

Press Forward Chicago



Table of Contents

Letter from the Executive Director	3
Meet the Team	4
Peer Learning Community	5
Case Study: Borderless Magazine	6
Case Study: Chicago News Weekly	7
Case Study: South Side Weekly	8
Capacity Building Grants	9
Immigration Journalism Grants.	10
Shared Services	11
Sponsorships	12
Events.	13
Fundraising	15
Governance.	17
Our Supporters.	18
Case Studies: Why We Give to Press Forward Chicago	19
Looking Ahead to 2026	20
Appendix A: Capacity Building Grant Recipients	21
Appendix B: Immigration Journalism Grant Recipients	22

CREDITS

Writer: Taylor Moore
Editors: Tracy Baim, Kimberly Bolton
Design: Vivian Gonzalez

Photography:
Hannah Carroll, Jamel Williams, Kathleen Hinkel,
Ajani Akinade, Borderless Magazine

Letter from the Executive Director

Welcome to the first annual report for Press Forward Chicago, a pooled fund based at The Chicago Community Trust. The Chicago effort is one of 44 Press Forward chapters across the United States, all working in coordination with Press Forward National.

The Press Forward movement was launched at the end of 2023 by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Knight Foundation, along with more than 80 other funders, to help create more sustainable media at the local level. Last year in Chicago, we awarded \$1.5 million to local news organizations. We gave \$883,059 in capacity building grants, focused on audience growth, audience engagement, or business sustainability, to 18 newsrooms.

We also supported 14 newsrooms with \$906,500 in immigration journalism funding. This effort was inspired by the work of existing foundations and journalism organizations trying to keep pace with the rapid developments and enforcement actions in Chicago and other cities.

In total, Press Forward Chicago has disbursed more than \$3.4 million in new funding to local news organizations since 2023.

We also raised more than \$3.7 million in new commitments in 2025, bringing our total to \$14.7 million raised in support of local news and information.

This will allow us to give out even more in direct funding and shared service supports in 2026. We will place particular emphasis on expanding shared services, guided by insights gathered from our early 2025 survey of newsroom needs. We are looking for solutions to create healthier communities through the support of strong and sustainable news and information ecosystems.

Some of this funding is targeted to specific coverage for education issues, and we are leaning into raising more funds for topic-based coverage in the coming years.

Chicago is the city of big shoulders, big dreams, and big solutions – and has a history of incredible journalists, from Ida B. Wells-Barnett to Studs Terkel. These pioneers knew that fact-based storytelling is a vital part of how we build our neighborhoods and communities. Press Forward Chicago is honored to help support modern-day journalists and journalism, alongside other incredible philanthropic institutions and individuals who care deeply about this region. **We are Chicago proud.**

Sincerely,



Meet the Team



Tracy Baim is the executive director of Press Forward Chicago. Tracy has worked in community journalism for 41 years, including nearly 40 years as co-founder and publisher of Windy City Times. She spent almost five years as publisher of the Chicago Reader.

She has authored 14 books, produced three films, and was a key organizer of major LGBTQ+ events such as Gay Games VII and the March on Springfield for Marriage Equality. She is also passionate about smaller footprint housing and has hosted two tiny home conferences to push for new solutions to the housing crisis.

Taylor Moore is the program specialist for Press Forward Chicago. Previously, Taylor was an associate program manager for the International Women’s Media Foundation, where she managed reporting grants, fellowships, awards, and press freedom initiatives for women journalists around the world.

She is an award-winning investigative journalist who has written for The Guardian, VICE, TIME, WBEZ, Chicago Reader, and many other publications. She is a member of the Asian American Journalists Association, Asian Americans / Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP), and Investigative Reporters & Editors.



Press Forward Chicago, a pooled fund for journalism based at The Chicago Community Trust, seeks to create healthier communities through the support of strong and sustainable news and information ecosystems. Press Forward Chicago advances the public interest by strengthening access to trustworthy local information, supporting an informed community, and enhancing residents’ ability to participate meaningfully in civic and community decisions.

Press Forward also supports public benefit reporting that enhances government transparency and accountability, helping to lessen the burdens of government by facilitating public understanding of local governmental processes and decisions. We do this work through supporting nonprofit educational activities that inform the public, increase access to reliable information, and promote civic understanding through the production and dissemination of fact-based, non-partisan local news.

