



Illinois LOCAL NEWS SUMMIT^{NEWS} 2026

Final Report Illinois Local News Summit

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Hosted by Press Forward Chicago & Press Forward Springfield

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Press Forward
Chicago 

Press Forward
Springfield 

A Message from Summit Organizers

When Press Forward Chicago and Press Forward Springfield began planning the Illinois Local News Summit, the goal was simple: convene the people who need to shape the future of local news in Illinois. We aimed to explore the sector's challenges and opportunities, expand the network of stakeholders, and identify new policy priorities.

What happened on April 10, 2026, at the Union League Club in Chicago exceeded those goals in every way.

Four hundred people filled the room, including funders, academics, elected officials, policymakers, journalists, and civic leaders. Many more were turned away in the weeks before. Poets Mark Turcotte and Tara Betts set the tone at the start, reminding everyone that this work is not just policy and data. It is about people, community, and what is lost when their stories go untold.

The conversations that followed reflected the urgency of this moment. Illinois Governor JB Pritzker opened by naming the threats plainly: corporate consolidation, federal defunding of public media, and political pressure on journalists. Tim Franklin, founding director of Northwestern Medill's Local News Initiative, followed with data. Nine Illinois counties are now "news deserts" (i.e. counties that have no local news source of any kind), four more than just a year ago, and 47% of Illinois counties are low-information areas. The research is clear: strong local news plays a vital public role in supporting civic participation, reducing government corruption, and helping communities hold leaders accountable.

As Dale Anglin, director of Press Forward National, noted, local news is not disappearing; it is transforming, and that transformation will require collective effort. But this was not a day defined by crisis. Illinois implemented the first-in-the-nation tax incentives to help local news. Philanthropy is organizing at a scale not seen before. Public media stations are exploring and implementing new models. Student journalists are gaining real-world experience while helping bring coverage to news deserts and low-information communities.

This report captures the key themes and ideas that emerged across the day. It is intended as a resource for funders, policymakers, journalists, and community members, as we figure out what comes next together.



Stacy Reed (left) and Tracy Baim.

The path forward depends on including everyone and building toward something more abundant, a point underscored in closing by Lauren Woods, director of abundance at the Grand Victoria Foundation. The summit made clear that the tools, the relationships, and the political will to lead a national response are here, and that Illinois is already being looked to as a model for what is possible.

The number of people willing to be at this table is larger than ever. We are all part of the solution, and the next phase of this work will depend on what each of us chooses to do. You don't have to start big to make an impact. Find one place where you can contribute and begin.

Tracy Baim
Executive Director
Press Forward Chicago
The Chicago Community Trust



Stacy Reed
Chief Program Officer
Press Forward Springfield
Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln



Illinois Local News Summit 2026



Andrea Sáenz addresses the summit.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Illinois Local News Summit, hosted by Press Forward Chicago and Press Forward Springfield, was a one-day convening of key stakeholders from across the state to advance solutions for the future of local news in Illinois. The convening made clear that local news has entered a new phase, marked by the emergence of a multi-sector system working to rebuild it, even as the field continues to decline significantly. Local newspapers continue to close faster than news outlets are emerging, newer organizations operate with fewer resources, and the long-term future of public media, particularly in smaller markets, remains uncertain. A central question is whether these efforts can be deployed at the scale and speed the moment demands, or whether gaps in access to local news will continue to deepen.

At the same time, there is a growing, nonpartisan alignment across sectors. Funders, policymakers, journalists, and civic leaders are no longer operating in isolation. They are aligning around a shared understanding that local news is a public good that functions as essential civic infrastructure, equipping residents with the information they need to participate in civic life and hold institutions accountable. As traditional business models erode and news deserts expand, the need for coordinated, long-term investment has become urgent.

Illinois is at the center of that shift. The state has paired leading public policy, including one of the first state-level journalism tax incentive programs, with a growing philanthropic network and expanding collaborative newsroom models. Together, these efforts position Illinois as a national test case for building a durable local news ecosystem.

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker opened the summit by framing the stakes in direct terms. The erosion of local journalism, he argued, is not simply a market failure but a threat to democratic accountability, driven by corporate consolidation, disinformation, and political pressure on the press. He pointed to Illinois' policy response, including the Journalism Sustainability Tax Incentive Program, the Strengthening Community Media Act, and an amendment to the Citizen Participation Act protecting newsrooms from frivolous defamation lawsuits. The governor closed by invoking the late journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett: "The people must know before they can act." The absence of local news weakens the systems on which democracy depends.

The national panel on local news philanthropy underscored a shift from isolated grantmaking to ecosystem-level investment. Silvia Rivera, director of the Local News Portfolio at the MacArthur Foundation, described the foundation's \$150 million, five-year commitment as a catalyst to bring new funders into the space, noting that climate, health, and economic development funders all have a stake in access to trusted local information. She also identified persistent funding gaps for Spanish-language media, Chinese-language print media, and Black and Brown community outlets, areas that require more intentional and sustained investment because they have historically been under-resourced. This lack of support has led to difficulty sustaining fact-based local media serving these audiences, which studies show can affect civic and voter participation.

John Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation, emphasized that local news requires far greater investment than it currently receives, and that responsibility extends beyond a small group of national funders. Maribel Pérez Wadsworth, president and CEO of the Knight Foundation, underscored that defending press freedom is inseparable from defending democratic participation, noting that rebuilding a sense of community ownership of local news may be as critical as rebuilding its business model. Nicholas Burt, senior program officer at the Driehaus Foundation, reinforced that shift, arguing that success should be measured not by dollars granted but by civic outcomes, whether communities are more informed, engaged, and able to hold institutions accountable.

Federal defunding of public media emerged as one of the most immediate structural threats to the ecosystem. Public media leaders described urgent efforts to replace federal dollars through member support, philanthropy, and operational restructuring, with varying levels of stability depending on station size and market. Chicago Public Media CEO Melissa Bell described a station that has offset losses through strong member support, but emphasized this is a short-term solution requiring sustained engagement. For smaller stations, the situation is more acute. Heather Norman, general manager of Tri States Public Radio, which serves 20 counties across western Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri, described a station reduced from 14 staff to six and from five reporters to two. Covering that geography with two reporters is not feasible, and expansion plans are on hold indefinitely. WTTW and WFMT President and CEO Sandra Cordova Micek noted public media has long relied on member-driven support, allowing continued investment in news, but that model requires ongoing investment and cannot fully replace the scale and stability of federal funding.

Across the public media panel, a consistent throughline emerged: stations with the deepest community relationships and proximity to concerned funders are the most stable. Trust, built through consistent, community-rooted journalism, remains the sector's most valuable asset. Melissa Bell framed the moment as both a crisis and an opportunity, a chance to build forward rather than defend legacy models.



From left: John Stremsterfer, Daniel O. Ash, Dale Anglin, Chuck Todd, Andrea Sáenz, Tracy Baim, R.C. McBride, Gov. JB Pritzker, John Palfrey, Julie Morita, and Maribel Pérez Wadsworth.

Throughout the day, a consistent picture emerged: the challenge is not a lack of solutions, but a lack of coordination and scale. Promising models exist across policy, philanthropy, and newsroom innovation, but they are not yet operating at the level required.

Community-based and ethnic media, suburban, and rural outlets, remain under resourced and underconnected to funding streams. Many newsrooms lack the operational capacity to access and sustain new funding opportunities, even when they exist. The discussion also pointed to the need for philanthropy to evolve in response to the moment, expanding beyond traditional models to for-profit news outlets and hybrid structures, reaching beyond urban to rural communities, and engaging funders who have not historically funded local news. Without greater alignment, the risk is not failure but fragmentation.

Several core insights and pathways forward emerged. Blended funding models that combine philanthropy, public investment, and earned revenue are gaining traction. University partnerships are expanding coverage while strengthening the pipeline of future journalists. Government advertising programs and fiscal sponsorship models are opening funding pathways for historically excluded outlets. Illinois' journalism tax credit is reaching smaller and downstate newsrooms but is already oversubscribed. This shows the need for even more support of the tax credits. The summit closed with a reframing of the work ahead. Lauren Woods from the Grand Victoria Foundation emphasized a shift from scarcity to abundance, focusing on the assets already present in communities. Communities deserve not just to be seen, but to thrive. Community media outlets are one part of that equation.

As Dale Anglin, director of Press Forward National, noted, local news is not disappearing; it is transforming. The question is no longer whether local news can survive, but whether stakeholders will act with sufficient urgency and alignment to build systems that sustain it as a long-term public good. Illinois has the foundation to lead nationally. The next phase will depend on whether those efforts can be coordinated and scaled.

Key Themes

- **Local news is a public good.** Shaping informed and connected communities. Without it, civic engagement declines, accountability erodes, and polarization intensifies.
- **Illinois is leading, but not yet at scale.** Public policy and philanthropy are aligned, but coverage gaps persist across the state and in ethnic, suburban, rural, and other local media.
- **No single sector can solve this.** Sustainable progress requires coordination across philanthropy, government, media, and community institutions.
- **Capacity is the binding constraint.** Many newsrooms lack the staffing, operational infrastructure, and technical support needed to access funding and sustain growth.
- **Trust and proximity are foundational.** Community-rooted journalism remains the most durable and effective model. Local news is still trusted, and still matters.

Key Challenges

- **Mismatch between scale and need.** Nearly half of Illinois counties are now news deserts or low-information areas.
- **Fragmentation limits impact.** Promising models exist, but a lack of coordination risks isolated successes rather than a cohesive statewide strategy.
- **Capacity gaps constrain growth.** Operational limitations prevent many news outlets from accessing and sustaining funding.
- **Uncertain long-term sustainability.** Long-term funding models are not yet fully developed or stabilized.
- **Declining advertising revenue.** Traditional revenue streams continue to erode without scalable replacements.
- **Public media instability.** Stations of all sizes are affected, with the smallest absorbing the deepest cuts.
- **Structural inequalities in funding access.** Community-based, ethnic, suburban, and rural local news outlets face structural barriers that limit equitable access to funding and participation.
- **Workforce strain and pipeline gaps.** Burnout, staffing shortages, and limited training pathways threaten future capacity.

