

Fall 2026

Press Forward Vermont: News & Community Collaboration Grant



Vermont
Community
Foundation



Press Forward: A National Initiative

Press Forward is a **network** with over 40 chapters nationwide, working to strengthen local news so communities stay informed, connected and engaged.

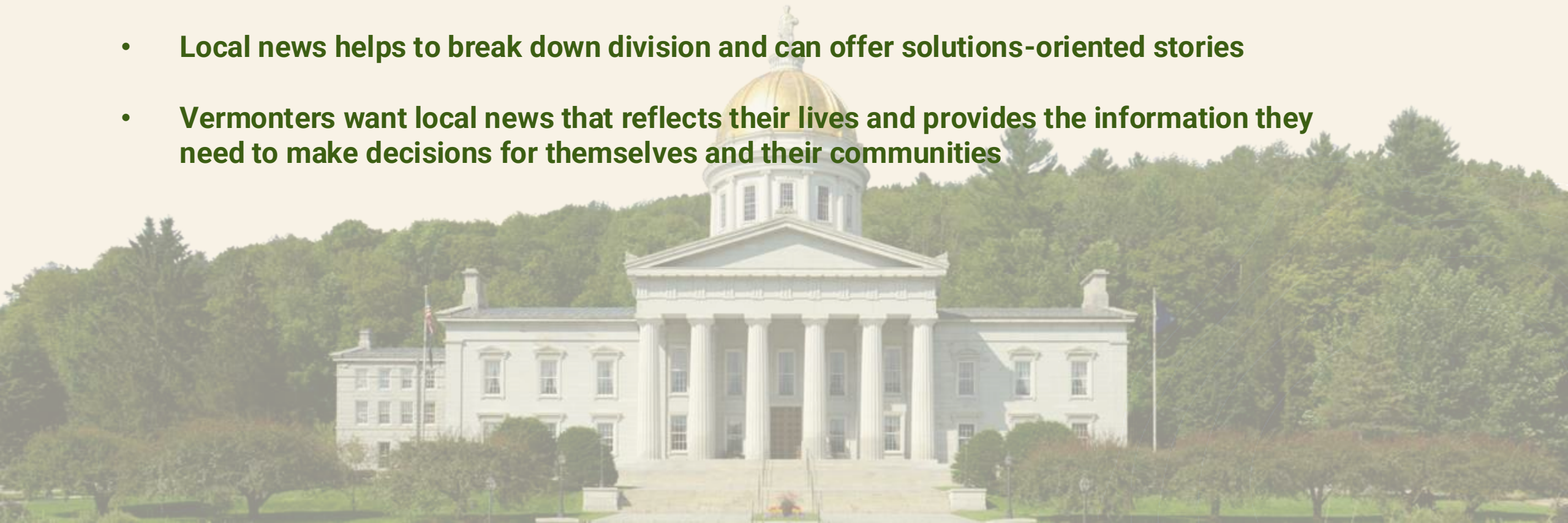
As a nationwide philanthropic initiative with hundreds of foundations, funders and donors pooling their investments, this effort is designed to **strengthen local news ecosystems** by investing in independent journalism, testing new local newsroom models, supporting regional and statewide collaboration, and expanding reporting capacity.

In 2024, VCF was selected as a partner in the national Press Forward initiative and launched **Press Forward Vermont** to strengthen local news statewide.



Why Local News?

- Local news is a core function for a civically engaged community
- Local news and information keeps people connected and builds social cohesion
- Local news helps to break down division and can offer solutions-oriented stories
- Vermonters want local news that reflects their lives and provides the information they need to make decisions for themselves and their communities





Why Now?

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**.
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.

Vermonters value local news, but the way they access and consume it has changed. What they want from local news has also evolved.



