CALIFORNIA
CIVIC MEDIA PROGRAM

California Civic Media Program

Program & Application Guide

June 2026

cacivicmedia.org

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California Civic Media Program

Program & Application Guide | 2026

Everything you need to understand the program, check your eligibility, and prepare a strong application.

Key Dates

- **June 15:** Pre-Registration Opens
- **June 30, 2:00–3:00 PM PT:** Civic Media Program Applicant Webinar 1
- **July 6:** Application Period Opens
- **July 7, 10:00–11:00 AM PT:** Civic Media Program Applicant Webinar 2
- **July 14 - August 18, 2:00 PM PT:** Weekly Technical Assistance every Tuesday
- **August 4, 2:00–3:00 PM PT:** Civic Media Program Applicant Webinar 3
- **August 21, 12:00 PM PT:** Application Period Closes
- **Fall 2026:** Awards Announced

Mission Statement

Every Californian deserves access to accurate, well-sourced information about their community. By expanding access to local, ethnic, and community media, supporting newsroom sustainability and diversity, and strengthening California's press corps to reflect the communities it serves, the Civic Media Program aims to close information gaps, empower people to participate in civic life, and build stronger, healthier, more connected communities across the state.

About the Program

The California Civic Media Program is one of the state's first public investments dedicated to strengthening California's journalism ecosystem through direct grants to news organizations. Established within the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), the program launched with support from Google as its founding private sector partner bringing together state funding, private investment, and implementation support from philanthropic infrastructure to invest in newsrooms across California. The program is administered by the James B. McClatchy Foundation with support from Journalism Funding Partners and is guided by the Civic Media Program Advisory Board, composed of California news industry leaders.

Program Goals

The California Civic Media Program was established under GO-Biz in advancement of the following goals:

1. Enhancing the public good through supporting a robust and dynamic California press corps and reinforcing the vital role of journalism in our democracy.
2. Empowering Californians by fostering greater understanding of and access to information about their communities and governmental structures.
3. Ensuring the sustainability of existing and new online publications with an emphasis on community-facing journalism.
4. Supporting California-based state and local news organizations, particularly those serving underserved and underrepresented communities.
5. Strengthening journalism that facilitates social integration, promotes civic engagement, and addresses inequalities among underserved communities.

Source: California Government Code 12100.161

The Program Model

The California Civic Media Program model was designed to be equitable, transparent, and replicable, balancing objective funding criteria with space for organizations to demonstrate the full scope of their impact.

The model has three main components: eligibility, funding determination, and prioritization.

Eligibility

The California Civic Media Program was designed to reach organizations doing the core work of local journalism: producing original, fact-based reporting on the communities and institutions that shape Californians' daily lives. For the purposes of this program, a news organization is the entity under whose title news content is published—not necessarily the legal operating entity behind it.

To be eligible, a news organization must:

- Have a current Statement of Information filed with the California Secretary of State through its own name or a parent company—or have a Fictitious Business Name Statement for sole proprietors only
- 3-Years of News Organization Operation
- Produce original, fact-based content on state or local matters of public interest
- Maintain a publicly posted ethics and correction policy
- Have publicly disclosed its ownership

The following organizations are not eligible:

- Broadcast organizations whose principal business is the distribution of audio or visual programming through TV, radio, cable, satellite, or internet-based streaming
- Organizations controlled by lobbying firms, political action committees, or entities with 501(c)(4) or 501(c)(6) status under the federal Internal Revenue Code

Funding Determination

The California Civic Media Program distributes $18.75 million through a single application process. Award amounts are determined by two mechanisms. The first is a pro rata formula based on journalist headcount, which accounts for the majority of funding. The second is a set-aside, reserved within that total, that adjusts awards for organizations whose impact exceeds what headcount alone reflects. Organizations may apply to be considered for this adjustment.

Pro Rata Formula

The foundation of the model is straightforward: organizations receive funding based on the number of eligible journalists they employ. The formula is designed to be objective and transparent, rewarding the scale of local reporting without requiring organizations to compete against each other on qualitative criteria alone.

The formula:

- **First 1–5 FTEs:** $20,000 per journalist
- **FTEs 6–20:** $10,000 per journalist
- **Maximum award:** $250,000 per organization

FTE stands for full-time equivalent: a full-time journalist counts as 1.0 FTE, and a part-time journalist averaging 15–29 hours per week counts as 0.5 FTE. Organizations that fall below 1 FTE may still apply through the needs-based adjustment. Independent contractors are not included in the pro rata calculation but may also be referenced in the needs-based adjustment.

