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The City of Chicago Commits to Advertising Equity in Local Media

Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot signs an Executive Order allocating at least 50 percent of all City departments' annual advertising spending to community media outlets

CHICAGO — Today, Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot signed an Executive Order designating that City of Chicago departments allocate at least 50 percent of their annual advertising spending to community media outlets. More than 153 languages are spoken in households citywide, in addition to other diversity factors. Together, Chicago's local media outlets reach all 77 community areas in all of the languages the city's communities speak.

This is an effort that the Chicago Independent Media Alliance (CIMA) has been advocating for since 2020.

“Chicago is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and it's only right that City government honors that diversity by supporting community and ethnic media outlets,” said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. “Through this equity-based Executive Order, we will ensure that City communications and information on programs are accessible to all of our residents — no matter their circumstances. This effort will also serve as an economic boon for many of our local media outlets, and strengthen the City's relationship with the communities they represent.”

With this Executive Order, the City demonstrates its commitment to equitable access to vital information about City services and resources. It also commits to supporting the small, local media outlets that reach, cover, and hire people from all of Chicago's communities.

“We are so excited Mayor Lightfoot is taking this first big step toward creating a more equitable playing field for the city's marketing and advertising spending. We urge all city, county and state agencies to follow this lead,” said CIMA founder and Chicago Reader Publisher Tracy Baim. “This decision will not only ensure that Chicago's local media can grow and support more voices; it will ensure that Chicago can be a blueprint for other cities.”

“Chicago is a leader in hyperlocal journalism. This is a significant step for advancing equity of voice in Chicago and beyond,” said Jhmira Alexander, President & Executive Director of Public Narrative. “Agency marketing and advertising dollars will offer community media outlets the

chance to increase their capacity for coverage and innovation in better serving the different communities in our diverse city.”

Chicago’s local media outlets have been advocating for this effort since October 2020, when CIMA — a project of the Reader Institute for Community Journalism linking more than 60 community media entities representing more than 80 outlets — began the work of replicating a study of New York City governmental advertising conducted by the Center for Community Media at the City University of New York (CUNY) Newmark Graduate School of Journalism.

The New York project resulted in an Executive Order signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio in mid-2019. In 2020, the first year of full implementation, there was a multi-million-dollar shift to community and ethnic media.

“The Newmark J-school is thrilled to learn that Chicago is following in the steps of New York City and creating a more equitable landscape for community media,” said Graciela Mochkofsky, Dean of the CUNY Newmark Graduate School of Journalism. “The New York City Executive Order and now permanent law, supported by the work of our Center for Community Media, allocates government advertising dollars to the myriad of newsrooms serving communities of color and immigrants in New York. This has strengthened the sector, effectively allowing thousands of people to stay informed and civically engaged.”

For the Chicago project, CIMA hired Sam Stecklow — journalist and researcher currently at Invisible Institute — who conducted a FOIA investigation of advertising spending by city, county, and state agencies. Unlike New York City, Chicago and sister city agencies do not handle advertising in a central fashion. Thus, FOIA requests were made to all City departments and sister agencies, other local agencies that are run by appointees of the Mayor of Chicago, and City-affiliated nonprofits that are run by appointees of the Mayor of Chicago.

CIMA Co-Directors Yazmin Dominguez and Savannah Hugueley created the City of Chicago Marketing Report summarizing the investigation results. Overall, it found that, from 2015 to 2020, while 47.4% of advertising from city agencies was in community media, that only translated to 18.8% of total dollars spent. For what the City reported, 38.8% was spent in community media, but that was just 13% when viewed on dollars spent.

“This project has been a goal of the Chicago Independent Media Alliance since its inception. This win could not have been accomplished without Sam Stecklow’s one-year dedication to the project,” said Co-Director of CIMA Yazmin Dominguez. “For a full picture, I encourage interested parties to read our City of Chicago Marketing Report. This Executive Order has the opportunity to be a gamechanger for Chicago’s local outlets. A more consistent and solid flow of advertising dollars will equate to stable newsrooms resulting in secure resources to fund and uplift more on-the-ground and investigative reporting.”

As part of the Executive Order, the Office of the Mayor will maintain a list of local media that exemplify Chicago’s interconnected communities. Agencies will also be able to utilize the Chicago Independent Media Directory created by CIMA. Featuring outlet statistics and audience demographics, this free media directory includes a growing list of Chicago’s independent and local media outlets in one central website.

The Chicago Independent Media Directory was created in collaboration with Public Narrative — a Chicago-based nonprofit that has been elevating community voices in journalism for more than 30 years. Since 1995, Public Narrative has produced the Chicago Media Guide, “Getting on the Air, Online & Into Print,” which today provides contact information for over 5,000 Chicago-area journalists and media outlets. Public Narrative’s partnership with CIMA has been essential in advocating for, and creating resources to bring more revenue and support to, independent community media in the city.

CIMA information and reports: indiemediachi.org/about/

CIMA’s Chicago Independent Media Directory: cimadirectory.org
Public Narrative’s Chicago Media Guide will relaunch in November 2022. Visit publicnarrative.org/the-guide/ to learn more.



About CIMA

The Chicago Independent Media Alliance (CIMA) is a coalition of 62 independent, local, and community-driven media entities covering communities throughout the Chicago area, representing more than 80 outlets. Through regular collaboration and the creation of new revenue streams, CIMA uplifts the ecosystem in order to amplify the voices of Chicagoans. Since its founding in 2019, CIMA has helped direct more than \$700,000 in funding for its members, through an annual fundraiser, matching foundation funds, and collaboration grants. Founded in 2019, CIMA is a project of the Reader Institute for Community Journalism, publisher of the Chicago Reader. See indiemediachi.org/about/.



About Public Narrative

Public Narrative is Chicago’s premiere cultivator of narrative change and supporter of community-oriented journalism since 1989. It facilitates training, programming and resource building focused on cultivating media literacy, uplifting community voices in media, and shifting narratives around public health, public safety, and public education. Public Narrative supports more than 200 community and ethnic news outlets and for-and not-for-profit organizations through its initiatives. And it builds meaningful relationships among stakeholders to shift existing community narratives and amplify more inclusive and complete storytelling across Chicago, greater Illinois and beyond. See publicnarrative.org.