

Community News Transformation Grants

A new statewide community college cohort to broaden New Mexicans' access to local news and information

OVERVIEW

Journalism + Design (J+D) at The New School and the New Mexico Local News Fund (NMLNF) are excited to announce “Community News Transformation Grants,” a new funding opportunity aimed at supporting community college-based projects that will strengthen and expand New Mexicans’ access to vital information.

We are offering several seed grants of at least \$30,000 each for initiatives centered at community college campuses that improve the flow of reliable news and information in their surrounding communities. This program seeks to develop pathways for more people to participate in keeping their communities informed and demonstrate how journalism and media skills can equip people for career success in many sectors.

Understanding how information flows formally and informally in a community—in other words, the [local news ecosystem](#)—can be a powerful tool for advancing community development, civic health, and democracy. As typically trusted local institutions, community colleges are already key parts of this ecosystem: they serve populations that have historically been cut out of news and knowledge production, and they play a vital role in sharing, embedding and nurturing knowledge and skills in communities.

Faculty and staff at community colleges across New Mexico have told us that they want to use their trusted positions to enable more people in their surrounding communities to do good in the world—including by encouraging greater participation in local news. Yet they often don’t have the resources, internal capacity, or know-how to accomplish this work. Community News Transformation Grants meet that need.

BACKGROUND

All across the U.S., local media outlets and support organizations are working hard to strengthen democracy by supporting people’s access to reliable news and information—and

hundreds of colleges and universities are right there alongside them. Community colleges are forging creative ways to enable more people to participate in the production and distribution of high-quality news and information, and discovering how to leverage resources—faculty expertise, community connections, alumni networks, even campus spaces—in service of their communities’ information needs. Through these efforts, colleges and universities are redefining community engagement and creating exciting educational, employment, and experiential pathways for people to acquire and apply media, communication and journalistic skills. Our Community News Transformation Grants are part of this broader movement.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Community News Transformation Grants will provide seed grant funding and cohort-based support to up to three New Mexico community colleges as they research, develop and launch original initiatives that 1) broaden community and organizational participation in New Mexico’s local information ecosystems, and 2) envision sustainable pathways for program participants to apply their journalistic skills via trainings, educational credit, community engagement, paid part-time or full-time jobs, fellowships, internships, or entrepreneurship.

Project teams at each college will participate in a hands-on design process, facilitated by J+D over the course of 12 months, to fully realize their initiatives and develop plans for long-term sustainability. Seed grant funds may be used to develop and launch new initiatives that prepare participants to improve the flow of information in local New Mexico communities, or to refine or extend existing programs at the college that contribute to a stronger local information ecosystem.

Colleges may propose their own initiatives or select/adapt one (or more) of the examples below:

- **Noncredit or credit pathways.** Develop, market, and launch a [noncredit program or credential rooted in journalism, media literacy and/or storytelling](#) or a credit-bearing program, or adapt/expand an existing journalism program, certificate, or credential to incorporate practices that fuel community-centered news. We are especially interested in pathways that engage New Mexico high school students and allow them to explore different careers and educational paths that use journalistic skills.
 - What it looks like: “[Community Journalism for Civic Power](#),” a free noncredit certificate program from Community College of Philadelphia, Resolve Philly and

J+D that gives community members the skills to tell and share stories and information that their communities need to thrive.