Peer Learning Community



In 2024, Press Forward Chicago supported 13 newsrooms with two-year \$125,000 capacity building grants, totaling more than \$1.6 million in new funding for journalism.

The initial round of funding benefited small- and medium-sized newsrooms, serving audiences in Chicago and the suburbs of Lansing, Cicero, Berwyn, Forest Park, and Oak Park. With this funding, 69 percent increased their organizational capacity by hiring new staff, 23 percent expanded their social media presence and following, and 15 percent made progress transitioning to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

2024 Grant Recipients

Borderless Magazine
Chicago News Weekly
Cicero Independiente
Growing Community Media
Injustice Watch
Investigative Project on Race and Equity

Invisible Institute
La Raza
Lansing Journal
Reparations Media
Repair Production & Media
South Side Weekly
Windy City Times

Press Forward Chicago engaged Northwestern Medill Local News Accelerator to lead a peer learning community for our grant recipients.

In 2025, Medill hosted workshops on grant writing, revenue strategy, and collaborative revenue models. It also worked with the Investigative Project on Race and Equity and the International Women's Media Foundation to deliver specialized trainings in data journalism and journalist safety, respectively. The Peer Learning Community will conclude in June 2026.

Case Study: Borderless Magazine

In January 2017, the federal government reduced refugee admissions and temporarily suspended travel from seven majority-Muslim countries. A group of journalists sprang into action to cover the effects of this policy on Chicagoans and their families.

This project, known as “90 Days, 90 Voices,” led to the creation of Borderless Magazine, the only publication in Chicago dedicated to covering immigration and pan-immigrant stories. The magazine is fully bilingual, publishing stories and videos in English and Spanish. Borderless Magazine is a Press Forward Chicago grant recipient, receiving a \$125,000 capacity building grant in 2024, followed by additional support in 2025 to launch its visual journalism desk.



“Borderless has grown and matured exponentially since we got the grant,” said Executive Director and Co-Founder Nissa Rhee. Within two years, revenue has nearly tripled, and the magazine has hired a chief development officer, marketing and engagement manager, visuals editor, and photojournalist. “A lot of that has been made possible by the Press Forward Chicago investment and our strategic use of that to mature our business side of the operation.”

One of Rhee’s favorite stories from the magazine’s new visual desk profiles two Guatemalan American brothers who founded an organization called Boards Across Borders, where they collect new and used skateboard gear in the city and redistribute it in Guatemala. Photojournalist Camilla Forte’s story “went way beyond portraits. There are so many great action shots. It has a fun dimensionality and it’s just something I’ve never seen elsewhere.”



Investing in original, stereotype-busting imagery of immigrants is critical to narrative change, Rhee says. “So many people won’t respond to words, but they’ll respond to a photo.”

Borderless prides itself on being a steady voice as interest in immigration news ebbs and flows. “While the news cycle moves on, Borderless sticks with these communities.”

Case Study: Chicago News Weekly

Cheryl Mainor Norman has spent much of her 35-year career in media, notably as co-founder of Black Press Specialty Publications and as the first woman publisher of the Chicago Defender.

But in the past several years, the landscape has changed. Media outlets that once viewed one another as competitors now see themselves as peers and collaborators, said Mainor Norman, now the publisher of Chicago News Weekly.

She attributes much of this change to Press Forward Chicago and other organizations that exist to support newsrooms in the ecosystem. “Even calling it an ecosystem, for me, is new. Just a whole new language I have had to embrace,” said Mainor Norman.



Chicago News Weekly was founded in 2017 and publishes entertainment, politics and health news with a focus on covering Black Chicago. It is making the transition to a digital-first, multiplatform media company, with a suite of narrative and talk shows on its CNW Network and a podcast studio to incubate new ideas and new voices. Cornered, for example, is a limited-run podcast series by journalist Malachi Webster that follows three people as they fight evictions, organize against community violence, and seek community in locally owned businesses. Through its \$125,000 capacity building grant from Press Forward Chicago in 2024, Chicago News Weekly has been able to hire Laura Miller as managing editor/chief content officer. She has expanded its roster of freelancers and brought on student interns. One such intern, Elijah Lee, decided to pursue college after a summer internship with CNW and now has a weekly art column in the paper. Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief Kai El'Zabar instructs the interns and young journalists on the fundamentals of journalism.