Needs-Based Adjustment

Headcount tells part of the story. The Needs-Based set-aside exists to account for the rest, particularly for newsrooms serving deeply disinvested communities or whose workforce structure doesn't fully reflect their reporting impact.

Organizations that have not reached the $250,000 cap through the pro rata formula may apply for up to double their base award. Organizations with fewer than one FTE journalist may apply and be eligible for a total award between $20,000 and $40,000.

Geographic Allocation

California is a large, economically diverse state and the program was designed to reflect that. The geographic allocation model is adopted directly from the Governor's California Jobs First State Economic Blueprint, which divided California into 13 economic regions developed over three years as part of the state's broader economic strategy.

How does regional funding work? Before funding is awarded statewide, $250,000 is reserved for each of the 13 regions and is available only to news organizations located in that region. Within your region, applications are funded in order of score until that region's floor is met. Once every region's floor has been allocated, all remaining eligible applications across the state compete together in a single statewide pool, funded in order of score until program funds are depleted. This guarantees that every region of California receives funding while still rewarding the strongest applications overall.

California's 13 Jobs First Regions

1 **North State**
Butte
Glenn
Lassen
Modoc
Plumas
Shasta
Sierra
Siskiyou
Tehama
Trinity

2 **Redwood**
Del Norte
Humboldt
Lake
Mendocino

3 **Capital**
Colusa
El Dorado
Nevada
Placer
Sacramento
Sutter
Yolo
Yuba

4 **Sierra**
Alpine
Amador
Calaveras
Inyo
Mariposa
Mono
Tuolumne

5 **Bay Area**
Alameda
Contra Costa
Marin
Napa
San Francisco
San Mateo
Santa Clara
Solano
Sonoma

6 **North San Joaquin**
Merced
San Joaquin
Stanislaus

7 **Central San Joaquin**
Fresno
Madera
Tulare
Kings

8 **Central Coast**
Monterey
San Benito
San Luis Obispo
Santa Barbara
Santa Cruz
Ventura

9 **Kern County**

10 **Los Angeles County**

11 **Inland SoCal**
Riverside
San Bernardino

12 **Orange County**

13 **Southern Border**
Imperial
San Diego

Each region has guaranteed $250,000 funding floor, open only to news organizations within it.
Regions per the Governor's California Jobs First Blueprint.

Prioritization

The pro rata formula determines how much an organization could receive. Prioritization determines the order in which applications are funded, which matters because the program operates until funds are depleted.

All applications are scored by an independent Review Committee based on three short narrative responses. The committee is made up of 15-20 members from across California, representing a range of expertise including journalism practice, philanthropy, academic research, information equity, community representation, organizational sustainability, digital media, and more. The committee is selected and managed by the program's third-party administrators. Neither GO-Biz nor the Advisory Board participates in the review.

Scoring is based on indicators of need and impact, giving organizations the opportunity to demonstrate how their work serves California communities, how they plan to sustain that work, and how they would invest their award. Applications are funded in order of score until program funds are depleted.

The Application

Applying for the California Civic Media Program is designed to be straightforward. This section walks you through everything you need: what to gather, what to expect, and how to put your best application forward. The application is hosted on Temelio, the program's online grants management platform, and takes place in two stages: an optional pre-registration period from June 15 to July 5 which allows applicants to prepare their account, and the full application, which opens July 6 and closes August 21, 2026 at 12:00 PM PT.

Part 1: Applying Through Temelio

Whether you pre-register or start your application on July 6, news organizations will begin by determining their eligibility and setting up their organizational profile:

1. **Take the eligibility quiz.** A short set of questions confirming your organization meets the program's basic requirements.
2. **Create your Temelio account.** This is the login you'll use throughout the process.
3. **Complete your organization profile.** Basic information about your news organization, principal business address, website, date established, business entity type, organizational budget, and total number of employees.
4. **Share California News Ecosystem Data (optional).** Voluntary information that helps build a picture of California's news ecosystem: your medium, scope of coverage, membership in journalism associations, languages you report in, and the communities your reporting primarily serves. This data is analyzed only in aggregate and has no bearing on your award.

Everything you enter is saved. If you pre-registered, you won't start over later – you'll be notified when the full application opens and can pick up right where you left off.