- **Community collaborations.** Partner with local news outlets or community-based organizations (e.g., community outreach and service organizations, public libraries, community or economic development projects) in your area to design fellowship, internship, or employment opportunities that will allow community members to acquire and apply journalistic and information skills in real-world contexts. These collaborations could also build community organizations' capacity to connect with local news outlets and vice versa.
 - What it looks like: A [community news fellowship](#) launched by Cuyahoga Community College with support from Signal Cleveland, Neighborhood Media Foundation and J+D, trains and pays community members to work from the college's [Access Centers](#) and talk with residents to identify information needs.
- **Strengthening student media.** Support efforts to expand and deepen the ability of student-produced media (e.g., newspapers, podcasts, social media channels, radio, etc.) to be a community resource for the greater geographic region beyond your campus and involve community members in producing and sharing news.
 - What it looks like: Mercer County Community College (NJ) launched a [Community Journalism J Lab](#) that trained community members to report and produce stories that it could publish and distribute through The College VOICE, the campus newspaper.
- **Local community newsrooms:** create or expand physical spaces or services at the college that pool community college and community resources and provide direct support for community members to produce and share local news and information.
 - What it looks like: Middlesex Community College (NJ) launched a "community media studio" to meet regularly with community members and help them develop and produce ideas for local stories that need to be told.
- **Entrepreneurship:** design a program that teaches participants the ins-and-outs of launching community-driven news products and prepares participants for careers in local news and information entrepreneurship, with potential access to a spot in NMLNF's [Local News Incubator](#).

In addition to financial support, colleges will receive coaching, peer support, and access to a network of community journalism experts through monthly virtual cohort meetings and

regular 1:1 check-ins with J+D program staff (for more details, see the “How it Works” section below). Colleges also will be able to connect with existing programs operated by J+D and NMLNF, such as NMLNF’s [Local News Fellowship](#) and [Local News Fund Incubator](#).

Colleges that have piloted successful programs during the award term may be eligible to receive additional funding and advisory support from J+D/NMLNF, to extend their initiatives beyond year 1 and develop plans for programmatic and financial sustainability.

ELIGIBILITY

The opportunity is open to all accredited two-year community colleges, associate’s degree-granting regional branches, and associate’s degree-granting tribal colleges and universities in New Mexico. We welcome applications from colleges that already have journalism and media courses, programs, or expertise on their campuses. *We also strongly encourage applications from colleges that do not have any kind of journalism courses, programs, or expertise but are interested in learning about how their college can become a hub for local news.*

To spark your imagination, we’ve seen local news efforts that involve community college faculty, staff, and administrators from offices, centers, programs, or departments dedicated to community engagement and education; workforce development; cultural education and outreach; adult education; the arts and humanities; innovation; and business development.

APPLICATION REVIEW AND CRITERIA

All eligible and complete applications will be read and evaluated by members of the program Advisory Board who have expertise in areas including community college instruction and administration, workforce development, experiential learning, local news in New Mexico, news-academic partnerships and collaborations, and community engagement. Evaluators will use a scoring rubric that reflects the application questions and the five evaluation criteria below:

- The project’s potential to broaden participation in how local news and information is produced and shared throughout local communities in New Mexico
- The project’s potential for building sustainable pathways for program participants to apply journalistic tools and skills;
- The feasibility of the proposed project plans;
- The project’s demonstrated understanding of and engagement with communities that the project hopes to serve, especially communities that have been historically underserved and underrepresented by the news and media sector: Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities; rural communities; and communities that have experienced socioeconomic inequities;

- The project’s potential for establishing or deepening mutually beneficial collaborations with other media and community-based organizations and institutions.

WHAT WE LOOK FOR

J+D and NMLNF acknowledge that every community college is different, especially in a state as large and diverse as New Mexico. We are committed to working with each college team to understand how your college operates, to generate and refine program ideas that suit your community’s unique needs, and to co-assess your readiness to participate in the program. That said, we’ve identified a few things that our successful community college partners tend to have in common.

- Capacity for “blue sky” thinking about how the college can contribute to the local news ecosystem—and also how this work can help fulfill the college’s mission
- Project teams of two or more people
- Capacity and appetite for cross-program/department/office collaboration within the college
- Robust support from college leadership (presidents, deans)
- Track record of engaging underserved communities on and off campus in mutually supportive ways
- Strong and diverse network of relationships with community nonprofit organizations, employers, news outlets, cultural institutions

HOW IT WORKS

Colleges that are selected for the cohort will work closely with J+D and NMLNF over a 12-month award period to imagine, design, and launch original initiatives that broaden participation in how local news and information is produced and shared throughout local communities in New Mexico and create sustainable pathways for program participants to apply their journalistic skills.

