

25th ISOJ Press Forward: A half-billion-dollar philanthropic initiative to revitalize U.S. local news

- Chair: **Rachel Davis Mersey**, dean, **Moody College of Communication, UT Austin**
 - Special presentation: **John Palfrey**, president, **MacArthur Foundation**
 - **Dale R. Anglin**, director, **Press Forward**
 - **Courtney Bengtson**, chief strategy officer, **Wichita Foundation**
 - **Jim Brady**, vice president of journalism, **Knight Foundation**
-

John Palfrey [00:00:00] Thanks so much for the invitation to be here and to the associ . Organizers, this is an amazing opportunity to be with an inspiring group from around the world, and of course, to be on live stream with hundreds more around the world talking about something we all feel really strongly about and are passionate about, which is support for local news. And the panel you just heard or the keynote discussion between, two amazing leaders in, Wendi and Emily is really the why? I don't think there's much more I have to say ultimately on the way. And I think you all get it. But what I thought I would start with is a tiny bit of the origin story of Press Forward. And then I'm going to pitch it over, or we will pitch it over to our colleagues who are doing the work on the ground of Press Forward right now, and some heroes of mine, to to my left, who are leading the way. So on the origin story of Press Forward, I know that there are a lot of, views about it, and there are a lot of different stories about. But let me just tell it from my perspective, and maybe we can do a little myth busting, but also, tee up what I hope will be a productive conversation about the future of local news. So in some ways, I think it starts from the incredible, crisis that is on the ground. We understand in local news, the fact that we are losing 2 to 2 and a half newspapers in America every week, it is the decline in support for journalism, in terms of financial support from people paying for newspapers or paying for other forms of media. It is the growth of news deserts so well documented, by Meadows, Penny Abernathy and others. We do not need to go into the the negative parts of the story, but the positive side of the story is just as important, and is why I think philanthropy is stepping up in this particular way. And the positive side of the story is exactly, I think, what Wendi is doing in Memphis and so many other examples across the country, and that the 19th is supporting in communities across the country. And there are many things, I think, that these organizations and others like them have in common. And one of them is they are incredibly devoted to serving democracy. Right. This is exactly what we need to revitalize an American democracy that is in crisis. The other thing they have is they're all two, a one, I believe, undercapitalized. They just don't have enough money. Right? Emily is on the road raising money. She's got a kid at home all the time. She's out there, you know, around the country, raising money for the 19th. Wendi, ditto, raising money constantly. This is what people have to do to keep these organizations going and are doing a wonderful job of it, particularly the ones that have great stories. They mentioned Outlier in Detroit, another shining example of this, but it is they're all undercapitalized. And so I think one of the things that we in philanthropy have to do. So the origin story, of course, is about what's happening on the ground in communities. In fact, we've never served many communities. Memphis and Detroit have communities that have never been served. Well, for instance, by the journalistic sector, something we have to come to grips with. But also their wealthy communities, wealthy white communities that are under, investing in their

news infrastructure as well. It's not only about, under- resourced communities, literally, it's just everywhere we're having this crisis. On the flip side, though, is what are we doing as philanthropy? And so the other side of the origin story is can we step up and do more? So if you want to know what Press Forward is in a literal sense, it is a movement to get more people paying for. News, local news, so for all of the, hopes and dreams they've been pinned on Press Forward or the critics or whatever, we can get into that. It is really actually simple. It's saying to ourselves as funders and to others, let's get in the game. You're going to hear from an amazing hero, Courtney, who is doing this in Wichita on the ground. You are going to hear from Dale, who is doing this incredible way, via the Miami Foundation. Across the country, you're going to hear from Jim Brady, first person to raise their hand. Let's double what we're doing. Right. So what we're asking people to do who are in positions to do this is to increase the amount of money you're putting in local news that's press forward. We can get off the stage. Like that is the effort to get more people thinking about this as something to support. Okay. There are conversations about how to allocate funds. I get that we'll come to it. But really simply, if you want the headline, it is about more people should pay more money for news, particularly at the local level. Otherwise we won't have a democracy in America. Okay, does that make like really simple sense? Real clarity right, is more people need to pay more money for local news so we can have a democracy. That's it. That's press forward. Right? We're doing it now when we ask ourselves, for instance, at MacArthur Foundation, how do we do that? We have an amazing program, I think, in journalism, media supporting many of you in this room and many others, elsewhere, that has been going for decades. It is one of our two enduring commitments. It means we're doing it forever, or at least as long as I'm around or whatever we are doing journalism, media, that is. And over the next five years, that'll be another, say, \$150 million. We gave that phrase that is support for NPR. It's support for diversity across the country. Newsrooms. It's independent film and so forth. But we weren't really deeply doing local news, and we found when we did a strategic review that we needed to do that too. So if you want to know, what did MacArthur Foundation decide to do? We said we're going to double more than double, substantially more than double what we were putting into the Racial Equity and Journalism Fund, more than double what we're putting into News Match. By the way, the news match money does come from somewhere, which is to say large. They have big foundations. We're going to more than double what we're doing locally, because that is what it's going to take at that kind of a lift. But then we looked at the math and we said, even with our balance sheet, even if we take money from all sorts of other things, which is true, you have to make really hard choices. You have to wind down other programs to put money into local news. Even with we did what we're committing to do, which is an extra 150 million on top of the previous 150 million over the next five years, and \$25 million in impact investment, which what we've committed to do, that's not going to be even close to enough. So what we decided to do is something that philanthropy has not done, which is try to get our act together and do it together. So press forward has been, from my perspective, really simple. I have spent 18 months on airplanes going from place to place, and the next place I'm going is Alaska next week, where we're raising money week after or two weeks after that, Wichita and so forth. So whistle stop tour. We now have 57 donors who have said they're going to step up and do more for local news. That's what press forward is. It is really simple. More people saying they're going to put more money into the incredible, super important, diverse, emerging work that's going on. Dale is leading that effort

nationally, which is incredible. Jim is leading that work at Knight Foundation and Knight Foundation said. We'll do the same thing. We will more than double what we've been doing. And I was board chair of Knight. I can say this is all true. Like they were doing this huge amount. They're the biggest funder in journalism and they're more than doubling it over the next five years, more capital in. Right. And doing this in a great way. And then from a national level, we realized there is no way, even if we commit a half \$1 billion, which we have done or more over the next five years, that that's going to do it. And we realize that what has to happen over time is this has to be funded locally. It absolutely has to be from local communities. So part of it, we started with our hometown of Chicago. We said, all right, let's do it where we are. We've put with others \$10 million into a fund in Chicago to support the amazing, and we could get into that, but dozens and dozens of incredible newsrooms in Chicago, we said, oh my gosh, in our state of Illinois, the the, the capital Springfield is almost uncovered there, like 3 or 4 people covering the capital. We're putting a couple million dollars, along with the community Foundation of the Land of Lincoln, into a press board in Springfield. And what we've seen is that around the country now, 20 different organizations and communities have stepped up to do press for local. I think the next half a billion is going to come there. We're going to help seed it. We're going to help support it. We're going to put money in. We're going to be there on planes. We're going to support the heck out of Courtney as she does it in Wichita, which is one of the first six to raise their hand. But I think ultimately the success of this is when people in communities, individuals, families, family foundations, community foundations and yes, the big ones all step up and say we have to fund local news. We have to fund this bigger, more diverse set of people covering more communities better than we've ever done to revitalize democracy. That's what has to happen. If it doesn't happen, it's not going to work. It's not the only thing, it's one part of it. But we absolutely have to get to a place where people are adding subscriptions to newspapers or to media, whatever it might be. On top of Netflix and Hulu and Amazon Prime, we have to get to a place where, in addition to giving money to the arts and culture organizations the symphony, the jazz club, the kinds of things we've supported, the hospitals, the alma maters you have to give to local news, too. That's the point of what press forward is, is to get in community after community. People doing that. Now, before I turn it over to my colleagues, I will add one little tidbit, which is that this is the International Society of Online Journalists, so I heard and what is so exciting to me is that since we have launched this commitment of more than half \$1 billion, which I hope we'll get even more to, you know, maybe 2 billion over time, is that I've heard that around the world, there are some other efforts to do this where other people are saying, yes, we need to do this in other countries. We know that there are efforts going in at least three other countries around the world be traveling this summer to two of those countries as they get going. I actually think you don't have to agree with me, but I actually think for most places this kind of an effort, this kind of a focus, this kind of an investment is going to be necessary around the world. Probably in most countries we do a lot of investment. For instance, in Nigeria and India. I know it's necessary. They're undercapitalized as well. So one thing that I'm excited about in this international setting is to say we have to get our act together in the U.S., just to be clear and community after community. But I think a network of efforts that actually are getting more people to step up and put more money into local news would be a really powerful thing. So that's probably a year, you know, three, 4 or 5, right. Effort. But I think it's going to be. Exciting if we

