



Why Local News Matters

Local news is essential for maintaining democratic health, encouraging civic engagement, and strengthening community connections. It keeps residents informed about decisions affecting their lives, supports local economies, and ensures diverse voices are heard.

CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

According to the **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)**, all U.S. residents need access to timely, factual, and nonpartisan information – in their language, via accessible media – in **eight essential categories**:

- **Emergencies and Risks** – Immediate and long-term information on crises, natural disasters, and public safety threats.
- **Health and Welfare** – Including group-specific health information and resources.
- **Education** – Quality of local schools and parental options for their children's education.
- **Transportation** – Cost, schedules, and infrastructure updates.
- **Economic Opportunities** – Job information, training resources, and small business assistance.
- **The Environment** – Local air and water quality, access to green spaces, and recreation.
- **Civic Information** – Opportunities to engage in civic and religious institutions to build stronger communities.
- **Political Information** – Coverage of candidates at all levels, public policies, and initiatives affecting local neighborhoods.

Local news is the backbone of providing these crucial needs to Middle Tennessee residents. Without it, communities face gaps in knowledge that hinder civic engagement and collective problem-solving.

When local news thrives, communities thrive.

The Local News Crisis

Nationwide Decline

- One-third of U.S. newspapers have closed since 2005, with closures accelerating at a rate of two per week.
- Over half of U.S. counties now have no or limited access to reliable local news, with many of these "news deserts" concentrated in high-poverty communities across the Southeast.

Middle Tennessee at Risk

- As the region grows, underserved rural and urban areas face the loss of local news coverage. This creates knowledge gaps, weakens accountability, and increases susceptibility to misinformation and polarization.

Philanthropy's Role in a Local News Renaissance

Emerging Opportunities

Press Forward »

Press Forward Coalition: A national campaign committing **\$500 million over five years to strengthen local news**, including catalyst grants of **up to \$175,000 for regional, community-focused media efforts**.

Press Forward's local chapters are now in **41 regional and state locations**, and it has an additional 30+ national funding partners, including **Carnegie Corporation of New York, Democracy Fund, Ford Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Knight Foundation, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, and more.

"The philanthropic sector recognizes the need to strengthen American democracy and is beginning to see that progress on every other issue, from education and healthcare to criminal justice reform and climate change, is dependent on the public's understanding of the facts," said John Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation.

Additional national and aligned funding opportunities are also available.



Phase 1 to Revitalize Local News in Middle Tennessee

Landscape Scan: Community Information Needs Assessment

Conduct a thorough analysis of the local media ecosystem to:

- Identify where residents currently get their news.
- Assess the number of minority-focused outlets.
- Map existing digital platforms and their reach.
- Understand audience expectations and gaps in coverage.

Governance Structure:

Establish a coalition of media experts, academic and research partners, donors, and local stakeholders (e.g. Tennessee Press Association, foundation partners) to guide the initiative and ensure strategic alignment.

Fundraising and Funding:

Build a local donor base to demonstrate regional commitment and apply for national funding through initiatives like Press Forward to support long-term growth.

Phases 2 & 3 aim toward addressing the need, based on the results of the landscape scan, by advancing a more collaborative local news and information ecosystem, strengthening existing reporters'/editors' capacity through training and network building, fortifying the infrastructure of local newsrooms, and building a journalist pipeline through internships and mentoring opportunities.

The Path Forward

Local news strengthens communities by connecting residents with one another and the issues that affect their lives. Middle Tennessee can join the nationwide effort in reimagining local news for the digital age, ensuring every resident has access to trustworthy, community-centered news.

Local Investment Priorities:

- Preserve locally-owned newspapers to keep them rooted in community values.
- Support digital and traditional outlets that serve underserved rural and urban areas.
- Help news organizations adapt to meet audience needs through sustainable models.

By investing now, we can reverse the tide of news loss and build a stronger, more informed Middle Tennessee.

Centering Older Adults in the Future of Local News

Why It Matters

As Middle Tennessee's population grows and ages, older adults face increasing challenges accessing timely, accurate, and relevant information. From healthcare and housing to benefits and safety alerts, older adults rely on local news to live independently, stay engaged, and make informed decisions. But as newspapers close and community-centered journalism erodes, our region risks leaving aging residents behind.

Aging Well Requires Trusted Information

Older adults are more vulnerable to misinformation, more likely to be isolated, and more reliant on accessible local news for:

- Medicare and Medicaid changes
- Affordable housing options
- Transportation updates
- Emergency weather alerts
- Mental health and caregiver resources
- Social and civic engagement opportunities

Why Press Forward?

Press Forward Middle Tennessee is part of a national \$500 million movement to rebuild trusted, community-centered local news.

Our regional approach includes:

- Listening sessions with aging adults and caregivers
- Mapping gaps in local news coverage for seniors
- Collaborating with senior-serving nonprofits to co-create and amplify stories that inform, connect, and empower older adults, ensuring their programs are accessible and their impact is visible through trusted local news
- Elevating trusted sources of public information in print, digital, and audio formats

Where West End Home Foundation Comes In

You already support advocacy, digital inclusion, enrichment, health, and housing for older adults. Press Forward strengthens these efforts by ensuring:

- Stories about aging and caregiving are told with accuracy and dignity
- Essential programs and services reach their intended audiences
- Older adults are engaged as co-creators of the information ecosystem

We have an opportunity to reshape local news into a force that uplifts and empowers our aging neighbors. With your support, older adults can move from the margins to the center of Middle Tennessee's media landscape.