

Inside Philanthropy



The State of
American Philanthropy

Giving for
Journalism
&
Public Media

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ABOUT INSIDE PHILANTHROPY

Inside Philanthropy is a digital media site that covers the world of charitable giving. We report daily on foundations, major donors, and trends in philanthropy. Through our GrantFinder resource, we also profile and track thousands of funders working across key issue areas and geographic regions. Inside Philanthropy is supported by reader subscriptions and advertising. We do not receive funding from any other source. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com

ABOUT THE STATE OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

The State of American Philanthropy is a series of background papers on important topics and trends in U.S. philanthropy. The papers draw on past research and reporting by IP writers, as well as new interviews, grantmaking data, and other sources. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This State of American Philanthropy brief explores the giving of private foundations, corporations, community foundations, and major donors to nonprofit journalism organizations, public and private media outlets of all kinds, and university programs training the next generation of journalists. We will explore the long-term factors and trends every funder and fundraiser in journalism and public media should know about. This report is based on exclusive interviews with professionals in the field and an analysis of relevant datasets, papers, and news coverage.

In general, philanthropic support for journalism has steadily increased in the past 20 years, as funders seek to address the urgent gaps in local and investigative reporting that initially arose from a confluence of factors in the early aughts, including the ascendancy of digital media, aggressive cost-cutting and consolidation measures that became standard practice at private media companies, and stark reductions in federal funding for nonprofit media outlets. More recently, the 2016 election and the associated slew of misinformation and disinformation galvanized funders, while the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capital underscored the connection between healthy information ecosystems and healthy democracies.

Public media stations and large, independent outlets receive a significant portion of the sector's charitable contributions. Support from individual donors, which includes grants made through family foundations, donor-advised funds, and limited liability corporations (LLCs) also plays a significant role across the sector. As much as 90% of the typical nonprofit outlet's revenues come from combined private supports rather than earned sources like events, subscriptions, and advertising.

Who's Giving

- Institutional grantmakers, mostly private foundations and community foundations, play a leading role in media and journalism philanthropy. These entities focus on strengthening local news and investigative reporting, combating misinformation, and supporting BIPOC-led outlets and those serving communities of color.
- Major individual donors, many of them hailing from tech, finance, and entertainment fields, tend to earmark gifts for initiatives to combat misinformation, independent journalism organizations, public media, and university journalism education programs.
- Intermediary organizations and multi-donor pooled funds play an increasingly important role in supporting local journalism and media ecosystems.

Who's Getting

The bulk of private giving flows to private and public media outlets in major metropolitan areas, support for local reporters and newer outlets, established national investigative outlets, and efforts to combat misinformation, including advocacy for digital platform regulation.

- Funding for projects targeting the intersection between local media, democracy, civic health and elections has dramatically increased since 2021.
- Funders seek to cultivate a more balanced nonprofit media ecosystem by extending support to historically undercapitalized organizations.

The Big Issues & Funding Trends

- As new nonprofit journalism and media organizations emerge, funders' top priorities include bolstering local news, strengthening investigative reporting, combating misinformation, and boosting racial equity across the field.
- Funders' most prevalent grantmaking strategies include resourcing intermediaries to advance strategic priorities, helping organizations boost earned revenue by increasing reader retention and building fundraising capacity, and supporting university journalism programs and related activities.
- Funders and nonprofit media organizations have identified a set of emerging opportunities for grantmakers like local climate change coverage, an intersectional approach that links the news to issues like the environment and healthcare, and increased support for international journalism outlets.

Equity in the Sector

- In an effort to address longstanding disparities across the sector, funders are ramping up support for BIPOC-led outlets and those serving communities of color and supporting initiatives to cultivate journalists of color.
- Funders are seeking to advance gender equity in the field and help journalism organizations more effectively serve the needs of immigrant communities and individuals who identify as LGBTQ+.

Fundraising Trends

- In interviews for this report, many of the nonprofit leaders working in this area said that philanthropic support for journalism is surging. Fundraising from foundations – including newly-established entities and funds organized specifically to support struggling for-profit newspapers – is becoming a more prevalent part of the news business.
- Private philanthropies and donors work in conjunction with nonprofits and public leaders to create new nonprofit media outlets, or convert existing private media outlets to a nonprofit model. This is a dynamic and evolving area of philanthropy.

Philanthropic support for journalism responds to developments across the broader media landscape and American society itself. Each of these larger catalysts – including the devolution of the for-profit news sector, the growing threat of online misinformation, and calls for social and racial justice – will be with us for the long term. With for-profit public interest media facing potentially inexorable decline, philanthropic support for journalism is increasing like never before.

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, the handful of philanthropies that funded journalism and media operated against a backdrop of healthy for-profit media outlets, where revenues were surging, metropolitan dailies thrived, and most Americans had access to at least one local outlet that provided relevant and trustworthy coverage.

Today, the reality is quite different, and rather grim. According to the 2023 “State of Local News” report from researchers at Northwestern University’s Local News Initiative, the U.S. has lost 2,900 local newspapers since 2005. This amounts to one-third of the country’s newspapers lost in the past two decades. Importantly, news reporters have atrophied at an even steeper rate: since 2005, the U.S. has lost almost two-thirds of its newspaper journalists. The collapse of local news is a disaster that doesn’t lose steam. The loss of newspapers nationally continues at an average rate of two per week.

The beginning of the local news crisis can be traced back to the early aughts. Newspapers were still thriving at this time—indeed, advertising and circulation revenues for daily papers peaked in 2000 at \$89 billion. Perhaps this is why, initially, there wasn’t a profound sense of urgency to resuscitate the media ecosystem, despite the creeping dominance of online media. Blogs and online commentary began to vie for readers’ attention. Tech giants like Facebook eroded the primary revenue stream of for-profit outlets—paid advertising. According to Dan Froomkin, editor of Press Watch, many factors contributed to the sector’s troubles, “but none more so than the cornering of the digital

advertising market by the duopoly of Facebook and Google.”

All the while, short-sighted newspaper executives failed to pivot to the digital space. As revenues nosedived in the mid- to late 2000s, for-profit outlets embarked on aggressive consolidation and cost-cutting measures. Thousands of reporters were laid off. Hundreds of outlets closed, leaving Americans without access to reliable local news sources, differing perspectives, or investigative reporting that kept a watchful eye on local officials.

In the philanthropy world, grantmakers found themselves navigating a radically transformed landscape. Foundations and donors stepped up to fill the growing breach by supporting independent journalism organizations and public media outlets grappling with diminishing federal appropriations. The nonprofit news model became a sort of balustrade against the crumbling for-profit infrastructure.

The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) found that, of the approximately 200 nonprofit news organizations in the U.S., three-quarters of them launched between 2008–2018, a period marked by “major cutbacks by traditional news organizations.”

All the while, the state of the for-profit news sector continued to deteriorate. In 2012, the year Facebook went public, U.S. newspapers’ estimated advertising and circulation revenues fell to \$25 billion, [down 49%](#) from 2006.

Growing concern over misinformation. The tech revolution’s existential effect on for-profit outlets’ revenue model was the initial impetus of

increased philanthropic support for journalism. A second wave of philanthropic support began in 2016, when that year’s presidential election starkly revealed the risks posed by unregulated social media giants, proliferating misinformation, and foreign interference in the democratic process via digital media manipulation.

Practically overnight, funders announced huge gifts aimed at combating “fake news,” boosting news literacy, and restoring trust in the media. Interviewees for this report even have a term for the phenomenon—“the Trump Bump.” Many working in the sector wondered if the upward trend in journalism funding would be short-lived. It hasn’t been, thanks in no small part to social media networks’ inability—or, some would say, unwillingness—to tamp down on “click-worthy” misinformation. Trump has himself been a contributing factor, making a point to repeatedly denigrate the press as the “enemy of the people.”

Two additional events accelerated philanthropy’s increased support for journalism: the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 assault on the U.S. capital. In the early months of the pandemic, independent and local media outlets enjoyed increased traffic as readers sought out trusted information. At the same time, shuttered local brick-and-mortar businesses pulled newspaper advertisements, magnifying the impact of for-profit news’ broken revenue model.

On January 6, 2021, protestors stormed the U.S. Capitol, driven by the false belief that the 2020 election was stolen, confirming civic-minded funders’ worst fears. The riot also reaffirmed

funders’ long-held commitment to boosting local news. “The way to address misinformation and disinformation—which flourish in the absence of clear information—is to rebuild public trust,” said Media Impact Funders’ Executive Director Vince Stehle and Communications Director Nina Sachdev in a joint statement. “But you need to rebuild local news and invest heavily in diverse voices and communities in order to get there.”

According to Media Impact Funder’s [2023 analysis](#) of philanthropy’s growing role in journalism, funder support increased steadily between 2018 and 2022. The percentage of journalism funders making journalism grants exceeding \$1 million increased from 25% in 2018 to 40% in 2022, and 59% of funders reported increased support for journalism during the same time period. This surge in philanthropic support continues to act as a counterweight to the sagging fortunes of for-profit media outlets.

Philanthropic support for journalism is flourishing like never before, providing organizations with an unprecedented opportunity to engage funders around issues like supporting local news, curbing misinformation, and advancing racial equity.

The role of public media

As this brief details in the “Who’s Getting” section, a substantial portion of philanthropic dollars flow to public broadcasting outlets. This is an unfortunate necessity, as federal funding for these outlets has all but evaporated.

The American public media field dates back to the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967, which created the private, nonprofit

taxpayer-funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) with the mission of providing high-quality content and telecommunications services that are commercial-free and free of charge. By law, [95% of the federal appropriation](#) of the CPB is earmarked as grants to local television and radio stations, including PBS, the nonprofit public broadcaster and television program distributor that was established in 1969, and NPR, the privately and publicly funded nonprofit media organization established in 1970.

Since Congress stipulated that public media outlets must provide content free of charge, these organizations developed a revenue model that included government funding and philanthropy, a break with for-profit newspapers and television stations that generated revenues from paying customers and advertising dollars.