Chicago News Weekly is an active participant in the Medill-led peer learning community and hosted a revenue collaboration training at its office for more than a dozen newsrooms. Mainor Norman was selected as a fellow in the 2026 Media Transformation Challenge @ Medill cohort, which she learned about through the peer learning community.

In the coming year, Chicago News Weekly is looking to bolster its sponsored content and advertising sales, in addition to enhancing sports and entertainment coverage. The goal is to become a resource for people to turn to “when you need a doctor, when you need a therapist, when you want to know what’s going on in local politics, when you want to know where the party is,” said Mainor Norman. “That’s what we’re building.”

Case Study: South Side Weekly



Since joining South Side Weekly in 2020, Malik Jackson has worn many hats at the newspaper: culture writer, housing editor, special projects coordinator, program manager, and now publisher.

At the time that the Weekly received a \$125,000 grant from Press Forward Chicago in 2024, it was undergoing a significant transition. The staff decided from then on to reorganize the business. South Side Weekly reactivated its volunteer team of senior editors, developed a forward-looking editorial strategy, and re-tooled its annual Best of the South Side issue. “Once that Press Forward funding came through, we finally had breathing room,” said Jackson. “That injection of cash gave us the space and the added capacity to actually talk about our operations for the first time that I had seen in a very, very long time.”

The nonprofit newsroom also received grants in 2025 from Press Forward Chicago and the Illinois Immigration Funder Collaborative to promote its part-time immigration editor and writer, Alma Campos, into a full-time position. Under Campos, the Weekly has focused on “breathing humanity into the broader news cycle,” in addition to policy-heavy stories, according to Jackson.

Defining the Weekly’s editorial direction and voice has made all the difference, says Jackson. “We’re in a better position to make appeals to philanthropic organizations and to determine—based on what we know about these audiences, what we want to cover, and how we want to cover it—where our distribution needs to go and what types of partners we need to bring in.” Jackson has also found the Press Forward Chicago peer learning community essential in creating bonds with other news organizations. “Now that we’ve been in conversation with each other through the peer learning community, and wrapping our heads around our own individual challenges, it creates these clear opportunities to come in and to think together.”

Capacity Building Grants



Chicago has a robust news ecosystem that includes hyperlocal and regional news outlets serving the information needs of its communities. However, many of these outlets have expressed the need for support in navigating the complexities of the media landscape, such as adapting to digital changes, diversifying revenue streams, and building sustainable business models.

Press Forward Chicago focused on applications that sought to grow audience numbers and engagement, as well as applications that sought to launch or scale business models with the goal of long-term sustainability. “These one-year capacity building grants were awarded to projects focused on either growing audience numbers and engagement, or launching or scaling business models with the goal of long-term sustainability.”

The following 18 organizations received a total of \$883,059:

Better Government Association (Illinois Answers Project)	Free Spirit Media
Block Club Chicago	New City Communications
Chalkbeat	Public Media Institute (Lumpen Radio)
Chicago Access Television (CAN TV)	Reader Institute for Community Journalism
Chicago Defender Charities Inc. (The Defender Legacy)	Record Community News Group
City Bureau	The Bigs Media
Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community	The NDIGO Foundation
Evanston RoundTable Media	True Star Foundation
	Westside Health Authority (The Culture)
	YWCA Metropolitan Chicago (StreetWise Magazine)

You can find short descriptions of these projects in Appendix A.

Immigration Journalism Grants

Press Forward Chicago and a group of funders came together in 2025 to create a funding pool specifically for increased immigration coverage. This coalition of funders includes the Democracy Fund, Field Foundation, Illinois Immigration Funder Collaborative, Joyce Foundation, Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, Press Forward Chicago, Schreiber Philanthropy, The Chicago Community Trust, and Walder Foundation.

The following 14 organizations received a total of \$906,500 in support of increased immigration reporting and expanded audience engagement.

Block Club Chicago
Borderless Magazine
Chicago Public Media
Chicago Reader
Cicero Independiente
City Bureau
Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community

Injustice Watch
La Raza Chicago
South Side Weekly
ProPublica
Public Media Institute (Lumpen Radio)
Reparations Media
The TRIIBE

With Press Forward Chicago support, Chicago Public Media will launch an immigration reporting hub that will amplify the work of WBEZ, Chicago Sun-Times, La Voz Chicago, and other newsrooms around the city. Additionally, City Bureau will launch a legal defense fund for journalists, which includes legal consultation and representation for up to 40 journalists.

