

Press Forward VT Community Collaboration Grant 2026

Vermont Community Foundation

Guidelines

Across the country, people and organizations are coming together to support and strengthen a civic resource we often take for granted—local news. In a world full of noise, local news offers something distinct: trusted information that connects people, helps them make sense of issues, and enables them to engage in solving community challenges together. Quite simply, local news is a public good that is worth investing in.

But local news is at a crossroads. In just 20 years, newspaper circulation, nationally, has been cut in half; advertising revenue has dropped by 80 percent, and more than 2,800 local papers have shut their doors. In that same time, Vermont has lost nearly three-quarters of its newsroom employees and one-fifth of its outlets.

In the face of these challenges, the Vermont Community Foundation (VCF) is proud to be a part of Press Forward, a nationwide initiative to strengthen local news. As the Vermont chapter of Press Forward, VCF will mobilize philanthropic investment throughout the local news sector through 2028. The Community Collaboration grant is the first competitive grantmaking opportunity VCF is making available to do this important work.

In 2025, VCF commissioned a Local News & Information Report to better understand the current state of local news: where we are now, where we want to go from here, and how we might get there. Through deep community engagement, we learned that local news has an opportunity to enhance its connections with Vermonters: more people want to see themselves represented in stories, and they want more accessible and solutions-oriented journalism. Currently, some Vermonters rely on information from trusted community partners instead of from traditional media. At the same time, local news often lacks the capacity to comprehensively cover local news and community interests, and to make this coverage accessible to a broad range of Vermonters.

These findings represent an opportunity for more collaboration between community organizations, local news, and the people they serve. VCF's Community Collaboration grant seeks to support creative approaches to this type of partnership.

Broadly, this grant will support collaboration between a community organization or municipal entity and an information or news provider to reach a new audience and/or create new community-driven content. These collaborations can be used to pilot or experiment with new models that achieve these goals, build relationships while maintaining journalistic integrity, and

to expand on existing collaborations.

Nonprofit and governmental entities are eligible to apply. Applications should include one community organization or municipal entity (ex: nonprofit, school, library, etc.) and one information or news provider, with one entity being the lead applicant. Nonprofit lead applicants may partner with a for-profit news outlet.

Successful applications will:

- Demonstrate how the proposed work will support both local news and communities
- Be informed by the findings of the Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report
- Provide evidence of community buy-in, interest, and/or engagement
- Demonstrate that the work will result in news outlets reaching new audiences and/or creating new community-driven content
- Present ideas for how this work could be sustained after the grant is expended and how this model may be replicated in other towns/regions

This program will prioritize projects that:

- Address one or more community-related need, challenge, or opportunity as identified in the Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report

Applications that address a community-related need, challenge, or opportunity not identified in the report will be considered, but applicants must describe why the need, challenge, or opportunity is relevant and timely.

Examples of outcomes may include but are not limited to:

- Building relationships between communities, especially underserved ones, and news outlets to expand the coverage of people and topics
- Identifying and collaborating with non-traditional community leaders to better understand audience needs and barriers to access
- Developing or using new media formats, platforms, or technologies to reach new audiences
- Engaging and training community members to be community journalists or documenters, producing community-driven and solutions-oriented news and information for dissemination
- Developing new features and products that are informed by and responsive to community needs

Eligible Applicants

Applicants must be Vermont-based local news outlets with reporters in Vermont creating

original local news content, or a Vermont-based community organization partnering with an eligible news outlet.

The applicant organization must be tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or must be a public agency, municipality or religious entity in the state of Vermont. Alternatively, nonprofit organizations or community groups who do not have 501(c)(3) status may apply for this grant if another tax-exempt organization acts as a fiscal sponsor, and if the grant's purpose is deemed charitable by the VCF.

For-profit organizations may NOT submit an application, but for-profit news outlets may serve as the project partner on an application submitted by an eligible nonprofit or municipality.

Guidance for Proposals

Applications should describe the project and the intended audience, with a timeline and workplan, as well as an explanation of how the project will reach a new audience and/or create new community-driven content. A project budget is required.

Here are some examples of what the program will fund:

- Community listening sessions, events, or other grassroots outreach organized by a community organization and news outlet to inform coverage. Novel and culturally relevant approaches to this engagement are highly encouraged.
- Engagement with non-traditional leaders that leads to concrete projects that address audience needs and barriers to access
- Demonstration projects using audio, video, WhatsApp, or other nontraditional methods of communication to reach new audiences
- A community journalist training program to empower people to pitch and cover stories that interest them and their communities, or to become documenters for public meetings or other events
- New columns, newsletters, podcasts, audio stories or other products created by communities with support from news outlets

This list is not exhaustive; new, creative ideas informed by community needs are highly encouraged, though this grant may also be used to support the expansion of existing initiatives that further the goals of this grant opportunity.

Funds may be used for salaries, benefits, contracted workers, project materials and equipment, reasonable overhead costs, and similar, necessary project expenses.

What We Don't Fund

- Projects aimed at a national audience

- Capital costs and campaigns, unless the capital investment is needed for an activity or event that meets the grant program goals (for example, eligible expenses may include purchase of equipment to produce a podcast)
- Ongoing, recurring, or annual events
- Event sponsorships
- Projects that are not informed by and/or do not prioritize community engagement
- Debt reduction
- Individuals – though salaries are an eligible expense
- Expenses that have already been incurred
- Requests for general operating support
- Programs with religious instruction

Grant Size

VCF intends to make approximately 10-15 grant awards of up to \$10,000 per award

Application Deadline & Notification

Applications will be accepted between August 25 –October 9, 2026. Applications must be received by 5PM on October 9, 2026, in order to be considered. We anticipate notifying applicants of grant decisions by December 2026. Grants can be used to cover activities beginning in January 2027 and extending through December 2027.

