



The Sunflower

The Sunflower's membership in the Wichita Journalism Collaborative

The Wichita Journalism Collaborative is a coalition of newsrooms and community partners joining forces to help meet news and information needs in and around Wichita. We aim to support and enhance quality local journalism.

The Sunflower was a founding partner of the Wichita Journalism Collaborative in 2020. Launched about a month into the pandemic, the WJC initially served as a way for local news organizations to join forces in finding and reporting quality information during a time when misinformation was running rampant and journalists were navigating working from home. Covering students learning from home and the transition back into school led the collaborative to a focus on a project covering mental health for about 18 months, and now, for more than a year, the WJC has been focusing on housing issues.

The Sunflower being a collaborative partner is a win-win. We get to work alongside editors and reporters from local newsrooms planning stories, audience engagement initiatives, social media strategies and more. In return, we provide coverage ideas and delivery method ideas from a younger perspective. Being a larger newsroom than most of the professional newsrooms now, we also help our partners on big news days.

- One or two editors attend bi-weekly WJC meetings.
- We collaborate on reporting projects/stories with WJC partners.
- We provide stories to our partners from a student perspective.
- We participate in audience engagement initiatives, including forums, panels and community events.
- We provide extra reporting and photo help to our media partners on big news days (election day, for example)
- Our staff members have helped WJC start an Instagram account and adapt stories to shorter versions adapted for the platform.

The following examples are all from the past year, so they are all focused on housing-related topics/issues.

WJC Partners

the **active**age

THE VOICE

THE JOURNAL
— A Civic Issues Magazine —
FROM THE KANSAS LEADERSHIP CENTER

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WICHITA **89.1**

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The Wichita Eagle
Kansas.com

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Audience engagement

Learning about and doing more with audience engagement has been a real area of growth for us through our partnership with the Wichita Journalism Collaborative. We better understand the need for it and are actively seeking out new opportunities both on and off campus. Here are some examples:

ICT Open Streets — We have participated multiple times in the community-wide initiative meant to bring people together to have fun and learn about the organizations, initiatives and businesses in the various neighborhoods of Wichita.

Table in our student center — We invited the collaborative onto campus to join in talking with students about housing issues and our partnership.

Oaklawn community event — We participated in a WJC event in a neighborhood with a large Hispanic population, wanting to connect with the people in that neighborhood and to learn about their information needs. The event featured food, live music, games and so many important face-to-face conversations with community members. We signed people up for our newsletters and asked them to submit story ideas.





Renters' Rights panel

In August, The Sunflower planned and hosted a panel on campus about renting rights featuring experts on leases, renting-related laws and credit scores.



- The Collaborative helped us by providing snacks as incentive to getting college students to show up.
- We wrote about the panel, publishing a story and a Q&A with information provided by the panelists.
- We followed up by creating a resource guide (right) with answers to some of the most important questions and a list of organizations renters can go to for additional information and help. We published the guide and shared it with all our WJC partners.
- Our WJC partner Planeta Venus translated the guide into Spanish for all of us to make available to our audiences.



Know your renting rights

What are some red flags that someone should watch out for when searching for an apartment?

Look at the grounds. Does it look like they keep everything up? If it looks messy or like people aren't doing regular maintenance, don't go there. Ask the property manager how long they've been there. Look at reviews online for the place and the manager. Talk to people in the complex. If people living there have serious complaints, it might be worth avoiding.

What is the 14-30 notice?

The 14-30 notice is the Kansas (Residential) Landlord and Tenant Act. If you are violating the lease but you paid the rent, the landlord can issue a 14-30 day notice, which means fix the issue in 14 days or your lease is up in 30 days. If you get it fixed, then they can't bill you. If the landlord isn't doing a good job, the renter can give out a 14-30 day notice, mostly about property repairs.

What are tenants responsible for and what are landlords responsible for?

Under Act 58-2553, the landlord is responsible for appliances that come with the rental until they need to be in and kept in working order. The tenant is there to maintain the property, including things such as cleaning, removing trash and lawn care, if needed.

Why does my credit score matter? What do I do if I do not have good credit, and how can I improve my credit?

Having no credit is just as bad as having bad credit. Get a secured credit card and use it to sign up for something like Netflix. Then pay it off every month. People want to see your credit to see if they can rely on you to pay the rent. Landlords can ask for more information, such as pay stubs or first and last month's rent if you have bad or no credit.

What are the options if a landlord unethically breaks the lease?

You can require the landlord to go through the court process to evict you. If you've been locked out, you are allowed to "break in." You can call the police, too.

What should first-time renters know?

Take it seriously if you sign a renting contract. It is a legal contract, and you should make sure you understand what it says and what can possibly happen to you if you break the contract. Know that if you damage the property, you do have to pay for that. If you get evicted, then it gets reported, making it harder to get a new rental. Take photographs of the condition of the property when you move in and keep a copy of those. Do the same as you are moving out.

