The Better Government Association has received a $1.43 million commitment from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation to support a novel, statewide expansion by the BGA’s Illinois Answers Project newsroom.

Driehaus Foundation Executive Director Anne Lazar said the award is the first in a series of planned special legacy grants, given in memory of founder Richard H. Driehaus, who died unexpectedly in 2021. These legacy grants are the largest ever awarded by the foundation and are designed to honor Mr. Driehaus and his several interests, including investigative journalism.

The Driehaus resources will enable the BGA’s Illinois Answers Project newsroom to provide reporting resources to newsrooms in cities across Illinois—essentially “embed” work on investigative and solutions-focused stories. The new program is a key component of the Illinois Solutions Plan, a multi-year strategy developed by the BGA to expand its investigative and solutions reporting resources, as well as outreach to communities across the state.
“We wanted to honor Richard’s extraordinary legacy in a special way that would reflect his passion for the initiatives he cared most deeply about and that would be transformational for the grant recipients. The BGA’s Illinois Answers “embed” program is the type of initiative Richard would have been so proud to support,” said Driehaus Foundation Executive Director Anne Lazar. “The Driehaus Foundation has a long history with the Better Government Association. Richard believed strongly in the impact investigative journalism can make so this grant is a meaningful way to pay tribute to him.”

The embed strategy will pair the investigative and solutions journalism expertise of the Illinois Answers Project newsroom with the local-market knowledge of newsrooms across Illinois. This combined effort will produce statewide reports with local relevance, while calling attention to problems affecting overlooked cities and rural populations statewide.

“The Driehaus Foundation’s commitment to the Illinois Answers Project’s statewide embed program continues Mr. Driehaus’ longstanding commitment to reporting that has a positive impact in Illinois,” said David Greising, president of the BGA.

For more than two decades Richard H. Driehaus championed investigative journalism and the importance of the BGA’s watchdog role. In 2004, Driehaus committed to support the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Awards for Investigative Reporting, which recognize the best investigative reporting in Illinois. The BGA administers the awards, which have received nearly 500 submissions and honored more than 90 investigations.

The new grant represents a three-year commitment both to the Driehaus Awards and the Illinois Answers Project’s new embed program. The BGA intends to hire three reporters and assign each to focus on several different cities statewide.

Driehaus’ investment firm, Driehaus Capital Management, was known for “momentum investing,” by which he doubled down successful investments. Driehaus often said he was honored to play a part in recognizing the value of investigative journalism and doubling down on the BGA’s success. In an interview with Greising in 2020, Driehaus said investigative reporting was a good investment because of its outsized impact. The BGA’s work is “a big deal,” Driehaus said.