

## **Door County Knock Summary**

**Number of employees:** 2.5 (two full-time; one part-time)

**Number of volunteers:** 13

### **What is your Mission Statement?**

Door County Knock advances the truth; centers, and drives understanding of, critical issues that affect Door County residents' lives; and holds powerful institutions accountable to the people, including by investigating betrayals of the public trust and other abuses of power.

### **What is the main source of your funding and what percent of your funding does that source provide?**

The primary source of our funding is reader donations and matching funds. Our journalism is supported by readers through our membership program, in which readers have the option to donate or set up a recurring monthly or annual donation through our website. Our work is always free – we view news as a public good – but reader support makes our work possible. We're a member of the Institute For Nonprofit News (INN), a network of more than 500 nonprofit news organizations around the country dedicated to news as a public service. Through INN, we're fortunate to participate each year in NewsMatch, a year-end fundraising campaign that provides dollar-for-dollar matches of all reader donations. Combined, reader donations and matching funds made up about 70 percent of our revenue in 2022; they also made up more than 70 percent of our revenue in 2023.

Starting in 2024, we've been fortunate to receive some short-term funding from national funders of journalism, including Report for America and Press Forward. Because of this, the percentage of our revenue that came from reader donations and matching funds temporarily decreased to about 35 percent in 2024 (we project it will remain at that level in 2025). These investments from national funders are meant to be one-time "down payments" on our growth; they're allowing us to increase our capacity for local fundraising by growing our membership program and developing a major donors program. These funds will all go away in the next one to two years; as that happens and our local fundraising capacity grows, we expect the percentage of our revenue that comes from reader donations and matching funds to once again be about 70 percent or greater. Our financial sustainability as an organization depends on the support of readers and local donors who believe in in-depth, solutions-focused journalism for Door County.

### **What is the geographic scope of your services throughout Door County?**

We provide in-depth local news covering all of Door County. Our team works together virtually and is well distributed throughout the peninsula, with staff, board members and volunteers from Clay Banks and Sturgeon Bay to Liberty Grove and Washington Island.

**Explanation of how you serve Door County including primary programs your organization offers to the community.**

Door County Knock empowers residents, improves public discourse in Door County and binds our community together by providing a solid source of in-depth local news on critical issues facing residents.

We report stories on the issues, institutions and decision-makers that affect residents' lives—including independent coverage of our county government and other institutions, as well as in-depth reporting on economic and social issues affecting Door County residents, such as affordable housing, child care, mental health, addiction and development.

Door County Knock's stories are published online and distributed via our email newsletter and social media channels. In addition to our direct publishing and distribution, we reach and engage with community members through regular appearances on local radio stations (WDOR and Washington Island Radio) and through in-person events including farmer's markets, neighborhood association meetings, festivals and other events and the issue-based community forums we host.

**How would you define the impact your organization is making in Door County?**

Door County Knock is uniquely filling a role as a civic-minded news organization in Door County. As a nonprofit news organization funded by readers, major donors and grants, we produce reporting independently and on behalf of residents, centering and bringing to light critical issues that affect residents' lives and striving to help lead productive community conversations about those issues.

We've seen through our work hosting community forums that facilitating these conversations can elevate the voices of underrepresented residents and spread awareness among community members not directly affected by an issue. Concretely, we track impact through a definition created by the nonprofit news movement: Impact can be measured through informed actions (such as a new policy created or new funding made available), informed decisions (such as residents citing our stories in public comment), and readership (tracked through our website and email newsletter analytics and re-publishing by other news organizations).

Research has shown over and over that local journalism empowers residents and helps to create positive change by providing a source of solid information about issues that affect residents' lives. By informing stakeholders and the local public, we can keep our energy focused on improving quality of life for residents, especially those most vulnerable.

The response we've seen from our audience indicates that people in the Door County community are hungry for high-quality and in-depth local news – a neutral source of facts reported with integrity. The stories we publish that we think of as our most important work – those that deeply explore a critical local issue or

examine evolving economic or social needs – also receive the most readership and engagement of anything we produce. Our email newsletter average open rate (55 to 60 percent) is roughly double the median (29 percent) among members of the News Revenue Hub, a national group of nonprofit news organizations.

**What is your annual budget?**

\$179,475

**If you were to receive a donation from 100+WWC, how would that donation be used?**

Funding would be used to directly produce in-depth journalism about critical local issues.

A primary focus of our work is producing major projects on issues of particular importance and timeliness to Door County; the projects take the form of in-depth journalistic series on the chosen issue, paired with solutions-oriented community forums. If we were to receive a donation from 100+WWC, funding would be used to pay our team of journalists to produce the in-depth series for multiple projects. Some funding would also be used to pay for any venue fees for hosting community forums. Depending on the size of a donation, we believe funding could be used to support 2-4 projects.

Through the in-depth series in each project, we examine the issue's background (including causes, trends, and regional and national context); the current state of the issue in Door County (including data as well as stories of the lived experiences of residents dealing with the issue); and paths forward for the community (including possible solutions and gaps in local resources to be filled). We then build on that reporting with one or more civil and productive community forums about the issue. We host the community forums, which include a panel discussion featuring residents dealing with the issue and local experts, as well as opportunities for questions and conversation between participants and panelists. The forums are available to attend both in-person and online; we post a recording on our website afterward. All of our journalism and the community forums are available to the public for free.

A successful example of this work is the project we produced in 2023 on opioid and meth addiction in Door County. This project included eight in-depth stories, as well as a productive community forum held in August at Crossroads at Big Creek in Sturgeon Bay. The issues we're prioritizing for projects in 2025-26 are affordable housing; drinking water quality; food insecurity; and child care and child welfare.

Our work is produced by a team of journalists that includes one full-time reporter and several freelance journalists (an editor, a copy editor, a designer, another reporter, and a data analyst). Specifically, some funding would be used to pay our editors to oversee and edit the series for each project. Our editors will work with reporters to establish the structure of each story, verify that all questions are answered and oversee the team working on the series, ensuring that the stories fit together as a cohesive series benefiting the community. Funding also would allow us to pay one or more reporters to report and write the series, work that would

include covering direct-service organizations and other relevant systems that work on the given issue, interviewing local experts and those who work on the issue, and featuring residents whose daily lives are affected by the issue. Finally, funding would be used to pay our journalists to produce photography, illustrations and graphics to help tell the stories visually, and to analyze any relevant data and create interactive charts or maps.