Emerging Ideas

- **Position local news as essential civic infrastructure.** The decline of local news produces measurable civic consequences, including reduced civic engagement, weaker government accountability, increased polarization, and the loss of community connective tissue. This is a governance issue, not solely a media issue.
- **Align capital, policy, and funding models.** Philanthropy, public policy, and revenue models should be coordinated to reduce fragmentation and build more sustainable systems.
- **Blended funding models.** Sustainable local news will rely on a mix of philanthropic investment, public policy support, advertising, memberships, and earned revenue, rather than any single funding source.
- **Small business advertising tax credits.** Incentivizing local businesses to advertise in local news could generate sustainable revenue while rebuilding the relationship between Main Street commerce and local media.
- **Leverage government advertising.** Investing public advertising dollars in local media has proven benefits, with New York City leading the way and other cities, including Chicago, working to build on that model. Maryland just became the first state to enact a statewide advertising set-aside law for local media.
- **Rebuild local advertising models.** Corporate and nonprofit institutions need easier pathways to advertise in local media, so it can compete with digital ad systems. This would build brand loyalty while supporting local media. Press Forward Chicago and Chicago Public Media are testing a model soon.
- **Strengthen and scale public policy tools.** Continue to adopt proven models from other states. As Rebuild Local News noted, these include supports such as journalism fellowships, scholarships, and other pipeline investments that can strengthen the state's long-term capacity.
- **Stabilize public media.** Help grow philanthropic and community support to offset funding losses, with a targeted focus on smaller and rural stations.
- **Expand university newsroom partnerships.** University-newsroom partnerships and training programs increase coverage in underserved communities and build the next generation of journalists.
- **Diversify funding and expand the donor base.** Press Forward Chicago and Press Forward National are bringing new philanthropic dollars into local news from new funders, through topic-based funding across areas such as climate, education, health, housing, aging, business, criminal legal system, youth, and immigration.
- **Prioritize investment in ethnic and community media.** Structural funding gaps disproportionately affect hyperlocal and community outlets.
- **Strengthen audience growth and community ownership.** Invest in digital distribution, membership models, and direct engagement to increase reach, build trust, and support long-term sustainability.
- **Advance news literacy and public trust.** Illinois has a Media Literacy Law that supports critical news consumption across age groups. Full funding is needed to ensure educators statewide have resources to implement it effectively.
- **Fiscal sponsorship for community media.** This is one way that philanthropy can support different forms of media, regardless of business model.
- **Explore responsible use of AI.** Emerging technologies can support production, distribution, and sustainability while maintaining trust and editorial integrity.

Next Steps

- **Align capital, policy, and implementation:** Stakeholders across philanthropy, government, and media must move from isolated but parallel efforts to coordinated strategies that align funding, policy, and implementation. For example: Identify parts of the sector and populations that are more vulnerable and concertedly address their information needs. Share data-collection strategies across the ecosystem.
- **Expand and refine Illinois' journalism tax credit:** Scaling this program to subsidize newsroom jobs remains a near-term priority, including addressing eligibility gaps for university-licensed public radio stations and ensuring access for smaller and community-based outlets.
- **Push additional policy solutions:** Propose local and state policy regarding advertising, fellowships, and other areas, based on successful policies across the country.
- **Scale proven models across regions:** Efforts such as university-newsroom partnerships and government advertising marketplaces should be expanded and adapted to reach underserved communities across Illinois. Grow editorial content-sharing models and grow story- and data-sharing efforts.
- **Invest in capacity alongside capital:** Funders and intermediaries should prioritize operational support, technical assistance, and staffing to ensure that under-resourced newsrooms can access and sustain new funding opportunities. For example, simplify further application processes to allow in smaller, community-based newsrooms, and design capacity-building efforts that involve peer skill-sharing.
- **Civic response and support:** Create educational and visibility efforts to encourage the public to support local media, and corporations to return to seeing local advertising as both good for business and civic pride. For example: Explore strategies such as harnessing the Illinois Service Learning mandate to encourage high school-aged volunteers in local media.
- **Strengthen participation pathways:** Newsrooms and organizations should connect with intermediaries, including the Illinois Press Foundation and the Chicago Independent Media Alliance, to participate in emerging partnerships and pilot programs. Consider information-sharing and other partnerships that span urban and rural areas.
- **Activate the network:** A follow-up survey will identify where participants are best positioned to engage, and organizations are encouraged to commit to one concrete action as an entry point for deeper collaboration.

Conclusion

The Illinois Local News Summit demonstrated something important: the tools, relationships, and political will to lead a national response to the local news crisis are not hypothetical. They are being built in Illinois.

What remains uncertain is whether they will be deployed at the scale and speed this moment requires. Without sustained coordination and investment, information gaps will deepen, and progress in some communities will remain out of reach for others. The consequences have real implications. They are felt in the meetings that go uncovered, the decisions that go unchallenged, and the communities that go unseen.

The path forward is clear, even if it is not easy. Expanding policy, aligning capital with capacity, ensuring community and ethnic media are fully included, and activating the network built through this summit are not aspirational goals. They are the specific next steps that will determine whether Illinois translates momentum into lasting impact.

As Silvia Rivera of the MacArthur Foundation noted, “This is the beginning of a long game. We are seeing the effects of decades of disinvestment, and the work ahead will require sustained, long-term commitment.”



Attendees at the summit.

Full Report from the Illinois Local News Summit

SUMMARY

The Illinois Local News Summit made one thing clear: local news is no longer the responsibility of news organizations alone. What is emerging instead is a multi-pronged strategy, where successes and failures are discussed, where multiple partners help to provide funding and capacity building, and where business services and editorial content are shared. Where philanthropy, public policy, community institutions, and journalists are beginning to operate with shared purpose and growing alignment.

Illinois is becoming a framework for what that system can look like in practice. The state has combined public policy leadership with a rapidly expanding philanthropic network and a growing set of collaborative newsroom models. Together, these efforts point toward a more durable approach, one that moves beyond sustaining individual outlets to building the infrastructure required to support local journalism over time. But the gap between momentum and need remains significant.

Nearly half of Illinois counties are already news deserts or low-information areas. Revenue models continue to erode faster than new ones are being built. Community-based and ethnic media and suburban outlets remain undercapitalized and underconnected to funding streams. Across the system, capacity, not just capital, is the binding constraint.

What emerged across the day was not a lack of solutions, but a lack of coordination and scale. Promising models exist across policy, philanthropy, and newsroom innovation, but they are not yet operating at the level required to meet the scope of the crisis. Without greater alignment, the risk is not failure, but fragmentation, a landscape of isolated successes without a system strong enough to sustain local news statewide.

Four strategic realities surfaced:

- Local news functions as civic infrastructure, a public good, with measurable consequences when it declines.
- No single sector can solve this alone; sustained progress depends on coordinated action across systems.
- Trust and proximity are the field's most valuable and least replicable assets.
- Illinois has a near-term opportunity to lead nationally, but only if what is working is scaled intentionally and equitably.

The question is no longer whether local news can survive, but whether stakeholders will move with sufficient speed, coordination, and sustained investment to build the infrastructure required for it to function as a durable public good.

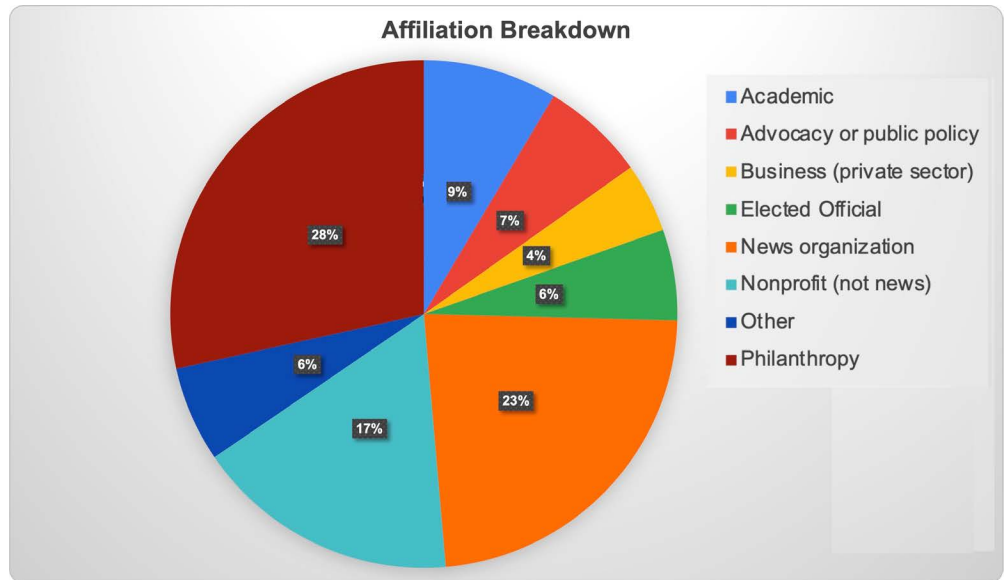
As Lauren Woods, director of abundance at the Grand Victoria Foundation, noted, "At its best, local news helps connect those dots. It strengthens lives."

Attendees

Affiliation Breakdown:

The 400 attendees to the Illinois Local News Summit were from a range of professions and backgrounds.

This was an intentional part of the planning. The primary focus was getting the leaders of philanthropic and family foundations in the room (the numbers in the chart are rounded):



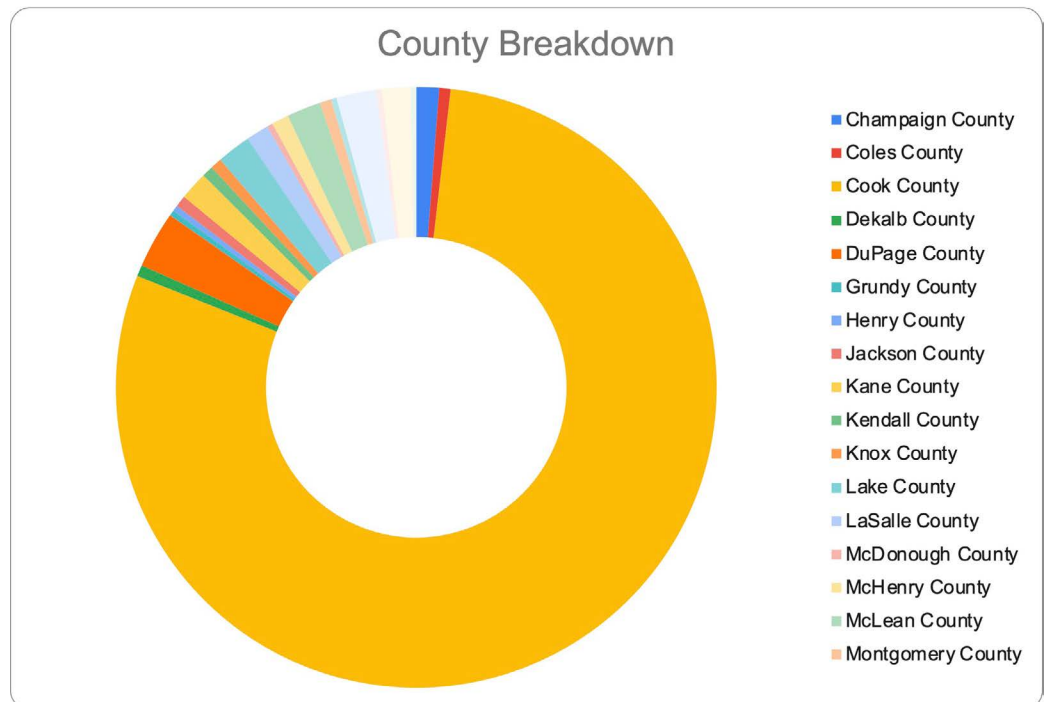
Philanthropy: 28.5%
News organization: 23.2%
Nonprofit (not news): 16.9%
Academic: 8.6%

Advocacy or public policy: 6.6%
Elected official: 5.8%
Business (private sector): 4.4%
Other: 6.1%

County Breakdown:

Organizers also worked hard to get people from across the state of Illinois, offering stipends to those foundations and media executives in need of support.