Illinois Immigrants' Rights Groups: A Journalist's Guide

As part of a new collaboration funding additional journalistic coverage of immigration, Press Forward Chicago commissioned Public Narrative to create this toolkit for reporters covering these issues.

What follows is a thorough—but by no means all-inclusive—resource directory of immigrant rights' organizations in the Chicago area, with information on how to reach them. There are also some relevant national organizations listed as well.

The inclusion of these organizations does not imply endorsement or support for their work or mission; the purpose is to offer a guide for journalists seeking sources of information for their reporting.

Lastly, we have compiled a short list of safety and legal resources for journalists covering immigration issues on the ground.

ALIANZA AMERICAS
Website: alianzamerica.org/es
Contact Information:

info@alianzamerica.org
Mission & Description: The Chicago-based Alianza Americas has a stated mission "to create an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable way of life for migrant communities living in the United States and across the Americas." The group brings together and empowers community leaders, government agencies, labor organizers, and faith-based communities to address inequities, defend and promote democracy, defend human rights—including the right to mobility—and co-create narrative with migrants willing to tell their stories and advance Alianza's vision for a better future. Alianza's immigrant justice work involves educating the public on "the challenges, triumphs, and needs of migrants" and advocating for policies that enable them to "establish deep roots in a safe and dignified manner."

ARISE CHICAGO
Website: arisechicago.org
Contact Information: Shelly Ruzicka
Communications Director

shelly@arisechicago.org
Mission & Description: Founded in 1991 by a diverse group of religious leaders, Arise Chicago focuses on workers' rights and has periodically published a Workers Rights Manual in Spanish, Polish and English that covers laws specific to Illinois. The organization has also provided worker leadership development and partnered with workers to recover more than \$9 million in withheld wages and compensation. Arise Chicago published a toolkit for immigrant workers that provides information and resources—although not specific legal advice—to enable them to know their rights.

CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT PROGRESS
Website: centerforimmigrantprogress.org
Contact Information: Carmen Patlan
Executive Director
cpatlan@centerforimmigrantprogress.org

Mission & Description: A grassroots organization helmed by young leaders, the Center for Immigrant Progress has a mission "to build communities that provide protection, education, and social and economic opportunity for immigrant children and families," and a vision for "an immigrant community that is self-empowered and civically engaged to transform social structures that benefit all people." The Center advocates for policies to increase resources, protection and opportunity for immigrants, provides community members with a platform to inform decision-makers how anti-immigrant policies impact them and their families, conducts community education sessions to bring awareness to current issues, and provides leadership training to youth and young adults on how they can change the system through civic engagement, policy and organizing.

1 ILLINOIS IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS GROUPS: A JOURNALIST'S GUIDE

Lastly, to assist reporters on the ground, Press Forward Chicago hosted a Know Your Rights training in October and commissioned Public Narrative to create an immigration resource guide, which includes the contact information of more than 50 local organizations serving immigrants (for sourcing), national safety resources for journalists, and local hotlines for rapid-response legal representation.

Please contact Taylor Moore at tmoore@cct.org for access to this guide, written by freelance writer Ed Finkel.

Shared Services

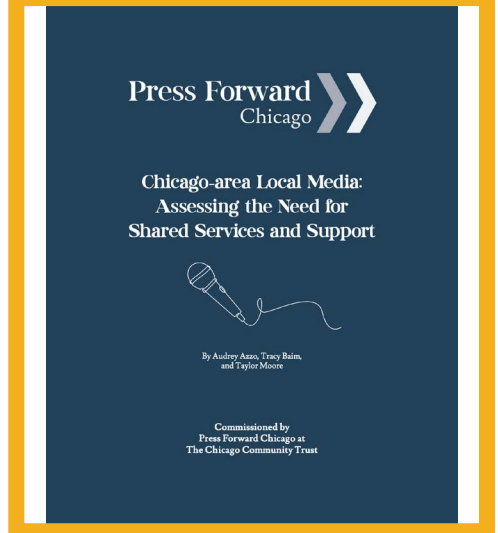
In early 2025, the Press Forward Chicago team designed a survey to assess the needs and goals of local news in the Chicago area, in collaboration with lead researcher Audrey Azzo.