“For more than 50 years, public broadcasters commanded the attention of large audiences and had significant power and influence,” wrote media and technology consultant Sue Gardner in a Knight Foundation white paper titled [“Public Broadcasting: Its Past and Its Future.”](#) Public broadcasters’ influence began to wane in the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of cable TV and decline of government support. These factors led to a shift in the public media revenue model, as broadcasters became more reliant on a “market-centered” approach built on advertising and other commercial activities.

With the dawn of the internet age, broadcasters had to compete with tech giants and media from around the world. Social media networks like Facebook and Twitter republished sensationalistic content without creating

original content. By 2018, public media’s primary revenue source for subsidizing news production—paid advertising—had “mostly disappeared,” Garder wrote. At the same time, public funding has become a miniscule portion of public broadcaster’s budgets. CPB currently manages a relatively meager \$450 million annually appropriated by Congress for public broadcasting. On average, less than 1% of NPR’s annual operating budget comes in the form of grants from CPB and federal agencies and departments.

In other words, the revenue models that sustained public media for decades has disappeared. This explains funders’ robust support for public media organizations.

The Lay of the Land

Who's Giving

The ecosystem of philanthropy supporting journalism consists of a mix of private and family foundations, individual donors, corporations, and collaborations with government agencies. Historically, a handful of large national foundations like Ford, MacArthur, and Knight dominated the field of journalism philanthropy, providing support to prominent public media and investigative journalism outlets. However, in recent years, wealthier new entrants hailing from the tech and finance sectors have begun to reshape the ecosystem, along with more participation from community organizations and intermediary re-grantors.

Google and Meta (formerly Facebook) have funded local news nonprofits through the Google News Initiative and the now-defunct Facebook Journalism Project. Major donors like Laurene Powell Jobs (via The Emerson Collective), MacKenzie Scott, Craig Newmark, Pierre Omidyar (via the Democracy Fund and Omidyar Network), and John and Laura Arnold (via Arnold Ventures) typically frame their support for independent journalism as a means to establish trust in civic institutions, reduce divisiveness across the body politic, and strengthen democracy.

A major new donor collaborative, Press Forward, [launched in 2023](#) with \$500 million in pledges from 22 donors, including the MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and the Henry Luce Foundation. The collaborative defines itself as a “national initiative to strengthen communities and

democracy by supporting local news and information.” Press Forward is, to date, by far the largest philanthropic collaborative in support of local news, and its formation is emblematic of philanthropy’s growing role in supporting the local news ecosystem across the country.

Journalism & Public Media Funders to Know

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Ford Foundation

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Silicon Valley Community Foundation

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The California Endowment

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Lilly Endowment

Major donor-advised fund managers like Fidelity, Vanguard and Schwab also play an increasingly large role in the public journalism space with the large sums of personal donations they manage. Large community foundations, including the Chicago Community Trust and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, likewise control a huge pool of DAF contributions by thousands of individual donors. By funding journalism organizations recommended by donors, DAFs essentially act as proxies for individuals. However, giving through DAFs is

opaque and difficult to track, and the true level of support for journalism flowing through DAFs is unknown.

In a joint statement for this report, Media Impact Funders' Executive Director Vince Stehle and Communications Director Nina Sachdev noted that while many of the large grantmakers support national outlets, they support niche local news as well. "At the state and local level, most nonprofit media funding comes from large, national foundations, rather than community foundations or public charities or donor-advised funds," they wrote. Media Impact Funders is a membership organization that advances the work of over 100 foundations, high-net-worth individuals, and donors committed to ensuring that compelling media serves the public interest.

Stehle and Sachdev cited three particularly influential funders in the sector—the Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and KFF

(formerly known as the Kaiser Family Foundation). The Democracy Fund, the pair said, is "intensely focused on issues of equity, and many of its efforts are focused on investing in leadership and emerging talent in communities of color." Meanwhile, KFF "has shaped the way media and journalism pays attention to health news and information" with its editorially independent health journalism newsroom, Kaiser Health News.

Intermediaries and re-grantors have become far more prominent. While these funds receive support from some of the most monied philanthropies (like Ford, MacArthur, and the Gates Foundation), they run independent grantmaking programs and are powerful funders in their own right. These include the Racial Equity in Journalism Fund at Borealis Philanthropy, the Lenfest Institute, Tide Foundation's Healthy Democracy Fund, the American Journalism Project, and NewsMatch, a large donor collaborative and matching program spearheaded by the Knight Foundation.

In the arena of journalism education, alumni donors frequently make gifts that can match or eclipse the annual journalism grantmaking for a mid-sized foundation. We will explore individual donor support for journalism education in the "major donors" section of this report.

Funders that lack programs explicitly devoted to journalism and media grantmaking may nevertheless become major journalism grantmakers if they support news and media within niche topic areas, such as climate change or science news. These grantmakers seek to "sustain strong information ecosystems in the

Inside Philanthropy Survey

"Local news and information are essential to a healthy democracy. Newspapers are struggling financially and many have gone out of business creating news deserts. The number of reporters employed by newspapers is down over 60% in the last decade. Journalism projects funded by philanthropy must play a bigger role going forward."

—Foundation professional,
Ponte Vedra, Florida

fields in which we work,” said Neha Gohil, communications officer for the Education and U.S. Democracy programs at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. For example, the Hewlett Foundation’s Environment Program provides support for the Society for Environmental Journalists. Another prominent example is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which supports an array of nonprofits and publishers working in health and public health journalism.

The journalism funding ecosystem consists of many additional grantmakers that have less of an explicit, ongoing focus on U.S. journalism but are nonetheless important players. These funders include the Abrams Foundation, Arthur Vining Davis Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, the McClatchy Foundation, the Gates Foundation, Heising-Simons Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Rockefeller Foundation and the Tow Foundation.

Regional funders are also major players. Examples include the Joyce Foundation and Robert R. McCormick Foundation (Chicago), Inasmuch Foundation (Oklahoma), Barr Foundation (New England), Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation (New Jersey), Heinz Endowments (Pittsburgh/Southwest Pennsylvania), and the William Penn Foundation and Wyncote Foundation (Philadelphia).

Funders support a broad spectrum of niche areas across the journalism space, including photojournalism (W. Eugene Smith Memorial

Fund, CatchLight Foundation), coverage of religion (Lilly Endowment), the environment and science (Earth Journalism Network, Walton Family Foundation, Sloan Foundation, Fund for Environmental Journalism), arts and culture (Andy Warhol Foundation and Creative Capital), health (the California Wellness Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Association of Health Care Journalists, and Helmsley Trust), and education (Lumina Foundation).

Who’s Getting

In past decades, the bulk of institutional philanthropic giving for journalism flowed to public media organizations in major metropolitan areas with sophisticated fundraising operations and established independent journalism outlets. NPR, PBS, and affiliated organizations like the WGBH Educational Foundation—which produces much of PBS’s journalistic content—all receive support from an array of private and family foundations, donor-advised funds, corporations, and contributions from individuals.

WNET is America’s flagship PBS station. It is the parent company of New York’s THIRTEEN, WLIW21, WLIW-FM, and operator of NJTV, the statewide public media network in New Jersey and its news division, NJ SPOTLIGHT NEWS. In 2015, WNET announced a gift of approximately \$20 million from the estate of Sylvia and Simon B. Poyta, then the largest bequest in the station’s history, which established the Sylvia and Simon B. Poyta Programming Endowment to Fight Anti-Semitism.

The Boston-based WGBH is the largest producer of PBS content for TV and the web. WGBH and

its programs are supported by a broad mix of funders, including the MacArthur, Ford, and Heising-Simons foundations.

NPR is primarily funded by station dues and fees (35%) and corporate sponsorships (33%), which, according to Report for America’s Steven Waldman, are “pretty much the same thing as advertising.” NPR received 13% from “contributions of cash and other financial assets.” NPR has over 1,000 member stations that mostly rely on contributions from listeners. Individuals provide the highest percentage of revenues (38%), followed by corporations (19%), “investments and other” (11%), foundations (10%), colleges and universities (10%), federal appropriation via CPB (8%), and federal, state and local governments (4%).

Public TV and radio outlets’ revenue models differ dramatically from those of nonprofit journalism organizations like ProPublica and the Center for Investigative Reporting. “Contributions and grants” constituted 96% of ProPublica’s and 97% of the Center for Investigative Reporting’s total revenues in 2018.

The Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), which provides education and business support services to its nearly 450 member organizations, conducts a comprehensive annual survey of the nonprofit news field. Its 2023 report found that, on average, INN’s member organizations generated 48% of revenue from foundations, 31% from individuals, and 16% from earned revenue.

Another recent survey included responses from both nonprofit and for-profit media outlets (INN’s survey is limited to nonprofits). This is

Media Impact Funders (MIF)’s 2023 survey of journalism funders and newsrooms, conducted in partnership with the Lenfest Institute for Journalism and NORC at the University of Chicago. The study showed growing support for journalism and local news across the board. One of the most notable findings was that funders are spreading their support widely, giving to many local news outlets, rather than focusing excessively on major national organizations like ProPublica.

Another eyebrow-raising finding is that many funders now support for-profit media outlets rather than focusing exclusively on nonprofit news. This tracks with developments in the field, where both nonprofit and for-profit outlets, in a struggle to survive, are experimenting with novel business models and public-private partnerships.

**Journalism & Public Media
Grantees to Know**

National Public Radio
WNET

WGBH Educational Foundation

WETA-Greater Washington Educational
Telecommunication
Association

ProPublica

Northern California Public Broadcasting

Council on Library Information
Resources

WYNC Radio

Minnesota Public Radio-American
Public Media

Center for Investigative Reporting

In an interview with Inside Philanthropy, Jennifer Preston, an MIF consultant who was involved with the survey, said the study's most surprising finding was that 38% of funders said they had supported a for-profit news outlet in the last five years. This suggests "funders see that there isn't a silver bullet solution," she said. When asked about the "most important possible factors in their funding decisions," 81% of respondents said promoting "civic engagement with trusted news and information" is "extremely or very important."