Part 2: Eligibility Verification

Eligibility Documents

You will need to show the following verification to underscore your eligibility:

- **Ethics & Correction Policy:** Your policy must be publicly accessible on your website or in print. It should describe how your organization ensures accuracy and transparency in its reporting and how it corrects errors. If this policy is not currently posted, please add it before returning to the application.
- **Public Disclosure of Ownership:** Your ownership information must be publicly available on your website or in print. For nonprofits, disclosure of your board of directors satisfies this requirement. If this is not currently posted, please add it before returning to the application.
- **Proof of Authorization to do Business in California:** Submit a Statement of Information filed with the California Secretary of State as proof of legal business operations in the state. Sole proprietors who operate a news organization may submit a Fictitious Business Name Statement filed in the county of operations in this field. Following submission, additional documentation may be required for organizations whose filing does not reflect a principal business address in the state.
- **Media Liability Insurance:** Optional at the time of application. If you do not submit proof now, you will be required to provide an active policy before a grant is made.

Part 3: Calculating Your FTE

Your award is calculated based on the number of eligible journalists at your organization. Before you sit down to fill out this section, it helps to know exactly who counts, how they count, and what documentation you'll need to support your submission.

Who Counts

An eligible journalist is a W-2 employee whose primary professional function is the gathering, reporting, editing, or production of original, fact-based news on local and state matters. They must live in California and be employed at the time of application.

Eligible functions include:

- Reporters, editors, copy editors, and fact-checkers
- Photojournalists, videographers, and audio producers
- Digital journalists, data journalists, newsletter authors, and community engagement producers (journalistic, not promotional), and graphic designers (journalistic, not promotional)

The following do not count toward your FTE calculation:

- Advertising, sales, marketing, graphic design (promotional), public relations, and fundraising staff
- HR, accounting, legal, and general operations staff
- Publishers or owners who dedicate less than 50% of their working hours to editorial production or management
- Individuals who exclusively curate, syndicate, or aggregate content without contributing original reporting
- Journalists who do not cover local or state California matters
- Independent contractors (1099)

How They Count

- **Full-time journalists** averaging 30 or more hours per week count as 1.0 FTE
- **Part-time journalists** averaging 15–29 hours per week count as 0.5 FTE
- **Journalists working fewer than 15 hours per week** are not eligible for the pro rata calculation

> **Fewer than one FTE?** You will not be eligible for pro rata but you can still apply. If your organization totals fewer than 1.0 FTE, you'll be able to indicate that you intend to apply for the needs-based adjustment. Organizations with fewer than one FTE journalist are eligible for a total award between $20,000 and $40,000.

Verifying Your Pro Rata

For each journalist you submit, you will need their name, start date and employee zip code. You will also upload a payroll summary as supporting documentation.

As you enter journalists, the application will calculate your estimated award in real time.

Part 4: Preparing Your Narratives

All applicants answer three narrative questions of 250 words or fewer. Your responses are scored by the independent Review Committee and used to rank applications for funding.

The narrative section is how every application is evaluated for prioritization, regardless of headcount. **That means all applicants must complete this section, including organizations with fewer than one FTE that intend to apply only for the needs-based adjustment.**

The committee is looking to understand your organization, your community, and your plans. You can and should prepare your responses before you log in.

Question 1: Coverage of Disinvested Audiences

> *"Describe how your organization serves communities that face barriers to accessing local news. This includes communities experiencing economic hardship, geographic isolation, minimal existing coverage, or limited English proficiency. What tactics do you employ to address the specific civic information needs of these communities?"*

Question 2: Ongoing Viability

> *"Every news organization faces financial pressures and creates unique ways to thrive. Describe how yours is navigating them. What does your current revenue picture look like and what steps are you taking to build your organization's continued operation?"*

Question 3: Use of Funds

> *"If awarded, how would you plan to use the funds to advance the goals set forth in the Civic Media Program? Pick one or multiple goals and describe how you would invest the award."*

Goals you may reference:

- Supporting California's Press Corps / Workforce Investments
- Expanding Coverage of Local Government and Communities
- Investing in Operational Sustainability
- Serving Underserved and Underrepresented Communities
- Strengthening Journalism that Promotes Civic Engagement

Part 5: Optional Needs-Based Adjustment

If your pro rata award does not reflect the full scale of your organization's impact, you may answer one additional question to be considered for the needs-based adjustment. Answering this question does not guarantee additional funding.

Eligible organizations can receive up to double their pro rata award, not to exceed $250,000. Organizations with fewer than one FTE journalist may apply for a total award between $20,000 and $40,000.