We received 78 completed surveys out of the 114 distributed to qualifying community-based media—a response rate of about 70 percent. The survey presented nine categories of services (known hereafter as “shared services”) as essential to the sustainable functioning of most newsrooms, such as website support and business/HR operations, and asked organizations to rank them for importance.

In 2025, we released the resulting report, “Chicago-area Local Media: Assessing the Need for Shared Services and Support,” drawing upon the survey responses as well as qualitative feedback collected from two focus groups that convened 33 newsroom leaders.

The top five areas of need were audience growth, demographic and market research, fundraising support, grant writing, and advertising sales.

At Press Forward Chicago, we recognize a unique opportunity to pool resources as an industry. Shared services are critical to increasing the capacity of local newsrooms, which are under threat and under-resourced. We see this as a starting point for media sustainability and self-sufficiency—to make sure communities have the best and most authentic information they need and deserve.



This year, we rolled out our first shared services programs with two cohorts for email newsletter growth, working in collaboration with Christopher Hass of R16 Publishing and Melissa Harris and her team at M. Harris & Kern.

In 2026, we will launch programs related to grant writing, demographic research, advertising, and management training.

Sponsorships



Press Forward Chicago is committed to supporting trainings, workshops and convenings for the professional development of local journalists in Chicago. In 2025, we hosted a newsletter growth training for more than 20 journalists, led by Melissa Harris of M. Harris & Kern and John Pope of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists.

We were the lead sponsor for Public Narrative’s inaugural Connecting Media & Community conference, headlined by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Trymaine Lee and attended by more than 200 journalists, community organizers, educators, and civic leaders.

We were the exclusive sponsor for the Chicago Headline Club’s third-annual Chicago Media Career Fair, helping to drive a 70 percent increase in attendance. The event featured the participation of 10 newsrooms, 17 resumes reviews, and 63 professional photos taken.



We sponsored conference registrations and travel expenses to the Institute for Nonprofit News’ INN Days conference in Minneapolis, to the National Association of Hispanic Journalists conference in Chicago, and to The Chicago Network’s Launchpad Women’s Senior Leadership Summit.

We also supported a Perspectives event on public health crisis messaging and a WF Fund panel on Muslim narratives and representation in journalism.

Events

Influencers and Creators

In November 2025, Press Forward Chicago and The Onion co-hosted a lively gathering of local social media creators and influencers, journalists, funders, and social media marketing executives. Keynote speaker Liz Kelly Nelson, of Project C, presented research and resources about the changing creator and media landscape.

We also heard from Eric Rynston-Lobel of Medill Local News Initiative, journalist Natalia Perez-Gonzalez, Angela Massino of Chicago Public Media, Ayoko Djisseglo of HausCo, historian and creator Shermann “Dilla” Thomas, Jordan LaFlure of The Onion, and Ellie Artone of Social Currant.

In 2026, Press Forward Chicago will continue to explore ways to foster collaboration between news outlets, creators/influencers.



Education

In July, Press Forward Chicago and the Forefront Illinois Education Funders group co-hosted a panel at Impact House on the importance of education journalism in Chicago and why we need funders to step forward amid changes in federal funding.

We heard from ProPublica reporter Jodi S. Cohen, WBEZ reporter Sarah Karp, and Chalkbeat Chicago reporter Samantha Smylie about their experiences covering education.



The event was planned by Nedra Lucas of Crown Family Philanthropies, who also served as moderator, Caleb Herod of The Chicago Community Trust, and Mara Botman of Vivo Foundation.

Events



The State of Journalism

In April, we welcomed Heather Cox Richardson—historian and author—for an intimate speaking event with local civic leaders. During the event, Heather and Tracy talked about how history might inform our understanding of current events.



In November, the Executives' Club of Chicago hosted a "Bottom Lines: The New Rules of Journalism" panel, featuring Tracy Baim, Ginny McDermott of Loyola University Chicago, Melody Spann-Cooper of Midway Broadcasting Corporation, Tracy Brown of Chicago Public Media, Stephanie Lulay of Block Club Chicago, and Brad Edwards of BE Media.

Fundraising



In 2025, we started the year at about \$11 million in committed funds. As of the end of 2025, we have \$13.8 million committed; \$10.3 of that has come in (in addition to \$866,500 in aligned funding). In total, we have raised \$14.7 million, including aligned funding.