get there, so I hope that's an okay overview. Dean mercy. And I'm really excited to hear about the true heroes who are working on it. Talk about the effort. Thank you.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:10:08] Thank you. That was a wonderful overview. And I think it's not only helpful to hear the international framework and vision, but also the deep dive here in the US. So I appreciate that very much. And I think local news has had a real impact. If we have the president of the MacArthur Foundation giving us the headline in an overview like that. So thank you, Jim. John mentioned that Knight was one of the first organizations to raise its hand and say, we're going to double. I'd like you to talk a little bit about Knight Foundation's commitment in this space. Why do you do it and why do you do it now?

Jim Brady [00:10:38] John asked. But I mean, to some extent I'm being facetious, but I think actually one of the best things about Press forward is that it wasn't led by Knight. Because I feel like if Knight had gone out there and said, we want to raise this massive fund, people would have said, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's what you guys do. Everybody knows that's what you do. Having MacArthur having John lead on this, I think got a bunch of people in who I think heard the heard the ask differently than they would have heard it from us because we've been doing this for such a long time. So I think it was crucial that John took the mantle on this and did in got his million mile club or whatever you're in now flying around the country and world to do this. So I mean, it really was as simple as once, this was once this was something that was happening. We went to the board and got it approved rather easily because this is something that's really important tonight. And of course we were going to be a part of this. And so I mean, we were in from we were in right out of the gate and and like John, I mean, I think Dale and I are going to get a probably a tour t shirt made before too long. Of all the places she and I have gone together to try to get local press forward started, because that's such an exciting part of this to have. We've been flying all these places to meet with funders who have never funded journalism or done it in very, very small increments, who now want to be part of a local press forward. And if we can get them in the habit of funding journalism in their community, that's amazing. It's an amazing legacy for Press Forward, because, as John noted, there just is not enough money for national philanthropy to to give money to every local news organization in the country that just doesn't scale. But if you can get local funders to start taking those that responsibility locally and the national funders can look at sort of the bigger picture and some of the, you know, service organizations and industry orgs and also newsrooms, but also working at that national level. I think that's a really interesting partnership there that could make a significant difference down the road. So as John said, we we're doing \$30 million a year, already, and now we're doing 60 million for the next five each of the next five years. So we went from 150 to 300 million over the next five and are excited to see where this goes, because it's a real once in a generation opportunity to solve this problem that's beset us for the last 25 years.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:12:50] And Knight has certainly set the example of national funding, but also local funding, where the Knight brothers had really invested in newspapers. Dale, I'm hoping you can expand on that local piece. Talk to us about the origin stories of these local chapters. What do they look like, what's happening in that market?

Dale R Anglin [00:13:06] So first, I want to thank the people who have stepped up and become those 20. There are 20 chapters and there are 20 origin stories. I will just say that, we have some where journalists themselves came together and said, we want to figure out how to support each other in this very tenuous space that we're in. And then they went to the funders and said, we're together. Will you work with us, to figure out how we can support, bring more resources to this space? We've got places where a former journalist is now at a foundation and has taken up the mantle and has really advocated for this to be part of the portfolio. We've got groups in Pennsylvania where they were going to do separate. We wanted to do separate chapters. And they realized actually, even though they're like 20 different counties, it's the same issues. And so now we're going to have a large central Pennsylvania press forward. And for the first time, they're going to be working together. They're not used to doing that. So some of our work is teaching collaboration. It really is not for National to come in and tell local how to do it. It is to galvanize and educate and get people to really understand that we all have this issue in every community. If you just ask the question, get the funder and the important person in the space, and sometimes it's an individual donor. By the way, we have places where I was just in Florida, a couple of individual donors really worked with their community foundation to advocate for this. So there's no one right way in. The point is, are you asking the question about what does local news look like in your ecosystem? Usually we all have our own biases and we know 1 or 2 outlets. It turns out there's probably five, or there should be because there's that many communities that need support. We try to get all of our local chapters to do a first few things first. Do the research. Figure out who to bring on board. Talk with your journalistic ecosystem, not just funder. The funder talking to each other. Right? You got to talk to the practitioners on the ground. So we're having a lot of fun flying to different places. But people, when we get to those places, I think expect us to tell them how to do it. And it really is. How do we get the right types of people in the room in your location, get you the information on how other people are doing it, and then you sit at a table and think about what would work for you best. But I want to emphasize the thing that, John said that this is about more and better. And so, yes, we need more money and we know audiences have changed, for example. So there's also got to be conversations on the journalism side about how are you approaching audience? Things are just shifting. I'm sorry. And you can't write what you wrote five years ago and expect them to just come. So we all those conversations have to happen in this. What I think of is not just about money. It really is this movement, to help people understand, I think we all thought we just assume or local journalism would always be there, and we didn't understand how important it was to threading us together. And now when it's not there and you see the threads go away, you realize how important it is. So the question is, how do you get it back? But it can't look like it look 20 years ago.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:16:30] Dale, I feel like, a little validated here. 15 years ago, when I started studying the psychology of media use, people thought I was sort of selling and marketing the news. But now I realize that that's really what this is, the relationship between local news media's and their audiences. Courtney, we've talked kind of broadly about how everyone has a different origin story, but I'd love for you to talk through what's happening in Wichita. Where did press forward connect with your priorities, and how did this accelerate what you were looking to do?

