on death and birth certificates
BECAME LAW	HB 127	Generally revise laws related to state payments to schools
PROBABLY DEAD	HB 128	Revise funding provision for Game Wardens' and Peace Officers' retirement system
BECAME LAW	HB 444	Provide funding allocation for intermediary re-lending program
PROBABLY DEAD	HB 536	Secure voter registration when applying for Driver's License or ID card
BECAME LAW	HB 661	Revise aviation fuel taxation

Floor votes

Second readings on House floor

93% of votes with majority of body	82% of votes with Republican caucus	83% of votes with Democratic caucus
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Figures calculated for second reading floor votes only. The majority caucuses from statistics provided by the Montana Legislature.

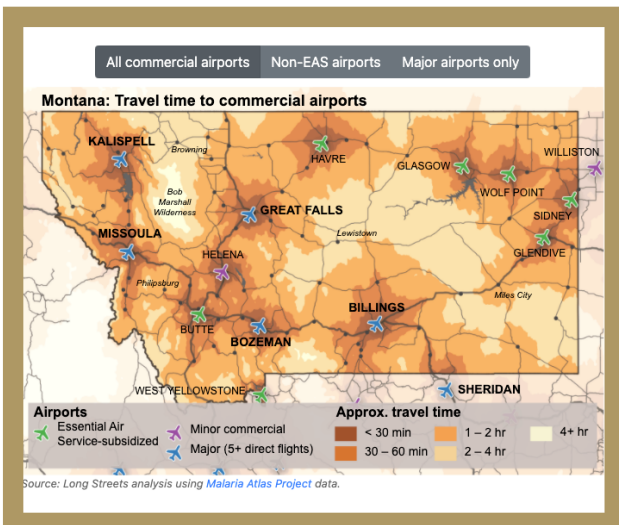
LEGISLATIVE GUIDE

During the 2019 legislative session, we produced an experimental legislative guide 'news app' that compiled and presented legislative data to help readers understand how proposed laws were moving through the legislative process and how lawmakers were voting. We ultimately published a page in the guide for each of the 1,140 bills introduced in 2019 and presented statistics indicating how often each of Montana's 150 lawmakers were voting with their respective party caucuses.



MONTANA LOWDOWN PODCAST

The Montana Lowdown features in-depth conversations with top newsmakers, journalists, politicians, and experts about significant issues facing America's "last best place." Hosted by veteran award-winning journalist and Montana Free Press founder John S. Adams.



LONG STREETS PROJECT

Our Long Streets Project, a series devoted to in-depth explorations of the dynamics around Montana's "long streets" economy, uses data analysis and narrative reporting to dig into telecommuting, workforce development and air travel access among other topics. Long Streets stories are routinely republished online and in print by urban and rural local news organizations across Montana.

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