

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Open Call on Closing Local Coverage Gaps

Apply through
11:59 p.m. ET / 8:59 p.m. PT
June 12, 2024

Press
Forward 

pressforward.news

Open Call on Closing Local Coverage Gaps

Providing General Operating Support for Newsrooms

Press Forward's first open call will address longstanding inequities in journalism coverage and practice in the U.S. by investing in small, local newsrooms that provide original reporting to underserved communities.

This open call focuses on the following funding priority: **Closing longstanding inequalities in journalism coverage and practice.**

Press Forward will move resources to newsrooms and organizations that are improving diversity of experience and thought along with the availability of accurate and responsive news and information in underserved communities.

Through this Open Call on Closing Local Coverage Gaps, at least 100 newsrooms will receive around \$100,000 each in unrestricted funds over two years.

These program guidelines include eligibility requirements, 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. All further questions should be directed to grants@pressforward.news.

Applications close on Wednesday, June 12, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. ET / 8:59 p.m. PT. Awards will be announced in early fall 2024.

Connect:

Email: grants@pressforward.news

Website: <https://www.pressforward.news>

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

Steps to Apply

1. Review this document, the Open Call Program Guidelines.
2. Register your organization on [JustFund](#) (note: it may take up to 48 hours for your registration to be approved).
3. Create your organizational profile via the Common Application on JustFund.
4. Prepare your responses to the three questions and gather necessary additional materials for the Press Forward Open Call on Closing Local Coverage Gaps application.
5. Submit application by June 12, 11:59 p.m. ET / 8:59 p.m. PT.

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

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Eligibility Requirements

This open call will invest in small, local news outlets that provide original reporting to underserved communities. Press Forward aims to reimagine local news across the country and understands that addressing this growing crisis in news and information will require a variety of solutions and models.

Eligible applicants must be local news outlets focused on providing and producing original local reporting.

Applicants must meet all of the following requirements:

- An operating budget of less than \$1 million for 2024
- In operation and publishing since at least September 1, 2023
- A commitment to editorial excellence, editorial independence, and transparency

Applicants can be:

- 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations or for-profit organizations
- For-profits with an established 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor (note: fiscal sponsor is not required for for-profits to apply)
- University or college student newsrooms producing original reporting that is community-facing

The following types of organizations are not eligible to apply:

- Outlets in which the majority of content is not focused on local news
- Organizations with an operating budget greater than \$1 million for 2024
- Start-up organizations that have not been publishing since at least September 1, 2023
- 501(c)(4) organizations

For more information about eligibility criteria, please see the Frequently Asked Questions section on page 9.

Grant Awards

Press Forward intends to offer grants of around \$100,000 to at least 100 newsrooms.

- All grants will be unrestricted. This means all grants will be made with the intention of serving as mission-building, general operating support.
- Grants will be awarded in two installments (two payments of around \$50,000).
- The expected grant period will be two years, Sept. 1, 2024 – Aug. 31, 2026.
- Grantees will be required to submit a short report after year one in order to receive the second grant installment.
- Press Forward reserves the right to award amounts outside of this dollar range.
- Grantees will be eligible for and encouraged to participate in grantee capacity building opportunities throughout the life of the grant.

Key Dates

April 30	Applications open. Apply now.
May 9 11 am PT/2 pm ET	Information session for applicants. Register.
June 3 11 am PT/2 pm ET	Open call Q&A for applicants with Press Forward staff. Register.
June 12 11:59 p.m. ET	Application window closes.
Early fall 2024	Grant awards are announced.

