



AIP Member Meeting

Calling all AIP members - The AIP Board and Executive Director will be holding a member meeting on Friday, 24 July to discuss the Digital News Transformation Fund and IEC Campaign Representation with members.

Come with your questions.

The AIP Board and ED will also give a briefing and will be available to respond to queries.

The meeting will be held online from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on Friday, 24 July 2026.

Background briefing Note on the DNTF:

The AIP's Commitment to Good Governance and Transparency in the DNTF

Background

The Association of Independent Publishers (AIP), in partnership with Google, established the **Digital News Transformation Fund (DNTF)** on behalf of the South African news publishing industry to support the digital transformation and long-term sustainability of **small and medium-sized independent news publishers**.

The creation of the DNTF represents a significant investment in South African public interest journalism and reflects a collective commitment to building a stronger, more sustainable independent news ecosystem.

A Commitment to Good Governance

AIP recognised from the outset that the credibility of the Fund would depend on robust governance structures and independent decision-making.

For this reason, the DNTF was established with clear governance mechanisms designed to ensure fairness, accountability and transparency.

These include:

- an **independent DNTF Board**, responsible for overseeing the strategic governance of the Fund;
- an **independent adjudication panel**, responsible for assessing funding applications and making grant recommendations based on merit; and
- independent fund management and administration.

Importantly, **the AIP Board and the AIP Executive Director do not participate in, influence or determine funding allocations**. Decisions regarding successful applicants are made through the Fund's independent governance processes.

This separation between AIP's advocacy role and the Fund's grant-making functions was deliberately designed to protect the integrity of the process and to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly.

Independent Oversight and Auditing

As with any new initiative of this scale, the first funding round presented several operational challenges. These included administrative and implementation issues that were acknowledged by the Fund's leadership.

However, throughout this process there has been a strong commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

To strengthen confidence in the Fund:

- the **first round of funding has been independently audited**; and
- **Tshikululu's management and administration of the Fund has also undergone an independent audit.**

These independent reviews form part of the Fund's commitment to learning, improving systems and ensuring that governance standards continue to be strengthened over time.

Transparency and Sector Communication

Transparency has been a central principle of the DNTF since its establishment.

Throughout both the first and second funding rounds, the DNTF has maintained regular communication with the sector through multiple channels.

These efforts have included:

- regular email communications distributed to industry bodies throughout both funding rounds;
- AIP forwarding these communications to its own members;
- publication of key DNTF information and updates on the AIP website;
- stakeholder engagement before the Fund was officially launched;
- invitations to AIP members to attend the launch of the DNTF;
- presentations by Google and Tshikululu at AIP Annual General Meetings in both 2024 and 2025; and
- a sector-wide stakeholder meeting following the completion of the first funding round to reflect on lessons learned.

These communication processes have sought to ensure that publishers remain informed about developments within the Fund and understand how the application and assessment processes operate.

Capacity Building and Applicant Support

Recognising that many independent publishers require support in preparing competitive funding applications and strengthening their digital strategies, the DNTF has invested significantly in capacity building.

The Fund has organised multiple training and information sessions for publishers ahead of both the first and second rounds of funding.

In addition, AIP has complemented these efforts through its own independent support programmes, including practical training workshops facilitated by respected media development expert **Paula Fray**. These sessions have focused on helping publishers strengthen proposals, improve sustainability planning and better understand the expectations of funders.

Together, these initiatives reflect a shared commitment to ensuring that publishers are not only able to apply for funding but are also better equipped to build resilient and sustainable news organisations.

A Commitment to Continuous Improvement

AIP believes that transparency, accountability and constructive feedback are essential to the long-term success of the Digital News Transformation Fund.

As an industry body, AIP welcomes thoughtful engagement on how the Fund can continue to improve while also recognising the significant achievement represented by the establishment of one of the largest investments ever made in South Africa's independent news publishing sector.

The organisation remains committed to working with Google, the DNTF Board, Tshikululu, industry stakeholders and publishers to strengthen governance, improve transparency, share lessons learned and ensure that the Fund continues to deliver meaningful support to independent public interest journalism across South Africa.

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