Courtney Bengtson [00:16:58] Sure. Thank you. So in Wichita, just to kind of give you a quick landscape scan, MSA is about 600,000. Where? Right almost in the middle of America, the only real urban city in a rural community, all around us, farmland everywhere. And we have always tried to, as a mid-sized community, fight above our weight class, but there are just some things that we have struggled to get to and so related to our news and information work. And you'll hear me call it news and information and not journalism strategically. And I can explain that later. Our news and information work really began. We're a public place based community foundation, we focus solely on the city of Wichita. Because we have that geographic boundary. What we're able to do is really dive deep into what are some of the community issues that we can help try and affect. We can't solve any one issue as a community foundation. Sort of the expectation is that, you know, all of the the challenges and opportunities in your community and you're going to be able to to fix all of them. We definitely don't believe that. But when we did, about five years ago, a predictive analytics study around what Wichita needed to do to be competitive in the midsize market. There were all of these economic challenges that were laid forward, really large ones that with the capital that we have available were like, we really we don't know if we can really move the needle on this. But it all went back to the very beginning of the story when the predictive analyst company said, you can say all of these things, but your own community doesn't even know that these challenges exist because they're not informed about them. And that was like I think sometimes philanthropy in general makes things really hard, right? That we think, oh, we can do X, Y and Z and how can we affect all of those pieces? And we just took a step back as an organization and said, people need to know what's going on. If they don't know what's happening they can affect this change. And so we are letting other people in our community deal with those sort of economic challenges. And we're focused on news and information, both access and dissemination. And we began that journey about five years ago. Slowly started investing capital partnered with a lot of national organizations thanks to our connection with Knight Foundation. And, and really started diving into some of that. But what really evolved and kind of changed the game for us is when people across the country started talking at the local level about affecting news and information. We, we I feel like we lived on a little bit of a lonely island for a while, and I don't feel that way anymore. Now that we have sort of this network of, of community that is coming together to really say, hey, local news and information matters in your community just as much as all of the other cultural, societal amenities that you have. And if you can't make systemic or effective change as a citizen, we as a community foundation need to be working and helping try to find that solution, to be able to get you to the point where you can make that change for yourself, your family, your business, the people in your community. And that's really the impetus for us is just we want people to be able to make informed and engaged decisions about the things that affect their everyday lives.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:20:33] That's really helpful framing. And it sounds like then the Wichita Foundation really came to this through your own exploration of what was going on in your community. I'm curious to hear from the rest of the panelists. What messages are echoing with local funders? What are local funders? How are you convincing them to come to the table if they're not the Wichita Foundation who saw this on their own? John.

John Palfrey [00:20:55] Well, the most fun thing, truly, about being part of press forward and part of our effort here, by the way, it's really serious work, but trying to make it fun. And so the best thing Courtney said of the many things this amazing American hero has said this morning, is that it's a community, right? You have found a group of people. There's now a network of people in community after community who are saying, this matters, and you're going to connect and we're going to make it an interesting, positive, forward looking kind of community. And so I've been on sort of a whistle stop tour with all these guys going around the country and talking to many different donors who have not been donors to, news and information around the country. And different things resonate. And so anybody who has ever done this and it's sort of weird, I know foundation president that has a lot of money takes up the, you know, fund, giving hats and puts on the fundraising hat. That's what I've been doing. But sitting across from other people and saying, we're doing this, inviting you in, the reasons why people join us in that invitation, many of whom, as I said, have never given money to, news and information, ever before. They come to it because they really care about climate. And they know if we don't agree on the basic facts about the fact that the Earth is warming and various things are happening, that it's going to be hard to achieve those goals. They care because they care about the justice in their community. And if we don't have agreement about the criminal justice system and how it works, that's not the reform is not going to play out if there's misinformation down the line, whatever your issue is, as we've been arguing to individuals, make this one of your topics. Invest in news and information no matter what your number one issue is. So across the country, what we've seen is through press forward and otherwise, is that people who are health funders have joined Press Forward as a cohort to focus on quality news and information locally around health. If people don't believe in a vaccine, they're not going to take it right. It's crucial to big foundations like Robert Johnson, Kaiser Family Foundation that people at the local level get this. So it's all sorts of reasons that people are standing up and investing. And ideally, it just as Courtney put it, it's because it's crucial to the democracy of that community, to the engagement of that. And if we don't do it, we are missing something that makes everything else impossible. So tons of origin stories, as you've said, but lots of roots to the same answer. We have to invest in this.

Dale R Anglin [00:23:14] Yeah, I'm finding that. I just ask, what are the issues in your community? I just start there and there's always an answer. I was we were in Florida last week and that was mental health and literacy. I've talked to some others and it's children and whatever. And then I just ask the next question, how do people know that's what the problems are? How are they getting information? Both investigative and quality of life information. Right. And inevitably, everybody has a story of somebody not getting the information that they need. Right. I don't even have to say much than I say, "and what's the outlet for that happening?" And then they're like, well, this paper has been decimated. Or and there's a story. And then it's like, well, we have bright spots and options for you. If you're willing to join us on your local level to figure out how to make this work, because it turns out when you don't have that, really, people cannot make the life and death decisions that they need to make. We saw that in COVID when we did it in Ohio while we were learning this space. The government shut down for five weeks and we literally had nobody telling people where to get their checks, what was going to happen to some of their systems. There was literally nobody doing it. It was a real experiment in real time. Everybody has a story like that. You just need to get them to focus on it and then figure

out, okay, this is something in addition to health and arts and things that if that's as important to you, this should be as important to you. The question is just what does it take? Not everybody has to have a 17 person newsroom. We're not saying that two people paid for on a regular basis, with some memberships, and subscriptions can make it work in certain communities. There's really all sorts of ways to do it. But you got to ask the question first. No matter what issue you care about, that's how we convince my staff at the Cleveland Foundation, because nobody was a journalism funder. I was not even one. And at first they were like, but that means you're taking money away from this budget item. And I said, you're working on census, you're working on homelessness, you're working on climate. I know for a fact people in Cleveland don't even know what that stuff is. They don't know where to go to even get the information. We can't figure out the news and information. All of the work you are doing will not matter. So those are the conversations we're having with donors, individual donors, staff, foundations, community foundations. Everybody's got an answer. The question is just then how do you help them really to see what's the path toward doing something that's sustainable in their community?

Jim Brady [00:25:47] I had to, I think I agree with both John and Dale. I think there's also a FOMO thing. But the slight alteration I would be fear of missing the opportunity. There. I think we underestimate those of us who work in journalism. Underestimate how hard it is to evaluate journalism. If you don't come from this area. Right. It's like I. I got a proposal to fund something, and astrophysics wouldn't really know. I really wouldn't know what to do with that. And I think we underestimate when you get a proposal. If you're a funder who doesn't fund journalism and you get a proposal that's to fund a local website to, here's a couple of resumes of the people who want to do it. I think we all feel like we could make that call. But if you don't really understand journalism and you don't understand, it's not that easy to make it. And I've made this joke before that we used about 20 words to name newspapers in this country for like 300 years. So like if you just put on your resume, like I worked at the register guard, like everybody's like, well, that sounds legitimate. But we all know there are pink slime sites all over the country that are funded by partisan actors that can absolutely pollute communities with crappy information if you let them out, if you actually give them money to fund them. And that has happened where people have given money to something they thought was going to help the community. And not only didn't it help the community actually hurt the community. So I think there's this sense of like, I can get into press forward and I can work with all these people who do fund journalism, who do understand how to make these decisions, do understand how to analyze proposals. And I think that part has been really interesting for a lot of funders who have not. Wichita has been at this for a while, I really want to tip to my cap to tip my cap to Courtney. I mean, they've been leading on this for years, but there are a lot of funders who I think are in this now because they feel like they can work with people who do fund journalism, and they can learn some of the ways, learn about the industry, learn what areas need more funding. I do think the other thing is when you start to expand their minds a little bit around what they can fund, because I think a lot of community foundations immediately think I can just fund all these newsrooms in my community, but there's other things they can do to strengthen the overall ecosystem, whether that's funding technology upgrades, whether it's funding business positions, funding RFA cohort members. This is a lot they can do. And I think once you start opening their mind to what other

opportunities are out there for funding and community, I think they get excited because they're learning things that they hadn't thought of on their own.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:28:00] Courtney, as we talk about messages that resonate at the local level, can you talk through your point about journalism versus news and information? I think that's an important conversation to have in this context.

