



Press Forward Must Ensure Equitable Distribution of Resources So Underrepresented Voices are Heard and Supported

For those of us who work in journalism, there is not a day that passes that we don't see vividly how newsrooms are shrinking and how local news deserts are negatively impacting people.

So when a group of foundation leaders and heads of philanthropic organizations announced the Press Forward initiative to raise hundreds of millions of dollars to support local news, those of us who work in the field didn't hesitate to applaud. After all, we need many more funders to understand that local news is vital to the health and sustainability of our democracy. A growing number of people are vulnerable to becoming victims of disinformation and misinformation masquerading as credible local and national news.

As the much-anticipated initiative to fortify local news ecosystems rolls out, we think it's important to remember just what is "local news" and who are the people who have long been providing it.

The organizations that have signed this open letter represent, support, train and serve many of the journalists, leaders and founders of color who are essential to the sustainability of healthy, equitable and trustworthy local news ecosystems.

Philanthropy has a responsibility to be inclusive, intentional and transparent about how funding from this initiative is distributed. It is no secret that BIPOC-led organizations are awarded [less grant money](#) and are less trusted with how to spend that money when compared to white-led institutions. A recent [study](#) of 103 publishers of color and outlets serving "racial, ethnic, or linguistic communities" revealed that 53 percent of them will be out of business in less than five years if current revenue trends persist." In effect, that would undermine the stated objectives of the Press Forward initiative.

Our organizations have come together to advocate on behalf of Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous and other people of color who have historically been neglected, misrepresented or tokenized. Engaging our people and our communities in Press Forward will be vital to its success and credibility. In many of the country's most populous regions and cities, communities of color account for the majority demographic.

We are pleased to see that the funding priorities of the Press Forward initiative include "improving diversity of experience and thought." As this initiative unfolds and decisions are made about where support is directed, we want to be clear: Racial and ethnic diversity, equity and belonging must be among the pillars of its foundation. An equitable distribution of resources and opportunities ensures that underrepresented voices are heard and elevated by journalists, leaders and publishers who know them best.

What we mean by this is:

- Align funding priorities with the demographic shifts occurring across our nation by investing in trusted leaders, publishers, journalists and organizations serving communities of color.
- Consider as a foundational criteria for all newsrooms that their organizations, including leadership, are reflective of the communities they serve.
- Break the cycle of disinvestment and the disproportionate investment in white leaders and organizations with under-representation of people of color.

Racial and ethnic diversity fosters trust between media outlets and underrepresented communities. When people see themselves and their experiences reflected in the news, they are more likely to engage with it and view journalism as a credible and valuable resource. We know from research done by the [Trust Project](#) that one of the [indicators of trustworthiness](#) on the part of news consumers is the inclusion of diverse voices.

If philanthropy is not intentional about addressing historical funding inequities and the processes by which they persist, it is complicit in the harm they inflict. At a time when we are seeing intentional and structural attacks on marginalized communities gain momentum in our society, this would be unacceptable.

Significant investment in the people, publications, and organizations that serve an increasingly diverse society must be made with clear-eyed intention. We commend the support many of the foundations that are part of this initiative have contributed to news ecosystems. We stand ready to help this effort any way we can; we are watching it with enthusiasm, with vigilance and concern.

As philanthropic stakeholders dedicated to supporting the growth and sustainability of local news, your commitment to these values can help shape not only the future of journalism, but also the broader fabric of our society.

Thank you.

Signed,

Professional Membership Associations

Naomi Tacuyan Underwood, Executive Director, Asian American Journalists Association

Nicole Dungca, National Board President, Asian American Journalists Association

Rebecca Landsberry-Baker, Executive Director, Indigenous Journalists Association

Christine Trudeau, President, Indigenous Journalists Association

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Vision25: Racial Equity in Journalism Partners

John X. Miller, Chair, Board of Directors, Maynard Institute

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LaSharah S. Bunting, CEO and Executive Director, Online News Association

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