



JOURNALISM
FUTURES FUND

FONDS AVENIR
MÉDIAS

FUNDING GUIDELINES

PROJECT FUNDING STREAM

SPRING 2026

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1. JOURNALISM FUTURES FUND: BACKGROUND

The Journalism Futures Fund is Canada's first collaborative philanthropic fund to strengthen **independent** media. Supported by foundations and individual donors, the Journalism Futures Fund's mission is to support journalism that strengthens civic life in Canada by investing in journalistic excellence, equity and financial sustainability.

The Journalism Futures Fund focuses on strengthening small and medium-sized media organizations with operational funding, project-based funding and capacity-strengthening support. Launched in 2025, the Fund has distributed \$1.875M in philanthropic funding to newsrooms across Canada through its inaugural Organizational Funding round.

[\[Learn more about the Journalism Futures Fund\]](#)

[\[Learn more about the inaugural 2025 Organizational Funding round\]](#)



2. PROJECT FUNDING STREAM: OVERVIEW

The future of journalism in Canada depends on engaged, enduring and well-informed audiences. Many journalism organizations have ideas to better connect with and expand their core audiences, but lack the time, funding and support to put them into practice.

In June 2026, the Journalism Futures Fund launches the Project Funding stream, inviting proposals focused on the theme of *Audience Relationships*.

Applications are open to **independent, established** small-to-medium-sized journalism organizations (with a budget under \$1M CAD) working on any **platform** and serving audiences primarily in Canada. The Journalism Futures Fund prioritizes organizations that serve and are led by communities that are **underserved** in Canadian media.

We welcome first-time grant applicants. Further information on eligibility is included in Section 5.

Purpose and objectives

The **purpose** of this round is to support journalism organizations to test, implement or deepen approaches to audience engagement and growth.

Grants will support practical, audience-centred projects that advance one or both of the following **objectives**:

- **Engagement:** Deepen ongoing conversations and relationships with current or intended audiences.
- **Reach:** Expand the number of people who regularly engage with the organization's journalism, including new and existing audiences.

Proposed projects should leave organizations better positioned to continue their work going forward. For guidance, please see project examples in Section 4.

Proposals are welcome for projects lasting one to two years, with a total budget of \$15,000 to \$150,000. The total funding available for this round is \$500,000. Applicants should request the amount they require for their proposed project, bearing in mind that the independent jury mandate will include funding projects with a range of budget sizes.



3. 2026 THEME: AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS

Why focus on Audience Relationships?

Canadians' trust and confidence in the news has declined sharply since 2018.¹ This trend is notably fueled by the under- and misrepresentation of many communities in mainstream media,² paired with the rise of misinformation, deepfakes and AI-generated content.³

Against this backdrop, when communities see themselves accurately reflected in the news they consume, their trust and engagement with journalism grows.

Small-to-medium-sized **independent** outlets that are anchored in communities are key to keeping **underserved** audiences informed and engaged. Deepening audience relationships can improve reporting, unlock new partnerships and revenue from supporters and strengthen the case for government and philanthropic funding.⁴ Experimental projects or approaches can also generate models or practices that benefit Canada's independent journalism sector as a whole. However, many of these outlets face declining or uncertain revenues,⁵ limiting their ability to experiment with how to engage their audiences.



4. PROJECT EXAMPLES

The purpose of this round is to support journalism organizations to test, implement or further develop ways to strengthen relationships with their audiences and expand their reach.

This may include building on an existing project or testing a new approach that the organization has not yet had the funding or capacity to pursue.

Examples of projects could include one or more of the following:

- an event series that strategically expands audiences (e.g. hosting election debates);
- a significant improvement to digital or social media presence, including new formats or strategies;
- a partnership with another newsroom or a community organization to address information needs (e.g. co-hosting a conversation to shape reporting on a given theme);
- a new way of involving audiences in the production of journalism (e.g. citizen journalism);
- an audience-focused initiative that generates revenue and/or long-term value (e.g. a matching donation drive to convert readers to monthly subscribers);
- a new way of distributing journalism that meets an audience's need (e.g. a printed monthly newsletter to reach readers without digital access);
- shared infrastructure or collaborations where audiences are a core focus (e.g. establishing new best practices in reporting on **underserved** communities);
- and more.

The examples above are illustrative only – applicants should propose ideas that align with their outlet's goals and needs.



5. ELIGIBLE AND PRIORITY APPLICANTS

The Journalism Futures Fund welcomes applications from journalism organizations that:

- produce **original journalism** primarily in English and/or French, distributed on any platform;
- are small-to-medium-sized, with an annual budget of less than \$1,000,000 CAD;
- are **established**, with a track record of at least a year of publishing;
- are registered businesses or are incorporated as a for-profit or non-profit in Canada (this includes organizations with Registered Journalism Organization status and sole proprietorships);
- are **independent**, meaning not a government outlet, or primarily or majority-owned or governed by a publicly-traded company, advocacy group, religious group, political party, hedge fund or private equity firm; and
- adhere to journalistic ethics guidelines, such as those from the Canadian Association of Journalists or the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec.

