

# Major Initiative Launched to Invest in Local News

09.20.23 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



“Today, we’re experiencing a crisis in news and information.” But “... we have a moment to support the reimagination, revitalization, and rapid development of local news.”

That’s the great news just announced through the launch of Press Forward, “a national initiative to strengthen communities and democracy by supporting local news and information with an infusion of more than a half-billion dollars over the next five years.”

While there’s a brand new website for Press Forward that explains the vision, the historical problem, and the proposed solutions, the planning for it has been underway through “... years of work and investments....” by a “growing group of national, regional, and local funders....”

Indeed, it is already a “... coalition of 22 of America’s leading funders” who are now committed to this massive new project “to invest in local news and information.” See *Press Forward Will Award More Than \$500 Million to Revitalize Local News* (September 7, 2023) Press Release, [macfound.org](https://macfound.org)

Grantmaking will begin in 2024 – or perhaps sooner – according to the website.

## ***The Problem***

“Since 2005, approximately 2,200 local newspapers have closed, resulting in 20 percent of Americans living in ‘news deserts’ with little to no reliable coverage of important local events.”

This is a development with dire consequences. “As local newsrooms have disappeared across America, communities have witnessed fading civic engagement, eroding social bonds, surging misinformation, and dwindling governmental accountability.”

In our recent post – [Some Charity Fraud With Your Hot Dog, Sir?](#) (September 1, 2023) – we discuss how important it is to a community to have a vibrant local news outlet to investigate and expose wrongdoing. There are several current projects and initiatives to encourage and support independent and nonprofit media ventures.

The Press Forward folks acknowledge that “...philanthropic support for journalism has grown over the past decade,” but “overall giving to local news falls short of what is needed.”

### ***The Solution***

“Press Forward seeks to reverse the dramatic decline in local news that has coincided with an increasingly divided America and weakening trust in institutions.”

The goal of Press Forward is “to catalyze a local news renaissance that will reshape the local news landscape and re-center local journalism as a force for community cohesion, civic participation, and government accountability.”

“Press Forward will enhance local journalism at an unprecedented level to re-center local news as a force for community cohesion; support new models and solutions that are ready to scale; and close longstanding inequities in journalism coverage and practice.”

“Simply put,” according to the website, “our ambition is to raise significant new resources for local news, and lower the transaction costs to both funders and grant seekers in the process.”

It will “...fund programs and organizations that will bolster democracy at the local level, support greater diversity, lean in to digital technology, develop long term sustainable models, and help drive demand for the high-quality local news and information necessary for every member of every community to thrive.”

### ***Funding Priorities***

“Press Forward funders are ready to move from individual grantmaking strategies to a shared vision and coordinated action that ensures individuals are informed and engaged on issues that affect their everyday lives.” This includes:

- “Strengthening local newsrooms that have the trust of local communities
- Closing longstanding inequalities in journalism coverage and practice
- Accelerating the enabling environment for news production and dissemination
- Advancing public policies that expand access to local news and civic information”

There are two ways in which funders can participate financially. They can contribute to a “pooled fund, managed by The Miami Foundation, or they may participate in aligned grantmaking. The pooled fund is for funders who wish to make a one-time contribution and are motivated to contribute to ‘big’ swings.”

By contrast, the “aligned grantmaking is for funders who have internal staff capacity (or limitations on what they can support, for instance climate funders that can only support climate journalism or regional/local foundations that have narrow geographic priorities) and prefer to retain maximum flexibility in which aligned grants they will pursue.”

The priority of the initiative right now is to increase the number of funders in the coalition and to set up the staffing and infrastructure needed to operate.

Grantmaking guidelines will be released in early 2024.

There is a [sign-up sheet link](#) for potential funders, grant recipients, and any others interested in the initiative to receive news and updates.

### ***Conclusion***

It's clear that the coalition of funders behind Forward Press understand the urgency of the initiative and are moving forward quickly: "Democracy flourishes when people have access to reliable information."

When it is absent or compromised, our democracy is at greater and greater risk.

*– Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director*