Press Forward: A Guide for Local Funders

Press Forward ❯❯

III.
How To Get
Started

Planning

If you are starting to bring together stakeholders, including local journalists and other civic leaders, designing a framework for conversations before you begin is helpful.

Democracy Fund provides some useful guidance on utilizing census data, assessing existing infrastructure for local news and determining the best strategies for data collection in Section 2 of the Guide To Assessing Your Local News Ecosystem.

You may also want to consider the framework developed by the Listening Post Collective for deep engagement with communities about their news and information needs:

Guided DIY Civic Media Playbook for Community-Led Projects (Listening Post Collective)

Building coalitions takes time, often more time than you imagine when you get started. If you are bringing together local funders and other stakeholders that do not normally collaborate, make sure to set aside time for relationship building before digging into the details of collaboration.

Sample Timeline

This is an example of planned activities over one year from the Press Forward Minnesota chapter, led by the McKnight Foundation.

Remember that your timeline will be dependent on existing relationships and programming in your community and/or local news ecosystem. You may need to give yourself more time to carry out some of these activities, particularly the early-stage relationship building with local journalists or other local funders.

Q1

- Identify fundraising opportunities and set goals for pooled fund
  - Begin funder and partner engagement to ensure community is informed and aware of opportunities related to the initiative

- Coordinate and connect Pivot Fund as landscape analysis begins

- Identify possible Advisory Committee and Steering Committee members
  - Advisory Committee — practitioners and funders with goal of providing strategic input to the pooled fund

- Steering Committee — smaller group dedicated to decision making for pooled fund

- Plan early for two large Press Forward-adjacent convenings: AJPalooza in May and Report for America convening in July

Q2

- Continue fundraising
  - Including plugging into Press Forward National efforts to identify funding opportunities there

- Planning for public launch of PF Minnesota, to coincide with AJPalooza
  - Confirm with AJP if this can be a complementary panel and session
  - Also draft press release

- Finalize Advisory Committee and Steering Committee appointments

- Finalize grantmaking strategy and structure (open vs closed, single or multiyear)

Q3

- Grantmaking begins — shepherd the process in partnership with MCF

- Planning for Report for America event — possible side panel and fundraising opportunity

- Fundraising continues — assess whether on track to meet goals and reassess targets

Q4

- Grantmaking continues
- Begin writing a year one recap to be shared with the field
  - Learnings, adaptations and lessons to take into year two

Ecosystem Mapping

Mapping your local news ecosystem can be incredibly valuable for individual funders and groups of funders. It can help you identify existing local news outlets, assess where people are going for news and find crucial gaps in coverage.

One of the first challenges of ecosystem mapping is identifying local news producers. This can be harder than it sounds because news can be produced in many different formats and targeted for different communities, which Sarah Stonbely found at the Center for Cooperative Media in its mapping of the New Jersey local news ecosystem:

> *"Understanding any local news ecosystem is impossible without first understanding the depth and breadth of news production there. It sounds simple, but the reality of answering that question with data is much more complex. Quite obviously, producers of local news operate in several media: print, broadcast and online. Failing to account for any one medium will produce an inaccurate picture of the local news landscape in question. The problem is, no comprehensive list or database exists that covers local news producers across all media."*
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> —Sarah Stonbely, Center for Cooperative Media

Ecosystem mapping can be accomplished in many different forms with various partners, from university researchers and humanities scholars to organizations that promote civic dialogue. Mapping and landscape reports should not stop with a list of existing local media but also reveal gaps in news and information and the needs identified by community members themselves.

Here are a few recent examples of initial ecosystem mapping reports from various communities:

The News Philadelphians Use (Center for Media Engagement, with support from The Lenfest Institute for Journalism and Independence Public Media Foundation, 2023)

Georgia News Landscape Analysis (Pivot Fund for Georgia News Collaborative, 2023)

Oklahoma's News Media Ecosystem: Phase 2 (Oklahoma Media Center, 2023)

Who's Doing Local News (Colorado Media Project, 2023)

Assessing Oregon's Local News & Information Ecosystem (Agora Journalism Center, 2022)

Southern New Mexico News & Information Ecosystem Assessment (New Mexico Local News Fund, 2021)

What Makes For Robust Local News Provision? (Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, 2021)

Chicago News Landscape (Center for Media Engagement in partnership with City Bureau, 2018)

Some goals of ecosystem mapping may include: identifying where there are gaps in news access; creating a list of current news providers; developing a rigorous framework for measuring improvements over time; testing assumptions about local news access; and identifying high potential areas of investment for local and national funders.

Sample Documents

MESSAGING & DONOR RECRUITMENT

How we know journalism is good for democracy
(Democracy Fund)

Lenfest Institute: Partner with Us
(Lenfest Institute for Journalism)

Press Forward Minnesota Effort Launches to Strengthen Local News
(Press Forward Minnesota)

Press Forward Wichita to Level Up Local News
(Wichita Foundation)

Wichita Foundation Joins Press Forward, A National Effort to Revitalize Local News
(Wichita Foundation)

HIRING

Minnesota Coordinator (McKnight Foundation)

Scope of Work (Wichita Foundation)

WF is interested in engaging a consultant to better understand its Fund for Wichita (unrestricted fund) outcomes and opportunity gaps. WF would like to partner with a consultant to answer the following questions:

- Are there any unintended consequences or side effects – positive or negative – resulting from our Fund for Wichita work?
- To what extent has the Fund for Wichita achieved its intended outcomes and objectives?
- How do we define the overall impact of the Fund for Wichita and/or communicate it?
- What factors have contributed to the successes and/ or challenges faced by grantees?
- What lessons can be learned from the program's implementation and impact?
- What else needs to be done to truly "move the needle?" What does it mean to "move the needle?"
- Do we have the correct level of human and financial capacity to impact this work at a deep level?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Info Challenge Seeks Information Solutions in Wichita
(Wichita Foundation)

WF News And Info Fund Invests $100,000 In National Partnership To Kickstart Three Information Sources
(Wichita Foundation)

Wichita Journalism Collaborative Focuses On Mental Health Solutions
(Wichita Foundation)

WF, Envision And Sonify Collaborate On Data-Driven Audio Solutions For The Blind And Visually Impaired
(Wichita Foundation)