This urgent drive to fund local media outlets is new, and undoubtedly in response to the crisis in democracy and the plague of misinformation felt across the U.S. As recently as 2018, a report called

"Funding the News," by the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and Northeastern University, found that 80% of foundation dollars supported just 25 news nonprofits and only 5% of total funding went to state and local news outlets. The study characterized funders' penchant for established and affluent coastal outlets as an example of "elites supporting elites."

Things have certainly changed since 2018, with a wider array of small, regional newspapers, local radio stations, and other hyper-local media outlets receiving philanthropic support. That said, the Media Impact Funders report referenced above suggests an ongoing lack of funding for smaller news organizations serving communities of color. While 68% of funders said "ensuring racial equity and inclusion in the production of news is extremely or very important," only half of organizations that primarily serve communities of color have seen increases in philanthropic funding. This discrepancy underscores the need for funders to remedy [historically tepid support](#) for organizations serving communities of color.

It's notable that several of today's most successful journalism nonprofits are themselves active grantmakers who use financial support from major philanthropies to re-grant to local news organizations. As an example, The American Journalism Project (AJP), founded in 2019, has committed \$55.3 million to 44 grantee partners in 33 states since its inception. The AJP receives funding from the Knight Foundation, Emerson Collective, Arnold Ventures, and OpenAI, among other funders.

Program Spotlight



In 2019 the Knight Foundation launched a \$50 million initiative to "better understand how networked digital technology enables and erodes democracy." Since its launch, funding has led to the establishment of new research centers at five universities around the country, and created a well-resourced network of independent research organizations and policy think tanks focused on understanding digital media and technology's impact on democracy and helping to inform solutions.

Despite this surge in philanthropic support for local news, the need far outweighs the growing support. Northwestern University's annual State of Local News report shows that even as new nonprofit news outlets appear, other outlets continue to shutter, and reporters continue to face mass layoffs. Indeed, in February 2024, hundreds of reporters and editors had already been laid off just since the start of the year. More than half of U.S. counties have either one or no remaining local outlets. Facing such an uphill battle, it's promising that philanthropies are exploring new revenue models and novel approaches to supporting local news.

In an interview for this report, Kathy Im, director of the MacArthur Foundation's Journalism & Media program, attributes increased funder support to funders' recognition of "the full impact of the steady and dramatic decline of the news industry on American democracy, but also Donald Trump's and his supporters' persistent attacks on the press." The connections between the rise of misinformation, the decline of local news, and the fragility of U.S. democracy have become all too clear.

A 2024 poll from *The Free Press* found that 79% of Americans are concerned that the information they see online is false and/or a deliberate attempt to confuse people; 76% are concerned about misinformation related to the 2024 presidential election. Similarly, the Democracy Fund recently conducted a survey of more than 70 funders engaged in democracy-related work. It found that 59% of respondents reported funding media policy, misinformation and disinformation. However, media policy and mis- and disinformation were also cited most

often as areas that need more attention and focus from funders.

A growing number of nonprofits pursue journalism programming and voting and civics programs simultaneously. In tandem, a growing number of funders frame these issues as interconnected. As an example, The Democracy Fund, funded by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, has become an important local news funder. The fund's overarching goal is to "work toward an open and just democracy that is resilient in the face of change and worthy of the American people's trust." Many of the fund's grantees are nonprofits that work within both the journalism and democracy/civics spaces. This includes The Center for Public Integrity and the Media Democracy Fund.

The Big Issues & Beyond

A number of issue areas have emerged as the most important for journalism funders. In the past, priority areas were often divided between media types (radio, TV, print) or media outlets versus journalism education. Today, funders are more likely to support outlets that produce a variety of content types and think about funding in terms of civic impact rather than media type. Key issue areas include: bolstering local news, strengthening investigative reporting, combating misinformation, and investing in equity and representation in the media. (This brief explores the equity mandate in greater detail in the "Perspectives on Equity" section).

Boosting local media ecosystems.

Most will agree that addressing the local news crisis is the most important issue area in journalism. Driven by the belief that a strong

local news ecosystem can restore trust in civic institutions, invigorate communities, hold elected officials accountable, and curb the spread of misinformation, funders have committed substantial resources to rebuild a local news infrastructure.

The Knight Foundation has been a consistent leader in this area. In 2019, it redoubled its previous efforts with a journalism funding commitment of \$300 million over five years, focusing on local news. “We’re not funding one-offs,” said Alberto Ibarguen, the former Knight Foundation president, in an interview for this report. “We’re helping to rebuild a local news ecosystem, reliable and sustainable, and we’re doing it in a way that anyone who cares can participate.”

Major nonprofits and donor collaboratives that disperse funding to local journalism outlets across the U.S. include Report for America, NewsMatch, and Press Forward.

Looking ahead, funders say they will remain committed to shoring up local news ecosystems. Local media outlets are partnering with both local and national philanthropies to create truly innovative business models to support local journalism. Recently this has included converting existing for-profit media outlets into non-profit organizations. Interest in this approach gained currency in 2016 when H.F. Lenfest donated the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Philadelphia Daily News and Philly.com to the newly-formed nonprofit Lenfest Institute for Journalism. (Lenfest passed away in August 2018.) Creating new nonprofit outlets and converting existing for-profits into non-profits

is an important and dynamic new area of journalism philanthropy that will likely continue in the coming years.

In 2019, the *Salt Lake City Tribune* was the first major metropolitan paper to become a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit thanks to a civic-minded former owner (Paul Huntsman) and a long list of donors. In 2022, Stewart Bainum donated \$50 million to launch the *Baltimore Banner*, a full-service, nonprofit digital newspaper. (This was after his unsuccessful attempt to buy Tribune Publishing). Also in 2022, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, one of Chicago’s two major dailies, was acquired by [Chicago Public Media \(CPM\)](#), becoming a nonprofit subsidiary. CPM owns WBEZ, the city’s public radio station and NPR affiliate.



“[The MacArthur Foundation is most concerned with] *the proliferation of disinformation and the media and political environment that allows it to spread and flourish and the lack of diversity and inclusion inside newsrooms, particularly in leadership roles, and the feeble institutional response to the vitriolic attacks experienced by women and people of color reporters.*”

—Kathy Im, director of Journalism and Media, MacArthur Foundation

This unprecedented move to save a for-profit outlet by merging with an existing local non-profit organization was supported by numerous Chicago-area donors and philanthropies, including the MacArthur Foundation, Pritzker Traubert Foundation, the Builders Initiative, the Joyce Foundation, the Walter and Karla Goldschmidt Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, and the Mansueto Foundation.

Jonathan Kealing, chief networking officer of the Institute for Nonprofit News, anticipates that more for-profits will consider the nonprofit model, increasing the number of organizations

competing for philanthropic support. “When things start to bounce back, and things are just a little more stable, organizations that may have survived but barely will look for those other paths,” he said.

While this is an exciting development, wrestling for-profits from corporate control is not easy. The Sun-Times merger occurred after the city’s other major publication, The Chicago Tribune, lost a ferocious, multi-year battle to resist hostile takeover by Alden Global Capital, a hedge fund. Many dailies and weeklies remain under the control of corporations that see newspapers as sources of profit rather than components of a healthy civic infrastructure. Saving local media by transitioning for-profits into non-profits is one among several strategies that have emerged to wrest the control of local journalism away from corporate entities that gobble up newspapers by the dozens. For example, outlets like The Guardian and the New York Times have formed separate independent charitable organizations to generate support for their journalism work.

Curbing misinformation. In the aftermath of the events of 2016, including an election marred by foreign interference, an explosion of social-media-driven conspiracy theories and the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal, civic-minded funders ramped up efforts to combat the proliferation of online misinformation.

“The tools of the tech industry’s platforms are now a big part of our lives and a big part of the way we govern ourselves—our politics—and it has to be done just right,” Craigslist founder Craig

Venture Philanthropy Spotlight



According to the American Journalism Project (AJP) website, 2,100 communities have lost their local newspapers since 2004. This ongoing collapse of local journalism is one of the many reasons why Elizabeth Green and John Thornton established AJP. With around \$50 million in its initial fund, it offers financial investments, venture support and movement building to “exceptional leaders with newsrooms that hold the powerful accountable, combat disinformation, and deepen civic participation.”

Newmark told IP in 2018 after committing \$20 million for The Markup, a journalism outfit that investigates and examines the effects of the tech industry. “Previously, we didn’t quite get how big the effect would be, what the effect would be. Now, we do. People with goodwill who have the resources should do what we can to make things better for everyone.”

Channeling Newmark’s sentiments, a broad range of funders responded by allocating support for research into the origins of digital misinformation, building trust across communities, and empowering consumers and journalists to detect disreputable online sources. Knight, Hewlett and Ford foundations, as well as the Democracy Fund, have all launched initiatives in recent years aimed at curbing disinformation.

These produced significant results, said Joshua Stearns, director of the Democracy Fund’s Public Square Program. Beginning in 2016, those working in journalism philanthropy began to develop an understanding of how to address misinformation and how to work in coalition to stand against its seemingly endless flow. “Community organizers, researchers, advocates, and educators organized around new networks, suppressing bad information and boosting good information,” Stearns said. Funders were then able to draw from this existing experience in the spring of 2020 to curb online misinformation about COVID-19.

In the years since, funding to combat disinformation continues to grow, as the presence of digital disinformation continues to be a trenchant problem. “The best defense is a

good offense,” Lenfest Institute’s Friedlich told Inside Philanthropy. “Fake news and misinformation fill voids where there is a lack of quality news and information.” Major funders continue to commit millions to combat what the *Wall Street Journal’s* Joanna Stern called “the reach of the incendiary—the attacks, the misinformation, the conspiracy theories” that push us “further into our own hyperpolarized filter bubbles.”

Foundation leaders told Inside Philanthropy that until social media companies change their algorithms to de-escalate public discourse, funders’ efforts to combat misinformation will only go so far. “We do not yet have the visibility into platform operations that allows us to truly understand what is happening, who sees what, and to properly study the impact and reach of social media in particular,” Open Society Foundations’ Vera Franz said. “We need access to the platforms’ data and algorithms so we can understand and keep the platforms accountable.”

