



Illinois
LOCAL NEWS
SUMMIT
2026

Friday, April 10, 2026
Union League Club, Chicago

Press Forward 
Chicago

Press Forward 
Springfield

CONFERENCE TEAM

Tracy Baim, Summit Director

Mark Hallett, Summit Coordinator

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Vivian Gonzalez, Designer

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Liz Sung and Stephan Mazurek

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Cynthia McCafferty, Richard Ray

Publicity Club of Chicago

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Tracy Brown

Don Craven

Hugh Dellios

Tim Franklin

Steven Jameson

Heather Norman

Susan Patterson Plank

Stacy Reed

Jeff Rogers

Sen. Steve Stadelman

Judi Terzotis

Steven Waldman

Thank you to

Ken Severin and the

Union League Club team.

Thank you to the

Local Media Association for

inspiring this event based on

its 2025 convening in Michigan.

A special thank you to

Tim Franklin

for his work in securing key speakers.

Thank you for joining us today. Press Forward Chicago and Press Forward Springfield welcome you to the first Illinois Local News Summit. Thank you to the dozens of people and companies who helped us pull this together.

Press Forward Chicago and Press Forward Springfield work to create healthier communities by supporting strong and sustainable news and information ecosystems. We advance the public interest by strengthening access to trustworthy local information, supporting informed communities, and enhancing residents' ability to participate meaningfully in civic and community decisions.

Our goal today is simple: to present a myriad of options for key stakeholders to be engaged in solutions that can expand access to fact-based news and information throughout the state of Illinois. We have asked policymakers, foundations, philanthropists, civic and business leaders, academics, and media representatives to come together to hear about existing and potential solutions to help address the decline in local news and information in Illinois.

As you will hear today, the situation is at crisis level in some parts of Illinois that are effectively local news "deserts." Even in Chicago, which is considered an oasis, there are many people who can't access accurate news and information for their communities.

While the media world has changed dramatically in the past decade, there is clearly a path forward. There are creative solutions across the country that help fill the gaps in local coverage. When we say local coverage, we mean original news and information content, locally produced and distributed through a variety of ways: print, radio, broadcast, email newsletters, websites, social media, podcasts, and more.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but there are many possibilities. The solutions we will hear today, and work toward together on in the coming months and years, include:

- State and local government policies including tax credits for journalists, advertising tax credits, news literacy, and government advertising equity. Other policy efforts should ensure support for laws that protect journalists from attack (e.g., shield laws, physical protection to cover protest) and transparency (e.g., all forms of transparency at the state and local level, Open Meetings Act, Freedom of Information Act, reporting in the courtrooms).
- Colleges, universities, community colleges, and even high schools, including those with journalism programs, play an important role in the journalism ecosystem—and not just as a training ground. There are innovative ways journalism students are helping to cover their local communities. This should be expanded, and Illinois can create a robust and funded scholarship and fellowship program to fill news deserts across the state. There is vast potential for partnerships between higher education and the communities where they are based.
- Public and private philanthropy, both institutional and individual, can do more. The Press Forward movement is part of this, but funders throughout the state don't need a Press Forward chapter to fund local journalism directly. We welcome all solutions that invite more funders into journalism.
- Corporations can contribute by rebuilding their muscle for local advertising, which studies show is better for brand loyalty. Corporate foundations can go further, supporting nonprofit and public media through donations.
- Readers and listeners can donate small amounts to the local media they consume. Even just subscribing helps build the audience for these vital voices.
- Technology companies can support local media through direct funding and advertising credits. They rely on credible news sources for their content; the media should be compensated.

We are so excited by the success stories in local media, from diversifying revenue to creating new ways to meet audiences where they are — whether that is on social media or WhatsApp, at in-person events or virtual town halls. But more is needed to make sure our news deserts are filled with fact-based news and information.

If you take anything away from our event today, we hope it is that we are one state when it comes to accurate local news and information. We can't have a flourishing media scene in just a few parts of this state. Many important issues that need to be covered are statewide, from education, housing and health-care to climate and criminal justice. We are in this state together. Let's make sure we can all — in the words of newspaper hawkers throughout the years — “read all about it!”

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



By Mark Allen, Publisher, Olney Gazette

It is a nod to human absurdity that the most momentous decisions, such as “What shall I do with the remainder of my life?” must be made at such immature ages.

I wanted a career I was able to do, and that would at least not damage society, and perhaps make it a bit better.