Evaluation Criteria & Review Process

We encourage applicants to review these criteria as they prepare their grant applications, as Press Forward will prioritize applications that demonstrate the following:

- **Addressing gaps in coverage** | We will prioritize organizations that are producing and delivering news and information to underserved audiences, such as communities of color, linguistically diverse communities, low-wealth rural communities, and others not adequately served, reached, or represented.
- **Community-centered** | We will support news outlets that can demonstrate a commitment to community listening and audience research, especially those intentionally gathering audience feedback to guide their work.
- **Collaboration** | We will prioritize organizations that have evidence of strong networks and partnerships with members of their community.
- **Sustainability** | Using [LION Publishers' definition](#) of sustainability as a framework, we will prioritize outlets that are intentional about their editorial impact, operational resilience, and/or financial health. We will support organizations that have a clear plan for how they will use this investment as a foundational step toward developing and maintaining a long-term business model.
- **Leadership** | We will support leaders who reflect the community served, listen to the community, and have a clear vision for how to effectively serve the local news needs of the community.

To view the application questions, please see the Application section on page 7.

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 community impact. Reviewers will be sourced from the journalism/local news field as well as from philanthropy.

Representatives of applicant organizations **are** eligible to be considered as reviewers and will be assigned applications to review that minimize conflicts of interest. 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.

To help fairly evaluate the applications, reviewers will be assigned applications within one of four categories (“budgets” refers to 2024 operating budgets).

Nonprofits	For-profits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budgets under \$500,000• Budgets between \$500,000 and \$1 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Budgets under \$500,000• Budgets between \$500,000 and \$1 million

About the Application

The application process on the grantmaking platform JustFund is made up of three parts:

1. Register for a JustFund account
2. Complete JustFund's Common Application to create a profile.
3. Submit your application for Press Forward's Open Call on Closing Local Coverage Gaps.

Here is a [link](#) to a step-by-step guide. For application tips and access to additional support, please see the Resources section on page 9.

Organizational profile via the Common Application

Funders outside of the Press Forward coalition will have access to this section.

For support, [see](#) an instructional video of the Common Application being filled out [here](#) and a PDF of the Common Application [here](#).

The Common Application will ask you to provide information on your organization's mission and leadership. Under Team Description, Press Forward recommends you address your leadership's vision for how to effectively serve the local news needs of the community.

Press Forward Open Call on Closing Local Coverage Gaps application

This section will be visible only to Press Forward funding partners.

Please keep responses to each question to 500 words or less.

1. **Describe the current state of the local news ecosystem in your region.** How is it served (or underserved) by media and funders? How does your news outlet partner effectively within the local news ecosystem?
2. **Describe the specific audiences your outlet serves and how it serves them.** What are the specific information gaps your organization fills? Include examples of how your outlet is focused on providing accessible, local, community-focused journalism.
3. **What would funding from Press Forward enable for your news organization?** Please share how this funding will help you strengthen your financial health, strengthen your operational resilience and/or editorial impact.

Additional materials:

** Indicates required fields. All other fields are considered optional.*

- Grant amount requested*: Grant funding is expected to be around \$100,000 distributed over two years. If you are seeking an amount less than that, please use the financial need question below to explain your request (note: this is a number field).
- Financial need
- Attachments:
 - Current year operating budget *
 - Strategic plan or business plan *
 - Sample of your outlet's coverage *
- Notes - Do you plan to use these funds to join a journalism support group or hire a service provider? If yes, which one(s)?
- Additional attachments: If you have additional information you would like to share, please do so here. You may include multiple attachments and a website link.
 - Letter or video (max. two minutes) of support from a member of your audience or a local partner

Resources

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

Info Sessions and Application Support

- Information Session for Applicants | May 9, 11 a.m. PT/2 p.m. ET. [Register](#).
- Open Call Q&A for Applicants with Press Forward Staff | June 3, 11 a.m. PT/2 p.m. ET. [Register](#).

Both sessions will be recorded for those who cannot attend.

- Press Forward has partnered with the Lenfest Institute to offer all applicants a complimentary one-hour session with a fundraising coach to help fine-tune their application. [Register](#).

Important Tips

Registering your organization on JustFund

- If you are creating a profile on JustFund for the first time, you will need to register. When registering your organization, please list Press Forward as the funding opportunity to which you are applying.
- If you already have a JustFund profile, you can access the Closing Local Coverage Gaps application on the platform under Funding Opportunities – or via this [link](#).
- If you are a nonprofit, JustFund needs to approve your registration before you can apply to funding opportunities. This can take up to one business day.