Looking ahead, funders face an array of challenges inhibiting their work in curbing misinformation. Paul Cheung, the Knight Foundation’s former director of journalism and technology innovation, told Inside Philanthropy that while Knight is investing in training to help journalists detect misinformation, institutional philanthropy writ large will need to do more. “Who can fund media literacy for different segments of our populations so that they can distinguish facts from fiction?” he said. “Who can equip community leaders with resources so that they can prevent their community from a misinformation attack?”

Strengthening investigative reporting.

Drew Sullivan, founder of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, speaking at the 2019 Global Investigative Journalism Conference, predicted that “the for-profit world for investigative reporting will almost disappear, I’m afraid, and we will go back to a public service [model].” The next year, newsroom layoffs reached a record high, growing nearly 200% in 2020 compared to 2019, according to a study from the global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

Disruption across the for-profit sector presented nonprofit organizations with an opportunity to engage civic-minded funders focused on holding public officials accountable and strengthening the body politic. Laura Arnold, the co-founder of Arnold Ventures, succinctly encapsulated this sentiment, saying, “Policy work won’t mean a thing if we have no democracy, if our political institutions are broken, and if there’s no check on power. Unfortunately, we can’t rely solely on private journalism to carry the banner of transparency and rigorous reporting. The business model of journalism is broken.” Arnold Ventures has been a strong supporter of investigative journalism. Grantees include the Global Investigative Journalism Network, Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, El Paso Matters, the Texas Tribune, Spotlight PA, and The Trace.

The pandemic further incentivized citizens to demand accountability from their elected officials, said Chris Fitzimon, director of States Newsroom, which has established a network of over a dozen outlets dedicated to statehouse reporting with support from Google, small



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—Laura Arnold, cofounder and co-chair, Arnold Ventures

foundations, and an array of individual donors. People “want to know what the state governments are doing,” he told IP. Fitzimon predicts there will be more disruption across the for-profit news sector. “Our biggest concern about statehouse coverage is how hedge funds and private equity are buying and consolidating legacy outlets, shortchanging the people who depend on their coverage.” (Hedge fund Alden Global Capital [recently purchased](#) Tribune Publishing and its nine metropolitan papers.)

In December 2020, the *New York Times* announced it had raised \$4 million to launch Headway, an initiative to investigate global and national challenges. Funders for the initiative include the Ford Foundation, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. A month later, Lenfest Institute Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Jim Friedlich told Inside Philanthropy that the funder had doubled the size of the

investigative news team at the Philadelphia Inquirer by building and launching Spotlight PA, a nonprofit newsroom covering state government in Pennsylvania. “With a team of more than 12 investigative journalists, Spotlight PA covers governmental excess, corruption and fake news, and it partners with more than 50 newsrooms around Pennsylvania,” he said.

By underscoring that strong investigative journalism can hold the powerful accountable while combating misinformation, Friedlich provides fundraisers with a resonant talking point in their discussions with civic-minded funders like the Open Society Foundations. “Aggressively countering disinformation is not enough,” said Vera Franz, deputy director at the grantmakers’ Information Program. “That is why we fund networks of independent, investigative journalists and locally based journalism organizations that produce credible, verifiable information and build trust with local audiences.”

Funder Trends & Strategies

The most prevalent grantmaking strategies of nonprofit journalism funders include resourcing intermediaries to advance strategic priorities, and helping organizations build sustainable business models by increasing reader retention and building fundraising capacity. Funders also provide extensive support to university educational initiatives.

Resourcing intermediaries. Beyond directly supporting nonprofit media outlets, funders support grantmaking intermediaries focused on broad initiatives like bolstering local news. One of the most promising recipients of

philanthropic dollars is the American Journalism Project (AJP), a venture philanthropy organization and grantmaker that helps local outlets build a sustainable business model on a revenue mix of earned income, public funding and philanthropy. AJP has grown rapidly, drawing support from a range of funders who recognize the need to build a strong infrastructure for local news in the long term. Funders include the Knight Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, the Google News Initiative, and the California Community Foundation. The project’s long-term goal calls for catalyzing \$1 billion in financial support for independent local news.

Collaborative Spotlight

LocalMedia
Association

The Local Media Association centers its work on the business side of local media, focusing on areas such as reader revenue, brand content, and philanthropically funded journalism. Its charitable arm, the Local Media Foundation, aims to “provide local media companies the strategies and resources for meaningful innovation and impactful journalism.” Since early 2020, the foundation has launched five news media collaboratives including Word in Black, Oklahoma Media Center, LMA Covering Climate Collaborative, Solving for Chicago, and Amplify Ohio.

Other intermediaries that support local newsrooms, act as membership organizations, and provide training and collaboration opportunities include the Institute for Nonprofits News (INN), LION Publishers, the News Revenue Hub, the Solutions Journalism Network, Media Impact Funders, and the Media Democracy Fund.

Report for America is another fast-growing organization that has become a central player in supporting local newsrooms across the country. RFA is national service program that aims to address the huge need for local reporters by training journalists and placing RFA reporters in local newsrooms. RFA pays about half the reporter's salary, while participating newsrooms "raise their half from local donors, small and large." Report for America supports all types of newsrooms. RFA's website states that "participating newsroom partners include nonprofit and for-profit organizations, daily and weekly newspapers, digital only newsrooms, TV and radio stations. They've been in every state, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and Guam."

In a 2021 interview with Inside Philanthropy, Report for America co-founder Steven Waldman said that "Report for America and our peers have benefited greatly from the leadership of the Knight Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, Facebook, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Joyce Foundation and more, who see the many ripple effects good journalism can have at the local level and nationally."

Boosting outlets' earned revenues. One of the most interesting developments in journalism philanthropy is that funders support local

newsrooms in forming new long-term business models. Jennifer Preston, Knight Foundation's former vice president for journalism, said in an interview for this report that while "there is not a single model for sustainability, the strongest organizations include leaders who are completely focused on revenue, whether it's from local philanthropists, national foundations, local events, sponsorships, advertising, memberships or subscriptions."

In 2019, INN's annual survey of nonprofit newsroom showed that earned revenue made up, on average, 11% of nonprofit newsrooms' total revenue. At the time, INN called on philanthropy to better-support local news sources in developing better models for earned revenue streams, including display advertising, event sponsorships, sponsored content and other earned sources. It appears that efforts in this direction are having an impact. The [INN 2023 Index](#) found that in 2023, earned revenue made up, on average, 17% of nonprofit newsrooms' total revenue. Funders continue to look at ways to boost outlets' earned revenue sources to build long-term financial stability.

Funders also help nonprofit outlets engage individual donors. In late 2016, the Knight Foundation, in a partnership with the Democracy Fund and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, launched NewsMatch, a nationwide campaign focused on three interlocking goals: driving more donations to nonprofit journalism, strengthening nonprofit newsrooms' fundraising capacity, and promoting the role of nonprofit news in America. The unique program features an end-of-year matching gift campaign during which

outlets receive matching support from partner funders, as well as from donors and organizations in their communities. Since its inception, NewsMatch has helped raise \$330 million to “jumpstart emerging newsrooms and support independent media outlets that produce fact-based, nonpartisan news and information.”

Supporting university activities and initiatives. Funding for journalism education tends to be more dispersed than local news funding, oftentimes taking the form of alumni gifts to graduate schools of journalism. While topline data on donor gifts to journalism schools can be hard to come by, one detailed report is The Shorenstein Center’s 2018 “Funding the News” study, which found that the top 10 U.S. foundation funders for university-based journalism initiatives from 2010–2015 were, in order, the Knight Foundation, Ford Foundation, William Penn Foundation, Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Open Society Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and Omidyar Network Fund.

Inside Philanthropy Survey

“There seem to be a lot of big funders who care about local news, but would rather fund research papers and self-aggrandizement than actually funding the local news.”

—Fundraiser, Brooklyn, New York

Funders provided approximately \$147 million to university journalism/communication programs in general support from 2010–2015, with two foundations and universities accounting for nearly half the funding—Annenberg Foundation, which gave \$50 million to build a new academic building at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School of Communication, and the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, which donated \$30 million to the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Funders also earmark support for journalism scholarships and internships, specialized training opportunities, and named professorships or faculty hiring initiatives.

Perspectives on Equity

Several interviewees for this report highlighted the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 racial justice uprisings as points in time when more funders became attuned to the importance of supporting equity in journalism. Before then, misinformation was the dominant focus area for journalism funders. “In the wake of the 2016 election, there was a rush to invest in tech solutions and tools to address misinformation, rather than learning from and investing in the communities who have been battling these issues for a long time,” said the Democracy Fund’s Josh Stearns.

The Democracy Fund defines “equity in journalism” as “investing in newsrooms led by and serving historically marginalized groups, supporting organizations working to shift industry culture and leadership, and closing historic resource gaps that philanthropy has

helped to perpetuate.” In 2018, the funder launched the Engaged Journalism Lab with the mission of engaging funders to support equity in journalism.

In 2019, Borealis Philanthropy launched the Racial Equity in Journalism Fund to bolster the capacity and sustainability of news organizations led by people of color and increase civic engagement for communities of color. Seed funding for the new initiative came from funders like the Ford and W.K. Kellogg foundations, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and the Democracy Fund. Another important equity funder, the Pivot Fund, launched in 2022, led by Tracie Powell, who was the founding manager of the Racial Equity in Journalism Fund. The fund aims to [invest \\$500 million](#) into independent BIPOC-led community news. The

fund has received support from the Heising-Simons Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Craig Newmark Philanthropies.

When it comes to equity in journalism, funders are now pursuing a range of priority areas, including supporting BIPOC-led newsrooms, boosting the ranks of journalists of color, and supporting organizations advancing equity efforts focused on women, immigrants and LGBTQ+ communities.

Calls for direct support to BIPOC-led newsrooms. According to a Democracy Fund analysis, based on available data in the Foundation Maps for Media Funding, \$1.1 billion went into journalism more generally in the United States from 2013 to 2017. However, only 8.1% of this funding flowed to journalism efforts specifically designed to serve populations that included racial and ethnic groups, women and girls, and LGBTQ+ communities. A Borealis Philanthropy study reached a similar conclusion. Researchers interviewed 114 news media outlets serving communities of color and found that 45% of respondents cited “advertising” as a major source of revenue. Only 2% cited “grants.”