In the end, 21% of the attendees from Illinois were from outside of Cook County.



In a post-survey response, 100% of those responding said they learned something new at the summit.

One respondent said their key takeaway was: “Local news is the glue that holds everything together. A community’s health improves when residents know about the triumphs and struggles of their neighbors and are aware of how its government representatives are voting and spending tax money. Local media holds up a mirror to the community and reflects the truth — the good and bad. And if residents stop to carefully look in the mirror, they can make informed, fact-based choices that aim to make themselves and the community around them better.”

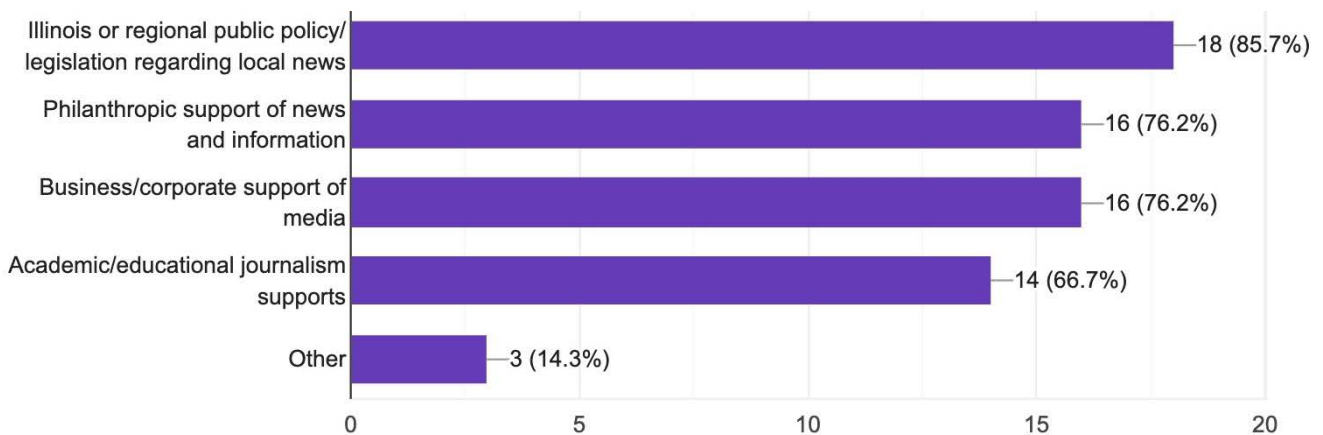
Another said: “Local news and information is essential for an engaged and vibrant community. It’s the bedrock of how we learn about each other, opportunities, and challenges that make our communities who we are. Trusted information flow is vital, especially on the local level.”

Another person wrote that local news is “absolutely critical for a healthy democracy, civic engagement and awareness, relationship and trust building at the most grassroots levels.”

And a fourth said, “The role of local news and information is one-of-its-kind. Our connection to fact-checked information presented by credible sources is critical in the age of misinformation. The role of local news and information furthers our understanding, expands our reach, and increases our ability to properly contribute to the world around us.”

Many of those attending were willing to stay engaged. This chart is an example; the question was “Would you like to receive follow-up information on any of these areas?”:

Survey Question: “Would you like to receive followup information on any of these areas?”



The Opening

The Illinois Local News Summit opened with Emcee Stefan Holt, an anchor for NBC Chicago, followed by readings from Illinois Poet Laureate Mark Turcotte and Chicago poet Tara Betts. Turcotte welcomed attendees by honoring the work of everyone in the room, framing journalism as an act of “bearing witness, shedding light on what we all call the news.” Betts grounded the convening in the state’s history and resilience, describing Illinois as a place that “does not forget ... it beats, a heart.”

*Illinois does not forget it beats.
A heart, a muscle, a fulcrum
for blood that runs deep, thrums
in this state, this land of former
factories shuttered and farms
that keep marching, moving
into relentless seasons, moon
cycles. Illinois, you persist.*

— Tara Betts, Chicago poet



Tara Betts.

The summit welcome was delivered by John Stremsterfer, president and CEO of the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln, and Andrea Sáenz, president and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust. Their respective foundations host Press Forward Springfield and Press Forward Chicago, two of the first six Press Forward chapters established nationwide. They described how the work of their chapters ties to the civic needs of the communities they serve and urged the many community foundations in attendance from across the state to join them in supporting community-based local media.



From left: Mark Turcotte and Stefan Holt.

Stremsterfer spoke to the particular importance of journalism in smaller communities, noting that places like Springfield serve largely rural areas where residents often feel overlooked and forgotten when their stories go untold. “Journalism is the first draft of our history,” he said, framing the summit’s work as essential to ensuring more people can be heard and seen.



Sáenz focused on access, arguing that without trustworthy, relevant information about local institutions, workplaces, and civic life, everything else becomes harder. She described local news not as an institution but as a public good, one that a shared sense of purpose can make more inclusive.

She pointed to concrete examples of what collaboration makes possible, including an innovative advertising initiative coordinating 40 outlets through Chicago Public Media, and Press Forward Chicago's coordinated coverage of immigration last year and education this year, driven by the historic elected school board races.



Field Foundation President Daniel O. Ash, a longtime part of the Chicago media ecosystem and an early supporter of the Press Forward movement, then introduced Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

Left: Daniel Ash.

Governor's Remarks



Illinois Governor JB Pritzker opened by honoring the journalists in the room as indispensable public servants, then made clear that the threats they face are not market forces but deliberate attacks on democratic accountability. He named as obstacles corporate consolidation, defunding of public media, physical violence against journalists, and the use of arrests and lawsuits to intimidate reporters.

The governor pointed to Chicago's local press corps as an example of journalism at its best, citing their coverage during Operation Midway Blitz as evidence that the work reporters do every day, at school board meetings, zoning hearings, and local elections, is as essential as their coverage of moments of crisis. He also mentioned being grilled by two high school students from Fairfield, Illinois, in their school paper, *The Pretzel*, about a teacher's strike and local economic development, as proof that the instinct to hold power accountable runs deep and starts early in communities across the state, not just in major cities. He argued that local reporters have an advantage no outside outlet can replicate. They are members of the communities they cover. They know their neighbors, which gives them the context to deliver news that is trusted precisely because it is proximate.

"There is no computer, no artificial intelligence, or algorithm that can replace a good human reporter that knows and lives in their community."

— Governor JB Pritzker

On policy, Gov. Pritzker highlighted three concrete actions Illinois has taken: the Journalism Sustainability Tax Incentive Program, the first of its kind in the nation, which supported 58 news entities and more than 600 journalists in its first year; the Strengthening Community Media Act, which creates transparency requirements for media outlet sales; and an amendment to the Citizen Participation Act to protect newsrooms from frivolous defamation lawsuits. He closed by invoking the late journalist Ida B. Wells: "The people must know before they can act."

The State of Local News in Illinois

Tim Franklin, Founding Director, Medill Local News Initiative, Northwestern University

Tim Franklin opened his presentation at the summit by putting the current moment in historical context: we are living through the most significant change in how news is consumed, produced, distributed, and paid for since the Penny Press nearly 200 years ago. The collapse of the local news business model is the root cause. Newspaper advertising revenue, which once made up 70% of all revenue, has declined 80% over two decades. No industry can lose 80% of its primary revenue source and not be fundamentally altered. Digital traffic to the nation's 100 largest local news organizations has fallen 45% in just four years. Every week in the United States, roughly two and a half newspapers disappear. Newspaper employment has fallen 75%, with 270,000 jobs lost, making the newspaper industry fourth among all economic sectors in job loss.



Nationally, there are now 214 counties with no local news source of any kind, no newspaper, no digital outlet, no public broadcasting, no ethnic media. An additional 1,500-plus counties are down to a single local news source. Taken together, more than 50 million Americans have no or limited access to local news.

In Illinois specifically, nine counties are now news deserts, up four from 2024 alone, and 47% of counties are either news deserts or low-information areas, home to 700,000 residents. Franklin pushed back on the assumption that this is purely a rural problem: more than half of Illinois newspaper losses have occurred in the suburbs around Chicago. A Northwestern predictive model identifies 249 additional counties nationally at high risk of losing local news within five years.

“With any industry changing this rapidly, there is both destruction and creation. Right now, unfortunately, we are seeing more destruction than creation in local news.”

*— Tim Franklin,
Medill Local News Initiative*

The civic consequences are well documented: in news deserts and low-information areas, municipal election participation declines, government corruption rises, polarization increases, and government secrecy grows. A Tulane study found more corruption in areas without local news. A University of Florida study

found that government officials are more likely to ignore freedom of information laws in states with fewer newspapers per capita. Franklin also named the broader disinformation problem: the absence of reliable, trusted local news creates a vacuum that misinformation fills.

Franklin closed on a note of optimism. More than 300 local news startups have launched nationally in five years, seven of them in Illinois. Chicago remains a national incubator of journalism innovation, and the growth of national local news networks, journalism school partnerships, and philanthropic investment are all reasons for hope.

Pressing Forward: The National Movement

Dale Anglin, Director, Press Forward National

Dale Anglin opened by acknowledging the journalists in the room directly, recognizing that doing this work every day can feel hard and lonely. But they are not doing it alone. A growing coalition of journalists, funders, and civic leaders has formed behind them, and it is choosing to act on the belief that strong communities depend on strong local news. There are now 45 Press Forward chapters in 35 states.

Local news is not dying; it is transforming. That transformation is not neat, easy, or evenly distributed, but it is producing new infrastructure that did not exist just a few years ago. Press Forward's network has moved more than \$400 million into local news in two years, half directly into newsrooms and half to regranteeing organizations. The coalition has grown five-fold, from 22 founding donors to more than 130 funders, many of whom do not think of themselves primarily as journalism funders but understand that trusted local information is essential to every other philanthropic strategy they pursue. Whether the focus is climate, education, health, or economic opportunity, none of it works, she argued, if people do not have access to trusted local information.



Dale Anglin.

“Local news is not dying. It is majorly transforming. And that transformation is not neat, not easy, and not evenly distributed.”

