

MuckRock / DocumentCloud — Press Inquiry, Miranda Response & Closure

Full correspondence chain: April 15 – May 7, 2026 · Gmail threads: 19d92923bc997d0f (Req #149414), 19e03e9442a470e2 (Req #150057 closure) · Investigation: Platform Gatekeeping: Press Freedom

Background

DFP submitted two DocumentCloud verification requests in February 2026 and paid \$80 in Professional subscription fees. On March 14, 2026, verification was denied without criteria. On April 15, 2026 — after DFP demanded and received a refund — DFP filed a formal press inquiry. The full chain follows.

EMAIL RECORD

From: newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org
To: info@documentcloud.org
Cc: newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org
Date: April 15, 2026 — 19:19 UTC
Subject: Press Inquiry — DocumentCloud Verification Criteria: Dismal Freedom Press

April 15, 2026

MuckRock Foundation / DocumentCloud
info@documentcloud.org

To the DocumentCloud Verification Team:

Dismal Freedom Press (DFP) is an independent investigative newsroom based in Manteca, California, serving the San Joaquin Valley and East Bay. We are members of the Society of Professional Journalists, operate under a published editorial standards guide, and conduct original investigative reporting under the California Public Records Act.

We are writing regarding our DocumentCloud verification requests and to formally request written disclosure of the criteria MuckRock/DocumentCloud applies when evaluating newsroom verification applications.

Background: DFP submitted two separate verification requests — the first on February 7, 2026 (Torie Cortez / Dismal Freedom Press), the second on February 10-11, 2026 (dismalfreedompress.org account). Both requests provided detailed descriptions of DFP's investigative practice, public records methodology, SPJ membership, RCFP guidance adherence, and planned use of

DocumentCloud for source document publication.

On March 14, 2026 — 35 days after the first application — DocumentCloud declined verification with the following language: "we've determined that your project is not a fit for verified membership." No criteria were cited. No explanation was offered. No reconsideration pathway was provided. The thread was immediately declared closed and unmonitored.

DFP had been paying \$40/month for a Professional subscription since February 8, 2026 — a total of \$80 paid for access that was conditionally withheld pending verification, then denied without explanation. A refund was issued upon request on March 15, 2026.

We are seeking written responses to the following questions:

1. What are the specific criteria DocumentCloud applies when evaluating newsroom verification applications?
2. Are those criteria published anywhere accessible to applicants prior to submission?
3. What specific criterion or criteria determined that Dismal Freedom Press was "not a fit for verified membership"?
4. How does DocumentCloud distinguish between independent investigative newsrooms and non-journalistic applicants in its evaluation process?
5. Is there a formal reconsideration or appeal process for declined applications?
6. What is DocumentCloud's policy regarding Professional subscription fees collected during the period verification is under review and subsequently denied?

DFP is conducting a journalism accountability inquiry into the publisher and newsroom verification practices of journalism infrastructure platforms. We are examining whether independent newsrooms serving non-institutional, non-coastal communities face structural barriers to access that are not applied to legacy or institutional outlets. DocumentCloud's response — or non-response — will be reflected accurately in our reporting.

We request a written response by April 29, 2026.

Sincerely,

Investigations Desk

Dismal Freedom Press

newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

dismalfreedom.press

EMAIL RECORD

From: info@documentcloud.org (Miranda, DocumentCloud)

To: newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

Date: April 21, 2026 — 15:34 UTC

Subject: [MuckRock] Re: Press Inquiry — DocumentCloud Verification Criteria: Dismal Freedom Press

[MuckRock Support Ticket #149414]

Hi Torie,

We understand that you are frustrated by our decision, and we wanted to provide a bit more information.

MuckRock is a non-profit organization, and not every project is a fit for our services. You can read more about our verification process here:
<https://help.muckrock.com/Verification-19ef8892696381dba944e17e14938433>

If you would like us to reconsider your application in 6 months, you are welcome to reapply.

We would also like to note that a MuckRock Professional or Organization membership does not require you to be a verified newsroom. You are still able to use your request credits to file requests without being a verified newsroom. We welcome academics, activists, community organizations, and private citizens to use our tools.

Thank you for your understanding.

Yours,

Miranda

[Note: This response addressed 2 of 6 questions in DFP's April 15 inquiry. Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 — specific criteria, evaluation methodology, formal appeal process, and fee policy — were not addressed. The response

referred to DFP in the same category as "academics, activists, community organizations, and private citizens."]

EMAIL RECORD

From: newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org
To: info@documentcloud.org
Date: April 27, 2026 — 15:00 UTC
Subject: Re: [MuckRock] Re: Press Inquiry — DocumentCloud Verification Criteria: Dismal Freedom Press

Miranda —

Thank you for the link. The Verification page resolves and we have read it carefully. It addresses two of the six questions in our April 15 inquiry (general categories of eligibility and SPJ Code expectations). It does not address questions 3, 4, 5, or 6 — the specific criterion or criteria that determined DFP was "not a fit," DocumentCloud's evaluation methodology, the formal reconsideration or appeal process, or DocumentCloud's policy on Professional subscription fees collected during pending review.

We are restating those four questions and request a written response by April 29, 2026, in advance of publication.

Investigations Desk

Dismal Freedom Press

newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

EMAIL RECORD

From: newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org
To: info@documentcloud.org
Date: May 7, 2026 — 19:48 UTC
Subject: Re: [MuckRock] Re: Press Inquiry — DocumentCloud Verification Criteria: Dismal Freedom Press

May 7, 2026

Miranda

DocumentCloud Verification Team

MuckRock Foundation

info@documentcloud.org

Re: Request 149414

Miranda,

This is a follow-up to DFP's April 27, 2026 reply to your April 21 response in Request 149414.

Your April 21 response directed DFP to DocumentCloud's verification page and offered the opportunity to reapply in six months. As DFP noted in its April 27 reply, that response addressed two of the six questions in the original April 15 inquiry — general categories of eligibility and the existence of a public verification page. The following four questions remain unanswered as of today:

1. What specific criterion or criteria determined that Dismal Freedom Press was "not a fit for verified membership"?
2. How does DocumentCloud distinguish between independent investigative newsrooms and non-journalistic applicants in its evaluation process?
3. Is there a formal reconsideration or appeal process for declined applications beyond the six-month reapplication window?
4. What is DocumentCloud's policy regarding Professional subscription fees collected during the period verification is under review and subsequently denied?

The April 29, 2026 response deadline in DFP's April 27 letter has now passed without reply.

DFP is formally closing this inquiry as of May 7, 2026. The full correspondence record — including DocumentCloud's March 14 denial, the April 21 partial response, and the four unanswered questions — will be reflected accurately in DFP's reporting on platform gatekeeping of independent investigative newsrooms. Publication is anticipated in May 2026.

If DocumentCloud wishes to provide substantive responses to any of the four outstanding questions prior to publication, please respond to this email by May 12, 2026.

For the record: DFP is also seeking full name and title for the correspondent identified in this thread as "Miranda (DocumentCloud)" for accurate attribution in our reporting. Please provide or confirm at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Investigations Desk

Dismal Freedom Press

newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

(209) 425-2677

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