The Ford Foundation’s Margaret Morton and Farai Chideya told Inside Philanthropy that this stark funding discrepancy stems from funders’ misconceptions of what kinds of outlets have sufficient capacity. “Historically, larger and generally white-led news organizations were seen as ones which had the ability to absorb funding; while many led by underrepresented groups like disabled journalists, people of color, or lower wage earners, were seen as ‘not able to scale’ or ‘not having capacity.’”

Funder Spotlight



In September 2021, Democracy Fund joined other funders pledging to raise \$50 million over the next five years to support Black, African, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (BAMEMSA) communities “deeply impacted by the United States’ response to 9/11.” The fund also has a grantmaking program dedicated to BAMEMSA-led organizations. Recent grantees include the RISE Together Fund, Pillars Fund, and the Insitute for Public Understanding.

In an interview for this report, the Pivot Fund’s Tracie Powell said that funders need to recognize burdensome grant applications and reporting requirements as an equity issue that impacts BIPOC-led newsrooms, which are often understaffed and working on limited budgets. “Providing applicants and grantees with reams of paperwork isn’t helpful,” she said. In general, Powell believes there is now more awareness of the insufficient support for BIPOC-led outlets and those serving communities of color. “Many funders are asking, out loud, how they can ensure that their dollars are being spent in much more equitable ways and how they can reach communities that they’ve only marginally engaged before,” Powell said.

Powell also believes that capacity-building and wraparound support are vital ingredients in supporting diverse newsrooms. It’s not just about grant dollars, but collaboration and support. “If we are going to position our grantee partners for success, we have to provide more than money,” Powell said. “We have to offer training, give them access to our critical networks, and share expertise and technology.”

Funding experts interviewed by IP cited an array of organizations working to advance racial equity in journalism and combat disinformation campaigns aimed at communities of color, including Media Justice, Color of Change, Free Press, Disinfo Defense League, Type Investigations, the Association of Black Journalists, the Center for Journalism and Democracy at Howard University, the Asian American and Indigenous Journalists associations, and the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education.

Cultivating journalists of color. People of color make up more than 42% of the U.S. population, according to Census Bureau figures. In comparison, only 16.55% of journalists in U.S. newsrooms in 2017 were people of color—down from 16.94% in 2016, according to the News Leaders Association (NLA) newsroom census. Of all newsroom leaders in 2017, only 13.4% were BIPOC.

Tellingly, the NLA doesn’t have an updated newsroom census due to low participation rates. Newsrooms were reluctant to share data on the demographics of their journalists. In 2022, the NLA was poised to release a new census when it was pulled due to problems with the data. Meredith Clark, the survey’s leader, [resigned in frustration](#). In the absence of a national survey, local surveys provide some insight. A 2021 [study of diversity](#) in San Diego newsrooms found that they are “largely staffed by white men.” A 2022 study at Northwestern University asked 1,500 journalists about diversity in the field; 87% of respondents were white. A major [Pew Research Center survey](#) of journalists didn’t ask about the racial makeup of newsrooms, but it still offered key insight into newsroom diversity by way of deductive reasoning: Of the 12,000 journalists surveyed, over three-quarters identified as white.

In a [2022 interview](#) for Inside Philanthropy, the Pivot Fund’s Tracie Powell said a big reason there are so few people of color in journalism “is that people hire their old colleagues and friends. We’re seeing the same practices in the [nonprofit journalism funding space](#), and I’m trying my best to not let that take root.”

In a 2019 piece on the Knight Foundation’s blog, former Director of Journalism LaSharah S. Bunting argued that funders hadn’t sufficiently addressed “the institutional racism and unconscious biases that pervade many news organizations.” Bunting framed Knight’s \$1.2 million investment in the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education as “an attempt to help newsrooms rethink solutions to the diversity crisis.” Knight’s grant funded the institute’s Equity and Inclusion Transformation Program, which embedded specialists in newsrooms “to help them better inform underserved communities and establish more equitable and inclusive workplaces.”



“If news outlets are to survive, they must engage new and younger audiences who are increasingly more diverse. They need to be relevant to the people who live in their communities and attract and nurture a diverse workforce. They must commit to making comprehensive structural changes to their organizational cultures, putting the onus on all leadership and staff—not just the people of color.”

— LaSharah S. Bunting, former director of Journalism, Knight Foundation

Advancing gender equity. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation commissioned researchers at AKAS consulting to gauge women’s role in the global news ecosystem as part of its larger gender equality work. AKAS’ findings, published in 2020, found that while women make up half of the population, they comprise **39% of journalists** and just 26% of journalism leadership globally. “Particularly in the U.S. and U.K., people think, ‘Oh, we’ve dealt with that. Patriarchal norms are no longer an issue in our countries and we’ve reached gender equality,’” said AKAS co-founder Luba Kassova. “Actually we haven’t, and these values are one of the key barriers to balanced representation of women in news coverage.”

In response, funders are putting dollars behind advancing the role of women in news media across the U.S. and globally, boosting representation and supporting journalists experiencing threats of online and physical violence.

The International Women’s Media Foundation’s (IWMF) Howard G. Buffett Fund for Women Journalists was established in 2014 with a \$4 million gift from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation to support projects including educational opportunities, investigative reporting, and media development initiatives. The Channel Foundation, which supports organizations combating gender inequality around the world, cites “amplifying gender equality in media” as a key focus area. One grantee, the Global Press Institute, trains and employs local female journalists to produce ethical, accurate news coverage from the world’s least-covered places. The Gannett Foundation funds the Poynter Institute’s Leadership Academy for Women and Digital Journalism.

UNESCO's survey, "Online Violence Against Women Journalism: A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impact," found that **73% of women journalists** who responded had experienced online violence in the course of their work and 25% had received threats of physical violence. Launched in 1990, the IWMF's Courage in Journalism Awards recognizes "brave journalists who report on taboo topics, work in environments hostile to women, and share difficult truths."

The Ford Foundation funds initiatives tracking the sector's progress in the area of gender equity, including a major convening featuring original research by Dean Iris Bohnet of the Harvard Kennedy School and her team and another on media equity and race. "This kind of field-facing work allows Ford to reach a wider audience of influencers in the industry, particularly for-profit media leaders who were eager to engage with and learn from evidence-based research," said the foundation's Morton and Chideya. Ford also funds the Disability Futures Fellows, which includes support for disabled journalists. Major nonprofits that support women in journalism include the Maynard Institute and the International Women's Media Foundation.

Addressing issues facing immigrant communities. According to the Knight Foundation, community media outlets serving immigrants and non-English speakers in the U.S. often lack the technical acumen and requisite distribution capacity to effectively engage audiences. "They also remain largely invisible to mainstream media, public officials, the nonprofit sector, advertisers and philanthropic organizations," [the foundation said](#).

Funders are ramping up capacity-building support for these organizations while supporting outlets exploring the plight of refugees, the pandemic's effect on immigrants, and issues facing communities along the U.S./Mexico border.

The Newmark Graduate School of Journalism launched the Center for Community Media in 2012 with the goal of supporting local media outlets serving immigrant communities and communities of color through research, training and networking. In 2020, the center announced it was expanding to serve national news outlets providing coverage of people and issues unrepresented in the mainstream media. The Democracy Fund and the Knight and Ford foundations provided financial support for the expansion.

Migration is one of the key program areas for the MacArthur Foundation. Grants support research, policy and practical interventions to improve the lives of and protections for immigrants and refugees. Grantees include the Institute for Justice and Journalism and the GroundTruth Project's Global Migration, Refugees and Resettlement Reporting Fellowship.

USC's Center for Health Journalism and the Kaiser Family Foundation (now KFF) supports work examining the effect of health crises, including COVID-19, on immigrant communities and undocumented workers. In March 2021, Ford Foundation announced it will partner with Borealis Philanthropy, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, and other organizations to launch Reclaiming the Border

Narrative, an effort to “penetrate and shape the national attention on migration and the United States-Mexico border by supporting authentic storytelling by affected communities on the cultures and socio-political dynamics that comprise the region.”

Closing the funding gap for LGBTQ+ communities. As noted previously, a 2019 Democracy Fund analysis found that only 8.1% of the \$1.1 billion that went to U.S. journalism organizations from 2013–2017 was specifically earmarked to serve populations that included racial and ethnic groups. Of this amount, less than 1% flowed to organizations focused on LGBTQ+ communities. “Of course, this kind of categorization does not capture the complexities of identity,” the report’s [authors state](#). “To invest fully in changing structural and institutional inequity in journalism, funders must consider questions around how gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity intersect.”

To this point, one of Borealis Philanthropies’ Racial Equity in Journalism Fund grantees, the Bay Area-based El Tecolote, is the longest-running Spanish/English bilingual newspaper in California. It also focuses on the Bay Area’s LGBTQ immigrants. Borealis’ Powell called the outlet a good example of intersectionality.

The Blade Foundation is the giving arm of the country’s first LGBTQ newspaper, the *Washington Blade*. Launched in 2010, the foundation funds journalism projects focused on LGBTQ and scholarships for LGBTQ journalists. The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association is an American professional association dedicated to unbiased coverage of LGBTQ issues in the media.

The association bestows an array of awards, including the Association of LGBTQ Journalists Excellence in Journalism Awards, which were established in 1993 to foster and recognize excellence in journalism on issues related to the LGBTQ community; and the AI Neuharth Award for Innovation in Investigative Journalism, which receives support from the Gannett Foundation.

Donor Collaborative Spotlight



Since its launch in 2019, the Racial Equity in Journalism Fund (REJ) has awarded \$2.3 million in grants to news organizations serving communities of color. Inaugural grants were awarded to 16 organizations whose work focuses on Black, Native, Latinx, immigrant, refugee, and low-income communities.

Housed at Borealis Philanthropy, REJ is a donor collaborative with support from the American Journalism Project, Ford Foundation, the Democracy Fund, MacArthur Foundation, the Google News Initiative, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and the News Integrity Initiative at CUNY.