Press Forward Chicago hosted three major fundraising events in 2025 and worked with The Chicago Community Trust's Philanthropic Services team, including Adele Nandan, to engage hundreds of potential donors through in-person meetings, community events, and a direct-mail campaign.

In May, we hosted a reception at the penthouse of Steering Committee Member Ken O'Keefe and Jason Stephens, with support from co-hosts Christie Hefner, Daniel O. Ash, Kristen Mack, Andrea Sáenz, and Silvia Rivera. The gathering drew more than 100 people and raised about \$30,000.

In September, we hosted a "Taste of Chicago Media" reception at Bronzeville Winery, where we heard from leaders, reporters, and editors of key outlets serving Chicago's diverse South Side communities. More than 100 people attended, and about \$30,000 was raised from that event, which was planned in partnership with APS & Associates.

Fundraising



We have cultivated more than 100 new donors this year, including major institutions, family foundations, and individuals.

A key area of fundraising success has been topic-based journalism funding. Our immigration and education work are examples of this. Ten funders came together for the immigration collaborative, and two funders (Crown Family Philanthropies and IMC Chicago Charitable Foundation, in part through the Leading from the Front pooled fund) have helped us launch the educational coverage effort, which is a three-year commitment to have more reporters covering a wide range of education issues.

Many funders have a specific mission or missions around topic areas, and not specifically journalism. But more are understanding the critical role that journalism plays in covering and increasing knowledge about these issues. A pooled fund gives a multiplier effect for the dollars granted and helps create a barrier for funders concerned about supporting journalism in an area where they also fund nonprofits doing the work. The funds will be used not just for the direct journalism, but also “wraparound” supports that include translations, stipends to other media to run these stories, marketing to amplify this coverage, and tools to strengthen the local media outlets in these collaborations.

We also worked with Jessyca Dudley and her team at Bold Ventures to host funder-journalist-advocate convenings on health equity and criminal legal system coverage. These sessions sparked great ideas and innovative solutions to increase coverage on these subjects. We plan to do similar work for housing, the environment, business, and other key reporting areas.

Governance



Steering Committee

Andrea Sáenz, President and CEO,
The Chicago Community Trust

Daniel O. Ash, CEO, Field Foundation

Kayce Ataiyero, Chief External Affairs
Officer, Joyce Foundation

Gillian Darlow, CEO, Polk Bros. Foundation

Hartley Rogers, Executive Co-Chairman,
Hamilton Lane

Christie Hefner, business and
philanthropic leader

Kristen Mack, Vice President, MacArthur
Foundation

Ken O’Keefe, business and philanthropic
leader

John Palfrey, CEO, MacArthur Foundation

Silvia Rivera, Director, Local News,
MacArthur Foundation

David Snyder, CEO,
Economic Club of Chicago

Advisory Council

Steve Edwards, EVP for External Affairs
and Civic Engagement, Federal Reserve
Bank of Chicago

Sylvia Ewing, Vice President of Journalism
and Media Engagement, Public Narrative

Brenda Hernandez, Network Resources
Director, Allied Media Projects

Evan F. Moore, Press Secretary,
Chicago Public Schools

Taylor Moore, Program Specialist, Press
Forward Chicago

Gisela Orozco, writer, translator,
and copy editor

Hilesh Patel, consultant

Brandon Pope, President, NABJ Chicago

John Palfrey, CEO, MacArthur Foundation

Silvia Rivera, Director, Local News,
MacArthur Foundation

Lauren M. Woods, Director of Abundance,
Grand Victoria Foundation

Our Supporters



Additional Institutional Funders

Comer Family Foundation

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

Illinois Immigration Funder Collaborative

Schreiber Philanthropy

The Joseph Pedott Legacy Fund

Walder Foundation

Leading from the Front

Individual Donors

\$5,000 and up, in alphabetical order by last name

Patrick Carey

David Hiller

Sam Coady

Sharon Mylrea

Amy Falls & Hartley Rogers

Ken O'Keefe & Jason Stephens

Marshall Field V

John Palfrey

Judy & Bill Greffin

Laura Peracchio

Melissa Harris

Bruce Sagan & Bette Cerf Hill

Christie Hefner

David Snyder & Margaret Salamon

Elzie Higginbottom

Lilly Wachowski

Case Studies: Why We Give to Press Forward Chicago

We are grateful for our Day One supporters who have helped shape the framework and future of this initiative. Read, in their words, why they support Press Forward Chicago.