— Dale Anglin, Press Forward National

Anglin illustrated what the network can do in practice: when ICE raids triggered protests and unrest in Minnesota, the Press Forward chapter there raised \$700,000 in rapid response funding within a few weeks, allowing journalists to stay on the story safely and serve their communities in a high-stakes moment. Press Forward Chicago did something similar in 2025, joining with other funders to put more than \$900,000 into immigration reporters, legal and safety support,

and overall coordination. Anglin was candid that chapters are not always built for crisis response, but that the capacity to move quickly when it matters is growing.

Anglin closed with a clear framework for what the movement requires. Funders must treat local news as a civic public good, investing in both the reporting side and the business side, because sustainable outlets require both. Journalists must be deeply rooted in community and understand their audiences. And government officials must see local news funding as civic infrastructure, as essential as roads and schools. Local news, she said, is the connective tissue. It is how communities understand what is happening, how they know each other, how they hold leaders accountable, and how they decide what to do next.



A National Focus on Local News

Moderator: Chuck Todd • John Palfrey (MacArthur Foundation), Maribel Pérez Wadsworth (Knight Foundation), Julie Morita (Joyce Foundation)

This panel framed the local news crisis not only as a collapse of business models, but as a collapse of trust rooted in the erosion of local journalism. As Chuck Todd noted, national media credibility has always been derivative, built on the foundation of local reporting. When that foundation weakened, the broader information ecosystem followed. Rebuilding trust, he argued, requires rebuilding local news.

Philanthropy's role in that effort is expanding beyond funding individual outlets to shaping the systems that support them. Maribel Pérez Wadsworth, president and CEO of the Knight Foundation, emphasized that strengthening the First Amendment is an urgent priority and that defending press freedom is inseparable from defending democratic participation more broadly. She also made the case that public funding for journalism is not a contradiction but a reflection of public priorities.

Examples like Village Media in Canada, the American Journalism Project, and Report Local point toward models that combine sustainability with scale, pairing reporting resources with business infrastructure and fundraising capacity.



Chuck Todd, John Palfrey, Maribel Pérez Wadsworth, and Julie Morita.

Julie Morita, president and CEO of the Joyce Foundation, reinforced that shift, arguing that philanthropy must measure success not by dollars granted but by civic outcomes. Investments in local journalism should result in more informed communities, greater engagement, and stronger accountability. She pointed to Joyce’s support of Chalkbeat’s coverage of Chicago’s first elected school board as an example where sustained reporting contributed to record turnout and more representative participation. The implication is clear: journalism is not only an output, but a driver of civic health.

At the same time, the field remains significantly undercapitalized. John Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation, made the case that local news requires far greater investment than it is currently receiving, and that responsibility extends beyond a small group of national funders. While Press Forward has grown rapidly, from 22 to more than 130 funders in two years, it still falls short of what is needed. MacArthur’s strategy reflects that gap, investing not only in Chicago but in under-resourced regions such as the borderlands with Mexico and in Appalachia, where the need is greatest. Examples like the Baltimore Banner and the Salt Lake Tribune demonstrate what becomes possible when local philanthropy provides sustained, multi-year support.

The discussion ultimately pointed to a broader shift: from isolated funding decisions to shared responsibility for building and sustaining local news systems. The goal is not a handful of national funders operating at a distance, but communities developing a sense of ownership over the news that serves them. As Pérez Wadsworth reflected, when she ran local news organizations, readers did not describe them as institutions, but as “my paper.” Rebuilding that sense of connection may be as critical as rebuilding the business model itself.

The Policy Landscape

*Steve Waldman, President & Founder,
Rebuild Local News*

Steve Waldman described Rebuild Local News as a nonpartisan coalition broad enough to bring labor unions and publisher groups into the same room, united around the view that public policy must be part of the solution for local news. Government support is not the only answer, nor the primary one, but it is a necessary part of the response. The work happening in newsrooms to build new business models is essential. But given the severity of the crisis, a 75% drop in the number of journalists and thousands of communities without any local news, public support needs to be part of the puzzle.

Six states have passed journalism support legislation directing \$72 million to local newsrooms in 2026 alone. Twenty states are now seriously considering similar measures, momentum driven in part by Press Forward making public policy one of its four pillars. Illinois is leading. Waldman credited Illinois Senator Steve Stadelman as the most effective state legislator in the country on this issue, describing the task force he convened as a model for how to bring a wide range of stakeholders together and produce legislation rather than just recommendations.

The Illinois journalism employment tax credit, a grant program using the tax system as its delivery mechanism, provides roughly \$15,000 per existing reporter and \$10,000 for new hires, capped at \$150,000 per newsroom, with an additional cap on what any single chain with multiple newsrooms can receive. About 130 outlets have benefited so far, and the results have defied early concerns. Rather than flowing to large outlets, the program has disproportionately benefited smaller newsrooms, those outside Chicago, and nonprofits.

Two-thirds of recipients were newsrooms with six or fewer employees.

The guardrails put in place have held, ensuring dollars are flowing to genuine community journalism, and not to partisan, computer-generated, or low-quality sites that masquerade as legitimate news. The program is on track to be oversubscribed in 2026, and Waldman's view is straightforward: grow it.



He outlined three additional policy tools gaining traction nationally. Government advertising directed to local outlets was pioneered in New York City where a law requiring half of government advertising to go to local media redirected \$72 million over five years from national platforms and tech companies to community news outlets, without the government spending an additional penny. Chicago Public Media is working on an advertising exchange for businesses and nonprofits, and laws are being considered related to government advertising set-asides at the state level. Chicago and Cook County are taking steps in this direction on government ads through Public Narrative, and Maryland is the first state to pass a similar program statewide (with New Jersey close behind).

Journalism fellowships financed by state governments, modeled on Report for America but publicly funded, are already operating in California, New Mexico, and Washington State, with Washington partnering with Report for America to place a reporter in every county in the state. And small business advertising tax credits, which incentivize restaurants, hardware stores, and other local businesses to advertise in local news, would both generate newsroom revenue and re-energize the symbiotic relationship between Main Street commerce and local media that has been so important historically and has badly eroded.

Waldman closed by stating that public policy done badly can make things worse. The guardrails protecting editorial independence and preventing political meddling are not optional. Programs must be platform agnostic, future friendly, and designed to support new and emerging players, not only to enshrine legacy ones. The goal, he said, is policy that would still work for models that do not yet exist.

“Illinois has something here that is really working well. It is a rare and beautiful thing. Let’s perfect it and grow it.”

*— Steve Waldman,
Rebuild Local News*



Moderator Tracy Brown, Sen. Seth Lewis, Sen. Steve Stadelman, Hugh Dellios, and Jhmira Alexander.

The Response of Illinois Policymakers

Moderator: Tracy Brown (Chicago Public Media) ▪ Sen. Steve Stadelman, Sen. Seth Lewis, Jhmira Alexander (Public Narrative), Hugh Dellios (Joyce Foundation)

Tracy Brown, chief partnerships officer at Chicago Public Media, set the stage by noting that this summit grew out of a 2025 local news convening in Detroit organized by the Local Media Association. What began as an idea to bring a similar conversation to Illinois became something more intentional: a cross-sector discussion that included both Democratic and Republican legislators alongside philanthropy and community media. That mix of voices was not incidental, it reflected a deliberate effort to move beyond alignment in principle toward coordination in practice.

The panel made clear that Illinois has entered a new phase in its approach to supporting local journalism. The question is no longer whether government has a role to play, but how that role is designed, implemented, and sustained. The Journalism Sustainability Tax Incentive Program, the first of its kind in the nation to be implemented, has shifted the focus to ensuring it is reaching the full range of newsrooms it was intended to support. As Illinois 34th District Senator Steve Stadelman emphasized, the goal is not simply to pass legislation, but to make sure the programs are working in practice, tracking where dollars are going and ensuring they reach outlets across the state, not just in Chicago.

At the same time, the conversation surfaced unresolved tensions that will shape the next phase of this work. Chief among them is the relationship between public funding and editorial independence. As funding models grow more complex, questions about how to maintain public trust are becoming more central. Illinois 24th District Senator Seth Lewis raised this concern directly, noting that while safeguards exist, the field must be able to clearly and publicly demonstrate that funding does not influence coverage.

Capacity emerged as a consistent constraint across the system. Even where funding mechanisms are in place, many newsrooms lack the infrastructure to access them while continuing to produce journalism. Jhmira Alexander, executive director of Public Narrative, pointed to this challenge in the rollout of their Chi Media Exchange and broader government advertising efforts, emphasizing that without operational support, well-designed programs will continue to underserve the outlets they are intended to reach. The ability of newsrooms to participate fully, not just as recipients of funding but as active partners in implementation, remains uneven.

Hugh Dellios, journalism program director at the Joyce Foundation, framed the moment in terms of return on investment. There is likely no greater leverage point in philanthropy than aligning public dollars with private investment to support a public good. Joyce's role in the first year of the tax credit focused on implementation, funding legal and accounting assistance to help small newsrooms navigate the program and supporting an independent evaluation of its impact.

That evaluation confirmed that guardrails are working and that funding is reaching smaller and downstate outlets. It also identified persistent gaps, particularly among ethnic media, small broadcast outlets, and university-based public media, that will need to be addressed in the next phase.

Taken together, the discussion pointed to a shift from legislating to implementing, from announcing to delivering. Illinois has built a policy framework that is already being looked to nationally, but the test ahead is whether that framework can be executed in a way that is equitable, accessible, and sustainable over time. The success of this model will depend not only on continued investment, but on the ability of stakeholders across government, philanthropy, and media to coordinate around what is already working and close the gaps that remain.

“There is probably no bigger return on investment than if we can harness public dollars to help make sure this public good is available to the public.”

*— Hugh Dellios,
Joyce Foundation*



Moderator Kayce Ataiyero, Silvia Rivera, Nicholas Burt, Heidi Dusek, and Chrissy Towle.

Funders For News & Information

Moderator: Kayce Ataiyero (Joyce Foundation) - Silvia Rivera (MacArthur Foundation), Heidi Dusek (Lumpkin Family Foundation), Nicholas Burt (Driehaus Foundation), Chrissy Towle (Google News Initiative)

This panel focused on how philanthropy is evolving in response to the local news crisis, moving from isolated grantmaking toward a more coordinated, ecosystem-level approach. As Kayce Ataiyero, chief external affairs officer at the Joyce Foundation, framed it, the goal was to make funder decision-making more transparent and accessible, giving newsrooms a clearer understanding of how priorities are set and how support is allocated.

A central theme was the recognition that local news is not a standalone issue, but one that intersects with nearly every philanthropic priority. Silvia Rivera, director of the Local News Program at the MacArthur Foundation, described the foundation's \$150 million, five-year commitment as a catalyst designed to bring new funders into the space. Climate, health, and economic development funders all have a stake in whether communities have access to trusted local information.