A Closer Look at Funder Types

Private Foundations

Private and family foundations focus on priorities like supporting local media, boosting equity, and providing general operating support.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is known as a preeminent, strategic, and collaborative supporter of journalism in the U.S. The private foundation was founded in 1950 by the Knight brothers, John S. and James L., both of them newspaper magnates. Over the decades, the foundation grew significantly through multi-million-dollar bequests left by the estates of Knight family members, and has expanded its work in various focus areas to serve the 26 cities where Knight-owned publications have had a presence, as well as supporting national initiatives.

The foundation is a prominent thought leader, rolling out initiatives focused on boosting diversity, supporting local news, and exploring technology's impact on democracy. Along with its pivotal involvement in major national programs like NewsMatch, Knight was also an early funder of ProPublica, the Texas Tribune, and The Voice of San Diego, amid other innovative nonprofit news partnerships.

“Knight also brings its convening power,” said Media Impact Funders’ (MIF) Stehle and Sachdev. “Every year, it gathers hundreds of place-based and community foundations at its Knight Media Forum to discuss the most pressing issues facing journalism and community information needs.”

Other major foundation funders, as explored elsewhere in this report, include Ford, MacArthur, Mellon, and Kellogg. The Ford Foundation’s Creative and Free Expression program focuses on supporting social justice storytelling communities as part of its overarching strategy to combat inequality. “Over the past three years, we have worked to align the journalism portfolio with these larger strategic goals and focused on funding media serving underserved news consumers, a group which includes people with disabilities, people of color, Indigenous Americans, and low-income and rural white Americans,” said Margaret Morton, program director, Creativity and Free Expression, and Farai Chideya, program officer, Creativity and Free Expression, in a statement to IP. “We believe that our democracy requires an information ecosystem that serves us all.”

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s grantmaking for journalism complements its work in advancing culture and the humanities. This includes grants earmarked for the preservation of media from historically underrepresented and underfunded cultures and populations. In June 2020, the foundation’s board of trustees approved a plan to boost giving from \$300 million to \$500 million. Later in the month, the foundation, which has a \$6.5 billion endowment, announced it would prioritize social justice across all of its grantmaking.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation “is a big player, but perhaps not recognized in the same way as Knight,” said MIF’s Stehle and Sachdev. “MacArthur has been influential in this field because of how they approach their grantmaking, which is done with

substantial long-term general operating support. And their thinking on general operating funds has influenced other funders to do the same.” Kathy Im, MacArthur’s director of journalism and media, told IP the foundation is most concerned with “the proliferation of disinformation and the media and political environment that allows it to spread and flourish,” and “the lack of diversity and inclusion inside newsrooms, particularly in leadership roles, and the feeble institutional response to the vitriolic attacks experienced by women and people of color reporters.”

Many foundation funders also provide integral support to investigative journalists in the form



“Over the past three years, we have worked to align the journalism portfolio with these larger strategic goals and focused on funding media serving underserved news consumers, a group which includes people with disabilities, people of color, Indigenous Americans, and low-income and rural white Americans.”

—Margaret Morton, program director, Creativity and Free Expression, Ford Foundation

of fellowships, commissions and residencies. Funders supporting the field in those ways include the Heising-Simons Foundation, Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, the Fund for Investigative Journalism, and the International Women’s Media Foundation.

Corporate Funders

Corporations approach philanthropy from a different vantage point than private foundations, community foundations, and individual donors.

“A lot of corporations have questions about ‘what do you have in terms of programs that I can put my name and logo on now?’, and that’s just different than a private foundation,” said Ben Cameron, Jerome Foundation president and former manager of community relations at Target. “A private foundation isn’t looking for market share; corporations, though, have a bottom-line responsibility to shareholders.”

While it can be somewhat misguided to paint all corporations with a broad brush, these funders are generally driven by a common set of motivators, such as how a gift aligns with its broader social agenda, burnishes its brand, complements pre-existing investments, and creates a pipeline of future journalists.

Fundraisers who create proposals that align with these types of motivating factors may be more likely to attract corporate donations.

Corporate funding represents a relatively small portion of the larger journalism and media philanthropic ecosystem. The Shorenstein Center’s 2018 “Funding the News” report listed the top 25 U.S. foundation funders of public

media by amount of grants from 2010–2015. Authors cited only two corporate foundations in its list—Newman’s Own Foundation (No. 19) and MetLife Foundation (No. 20). The two foundations provided a combined 4.7% of the \$303 million in total funding.

Tech and media companies provide the bulk of corporate funding for nonprofit journalism and media organizations these days. Two of the largest players in the space are tech giants Meta and Google, which, according to critics, bear a considerable amount of responsibility for journalism’s precarious financial state.

Mark Zuckerberg’s company launched The Facebook Journalism Project in 2017 to “strengthen the connection between journalists and the communities they serve.” Upon announcing the project’s \$300 million investment in local news in 2019, Campbell Brown, VP Global News Partnerships, said, “There are two key areas where we hope to help: supporting local journalists and newsrooms with their newsgathering needs in the immediate future; and helping local news organizations build sustainable business models, through both our product and partnership work.”

In 2022, Meta announced that it was phasing out the program, which had been renamed the Meta Journalism Project.

In March 2018, Google launched the \$300 million Google News Initiative to support publishers and combat misinformation. “People come to Google looking for information they can trust, and that information often comes from the reporting of journalists and news

organizations around the world,” said Chief Business Officer Philipp Schindler. “And while the demand for quality journalism is as high as it’s ever been, the business of journalism is under pressure, as publications around the world face challenges from an industry-wide transition to digital.”

Community Foundation Spotlight



SVCF’s Local Journalism Fund supports media coverage of “hyper-local issues that address the gap in news and information reaching underserved communities.” The fund is part of its long-term strategy for systemic change in Silicon Valley. Funding priority is given to BIPOC-led organizations with annual budgets of less than \$1million. Recent grantees include the India Currents Foundation, Mosaic Journalism, and the South Pacific Islander Organization.

Between 2018 and 2022, Meta and Google pledged a total of \$700 million in funding for journalism, not counting other “undisclosed” funds and in-kind contributions. In a 2022 interview with IP, Nikki Usher, associate professor of journalism in the College of Media at the University of Illinois, expressed concern that the financial support may compromise

outlets' editorial independence. "Journalists routinely pounce on similar conflicts of interest when they occur in government or science, or in virtually any other institution, and for good reason," Usher said. "When we need critical reporting about Big Tech more than ever, we should all be concerned that Facebook and Google are funding the news."

A 2022 Media Impact Funders (MIF) survey of journalism funders and nonprofit news organizations found that a full 52% reported having received support from the Google News Initiative and 36% from Meta. This suggests that Meta's closure of its funding program might have a substantial impact on revenue streams for previously supported newsrooms. In 2023, The Tow Center [attempted to uncover](#) where Meta's grants to local news had actually gone. The results imply that some of the pledged funding never materialized, likely because of Meta's financial strains and mass layoffs in 2021. Still, Meta's grants were vital for many smaller newsrooms. "The financial holes news organizations need to plug will differ wildly, as will the impact on their bottom lines," the report's authors wrote.

Other tech companies that have provided support for nonprofit journalism and media organizations include Dropbox, Craigslist Corporation, AppNexus, Mozilla, OpenAI, and Betaworks.

Media companies provide philanthropic support to nonprofit journalism outlets as part of their broader philanthropic efforts. The Hearst Foundation, Inc. was founded in 1946 by William Randolph Hearst, the American

businessman, newspaper publisher, and politician known for developing the nation's largest newspaper chain and media company, Hearst Communications. While the foundation's website notes that it has been "independent" from the Hearst Corporation since 1975, its board is composed mostly of Hearst executives, so this brief discusses it as a corporate funder. One of the foundation's initiatives, the Hearst Journalism Awards Program, awards scholarships to students in college-level journalism, with matching grants to the students' schools.

The Gannett Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Gannett Co., Inc., the largest U.S. newspaper publisher as measured by total daily circulation, funds the Sports Journalism Institute Boot Camp at the Arizona State University's Cronkite School.

The Henry Luce Foundation, whose namesake founded magazines such as Time, Fortune and Sports Illustrated, funds the Luce/American Council of Learned Societies Program in Religion, Journalism & International Affairs to foster new connections between scholars and journalists covering international affairs, and the GroundTruth Project's Global Migration, Refugees and Resettlement Reporting Fellowship. With \$350 in grantmaking in the past decade, The Henry Luce Foundation has become a major journalism funder, and it is independent from the for-profit news outlets from which Henry Luce's fortunes derived.

Philanthropic support from existing media corporations—like that of the broader corporate sector—lags behind that of institutional

grantmakers and individual donors. A search of the terms “journalism” in the Hearst Foundation’s [online grant database](#) yields four grants averaging \$175,000 each for the years 2017 through 2020. In 2019, the Gannett Foundation awarded [\\$2.9 million](#) in contributions, gifts and grants. However, 43% of this amount went to the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

Inside Philanthropy Survey

“There is a much greater emphasis on funding local journalism and/or local media outlets. This translates to diminished interest in funding national platforms.”

—Fundraiser, New York, New York

Media companies’ support for journalism organizations reflects key corporate priorities like building a pipeline of journalists and reaching new audiences. For example, the Scripps-Howard Foundation, the philanthropic arm of E.W. Scripps Company, provided \$3 million in grants to launch investigative reporting centers at Arizona State University and the University of Maryland. The Scripps Howard Fund, a sister organization of the Scripps-Howard Foundation, earmarks grantmaking for journalism education, childhood literacy, and local causes.

Other active funders include the Thomson Reuters Foundation and the TEGNA Foundation, the funding arm of the Virginia-

based media and digital company TEGNA Inc., which funds training for “the next generation of diverse journalists and education and development opportunities for journalists and other professionals in the media field.”

Corporations also support journalism and media outlets through donor-advised funds housed at community foundations.