Silvia Rivera, Director, Local News, MacArthur Foundation



“What’s transforming Chicago’s media landscape is Press Forward Chicago’s role as a true backbone organization in convening funders, leveraging co-funding matches, and building collaborative solutions like its advertising partnership with Chicago Public Media or the Immigration Hub it helped support during a moment of crisis in our city. This is work that addresses immediate needs while setting the stage for long-term collaboration.”

Kayce Ataiyero, Chief External Affairs Officer, Joyce Foundation

“I support Press Forward Chicago because I believe in the vital role local news plays in fostering the civic health of communities. You can draw a straight line between the decline of local news and the decline of civic participation in this country.

“When people know less about what’s going on in their communities, they’re not only less informed—they’re less engaged and that weakens our democracy. Press Forward Chicago is supporting journalism that is critical connective tissue for communities, so they are empowered with the news and reliable information they need to make informed choices about the key issues affecting their lives.”



Christie Hefner, business and philanthropic leader



“In its short existence, Press Forward Chicago has significantly increased resources available to the local media ecosystem here, as a funder and a catalyst, bringing many new funders into the space and targeting resources toward specific subject areas like immigration.

“Looking ahead, I believe that there will be more and more opportunities to help outlets build sustainable business models through shared services, and that Chicago can and will become a national model.”

Looking Ahead to 2026

We are excited to carry forward the momentum of our shared services program in 2026.

In January, we launched a 10-week grant-writing boot camp for 20 newsrooms, led by Artistic Fundraising Group, with some newsrooms graduating into a year of subsidized grant writing support.



We have also partnered with Medill Local News Accelerator to conduct a demographic survey on behalf of 40 media outlets and with Loyola University Chicago to host a two-day management course for 20 emerging media leaders.

Additionally, we are collaborating with Chicago Public Media on a new model for advertising revenue that is expected to launch in 2026 and will provide a new revenue stream for more than 40 media outlets in the Chicago area. We are also looking into opportunities around fundraising, shared editor services, and collaborations between news outlets and local creators and influencers.

In April, we will host the first Illinois Local News Summit, which will convene journalists, elected officials, and leaders of civic, business and philanthropic organizations to discuss the state of local news and how we can advance the industry to support better news and information for all Illinoisians.

We will also launch new funding programs related to education journalism (in support of the November 2026 Chicago Board of Education races) and to revenue collaborations that strengthen multiple newsrooms or the ecosystem as a whole.

We are very excited about working with both Press Forward National and our regional partners in supporting local media. Our growth in fundraising and supports has been strong, and we see the topic-based work on immigration and education as leading to additional tracks that might include health equity, the criminal legal system, housing, the environment, business, and more.

The need is great, but there are great models in place that are already creating a stronger local media ecosystem. We just need to lean into those and be open to additional solutions that help provide what is needed for a vital and vibrant local news and information landscape.

Appendix A: Capacity Building Grant Recipients

Project Descriptions

Better Government Association (Illinois Answers Project)

Illinois Answers Project will audit its audience funnels to build reach and engagement with Chicago's South and West sides.

Block Club Chicago

Block Club Chicago will launch a direct mail campaign to reach new South and West Side audiences.

Chalkbeat

Chalkbeat Chicago will grow its audience through a one-year brand awareness campaign.

Chicago Access Television (CAN TV)

CAN TV will engage a consultant to create a fundraising strategy and donor engagement roadmap.

Chicago Defender Charities Inc (The Defender Legacy)

The Defender Legacy is a journalism initiative of Chicago Defender Charities that will train residents in journalism, publish monthly feature stories, and launch a resident story submission portal.

City Bureau

City Bureau will revamp its newsletter distribution with a focus on giving context behind important local policies and how people can get involved to address civic issues in their neighborhoods.

Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community

Chinatown Spotlight will expand editorial capacity and increase print news volume, frequency and distribution.

Evanston RoundTable Media

Evanston RoundTable will grow the audience of Raising Evanston, a new parenting-focused newsletter designed to engage younger families.

Free Spirit Media

Free Spirit Media will launch a weekly podcast series produced in part by young adults in FSM's creative workforce development program.

New City Communications

Newcity will upgrade its technology stack to improve and diversify its membership, subscription and audience revenue streams.

