

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Open Call on Infrastructure

Updated 12/4/24

Press
Forward 

pressforward.news

Highlights

- Eligibility: Journalism Support Organizations, newsrooms and newsroom collaborations are eligible to apply.
- Timing:
 - Phase I: Letter of Inquiry:
Nov. 13, 2024–11:59 am ET. Jan. 15, 2025
 - Phase II: Full for Proposal for Invited Applicants: February – March 2025
- Grant size: \$500,000 - \$1.5 million
- More information: pressforward.news/opencall
- Application link: pressforward.submittable.com

This open call focuses on strengthening the infrastructure of the local news industry, one of Press Forward's four strategic pillars. Through this initiative, Press Forward is seeking to fund solutions to the common challenges that outlets face in sustainably creating and disseminating local news. We are looking for bold ideas that can impact the sector at large.

Through this second open call, Press Forward is awarding \$20 million in grant funding. Letters of Interest from IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofits will be accepted until Wednesday, January 15, 2025, at 11:59 am ET. Awards will be announced in late spring 2025.

Why infrastructure

Healthy communities deserve quality local news and sustainable, resilient local newsrooms. However, rapid changes in technology have impacted every facet of the news industry, including how outlets produce stories, reach audiences, raise revenue and cultivate talent. At the same time, a dramatic decline in the number of professionals employed by independent local news outlets has left many dedicated journalists and news leaders running on fumes.

Press Forward's second Open Call on Infrastructure will support shared solutions to the common challenges newsrooms face. We are particularly seeking scalable, replicable or new ideas, tools or technology that will help multiple independent local newsrooms address four priority areas:

- Audience
- Operations
- People
- Revenue

Successful proposals will be bold ideas that benefit multiple organizations, build stronger shared infrastructure at the national, regional or local level, and/or have the potential to impact the sector at large.

We expect to award a total of up to \$20 million among 20-30 applicants distributed across the four funding priorities. We expect most grants will range from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million over three years, though awards may fall outside of this range.

These program guidelines include eligibility requirements, funding priorities, application instructions, evaluation criteria, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and more. We recommend that you review this document in its entirety before beginning the application process.

Connect

Apply: pressforward.submittable.com

Questions: grants@pressforward.news

Website: www.pressforward.news

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/press-forward-news

Table of contents

4	<u>Process + Key Dates</u>
5	<u>Eligibility Requirements</u>
6	<u>Funding Priorities</u>
6	<u>Evaluation</u>
6	<u>Grant Awards</u>
7	<u>Application & Evaluation Criteria</u>
7	<u>LOI Questions</u>
7	<u>LOI Evaluation Criteria</u>
8	<u>Full Proposal Questions</u>
8	<u>Full Proposal Evaluation Criteria</u>
9	<u>Resources</u>
10	<u>Frequently Asked Questions</u>
12	<u>About Press Forward</u>

Process + Key Dates

Press Forward’s Open Call on Infrastructure will use a multi-phase proposal process.

Phase I: Letter of Inquiry

Eligible applicants should submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) **by 8:59 a.m. PT/ 11:59 a.m. ET Wednesday, January 15, 2025**. LOIs can be submitted here: pressforward.submittable.com. LOIs will be reviewed by Press Forward staff and an external review panel made up of subject matter experts in each priority area.

Phase II: Full Proposal + Interviews

Top-scoring applicants that are most aligned with our areas of interest will be invited to complete a full application that requests more in-depth information.

Select applicants may be invited to participate in a panel interview with Press Forward staff, funders and external reviewers. Co-applicants may be required to participate in the interview along with the lead applicant.

Press Forward may reach out at any point in the process to obtain additional information. This outreach is not indicative of the status of your application. Final grant decisions will be made by the Press Forward staff in partnership with expert advisers from the field.

Date	Milestone
November 13, 2024	Grant portal opens for Phase I: Letters of Interest (LOI). Submit here: https://pressforward.submittable.com/ .
November 22, 2024 Noon PT/ 3 pm ET	Information session for applicants. Register .
December 17, 2024 1 pm PT / 4 pm ET	Answers to common questions with Press Forward staff. Register .
January 8, 2025 11 am PT /2pm ET	Open call Q&A for applicants with Press Forward staff. Register .
January 15, 2025 8:59 am PT/ 11:59 am ET	Grant portal closes for LOIs.
February 2025	Invitations to submit full applications are sent.
March 2025	Full proposals are due from invited applicants.
Late spring 2025	Expected announcement of grant awards.