Corporate support for journalism and media frequently takes the form of sponsorships, which, as noted in the “Who’s Getting” section of this brief, constitute a significant portion of public media outlets’ revenue model. Unlike a philanthropic gift, a sponsorship is a business transaction, akin to advertising, in which the sponsor pays or gives the organization money in exchange for something “that will help them make more money, be it through alignment with the property,” or through sales, brand development, public relations or employee engagement, according to the Partnership Group.

For example, WNET’s website notes that its corporate sponsors enjoy “many executive, employee and client perks,” including private screenings, on-air challenges, and volunteer opportunities. The PBS home page has dozens of commercials from its corporate sponsors, including Target, Raymond James and IKEA.

Community Foundations

The importance of community foundations to the larger world of journalism philanthropy has increased exponentially, in tandem with the expanding footprint of philanthropy journalism more generally. “Community foundations have played a critically important role in advancing

quality news and information, and are increasingly key partners in inspiring news collaborations, bringing their local expertise and convening power to the table,” said Media Impact Funders’ (MIF) Sarah Armour-Jones.

According to Candid’s Foundation Maps for Media Funding, 26 U.S.-based community foundations gave only \$2.6 million in journalism grants in 2009. By 2014, that number had more than doubled to \$6.5 million. Four years later, 80 community foundations gave \$26.3 million—an increase of 1,000% since 2009. All told, community foundations have given \$124 million in journalism grants (excluding journalism education) between 2009 and 2021. When you add other relevant media categories, like media access and policy, the total contribution of community foundations between 2009 and 2021 is \$1.1 billion.

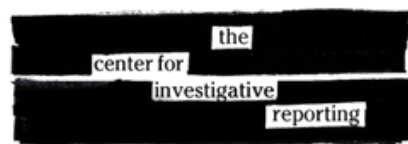
According to a 2022 Media Impact Funders (MIF) report titled “Community Foundations & Media: Funding Data from 2009-2021,” the top 10 community foundations for journalism funding are the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, Foundation for the Carolinas, New York Community Trust, Chicago Community Trust, the Pittsburgh Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, Seattle Foundation, Miami Foundation, and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.

The SVCF has been working to support local media since 2014 thanks to an initiative funded by the Knight Foundation that helped community foundations define their support of local journalism ecosystems. The foundation

partnered with New American Media to launch a fellowship for journalists of color working on the implementation of Common Core education and with Renaissance Journalism to support the Bay Area Media Collaborative, which focused on the region’s housing crisis.

With support from the Knight Community Information Challenge, the funder launched the SVCF Local Journalism Fund in March 2020 to build stronger and more engaged communities and address inequities faced by communities of color, including Black and Indigenous residents.

Grantee Spotlight



Established in 1977, the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) is an independent newsroom supported through grants, sponsorships and gifts and does not have any corporate owners. According to the CIR website, its mission is to “hold the powerful accountable,” through its reporting. The organization’s many supporters include Arnold Ventures, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Emerson Collective.

“We believe that accurate and inspiring community stories play an important role in informing, engaging and activating individuals and groups to participate in our democracy,”

Mauricio Palma, SVCF’s director of community building, told IP in 2021. “Our fund will strengthen local media nonprofits working to amplify untold or under-told stories created by, about, and for communities of color.”

In 2022, Report for America released a report about community foundations’ expanding role in supporting local news outlets. In an interview with IP, Todd Franko, RFA’s director of local sustainability and development, said the “key headline from the report” is that community foundations are “taking on a partnership role in helping the local newsroom appeal to donors and explain it in a way that resonates, and more money comes into the operation.”

Journalism experts expect community foundations to be a growing force in the years ahead. American Journalism Project CEO Sarabeth Berman told IP her organization has “been partnering with several community foundations to help them assess their communities’ information needs and craft business plans to incubate new nonprofit newsrooms that can fill the void left by the decline of commercial news and play a powerful counterweight to misinformation.”

Report for America’s report detailed several examples of community foundations playing a key role in the local journalism ecosystem, including setting up funds and programs to attract support for local journalism over the long term. In 2022, the Traverse City Record-Eagle in Traverse City, Michigan, approached a community foundation for support, and ended up leveraging the foundation’s skills and network to parlay the foundation’s grant into

multiple additional grants and gifts from other donors and institutions in the community. The RFA report emphasized that “local news needs a new level of foundation engagement – something that grows beyond incremental granting and becomes sustained partnerships between local news and local foundations.”

Experts advise fundraisers to reach out to their local community foundations to discuss funding opportunities, explore potential partnerships, and identify ways to alert individual donors about the outlets’ value to the broader region.

Major Donors

Major individual donors tend to earmark gifts for university journalism education programs, initiatives to combat misinformation, independent journalism organizations, and public media. Several major donors have transformed the landscape of journalism philanthropy by way of large gifts to media outlets, schools, and nonprofits. These donors include Craig Newmark, Laurene Powell Jobs, MacKenzie Scott, and Pierre Omidyar.

In 2018, Craigslist founder Craig Newmark gave \$20 million to the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism’s foundation to enhance the school’s mission of training journalists, diversifying voices in media, and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship. The CUNY Board of Trustees renamed the school the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York in recognition of the gift.

“This is a generous and welcome gift,” tweeted financial journalist Felix Salmon regarding the announcement. “But it’s utterly bizarre to name

a journalism school after the man who almost single-handedly destroyed local newspapers.” To his point, a 2013 study conducted by researchers at New York University’s Stern School of Business and Harvard Business School found that newspapers lost **about \$5 billion** in classified advertising revenue to Craigslist from 2000 to 2007. Similar critiques can be made of the sums Mark Zuckerberg donated to local journalism via the now-closed Meta Journalism Project.

Newmark, meanwhile, keeps the gifts flowing. In 2019, he gave \$10 million to the Columbia Journalism School to bolster

journalism ethics and provided seed funding for the News Integrity Initiative. “A lot of people have been deliberately misinformed,” he told Inside Philanthropy. “My focus is on people who are doing things like better understanding disinformation, where it’s coming from, and how to counter and disrupt it.” Journalism organizations that focus on efforts to “promote an honest press and counter disinformation” can learn more about grant opportunities via the Craig Newmark Philanthropies website.

The journalism philanthropy of eBay founder Pierre Omidyar flows through several channels, including the Democracy Fund, the Omidyar Network and First Look Media, which serves as an umbrella for several entities receiving support, including The Intercept, an investigative reporting outfit, and the Press Freedom Defense Fund. While many billionaire donors have reputations of being opaque and inaccessible to small nonprofit organizations, Newmark and Omidyar’s respective giving vehicles are relatively transparent and accessible to advancement teams. In contrast, fundraisers find it difficult to engage mega-donors who typically restrict their journalism giving to nationally renowned outlets or institutions.

An influential journalism donor who isn’t known for accessibility is Laurene Powell Jobs, whose giving vehicle, the Emerson Collective, is an investor in Axios, controls The Atlantic, and supports nonprofit organizations like Mother Jones, the Marshall Project and ProPublica. “Our involvement in media is not to turn a profit,” Jobs said in September 2020. “It’s important that everyone know that great journalism should not be for free. It’s a civic good.”

Major Donor Spotlight: Craig Newmark



“A lot of people have been deliberately misinformed. My focus is on people who are doing things like better understanding disinformation, where it’s coming from, and how to counter and disrupt it [and to] promote an honest press and counter disinformation.”

—Craig Newmark, founder, Craigslist and Craig Newmark Philanthropies

In 2018, NPR President Emeritus Jarl Mohn and his wife Pamela gave \$10 million to the public radio station's 50th-anniversary capital campaign. Mohn hoped to raise over \$200 million for NPR by "building relationships with donors who believe in the importance of NPR's fact-based journalism and want to invest in the next chapter in the network's history." The same year, actor, filmmaker and comedian Seth MacFarlane announced a \$2 million donation to support NPR's Collaborative Journalism Network, which aims to better connect the outlet's 1,800 journalists with local newsrooms. A year later, the network received a \$4.7 million grant from former Google CEO Eric Schmidt and his spouse Wendy to create two new regional newsrooms—one in California and a Midwest hub connecting member stations in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska.

In 2018, the Media School at Indiana University received a \$6 million gift, earmarked for training in a "heartland news desert" from alumnus and journalist Michael I. Arnolt. A year later, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill announced a \$25 million endowment gift from alumnus Walter Hussman, Jr. and his family to support efforts to enable the newly renamed Hussman School of Journalism and Media to better prepare students for careers in journalism, public relations, advertising and communications.

Other notable donors to journalism schools include Curtis Media Group CEO Don Curtis (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Media and Journalism), Florida-based real estate executive Nathan Collier (University of Florida College of Journalism and

Communications), and Angela Filo and her husband David Filo (University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism), whose Skyline Foundation is a partner of Press Forward, the [\\$500 million commitment](#) by 22 funders to back local journalism.

Alumni gifts often materialize after years of close collaboration with the advancement officers or on the heels of a series of smaller gifts from the donor. As to what drives mega-donor giving, a December 2019 Public Administration Review report cited the "desire to have an impact" by increasing "the quality and/or reputation" of a university as the "most common motivation" for wealthy donors. Fundraisers may want to consider these factors and how a potential gift aligns with the university's mission while cultivating support from affluent alumni donors.

As noted, donors also provide support through donor-advised funds housed at community foundations and DAF sponsors like Fidelity, Schwab and Vanguard. Those DAF managers move a large portion of the charitable funds directed to nonprofit journalism, an important fact for fundraisers to consider, even if strategizing to receive those funds is nearly impossible.

Billionaires have also stepped up to purchase besieged for-profit outlets. In 2013, Amazon's Jeff Bezos bought the *Washington Post* and Red Sox owner John Henry bought the *Boston Globe*. A year later, businessman Glen Taylor purchased the Minnesota Tribune. In 2018, physician Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong bought the Los Angeles Times. While these purchases are sometimes

couched in philanthropic language, they remain for-profit entities outside the focus of this brief.

Associations & Intermediaries

Many of journalism philanthropy's key associations, intermediaries, and joint funding efforts have been mentioned elsewhere in this report, including the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), the Press Forward Initiative, the News Revenue Hub, and others. Intermediary organizations are important in many ways, including for networking, training, fundraising, research, and advocacy.