MacArthur's approach reflects that understanding, focusing on identifying organizations that already have community trust and equipping them with the business infrastructure to grow, rather than building new outlets from scratch. At the same time, significant gaps remain, particularly among ethnic and community outlets, and suburban newsrooms, all of which require more intentional and sustained investment.

The conversation also underscored a shift in how success is defined. Funders are increasingly focused not on outputs, but on outcomes, measuring impact in terms of civic engagement, accountability, and community well-being. Nicholas Burt, senior program officer at the Driehaus Foundation, described local news as democratic infrastructure and emphasized that the ultimate measure of success is whether journalism is driving meaningful change, whether communities are more informed, more engaged, and better able to hold institutions accountable.

Geography and access remain critical considerations in how funding strategies are designed. Heidi Dusek, executive director of the Lumpkin Family Foundation, highlighted the persistent gap between national conversations and rural realities, noting that smaller communities are often excluded from both funding and visibility. Her approach embeds journalism within broader regional strategies, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that coverage reflects the lived experiences of those communities and helps people understand how larger issues affect their daily lives.



Nicholas Burt and Heidi Dusek.

At the same time, the panel pointed to the need for news organizations to adapt to rapidly changing audience behaviors. Chrissy Towle, director of association and local news partnerships at Google's News Initiative, emphasized the importance of meeting audiences where they are, particularly younger audiences whose relationship to information is shaped by different platforms and formats. Supporting that shift requires not only financial investment, but capacity-building, including training, cohort-based learning, and tools that help newsrooms grow audience and revenue while navigating emerging technologies such as AI.

“The measure of success is not dollars granted but whether the journalism is driving real change. Are communities more engaged? Is life getting better as a result of this work?”

— Nick Burt, Driehaus Foundation

Taken together, the discussion reflected a field in transition, from fragmented funding toward more intentional coordination, from short-term support toward long-term sustainability, and from measuring activity to measuring impact. As Silvia Rivera noted, “The doers in the room, and the people coalescing around this moment, are the reason for optimism.” The opportunity ahead lies in whether that momentum translates into sustained action — aligning resources, strategies, and expectations to build a system that is both more inclusive and more durable.



Moderator Brandis Friedman, Melissa Bell, R.C. McBride, Sandra Cordova Micek, and Heather Norman.

The View From the Front Lines: Public Media

Moderator: Brandis Friedman (WTTW) - Alison Scholly (Public Media Company), Sandra Cordova Micek (WTTW/WFMT), Melissa Bell (Chicago Public Media), R.C. McBride (WGLT/WCBU/NPR), Heather Norman (Tri States Public Radio)

Alison Scholly, managing director of Public Media Company, set the national context before the panel began. Her organization has spent 25 years helping local public media stations become more impactful, more sustainable, and better able to serve their communities. Since Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) funding was cut, that work has taken on new urgency. The response has been more heartening than many expected: loyal viewers, listeners, and members at local stations across the country have stepped up and donated at levels that have replaced what CPB provided, in many cases within a single year.



Alison Scholly.

At the same time, national program providers like NPR and PBS are working with funders to sustain expensive but essential programming such as PBS NewsHour. Public Media Company has raised more than \$70 million to support the most at-risk stations, distributing \$26 million in late 2025 to stations receiving more than 30% of their budgets from CPB. It has also created an emergency fund for stations facing catastrophic events, whether a transmitter failure, a weather disaster, or the sudden loss of a university license holder. A final component is an innovative program designed to reduce back-office and infrastructure costs so that more resources can flow directly to local reporting. Federal funding has ceased in its current form, Scholly said, and it is not coming back. The system is acting with conviction and speed to ensure stations survive.



Brandis Friedman.

The panel made clear that the situation varies dramatically by station size and market. Melissa Bell, CEO of Chicago Public Media, described a station where the CPB loss represents about 6% of the overall budget and has been met with a strong outpouring from members and funders. This is a short-term solution, not a permanent one. It remains an annual challenge that requires sustained engagement. She also flagged the competitive instinct that has historically existed among public media organizations and argued this is exactly the wrong moment for it. The stakes are too high. Collaboration, not competition, is what this moment requires. Chicago Public Media is focused on expansion rather than contraction, continuing to invest in the merger of WBEZ and the Chicago Sun-Times and looking at what public media can become rather than what it has been.

Sandra Cordova Micek, president and CEO of Window To The World Communications (WTTW and WFMT), described a station in a relatively stable position due to its broad membership base and diverse programming across news, history, culture, arts, and children's content. But she was clear that stability cannot mean complacency.

Hard choices about what to cover are unavoidable, and she argued those choices ultimately strengthen the work. WTTW has chosen to double down on investigative reporting and strategic beats rather than trying to cover everything. She pointed to what the community has communicated clearly: people reach out to say what the work means in their lives, and that feedback guides editorial decisions. PBS nationally is making similar choices, including reducing some programming to focus resources on higher-impact content.

R.C. McBride, general manager of WGLT and WCBU and a member of the NPR board, described a station that had been in a period of growth, expanding to 20 staff, including 11 full-time journalists, before the CPB cuts reversed much of that progress. The community stepped up and filled the funding gap for a year, but long-term sustainability remains uncertain. What gives him hope is a shift to digital-first distribution that has driven significant audience growth, from 3,000 page views to 25 million, a signal that demand for local news remains strong. What concerns him is burnout: going from 20 staff to 13 while audience expectations increase is not sustainable. He also noted that the recent legal ruling against the presidential executive order that stopped funding for NPR and PBS is important but often misunderstood; it does not mean the funding will return.

Heather Norman, general manager of Tri States Public Radio, offered the clearest picture of what funding cuts mean for smaller stations. Tri States serves all or part of 20 counties across western Illinois, southeast Iowa, and a portion of Missouri, one of the largest coverage areas represented. Before the CPB cuts, the station had already absorbed a major funding loss when its university license holder eliminated support in 2019. That experience, she said, made the current moment feel like a continuation rather than a new crisis. The station has gone from 14 staff to six, from five reporters to two. Covering such a large region with two reporters is not feasible. They focus where they can. Plans to expand reporting are now on hold indefinitely. And yet, donors have stepped up, and audiences continue to rely on the station. A daily local news podcast and newsletter have become essential lifelines for communities with few other sources of information.



Sandra Cordova Micek and Heather Norman.

The panel converged on a broader conclusion: public media has not had to change as rapidly as the rest of the news industry, and that has become both a strength and a liability. Bell made the point most directly. Public media holds a level of trust that few other institutions can match, at a moment when reliable information is often behind paywalls and misinformation is widely accessible. That creates a significant opportunity, but only if public media is willing to evolve. The crisis, she said, is also an opening, a moment to move forward on changes that might otherwise have been delayed. She expressed optimism about what public media in Illinois can become and the potential for those models to extend beyond the state.

“We are in a crisis moment, but it breeds creativity, it breeds opportunity, and it allows us to push forward on change. While this is a scary, difficult moment, it also means we can affect real change.”

— Melissa Bell, Chicago Public Media

The group also identified threats beyond funding. Bell noted an ongoing SEC inquiry that could affect tax-exempt status for public media organizations, as well as the possibility of federal action on broadcast licenses. While the recent court ruling against the NPR and PBS funding cuts was an important victory, it does not eliminate future risk.

The discussion pointed to a consistent throughline: the stations finding stability and momentum are those that have deepened their connection to the communities they

serve. Member support, audience growth, and direct feedback from listeners and viewers all reinforce the same conclusion. Trust, built over time through consistent, community-rooted journalism, remains the sector’s most valuable asset. The challenge now is to build on that foundation, evolving quickly enough to meet the moment while maintaining the credibility that makes public media distinct.



City of Macomb Mayor Mike Inman. Melody Spann Cooper. Sierra Henry.

Community Impact: All News Is Local

Moderator: Maudlyne Ihejirika (Field Foundation) • City of Macomb Mayor Mike Inman, Jeff Rogers (Illinois Press Foundation), Melody Spann Cooper (Midway Broadcasting/WVON/WRLD/VONtv), Judi Terzotis (Local Media Association), Alee Quick (SIU/Daily Egyptian), Sierra Henry (Illinois Farm Bureau)

Maudlyne Ihejirika, director of Journalism and Storytelling at the Field Foundation, opened by grounding the conversation in a simple idea: all news is local. Chicago itself is home to outlets that serve as national models for community-centered reporting. She pointed to Block Club Chicago, Borderless Magazine, the Investigative Project on Race and Equity, The TRiiBE, La Raza, and Cicero Independiente as examples of journalism that is deeply rooted in the communities it serves. The speakers that followed extended that point to all of Illinois, illustrating what happens when that kind of coverage exists, and what is lost when it does not. Across geographies and business models, the throughline was consistent: the absence of local news is not theoretical. It is felt in real time.

Mayor Mike Inman of Macomb described what that absence looks like in practice. His community, long known as part of “Forgottonia,” has cycled through corporate ownership without building a meaningful local media presence. The result is a place that feels overlooked, underreported, and largely invisible. Drawing on his experience as a former public information officer for the Illinois State Police, he underscored how critical strong relationships with local media are in moments of crisis.

In Macomb, those relationships are now minimal, sustained largely by the two-person staff at Tri States Public Radio. A small startup, the Community News Brief, has begun to fill part of the gap. But the need remains significant, and he was clear that more coverage, and the accountability that comes with it, is something his community welcomes.



Moderator Maudlyne Ihejirika.

That gap is not isolated. It reflects a broader structural decline. Jeff Rogers, executive director of the Illinois Press Foundation, described the erosion of the statehouse press corps, from 50 reporters and 30 bureaus to just five reporters covering the entire state. Capitol News Illinois was created to respond to that loss and has grown from three to 13 staff, with additional expansion underway through partnerships with Northwestern’s Medill School, the University of Illinois Springfield, and Southern Illinois University. But the challenge extends beyond the capitol. Across Illinois, routine accountability journalism — city council meetings, school boards, local decision-making — is going uncovered. The next phase, he noted, is building on university partnerships to place student journalists directly in communities, restoring coverage that once formed the backbone of local news.

Judi Terzotis, president and publisher of the Times-Picayune, brought a national perspective on what sustainable local media business models look like and where the industry is heading. As a board member of the Local Media Association, she described the organization’s mission as helping media companies build sustainable models, with a focus on growing and strengthening local news operations rather than simply managing their decline.

For community-owned and for-profit media, the pressures are even more acute. Melody Spann Cooper, owner of Midway Broadcasting Corporation and stations WVON and WRLL, described a year marked by a 22 to 30 percent decline in advertising revenue, layoffs, and a rapid pivot to streaming, podcasting, and video. She pushed back on the nonprofit versus for-profit framing that often shapes philanthropic funding, arguing that it overlooks the reality that community-serving outlets exist in both models. A new fiscal sponsorship arrangement with Forefront now allows her stations to access nonprofit funding streams, but she was clear that funders also need to meet these outlets halfway, actively seeking out and investing in for-profit media rather than expecting them to navigate complex systems alone.