Armed with a bachelor of science in journalism from University of Illinois, I practiced my profession in newsrooms with multiple journalists in Mount Vernon and Olney, and was the sole journalist at weeklies in McLeansboro and Bridgeport.

Twenty years were then invested as editor of Olney Daily Mail with a staff of three news reporters, sports editor, editorial assistant, and page composer. The last decade of my tenure saw the attrition of all save myself and a sports guy, and the entirety of my labors consisted of composing newspaper pages for Olney and surrounding communities.

I leapt at the chance to start a new weekly in 2017, and purchased it in 2019. I have taken two days off in the years since, working daily (to the chagrin of my wife), including Christmas. That has still not afforded the time to cover innumerable stories, and feature stories are a thing of the past. Despite the thin nature of each issue, people are overjoyed each Thursday: The paper is theirs, the only medium that is about them and their community.

Now that I have access to my industry’s financials, I understand newspaper chains do not cut staff for the sake of profits. My entire operation consists of myself and one employee; hiring a reporter would put me out of business.

Costs for printing and postage have trebled in recent years while subscription and advertisement rates are the same as when the Olney Gazette opened in 2017. Concurrently, governments continue to attempt to pull public notices from print (and the associated Illinois Press Association-sanctioned website that collates

notices) in favor of posting them (or not) on government sites. A hundred dollars to print a notice is a rounding error on the multimillion projects they frequently announce, but is a life preserver for local journalism.

I am unsure how long the paper can continue, and how long I can continue working daily as my latter years approach.

There have been efforts in recent years to provide some modest subsidies, but I have been unable to navigate the somewhat byzantine structures, which seem to include making myself an employee rather than publisher/owner.

If I had any cogent policy concepts or brilliant business ideas, I would be a newsmaker rather than a news reporter. I feel but as a passenger or lowest-level crew member who signed onto the Good Ship Journalism in 1993, and have inexorably become a captain as senior crew fell (and were tossed) overboard as waves pummel the bridge. There’s no one to bail water or run the bilge pumps, but I have a feeling I will remain at the helm until death or illness overtake me, or my newspaper is pried from my (hopefully not cold/dead) hands.

Mark Allen is owner of Mark Allen Media LLC and publisher of the Olney Gazette in Olney, Illinois, in the southern part of the state. It is 132 miles southeast of Springfield or 246 miles south of Chicago.

See <https://olneygazettenews.com/> or email olneygazettenews@gmail.com.

The View from Southern Illinois: Quotes

"We are a twice-weekly, own seven others too. No matter what we do, advertising revenue keeps declining. This week, we have 32 pages, all local news, no filler. This is what people want; the chains die, because they're not committed to local news. That's the problem with the industry — getting that local coverage, and in a way that people trust."

— John Galer, Owner, Journal News — Hillsboro
Montgomery County, South Central Illinois

"The county used to have three papers, plus two outsiders that covered us. Now it's just me. Our circulation used to be 2,500; now it's down to 1,200. Everybody wants to get on Facebook; I tell them that's great, if Facebook will come and cover the community, and take pictures when your kids do something great at school!"

— Lindell Smith, Clay County Republican — Louisville
Clay County, South Central Illinois

"I graduated from Mizzou last year, so I've been working here as a reporter since June. I grew up here, then went to school in a relatively bigger city, and am back here as a reporter in my home town. It's fun — I get to deal with so many people, on city boards, city council, etc. I cover the schools, and the superintendent was my math teacher when I was little. It's a small world!"

— Reece Candler, Reporter, County Journal — Percy
Randolph County, Southwestern Illinois

"I'm publishing this community newspaper almost entirely by myself; really have no personal life. My grandfather took over in the '50s, then my mom took over as publisher when he passed away, putting in over 40 years. After her retirement I took over. This is a small community; everyone knows each other. I'm worn out but love doing the job and serving my community. It requires a lot of attention to detail. We have ideas for grants — one being 'The Community Connected Parent' offering a free subscription to every family in our school. They'd see their child in the paper, but most importantly be more informed about their community."

— Jennifer Lane, Editor/Publisher/Owner, Hardin County Independent — Elizabethtown
Hardin County, Southeastern Illinois

"I've been here since 1990. The Sun reports on city council meetings in Trenton and New Baden. Both towns share the same school district. Newspaper printing costs went up a year ago. Not sure how much longer print will be viable; we talk about making the jump from print to online only. The post office cost is high; we could use help from senators on that. We publish a monthly calendar, a weekly senior column, the Meals on Wheels menu, Church Directory and more. Do I have a message for the summit? Keep your head up!"