Priority support

*In addition to the eligibility criteria outlined above, the Fund prioritizes support to journalism organizations that serve and are led by members of communities that are underrepresented in newsroom **leadership**⁶ and news coverage,⁷ specifically:*

- Black and other racialized communities;
- Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis);
- newcomers, migrant workers, refugees and asylum-seekers;
- low-income communities⁸;
- 2SLGBTQIA+ people;
- people with disabilities; and
- those located in Northern, rural or remote areas.

The Journalism Futures Fund recognizes that many communities may be underserved, underrepresented or misrepresented in Canadian news media, and

that their experiences might intersect and vary depending on context.

Partnerships

Projects may include partnerships with other organizations or outlets. Partnership agreements should be established independently of the Fund, and any partner funding should be managed by the applicant organization. A majority of the project funding should benefit organizations that are eligible applicants to this round. A memorandum of understanding between partners may be required as part of the funding agreement.



6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

All applicants must meet the Fund's eligibility criteria. Please complete this two-minute Project Funding round [self-assessment](#) before beginning an application.

Strong proposals will meet this funding round's **objectives**, address a defined audience need and be led by a team with a track record of journalistic impact and the experience and capacity to deliver the work.

Applications will be assessed based on the following criteria:

Alignment: Clear alignment with the round's objectives, with a focus on engaging or expanding existing audiences, leaving the organization better positioned to continue its work moving forward.

Audience: An active and demonstrated understanding of audiences, meeting the information needs of communities that are underserved in Canadian journalism.

Strategy: A clear and compelling vision supported by a convincing and feasible implementation plan.

Impact: Clear potential impact for the organization, the audiences it serves, and/or the sector.



7. KEY DATES

Project Funding round opens to Expressions of Interest: June 17, 2026

Deadline to submit Expressions of Interest: July 22, 2026

Check the Journalism Futures Fund [website](#) for informational webinar dates.

Detailed proposal: Short-listed candidates will be invited to submit additional information in late August and will have four weeks to prepare their submission. The Fund team will be available for support.

All candidates invited to this stage will receive an honorarium.

Finalists in the detailed proposal round may be invited to participate in jury interviews.

Decision announcement: Grantee announcements will take place in late fall 2026.



8. APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications to the Project Funding stream of the Journalism Futures Fund will be processed in three steps:

A. ELIGIBILITY QUIZ

The eligibility quiz is a self-assessment that takes about two minutes to complete. If eligible, applicants can submit an Expression of Interest. [\[Access the quiz here\]](#)

B. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

The Expression of Interest consists of short-answer questions about the applicant's organization, their audiences, [leadership](#) and eligibility for the Fund. Applicants will

also submit a description of the proposed project, who would carry it out, the rationale for pursuing it and its expected impacts. Consider this a pitch, not a finished proposal.

After a due diligence review, eligible Expressions of Interest will be scored on a rubric by at least two independent reviewers. This process will determine a short list of applicants who will be invited to submit a detailed proposal.

[\[Access a PDF version of the application questions here\]](#)

[\[Submit an Expression of Interest here\]](#)

C. DETAILED PROPOSAL

Organizations with strong potential to be awarded a grant will be invited to submit additional information to complement their Expression of Interest. Applicants will provide a project implementation plan with key activities and objectives, a description of project partners (if any) and their roles, as well as a budget and draft timeline.


An independent jury will review the shortlisted submissions and select 8 to 12 awardees for grants of \$15,000 to \$150,000 CAD total.

The Fund team will be available to provide support during the submission process. All candidates invited to submit a detailed proposal will receive an honorarium.

Note: The jury review may include interviews for a short list of finalists.

All applicants will be notified of the results. Unsuccessful applicants are welcome to reapply to future rounds of the Journalism Futures Fund.

Need support applying?



Applying for funding can feel overwhelming, especially if you're new to philanthropy or have accessibility needs. We're here to answer your questions and help make the process as smooth and manageable as possible.

Please reach out to jff-fam@inspiritfoundation.org for guidance, accommodations or other support.



9. FUNDING AMOUNTS AND ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Proposals are welcome for projects lasting one to two years, with a total budget of \$15,000 to \$150,000. The total funding available for this round is \$500,000.

Applicants should request the amount they require for their proposed project, bearing in mind that the independent jury's mandate will include funding projects with a range of budget sizes.

Please note: Organizations may be awarded less than the total amount of funding requested. For organizations registered as for-profits, any applicable taxes will be included within the total funding amount requested.