Media Impact Funders (MIF) aims to strengthen connections among members and surface funding opportunities through networking, advocacy, and data gathering. Membership is open to all philanthropic organizations that fund journalism projects. While MIF does not distribute grants itself or host collaborative funds, its [Foundation Maps for Media Funding](#) serves as an invaluable tool for organizations by showing the full scope of philanthropically funded media projects worldwide since 2009.

The Council on Foundations, a nonprofit leadership association of grantmaking foundations and corporations, provides nonprofit journalism funders and organizations with legal and tax guidance, research, and networking events through its [Nonprofit Media program](#). The foundation does not distribute grants itself or host collaborative funds for journalism organizations.

The Institute for Nonprofit News' [Network Philanthropy Center](#) provides a comprehensive approach to help nonprofit news organizations

build and grow sustainable, diverse revenue from philanthropy. The [American Press Institute](#) is a nonprofit organization that helps news organizations understand and engage audiences, grow revenue, improve public-service journalism, and succeed at organizational change. Neither organization distributes grants.

Funder Coalition Spotlight

Press Forward

Press Forward is a 5-year national initiative working to support and enhance local journalism while closing “longstanding inequities in journalism coverage and practice.” This over \$500 million initiative is backed by 22 funders including the Democracy Fund, American Public Media Group, Hewlett Foundation and the Lenfest Institute on Journalism.

[The Lenfest Institute](#), one of the sector's newer and most influential grantmakers, works with organizations to build viable, replicable models for sustainable local news enterprises through its three core focus areas: high-impact journalism, news technology and innovation, and diverse, growing audiences. The Lenfest Institute was created in 2016 with \$20 million in seed funding by the cable television entrepreneur Gerry Lenfest. The Institute became the partner

organization of the Philadelphia Inquirer, which was transformed into a nonprofit. In 2017, one year before his death, Lenfest donated an additional \$40 million to the institute. The Lenfest Institute receives funding from major donors, and is now itself an important grantmaker for local news.

In 2020, the Lenfest Institute launched the [News Philanthropy Network](#), a community of practice to support those focused on fundraising to support journalism. Starting with 40 members, the network has quickly grown to nearly 1,000 people working in journalism. The group aims to serve its members in much the same way as the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education caters to fundraisers in higher education. “Philanthropy can be the biggest and fastest-growing revenue source for news organizations,” says Annie McCain Madonia, Lenfest’s chief advancement officer.

[Local News Lab](#), a project of the Democracy Fund, is dedicated to identifying creative experiments in sustainable journalism, including promising philanthropic news, initiatives and partnerships. While the Democracy Fund is a prominent funder, it does not distribute grants through the Local News Lab.

The [Contributor Development Partnership](#), which receives support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Boston’s WGBH, is a self-described “fundraising alliance.” Rather than directly awarding grants, it provides tech and marketing support, data analytics and best practices to help public media and television stations raise money and better serve their local communities.

Inside Philanthropy Survey

“An important topic to keep raising is inviting foundations to rethink perpetuity and/or significantly increasing their payout rates. It will be interesting to see what happens with the 10% payout campaign. More critical reporting on foundations’ reluctance to provide multi-year unrestricted funding. Bringing the lens of complex, adaptive systems into how foundations view their work and approaches.”

—Foundation professional, San Francisco, California

An Analysis of Opportunities & Challenges

Philanthropic leaders IP spoke with were nearly unanimous in their belief that the sector's top three priorities are: cultivating local news, combating misinformation, and supporting organizations and journalists of color. That said, experts called on philanthropy to address other critical funding gaps across the larger ecosystem, such as the lack of funding for issue-based journalism like climate change coverage, intersectional grantmaking, and support for international journalism outlets. While these causes have yet to reach "critical mass" across the funding ecosystem, they nonetheless represent a growing area of opportunity for the field.

IP's survey of philanthropic and fundraising professionals presented a list of 11 funding strategies and asked which ones merited increased attention and commitment from the philanthropic sector. Of the respondents who said their work focused on journalism and media, the top strategy was "climate change" (38% of respondents), followed by "centering racial justice" (37%) and "grassroots movement building and cross-movement organizing" (34%). (Respondents could choose multiple strategies.)

"There have been cases of grantmakers supporting climate coverage," said Frank Mungeam, chief innovation officer of the industry trade organization Local Media Association, in an interview for this report. "At the same time, I think it's fair to say climate reporting has been underfunded in the past."

Mungeam attributed this trend to funders' preoccupation with other critical issues like news deserts, the loss of local investigative reporting, and the need for more social justice reporting.

"The biggest gap and the biggest opportunity to drive meaningful change is at the local level," he said.

Mungeam oversees the Covering Climate Collaborative (CCC), an initiative of the [Local Media Association](#), that was created in 2021 and makes grants to support local news organizations covering the local impacts of climate change. Grantees include Climate Matters, SciLine, and the Solutions Journalism Network. The collaborative received early support from the Walton Family Foundation and the Society of Environmental Journalists. Mungeam anticipates demand for climate coverage will grow, citing a September 2020 study by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, which found that 78% of respondents expressed interest in news stories about the impacts of global warming on their local community.

"I think part of the reason we've reached a tipping point in demand for more and broader-based climate reporting—and the funding to support that reporting—is the emerging recognition that climate effects are present and intertwined with the other critical issues we face," Mungeam said. To meet the moment, Mungeam encouraged funders to de-silo climate issues and adopt a more intersectional grantmaking approach.

The Democracy Fund’s Stearns picked up on this theme as it pertains to funders’ other top priorities. “One of the most challenging limitations in the space is that misinformation has quickly become siloed as a standalone funding area,” said the Democracy Fund’s Stearns. “When, in fact, combating misinformation (and supporting local news, for that matter) ought to be a concern for every funder because of the broad effects it has on our society, democracy and every other issue that funders seek to address.”

The American Journalism Project’s Berman concurred. “If you care about the environment, you should give to the media,” she said. “If you care about healthcare, education and local issues, you should give to the media. We need to show that trusted news is essential to every goal a philanthropist has.”

Funder support for both local media writ large and topic-specific outlets continues to increase. Those interested in climate change can make a donation to the environmentally focused [Grist](#). Funders concerned with criminal justice reform can give to [The Marshall Project](#) or [The Appeal](#). Education funders might give to [Chalkbeat](#). Those interested in reproductive justice might support the Rewire News Group. The list goes on. Whatever your philanthropic priorities, there is almost certainly a journalistic project focused on that issue that could use more funder support.

It’s notable that mainstream for-profit publications are also receiving grant money for topic-specific news coverage. As an example, in 2022 the Associated Press received a three-year, \$8 million grant from five funders to hire new reporters to cover the impacts of climate change.

In an interview for this report, Lisa Gibbs, AP’s director of news partnerships, said that before 2017, the Associated Press had made no concerted effort to seek philanthropic contributions. But as of 2021, they had already hired two new staffers to support fundraising efforts. “Philanthropic support is driving innovation,” said Gibbs. “The philanthropic focus on outcomes and public interest helps media outlets connect more closely with their communities. There are things we’re able to do with philanthropy that we could never do with regular revenues.”



“Organizations have a right for general operating support and multi-year funding. The more that organizations feel brave enough to ask for that, the better, even if they don’t always get it.”

—Hillary Pennington, executive vice president of programs, Ford Foundation

As philanthropy plays a larger role in funding both nonprofit and for-profit news sources, a myriad of ethical questions arise. There are concerns about conflicts of interest, over-reliance on top funders, and, perhaps most importantly, editorial independence. The American Press Institute’s [“Guiding Principles for Funders of Nonprofit Media”](#) provides grantmakers and

grantees with a useful framework laying out respective roles to protect the independence, integrity, and impact of the organization's work. Key principles include funder transparency to avoid perceived conflict of interest, long-term views of grantee sustainability and organizational health, and a commitment to unrestricted general operating support.

Another looming challenge is how to divide philanthropic resources among the thousands of small media outlets scattered across the U.S. By definition, supporting local news entails a recognition that all communities need a reliable local news source. How does one decide which community to support? There is concern that large cities and the coasts receive too much funder attention, leaving rural areas and portions of the U.S. South and the Midwest behind.

Writing in [Local News Blues](#) in January, Washington Media Institute Director Amos Gelg argued that when Paul Huntsman converted the Salt Lake Tribune to a nonprofit in 2019, beleaguered for-profits realized that by going the nonprofit route, they could access a new revenue stream and retain control of operations without having to answer to shareholders.

And so, as [more nonprofits come online](#), competition for what is theoretically finite philanthropic dollars should intensify, effectively squeezing newsrooms in less-affluent regions that lack a deep bench of affluent place-based funders. "Is the increasing number of nonprofits actually good for us?" Gelg asks. "Are there too many deer in the forest to be sustainable?"

A related concern is lack of funding for international journalism organizations and international reporting. In an interview for this report, Kathy Im, the MacArthur Foundation's director of journalism and media, implored fellow funders to do more for international journalism organizations.

"As more resources were devoted to domestic and accountability reporting, support of international journalism waned markedly, causing some international journalism organizations to adjust their missions to cover more domestic news," she said. "The wars, terrorism and major events will be covered by the major outlets, but the sustained, nuanced, and intelligent coverage of transnational issues—such as migration, climate change, global health—is the area where nonprofit journalism organizations excelled and this work is severely underfunded."

An arising opportunity for philanthropy journalism is the new funding available related to AI regulation and AI's impact on society. Many large funders are turning their attention to AI, and this will intersect in interesting ways with journalism funding. In 2023, a new coalition of 10 funders launched a \$200 million initiative to "support responsible use and innovation of artificial intelligence." It's notable that the majority of this initiative's funders are also major journalism funders, including the Ford, MacArthur, and Heising-Simons foundations, the Democracy Fund, and the Omidyar Network.

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Feedback?

The State of American Philanthropy is an ongoing project, each SAP brief will be updated periodically to integrate new information, additional data and evolving perspectives. If you have comments or information you'd like to share with us, please email us at managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.org.