Courtney Bengtson [00:28:12] Yeah. So I think it depends on where you come from. And you really have to understand your local community and how they're going to respond. So when we first started doing this work, it was all about journalism, and we really weren't getting a lot of traction because at the time, five, six years ago, people were really like, they're really only focusing on one legacy media institution that existed in our community, and that is where their head went when you said journalism. And so we were like, okay, how can we you know, even sometimes I toy with even saying news. Sometimes I just drop that too. And I just say information just because I think if you almost put it to the level of when you're talking to people similar to what you said Dale, when we start a conversation, either with a potential partner, a potential donor, we start with, how do you get your information? And it's basic. I'm not saying, hey, which which outlet do you read? Or, you know, what's your morning routine? Do you talk to Alexa and have her talk about NPR? You know, like I'm not throwing out all of these things because it's a basic in my opinion. And our opinion at the Foundation news is a public good that should be provided to our community and allow you to be able to grow and thrive. The vision of the Wichita Foundation is to allow Wichitans to thrive and belong in the community that they live in, and that if we can't provide people information to make informed decisions, that's that's the key issue here. And so when we don't say journalism because it polarizes the conversation from the very beginning. And again, sometimes news does to you really, at the local level, have to understand how your community is going to respond and then use the terms that are most effective for the audience.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:29:55] Thank you for that. This is really a question for John and Jim. As you think about this news, information, journalism space, Knight has been in journalism for a long time. How does this funding differ from previous funding efforts in journalism? Maybe some of it's this language choice, but I'd love to hear your take on that.

Jim Brady [00:30:13] Not much, to be honest. I mean, I think, I would press the four pillars of press forward, are all things that we have funded for years. So I don't think there's really a massive there's not a major shift going on here. I say the one for us that's a little bit different is that we have historically not funded a lot of directly funded a lot of newsrooms outside of Knight cities. That's been a longstanding thing. Just because, again, as I said earlier, it doesn't scale to fund everywhere in the country because we're really trying to focus on an ecosystem level. That's a lot of our grant making, but we are doing more of that as part of press forward. So that's a slight shift as well that we want to collaborate with our fellow funders, and that is one of the priorities of Press Forward. And we've all committed to funding in the four priorities. And so we're doing that as well. But otherwise really not much of a difference. I think it's been for us, I think just been so exciting to see so many other people in the space. And I think we're trying to

do everything we can to not just be a funder and press forward to be as much of a help as we can to everyone else, whether that's recruiting new funders at the local level, whether it's being and making ourselves available to folks who are just looking for interesting things to fund. So I think it hasn't changed much. It's just doubled our budget. Not quite doubled our staff. That's, I guess, sarcasm, because we haven't added anybody to our staff, actually. So, I think we're, you know, we're managing a pretty big load at the moment, but we're trying to be as helpful as we can to the field because it's such a moment that we feel like we can't miss.

John Palfrey [00:31:38] I was just imagining, as Jim was talking the Night Foundation boardroom when this came up, and I will say I was a trustee and I was board chair for a long time, but not I had gone at this point, but I could just hear Alberto's gravelly voice, Alberto Baggio arguing, the president at the time, saying, "Jim, you can have the money, but no more staff." Some version of that is, I think, I think what, what Alberto probably said that wasn't a very good a better job arguing, but, you know, and I was trying to do, I think we should give Dale a minute to talk about the actually what the four priorities are. And that that may be useful because everybody else may not have them fully etched in their brain. But I will say, from where I sit, a couple things are different. As I mentioned before, we've had a national program for a long time at MacArthur. This is really focusing on the local, I think the press forward locals idea is really a huge distinction, which is and is born really of just the math of America, right? Is understanding how many communities there are out there and the fact that as a national foundation, I know it's super frustrating for somebody who is in a particular place, a particular community, doing something, not making payroll, having to dip into their savings, all the things that Wendi told us earlier and coming to a national foundation saying funders are not saying, you know what I'm just saying about my home state of Massachusetts, 351 cities and towns. Right. And from MacArthur in Chicago, like we have to deal with Chicago. We need to, you know, focus on where we're focused on. We can't much to evaluate, but much that sort of. And every one of those communities, right. So I think this networked approach is really different. It's saying we are going to put our money into the network. We're funding the network. We're putting real money in the catalyst funds that will go to places like Wichita if they apply, I'm guessing. But that's going to be seed funding. The real funding, the sustaining funding is going to have to come locally. I think that's one. Two would be I think the emphasis on diversity is more than has been the case in the field. Let's be clear. Like I think in general, you know, journalism is a pretty white, often male led field. And a lot of the funding has flowed that way. I think we've gotten intentional efforts, and we've all agreed to this through our efforts in press forward to be more diverse in our funding. I would also add the public policy piece, but I don't want to get too far into what Dale will say. But I do think the work that Steve Waldman is doing and I know he's here, free press and others looking at how public policy can be a part of the solution. And doing that in a way that's really equitable and effective. I'm not sure that's been something we've really funded so much. So I think it's a little bit in the, in the emphasis of where we're putting the money, but it's more in the how and it's more in the local, I think, trying to create that network in that movement. But, I don't know Dale if you want to do some, some of the grounding work.

Dale R Anglin [00:34:09] Yeah. Let's talk about the details. That's what I get asked to do all the time. So three things you should remember. One, in terms of our four priorities, and this was

agreed upon over a year ago, even before they announced officially it's locals and you've heard about the local chapters. It's policy because we see policy as a part of the solution. And we understand that that might be 50 states, different policies, but where we're going with it and supporting Steve and others who are working in this space. It's infrastructure, because you have to have the support systems for a lot of these institutions to share with each other, share back office, back office ideas, how to get a sustainability revenue officer and things like that. And then there's equity and equity for us means not just people of color led, but it also means places that are really underserved or have never been served. That could be a community in an urban area that could be a rural place. It really is very broad what we mean by equity. And then you have to think about when you have a donor collective. We're allowing investors to invest in the way that they see best. You don't quite tell donors what to do. So we have three pots of money. We have the aligned funders, and that's the bulk of our 500 million right now. And they are independent foundations and into wealthy individuals who come together, though, even though they give out the money on the on their own. But they're coordinating, they're sharing with each other, they're learning in spaces. You're funding these three things. I'll come in with you on that, or I'll fill this gap while you take on this. We've got pooled funders. They have actually put their money together. We have 11 of those funders so far. And what you're going to see on April 30th is our first open call. It's going to be funding directly to different types of newsrooms around the country. You'll get more details on April 30th. So look at our website. But that's out of specifically just the pooled fund. And then we have these locals and the locals are the unknown right now. We're developing them. We're helping them catalyze local funders and individual donors and community foundations in their region. And so there will be local RFP. Chicago's at the front of the game for that. They issued their RFP a few weeks ago, \$10 million. But other people will be doing the same. So there's three ways that people will be able outlets, infrastructure groups, youth groups will be able to get money aligned, pooled and local. You're going to see you're going to hear those those words a lot over the next five years. And some people may be able to get a little bit of both, to be honest. It just depends. But we're going to segment sometimes how we do those open calls, so that we're not comparing apples and oranges. The one thing I want people to understand and I'm coming to understand in this space, is there's no one size fits all. We need multiple solutions to this problem. And so that we can't just do newsrooms or just do policy or just two equity, even we put \$100 million just into that. It won't solve all the needs that we have. We got to go broad, and then deep in certain areas. And that's what we're trying to do.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:37:17] Thank you. That sets up a good conversation. Aligned, pooled local. I'd like to take a minute and talk about what's drawing the attention of money and funders in those spaces. And Courtney, maybe you could speak at least from your perspective at the local level, what draws your attention to someone who's seeking funding? What are you looking for?