Key Challenges

VCF's Vermont News and Information Ecosystem Research found:

- The way news is produced and consumed has changed – meaning **old business models that rely on ads and subscriptions no longer work for local newsrooms**
- The **loss of key public funding streams** is increasing pressure on newsrooms
- **Newsrooms operate with limited staff**; many rely on one or two people, and/or volunteers – limiting capacity to cover local issues and raising concerns about succession.
- **Some communities**, especially youth, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ+ Vermonters, and others historically underrepresented, **do not see their experiences or things that matter to them covered in local news.**
- **Access barriers persist**, including cost, a mismatch between the format news is available in and the format people want to consume it in, language access, broadband gaps, and information overload.
- As content creation and platform options increase, **“last mile” delivery and fragmentation of news makes it harder for Vermonters to find trusted information and the localized news they’re seeking.**

Without action, Vermont risks a continued erosion of the local news landscape, which could have profound effects on how Vermonters engage with one another and within their communities.

Key Opportunities

01 Strengthen shared infrastructure to support formal editorial, operations, and revenue collaborations among newsrooms.

02 Deepen collaboration: build on efforts among news providers to develop a sustainable vision and strategy for local news in Vermont

03 Enable community journalism by creating relationships among Vermont's robust networks of newsrooms and community-based organizations.

04 Address "last mile" content issues: better understand audience engagement challenges and provide solutions-based reporting

05 Mobilize funding for local news and information, both from philanthropic initiative like Press Forward Vermont and through public funding for news and information.

The News and Community Collaboration Grant Opportunity



- **10-12 grants of up to \$10,000 each; 2027 performance period**
- **Vermont news or information provider + community partner**
 - For-profit newsrooms may be a partner, but nonprofit must apply
 - For-profit use of funds must be for the public good
- **Reach a new audience and/or create new community-informed content**
- **Pilot or experiment with new models or expand on existing collaborations**
- **We will prioritize projects that address one or more community-related need, challenge, or opportunity identified in the [Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report](#).**

Examples

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.

01 Community listening sessions, events, or other grassroots outreach to inform coverage. Novel and culturally relevant approaches to this engagement are highly encouraged.

02 Engagement with non-traditional leaders that leads to concrete projects that address audience needs and barriers to access

03 Demonstration projects using audio, video, WhatsApp, or other **nontraditional methods** of communication to reach new audiences

04 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

05 New columns, newsletters, podcasts, audio stories or other products created by communities with support from news outlets

Ineligible uses



- Projects aimed at a national audience
- Capital costs and campaigns
- Ongoing, recurring, or annual events
- Event sponsorships
- Projects not informed by/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



How to Apply

- Applications are submitted online at vermontcf.org/OGM
- Applying organization must be a nonprofit or otherwise tax exempt
- In addition to narrative responses, you will need
 - Financial statements from last fiscal year and this fiscal year
 - Itemized project budget
 - Letter of support from project partner
 - Fiscal sponsor form (if necessary)

> Guidelines

> Organization Information

> Application Questions

Project Name*

Lead Applicant (Project Partner 1)*

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

1,000 characters left of 1,000

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.

1,000 characters left of 1,000

Project Summary*

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

400 characters left of 400



Evaluation

- Application clearly demonstrates how the proposed work will support **both** local news and communities
- Application is informed by the findings of the Vermont News & Information Ecosystem Report
- Application provides evidence of community buy-in, interest, and/or engagement
- Application demonstrates that the work will result in news outlets reaching new audiences and/or creating new community-informed content, or expanding an existing effort to meet these goals
- Strong applications will present ideas for how this work could be sustained after the grant is expended and/or how this model could be replicated in other towns/regions



What to Expect if You're Awarded

- Grant awards are paid in full, by mailed check, within a month of award notification
- Award must be used as outlined in the application
- Please acknowledge funding from Press Forward and VCF in public materials & events
- A simple report will be due 1 year after the award is received



Q & A

Important Dates

**Updated! Deadline
extended to
October 16, 2026**
Applications Due

Applications must be received by 5PM on **October 16** in order to be considered.

December 2026
Grant Decisions

Date is approximate. If you have not received an email, you can check your organization's email history in your Online Grants Manager account.

January 2027
Grant Period Begins

Grant can cover activities beginning in January 2027.

December 2027
Grant Period Ends

Grant can cover activities through December 2027. Short report at the end of the year.

Contacts

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Thank you!

Vermont Community Foundation



Give Where
Your Heart Lives