Eligible expenses

The following are generally considered eligible expenses within the Project Funding round. All costs should be clearly tied to the proposed audience strategy:

- administration costs – up to 15 per cent of the budget (e.g. administration staff, office rent, general accounting, software, IT systems, telecommunications);
- salaries and wages for individuals directly working on the project;
- meetings and events (e.g. venue rentals, catering and services related to organizing events or conferences that advance **independent journalism**);
- travel and accommodation within Canada directly related to activities proposed;
- professional fees directly related to the project (e.g. translations, accessibility costs, modifications and modernization of digital infrastructure, legal consultations).

Ineligible expenses

The following expenses are not eligible, unless clearly embedded within a broader audience-relationship-building strategy:

- individual reporting series or story pitches;
- travel unrelated to audience engagement;
- standalone audience surveys or marketing initiatives;
- research studies or individual research projects, including academic research;

- scholarships, fellowships, internships or general training costs;
- start-up costs for a new organization;
- conferences.

10. GLOSSARY

Established: Organizations that have been producing journalism for at least a year.

Independent journalism: Journalism produced by organizations that are not government outlets and are not primarily or majority-owned by a publicly-traded company, advocacy group, religious group, political party, hedge fund or private equity firm.⁹

Leadership: The Journalism Futures Fund defines a journalism organization's leadership as the individuals who make decisions about its editorial line, operations and governance.

Original journalism: Fact-based reports, features, investigations, profiles, interviews, analyses or commentaries that are written, researched, edited and formatted by and for the organization.¹⁰ Original journalism does not include reprints of mostly-unchanged press releases or wire copy.

Platform: The Journalism Futures Fund accepts applications from journalism organizations operating on any platform, including digital formats (websites, newsletters, podcasts, social media, etc.), print (newspapers, magazines, etc.), TV, radio or other platforms.

Underrepresented/underserved communities: The Journalism Futures Fund prioritizes communities that are underrepresented in newsroom leadership and underserved in news coverage. To that end, the Fund prioritizes organizations serving and/or led by:

- Black and other racialized communities;
- Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis);
- newcomers, migrant workers, refugees and asylum-seekers;

- low-income communities⁸;
- 2SLGBTQIA+ people;
- people with disabilities; and
- those located in Northern, rural or remote areas.

The Journalism Futures Fund recognizes that many communities may be underserved, underrepresented or misrepresented in Canadian news media, and that their experiences might intersect and vary depending on context.

11. ENDNOTES

[1] For more information on declining trust in news in Canada, see the [2025 Reuters Institute Digital News Report](#).

[2] Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young's [Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities](#) (2019), Duncan McCue's [Decolonizing Journalism: A Guide to Reporting in Indigenous Communities](#) (2023), the Reuters Institute's report [News for the powerful and privileged: how misrepresentation and underrepresentation of disadvantaged communities undermine their trust in news](#) (2023), and the public essay [Media 2070: an Invitation to Dream up Media Reparations](#) (2020) extensively document the negative effects of the stereotyping, racism, misrepresentation and erasure of minority and Indigenous communities in North American news coverage.

[3] This recent Statistics Canada study, [Shifting perceptions of misinformation in Canada: Trends in exposure, detection and trust](#) (2026), established that in 2025, four in five Canadians (80%) saw news or information on the Internet that they suspected to be misleading, false or inaccurate at least monthly; the paper further analyses how experiences with misinformation relate to confidence in the media.

[4] Recent research from LION Publishing demonstrates how centering audiences correlates with increased publisher revenue. Read more: [LION data shows centering audience grows publisher revenue](#) (2026).

[5] More on the trend of declining local news and its causes can be found in the CCPA Monitor's article [Local news media is declining in Canada—we have to](#)

[reverse the trend](#) (2025).

[6] The [2025 Canadian Association of Journalists' Diversity Survey](#) found that despite making up less than 70 per cent of the Canadian population, "White journalists hold 83.7 per cent of supervisor roles and 78 per cent of the top three leadership positions in newsrooms"; about 69 per cent of newsrooms employed no Indigenous or visible minority journalists in the top three roles.

[7] For a recent study on underrepresentation in Canadian news coverage, see "[Old WASPs" and "middle-class white ladies": what columnists' self-identification says about diversity in Canadian newsrooms](#)". The authors' conclusion on the two-decade study period: "while Canada's population grew increasingly diverse over this period, the gulf between the country's demographics and those who write on key Canadian issues widened. As a result, a large part of the Canadian public remains underrepresented by major news publications."

[8] The government of Canada provides backgrounders on [how low-income and poverty are measured in Canada](#), the [geographic areas where low-income neighbourhoods are most concentrated](#), and the [communities that are over-represented within low-income measures](#).

[9] Adapted from [Press Forward Canada's definition](#) of independent journalism.

[10] This definition was drawn from the [Canada Revenue Association's eligibility criteria for qualified Canadian journalism organizations](#).

A list of frequently asked questions is available on the Fund webpage:

journalismfuturesfund.org

For additional questions, please contact: **jff-fam@inspiritfoundation.org**



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