Completing Your Application

- We are looking for s specific information in the organizational profile section via the Common Application on JustFund. Press Forward recommends using the organization and team description sections to address your leadership's vision for how to effectively serve the local news needs of the community.
- Keep in mind that JustFund has limited formatting options. Please keep responses to the application's three questions to 500 words or less each. You are unable to revise your application once submitted.

Frequently Asked Questions

Open Call Criteria

Why is this open call limited to small newsrooms?

Small newsrooms do important original reporting but are often less likely to be reached by institutional funders and have a harder time getting the attention of donors. In recent years, the number of local news start-ups meeting local needs has grown, and we are trying to meet the field where it is.

What do you mean by “underserved communities”?

Press Forward wants to ensure that local coverage meets the needs of communities of color, linguistically diverse communities, low-wealth rural communities, and others not adequately served, reached, or represented.

Eligibility Requirements

What type of organizations are eligible to apply? Nonprofit and for-profit news outlets with annual operating budgets of less than \$1 million for 2024 are eligible to apply. The outlets must be in operation and publishing since at least Sept. 1, 2023.

Can public media apply?

Yes, public media is eligible to apply if the organization meets the eligibility criteria. Press Forward reserves the right to discern if an organization meets the established criteria and will do so on a case-by-case basis.

Can news collaboratives apply?

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

Can local Press Forward chapters apply?

No, Press Forward local chapters are not eligible to apply. Locals are eligible to apply for Catalyst Funds. Learn more [here](#).

What if I’m not eligible to apply to this open call?

Press Forward will host additional open calls in the future. In the meantime, we recommend that you register on JustFund and submit your organizational profile to Press Forward. Your profile will be visible to all Press Forward partners.

Application Process and Help

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

Press Forward has partnered with the Lenfest Institute to offer all applicants a complimentary one-hour session with a fundraising coach to help fine-tune your application. [Register](#).

How long will it take to complete the application?

The application is made up of two parts: creating your organizational profile via the Common Application on JustFund and answering the three open call questions on the grant application and submitting additional materials. The organizational profile should take less than an hour to complete. For support, see an instructional video of the Common Application being filled out [here](#) and a PDF of the Common Application [here](#). The three questions on the grant application may require a few additional hours to prepare.

I have more information I want to share about my organization. How can I share that?

All supplemental information can be shared via the optional “additional attachments” section of the application. You may include multiple attachments and a website link.

Review Process

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 community impact. Reviewers will be sourced from the journalism/local news field as well as from philanthropy.

Grant Application Platform (JustFund)

What is JustFund?

JustFund is Press Forward's grants management platform partner. JustFund was created to remove traditional barriers in philanthropy and to simplify the grants application process for organizations. The platform offers a Common Application and was designed to save applicants time and give them access to multiple funding opportunities simultaneously.

Who will see my organizational profile? Will it be available to the general public?

When an organization creates a profile on JustFund, that profile is also available to all Press Forward coalition members plus the hundreds of donors, program officers, and philanthropic advisors that use JustFund to find and fund new grantees.

Press Forward Chapters and Additional Funding

My organization got a grant from a Press Forward local chapter. Can we apply?

Yes, you can receive funding more than once from Press Forward regardless of the original funding channels (Aligned Grantmaking, Locals, or the Pooled Fund.)

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 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.

Can I receive funding more than once from Press Forward?

Yes, you can receive funding more than once from Press Forward regardless of the original funding channels (Aligned Grantmaking, Locals, or the Pooled Fund.)

Am I eligible to apply if I've received funding through Aligned Grantmaking?

Yes, you can receive funding more than once from Press Forward regardless of the original funding channels (Aligned Grantmaking, Locals, or the Pooled Fund.)

What do you mean by "Aligned Grantmaking"?

The bulk of funding committed to Press Forward so far is being invested through Aligned Grantmaking, where individual funders give directly to local news initiatives.

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 our democracy 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:** A number of 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.