Courtney Bengtson [00:37:39] We have approached in the last couple of years, we no longer call people our grantees. We call them our partners because I think we are absolutely learning just as much, if not more, than the partners when we're doing this work. So we're looking for people that want to experiment. So our work in at Press Forward Wichita is based on three things collaboration, experimentation and transformation. And those three things are the key

pillars to what we look for when we're investing. We do a lot of ecosystem level work as well at the local level, but we also understand that there are different scenarios and different situations that people need to work through. So we've done some individual investments as well. But really we look for people that are like, hey, I have this wild idea and we really want to try it. Would you be willing to do this with us? And those are the kinds of things that we're looking for. We're helping, you know, people who have full time jobs at, large corporations who have a blog on the side that you know, is getting now. This is like a very hot topic locally right now. Influencers are being paid by our city government to help get information out about how you can contact your local officials. And it's I mean, this is like hot off the presses. I guess I can say that in this, in this group, that people are really starting to talk about, what does it mean to be a journalist, capital J and all that stuff. And we're looking for people that just really want to make sure that they're contributing to their community. And what we found is that the trust aspect is so important. There's a woman in our community who's really, influential in the Latino community. And anytime we want to, as a philanthropy, get information out to Spanish speaking populations, the I think go to would be, "hey, let's hire a translator and do this." This woman has a Facebook group that has 10,000 women in it from Wichita and the surrounding areas that she informs on a daily basis. Why would we not utilize her to get the information out to the community? So part of it is looking for the nontraditional sort of ways and then experimenting with those. And then we talk about that. So all of our publications that we come out with for our donors, we're talking about here's what we're learning, not here's what we did, here's how many people we served, here's the number of stories that were produced. We're saying, hey, here's what we're learning. This was a really hard piece, or this piece worked out really well, and we think it's scalable in other places. And if we're not open and transparent about that, on the philanthropic side, I don't think we can expect that from our partners on the other side.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:40:24] Thank you for that. And maybe the three of you could talk about the aligned and pooled funds, what's really motivating your attention in those spaces, as we those of us who are new to this, start to understand the pillars, the priorities, all these pieces coming together.

Jim Brady [00:40:38] Well, I mean, Dale talked about the pooled funds, so I don't want to spoil anything coming in a couple of weeks on that. But on the aligned fund, I mean, I think the align fund is really, is helpful I think for the foundations, because everybody's got different things that they care about inside this larger local journalism ecosystem. And I think the align funds allows you to direct your funds a little bit toward those things that that may be closer to your, your core priorities. As I said earlier, almost everything and everything that's in press forwards priority list is something we care deeply about, but we also have a very inside of that we care a lot about. Nobody will be surprised about sustainability and about trying to fund the infrastructure of local journalism so that we create the system where any publisher in the country is able to plug into a lot of systems and operate their news organization in a more efficient, cheaper way so that the road to sustainability is shorter. You know, there's a lot of organizations in the country who are probably not going to get to like full on sustainability through earn revenue. I don't think in a lot of cases we're expecting that. But I always use the example of like, if you're a \$500,000 local news business and you're able to make 250,000 and you start and you need all philanthropic

money. But if you can get to the point in a couple of years where half that money's coming in via earned revenue, you've just freed up another \$250,000 that can go to other people who are trying to do what you were doing a couple of years ago. You're you're you're opening the door for more people to be able to try what you are now succeeding at. And so I think even if you're able to get halfway there, it's a huge bonus. So I think for us, sustainability isn't just about we don't want to fund you anymore. Sustainability for is about we want to fund a lot of other people to be with you in the same space. And so that's I think the underappreciated reason we push sustainability so hard is that we want to be able to take the money we gave you in 2024 and give it to the next to you in 2025 and 2026. And so, so sustainability allows us to expand the pie for everybody. So we'll continue to stay focused on that.

Dale R Anglin [00:42:31] And I'll just say on the pooled fund, more to come on criteria. But some of the things that are already in. Merging when we work with, when we talk to all our funders that are in the space and kind of, what are the common threads amongst them? I think that is going to matter as we do our reviews for the open call. I like Courtney's words. One is collaboration. I'm sorry. It's really hard these days to be a standalone entity, and you're just working by yourself in your community, not sharing with anybody else. There are other outlets near you that are doing the same, have the same issues. You need to know who they are. You could share a back office revenue person. You could share a digital person. You could learn from somebody else's digital person. Right? Other ecosystems I've worked in many other ecosystems. They got to the point it took them a while. The collaboration is key. It is part of sustainability. Journalism has to get there too. We can't do it alone, people. It's just not going to work. So if you come to us and say, even if you've just started, I talked to three people in my city. It turns out we each serve different communities, but we could jointly hire a person to do this. We could jointly do some research on that. That's going to appeal to us. Experimentation. We have groups, I learned. I have learned about languages I didn't know about recently, by the way, that didn't have anything given to them in their language, in the way that they want news. We need things like that. We need people to step up and think about places that have been missed that are not being served. There's a great story Judy Woodruff gave the other night about a town in Texas. One woman and her father had run the newsroom there for what sounds like 60 years. Finally, she gave up. She was tired. She was older and this is has nothing to do with conservative Democrat. Nothing. All our communities need this. The rancher in the in the, in the community of 1200 people said, oh my goodness, we need something. Who is stepping up to tell us we're in a desert? Nobody's here telling the story. We're going to look for places like that, right? Initially, because we just big foundations. Haven't looked for that in the past. Right? They just don't have the capacity really to do that, like you said. So but we do that press forward and we're going to let our local funders help shape, tell us information if they know some of those places. So some of those things are some of the things we're looking at. I just want to say one thing, because I'm a youth person is in particular. We also care about the range of types of news. So right now in some places, journalism at a college is the journalism. We want to support you too, right? You are it right now, and we could grow you to partner with people in your space. That's another way to go. Really. Like I said, there's no one solution.

John Palfrey [00:45:27] And I would say as from my perch as a foundation president, but not, in fact, the person doing the grant making, I've been fundraiser in chief. So let me just give it from the sort of fundraising perspective, less from the what we're looking for in grants. And I'll say how we're doing that too. But, from the big picture, this is an effort that is independent of ideology. This is not meant to be Democrats or Republicans. It's not meant to be someone trying to pursue an agenda. As long as you agree to a set of values that we have that are pretty basic. And to fund against these four, pillars we want you in, press forward. So the answer on the aligned front, which is actually where the bulk of the money is, is we really want you in to coordinate, to step up, to make bigger commitments. Of course, the point is, is to be additive. But my hunch is that lots of different people are gonna be looking for lots of different things. Democracy fund, one of the places that raise their hand most quickly, does fund differently than it does. They have different approaches. That's awesome. By the way, that's America. That's diversity. Right. And part of what I think is going to be exciting at the end of press forward is we can look back and see who decided to fund in what ways, what did we learn? Where did we double down for various reasons in this aligned way? I think that is actually going to be very exciting. And one of the reasons I note this and I don't mean to be in any way negative, this is meant to be a totally positive, presentation. But one of the challenges as a national foundation, which I do realize is frustrating, again, for people working on the ground, is if you think about the MacArthur Fellows Program, we give out 20 to 26 awards every year. We are choosing from 300 million people in America for that, right? The numbers are pretty staggering when you think about, you know, the choices, the discernment that you have to make. Grantees. We give about 400 grants a year. We do it in multiple countries around the world with offices in India, Nigeria, Germany. Do you know how many nonprofits that are in Chicago, our home city alone. Anybody have any? I guess it's 55,000 registered nonprofits. How many of those would like a MacArthur Award? Most of them. Most of them. And most of them are in my inbox, too. And that's on gun violence. That's on the all the other things that we work on. So if you think about what we're a national foundation is we have to do stuff that's really catalytic. That is a great example, a shining beacon. Part of the reason we do diversity, the way that we do, the way we do our racial equity work, is we're trying to show the full breadth of America, noting that that hasn't been how we've done the work before, noting, so when you look at our group of fellows, you look at our group of grantees. Part of it is making the case that in every community in America, people from every race, every background, every gender, every sexuality are doing unbelievable work. So when you look to who is MacArthur funding, we cannot fund in every community. Actually, in Chicago alone, 77 neighborhoods. We're not even funding in all 77 neighborhoods in Chicago. Not possible. But what we are trying to do is hold up people doing extraordinary work. Those are people like Wendi who are doing that in MLK 50 and others. That's, I think, what you can see from a big national foundation. But it's also why the structure of this is so, so important. The diversity of different funders and the local funders is because you can't look to the national funders, the very small handful of us putting up nine figures plus it has to be done in a way that's community by community in terms of what we're going to seek and then what we're going to be able to fund.