Judi Terzotis. Jeff Rogers. Alee Quick.

The conversation also pointed to where new capacity is emerging. Alee Quick, faculty adviser at Southern Illinois University Carbondale and the Daily Egyptian, described students filling a critical reporting gap in Alexander County, the southernmost county in the state. These student journalists are covering issues such as ICE enforcement and its impact on local families, stories that would otherwise go untold. What began as a training opportunity has become essential civic coverage, even as the program navigates financial pressures and the challenge of sustaining both education and journalism simultaneously.

That investment in future journalists is starting earlier as well. Sierra Henry of the Illinois Farm Bureau described efforts to support high school journalism programs across the state, helping students develop reporting skills and civic awareness before entering the profession. In a state where agriculture remains a

central economic driver, she emphasized the importance of ensuring those stories are told accurately and accessibly, both through the Farm Bureau's own reporting and through partnerships with local outlets.

Taken together, the panel reflected the full geography and diversity of Illinois journalism, from rural communities in Forgottonia to student reporters in the state's southernmost counties to Black-owned radio in Chicago. What connected each perspective was a shared reality:

when local news is present, communities are more visible, more informed, and better able to advocate for themselves. When it disappears, the consequences are immediate and concrete, in the meetings that go uncovered, the decisions that go unchallenged, and the communities that go unseen.

"My community has been overlooked and underreported for decades. One more body in that newsroom can make all the difference in the world."

— Mayor Mike Inman, Macomb, Illinois



Lauren M. Woods.

Towards Abundance

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

This conversation pointed toward a different way of framing the work ahead, one grounded not in scarcity, but in abundance. At Grand Victoria Foundation, Lauren Woods leads work centered on Black abundance, an approach that focuses on what already exists in communities: leadership, cultural memory, strategy, and collective capacity that too often go unrecognized and unsupported.

This framing challenges the deficit-based lens that has shaped much of journalism and philanthropy. Rather than focusing only on what is disappearing, it asks what is already working, and how it can be resourced, connected, and sustained at scale. In that sense, it reinforces a central theme of the summit: the solutions are not absent, they are unevenly supported.

At its best, local news connects communities to their own power. It strengthens the civic and cultural infrastructure that allows people to shape their futures and makes visible what has always been there. Communities deserve not just to be seen, but to thrive. That is the horizon the field should be building toward.

“Communities deserve not just to be seen, but to thrive.”

*— Lauren M. Woods,
Grand Victoria Foundation*

A Vision For The Future

We leave you with this potential vision for the state's future.

The vision is of healthy local news outlets across Illinois where this treasured contribution — locally produced, fact-based reporting — is valued as a public good and helps to build the fabric and quality of life in local communities that would otherwise go under-informed as well as unseen.

This can happen if a wide range of people and organizations step up to craft solutions, including philanthropy, private industry, policy makers, elected leaders, civic leaders, academics, and media leaders.

Resources

Links for the summit:

Photos by THREE20 Media

<https://three20media.pic-time.com/-illinoislocalnewssummit2026/gallery>

Video links:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbybLzTR2flxAwxdk6ltw7B9gVga6wa6>

Organizations and Initiatives

- [Press Forward Chicago](#)
 - [Press Forward Chicago: A Case for Support](#)
 - [Press Forward Chicago Annual Report](#)
- [Press Forward Springfield](#)
- [Press Forward National](#)
- [Rebuild Local News](#)
- [Local Media Association](#)
- [Capitol News Illinois](#)
- [Illinois Press Foundation](#)

Public Narrative (Chi Media Exchange, launching May 2026): A new marketplace connecting government and institutional advertising dollars to local and community-based media outlets, helping redirect public advertising spending into the local news ecosystem.

[Chicago Public Media](#) will soon launch an advertising collaborative to connect major corporations, nonprofits, and others to more than 40 local media outlets.

Research and Data

- [Medill Local News Initiative](#)
- [The Pivot Fund Illinois media mapping](#)
- [Chicago-area Local Media: Assessing the Need for Shared Services and Support](#)

Policy

- [Illinois Journalism Sustainability Tax Incentive Program](#)
- [Strengthening Community Media Act](#)
- [Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism \(CUNY\): NYC Policy Directs \\$72 million to Community Media](#)
- [Rebuild Local News: Maryland Legislature Passes the Nation's First State Advertising Set Aside for Local News](#)
- [New Jersey Assembly Bill A4677 \(Government Advertising Set-Aside for Local News\)](#)

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Press Forward Chicago

Press Forward Springfield

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Illinois Public Broadcasting Council

Hoopla Communications

Illinois Humanities

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

Illinois Media Literacy Coalition

Illinois Press Association

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Local Media Association

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NABJ Chicago Chapter

NAHJ Chicago

News Literacy Project

Public Narrative

Rebuild Local News

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The Chicago Community Trust

The Joyce Foundation

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Press-Forward-Springfield

"Illinois" by Tara Betts

"Illinois"

by Tara Betts

This is the poem read by Tara Betts at the summit. It is reprinted with permission.

Robust fields of corn unrolled
on plains cradled by rivers and lakes.
This land revered by tribes named
Menominee, Fox-Loup, Algonquian,
Ojibwe, Illiniwek, and Sioux.
This land nestled by lakes, heart
of a continent taken from tribes
now nicknamed America.

Illinois does not forget it beats.
A heart, a muscle, a fulcrum
for blood that runs deep, thrums
in this state, this land of former
factories shuttered and farms
that keep marching, moving
into relentless seasons, moon
cycles. Illinois, you persist.

Teach us to love picket signs
and soil, know the turns of cogs,
yet shout what is not right, not
fair. Illinois, you are always
shifting, permanent and radiant.
Your two former capitals - one drowned
in the effluvium of floods, before
settling on your third and final home
in fields—an industry that grows upward.

Illinois, DuSable crowned Chicago,
your grandest and roughest city.
Writers and musicians ease into growth here,
tough weeds from soil. Your contradictions
of machine and prairie grass sing. You are
the song that draws us to the hearth. Illinois,
you keep swinging with your feet firmly
rooted on earth. You keep us standing
upright, standing with tenacity.

Illustration by Mark Hallett

Iliamna Remota, commonly known as the 'Kankakee mallow.' This endangered species of flowering plant is endemic only to Langham Island, a 20-acre island located in the Kankakee River near Bourbonnais, Ill.

Illustration by Mark Hallett



PRESENTERS

Alphabetical order by first name



Alee Quick is the faculty adviser for the Daily Egyptian, the independent student newspaper at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and the director of community engagement for the national education nonprofit the News Literacy Project. She previously served as editor of the regional downstate newspaper The Southern Illinoisan.



Alison Scholly is managing director of Public Media Company, providing strategic and operations consulting to nonprofit public and independent media around the country. With more than 30 years of experience in public broadcasting, journalism, and digital media, she specializes in collaborations, mergers, acquisitions, and sustainable business models. A native of Chicago, Scholly has spent her entire career in and around Chicago media. She served as COO/Interim CEO at Chicago Public Media/WBEZ and as VP of Interactive at the Chicago Tribune, and she advised Chicago Public Media on the acquisition of the Chicago Sun-Times.



Andrea Sáenz is the president and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust, one of the nation's largest and oldest community foundations. Under her leadership, the Trust is committed to fostering a stronger and more prosperous Chicago region where access to opportunities transcends race, ethnicity, or zip code. This mission is both professionally fulfilling and deeply personal for Sáenz, who has dedicated her career to reimagining civic institutions to better serve all community members. Sáenz's previous leadership roles include her work for the Chicago Public Library, Chicago Public Schools, the U.S. Department of Education, and community-based organizations focused on increasing Latine career success. She serves on numerous nonprofit boards.



Brandis Friedman is the Alexandra and John Nichols Chief Correspondent and Anchor for the WTTW News flagship program Chicago Tonight. She joined WTTW in 2013 from WBBM Newsradio, where she was an anchor and reporter, and has also worked as a special projects producer and reporter for WJLA-TV/ABC-7 in Washington, DC, as deputy communications director for the House Committee on Science and Technology, and as a reporter for NBC affiliates in Little Rock, Arkansas and Wichita Falls, Texas. Friedman is a regional Emmy Award-winner.



Chrissy Towle is a Google veteran having just entered her 20th year at Google. Towle oversees a team at Google whose focus is collaborating with local publishers and associations to bring the best of Google products and programs to news partners and promote sustainability within the local news industry. Towle's passion for news started in college where she graduated with a degree in Communication and Journalism from Santa Clara University. Towle spent her first eight years at Google working in business development on the Google Ads team.



Chuck Todd is the host of The Chuck ToddCast, a thrice-weekly podcast offering in-depth interviews with political figures, experts, and thought leaders. A six-time Emmy® Award-winner, Todd was NBC News's chief Political Analyst and served as the moderator of Meet the Press, the longest-running broadcast in television history, from 2014 to 2023. During his tenure, Meet the Press became the number-one-rated Sunday public affairs program for several years, secured its first Emmy®, and expanded the brand beyond its single weekly show. Todd's role in shaping NBC News' political coverage extended to his daily hosting of Meet the Press NOW, which he launched in June 2022. Todd has co-moderated multiple high-profile presidential debates, including the historic 2019 and 2020 Democratic debates. Todd served as NBC News's chief White House Correspondent 2008 to 2014, covering the Obama administration, and hosting The Daily Rundown on MSNBC. In 2007, he joined NBC News as political director. Todd is head of politics and host of "Sunday Night with Chuck Todd" for the Noosphere App.



Dale Robinson Anglin serves as the inaugural director of Press Forward, the growing coalition of 88+ local and national funders committed to investing more than \$500 million to strengthen communities through local news. Press Forward now includes 44 locally led chapters in 34 states. Most recently, Anglin served as Vice President for Grantmaking at the Cleveland Foundation, managing a \$60 million budget. At the foundation, Anglin led the effort to invest in a regional network of nonprofit journalism initiatives, including the creation of Documenters Cleveland and Signal, the nonprofit newsroom of Cleveland and Ohio. Anglin had previously invested in NJ Spotlight and Chalkbeat Newark while she worked at the Victoria Foundation in Newark, NJ. Anglin also launched a new system of integrated physical health and mental wellness in Cleveland schools, and led the region's COVID-19 Fund.