Eligibility Requirements

Press Forward will invest in ideas and solutions that address newsrooms' shared challenges and impact the sector at large.

Eligible applicants include:

- Journalism support organizations and intermediaries with a proven track record of deep service to local news organizations
- News organizations that are working or plan to work collaboratively with other news organizations as part of their grant. Individual newsrooms may apply as lead applicants for a collaborative project with multiple partners that aim to solve a common challenge for the broader field. Collaborations can be at a local, regional or statewide level. For-profit newsrooms or for-profit service providers can be a part of the group; however, the lead applicant must be a non-profit organization.
- Newsroom collaborations, local/regional collaborations and/or a practitioner/university partnership.

Note: All applications must be submitted by a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

Fiscal sponsors are eligible to apply on behalf of a group of organizations. A fiscal sponsor is not allowed to submit a proposal on behalf of a single, for-profit organization.

All lead applicants must have financial or in-kind resources to contribute to the development of this idea.

Organizations of all sizes are welcome to apply. There is no budget limitation.

The following types of organizations are **NOT** eligible to apply as the lead applicant:

- For-profit organizations
- Organizations with a current active grant from Press Forward's Pooled Fund

To be considered eligible, all proposals must:

- Experiment with new solutions to solve common challenges
- Impact or inform the field nationwide
- Pilot ideas locally that can be replicated in other regions, and/or
- Have a proven track record but require deeper investment to realize a greater impact

We will not fund proposals that:

- Are not focused on the future of local news
- Offer solution(s) only to a single newsroom or are otherwise limited in scope or impact
- Do not have resources contributed toward this idea outside of this possible grant

Note: If an application is submitted on behalf of a group of organizations working together, applicants who are invited to submit full applications will be required to include partnership agreements from all co-applicants and a project budget that clearly indicates how funds will be used, including how funds may be allocated among partners.

For more information about eligibility criteria, and the role of fiscal sponsors, please see the Frequently Asked Questions section below.

Funding Priorities

Press Forward seeks to move financial resources to newsrooms, journalism support organizations and/or collaborations that address shared challenges in one or more of the following four key areas. As part of the Letter of Inquiry, applicants will be required to select **only** one priority area.

AUDIENCE

Applications should focus on methodologies, technology and tools that enable news organizations to attract new audiences, diversify their audience base and/or deepen relationships with existing ones. This can include experimental audience-facing approaches or technical infrastructure.

OPERATIONS

Applications should focus on ideas or solutions that directly impact critical business functions that are not related to editorial production. This includes accounting, human resources, governance, legal support, financial planning and other activities that enable news organizations to operate resiliently.

PEOPLE

Applications should include programs or solutions that bolster the talent pipeline and encourage a diversity of perspectives in the newsroom. This can include professional development, training programs, organizational design, improved workplace culture and/or communities of practice.

REVENUE

Applications should focus on methodologies or tools that help news organizations generate revenue and/or diversify their revenue streams. This can include shared positions, shared ad sales, sources of earned income, impact investing, B2B partnerships, licensing, corporate support or reader revenue.

These lists of examples are not exhaustive. We welcome all ideas that fit within these priority areas.

Evaluation

Press Forward will recruit a diverse and experienced review panel to evaluate proposals as part of this open call. Reviewers will provide subject matter expertise and guidance to Press Forward staff on which LOIs and applications are best aligned with the priority areas as stated. Reviewers will be sourced from the journalism and local news field as well as from philanthropy.

All reviewers will be offered an honorarium for their time. The list of reviewers will be made public at the close of the grant cycle.

Please see the Application section for the two rubrics that will be used to evaluate the LOI and the full proposals.

Grant Awards

We expect to award a total of up to \$20 million among 20-30 applicants distributed across the four funding priorities.

Additionally, Press Forward grants made through this open call will have the following features:

- All grants are considered project grants and will have specific activities, project budgets and expected outcomes tied to the grant.
- Grants will be awarded in multiple installments.
- The expected grant period is two or three years, June 1, 2025–May 31, 2027/2028.
- Grantees will be required to submit a report at the end of each year in order to receive the next grant installment.
- Press Forward reserves the right to award amounts outside of the dollar range noted above.
- Grantees will be expected to participate in knowledge sharing throughout the life of the grant and may opt-in to capacity building.
- Press Forward recommends that no more than 15 percent of the grant is used for overhead costs - unless approved by The Miami Foundation.