Resources

Kansas Legal Services

kansaslegalservices.org
This nonprofit helps low-income Kansans meet basic needs by offering legal and mediation services. Kansans can seek help when confronted with a dicey housing situation. The nonprofit's website also has resources, such as Tenant Issues and Rights for Kansas Renters webpage that offers tips and resources for renters.

18th Judicial District Court (Sedgewick County)

www.dct18.org
The court offers resources on its website for both renters and tenants. Searching "housing" on the website will pull up "City Wichita Housing Resources."

Consumer Credit Counseling Service (Wichita)

ccscsoftheheartland.org
Consumer Credit Counseling offers financial aid counseling services. The nonprofit agency offers financial education materials, which can be found on its website.

Housing & Community Services (Wichita)

wichita.gov/housing
The city of Wichita offers a housing resource page that details information on reasonable accommodation, fair/affordable housing, and the Violence Against Women Act, which prevents a renter from being evicted from their unit because they are a victim of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.



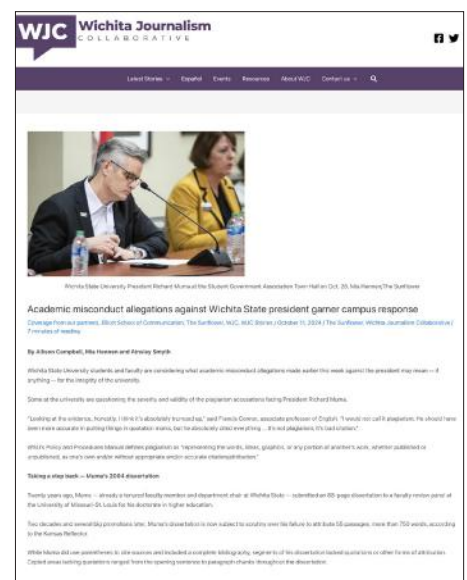
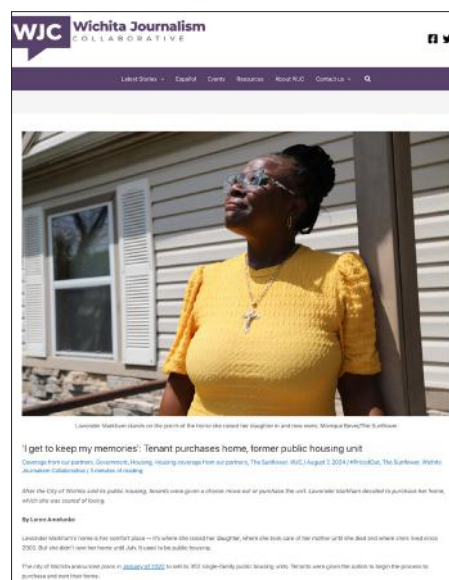
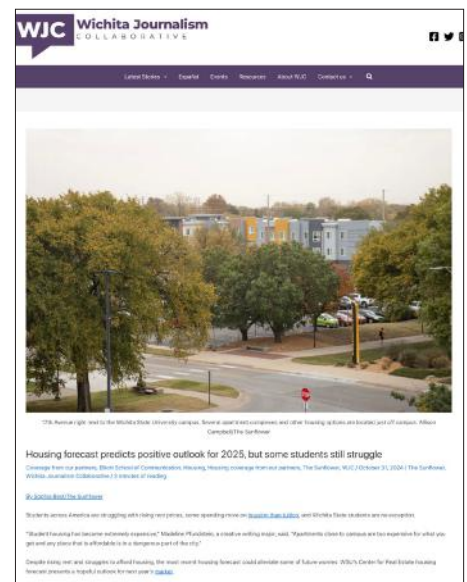
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The Sunflower



Examples of coverage we shared with WJC partners


Our partnership in the WJC has helped us better understand the importance of housing topics to our readers. Every time we do a housing-related story, we share it out with the Collaborative. They publish it on their website and it is offered up to all 10 partners, usually resulting in it being published by two or three other media partners, expanding our reach considerably. Sometimes we partner with reporters from other outlets and work together on a story or package. When there is a big news story on campus that's not housing related, we share that, too, to help out our partners and to expand our readership on those important stories.





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Social work student Robin Monroe poses for a photo in the Online and Adult Learners office. Monroe said that OAL helped her throughout her time at WSU. Ainsley Smyth/The Sunflower

'Nowhere to go but up': How a WSU student went from addiction, incarceration and homelessness to crossing the graduation stage

Coverage from our partners, Elliott School of Communication, Homeless, Housing, Housing coverage from our partners, The Sunflower, WJC, WJC Stories / May 12, 2025 / The Sunflower, Wichita Journalism Collaborative / 5 minutes of reading

Ainsley Smyth/The Sunflower


Robin Monroe walked into the Online and Adult Learners office at Wichita State "almost by mistake."

