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The Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona Announces \$225,000 in Grants to Six Organizations

Tucson, AZ (March 12, 2024) – The Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona, an initiative of the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona (CFSA), announced \$225,000 in grants to six organizations supporting local news throughout Southern Arizona. This is the first round of grants awarded by the recently established Local News Initiative.

The inaugural grant recipients include:

- Arizona Luminaria
- KAWC
- Nogales International
- Patagonia Regional Times
- Tucson Agenda
- Tucson Sentinel

The Initiative received eighteen applications for this first round of funding, totaling \$1.2 million. Grant recipients were selected by a grants committee comprised of diverse community volunteers from throughout Southern Arizona. For this funding round, the grants committee specifically considered applicants' capacity to produce and deliver news and information that community members need and their ability to reach traditionally underrepresented communities.

Advisory Board Chair Nancy Sharkey, a former senior editor at The New York Times who spent more than a decade as a professor at the University of Arizona's School of Journalism in Tucson, stated, "The newsrooms chosen will all be able to increase their reporting in Southern Arizona, a key goal in this first round of grants. The funding will support several different models for additional reporting, such as more traditional reporters, paid internships, and the training of citizen journalists. We hope to assist news organizations in Southern Arizona over the next few years as they develop sustainable business models. People in many cities lament the decline of local news; in Southern Arizona, we've started to do something about it."

National Issue, Local Solutions

In Tucson, as in cities across the country, local newsrooms are being hollowed out, meaning that accountability and watchdog reporting on government bodies, agencies, schools, and other critical civic organizations are lost. To counter this, a concerned and dedicated group of volunteers, led by longtime community advocates like Dino DeConcini and Mort Rosenblum, organized and raised funding from generous folks in the community to prevent Southern Arizona from becoming another news desert.

The group brought their concerns and ideas for addressing those issues locally to the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona. Together, this group and CFSA settled on a strategy, forming a Local News Initiative that would support an innovative local news ecosystem in Southern Arizona. The

Initiative aims to raise public awareness about the impact of declining local news and increase funding available to local news organizations and providers.

In addition to generous support from local donors, the Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona received a \$100,000 grant from Democracy Fund, a national foundation that has long supported local journalism. In the last decade, Democracy Fund has supported community-based philanthropic solutions to the local news crisis in Chicago, Colorado, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Oklahoma.

In the last two decades, the local news crisis has been spreading to communities across the U.S. as the collapse of the traditional advertising business model for local news has led to the shutdown of more than 2,200 local newspapers and the elimination of thousands of local journalism jobs. Today, millions of Americans lack access to coverage of important local events and issues. In Tucson and Pima County, dozens of local journalism jobs have disappeared in recent years at Tucson-based news publications.

CFSA President and CEO Jenny Flynn shared, "Without local news, communities experience fading civic engagement, eroding social bonds, surging misinformation, and dwindling governmental accountability. At CFSA, we envision a Southern Arizona that is a great place to work, play, learn, create, innovate, invest, prosper, grow up, grow families, grow businesses, and grow older. Every day, we work side-by-side with donors and nonprofits to create places where all community members are housed, fed, and have access to high-quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. In other words, a community that is thriving. And we understand you cannot have a thriving community without local news."

"In counties across America, the local news crisis means that people are not getting the news and information they need to make critical decisions about their lives, their businesses, and their families," said Jennifer Preston, Director of Accelerate Philanthropy for Journalism and an advisor to the project since early last year. "The Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona demonstrates what can happen when people in a community come together to address their concerns about the local news crisis and show how philanthropy and a local community foundation can play an important role in finding solutions."

Preston continued, "Southern Arizona is lucky to have such engaged local leaders and the leadership team at the CFSA to create a path for the future of journalism and informed communities. Most of all, there are people and projects — great journalists producing great journalism across Southern Arizona — providing solutions that deserve more local, state, and national philanthropic support."

Supporting Place-Based News

Becky Pallack, Co-founder of Arizona Luminaria, a Local News Initiative grantee, shared, "In our listening work, people told us they are frustrated by local news that focuses on problems with no solutions, publishes too late to take action, or lacks context and nuance. Based on that, we are framing our stories thoughtfully. We offer high-quality, solutions-focused journalism. We start following stories early and write frequent follow-ups to help our readers understand how they can get involved and have time to do it."

She continued, "This funding will help support Arizona Luminaria as we continue to grow our editorial team and business-side operations with an eye toward long-term sustainability and community impact. We are building a news organization that can fill important gaps in coverage for Southern Arizonans."

Marion Vendituoli, Managing Editor of Patagonia Regional Times, which provides local news and information to eastern Santa Cruz County, echoed Pallack's focus on news that is connected to community needs and engagement. She shared, "We may have a relatively small population, but our issues are not small. Our community needs the reliable information we provide to make sound decisions about all the issues that affect their daily lives. The Local News Initiative grant will help make our job of providing this information and engaging our community a reality."

As a small, rural nonprofit news organization, Patagonia Regional Times operates with an innovative citizen journalist model. Currently, twenty-two volunteer citizen journalists contribute to a newsroom that is for and by the community. Vendituoli said, "Many of our volunteers have never participated in journalism. Facilitating their growth and development as reporters is incredibly gratifying. Their diversity of experience and viewpoints gives the PRT a true voice of our community and sustains our grassroots organization and mission."

As the only public media source serving Yuma and La Paz counties, supporting the next generation of local journalists is critical to the work at KAWC, a non-commercial, educational radio station based in Yuma, Arizona. Funding from the Local News Initiative will support the launch of a Student Newsroom at KAWC in partnership with Arizona Western College, offering students an experiential learning opportunity that combines classroom knowledge and professional development. Students will rotate through numerous roles, including host, producer, field reporter, audio engineer, and social media manager, gaining critical skills and professional experience.

Lou Gum, KAWC's News Director, shared, "Local media is best placed to deliver the stories and information a community needs to thrive. KAWC looks forward to helping build a pathway for students to become the next generation of journalists and media professionals in our community."

Learn more about the Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona and the six inaugural grantees at cfsaz.org/news.

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About Community Foundation for Southern Arizona

Since 1980, the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona has been a trusted philanthropic partner, helping individuals, families, businesses, and nonprofits work together to create an equitable and vibrant community for all Southern Arizonans. Community Foundation for Southern Arizona has supported Southern Arizona with over \$245 million in grants and scholarships, stewarding the philanthropic legacy of our community's generous donors and increasing the breadth and depth of resources available to nonprofit organizations in our region. For more information, visit cfsaz.org or call 520-770-0800.

About Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona

The Local News Initiative of Southern Arizona, an initiative of the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona, works to strengthen local journalism in Southern Arizona and fill critical gaps in local news and information. The Initiative aims to raise public awareness about the impact of declining local news coverage in our community and increase funding available to support local solutions and opportunities.

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