— Sybil Conley, Publisher, Trenton Sun — Trenton
Clinton County, Southwestern Illinois

SCHEDULE *Subject to change*

DOORS OPEN 11:30 a.m.

- 12:00** **Stefan Holt**, MC Anchor, NBC Chicago
Mark Turcotte, Illinois Poet Laureate
Tara Betts, Poet
- 12:10** **Andrea Sáenz**, Pres. & CEO, The Chicago Community Trust
John Stremsterfer, Pres. & CEO, Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln
- 12:18** **Daniel O. Ash**, President, Field Foundation
- 12:20** **Illinois Governor JB Pritzker**
- 12:30** **The State of Local News in Illinois**
Tim Franklin, Founding Director, Medill Local News Initiative
- 12:45** **Pressing Forward**
Dale Anglin, Director, Press Forward National
- 12:50** **A National Focus on Local News**
Chuck Todd, Longtime national journalist and host of The Chuck ToddCast, *Moderator*
John Palfrey, President, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Maribel Pérez Wadsworth, President & CEO, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Julie Morita, President & CEO, The Joyce Foundation
- 1:25** 10-min break, coffee
- 1:35** **The Policy Landscape**
Steve Waldman, President and Founder, Rebuild Local News
- 1:50** **The Response of Illinois Policymakers**
Tracy Brown, Chief Partnerships Officer, Chicago Public Media, *Moderator*
Senator Steve Stadelman, D-34, Rockford area
Senator Seth Lewis, R-24, main district office in Carol Stream
Jhmira Alexander, Executive Director, Public Narrative
Hugh Dellios, Journalism Program Director, The Joyce Foundation

2:20

Funders for News & Information

Kayce Ataiyero, Chief External Affairs Officer, The Joyce Foundation, *Moderator*
Silvia Rivera, Director of the Local News Program, MacArthur Foundation
Heidi Dusek, Executive Director, Lumpkin Family Foundation
Nicholas Burt, Senior Program Officer, Driehaus Foundation
Chrissy Towle, Director of Association and Local News Partnerships, Google

2:45

The View from the Front Lines: Public Media

Alison Scholly, Managing Director, Public Media Company

2:50

Brandis Friedman, Anchor and Reporter, WTTW, *Moderator*
Sandra Cordova Micek, President & CEO, WTTW & WFMT
Melissa Bell, CEO, Chicago Public Media
R.C. McBride, General Manager, NPR Board, WGLT
Heather Norman, General Manager, Tri States Public Radio

3:20

Lightning Round: The Impact on Community

Maudlyne Ihejirika, Director of Journalism & Storytelling, Field Foundation, *Moderator*
Mayor Mike Inman, Macomb, Illinois
Melody Spann Cooper, Owner, Midway Broadcasting Corp., WVON, WRLL Radio, La Voz De La Comunidad Latina, VONtv
Judi Terzotis, President and Publisher, The Times-Picayune and Local Media Association Board Member
Jeff Rogers, Executive Director, Illinois Press Foundation
Alee Quick, Faculty Adviser, Daily Egyptian, Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Sierra Henry, Senior Media Relations Specialist, Illinois Farm Bureau

3:50

Towards Abundance

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

3:55

Closing

Stacy Reed, Chief Program Officer, Press Forward Springfield
Tracy Baim, Executive Director, Press Forward Chicago

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Reception

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 Illinoisian.



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.



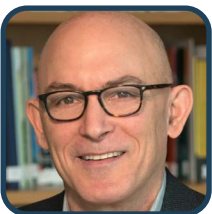
Jeff Rogers has been the executive director of the Illinois Press Foundation in Springfield and founding editor of its nonprofit newsroom, Capitol News Illinois, since late 2018. Before that, Rogers was a newspaper reporter and editor at daily and weekly newspapers in Illinois, Wisconsin and Virginia. 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 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.



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.



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.

Illinois Local News Summit Partners



Resources

Press Forward Chicago, including landscape needs assessment:

<https://www.cct.org/pressforward/>

Press Forward Springfield:

<https://cfl.org/Initiatives-Projects/Press-Forward-Springfield>

Press Forward National:

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

Local Media Association:

<https://localmedia.org/>

Rebuild Local News:

<https://www.rebuildlocalnews.org/>

The Pivot Fund, Illinois media mapping released soon:

<https://thepivotfund.org/>

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.

Contact: Tracy Baim
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DONATE TO PRESS FORWARD CHICAGO



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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