J+D and NMLNF will:

- Provide at least \$30,000 in seed grant funding to each college
- Co-lead the cohort through asset mapping and skill building activities that will prepare your college team to design a creative and sustainable community news initiative
- Facilitate a design process to help your college build out your initiative
- Support your college in launching initiative activities after the design phase is complete
- Create resources and knowledge-sharing opportunities that enable cohort members to codify and communicate what they’ve learned
- Clearly and proactively communicate any reporting expectations to the cohort

College teams are expected to:

- Commit to participating in expected cohort activities, including an intensive in-person skill-building period in late summer/early fall 2025 (to be scheduled with cohort input); monthly virtual cohort meetings during the design process; and asynchronous check-ins with J+D/NMLNF as needed during project implementation
- Collaborate with their institution's grants/sponsored research officer or team as necessary to ensure timely and complete grant administration
- Bring curiosity, flexibility, and a collaborative spirit to the cohort experience
- Work alongside J+D and NMLNF to define, track, and report on program success

HOW TO APPLY AND TIMELINE

To apply for a Community News Transformation grant:

Step 1: fill out a brief [Interest Form](#) to indicate your interest in the grant opportunity and share information about your readiness to apply and your project idea. Applicants are *required* to complete an interest form before creating a full grant application. J+D and NMLNF will read and review interest forms on a rolling basis through **April 8, 2025**; please allow us up to three business days to review your college's submitted interest form.

Step 2: Once J+D and NMLNF have received and reviewed your submitted interest form, we will email the contact designated on the interest form with a live link to the full grant application. **Grant applications are due April 18, 2025 at noon MT.**

February 2025: Interest form, guidelines, and application launch

March 2025: [Virtual information session](#) (register at the link) for interested colleges to learn more about the program goals, grantee experience, and application process; [weekly office hours](#) with J+D/NMLNF staff begin Thursday, March 13 at 1:00 pm MT

April 2025: Applications due

April-June 2025: Application review period

June 2025: Cohort announced

August/September 2025: Cohort kickoff

NO TIME FOR JOINING A COHORT RIGHT NOW?

No problem! We understand that a cohort-based program can be a big time commitment. If you are interested in our work but do not have the capacity to apply for and participate in our 2025-26 cohort, you can still be a part of our local news learning community. Drop us a line at journalismdesignteam@gmail.com or sign up for updates on our [website](#) for info on how you

can stay connected through our channels, join our virtual events, or drop in on our regular office hours.

WHO WE ARE

[Journalism + Design](#) (J+D) is an undergraduate program and lab at [The New School](#) dedicated to nurturing a more resilient free press for the future. Their major initiative, [Community News Networks](#), is rooted in fueling stronger local news ecosystems with community colleges by building pathways and power for more people – particularly those who have historically been excluded from legacy media systems – to participate in the production and distribution of news in their community. J+D has grown partnerships with more than eight community colleges across the country, including a [statewide cohort of community colleges in New Jersey](#), supported in partnership with the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. This work is supported by investments from the Hewlett Foundation, Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation and the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium.

[The New Mexico Local News Fund](#) works with journalists, community members and organizations across New Mexico to support journalism and ensure everyone has access to local news they can trust. Their current programs include [Local News Fellowships](#), a New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions-supported effort that builds pathways into local journalism by matching recently-graduated college journalists with opportunities at newsrooms across the state; the [New Mexico Local News Accelerator](#), which provides grants, coaching, and support to help local newsrooms create new revenue streams and develop sustainable business models; and the [Local News Incubator](#), which seeds news and information platforms in communities without access to reliable local news. Alongside the Thornburg Foundation, NMLNF leads the New Mexico chapter of [Press Forward](#), a national local news initiative led by the MacArthur Foundation and launched in September 2023.