Daniel O. Ash is president of the Field Foundation, a private and independent foundation that supports community power building in Chicago through strategic investments in civic infrastructure, the cultural sector, local news outlets, and organizers. Through its grantmaking, the Field Foundation collaborates with funding partners to distribute more than \$11 million annually to nonprofit organizations and leaders, focusing primarily on the city's South and West sides. Prior to this, Ash was associate vice president of Community Impact for The Chicago Community Trust, and he previously served as the Trust's chief marketing officer. Before that, Ash spent 10 years as vice president of Chicago Public Media. Ash was selected as a Leadership Greater Chicago Daniel Burnham Fellow in 2023. He was recognized as a Crain's Chicago Notable Leader in Philanthropy in 2025.



Governor JB Pritzker is Illinois' 43rd Governor, elected in 2018 and reelected in 2022 with the highest vote share for any Democratic governor in more than 60 years. Since taking office, he has accomplished one of the most ambitious policy agendas in the nation. During his tenure, he has worked with the Illinois General Assembly to overcome years of fiscal mismanagement by balancing the state budget every year, eliminating the state's multi-billion-dollar bill backlog, improving pension funding, and achieving nine credit rating upgrades. He raised the minimum wage to a living wage and made historic investments to infrastructure. He has attracted massive new investments in electric vehicle manufacturing and quantum computing, helping Illinois' economy reach over a trillion dollars. Illinois now ranks among the top five states for infrastructure and workforce development and has significantly improved its ranking among CNBC's "Best States for Business." Pritzker led nation-leading climate action and clean energy expansion, creating thousands of new jobs and doubling the state's renewable energy production.



Heather Norman is the general manager at Tri States Public Radio. Before becoming general manager, she was the Underwriting and Outreach Coordinator for the station. Norman also serves as president of Illinois Public Broadcasting Council and is on the Illinois Humanities board of directors. She lives in Galesburg, Illinois.



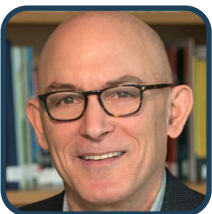
Jeff Rogers has been the executive director of the Illinois Press Foundation in Springfield and founding editor of its nonprofit newsroom, Capitol News Illinois, since late 2018. Before that, Rogers was a newspaper reporter and editor at daily and weekly newspapers in Illinois, Wisconsin and Virginia. Since its inception in early 2019, Capitol News Illinois has grown from three reporters at the Illinois Capitol to 13 journalists in Springfield, Chicago, Metro East, and Southern Illinois. It has scholastic journalism partnerships with University of Illinois Springfield, Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications, and Southern Illinois University. It also has news partnerships with most of the state's newspapers and broadcast outlets, and has a robust and growing digital and multimedia presence.



Heidi Dusek is the executive director of the Lumpkin Family Foundation in East Central Illinois. She has spent more than 20 years leading cross-sector efforts at the intersection of community development, philanthropy, and systems change. Her background spans grantmaking foundations, research and evaluation, public health, and K-12 education. She specializes in aligning vision with action, helping organizations bring bold ideas to life through thoughtful strategy, operational discipline, and collaborative leadership. Prior to her intentional pause and consulting work, Dusek served as executive director of the J.J. Keller Foundation, a family foundation in Wisconsin. Widely regarded as a creative problem solver and "uncertainty expert," Dusek is known for bringing clarity to complexity. In her upcoming book "Audacious Pause," she shares the lessons of her 18-month intentional break to travel North America with her husband, dog, and three kids. She also hosts the podcast Ordinary Sherpa.



Jhmira Alexander MPA, is a dynamic media engagement strategist and social impact leader with nearly 20 years experience cultivating collaboration among diverse groups. In 2025, she received the Leader for a New Chicago Award from the Field and MacArthur foundations. Alexander is the President and CEO of



Hugh Dellios is director of the Journalism Program at The Joyce Foundation, based in Chicago. He also co-chairs the public policy working group for the Press Forward national initiative to revitalize local news. Before Joyce, Dellios was an editor, reporter, and correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, Associated Press, NPR, and Crain's Chicago Business. While at the Tribune, he covered the Illinois General Assembly for two years in Springfield, Illinois.

Public Narrative, a media resource dedicated to narrative change and community-oriented journalism for nearly 40 years. Additionally, she leads Public Narrative's stewardship of the Chicago Independent Media Alliance (CIMA), a powerful collective of news and media makers supporting the city's independent media ecosystem. Alexander is deeply committed to amplifying voices that transform communities, lending her service to the City of Chicago's Reparations Task Force and the Al Raby Foundation and Nonprofit Quarterly's Boards of Directors.



John Palfrey is president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, one of the nation's largest philanthropies with assets of approximately \$9 billion, and offices in Chicago, New Delhi, and Abuja, Nigeria. Palfrey is a well-respected educator, author, legal scholar, and innovator with expertise in how new media is changing learning, education, and other institutions. Throughout his career, he has demonstrated a commitment to rigorous thinking, disruption, and creative solutions often made possible by technology, accessibility of information, and diversity and inclusion. Prior to joining the foundation, Palfrey served as Head of School at Phillips Academy, Andover, the only school of its kind to maintain need-blind admissions. Palfrey was the Henry N. Ess III Professor of Law and Vice Dean for Library and Information Resources at Harvard Law School. He is founding board chair of the Digital Public Library of America, and is the former board chair of LRNG, a nonprofit launched and supported by MacArthur. Palfrey is the board chair of the United States Impact Investing Alliance, co-chairs the Disability and Inclusion Forum's Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy, and serves on the board of the Fidelity Non-Profit Management Foundation.



John Stremsterfer is president & CEO of the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln (CFLL). As a leading philanthropic institution in the capital city, the Community Foundation seeks to increase philanthropy and impact the quality of life in Central Illinois. Stremsterfer came to CFLL from the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS), where he worked for the University of Illinois Foundation. Prior to UIS, he worked for his high school alma mater, Ursuline Academy in Springfield, and spent two years working in the Illinois Governor's Office, where he was a Dunn Fellow and Legislative Liaison for the Department of Corrections. Stremsterfer was the 2007 recipient of the Outstanding Fundraising Professional award of the Springfield chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals and, in 2014, he received the Young Alumnus Award from his alma mater, Illinois College. Stremsterfer currently serves as president of the Alliance of Illinois Community Foundations, is co-chair of the Illinois Philanthropy Roundtable, and has served on the board of directors of Forefront.



Judi Terzotis is CEO of Georges Media, Louisiana's largest news organization, where she leads strategy and growth across the company's portfolio of local news brands (The Acadiana Advocate, The Advocate, The Ascension Advocate, The New Orleans Advocate). She also serves as Executive in Residence for the Local Media Association, supporting national programs including the Lab for Journalism Funding. Prior to joining Georges Media, Terzotis spent 25 years with Gannett, most recently as regional president overseeing eight markets.



Julie Morita, MD, is president and CEO of The Joyce Foundation, overseeing the charitable distribution of \$65 million annually from assets of \$1.3 billion. The Joyce Foundation funds policy and other strategies designed to advance racial equity and economic mobility for the next generation in the Great Lakes region. Before joining The Joyce Foundation, Julie was executive vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, overseeing programs and grantmaking addressing systemic barriers to racial and health equity. She is also a former Chicago Department of Public Health commissioner, leading the public health needs of nearly 3 million residents. Julie has also served as an advisor to the White House, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



Kayce Ataiyero is the chief external affairs officer at The Joyce Foundation, where she oversees the foundation's strategic communications, the Journalism Program, and the Lend A Hand community grants fund. She is also a member of the foundation's leadership team. Ataiyero has extensive experience in communications, journalism and politics. Prior to joining the foundation in 2018, she served as director of external affairs for the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. She has also led communications for U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly, the Illinois Governor's Office, and the Illinois State Treasurer's Office. As an award-winning journalist, Kayce previously worked as a staff writer for the Chicago Tribune, The Raleigh News and Observer, Philadelphia Inquirer, and Washington Post. Ataiyero is board chair of Media Impact Funders, a national organization that advances the work of a broad range of funders committed to supporting media in the public interest.



Lauren M. Woods is director of abundance at Grand Victoria Foundation, where she leads the Abundance initiative, a philanthropic strategy advancing narrative power, cultural investment, and community leadership in Black communities across Illinois. Her work focuses on strengthening the civic and cultural infrastructure that supports local journalism, arts and culture, and community-driven solutions. Prior to joining Grand Victoria Foundation, Woods led the media and storytelling portfolio at The Chicago Community Trust, stewarding nearly \$15 million in grants to support local news, narrative change, and civic storytelling. She also helped launch Press Forward Chicago, a collaborative funding initiative designed to strengthen the region's journalism ecosystem.



Maribel Pérez Wadsworth is the president and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, as well as a trustee of the foundation. She is the first woman and the seventh president to lead the foundation. Drawing on her experience as the former president of Gannett Media and publisher of USA Today, Wadsworth brings a well-honed commitment to Knight's mission of informing and engaging communities. Starting as an editorial assistant with the Associated Press in 1994, Wadsworth's career evolved from reporter and editor roles to a key position in Gannett's corporate team, where she led the company's digital transformation. As president of the USA Today Network and later publisher of USA Today, she led a team of more than 4,000 journalists in more than 200 communities. During her tenure, Gannett newsrooms were recognized with five Pulitzer Prizes.



Melissa Bell joined Chicago Public Media as CEO in September 2024. She is the co-founder of Vox, which is a leader in explainer journalism, and the former publisher of Vox Media, which includes such publications as Eater, The Verge, and SB Nation. Bell played a critical role in shepherding Vox Media's merger with New York Magazine and its premium brands. Before starting Vox, Bell wrote a weekly consumer technology column and oversaw the development of new digital platforms for The Washington Post. Most recently, Bell was a visiting fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University.



Mark Turcotte was named in July 2025 as the sixth Illinois Poet Laureate. Turcotte (Turtle Mountain Band Anishinaabe) lived his early years on North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation and in the migrant camps of the western US. He is author of several books, including "The Feathered Heart and Exploding Chippewas." His work has appeared in many national and international literary journals and anthologies, including the new and first ever "Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry." He lives in Chicago, and since 2009, has been Distinguished-Writer-In-Residence in the English Department at DePaul University in Chicago.



Melody Spann Cooper is an innovative entrepreneur and communications leader with over 30 years experience in media management, marketing, and community engagement. Since becoming chairwoman and CEO in 1999, Melody Spann Cooper has expanded Midway Broadcasting's media assets, which includes the legendary WVON, Chicago's oldest Black-oriented radio station. Known for its social and political impact, WVON is considered one of the nation's most storied media institutions. In 2013, Spann Cooper spearheaded the development of WRLL Radio, La Voz De La Comunidad Latina, which delivers content to Chicago's thriving Latino community. In 2020, she led the company's acquisition of VONtv, WVON's digital streaming platform which reaches over 100 million households. Spann Cooper serves on numerous boards, including as co-chair of inclusion for the Obama Foundation and as past president and board member of the Illinois Broadcasters Association. She is also the author of "The Girlfriend's Guide to Closing the Deal."