Needs Based Question:

> *Please describe why the funding determination from your pro rata headcount (including those with less than 1 FTE) does not match the scale and full impact of your news organization's reporting. In your answer, please build on your responses provided in the narrative section to further discuss your service to disinvested communities or planned investments in workforce, operational viability, and local coverage that this award could catalyze.*

Part 6: Self-Attestation

Before submitting, you will sign a self-attestation confirming that:

- The information provided is true, accurate, and complete
- Your organization creates, edits, and distributes original, fact-based content as a majority of its operations
- All journalists submitted are W-2 employees who live in California and whose primary function is original news reporting
- Your narrative responses are complete and accurate to the best of your ability
- Acknowledgment that any misrepresentation of any material information may result in disqualification and repayment of awarded funds.

Technical Assistance & Support

The California Civic Media Program is committed to making the application process as accessible as possible. If you have questions along the way, support is available in multiple formats throughout the application period.

In the Application

You can leave comments directly in the application portal and program staff will respond in order of the comments received. This is a good option for questions specific to your organization's situation.

Webinars and Office Hours

Program staff will host three public webinars during the application period covering the program model, eligibility, and the application process. All webinars are open to any interested news organization.

- **CMP Webinar 1** — June 30, 2:00–3:00 PM PT
- **CMP Webinar 2** — July 7, 10:00–11:00 AM PT
- **CMP Webinar 3** — August 4, 2:00–3:00 PM PT

In addition, weekly office hours are held every Tuesday at 2:00 PM PT throughout the application period. Bring your questions, walk through your eligibility, or get help calculating your FTE. You can register via cacivicmedia.org

The Review Process

Once the application period closes on August 21, 2026 at 12:00pm PT, all eligible applications enter an independent review and scoring process. The following is what happens after you submit.

Who Reviews Applications

Applications are scored by an independent Review Committee of 15-20 members from across California, representing a range of expertise including journalism practice, philanthropy, academic research, information equity, community representation, organizational sustainability, digital media, and more. The committee is selected and managed by the program's third-party administrators. Neither GO-Biz nor the Advisory Board participates in the review.

How Applications Are Scored

Applications are scored on your narrative responses using a predefined rubric. Across all three questions, the committee looks for answers tailored to the specific needs of your community, your audience, and your news organization. The committee also accounts for differences in organization size and funding eligibility, so responses are weighed in proportion to your scale rather than against a single standard.

Component 1: Coverage of Disinvested Audiences (Max 40 Points)

This component evaluates how your reporting serves regions and communities with limited existing coverage, with an emphasis on serving historically disinvested audiences. The Review Committee looks for a clear description of your audience and their needs, as well as the informational, regional, linguistic, or economic gaps that your journalism helps to bridge.

- **0–10 Points | Low Impact:** The response does not adequately describe the audience or how that readership in particular is disinvested. It targets a generalized audience with limited or no tactics to address civic information needs.
- **11–25 Points | Moderate Impact:** The response adequately describes the audience and their needs. It shows intentional coverage of a geographic news desert or disinvested community and employs some tactics to fill civic information gaps.
- **26–40 Points | High Impact:** The response clearly describes the audience and the critical needs of its readership. The organization acts as a primary or sole source of information for its community and employs meaningful tactics to strengthen access to news and fill gaps in coverage.

Component 2: Ongoing Viability (Max 25 Points)

This component evaluates your current business model, strategic plan, and long-term vision for your organization. The Review Committee looks for your long-term revenue diversification strategy and operational model. Recognizing the financial pressures the industry faces statewide, the committee evaluates with an eye toward creativity and ingenuity as well as stability.

- **0–5 Points | Low Viability:** The response does not adequately describe the organization's current operational model and long-term business plan. Finances rely on temporary revenue sources with limited consideration for longevity.
- **6–15 Points | Moderate Viability:** The response adequately describes the organization's current operational model and long-term business plan. Finances rely on a mix of stable sources with consideration for longevity.
- **16–25 Points | High Viability:** The response clearly describes the organization's current operational model and long-term business strategy. Finances rely on diverse revenue streams with vision or creativity. The organization displays strong resilience and an enduring commitment to its community.

Component 3: Planned Use of Funds (Max 35 Points)

This component evaluates whether you have clear, impactful plans for grant funding that will deepen state and local news coverage, either through active expansion or investment in long-term news infrastructure. The Review Committee looks for spending plans that connect directly to the program's legislative goals, with attention to vision, achievability, and impact.

- **0–10 Points | Low Impact:** Spending plans have limited or no connection to legislative goals and are poorly defined or unachievable. Funding preserves status quo operations without adding new coverage, source depth, or reporting volume.
- **11–23 Points | Moderate Impact:** Spending plans connect to legislative goals and are adequately defined. Funding expands or strengthens the newsroom's baseline reporting capacity and adds new coverage, source depth, and/or reporting volume.
- **24–35 Points | High Impact:** Spending plans connect strongly to legislative goals and are well-defined. Funding significantly expands or strengthens the newsroom's baseline reporting capacity and adds new coverage, source depth, and/or reporting volume in high demand for that community.