Courtney Bengtson [00:48:42] Yeah, if I can chime in just to that point, similarly, in a community and local, the way the community foundations work, if you're not familiar, is that we are pooled

funds from a variety of donors. So at the Wichita Foundation, we have 300 fund holders. They've all contributed. They all have different focus areas. Excuse me. They all care about different things. And so we're actually toying right now with okay we have press forward Wichita. Here are our priorities. Here are the things we've done. Here's what we're learning. But we still have donors that we answer to. You know, we aren't we're not a private foundation. We're public foundations. So we answer to the donors themselves and follow their wishes very strategically. And some of them are they don't love news and information, but they love, you know, they love talking about how to eradicate homelessness in our community. So we're toying with the idea, okay. We have this local chapter. We've done a lot of overall strategic grantmaking, but maybe we need to have an aligned pool within Wichita that we can then go and fundraise for, because as we're fundraising at the local level, it's great to say we want to save democracy and we want to, you know, solve the news and information crisis in our community. But people at the local level don't really understand or care to understand what that actually means, but they care about the person sitting next to them, or they care about their family member who's struggling with drug addiction. And if we can start figuring out what those top high priorities locally are for people, I think we can raise capital in a way that we haven't done before. And coupled with in my I've been around philanthropy for 15 years at the Community Foundation for 12. And in that time, which isn't really that lengthy of a time, but I've never seen national foundations offer to come to local institutions and work with community foundations to help them raise money for their work. That has never happened, and I think that that is the most you know, that's why this is a once in a generation situation for us, that we have to be a part of this because we can now create a network and leverage. And it's beyond the money, it's beyond that. It's just this network of people who understand what we're trying to do at the local level and bring that back with people who have that national international perspective and people locally, quite frankly they have FOMO, like they have FOMO with, oh my gosh, these you know, the president MacArthur Foundation is going to be in Wichita in a few weeks, right? Like the VP of Journalism at Knight Foundation is going to be in Wichita. They want to be part of that conversation. And so whatever we have to do to get to our end goal of making sure people are informed and engaged, we're going to do that. And we're just lucky and just it's phenomenal to have a network now of people that are that are fighting for Wichita and other communities around the country to make sure that that people feel informed.

Dale R Anglin [00:51:35] Can I just say some things that I'm so excited about and press forward? And when I took the job, I hadn't thought so much about it. It really is a learning community we are going to be. Nobody has all the answers here. We're going to be learning and sharing out what we're learning. That does work or that does work. So expect that like on our on our websites. Right. But also the stories you're getting from the way journalists are interacting with their communities is amazing. In Cleveland. I'll tell Cleveland, our signal in one particular neighborhood, which was it's our one of our lowest income neighborhoods, it's got the highest number of children under in under ten, in poverty, highest number of public housing units. Just a very hard community to be in. The signal people said we can't just go in and deliver a newsletter. It's not going to work. Not even videos enough. They started with a spelling bee. I will just say, as the funder, I was like, okay, let's see where that goes. The kids liked it, but the adults liked it even better. It's become the thing in the community and signal sponsors it and

they go in and it's a way for the community to come together. Journalists have to think differently, is what I say to get to the audience. You can't just deliver what you delivered five years ago, and there's lots of stories like that. People opening coffee shops, journalism, people doing all sorts of things as think of yourselves now, not just as reporting the news and gathering the news, but as helping link people together in ways that right now there's not that it doesn't exist as much anymore. You're saving democracy means bringing us together. And in every community that looks just going to look different. But you can now be part of that, not just writing about it. You are literally doing it yourself. And I'm excited to understand those stories. There are lots of them, actually, and then share them out to inspire others.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:53:28] Those are beautiful examples. And I'd like to end with this question before we open up to the audience. From that perspective, you've given us some success stories. What does success look like for everyone on this panel in five years? What what is that on? Maybe you could get us started. What does that look like? I'd like to hear that from all of your perspectives.

John Palfrey [00:53:47] Sure. I mean, again, I said my job has been fundraiser in chief, so I want to be held accountable for the fact that we will move \$500 million from a group of funders in the five year period, and I would love that to be a much bigger number. Right. And we're going to track it and we're going to be serious about it and we're going to get it done. I realize that is not the end goal that is not it's self-importance. But I've been thinking a little bit about this from the perspective of being a foundation president. I can control what I can control. I actually can't control what the grantees do with money or the outcomes, but I can control where our money goes and the fact that we are diverting it from other really, really, really important stuff to do this and that we're convincing other people to do it. So I actually do think moving the money and being accountable to that is a piece of it. We are working very hard to say, here are some other end goals that we are going to, you know, be held accountable for. I don't know that all of that work has been done because it's a little more complicated when there have 57 different funders agreeing to doing things together, like, how can we really agree that press forward will accomplish this? So a simple goal will be to move at least half \$1 billion in that five years. But I would love to see so many exciting things. So much FOMO, such a great learning community, such a fun community that in four and a half years everybody reaps and does more right. And it's actually a movement that has vastly more people involved, vastly more people seeing their job is to fund and support local news. That's partly what I'm after. I realized that that isn't, again, the end goal, but I think that's something in our control, and it's something that I think we can help foment. So anyway, that's an initial answer.

Dale R Anglin [00:55:18] Yes and I would add that I am coming to understand that journalism, philanthropy is a fairly new field. And so I leave behind. After just the first five years. I'm hoping there will be a second is really a way to fund journalism. If you're going to get into this space here, the different ways to do it, the questions you should be asking as a donor or as a funder, because we don't have agreement on that right now. So that's one thing. And the second thing, and I'm going out. My husband, he asked me the other day I was going to have him people give money to signal I'm on the board. And he said, why do I need to give money to signal? And I'm

like five years from now. I don't want that question, I want the answer. I want people to tell me, you know, I'm given a signal because I know people who read signal. And I then always say, have you given because they take it for granted that it will be free because so much is free on the internet. We need to change that mindset in people's minds, even if it's just \$5. I understand that everybody can give it different points. But we've got to figure that out and we have figured it out in other systems, in arts, in people do for museums, right? Even in hospitals, they give a little bit of money if they were taken care of at that hospital. Newspapers and news and information needs to be in the same bucket. How do we get them there over the next five years?