Application

LOI Questions

1. Which of the four focus areas are you primarily addressing through your project? *Even if your proposal addresses more than one, please select the one most applicable.*

- Audience
- Operations
- People
- Revenue

2. What is the common challenge that you plan to address – and how? (max 250 words) *Describe the problem you are trying to solve. Include the following: data and evidence of the problem and its scale and data and evidence of the demand for your solution.*

3. Why are you the right organization to tackle this challenge? (max 250 words)

4. Who are the specific partners you will work with and/or support to ensure success? (max 250 words)

5. How will your organization, your partners, your local news ecosystem, your community and/or the field be stronger if you are successful? (250 words) *Describe the impact you hope to see and/or the model you hope to create/demonstrate.*

6. Are you a single organization or a group of organizations working together on this application?

- Single organization
- Group of organizations

LOI Evaluation Criteria

These are the questions we will use to assess LOI and drive decision making.

RELEVANCE: How well do the applicant and proposed idea meet the eligibility requirements? (Does it address a common challenge, benefit multiple organizations, build stronger shared infrastructure at the national, regional or local level and/or have the potential to impact the sector at large?)

PROJECT: Is the proposed idea compelling, feasible and realistic?

TEAM: Is the right team (partners/collaborators) assembled to address this common challenge?

IMPACT: Could the proposed idea impact the sector at large, or could the field learn something new or important from the scaling and implementation of this idea?

Only top-scoring LOIs will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Full Proposal Questions

1. Amount Requested: Most grant awards are expected to be in the \$500,000 to \$1.5 million range over three years but may fall outside of this range.

2. Purpose statement: What is the challenge you are tackling and how will you do it? (50 words max)
One sentence that succinctly explains the common challenge you are addressing and the proposed solution.

3. Proposed bold idea: Elaborate on the challenge and your solution. Include evidence or data that supports that this solution will be effective and has the potential for broad impact. (250 words max)

Are you a single organization or a group of organizations working together on this application?

*Single organization

*Group of organizations

(if group of organizations) **Collaboration:** We recognize that large-scale solutions often require buy-in from multiple partners. Explain the history and nature of your partnership. Describe the partners and their anticipated roles in this project. (250 words max)

Please attach signed commitment letters from each co-applicant in the attachment section below.

4. Goals and expected outcomes: What does success look like? What metrics are you planning to use to track short-term and long-term progress? (250 words max)

5. Relevance to field: How can this idea be applicable for other organizations to either learn from, replicate or participate in? Can this idea be scaled? (250 words max)

6. (optional) Updates: Have there been any major updates or changes since you submitted the LOI? Please describe them here. (250 words max)

Required Attachments

1. Project plan + timeline *Include all activities that would take place during the life of the grant broken out by six-month periods.*

2. Project budget

- Show the complete cost of this project
- Include how will you cover additional costs outside of the grant amount
- Indicate contributions (financial and/or in-kind) from lead and co-applicants

3. FY2025 Operating Budget for the lead applicant

4. *(as needed)* Partnership agreement for each co-applicant

Full Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated according to the following:

Common Challenge

- How important is it to the local news field that this problem be addressed?
- How extensive is the demand for solving this challenge?

Solution Proposed

- How well informed is the solution that is being proposed?
- What evidence or data do you have to support that this solution will be effective?
- How realistic and thoughtful is the planned approach to tackling this problem?

Expertise and Leadership

- Does this applicant have a history of successfully operationalizing big, bold ideas either internally or for the local news field?
- Is this the right organization/collaborative to tackle this challenge?
- How confident are you in the track record and vision of the executive leader(s) of this project?

Impact

- If this project is successful how impactful would this be on the local news field?
- Is the solution replicable and/or scalable?

Resources

We understand that applying for a grant takes time. The following resources are intended to help get applicants from start to finish.

Webinars with Press Forward staff

Information Session for Applicants | November 22, noon PT/3 p.m. ET. [Register.](#)

Answers to Common Questions | December 17, 1 p.m. PT/4 p.m. ET. [Register.](#)

Open Call Q&A for Applicants with Press Forward Staff | Jan. 8, 11 a.m. PT/2 p.m. ET. [Register.](#)

All sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend.

Technical support for Phase II applicants

Press Forward intends to partner with experts in the field to provide technical support to Phase II applicants. All applicants who are invited to submit a full proposal in Phase II will be eligible for a complimentary one-hour session with an expert to provide technical support. More details to come.

Frequently Asked Questions

Eligibility Requirements

What type of organizations are eligible to apply?

Journalism Support Organizations, newsrooms and newsroom collaborations are eligible to apply. Lead applicants must be IRS 501(c)(3) organizations that have a big idea that can impact the field of journalism.