You may view the full program guidelines online [here](#).

Helpful Hints

- Character limits include spaces and punctuation.
- Be sure to save your work frequently by clicking the "Save" button at the bottom of the page as the system will log out after 90 minutes of inactivity.
- The size of text boxes can be adjusted by dragging on the lower right corner.
- Create a PDF version of your application via the "Application Packet" button at the top of the page. All content and attachments will be included.

All applications must be submitted electronically to the Vermont Community Foundation through the application form in the Online Grants Manager. If you are viewing a PDF version of the application questions, please note that you must log on to your online account to access the online form at www.vermontcf.org/OGM. Applications will not be accepted by mail or email.

If you have questions about the Online Grants Manager, please

contact emarks@vermontcf.org. With questions related to the Community Collaboration program, please contact Haley Pero at hpero@vermontcf.org or 802.828.7917.

If you need an accommodation to support successfully making a grant submission, please contact jschmidt@vermontcf.org.

Organization Information

The questions in this section should be answered in reference to the applying organization / lead applicant, not the project partner.

What is your organization's annual operating budget?*

Character Limit: 20

Financial Statements - Current Fiscal Year*

Upload a copy of your organization's budget to actual, including both revenue and expenses, from its current fiscal year. Sample documents can be downloaded from the Community Foundation's website - visit our Online Grants Center FAQ (scroll to the middle section) for more details.

File Size Limit: 3 MB

What status best describes the applicant?*

Our grants must be paid to a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, place of worship/religious group, or town/municipal agency. If your organization or group does not fall into one of these categories, you will need to use a fiscal sponsor. If you have questions, please contact 802-388-3355 opt.6, or email grants@vermontcf.org. We are happy to talk through your options.

Choices

Municipal entity (i.e., town, public school, or other municipal department or agency)

Registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit

Place of worship or religious group

Other - Please provide details to your answer in the next question.

Use this space to provide additional information about the applicant's status (if applicable).

If you have a fiscal sponsor—or if you operate under the umbrella of a larger registered nonprofit—provide their name below.

Character Limit: 200

Fiscal Sponsor Agreement Form (if applicable)

Download a blank Fiscal Sponsor Agreement Form ([click here to download the form](#)) and forward it to your fiscal sponsor to print, fill out, and sign. The form must be filled out completely and you must use the official VCF form. 501(c)(3) nonprofit, place of

worship/religious group, or town/municipal agency; If your organization or group does not fall into one of these categories, you will need to use a fiscal sponsor. Please call 802-388-3355 opt 6 if you have questions.

Upload the form here.

File Size Limit: 3 MB

Application Questions

Project Name*

Character Limit: 100

Lead Applicant (Project Partner 1)*

This applicant must be a nonprofit entity. Please share 1-2 paragraphs about your organization.

Character Limit: 1000

Project Partner*

The partner may be a nonprofit or for-profit entity. Please share 1-2 paragraphs about your partner organization and the primary contact for this project.

Character Limit: 1000

Project Summary*

Please provide a 1-2 sentence summary of your project.

Character Limit: 400

Is this a new project or expansion of an existing project?*

Choices

New Project

Expansion of Existing Project

Total Amount Requested*

Maximum grant amount: \$10,000

Character Limit: 20

Geographic Area Served*

Where will your project happen? Provide town names and/or counties.

Character Limit: 400

Project Description*

Describe this collaboration and your project activities.

Character Limit: 2000

Leadership*

Who will provide editorial leadership and community leadership for this project? What background or experience do they bring that will help this project succeed? What responsibilities will each party hold, and how will decisions be made as the project progresses?

Character Limit: 1000

Project Objectives/Outcomes*

Please describe how the project will help local news and information reach a new audience and/or create new community-driven content. List 2-3 measurable outcomes you hope to achieve.

Character Limit: 1000

Addressing Challenges, Needs, or Opportunities*

How does this project address one or more community-related needs, challenges, or opportunities as identified in the Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report? Or, how does it address another challenge, need or opportunity that is relevant and timely?

Character Limit: 1000

Project Timeline*

Briefly outline the milestones and key steps in your project leading up to and including the presentation of this project in the community. If dates are uncertain, a general timeframe is acceptable. Please note the grant term is January 1, 2027 to December 31, 2027.

Character Limit: 1500

Project Sustainability*

Please describe how this work and/or its impacts may be sustained after the grant is expended and whether this model could be replicated in other towns/regions.

Character Limit: 500

Project Budget - Itemized*

Attach a copy of your estimated project budget. You should include both expenses and revenue, as well as pending and secured support. *Sample documents can be downloaded from the Community Foundation's website - visit our [Resources for Grantseekers page](#) for more details.*

File Size Limit: 3 MB

Website*

Please share a link to your organization's website or other web resource that tells us more about this project.

Character Limit: 2000

Optional: Supporting Materials

If you have any supporting materials that you would like to share, please upload it here. File types accepted include png, jpeg, and jpg.

File Size Limit: 3 MB

Letter of Support*

Please upload a brief letter of support for this project from your partnering organization, which includes the role they will play in implementing this project.

File Size Limit: 3 MB

Save and Submit

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By submitting your application to the Vermont Community Foundation, you give us permission to share your application and information about your project with other potential funders, both individuals and foundations.