Maudlyne Ihejirika is the director of Journalism & Storytelling for the Field Foundation. In her role, Ihejirika is responsible for supporting the foundation's work in strengthening local news production and storytelling to further reflect Chicago. She focuses on efforts to create a stronger, more connected, and sustainable local media ecosystem in which the stories of all Chicagoans are told accurately, fairly and contextually. Prior to joining the Field Foundation, Ihejirika spent 29 years with the Chicago Sun-Times, where she was an award-winning reporter and columnist, served as assistant city editor, and covered beats from crime and the inner city to housing and education, politics, and philanthropy. Ihejirika is the immediate past president of both the Chicago Journalists Association and the National Association of Black Journalists Chicago Chapter. She is also the author of "Escape From Nigeria: A Memoir of Faith, Love and War" (Africa World Press, 2016).



Mayor Michael Inman is serving his fourth term as mayor of Macomb, Illinois, having first been elected to office in May of 2011. Prior to his election as mayor, he served as a Macomb City 4th Ward Alderman, 2007-2011; was a Macomb Public Library Board Trustee, 2000-2010; and served on the McDonough County Board of Supervisors, 1994-1999. He serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the City, overseeing a nearly \$35 million annual budget. Inman, a lifelong resident of Macomb, is past president of the Illinois Municipal League. He was appointed to the Illinois Police Officers Pension Investment Fund Board of Trustees, as a municipal Trustee, by Governor Pritzker.



Nicholas Burt is the senior program officer for Investigative Journalism at the Driehaus Foundation. Since joining the foundation in 2015, he has led a program that has invested more than \$6 million in local newsrooms over the past three years, supporting initiatives from a new statewide reporting team to Pulitzer Prize-winning investigations. He brings nearly 15 years of grantmaking experience and is an alumnus of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.



R.C. McBride began his broadcasting career in his hometown of Danville, Illinois, while in high school. A graduate of Illinois State University's School of Communications, McBride returned to Bloomington-Normal to work at WJBC in 1997, serving as reporter, severe weather anchor, talk show host, and eventually the station's program director. McBride won a national Edward R. Murrow Award in 2002, and during his time as program director, the station won two Marconi Awards as National Radio Station of the Year and one national and six regional Murrow Overall Excellence awards. McBride moved to WGLT as executive director in 2017. In 2019, WGLT and Illinois State entered into an agreement with Bradley University to manage day-to-day operations of WCBU, Peoria's NPR station—a first of its kind partnership between public and private universities. McBride was elected to NPR's Board of Directors in 2022.



Sierra Henry is the senior media relations specialist at Illinois Farm Bureau, where she leads the development of public relations materials and coordinates with local, state and national news outlets to share the stories of Illinois agriculture and farmers. She also manages IFB's partnership with the Illinois Press Association, overseeing the selection and distribution of Farm Week and Partners magazine content to newspapers across the state. Before joining Illinois Farm Bureau, Sierra spent five years in the newspaper industry, most recently covering city government and business and economic development for The Pantagraph in Bloomington, Illinois. She is a native of Robinson, Illinois in Crawford County.



Sandra Cordova Micek is president & CEO of Window To The World Communications, Inc., the parent organization of WTTW, Chicago's PBS station, and WFMT, Chicago's classical music radio station. Previously, she was Senior Vice President of Global Brands at Hyatt, Senior Vice President of Marketing at USA TODAY,

and held leadership positions at NBCUniversal, Yahoo!, Accenture, and Turner Broadcasting. She earned a BA from Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Communications and an MBA from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. She was a McCormick Foundation Fellow in the inaugural class of the Leadership Greater Chicago Daniel Burnham Fellowship program, and serves on a number of boards including PBS and the Economic Club of Chicago, and was recognized by Crain's Chicago Business as a Notable Latino Leader.



Silvia Rivera is the director of the Local News portfolio at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, where she leads the foundation's Local News Big Bet and serves on the national Press Forward Management Committee. A seasoned leader in journalism, public media, and civic engagement, Rivera has spent her

career using media as a tool for social change and community voice—bringing deep expertise in strategic planning, program development, and information ecosystem assessments. She began her career as a youth journalism apprentice at Radio Arte (WRTE-FM), eventually rising to General Manager, and went on to serve as Managing Director of Vocalo 91.1 FM at Chicago Public Media, transforming the station into a pioneering Urban Alternative public media model. Prior to MacArthur, she served as Senior Business Strategist at Listening Post Collective, where she led strategic planning and built a capacity-building program supporting emerging civic media initiatives across the U.S.



Illinois Senator Seth Lewis proudly serves as the senator for the 24th District, which includes all or portions of 13 communities in Northeast Illinois' DuPage and suburban Cook counties. He was elected to the state senate in November of 2022 after serving two years in the House of Representatives. Prior to his service in the General

Assembly, Lewis was a trustee for the Bartlett Fire Protection District. Lewis is a member of the bipartisan Senate Budget Negotiation Team, and serves as the Minority Spokesperson for the Senate Appropriations-Public Safety & Infrastructure Committee. He also serves on the Senate Appropriations, Child Welfare, Consumer Protection, Financial Institutions, Human Rights, and Transportation committees. He created the state's first Indian American Advisory Council. Lewis is often considered the most bipartisan member of the Illinois Senate and was recently chosen by his peers and capitol insiders as the "Best Republican Senator" due to his commitment to compromise, civility, and bipartisan cooperation.



Stacy Reed is the chief program officer for the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln, where she leads the foundation's grantmaking and special initiatives, including Press Forward Springfield. In her role, she works closely with donors, nonprofit partners, and community leaders to direct philanthropic investments that

strengthen local organizations and expand opportunities throughout the region. Reed joined the Community Foundation in 2009 after spending a decade in Chicago working in public affairs. She currently serves on the board of directors for Heartland HOUSED and as a member of the Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.



Stefan Holt is an award-winning journalist and co-anchor of NBC 5 News at 5, 6 and 10 p.m., alongside Allison Rosati. A Chicago native, Holt returned to NBC 5 in 2020 after anchoring at WNBC-TV in New York, where he covered major national stories. His first chapter in Chicago included nearly five years anchoring the NBC 5 Morning News. He has earned multiple Chicago and New York Emmy Awards, including a 2022 Emmy for his investigative series "Flying Under the Radar," which explored the barriers airline pilots face when seeking mental health treatment. He was part of the team honored with a national Edward R. Murrow Award for coverage of the 2019 police standoff in Jersey City. Holt was also among the first U.S. journalists to report live from Havana, Cuba following the death of Fidel Castro. Before coming to NBC, Holt began his local news career in West Palm Beach, Florida, as a weekend anchor and reporter at WPBF-TV. Holt holds a commercial pilot certificate and frequently reports on aviation and transportation safety.



Tim Franklin is the John M. Mutz Chair in Local News at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. He was the founding director of the Medill Local News Initiative, which conducts research and works directly with newsrooms to bolster sustainability. Before joining Medill in 2017, Franklin was the president of The Poynter Institute, a nonprofit international school for professional journalists and a media think tank. He also has been the top editor of three metropolitan newspapers, The Baltimore Sun, Orlando Sentinel and Indianapolis Star, and he was a Washington managing editor for Bloomberg News. He worked for 17 years as a reporter and in senior newsroom leadership roles at the Chicago Tribune. Franklin has received a Distinguished Alumni Award from Indiana University. He has twice served as a jurist for the Pulitzer Prize. Franklin is the vice chair of the Local Media Foundation board. He also serves on The Associated Press Standards Advisory Panel and the board of the Alliance for Trust in Media.



Illinois Senator Steve Stadelman is an award-winning TV news anchor who decided to run for a seat in the Illinois Senate because his experiences as a journalist and parent convinced him of the need for fresh, no-nonsense representation in Springfield. Citizens in the Rockford-based 34th District elected him with 64 percent of the vote in 2012. In 2018, Stadelman was named Legislator of the Year for his work on the statewide expansion of the Rivers Edge tax credit. Stadelman previously had been awarded Legislator of the Year by the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Before entering public office, Stadelman worked for 25 years as a television news anchor and reporter for WTVO-Channel 17, where he developed a broad understanding of government and issues facing the Rockford area and state of Illinois.



Tracy Baim is executive director of Press Forward Chicago, a pooled fund for community journalism based at The Chicago Community Trust. Baim is co-founder and owner of Windy City Times. She is former publisher of the Chicago Reader. Baim has received Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Chicago Headline Club and the Chicago Journalists Association. In 2014, she was inducted into the NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists Hall of Fame. She is also in the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame. Baim has won numerous LGBTQ community and journalism honors, including the Community Media Workshop's Studs Terkel Award in 2005, the Lambda Legal Bon Foster Award in 2023, and the Center on Halsted Community Spirit Award in 2026. Baim has written and/or edited 14 books, her newest is "Liberating Healthcare," a biography of Howard Brown Health.



Steven Waldman is the founder and president of Rebuild Local News. He is also the co-founder and former president of Report for America, a national service program that places journalists in newsrooms across America. Before becoming an advocate for local journalism, Waldman was a journalist covering national politics for Newsweek, U.S. News and World Reports, and Washington Monthly. Later, he wrote a report for the Federal Communications Commission, outlining the information needs of communities.



Tracy Brown is chief partnerships officer at Chicago Public Media (CPM), where she has strategic oversight in building key partnerships with corporate and community organizations, local and national newsrooms, and media organizations. She oversees advertising and sponsorship at WBEZ public radio and the Chicago Sun-Times newspaper. Brown also leads innovative initiatives at CPM focused on sustainability and strengthening the news ecosystem. Brown joined Chicago Public Media in 2019 as managing editor at WBEZ. In 2021, she became Chief Content Officer, overseeing 200+ staffers in newsrooms at WBEZ and Chicago Sun-Times. Brown spent more than a decade as a news leader at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. She also worked as an editor at The Dallas Morning News and the St. Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) and at South Carolina's The State newspaper.



Tara Betts is the author of "Refuse to Disappear," "Break the Habit," and "Arc & Hue." She is a professor in the Peace Studies program at DePaul University and part of the faculty at the Solstice MFA program at Lasell University. Her poems, short stories, and essays have appeared in many journals and anthologies. She has represented Chicago twice at the National Poetry Slam and performed on HBO's "Def Poetry Jam." She also studied journalism at Loyola University Chicago.

PRESS FORWARD CHICAGO

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.

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PRESS FORWARD SPRINGFIELD

Support the Patrick F. Coburn Press Forward Springfield Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln to help rebuild a strong, sustainable local news ecosystem in central Illinois. Your gift honors a legacy of journalism while addressing the urgent decline of local reporting that leaves communities less informed and less engaged. Through Press Forward Springfield, this permanent fund is investing in trusted local news, strengthening accountability, and expanding coverage of critical issues shaping our region and state government.

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