Public Media Institute (Lumpen Radio)

Lumpen Radio will strengthen audience development systems, multilingual programming, and new audience outreach strategies that will help focus efforts on underserved listeners in Chicago—particularly immigrant communities on the Southwest Side.

Reader Institute for Community Journalism

The Chicago Reader will diversify its revenue streams and grow its audience with a data-driven plan that builds off previous analyses of its content and audience distribution.

Record Community News Group

The Record North Shore will grow its audience and revenue streams, aiding its expansion into suburban Skokie.

The Bigs Media

The Bigs will expand its newsletter offerings and launch a social media advertising campaign to target new potential followers.

The NDIGO Foundation

NDIGO Studio will engage a consultant to focus on audience viewership and sponsorship strategies.

True Star Foundation

True Star Foundation will grow the audience and impact of its youth-led, weekly video podcast.

Westside Health Authority (The Culture)

The Culture will hire part-time audience and membership staffers, host an event series for the public, and hire a small newspaper delivery team in the Austin neighborhood.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago (StreetWise Magazine)

StreetWise Magazine will expand its speaker's bureau and grow its contributor network.

Appendix B: Immigration Journalism Grant Recipients

Project Descriptions

Block Club Chicago

Block Club Chicago will expand immigration coverage with funds for freelance reporters and photojournalists, translation, and public outreach.

Borderless Magazine

Borderless Magazine will launch a visuals team with a full-time editor and photojournalist.

Chicago Public Media

Chicago Public Media will launch a hub for immigration journalism and resources in Chicago, commission freelance stories from journalists with connections to immigrant communities, and expand bilingual and multilingual content, particularly through La Voz Chicago. It will also amplify the work of other members of the cohort, through its newsletters, newspaper, and radio programming.

Chicago Reader

The Chicago Reader will increase its reporting on immigration enforcement, particularly around under-covered topics, such as the effects on the unhoused, on African immigrant communities, and on mutual aid groups.

Cicero Independiente

Cicero Independiente will deepen immigration coverage in Cicero and Berwyn by funding a full-time youth and schools reporter, freelance reporting resources, translation services, and audience engagement efforts.

City Bureau

City Bureau will provide resources and launch a legal defense fund for journalists covering immigration and federal law enforcement actions.

Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community

Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community will bolster Chinatown Spotlight's audience development strategy and expand immigration coverage capacity.

Injustice Watch

Injustice Watch will expand its immigration court-related reporting, in addition to translations, community engagement, and related operational/security costs.

La Raza Chicago

La Raza will launch a multipronged project to catalyze Spanish-language immigration journalism in Chicago.

South Side Weekly

South Side Weekly will hire a full-time immigration reporter and editor, responsible for coordinating a cohort of freelancers to expand human-focused coverage of immigrants on the South Side.

ProPublica

ProPublica will embark on a major immigration-related reporting project in Chicago.

Public Media Institute (Lumpen Radio)

Lumpen Radio will develop 10 episodes of Boletín Migrante, its Spanish-language radio series, publish know-your-rights media, and host live pop-up events.

Reparations Media

Reparations Media will publish short-form audio features about immigrant communities in Chicago through the Change Agents Podcast Journalism Lab.

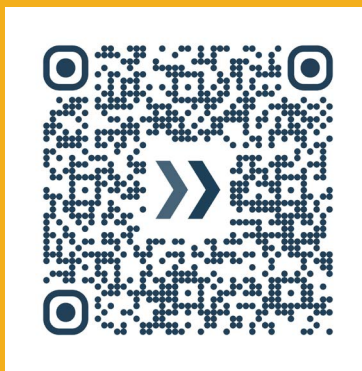
The TRiiBE

The TRiiBE will increase its coverage of federal immigration enforcement, with an eye toward community response and ways that local policies impact immigration justice nationwide.

Contact:
Tracy Baim
Executive Director
Press Forward Chicago
tbaim@cct.org

The Chicago Community Trust
33 South State Street, Suite 750
Chicago, IL 60603
312-565-2687

**DONATE TO
PRESS FOWARD CHICAGO**



Press Forward
Chicago 

The logo for Press Forward Chicago, featuring the text "Press Forward" in a large, bold, serif font, "Chicago" in a smaller, bold, serif font below it, and a graphic of two dark blue chevrons pointing to the right.