Jim Brady [00:56:38] I'd say two things really quickly. I mean, there's there's so many, but two being that we make funding local journalism a habit locally, but this is becomes a thing that people fund. And it's not something that they, they do as a 1-2 year special effort. They actually say, this is something I care about and I care about it in the long term. If we can make a lot of these community foundations that are joining, press forward, stick with it into, in, you know, for the long term, that's a huge success. Second, I think would be a obviously a bust the stabler economic system for journalism. But part of that will be a closer bond between newsrooms and their communities. I do think one of the some of the work we still have to do is I think we have a way of delivering things to people that we've been doing for a long time, and we just want to deliver it that way. We want people to accept it at that way. And I do think communities are seeking information in lots of different ways, and we're going to have to bend to meet that. But I do think working with local foundations who know their communities better as as direct funders, I think we have a better chance of getting there, where people will understand their own community needs, will fund things that match what the community wants, and you'll end up with a closer relationship between the people who live in those communities. And those news organizations, of course, could generate really benefits for membership and for subscriptions in other lines of revenue.

Courtney Bengtson [00:57:55] We made this commitment about five years ago to start this work. Press forward. It comes along. We made another commitment to this next five years. You can't make systemic and behavioral change in ten years. I think that we all have to recognize that and say, okay, at the end of this first five years, you know, there are going to be shifts and changes, but have we changed the world? Let's just be real. No, we won't have. But what does success look like? I want the Wichita Foundation to double down on this again. Maybe ten years. This next time, let's really talk about sort of lengthening and the longevity of the work that we're doing. And then at a real, just anecdotal personal level, I want to hear people saying, hey, have you seen X, Y, and Z? Have you seen what's happening at X, Y, Z? I want people to start advocating for the things that they care about, making sure that they are informing other people about those things without having to be asked. I want them to feel empowered enough to say, "hey, this really matters to me and I think you should care about it too." I'm all the way to the point of what Dale said is, you know, give money regularly to these organizations, whether it's \$10 a month, \$15 a month. Don't shy away from being an investor in your own community.

Rachel Davis Mercey [00:59:12] We have some wonderful questions from the audience and many of them about the international piece that John asked. But I want to focus on a couple of

things that I know there is some difference of opinion, maybe not here on this panel, but we've certainly talked about it previously. One of the questions about government funding, what is the role of government funding as press forward and as the revitalization of local news? I curious to hear from this panel how you feel about that piece.

John Palfrey [00:59:39] This is such a good question. So my view on, on the solution to this is that, again, as we've said over and over, it's not one size fits all, that there is not going to be one thing if one amazing thing. We know that one billionaire buying one big city newspaper does not fix the news and information ecosystem, and they say it just doesn't work right. Maybe it'll help in some. But but I actually hope next time a billionaire thinks about buying a big city newspaper, they put it in the press board and, you know, give it to a lot of other cool stuff going on and not buy one newspaper. Anyway, the stuff that has been tried to kind of save journalism is not working, and I think we do need a portfolio approach given how complex America is. Okay, so then you look at what are the possible things we can invest in. We know what the four areas are. We are investing in public policy. Why we do believe the public policy can be one part of this. And I imagine if you've ever met Steve Wildman, you've heard a lot about this. He will give you the case. Other people can make the case. There's very interesting national discussions. They're very interesting, though, subnational discussions. I'm very interested in what's happening at state levels in Illinois, as an example, where city level. One very specific example is that in the city of Chicago, this now an ordinance that says of the city ad spend, not all of that gets to go to Google. Some of that has to stay locally in the city. I think that's a very straightforward, a really good game plan, like the ad spend should not only go to national players, it's going to stay in the community. Is that government funding? It is. Right. But that's not going in the way of journalism. So anyway, we can have a debate about the degree of this, but I think it's going to be necessary to have state funding in. By the way, CPB is state funding, right. So there is already some state funding in the work. So anyway, I know it's controversial. I think it is a part of the mix. And it's a good democratic question of how much. But you know what? We need more revenue sources, more reliably. And if we're undercutting them as we are in community after community, for instance, those, you know, placements of required ads in newspapers, those are in some places going away. Right? That's a that's a negative. So we have to make sure that the money that is going up from government doesn't slow down and that there is more. And which sources. Those are I think is part of what this effort can help. So.

Dale R Anglin [01:01:46] Yeah, that's our answer. Rachel Davis Mercey [01:01:49] All right then. Courtney Bengtson [01:01:49] Oh, please. Just really quickly at the local level, just to kind of bring it to that. There's a discussion right now. Our city government has paid one particular entity \$150,000 for the last 15 years to. But all of the open records requests and open meeting were requests in this particular entity. And there's a really heavy discussion going on right now about is that the best way to spend those funds? And we at the Foundation are working behind the scenes to help advocate for the fact that one local news source isn't going to be the solution, to make sure that everyone in the community understands things that affect their lives every day at the city. And so we're you know, this isn't a financial transaction for us, but it's a convening opportunity for us to bring together the city government, council, mayor, etc. to say, hey, there are X number of ecosystem partners here, and how can we think about utilizing those funds

differently so that other people, besides the small readership that exist within that one institution, can have access to that information?

Rachel Davis Mercey [01:02:57] Thank you for that, John. You sort of suggested this in your comment about the billionaire buying the newspaper. Sometimes we think about the newspaper, and there's a great question here about how previous journalism funding has also thought about startups. But what about that middle? And Dale, this, I think, is probably a question for you as you talk about the equity piece, the Spanish and Asian language publishers independent publishers at HBCUs, Arabic community newspapers. How do those news organizations get in the press forward conversation?

Dale R Anglin [01:03:30] They're already in. Just know that, we're trying to figure out how to support, we are agnostic on for profit or for non profit. And as someone said to me yesterday, many of our for profit news outlets are mostly profit. They're not really making a lot of profit. And many of them are small. Often people have started those because they couldn't figure out how to do the nonprofit side and get the 501 C3, and that's just a lot of work. It's easy to form an LLC and just do something, and you're charging \$5 a month, right? And but you're still barely making ends meet. So we see all of those and we are trying and our different open calls, as you're going to see over the few years to try to, allow all of those in or as many as we can in, that's one thing in terms of whether you for profit or non profit. And then when I said we mean equity, you know we really are thinking about, America is an amazing amalgamation of people. And we need to have those that same number of news outlets, right. And we just know that our great media up to date has not always served all of those communities in the ways we want to be served. And so we're actively using thank you, academicians and all of the research that you guys are doing on news deserts and places that are not being served and how they're being served. We're trying to make sure that we are looking at all of that research. And by the way, when we do our open calls, let grantees know what research we are using so that they can look at that research tool to see, do I fit within some of those criteria? And if I don't, here's why. For this time, you can come back in for another open call, but maybe not this one. So we are actively thinking about that and learning. Like I said, we're going to be a learning community, so we're already learning Chicago. Just put out an RFP and they got a lot of youth groups that turned out, but they weren't prepared to get a lot of youth groups. So their next open call might be on youth. Right. We're going to learn two in the space. So look look for more. And we're open to suggestions as we go through this.