How Applications Are Scored: Needs-Based Adjustment

If you choose to apply for the Needs-Based Adjustment and answer the additional question, your response is scored on a 0–10 scale by the Review Committee. Your score sets the maximum increase to your pro rata award: the higher the score, the larger the increase for which your application is eligible, up to double. If you have no pro rata award, you are eligible for a $20,000 base award, with the percentage increase applied to that amount. Applying for the Needs-Based Adjustment does not guarantee additional funding and you must complete the entire application to qualify.

Grant Agreements

Following the review period, applicants will be notified of the outcome of their applications. Those that are selected to receive an award will be asked to enter into a grant agreement with terms including but not limited to: reporting on use of funds, relaying outcomes, and maintaining staffing levels for which funds were awarded. Failure to comply with grant agreement terms may result in the rescission of awards.

FAQ

What's the difference between pre-registration and applying?

Pre-registration (opening June 15) lets you create your account with Temelio, and pre-fill information about your news organization. The full application opens July 6, giving you access to calculate your journalists on a pro-rata basis and to enter your narrative responses.

Will all applications get funded?

Grants will be awarded until funding is depleted. Higher scoring applications on the prioritization rubric will be funded first.

Is this a one-time grant or renewable?

As of now, this is a one-time grant.

When will funds be disbursed if I'm awarded?

Funds will be disbursed in Fall 2026.

A journalist on my staff just left. Do I count them as part of my total?

No. Only journalists employed at your organization at the time you submit your application count toward your total.

What reporting will be required after I receive a grant?

Specific reporting requirements are determined during the awarding process and will be shared with you in advance through your grant agreement.

Will the award be a grant or a tax credit?

The Civic Media Program provides direct grants to news organizations, not tax credits.

My organization is less than three years old. Can I apply?

The three-year requirement is measured from your date established. If you believe a specific circumstance about your organization's history should be taken into consideration, reach out to program staff before applying.

My news organization performs some audio/visual reporting. Does that disqualify us?

No. The exclusion applies only to entities whose principal business is distributing audio or visual programming through broadcast, cable, satellite, or internet-based streaming.

Is there support available in languages other than English?

Yes. If you need language support, reach out to the program team and we will work to accommodate your request.

A thorough list of FAQs can be found on the program website and will be updated regularly throughout the application period.

About the Partners

Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz)

The Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development serves as the State of California's leader for job growth, economic development and business assistance efforts. GO-Biz brings together a diverse team of professionals with expertise across industries, regions and business disciplines, working collaboratively to attract investment, support business growth and drive statewide economic prosperity.

James B. McClatchy Foundation (JBMF)

The James B. McClatchy Foundation is a California based spend-down foundation committed to strengthening the civic information ecosystem in California's Central Valley and beyond. JBMF serves as the lead third party administrator of the California Civic Media Program, responsible for program design, implementation, and operations.

Journalism Funding Partners (JFP)

Journalism Funding Partners is a California based public charity focused on increasing the depth, diversity and sustainability of local journalism by building and stewarding partnerships between funders and news organizations. JFP serves as the steward of the California Civic Media Program's private funds and assists GO-Biz and JBMF in the program's execution.

Google

The Civic Media Program includes a $10 million private contribution from Google to support the long-term sustainability of local journalism across California. These funds are administered by Journalism Funding Partners. Google has no role in or influence over award selection or disbursement decisions.

Civic Media Program Advisory Board

The Advisory Board is composed of news industry leaders from across California. The board provides guidance on program direction but does not participate in the application review process. For more information about board members and meetings, please visit business.ca.gov/california-civic-media-program.

- **Arturo Carmona,** President of the Latino Media Collaborative
- **Chuck Corra,** Associate Director of Policy & Advocacy at LION Publishers
- **Erik Cushman,** Publisher at Monterey County Weekly
- **Julian Do,** Co-Director of American Community Media
- **Sean Emery,** President of the Media Guild of the West and Journalist at SCNG
- **Jeff Glasser,** General Counsel at the Los Angeles Times
- **Marian Kaanon,** President and CEO of the Stanislaus Community Foundation
- **Julie Patel Liss,** Head of Journalism at California State University, Los Angeles
- **Regina Brown Wilson,** Executive Director of California Black Media

Stay Connected

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Instagram — @cacivicmedia

We Look Forward to Your Application

Visit cacivicmedia.org for the latest updates and resources.