"I went to the advising office in Grace Wilkie (Hall) and on the way there, I went in the wrong door," Monroe, 57, said.

Monroe had been through a long journey to get to that office. A former nurse, she had gone through an addiction, the loss of her job, and separation from her kids – all accumulating in a prison stay and being homeless. After getting through those challenges, she wanted to make another change.

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An Office of Student Accommodations & Testing golf cart. OSAT has one golf cart and a van it uses for a mobility assistance program that transports students with disabilities across campus. Mia Hennen/The Sunflower

Mobility assistance program to expand at Wichita State with added golf carts

Coverage from our partners, Elliott School of Communication, Housing, Housing coverage from our partners, Social Services, The Sunflower, WJC, WJC Stories / May 7, 2025 / The Sunflower, Wichita Journalism Collaborative / 5 minutes of reading


Mia Hennen/The Sunflower

More golf carts will soon be roaming Wichita State as the university begins to update a program that aids students with disabilities on campus.

The additional golf carts are the first step in expanding a mobility assistance program that the university plans to update by the fall semester. The program, which has been around for several years, helps students with disabilities traverse the campus, providing a door-to-door transportation service.

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Attendees at the Sept. 24 county commission candidate forum line up to ask questions about housing issues under the county's control. Kristy Maca/The Sunflower

County Commission forums illustrate need for community input, collaborative options involving housing

Coverage from our partners, Elliott School of Communication, Government, Homeless, Housing, Housing coverage from our partners, The Sunflower, Voting, WJC, WJC Stories / October 2, 2024 / The Beacon, The Wichita Eagle, Wichita Journalism Collaborative / 4 minutes of reading

By Piper Pennetti

Candidates in two races for the Sedgewick County Commission certainly didn't agree on everything in forums last week.

But when it came to homelessness, they were often aligned in seeing the need for multi-faceted, community-driven responses supported by collaboration between governments and nonprofit sectors.

Two pairs of candidates, one running in District 3 and the other in District 2, offered responses to journalist and audience questions Sept. 23 and Sept. 24 at the Alumni Auditorium at Friends University.

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Illustration by Makenzie Miller / The Sunflower

OPINION: Wichita State misses window of opportunity by not expanding on-campus housing

Elliott School of Communication, Featured content, Housing, Housing coverage from our partners, Local news, The Sunflower, Top Stories, WJC / March 24, 2025 / The Sunflower, Wichita Journalism Collaborative / 3 minutes of reading

By Mya Scott/The Sunflower

Many college students rely upon on-campus housing when attending college. This is a home away from home, especially for out-of-state students. After the first year, many college students move into apartment life or online classes, but there is still a large sum of Shockers who choose to stay at the residence halls. It's convenient, and sometimes only being five minutes from my class is the motivation to get out of bed in the morning.

Despite the crucial role dorm life plays on college campuses, Wichita State University, when given the chance to expand upon the university with its master plan – a blueprint for the next 10 years of WSU – chose to not include any additions, renovations or changes to housing. The choice ignores the crisis of limited housing for on-campus students.



What WJC partners say



"The students at The Sunflower constantly raise the bar for journalism not just on campus but for the entire community. Through the Wichita Journalism Collaborative, The Sunflower contributes to more robust coverage of important issues such as housing in our community by elevating the experiences and needs of students. We routinely republish work from student journalists because they routinely demonstrate professionalism and excellence. They embrace engaging events, such as a renter's rights forum, that brings their coverage to life for their audiences. The Sunflower is an outstanding college newspaper. But it is far more than that. Its student journalists are playing a vital role in creating a more informed and engaged Wichita."

Chris Green, editor
The Journal, Kansas Leadership Center



"The stories reported by Sunflower journalists have shed light on the experiences of college students, improving the community's understanding of the housing challenges they face. Their coverage has highlighted the struggles and choices related to housing, including high costs and a lack of accessibility."

Kathy Lefler, coordinator
Wichita Journalism Collaborative



"When we launched the Wichita Journalism Collaborative in 2020, it was a new venture for all of us. And, to be honest, we were kind of figuring it out as we went along. But none of that stopped The Sunflower from taking a chance and signing on. And its staff has been a willing and able partner from Day One. The Sunflower helped us produce a zine focused on mental health and suicide prevention. It hosted an on-campus panel discussion for students on housing rights. It helped us sort through records on the use of restraint chairs in the county jail. In short, The Sunflower helped us improve media coverage of important topics by taking a chance."

Tom Shine, director of news & public affairs
KMWU, 89.1 (Local NPR affiliate)