

## Plucky Wire / Johnny Bassett — Application, Approval Notice & Press Inquiry

April 14–15, 2026 · Gmail threads: 19d8e08fbadc5962, 19d929290d8d83b4, 19d92a154385b512 · Investigation: Platform Gatekeeping: Press Freedom

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### Overview

Plucky Wire (Plucky Works LLC, Johnny Bassett) initially approved DFP's publisher application, then reversed the approval. On April 14, 2026, Bassett emailed DFP directly citing an absence of visible original reporting. DFP responded with a formal press inquiry on April 15. The full exchange follows.

### EMAIL RECORD

**From:** dont-reply@pluckyworks.org (Johnny Bassett)  
**To:** newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org  
**Date:** April 14, 2026 — 22:07 UTC  
**Subject:** Plucky Wire: Your outlet 'Dismal Freedom Press' has been approved

Hi Torie Cortez,

Great news! Your outlet "Dismal Freedom Press" has been verified.

You can now:

- Join, start, and/or manage content sharing groups
- Upload your own stories
- Download stories by other outlets
- Manage your outlet's public profile and team members

Notes from our team:

Hi Torie: Could you email me some examples of original reporting from your newsroom? I'm still not seeing any on your site, unfortunately, but I may be missing it.

Next Steps:

- Visit your dashboard to get started
- Consider joining a content sharing network to expand your reach

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Welcome to Plucky Wire!

Johnny

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Johnny Bassett

Plucky Works | pluckyworks.org

johnny@pluckyworks.org

[Note: This was the initial approval notification, sent simultaneously with a request for examples of original reporting. Bassett acknowledged he may be "missing" DFP's work. Shortly after, the approval was reversed pending DFP's response.]

## EMAIL RECORD

**From:** newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

**To:** johnny@pluckyworks.org

**Cc:** newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

**Date:** April 15, 2026 — 19:20 UTC

**Subject:** Press Inquiry — Publisher Acceptance Criteria: Follow-Up to April 14 Correspondence

April 15, 2026

Johnny Bassett

Plucky Works LLC / Plucky Wire

johnny@pluckyworks.org

Dear Mr. Bassett,

Thank you for your April 14 response regarding Dismal Freedom Press's publisher application. We appreciate that you reached out directly — that kind of human communication is genuinely rare in platform interactions.

We are following up with a formal press inquiry. We are conducting a journalism accountability investigation into publisher acceptance practices across news distribution platforms, and want to be transparent that this inquiry may result in published reporting.

The stated reason for DFP's rejection — "we're still not seeing any original reporting on your site" — is one we addressed in our April 14 reply, enumerating three active original investigations currently in progress.

We have not received a response to that reply.

We are seeking written responses to the following questions:

1. What are the specific criteria Plucky Wire applies when evaluating publisher applications?
2. Are those criteria published anywhere accessible to applicants prior to submission?
3. Does Plucky Wire's evaluation process account for newsrooms that publish primarily on Substack, where the primary URL may not reflect a full article archive?
4. We received an automated denial from the Freedom of the Press Foundation channel on April 15, 2026. What is the relationship between Plucky Wire's publisher review and FPF's membership criteria? Who makes the FPF channel determination — Plucky Wire, FPF, or both?
5. Is there a formal reconsideration process for declined applications?

We request a written response by April 29, 2026.

Sincerely,

Investigations Desk

Dismal Freedom Press

newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

dismalfreedom.press

## **EMAIL RECORD**

**From:** johnny@pluckyworks.org

**To:** newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

**Date:** April 15, 2026 — 19:31 UTC

**Subject:** Re: Press Inquiry — Publisher Acceptance Criteria: Follow-Up to April 14 Correspondence

Hello,

We are a mostly free service that aims to strengthen local newsrooms around the country. We are also a very young company, and we continue to update our policies to help serve the needs of small newsrooms.

Our underlying concern with your application, your email yesterday, and your email today, is that your communications and stories are AI-generated.

We may be mistaken, but if your site is AI-generated, DFP is not a good fit for Plucky Wire.

You seem eager to understand more about our process. If you'd like to discuss this further, I have set aside 30min next Monday to discuss this on a video call. You'll receive the invitation in a few minutes. I encourage you to attend that meeting so we can learn more about each others' goals and needs.

Thanks,

Johnny

[Note: This response: (1) did not address the five specific questions posed in DFP's April 15 inquiry; (2) changed the stated basis for rejection from "not seeing original reporting" to a new claim that content appears AI-generated; (3) acknowledged the AI characterization "may be mistaken"; (4) offered a Monday video call.]

## **EMAIL RECORD**

**From:** newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org  
**To:** johnny@pluckyworks.org  
**Date:** April 15, 2026 — 21:58 UTC  
**Subject:** Re: Press Inquiry — Publisher Acceptance Criteria: Follow-Up to April 14 Correspondence

Mr. Bassett,

Thank you for your reply. A few things need to be stated plainly for the record.

Dismal Freedom Press has formally opened a journalism accountability investigation into publisher acceptance practices across news distribution platforms. All communications in this matter — including this exchange — are on the record and may be published in whole or in part.

We want to correct something before proceeding. You characterized DFP as "eager to understand more about your process." That framing is inaccurate and we do not accept it. DFP is not seeking guidance on how to qualify for your platform. We are conducting a journalism investigation. Those are not the same thing, and the distinction matters.

We also note that your stated basis for denial has changed. The original rejection cited an absence of original reporting. DFP's April 14 reply directly refuted that basis, enumerating three active original investigations currently in progress. Rather than respond to that rebuttal, your April 15

reply abandons the original stated reason and raises an entirely new concern — that DFP's content appears AI-generated. We want to be precise: that is a pivot, and the record reflects it.

Regarding the AI characterization: we do not accept it as a factual basis for denial. It is an assertion, not a finding, and you have acknowledged you may be mistaken. DFP's editorial standards, sourcing practices, and publication record are documented.

We are also aware that simultaneous rejections have been issued across multiple platforms within the same window. That pattern is within the scope of this investigation.

We are willing to participate in the Monday call under the following conditions:

1. The call is recorded by DFP for accuracy and publication purposes.
2. All statements made on the call are on the record.
3. A written summary is provided to both parties following the call.

If those conditions are acceptable, please confirm. If you prefer to respond in writing only, our five questions from April 15 remain open with a response deadline of April 29, 2026.

Investigations Desk

Dismal Freedom Press

newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

## **EMAIL RECORD**

**From:** johnny@pluckyworks.org  
**To:** newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org  
**Date:** April 15, 2026 — 19:32 UTC  
**Subject:** Invitation: Plucky, Dismal re questions @ Mon Apr 20, 2026 8am - 8:30am (PDT)

Plucky, Dismal re questions

Monday Apr 20, 2026 · 8am – 8:30am

Pacific Time - Los Angeles

Join with Google Meet

<https://meet.google.com/grz-xqyd-iy>

Organizer: Johnny Bassett (johnny@pluckyworks.org)

Guests: newsroom@dismalfreedompress.org

[Gmail thread ID: 19d92a154385b512. This Google Meet invitation was sent approximately 1 minute after Bassett's April 15 email. DFP's conditions for participation in the call are documented in the April 15 reply above.]