Can I apply to support an existing project we have already been working on? Yes, organizations may apply to support an existing project. The proposal should focus on replicating or scaling the idea.

Can for-profit organizations apply?

No, for-profit organizations cannot apply as a single or the lead applicant.

Can a for-profit organization be a part of a group of organizations that applies?

Yes, for-profit organizations may partner with other entities, but they may not serve as the lead applicant.

Can news collaboratives apply?

Yes, news collaboratives are eligible to apply if they meet the eligibility criteria.

Can Press Forward local chapters apply?

Yes, Press Forward local chapters may serve as a fiscal sponsor on behalf of local organizations in their area. The projects must be driven by local newsrooms.

Can an organization submit multiple proposals?

Yes, an organization may submit one application as a lead applicant. The organization can join one other as a co-applicant.

Can a fiscal sponsor apply as the lead applicant?

Yes, a fiscal sponsor can apply as the lead applicant for an application made up of a group of organizations.

Can I be the lead applicant if I am a recipient of a Press Forward Open Call grant?

No, you can only hold one active grant from the Pooled Fund at a time. All grants made during the first open call are two-year grants. Active grantees are allowed to serve as co-applicants.

On how many applications can I serve as a co-applicant/ collaborator? An organization can serve as a co-applicant on one application.

If I am applying with a group of organizations, who should apply as the lead applicant?

The lead applicant will be expected to manage funds, grant and financial reporting and be the go-to organization we speak with if issues arise with their grant. The lead applicant must be a 501(c)(3).

Application Process and Help

What does Phase I – Letter of Inquiry entail?

Phase I – Letter of Inquiry invites eligible applicants to complete a short form. See “LOI questions” for more details.

What does Phase II – Full proposal entail?

Phase II – Full proposal invites a sub-group of top scorers from Phase I to submit a full proposal. See “Full Proposal Questions” for more details. If needed, some applicants may be invited to participate in an interview with Press Forward staff, funders and partners.

I've never applied for grant funding. Is Press Forward offering any help or resources?

Press Forward will host three webinars to answer applicant questions. Please see “Webinars with Press Forward Staff” for more details.

Can I submit an application in a foreign language (not English)?

No, currently we do not have the resources to review applications in foreign languages. All applications must be submitted in English. If you are unable to submit an application in English, please reach out to grants@pressforward.news.

How long will it take applicants to complete the open call process?

The process is a multi-phase process. We anticipate 10-20 hours of work for applicants to complete the process from start to finish, but hours may vary.

Who will be reviewing my application?

Press Forward will recruit a diverse and well-informed review panel for this open call. Reviewers will provide subject matter expertise and guidance to Press Forward staff on which applicants are best positioned to have the desired impact on the field.

When will grant funding be distributed?

Our goal is to have grant funding distributed during Q2 2025.

Press Forward chapters and additional funding

Am I eligible to apply if I have a Press Forward local chapter in my region? Yes, you are eligible to apply for funding if you meet the eligibility criteria even if you have a local chapter in your region.

What do you mean by “local chapters”?

Press Forward Locals are a network of chapters across the country where funders are bringing new donors and foundations together to expand resources for local news. These chapters are an opportunity to create place-based initiatives and move from individual grantmaking strategies toward a shared vision and coordinated action. Chapters will announce their own grantmaking opportunities.

What if I still have questions?

All further questions should be directed to grants@pressforward.news.

About Press Forward

Press Forward is a national movement to strengthen communities by revitalizing local news and information. A coalition of funders is investing more than \$500 million to strengthen local newsrooms, close longstanding gaps in journalism coverage, advance public policy that expands access to local news and to scale the infrastructure the sector needs to thrive.

All Press Forward activities support the following four funding priorities:

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

The work of Press Forward is grounded in a set of shared values:

- Prioritizing transformation
- Centering community needs
- Enabling growth with equity and diversity of thought
- Ensuring accessibility
- Independence and interdependence

Press Forward operates primarily in three ways:

- **Aligned Grantmaking:** Funders give directly to local news initiatives, projects and media outlets in alignment with Press Forward's four funding priorities.
- **Pooled Fund:** Several Press Forward coalition partners have come together to contribute to a national pooled fund for local news, housed at The Miami Foundation. This open call is part of the Pooled Fund.
- **Locals:** These emerging chapters offer a new opportunity for funders to work together to address specific, local information needs. Each chapter has committed to supporting a local pooled fund or investing in news collaborations that build common purpose and strengthen the local news ecosystem.

For more, visit pressforward.news.