John Palfrey [01:05:36] I don't know if you have time for just a teeny tiny add on to that. Just two of the observations I would make from, being on this whistle stop tour. Again, mostly speaking to donors. I think one is I think it's actually quite important that we shift our understanding and cents and you can disagree with me, but I think this is important from a presumption that local news has been a for profit enterprise to one where it's predominantly a nonprofit enterprise or low profit. To Del's point. Actually, it's not about the corporate form so much as just realizing that if it's thought of as something that still creates great fortunes like the Knight fortune or the McCormick fortune or the Annenberg fortune, it is not, you know, it's problematic. So that's one thing that I think shifts then to people saying, okay, it has to be part of our habit. It's got to be

part of our philanthropic practice. This is important, I think, from realistic perspective. But I also think it's important for a second point, which is we didn't ask the question of when have you been turned down by donors, which has been, you know, frequent. I've asked lots of people who have said no for press forward. And one of the things that wealthy people say is it's a business. I don't want to support that. If they're bad at their business, that's their problem. I promise you, this is a good number of people have said this, some version of this. Another version of it is I don't want to do this if it's adding another mouth to feed. You know, in my set of, you know, things as donations. And part of what I've said on that one is, look, we're going to do this as an enduring matter, but this is the reason for this CapEx moment. And I think part of that is gets to the core of your question, which is there are some organizations that with philanthropy now, with investment now, I'm also interested in impact investing as a way into this, although it's another conversation would be able to get to another level of support. They would be able to reach others. And so I do think that even for those who say no, no, no, it should be a for profit thing, I'm telling you, it's not anymore. But, even if you stick to that and you say, I don't want to do this forever, I would say to you, join us for five years, put some capital in now to the, you know, maybe it's MLK 50, or maybe it's the next MLK 50 that has not yet gotten that and see what they're going to be able to do, see, with the traction they're going to get in their community, see what they're going to be able to accomplish with this capital that is so badly needed right now. And I'll talk to you in five years whether you want to re-up. But the point is, I get in now. But I think the messaging right now is not great. If you're saying, well, it's kind of a business or whatever, or like don't tell, there's a weird set of messaging that's a little different than saying this really requires philanthropic support. This is really something that is essentially a public good or a nonprofit. And this is a great moment for capital investment, whether you're doing five years, ten years or 50 years, I think that's going to end up being a better pitch to get more people in. If your goal is more philanthropic support.

Rachel Davis Mercey [01:08:18] Thank you for that. And I also want to harken back to something Dale said, because we're getting a number of questions like sort of how to apply. And I'm just going to answer that for you, which is look for these open calls, right? I mean, look for these open calls that are happening now and forthcoming.

Dale R Anglin [01:08:32] And let me just add one piece I keep forgetting to add is because the aligned funders don't always have time to find all the outlets. We're also going to allow, we're going to create, we were working with a platform called Just Fund. And so entities in the news ecosystem, be they an outlet or infrastructure organization or whatever, will be able to create profiles. And then we will be able to share those profiles with the aligned funders. Right. It's like a match. We can't guarantee you'll get money, but at least you'll be seen. Right? Because right now it's hard for people to see what's all out there. So two things open calls. Expect those over the next few years. And these profiles on Just Fund. Well we'll try to match and share out with our aligned funders to make it easier for them to see what's out there.

Rachel Davis Mercey [01:09:16] And they find just fund through press forward.

Dale R Anglin [01:09:18] Absolutely pressforward.news. All right.

Jim Brady [01:09:20] And just add to that, I mean, while open calls are going on, online funding goes on all through that time as well. So it's not like the open call is the only activity in any given time. There will be an open call ongoing, but they'll also be aligned funding going on kind of 24/7, 365.

Dale R Anglin [01:09:36] And we're expecting locals to do their own, RFP and open calls over time. Right. It takes a minute to get there because they're starting with research opening. But that will.

John Palfrey [01:09:46] You know, a few of us have tried to put some more money out earlier. If you have not seen, I think it's \$55 million that has gone out through line funding. So if you think about over ten years, if we're six months in, we put out \$55 million. We're more or less on track for that pace. Even though the open calls you know, we want. Dale has been in the seat for a matter of weeks, so we wanted to give her a chance to do that. There is an open call in Chicago. As I mentioned, that is, you know, we put money on it, and I'm sure Wichita won't be too far behind the, there are, you know, the first set are coming on. And, you know, I think we are, roughly speaking, on track to get out 500 million plus in the in the five years.

Rachel Davis Mercey [01:10:20] Wonderful. Let's end on a really positive note. I'd like this for Jim and Courtney. Courtney, you've been in this space for five years. Jim, Knight Foundation has been out for a long time. How do news organizations demonstrate success? What do they come and say we're doing? We're doing this well. What do you want to see?

Jim Brady [01:10:39] I mean, I think again, when you're funding at a national level, what you're looking for are things that are that are extendable to the entire ecosystem. So if somebody is testing out a new way of covering a community and they're telling their stories through a new platform, if they've built some very smart chief technology that allows newsrooms to do something that is frankly, it right now might be a real pain in the ass and make it a lot easier to do so you can focus more time on the journalism. I think we're always I mean, I my theory on this is pretty simple. To be successful as a local publisher, you need to be spending 90, 90, 95% of your time doing one of two things, like covering your community and producing journalism that values that they value, and figuring out how to make enough money to keep doing it. And if you're sitting there wrestling with a content management system or trying to figure out who you know, this is all these launch a membership program, launch a smart newsletter product. There are organizations out there that know how to do these things, and there are lots of people out there who can help you do those things. But you can do uniquely is cover your community and figure out how to make enough money to keep doing it, whether that's through philanthropy or other lines of earned revenue. But the point is that we're looking for ideas that new publishers can grab on to and learn from, and get themselves closer to that point where they're able to focus on those two things. Or they can take an idea of a coverage idea from another organization to do it. So we're looking for things that extend. If he you know, I think, you know, there's we can't be in the business at the national level of solving, you know, every single problem that every single publisher has because you run out of money before you get through to many of them. Right. We're looking for we're looking for things that can help the entire field.

And so many of the people out in this room, I think, have benefited from a lot of those significant investments Knight's made at that, at that infrastructure level, in some cases, probably things you may not even think about in your daily basis. But, so that's what we're looking for. We're looking for something that that you can all that one person in this room has a bright idea. Every the other 400 people in the room can take advantage of it.

Courtney Bengtson [01:12:31] Similarly, I think we're looking for the the eagerness and the recognition that things can't be done the way they've been done traditionally in the field. And so we're looking for the ones that are going to raise their hand and say, hey, I want to learn. I want to learn a new way of delivering information. I want to collaborate and partner with other people, even though that's a very difficult thing to do. We want the people who want to figure out how to break this system, and whether that's in terms of looking at the different pie, the different revenue pies that they have, or looking at the different audiences that they're serving, how they're serving those people. We want the people that are going to raise their hand and authentically say like, hey, this is our role in the community. This is how we think we can play that help us work with us to be able to accomplish that.

Jim Brady [01:13:21] That's one that one more thing, too, because it hadn't come up, much. I think John referenced it early on in his comments. I mean, we're you know, there's lots of questions about this. There's lots of opinions about how press forward has been executed to this point or communicated. Go down the list of what individual people's complaints might be about it, like keep bringing that on. I think the thing that sometimes, some of the folks who are sending the criticism don't really process is that this hasn't been done before, like we had this kind of collaboration among funders, this many funders trying to fund journalism is really new, and we're all learning how to best communicate with each other and how to best share information with each other and how to best do this. And so we're not nobody up here is worried about. Yeah, nobody up here has figured this out yet. None of us up here are I mean, are worried about taking criticism. We view it as feedback to help us figure out how to operate this more efficiently going forward. So as you see things that, you know, frustrate you or bother you, or that you think you see an opportunity for us to do better, keep sending those things on. I think that's really important to us because this is we're trying to, you know, operate this kind of as we go. And it's very complicated, thrilling, but complicated.

Dale R Anglin [01:14:32] At the risk of getting a lot of emails, my email is Dale@Press Forward.news.

Rachel Davis Mercey [01:14:42] And like any good journalist, I'm going to tell you it's D-A- L-E. So, but I think this panel, you have faced some criticism, but you're here, you're caring, you're doing your whistle stop tour, you're standing in front of audiences like these and talking about these opportunities. So please join me in thanking this panel for their commitment to local news. Courtney, Jim, Dale, John, thank you so much. Thank you.

